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A Settler's Story

F. B. Forester

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A SETTLER'S STORY

BY
F. B. FORESTER

AUTHOR OF
'HIS LEVEL BEST,' 'THE SPANISH COUSIN,' ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY LEONARD LINSDELL

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[Proudfitt/188.]

"I . . . got him by the collar and shook him."

[Page 188.]

CONADA



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"Thar in the drift
 Back to the wall,
 He held the timbers
 Ready to fall.
 Then in the darkness
 I heard him call:
 'Run for your life, Jake,
 Run for your wife's sake,
 Don't wait for me!'
 And that was all,
 Heard in the din,
 Heard of Tom Flynne,
 Flynne of Virginia."—BRET HARTE

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A SETTLER'S STORY

CHAPTER I

IN THE SQUARE HOLE

“**YOU** have no more brains than—than an ass, sir! You are only fit to go and hoe turnips!”

My irate father—he was certainly uncommonly angry—pushed his gold-rimmed spectacles further up the bridge of his nose, and glared at me over the top of them. I, standing in front of him, leaning against the study table, and feeling, in spite of my nineteen years, exceedingly small, scarcely saw in what way it would be possible to get in a word to defend myself. So I wisely held my tongue.

After all, I suppose it was hard on my father. The rest of us had turned out so well, that he had come to regard turning out well as a natural development on the part of the members of his family, something on the same level as cutting their wisdom teeth, for example, which they would

be certain to arrive at in due course of time. Hence, when in my case his expectations met with a rude and sudden disappointment, as a matter of course he took it badly. There was Jack, the eldest, captain in a crack cavalry regiment; Hubert, the next, as high up in the Indian Civil Service as it was possible for a youngster of his years to get; one of my sisters had, as the saying is, married well, and the other was just coming out as a budding artist; and now here was I, the fifth of the family, and—there was no blinking the fact—a failure. At the very tip-top of his profession himself, my father had long ago set his heart upon having at least one of his sons tread in his footsteps, and as years passed on, and the other two had followed each his natural bent, I, having given no indication of a leaning in any other direction, had come to understand as a natural thing, that the Faculty was to be my destined walk in life.

The paternal wrath having passed the explosive stage, and reached the peripatetic, as evidenced by an excited pacing up and down the room, I found an opportunity to get in a word.

"I am awfully sorry, father; on my word I am. I tried my best. I did, on my honour, but it was no go. Fact is, I don't think I'm cut out for that sort of thing. I haven't got it in me."

"I will trouble you," my father interposed frigidly, and with scathing sarcasm, "to tell me something I do *not* know."

This was cutting, and I winced. But I felt bound to make use of the opportunity given me. It might not occur again.

"Well, sir, if you are morally convinced I haven't it in me, I don't see the good of expecting the signs of anything to come out," I asserted, logically if inelegantly. "If I had brains——"

"Brains, sir? As I said before, you have no more brains than an ass."

This struck me as somewhat unkind, and not as a particularly happy figure of speech either. Taking into consideration the size of his skull, there is no denying that, as far as bulk goes, a donkey ought to be blessed with a good allowance of brains; and although, not having gone in for any dissection of an asinine subject on my own score, I could not speak from personal knowledge, it seemed to me that an eminent scientist like my respected father, the author of a text-book on Comparative Anatomy that was in the hands of every student throughout the kingdom—ought not to have given himself away in such a fashion as that. But it would have been neither politic nor particularly respectful to have insisted on that at the moment, in the present highly electrical state of the atmosphere. However, there we were, back again, at the very point with which we had begun.

"Medical profession, forsooth!" snorted my father, striding up and down the room in a renewed outburst of wrath. "You are better fitted to go and hoe potatoes!"

"That's the very thing I want to do, or next door to it," interrupted I, seeing my chance at last. Then as he stopped short to stare at me, his brows bent into a frown, I went on hastily—"I don't mean at home, in England, of course; it wouldn't

do, I suppose. I've been a tax on you already, I know, with my education, and the fees for my course, and all that—but I won't ask you for much more. Let me have half in the way of a start that you gave my brothers, father, and neither the old country nor you shall be bothered with or ashamed of me and my failures much longer."

I meant every word, and spoke out frankly. But it was not in nature, under the circumstances, to avoid feeling a trifle sore, and there was a ring of bitterness in my voice that, do what I would, I could not keep out of it, as I went on—

"If Jack and Hubert had changed places with each other, say, and the one had tried the thing that the other has got on in, there's no saying that they might not have turned out to be the round men in the square holes, too. That's what I should have been as a doctor, I know; and it's a long way better that I should have found it out now than later. The honest truth is—I'd rather have been a farrier or a groom, and had the handling of horses, than be the greatest *medico* in the world, sir; and, but for one or two considerations, I think I'd try what sort of a vet I should make, even now. I'd a hundred times rather have the care of brutes than humans. They are a precious deal easier to manage; and, if you look at that side of the thing, they are a long sight more grateful." Human nature didn't stand very high in my estimation that afternoon.

My father still strode up and down the study in silence. But his strides were more deliberate and less hurried than they had formerly been; his

glasses had resumed their accustomed place on his aristocratic nose; and when in the course of his peregrinations he stooped to lift from the carpet that unlucky sheet of the *Times*, which, by declaring the results of the second examination, had thereby brought the fact of my lamentable failure to light, I knew that he was gradually cooling down.

"Then I am to understand," he demanded, turning suddenly upon me, "that it is your wish to emigrate?"

"Well, I suppose you would scarcely care to have me doing the sort of work I'm fitted for here in England," I answered moodily. "And if you and my mother didn't mind, ten to one the rest would howl at it; and one is bound to think of them and their prospects, I suppose. No; it's no good trying to square things here, and the best way will be for me to make a clean sweep of the whole business and clear out."

"Like the rest of you young fools, I suppose," snorted my father. "Let you meet with a check or a reverse, anything in the way of your plain sailing, and hey, presto! down goes your head and up go your heels, and it's kick over the traces and break away anywhere—no matter where, so long as you can get clear of the thing you have come to grief over and the hum-drum life at home. Mark my words, Frank, my boy. You may not think it at present—and at your age it might be odd if you did—but I tell you honestly, there's no place on God's earth where a man, if he means to win, doesn't have to put his heart into his work and

stick to it, unless he wants to find himself out of the running altogether!"

"I could stick well enough at work that was to my liking," rejoined I doggedly. "But this sort of thing, as far as I am concerned, is a perfect farce, and I'm morally certain that I should only make a wretched hash of it."

There was a minute's silence, during which my father traversed the length of his study a dozen times or so; and I contemplated the bound volumes of the *Lancet* and cheerful kindred works, wondering all the time how, supposing that to be the sort of nourishment on which the medical brain was expected habitually to thrive, I had ever been able to contemplate the possibility of having to assimilate it without undergoing a nightmare induced by the mere notion. Everything within the four walls seemed suggestive of the profession I hated, and when for distraction's sake I glanced out into the street, the first thing to salute me there was the sight of the tossing heads of the fine pair of horses in the waiting brougham at the door. Much as I loved horses I had an invincible dislike to that pair. To me they were the living symbols of the profession, and bore the impress of an eminent physician with a large West-End practice on every buckle of their harness; and if the words "Unto this last" had been stamped across their foreheads, I could not have regarded them more completely than I did as the fate I was inevitably destined to come to in the end. The sight of the tossing heads and the sound of the champing bits only acted as a fresh deterrent to keep me from the path at the

entrance to which my unwilling feet were already standing.

My father turned round after a minute or so. His face had softened somewhat, and the stern lines about the mouth were visibly relaxed.

"Understand me, my boy," he said abruptly. "I am no believer in pressed men, and in this matter you are perhaps the better judge. Don't come to a decision in a hurry, however. Take a week in which to think the thing over; and if at the end of that time you find yourself still in the same mind come to me and let me know."

Well, I took the week, and I considered the question fairly, studying it from every point of view, and weighing the *pros* and *cons* to the best of my ability. At the end of the stated time I presented myself in the study once more.

"If I could have gratified you simply by giving up my own wishes and staying in England, I would have done it, father. But I should never have proved myself a worthy successor to you, never have done you bare credit, even, I'm perfectly convinced of that; and the best thing will be to let me go. Better make a decent settler than a bad doctor! The one would be bound to shame you; and the other need not, and shall not, if I can help it."

Well, there it was. We talked a little more, but the decision was virtually made. And the upshot was that before many days had passed it was a settled thing that I should sail next month to push my fortunes in Canada.



to each other as his fine pair of steppers took us down at a smart pace to Euston. The *Leander* sailed from Liverpool, of course; and the eminent surgeon, hard run though he was, and with his time, as he was told once, worth a guinea a minute, would not allow his youngest born, ne'er-do-well though he might be, to leave England without seeing him off.

There in the river lay the big liner, as we got down to the docks next morning; and the sight of her came to me with a sudden shock, for it brought with it the first overpowering sense of the reality of separation—separation from parents and friends, from home and England. She was there, and the sight of her funnels gave me the first glimpse of the new life, holding in its depths unknown possibilities, that I was shortly to begin. Well, perhaps I did waver in that moment; perhaps even wish . . . I was but a lad of barely nineteen, and not ultra-precocious at that, and it would have been odd had a faint feeling of regret not made itself evident to me then. And just at that moment my father took out his watch; and the sight of that watch, with its ticking, restless second hand, which, whenever I looked at it, always struck me as the best representation of perpetual motion I could think of, acted on my wavering mind precisely as the sight and sound of the brougham horses had done a couple of months ago. To hold such a watch in my hand and count pulses by the round dozen? Not if I knew it! The medical profession might be the noblest in the world—I was quite ready to acknowledge that; but at the same

CHAPTER II

ON BOARD THE LEANDER

I WON'T say much about my parting with those at home. Every young fellow knows well enough what that is; and if he doesn't yet, it is a foregone conclusion that he soon will, in one way or another. It comes suddenly with some, with others by degrees; this breaking away from old ties and traditions, a gradual lengthening of the tether, little by little, until, looking back, one sees with a sort of surprise how far away one has got from the home nest, and realizes for the first time that between what was and what is now, there has been a great gulf fixed.

Emigration was all very well in the abstract, I found. But when it came to the genuine and particular reality, and I had to go to my mother and bid her farewell, not for such and such a definite period, but perhaps for all time, I found silence better than words for some minutes afterwards; and my father and I had very little to say

time, it was equally clear that the noblest profession was not the one for which Providence had intended me.

"Half-past twelve," said my father, replacing his watch, in blissful ignorance of the effect it had produced during those few moments, or how far I had gone in that space. "We've plenty of time."

We got aboard as soon as possible, for my father had set his heart on seeing all over her, and would not rest until he had inspected the cabin engaged for me. Some one else was to share it, for his traps were there already, a precious big heap of them, too; and I could not help wondering, as we went up on deck again and I looked curiously at the crowd of passengers, which out of them all was my destined cabin-mate, and what sort of a fellow he would turn out to be, old or young, English or American, pleasant or the reverse. But I soon gave over speculating on that score. The time left was too precious; yet, short though the remaining minutes might be, my father and I seemed to have less and less to say to each other, as they fled by, and the remarks we did make were the tritest of commonplaces, and distinctly short.

The bell rang, and the last moment came. I looked up at him, and held out my hand, speaking earnestly—

"Father, if I had felt I could—I'd have done it! You understand? you know that?"

He nodded. For a moment there was silence, and the surrounding din only made that silence between us more evident.

"My boy," my father said huskily, "I've not

much to say to you that you don't already know, that I've not said to you long ago. Keep straight with God and man, keep a corner in your heart for us at home, and you'll do." He wrung my hand. "Remember, you three lads between you have the honour of the family in your keeping. Good-bye, my boy. God bless you."

The bell rang again, and all the friends got ashore. I saw my father's face at the edge of the quay, realized that he was beyond my reach; and then I felt motion beneath my feet as the tug started, and knew that all that bound me to the old familiar life had been snapped through for ever.

One ought to play the hero invariably throughout one's own autobiography, I know. According to the story books, as a rule, the people seem to be either born Spartans of approved quality, or else they go to the other extreme and turn out to be Niobes of the first water. For my own part, I had nothing heroic about me; for in place of feeling inclined to express a Childe Harold sort of delight at seeing the last of my native land, I felt, to tell the plain unvarnished truth, not only a good deal down in the mouth, but a trifle misty about the eyes. Possibly the feeling was scarcely reasonable; yet I was conscious of a sort of resentment mixed up with the regret of parting, too, a kind of soreness, as if old England, regarding me as a genuine black sheep, had kicked me out in disgrace; and the consciousness roused in me, even at that moment, a dogged determination to let her see in one way or another that the said black sheep had something white about him after all. However, this feeling

did not remain long uppermost. It struck me that the best thing I could do would be to go below and look after my belongings there; and I went.

The door of my cabin was swinging ajar, and I had just reached and had my hand on it, when to my surprise I was greeted by a sudden shout from within.

"Steward! steward! ahoy!"

I wasn't the steward, but the cabin was mine, undoubtedly; and my first idea was that somebody must have got into the wrong quarters by mistake. In that case, it would be only kind to acquaint him therewith, with which intention I opened the door and looked in.

The cabin had been—comparatively speaking—empty when I had left it. It was not empty now. In point of fact, it was pretty well choked up by a pile of luggage, for the first instalment had received reinforcements, heaped anyhow on the floor; and over the pile, extended across in a frog-like, spread-eagle kind of attitude, the outcome of a desperate attempt to clutch and embrace the whole at once, lay the presumptive owner.

"Steward!" he shouted again as I entered, a desperate ring in his tone—not looking at me as he spoke, however, for the pile was unsteady, since she had already begun to pitch a bit, and it took him all his time to hold on. "Oh, you've turned up at last, have you?" He glanced over his shoulder there, and saw his mistake. "I beg your pardon, I took you for the steward. You're my cabin-mate, I suppose. Have to introduce myself. My name's Colquhoun—very much at your service.

Excuse my present attitude, will you? but the fact is, these wretched things will be all over the place if I don't hang on to them all I know how. Sorry to trouble you, but if you wouldn't mind going to the door and yelling for that steward I'd be infinitely obliged to you."

I went to the door as requested and gave the necessary yell. For some time, as might have been expected during the bustle of the steamer's departure, I exerted my lungs in vain; but after a time I succeeded in collaring one of the desired functionaries, and hauling him almost by main force to the cabin, to find my new acquaintance, although somewhat out of breath by this time, still clinging in desperation to his property. The steward promptly laid hold of one package, I collared a second, that had been to all appearance bound on a voyage of discovery through the open door on its own account; and the owner, with some difficulty, however, for he must have been tolerably stiff, got up and shook himself.

"New kind of experience," he observed, rubbing first one shin and then the other, and looking about him all the time with an interest that was more boyish than anything else. "Ever been to sea before?"

"Yes," I answered. "Haven't you?"

"First trip," responded he, shaking his head. "Don't like the sea. Never did. I shouldn't be here at all if within the bounds of possibility I could have got across without. I say, steward, where are you going to put 'em?"

"That's just what I'd like to know, sir," answered

the individual thus appealed to, who had been ruefully contemplating the pile of luggage before him. "You ought to have had these here things all marked, sir."

"So I have," responded the owner with cheerful assurance. "Got my name on every single package."

"'Tisn't that I mean, sir, begging your pardon. You ought to have had one or two of 'em marked 'Wanted on Voyage,' you know. The Company don't allow all this lot of luggage in the cabins, let alone there being no place to put it. The same as this other young gentleman has his done, sir."

The stranger turned, and contemplated my worldly possessions seriously for a moment.

"Oh, that's it, is it? And how on earth was I to be supposed to know that? Does the Company expect its passengers to evolve what is classically termed 'knowledge of the ropes' out of their own inner consciousness?"

This was beyond the steward. But he knew what he meant, at any rate, and he stuck to it.

"Didn't the Company send you no instructions, sir? No printed forms?"

"Instructions? No! They would have been clever to have sent printed forms along the telegraph wires. I wired to know if I could get a berth on this steamer, and when they wired back 'Yes,' I came down South as sharp as the Scotch night express could bring me. Had dinner up in Inverness-shire last night, so I don't fancy I've lost much time; and I can tell you I was glad enough to get myself and my traps aboard somehow,

without bothering my head about instructions. I say, steward, be careful with that gun-case. I'll have that in the cabin, at any rate."

"And what about the rest, sir? You don't want 'em all on the voyage, surely."

"Don't I?" responded my cabin-mate coolly. "I do though. My brother's man packed them, I didn't; and I'll be shot if I know where to lay my hand on a thing out of the lot. But if you or any one else imagines that I'm going to make the tour of the *Leander*—hope to goodness she won't come to grief like her namesake!—for everything I want between now and landing, he's made a pretty big mistake, that's all. Well, look here, steward. I've no wish to break through the rules, nor yet to trespass upon more than my share of the space here," with a slight bow in my direction. "I hate bother, and I'll be glad if you'll overhaul the lot at your leisure and pack them as they ought to be. Give you half-a-sov. for your trouble, you know. Think you can manage it?"

The steward stared; probably he did not often earn half-sovereigns so easily. But he was too old a bird to show the surprise he felt, so merely answered, in the tone of one conferring rather than accepting a favour, that he thought he could manage it, and, having obtained the owner's keys, dragged off the luggage, a package at a time. My new acquaintance, apparently well satisfied with this arrangement, turned to me.

I had had time to get a good look at him during the foregoing; and what I saw I liked. A tall, slight, although well-knit young fellow, apparently

a year or two my senior, his hair thick and dark, not curly, but with a free wave in it, the features clear-cut and well-formed, and dark, brilliant, penetrating eyes. I liked the square-cut chin and firmly-moulded, resolute mouth; I liked the frank steadiness of gaze in the brown, well-opened eyes, shining with the peculiar luminous softness characteristic of the colour; I liked the candour of the broad, open brow. It was a face that one could trust on sight, and the smile was a smile that won the heart.

"Queer little dog-hutch of a place, isn't it?" he queried, looking about him with the same eager boyish curiosity as before. "Talk about swinging a cat! there's not room enough here to swing a mouse with a tail worth-mentioning. These shelves are for us to sleep on, I suppose—bunks they call them, don't they? Which is yours?"

I told him I took it that the point was one we could settle for ourselves.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" He looked at me, whistling softly under his breath. "Shall we go by seniority, or is it to be the first in the field? Give up to any fellow who's my senior, you know. How old are you, if you don't mind? Don't say if you'd rather not."

"Close on nineteen," said I, laughing outright at the frank simplicity of his manner.

"I'd have taken you for more than that," he rejoined, with another keen glance that seemed to size me up from head to heel. "I'm three-and-twenty. In that case, the choice is mine, I take it. But you are having no chance that way. Look

here, we had better toss for the upper berth. It's the better place, I suppose."

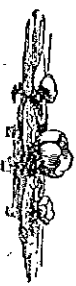
"Have you never been aboard ship before, then?" I asked, wondering at his manifest ignorance.

"Never in all my life. Only know the names at second-hand. You wouldn't find me here now, if I could get across any other way. But the herring-pond is a trifle too wide for a swim, and the time has not come yet when you can hire a pair of wings by the hour. Wish with all my heart it would. There are two things in the world I don't like: one is water in this connection, the other . . . never mind, tell you some other time, perhaps. Now then," and he pulled out a florin and threw it up, "heads or tails?"

"Heads," cried I; and heads it was. Colquhoun laughed.

"You've got the upper berth," said he, and glanced at me slyly. "Perhaps, considering that you've been to sea and I've not, it's just as well—for you. Shall we go on deck now?"

And that was my first introduction to my fellow-passenger and cabin-mate, Neil Colquhoun.



the acquaintance of one's fellow-passengers before it is about time to start bidding them farewell; and you have scarcely entered on the voyage itself before you find yourself in sight of the end.

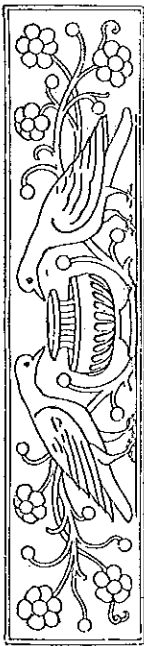
There was so much the more time to be got through under the old order of things, of course; and we fairly exhausted the usual resources in a determined endeavour to kill it somehow. Deck quoits and cricket—the ball tied to a long length of string and coming on deck every few minutes as “a demp unpleasant body” in consequence—by day; concerts, theatricals, tableaux, and all that sort of thing, in the evening. We had a jolly set of passengers, on the whole; one or two cantankerous old curmudgeons among them, of course, but those you will find in every community, and ship-board, with about a thousand souls all told, including crew and steerage, to be reckoned, is scarcely likely to be an exception. I used to get quite skilled in tactics concerning them; and I found before long that the best way to deal with them was just to turn conveniently deaf whenever I saw them getting ready to discharge a broadside of grumbling; or, better still, to discover something of profound interest forward, which required immediate and thorough investigation, the moment they heaved in sight. It was kinder, both for them and for myself.

But the pleasantest, most genial, and when he did show up, one of the most popular of the whole set, was my own cabin-mate, Colquhoun. No one could have been better qualified to speak on the point than I, for the simple reason that I shared

CHAPTER III

A BAD START

NEEED not say much about our passage. One trip across the Atlantic is pretty much like another in its main features on these liners; and the run is made by so many now-a-days that it would be stale work to go over old ground, and next door to impossible to attempt to say anything new on the subject. We had the usual experiences, of course; for the first day or two, with the exception of a hardened few, among whom I made one, there was uncommonly little to be seen of the passengers; next, a timid issuing forth on the part of a limited, very limited, number; finally, a complete resurrection, for it seemed nothing less, from the regions below. Of course the voyage was far longer in the days of which I write. Nobody had even dreamed of Atlantic greyhounds; and the notion of making the passage under less than a fortnight, at the very least, was never taken into consideration. At present it seems to me that one has hardly begun to make



cabins with him; and there is no better test going than that for knowing a fellow pretty nearly down to the ground and finding out the stamp he is. Not many would have suffered by the intimacy so little as Colquhoun. From first to last I found him just the same, courteous, pleasant, genuine, always willing to make the best of everything, and to look at things from the bright point of view, and without a particle of what is commonly known as "side" about him. If good standing, long descent, and all that kind of thing offer any excuse for fellows giving themselves airs, he might have done so with more to show for it than most; but I've noticed that it is generally those who feel by no means sure of their own standing ground who put on the side, evidently believing it to be necessary for the due preservation of their dignity. For all his native high spirits and vivacity, however, his nature was far from being one-sided; the saying—"Where there is much light the shade is deep," found ample confirmation in him. Poor old Neil! he was uncommonly bad, that first trip of his; and I never saw a fellow slower in finding his sea-legs. It took an awful lot out of him too, and in spite of his pluck, he spent the first half of the trip lying in his bunk, clean bowled over. I don't mean that he was actually sea-sick all that time, of course; but he was a fearfully delicate chap, only so wonderfully game, and the *mal-de-mer* took it out of him thoroughly. One night I had to cut out in the small hours and stir up the doctor to come to him, and I remember next day, when the latter strolled in to visit us after breakfast, what a string

of questions he asked Colquhoun, and how he looked him up and down as he did it. Finally, when the said questions had "made him sensible," as Neil himself would have phrased it, that, the thing having been done for him already, his patient was not on his way to Canada to make his fortune, he demanded bluntly—

"Why, what on earth's taking you out there, then? What are you going to do?"

"Going in for farming," responded my cabin-mate cheerfully, looking his questioner straight in the face.

The doctor—he was a young fellow fresh from St. Thomas's, much given to light tweeds and a purple velvet smoking-cap, with more of the athlete than the student about him, and as fond of a lark as any school-boy—very nearly laughed in his face. Then he told him pretty bluntly, that the best thing he could do would be to book his homeward passage in advance by the *Leander*, her next home trip but one, and go in for a bit of touring in the interval; for that would be about all he was fit for. Which, very naturally, Colquhoun didn't like, although in the main it was true enough. Of course he had no business to think of going to the backwoods to rough it, only a fellow doesn't usually care to have an outsider shoving in his oar and telling him unpleasant truths to his face.

I used to go below and sit with him a bit at times, for it struck me that it must be pretty dull for him down there; and we would get on the talk a good deal. It was not long before we knew all about each other. He came of an old Highland

family, a Scot born and bred, although he had been educated in England, and his only living relative was a brother. And in connection with that brother came in about the most original family arrangement that I had ever heard of.

"Twins," explained Colquhoun briefly, "but I'm the elder, and inherited, though there was little on the estate to inherit, except deer forest. But apart from that we came in for a good deal in other ways between us, through my mother; land up in Inverness, a manor, you would call it, among the rest. So we settled that the one to marry first should claim that, in any case, and the other the remaining personalty. Kenneth got married three months ago, so he's settled as the laird up in Strathspey for the rest of his natural life, and as I had a notion to try a new kind of experience, I let the deer forest for six years and came off here."

"And you mean to say," demanded I, remembering our first meeting, "that you only came to that decision—to settle in Canada—the day before the *Leander* sailed?"

"No, I don't," returned he with a stare. "Who said I did? I had made up my mind to go a couple of months before; I hadn't decided on the time, that was all. Then I took the fancy to go by the *Leander*, and I came South by the night mail. What's odd in that? When a man's his own master, with no one to please but himself, he doesn't need to lose much time over making up his mind."

Well, let me get it over, and say the worst at once. Whether all that went on in the smoking-

room of the *Leander*, after the majority of the passengers, including all the ladies, of course, had retired, was contrary to rule, and would have been permitted by the authorities, had they been cognizant thereof, I don't know. I suppose the truth was, that sort of thing was winked at. Steam must work off somehow, and that particular kind might have found a more dangerous safety-valve, had the one I refer to not been available.

They were grown men, the rest of them, old hands at that sort of thing, too, and I, to state the case in plain terms, was a raw lad, a tenderfoot, and a fool. A downright fool, nothing more or less, and as far as that phase of the matter went, there was not the shadow of an excuse for me. A man, be he prince or prophet, if he lean too far over a precipice, is bound to come to grief; and I, pressing heedlessly into the very forefront of danger, had no right to expect to get off scot free.

It was only the same old story over again, I suppose. Other resources, distractions, amusements, were not wanting, Heaven knows! but they failed to satisfy that fatal, pernicious craving for a false excitement, the desire to do as others did, to shake off restraints, and prove myself a man. Take care of myself? Of course I could take care of myself—I should just like to have seen the fellow who dared hint otherwise . . . So it began, and went on, night after night; and some time in the small hours, fresh from the company of the choice spirits in the smoking-room, with the echo of the gambling oaths still ringing in my ears,

aye! with the taste of them at times in my mouth, I would sneak along to our state-room, where my cabin-mate would be lying in his bunk, and asleep, nine times out of ten. If I found him awake it made no difference; I never told him where I had come from, or what I had been about, and he never asked. He was not the fellow to try to ferret out things, or to tender his advice without being asked for it. If he was awake, I would start telling him what had been going on earlier in the evening; the innocent amusements, the legitimate play in decent company, and other things that would bear talking over, and then I would turn in as soon as possible and shut up. Not invariably to sleep, however; and my thoughts, as I lay awake, were not so bright as they had been, not by a long way. In those days I did not care overmuch to think about home, and more than once, when the thought of my mother came to me, I would choke it back, and try to think of something else. That's a pretty sure test, remember, you lads who may be away from home when you read this story of mine. If at any particular time you don't care overmuch to have the remembrance of your mother come to you, depend upon it that there is something not on the square in what you are about just then; and I might have had a tolerably fair guess from that at the way things were going with me, had I stopped to think—a thing I never did.

So it went on until the end came. The bitter end, although in one sense it was for me a merciful pull up. It was a Friday, I remember, and we had been hard at it after hours every night that week.

I was losing; I knew that. Ever since my first innings, when I had of course come in for the slice of devil's luck that is bound to fall to the lot of a new hand, I had been losing heavily. Yet still I went on. One wonders at times that fellows should plunge the way they do, when they know all the time that the play is going dead against them, and the thing is inexplicable, except by bearing in mind the awful grip that play takes of one, and the lingering, desperate hope that the luck will turn at last and let the other side have a chance.

There had been a good deal of drinking going on, and the stewards had been running in and out incessantly for the last hour. No fear of their splitting; they knew on which side their bread was buttered a good deal too well for that. Most of the fellows were—well, excited, if one couldn't say worse of them, and the others were on the way. I had not got so far as that, yet; God only knows how it might have gone with me in the long run, but at present I had stopped on the safe side of that pitfall. We had been at it since midnight, and the time could not have been far off two. But a lull came at last, and the rest, recognizing that it was time to pull up, began totting up their winnings, or losings for the night. I didn't. For very shame's sake I didn't. I didn't even try. I had a too good idea of the sum total; I knew it well enough, and I sat there among them, sullenly silent. I had a trick of getting into a vein of abstraction at times, and so of noticing nothing of what was going on around me, and I must have been doing that on the present occasion, for

when a hand touched my arm and a voice sounded in my ears, I started as if I had been shot.

The speaker was my right-hand neighbour, a New Yorker named Walsh, who was returning *via* Canada to the States, and I glanced up to find him regarding me in a kindly, half-commiserating fashion. Naturally, after the way of youngsters, I felt inclined to resent that.

"Say, young fellow," he began in a friendly whisper, "hadn't you better clap the brake on right off, before she gets too much way on?"

"What d' you mean?" demanded I, firing up in an instant.

"No offence," came the prompt rejoinder. "But you've been making the pace considerable, I reckon, and I——"

Just then, for the first time it struck me that a dead silence had fallen in the place, and that every eye in the whole company was fixed on me. Then I saw that one of the men I had been playing against the whole of the week had stepped forward, and was looking my way. As soon as he caught my eye, he raised his eye-brows questioningly, pointing to the note-book in his hand.

I spoke out then. I knew what he meant. I had no notion of showing funk, and Walsh's words had in a measure prepared me. Besides, I knew that I had been losing heavily all along.

"How do I stand?" I asked, devoutly hoping that my voice sounded steadier in the ears of the listeners than it did in my own. I would have given worlds to have had the din of voices and laughter break out once more around me, any-

thing in preference to this hateful, waiting silence. No such luck. It was curious, the interest that an episode such as that excited among that knot of gamblers. Perhaps each of them, remembering his own individual experience at the outset of his career, felt an interested sort of curiosity in noting how the present victim took his.

Staubton, my principal opponent, bowed slightly in answer to my question, and opening his note-book, began rapidly totting up some columns of figures, his lips moving in time with his pencil. What an interminable age he seemed to be in getting to the foot! But he looked up at last.

"In full?" he asked briefly.

"In full," I responded doggedly, setting my teeth under the pleasant consciousness that every man in the room had his attention fixed on me, and was listening with all his ears.

"Then . . . Three hundred pounds!"

The room seemed to turn and swim with me. For an instant I saw nothing clearly except the lamps swinging rhythmically from the ceiling, and the glare of the light they shed on the surroundings, until through it all there grew gradually into view that circle of excited, eager—some of them evil—faces. But I pulled myself together presently, got to my feet, shaking off Walsh's restraining hand, and almost before I knew what I was about had fired out above all their heads the one word—"Impossible!"

There was a row at that, of course. You would have thought they would have gone on to have the ceiling off for a moment, until they remembered

themselves and pulled up, for prudence's sake. But a round dozen of geese would not have been in it for the storm of hissing that followed on. Staunton—he was a great, muscular, upstanding, black-haired giant, with quadron, or octoroon blood at the very least, in his veins—came raging up to me with an oath, his white teeth showing wolf-like against the full red lips, his great balls of eyes rolling in their sockets.

What did I mean by impossible? Would I tell him that?

"No use getting into a passion over the thing," said I with all the coolness I could muster. "My meaning's plain enough. You tell me I have lost to you three hundred pounds. I say that, playing as we have been doing all along, the thing's utterly impossible!"

"All along!" roared Staunton. "Where's your memory? The stakes were doubled, before we began play to-night!"

"Doubled?" gasped I; and I could feel myself grow white. "Not with my consent or knowledge," I added quickly. But a conviction of the truth was already dawning on me, and in my heart I had begun to curse myself for a fool.

"They were!" raged he, losing his head completely now, his voice rising to a scream. "You hear that, gentlemen, you hear that? I—I make one assertion, and he, this Englishman, dares to deny it, to——"

"No! look here, he did nothing of the sort," struck in the American hastily. "Clap the brake on, some of you fellows, will you? unless you want

them to get wind of all this bobbery up on deck. Call this the fair play you Britishers brag about! Guess I'll fight shy of it, if that's so. Who's to hear a word in all this noise, I'd like to know? Let the youngster have a chance to say what he's got to say."

They quieted down a bit at that, and I got my hearing.

"You say the stakes were doubled before we started to-night?" I asked Staunton, keeping my eyes on him, and speaking as coolly as I could.

"Yes," he answered doggedly, though his eyes shifted uneasily, refusing to meet mine with any steadiness. "The suggestion was made by—one of us, possibly myself; and every one in the room signified his consent." He turned to the other men present. "Gentlemen, I appeal to you as my witnesses. Oblige me by stating whether you were present at the time."

"I was. And I!—and I!" came back in a chorus from the other men; and my opponent flashed a triumphant glance at me from beneath his heavy brows.

"I don't question that point," I put in. "I question the fact of my being there." I turned sharply on Staunton. "Was I present when this proposal was made to double stakes?"

He looked black. The white gleam of his teeth showed again momentarily beneath the bristling moustache as he responded with a sullen sort of snarl.

"I can't tell whether you were or not. If you were not it was none of my business. If any one

objected, I took it for granted with the rest of us that he would speak up at the right time, and not kick up a row like this at the wrong one."

One or two of the men there laughed, and nudged each other.

"Then," rejoined I, "all I've to say is, that when this suggestion was made I was not present; and in all this evening's play I have remained under the impression that the stakes remained as they were at first. I say that in vindication merely of what has passed just now. As for the penalty incurred, by trusting to the good faith of the company, I'm ready to pay it; I don't seek to escape the consequences. That is all I have to say."

"One moment," put in Staunton, suavely now, for with the certainty of an advantage gained, he had begun to get himself in hand again. "At the outset of this trip, and before our young friend here did us the honour to make one of us, I believe that a tacit understanding was arrived at, amounting in effect to this, that should any one member dissent from a proposal made generally, he should at once declare his disapproval thereof."

A murmur of assent followed this appeal, and even my American friend found himself obliged to chime in with a reluctant—"That is so."

"And if," pursued my antagonist, in the same calmly modulated tone, passing his hand smoothly over his chin as he spoke, "any one member, through—ahem—lack of experience, shall we call it? has omitted to keep an outlook on his own interests, with whom in common justice ought the blame to lie? I ask. Is it reasonable to overturn

the calculations of—of twelve," with a keen glance round, "in order to set straight the negligence of one?" And he sat down.

Well, there was the same old row again at that. Some took one side, some the other, and for a moment or so there was no hearing an intelligible word. But it was not hard to see which way the thing was going; and it struck me as a curious phase of human nature that men, who, as I had now good reason to know, were a long way from acting on the square all through, should be such sticklers for what they called a point of honour. Staunton didn't take any very prominent part in the dispute. He sat by, stroking his moustache with that same catlike motion of his hand over his lips and chin, only throwing in a word here and there, though I knew well enough he was simply dropping oil on flame and egging the others on. So many talked at once that I could only catch a word now and again; but the phrase "create a precedent" seemed to be the one uppermost on the lips of all, and I wasn't idiot enough not to know the meaning of that. At last my friend from the States, who had been talking nineteen to the dozen the whole of the time, detached himself from the excited group of men and crossed over to me.

"Can you plank it down, lad?" he demanded in an anxious whisper. "Because if you can, that'll be the slickest way out for you, I can see. It's not all on the square, I suspicion that; and if you want to fight, say the word and I'm with you. But you've given them a handle, and they mean to

hang on to it, and that's a fact. You're not half smart enough for these fellows, that's about it; you've trusted them too far, and so you've come to grief. Won't do to leave your stakes to watch themselves and never give an eye to them. It's a stiff card for a youngster like you to play down; but better that than let an I.O.U. get into his hands. See?"

I nodded, I could not have spoken a word just then. Over the half of my little fortune, of all the money I had in the world, to go for this. I had the money with me, in notes and gold; day and night I never parted from it, the nest-egg, the nucleus of my fortune. But it would not do to think of that; and I planked the money down then and there, and obtained a receipt in full from Staunton. Walsh watched that part of the proceedings for me jealously; and when it was over, and he had seen, as he said, that it was all on the square this time, he came back to me with the receipt in his hand.

"I've taken the liberty of putting my name down here as a witness," said he in a low voice. "I strongly suspicion our friend yonder ain't the clean potato. Look here, young fellow, you're only a youngster, and a Britisher at that. But you are a plucky lad to take a knock like that without whining; and I like you for it. See here, my boy, if you'll take a word of advice from a man who's old enough to be your dad, you'll steer clear of this sort of thing for the future."

I sat listening dully, my chin sunk on my chest, my eyes on the carpet, my hands plunged in my

pockets. I could have gone under the earth, over the bows, rather, with shame at the mere thought of having been gulled in such a fashion, but pride forbade me to show it. I was too sore-hearted to stand questioning, however; and when Walsh went on with blunt kindness to ask further, trying to probe the depth of the wound by way of finding out whether I was quite stone broke, I answered curtly that I could pull through, and got up to leave the hateful den, longing only to find myself alone. No need to wonder now at what I had read of suicides at Monte Carlo! I knew in my heart how the poor despairing wretches must have felt, and could guess at the aspect the world must have borne to their eyes, before they took the last desperate plunge and left it by the coward's back-door. Years back though it be, the remembrance of that single quarter of an hour is with me still. Well it may! I paid for it in a way I shall remember to my dying day.



my heart. I envied his sleep, his mind at rest, his conscience clear, no black spot dimming the brightness of his present or past; and tried to get away from the contrast offered by myself. Then I flung myself on a seat, and tried to think—but in the storm of passionate emotions that swayed me then, thinking was next to impossible. But for the fear of waking my cabin-mate, I could have broken down with the wretched consciousness of shame and despair, and cried like a child.

I lifted my head and glanced at him furtively, after a minute or so, dreading to wake him and meet the penetrating steadiness of his gaze. To my wretched consciousness, it was to me a certainty that a moment's glance could not fail to tell him the truth; and I shrank with an overmastering reluctance from seeing the expected inevitable flash of contempt leap into his eyes. Never given to force his opinions on others, or to state them except when asked, I had never known a man who held clearer or stronger views on points of right and wrong than Neil Colquhoun; and although the subject had never been discussed between us, I knew pretty well in what light he would regard the sort of thing that went on after hours in the smoking-room. For the first time, while I sat looking towards the bunk, it struck me then, as my eyes rested on the clear-cut profile on the pillow, what a fine face it was. One need not depend alone upon the illuminating light of the eyes to feel the force of a conviction like that; the contour of eye and brow, the mere lines of the mouth and chin, telling their story when the

CHAPTER IV

THE GILT OFF THE GINGERBREAD

I GOT clear of the place somehow, and crept back to our own cabin. Bitterly did I wish I had never left it for the hateful den from which I had come. Overhead I could hear the tramp of the watch on deck, and even down there, the great onward pulsation of the steamer's progress as she forged her way ahead through the inky darkness throbbed and vibrated round me; but these were the only sounds that came to my ears. Quiet and peaceful, the cabin looked, the subdued light of the lamp shedding a softened glow on the surroundings, now at this end, now at that, as it swung noiselessly to the motion of the steamer.

Colquhoun lay in his bunk, sound asleep. Our steward was indefatigable in looking after him, and he had been in during my absence to see that he wanted nothing and to put the place to rights. I looked at the sleeper as he lay there, in the perfect abandonment of rest, and envied him from

individual is off his guard, are evidences that cannot lie. I don't refer to beauty of outline, of course; although as far as that went, my cabin-mate was as good-looking a fellow as you would find in a day's ride; it was something infinitely higher that I was conscious of then. For the first time, I recognized the latent strength behind the gentleness, and knew the face to be that of a man as strong as he was true. I had prided myself on my strength once. Would he have failed—have fallen into the trap as I had done? Would he, for all his winning grace of manner, his courteous bearing, his readiness to please and be pleased, have suffered himself for one moment to become the dupe of a knot of gamblers, to be enticed for so much as an instant from the course he held to be right? I knew the answer to be given to that, and despised myself anew for the weakest of weak fools. A good fellow all round, with nothing of the Puritan about him, he was one of those men concerning whom the discovery is not made all at once; that, once try to get them past a certain point, and you might as well try to move the Bass Rock.

I did not sit looking at him long. A sensitive, highly strung temperament like his would be certain even in sleep to respond unerringly to the power of the human eye, the consciousness that some one was looking at him; and I rose wearily after a minute or so and began to turn in. It was just as well he did not wake. I was in the very mood to pick a quarrel with some one, and there being no one else available just then, he might have had to do duty; although he was, as a rule, a

difficult fellow to get up a quarrel with. I don't mean thereby that he was too good-natured—he was the reverse of that, for the simple reason that good-nature implies a certain tendency towards the phlegmatic, and his temperament was too highly strung to admit the presence of a grain of phlegm in his composition—besides, he had a hot enough temper of his own, if he had let himself out of hand. But he had penetration enough to detect at once what the other fellow was driving at, and defeat his amiable intention by the force of coolness and sheer good-humour—a thing as widely different from good-nature as chalk is from cheese.

There was little sleep for me as I lay with wide-open eyes staring out into the darkness of the cabin, while the great liner throbbed and tore her way on through the night. We were in the neighbourhood of the Banks now; the fogs were pretty thick, with the fog-horn going every minute; and through the quiet below one could catch every now and then the muffled tramp and the hoarse voices of the men on deck. There might have been danger, possibly, I don't know; and in my condition just then, I doubt whether I should have cared over much if there had been. Sore-hearted, ashamed, and miserable as I was, it struck me that the world would have been well rid of me. For all that, contrition had not come yet, that is, if contrition implied utter abhorrence of the thing I had done. I had honesty enough in my nature not to attempt to blind myself, and I knew in my heart that had things gone the other way, or had my loss been only a slight one, I should

have felt nothing of my present experience. In other words, had the guarantee of success been given me, I would have staked my all again without an instant's hesitation. There was no principle in my self-reproach, not a shred of it, only the bitter sense of defeat and loss, with its attendant humiliation and shame, and the results to follow. Results! As fair a start as any young fellow could wish for, and I had flung it recklessly away. Five hundred pounds by way of capital, and my passage paid, second cabin; not many lads had a chance like that given them, and my own wicked folly had chucked it away for ever. More than half gone, and for what? For the purpose of paying an iniquitous gambling debt. Three hundred pounds lost in gaming, before I was even of age, before I had been much over a week on board. And I, in company with my brothers, had the good name of the family in my keeping!

There is one thing that every one, however short his experience of a voyage, must have had borne in upon his notice—namely, that no place favours the growth and exchange of confidence like ship-board. Probably there are many ways of accounting for the fact; but in all likelihood the sense of companionship, of enforced participation in whatever the lottery of fate may throw up, in a word, the circumstance that, for the time being, all are literally in one boat, is the strongest motive of any. Hence, apart altogether from more intimate considerations, it was scarcely in reason that a couple of young fellows, shut up together, as Colquhoun and I were for so many hours on end,

should not have talked things of mutual interest pretty freely over; or that, before we had been many days on board, each should not have been perfectly well aware of what were the other's plans and prospects on landing. Moreover, on coming to compare notes, we found that the intentions of each were in point of fact identical—namely, to take up land, and start farming it on his own account. Colquhoun didn't say much at the time. But he had evidently been thinking the matter over, for a day or so later, with a good deal of diffidence, however, he made a suggestion.

"I don't know how you'll take it, Carless," he began by saying, "or whether the notion would commend itself to you. If not, let it stop there, of course; no need to say another word. But I've been thinking that since we are both bound on following up the same thing, we might do worse, you and I, than cast in our lot together."

I sat on the edge of a portmanteau and stared at him. In business transactions I was about as ignorant and innocent as a baby; and for a minute or so I didn't catch his meaning.

"I mean run in double harness, go into partnership, or whatever they call it out yonder," explained he. "That's the idea that struck me. No great hurry though, of course; we've ample time to think and talk the thing over, since it's clearly evident that this old tub intends to take her own time in the way of getting across. If you don't like the notion——"

"There's nothing I should like better," I responded with promptitude. "The objection that I see in

the way is of another nature altogether. Look here, Colquhoun," for I saw that he was about to speak. "You know my resources, limited, decidedly; you know your own, the same, with the simple difference of a small *Um* before the word. Now, if the advantages to accrue to you from such an arrangement were likely in any sense to correspond with those coming my way, I'd say Done with you with all the willingness in life. But as it is——"

Neil—he was lying full length on his back in his berth, rolled round on his elbow with a grunt.

"Well, as it is," responded he, "since that confounded pride of yours, of which you've such a stock on hand, appears to be the stumbling-block, we had better try what ocular—no, tangible, material demonstration will do towards removing it. Come here, you obstinate specimen of a John Bull, and try that. Now try your own; and tell me honestly which of the two, in all the rough work we shall have ahead of us, is likely to make the better hand at it, and to have the pull of the other."

"That" was his biceps muscle. There was a good deal to choose between the quality of our individual and respective property, certainly, and I could not with truth have said otherwise.

"You heard what Morton said yesterday," he went on seriously—it was the day following that on which the doctor had stated his opinion with such engaging frankness. "None of his business of course; yet I suppose there was some truth in it. I was a fool to take up the notion, possibly; but what is done is done, and I have never yet known how to put my hand to the plough and

then look back. What I can do, I will, but I'm bound to confess that at times my share will have to be that of the sleeping partner. If I've the capital, which I didn't work for—and of which on that account I've no reason to be proud—you've the muscle, so we're quits. Any advantage you may gain will be more than outbalanced by what I come in for through you; so if the notion pleases you, shake hands on it, and the thing's virtually done. We'll see to the papers and all that as soon as we get ashore."

Well, we had a little more discussion after that, but he got, as he generally succeeded in doing, his own way in the end; and the outcome was, that before we had been a week on board we had agreed to cast in our lot together. That simplified matters considerably, of course. We made no end of plans, and talked over our prospects by the hour; and I set about writing an enthusiastic letter to my father, dwelling on the splendid opening that had come to me, and lauding Colquhoun up to the skies as the best fellow that ever stepped. So he was; I was right enough there. I had no cause to change my opinion now, as far as he was concerned. . . . And then that black work came in between.

Well! the chance was gone. I knew that, knew too that I had wilfully if not designedly chucked it overboard and lost it. I could not have thrown away that three hundred in a more abominably reprehensible style had I sunk it in a sack weighted with shot over the stern of the *Leander*. But Colquhoun knew nothing of that, of the circumstances that had forced me to change my mind, and for sheer

shame I would not tell him. Yet I was bound to let him know that I was no longer on, in other words; that the agreement between us must come to an end. More than once, when we were together in the cabin, I had it at my tongue's end; but the intention had hung fire on such occasions, as I say, for very shame's sake. However, a few days later, when we had got through the Gulf and well into the St. Lawrence, and another twenty-four hours or so would bring us to Quebec, I sat down at the saloon table and wrote a brief note to him. Better, after all, I told myself bitterly, since it was a business transaction, that he should have it in black and white.

I was no more than a lad, and it was a lad's letter, bluntly and inelegantly worded, but to the point, at any rate.

"DEAR COLQUHOUN—The partnership's no go, I find, and I'll have to cry off. I can't say anything more, except that I'm awfully sorry, for I believe we'd have pulled together capitally, but it can't be helped. Yours — FRANCIS J. CARLESS."

An odd proceeding, for two fellows occupying the same cabin to write like that to each other. But after all it seemed the best way; and he understood, and wrote back in his turn, just the sort of answer—a delicate-natured fellow like himself, a good sort to the tips of his fingers, would be likely to write. He could not say a word respecting the cause of my sudden change of decision, however. I had knocked the ground from under his feet there, and left him no chance to get a word

in edgeways; and although when we next came across each other, he looked at me in a wistful kind of way and seemed about to speak, he didn't after all, and no further reference, then or later, was made on either side to the matter. It meant constraint, of course, and the discussion of indifferent subjects for the rest of the time we were together, a contrast so great to what had formerly been the case, that in one sense it seemed ludicrous; but there was no help for it.

So, when it was all over, when the trip had come to an end, and Colquhoun, stepping to my side as I stood on the tender, and relying upon our former intimacy, had asked in a low voice whether I had made any definite arrangements yet, I merely answered evasively that I was going to look round a bit, and we shook hands and parted without exchanging another syllable on the subject on which we had lately talked for hours on end. I could read the disappointment in his eyes, though he did not say a word; and I stood back and watched the tall well-knit figure cross the gangway and stride away along the quay until he disappeared in the crowd, conscious, as I lost him, of a sudden and bitter pang of regret. He was my David, I knew that, and I had to let him go without a word. A hundred chances to one that we should never set eyes the one on the other again; and as I thought of what might have been, so great a wave of bitterness and savage resentment surged up in my heart that it was just as well I was alone then, I should hardly have been fit company for any one. It was only resentment against my bad luck

of which I was conscious, however. I had not got far enough to lodge the blame in the proper quarter yet.

I had no notion where Colquhoun intended to put up. To say truth, I had never thought of asking him; and although, on losing sight of the straight, clean-limbed figure among the hurrying throngs, I wished at first that I had done it, I told myself on second thoughts that it was just as well. For my own part, I got my traps taken to a small, unpretentious hotel; and as soon as I had had some dinner, and become in a degree accustomed to the sensation of feeling solid ground once more beneath my feet, I started off, after the manner of new arrivals, to carry out my expressed intention in the way of looking round.

Looking round did not promise to be a particularly paying pursuit, however; and, after a couple of days or so at it, I found myself contemplating my remaining capital with a good deal of gravity. It was tolerably clear that if I intended to retain anything worth calling by that name, I must set about restoring the balance between incoming and outgoing without delay, and I realized the truth of that conclusion with a sense of strangeness that bordered on the fantastic. There are few harder lessons for any of us to learn—any, that is, who have known nothing hitherto of the verb to provide in its active form—than this realization of the existing necessity of putting pride in the pocket; and in place of finding work come to us, start on the task of seeking it. I got through that experience in about fifteen minutes' steady contemplation of my worldly capital and possessions, displayed

upon my bed, and viewed from the chair on which I sat, whistling meditatively, my hands buried in my pockets; and as soon as I had got the lesson by heart, started off without delay for the Government Agency.

I found the agent civil, obliging, and a long way more ready to tender advice than I was to take it. The cases were reversed as regarded encouragement, however; and I acknowledged that truth with some firmness, as I stood waiting in the dusty office.

"You think it's no go, then?" I asked, after hearing what he had to say.

He paused an instant, and looked me up and down before speaking. But his face was a tolerably clear index to his thoughts.

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as that, sir. But?" This with some hesitation, "at your age, and with so little capital, I scarcely think I should be doing altogether right to encourage you. Another hundred or so, even, and I could have said a different thing. Why, bless you, for five hundred I could have put you in the way of as good a thing as any young fellow could wish for; fairly started, all improvements; but as it is, though I don't say the thing's impossible, I'm afraid you'll find it uphill work."

I leaned one elbow on the desk and stared moodily at the wall. The agent's eyes were looking me up and down, from head to foot. After a minute he spoke again. Accustomed as he doubtless was to draw inferences from the personal appearance of his applicants, the cut of my clothes had not been lost upon him.

"No possibility of any assistance, any further supplies in the way of——" he was beginning deprecatingly.

I suppose those grey tweeds did not bear the stamp of a London tailor for nothing, and being an evident believer in the theory of deduction, he probably scented capital in the background.

"No!" I fired out the monosyllable so savagely that the agent nearly jumped a yard, and begged my pardon. I scarcely heard him, scarcely noticed the curious glance which marked and noted the sudden flush that had mounted to the roots of my hair. Well it might. The scales had fallen from my eyes at last. I saw the sin in its true light, recognized it as such, too, for the first time. I had not only flung away and squandered the money entrusted to me as destined to give me my start in life; I had, as a matter of fact, robbed my father. No wonder that the mere suggestion of coming upon him for any further supplies made me wince and tingle with shame.

"You see, sir, it's this way," the agent was saying when I next took in his words. "You can get Government land cheap enough, of course; it's not that. For the matter of that, look at the squatters. But if you haven't capital at your back, what are you going to do with the land when you've got it? There's stock, and seed, and implements you'll want, setting aside the cost of living during the first year. Know anything of farming, sir?"

"Nothing practical," said I.

"Understand the rearing and managing of stock?"

"Nothing practical there either," I answered, as many a lad, and older man too, Heaven help him, has had to answer to his cost. A moment's silence. Then—

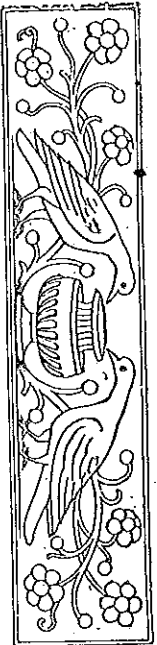
"What I should advise——" the agent began, and stopped.

I roused myself.

"Well?"

"Would be to put your capital in the bank and——" He glanced at me again with the same doubtful hesitation as before, and I could read his thoughts from his expression. "Well, sir, if you've really set your heart on trying farming, if I were you, as you haven't had any experience, I'd bank what capital I had, and get some one else to pay me for teaching me. This is what I mean." He turned swiftly, selected a newspaper from a file behind him, and laid it on the table in front of me. "This column," running his fingers down it. "Perhaps you'll find something here to suit you."

I stood looking down the advertisement columns in silence, but with a swelling heart. This was the kind of thing to which I had brought myself, then. Well, it had not come to that yet, I said to myself proudly; and I pushed the paper back, thanked the agent brusquely, and walked out of the office and back to the hotel, to spend the evening alone, in fruitless brooding, feeling more homesick, sore-hearted, and generally beaten than I had ever done in my life. The gilt was off the gingerbread, and no mistake.



again. The chances were ten to one that I should win back every penny I'd lost; and after that, there would be no need for me to touch a card again if I didn't want to.

The temptation was too strong to be resisted at last. I pushed the newspaper aside, got to my feet, walked out of the room, and, impelled by an irresistible force, went down the corridor straight towards that fatal door. It swung open just then, as if to invite me in; I could see the lights, the cards, the eager faces bent over the tables of green cloth, heard the rattle of the dice, the click of the balls—for they were at billiards beyond—and the very bets laid and taken came distinctly to my ears. I had my hand on the door, my foot was at the threshold, in another second I should have crossed it. . . . Then the latent manhood, all but stifled and choked out of existence, asserted itself in one great leap; and I walked past the door and out into the street, breathing hard, and conscious that I had come off by the very skin of my teeth, but victor for that time at least. Yet how near the flame the poor moth had gone! I had little cause to congratulate myself on my victory. The battle was not at an end, either, even when I had got clear of the hotel. The place seemed to be alive with billiard-saloons and the like, and the click of the balls came to my ears with a persistency that was maddening. Take it all in all, I believe I fought that night the toughest battle of my life, and that I came out on the right side was due to no merit of my own. I knew better than to trust myself too far, or to run the risk too often, however;

CHAPTER V

HAT night saw me put to the test. Looking back now, I can see that the trial came just at the darkest, as if to try the mettle I was made of, and prove what stuff I had in me. But, Heaven help me, at the time I was not conscious of that; and only felt, with a futile sense of savage resentment, that I had to fight the hardest when at my weakest, and least fit to do it.

It was the old foe over again. Times without number, as a certain door down the corridor, half-a-dozen paces from where I sat, opened, and my ears, keenly on the alert, caught the sounds that came from within, the temptation to enter, to seek distraction there, to risk my all in one last desperate endeavour to win back what I had lost, rose flood high; and every grain of pluck and resolution I'd got had to be called into play, to aid me in resisting the impulse and choking it down. Who knew which way the luck might turn this time? a tempting voice whispered in my ear again and

and the first thing I did after breakfast next morning was to start off to look up another agency. Not the Government this time. I had determined to take the advice tendered me yesterday, put my pride in my pocket, and realizing that I had no one but myself to thank for the necessity, begin at the lowest rung of the ladder and work my way up.

The clerk in charge showed no disposition to be encouraging. He took in my inches and shoulder breadth, looked me up and down, asked a round half-dozen of questions, and finally, after hearing what I wanted, remarked that they had a good many more applications just then than posts vacant. I knew that to be an old story, and it did not particularly discourage me; for if you believe all you are told, you are sure to hear that the supply of pretty nearly everything is in excess of the demand for it. The only exception seems to be hard cash—I've never yet heard of a complaint of the kind with reference to that.

The Employment Agency didn't impress me very favourably. I never did believe much in go-betweens, and preferred by a long way to deal with principals. However, I told the young fellow to put my name down on the off-chance of hearing of something to suit me; and made my way back towards the unpretentious hotel where I had put up, realizing that the present experience was a good deal pleasanter in the ideal than the actual.

I had bought a morning paper on the way, and while walking back I began running my eyes listlessly down its columns, taking in little enough,

however, pre-occupied as I was, of the sense of what I read. Suddenly I came to a halt. Something in one of the advertisement columns had caught my attention, and for a minute or so I could not take my eyes off it. I had found something to suit me at last.

"Advertiser wants to meet a young Englishman, not afraid of roughing it, to join him in farming. Public school-man preferred. Unexceptionable references given and required. Personal interview between 10 and 11 a.m. C. 24, Collin's Hotel."

I did not lose much time in thinking after reading that. I knew that berth to be the one for me, if I could get it. It suited me, or rather, I could suit its requirements, down to the ground. English, young enough,—green enough too, Heaven knows, though that particular essential was not called for,—public school-man, any number of unexceptionable references—thanks to my father—at my service; and, in view of the step I had just been contemplating by way of prospects, certainly not afraid of roughing it. My one fear, with the clerk's late observation ringing in my ears, was that so advantageous an opening could not fail to be snapped up instanter; and I could only congratulate myself that the day was as yet too young to have given any chance of that, since the clocks were only on the stroke of ten when I reached Collin's Hotel.

It was one of the best in the city, a handsome block of buildings, forming the whole of one side of a square, and although not in any sense to be compared with the palatial hotels of the States, amply big enough to impress a stranger. I had

half expected to find a *queue* outside, waiting admission, and it came as a slight relief to see none. Feeling a trifle more hopeful, I walked up to the office and stated my business.

"C. 24? Yes, sir, certainly," responded the civil clerk in charge, after a momentary consultation of an official-looking volume. "Jim," calling to a coloured waiter who was passing, "show this gentleman to No. 24. Any name, sir?"

Mechanically, and on the spur of the moment, I was about to hand him a card. Then pride—a queer kind of pride—yet, since it was simply the outcome of a resolve to be above claiming that which it felt to be no longer fitting, I suppose there was no other name for it—checked the impulse. What should a hired help want with cards? I said to myself bitterly. Besides, the interview might come to nothing, and, in any case, I preferred to see what sort of a fellow my prospective employer seemed likely to be before I let a card of mine get into his hands. So I answered briefly that the name was unnecessary, and followed my dusky guide along a handsome corridor, the parquet floor, carved pillars, and lofty ceiling, giving it so old-world an appearance to a town-bred eye, that I could almost have believed myself back in London. Presently the darkey ahead of me paused, opened a door, threw it wide, and with the words—"Gentleman to see you, sah," ushered me in and retired, closing it behind him.

It was a private sitting-room, well and handsomely furnished, and its aspect took me back to home with a sudden leap. My feet sank in the moss-like richness of the carpet, the walls were

hung with fine engravings, and the cloth, laid for breakfast, glittered with glass and silver. The room was not unoccupied, for some one was there, lying back in an arm-chair near the fire, a newspaper in his hand. He had his back to the door, and I could only see the outline of a dark head against the chair cushions, no more of his upper man being for the moment visible. Yet something oddly familiar about the shape of that head, in the attitude, in the very manner of holding the paper, in the long, straight limbs stretched out towards the fire, struck me; even in the one brief moment during which the occupant kept his former position. I had no time for a second glance. At the waiter's announcement he flung down the paper and leaped to his feet, and I found myself face to face with—Neil Colquhoun.

For an instant we both stood mutely staring at each other. Then Colquhoun, with a laugh of genuine delight, started forward and gripped my hand in his own.

"My dear fellow, this is a pleasure! I'm awfully glad to see you! What on earth has come over you all these days, that you've never looked me up till now? I remembered afterwards that I'd not your address, but I felt pretty confident that I had given you mine."

I don't very well remember what I said to him; I felt so utterly taken aback. But Colquhoun did not seem to notice anything odd in my behaviour. He pushed me into the arm-chair from which he had just risen, pulled the bell and ordered breakfast at once, taking no refusal from me, on the ground that my appetite had been good

enough for two breakfasts often enough on board the *Leander*, and talking all the time in his hearty way.

"Look here, old fellow, now I've got you, you're not going to escape me in a hurry, I can tell you. I'm bound to stay indoors till eleven, but after that I'm at your service for the rest of the day." He turned to the waiter. "See here, Jim, if any one comes asking for C. 24, show him in somewhere else, not in here, d' you understand?"

The waiter promised obedience and retired, and Colquhoun turned to me. But I cut him short.

"Stop a bit," I said, beginning to see daylight at last, "are you the fellow who advertised in the *Star*?"

"Yes," he answered with a stare.

"For some one to join you in farming?"

"Exactly. But——"

"Then I'm the answer to your advertisement," said I.

Not knowing in the least what I was driving at, he thought at first I must be chaffing him. But I was not long in explaining, lucidly, if inelegantly.

"You wanted a man," I told him bluntly, "and you advertised for one. I wanted a berth, and I answered your advertisement. You think I chanced on you by accident? I didn't. That's what brought me here, and that's how the case stands between us. If you're satisfied with me I'm satisfied with you. That's all. No—hold on a minute, Colquhoun," for I saw he was about to speak, and his eyes told me what he had at his tongue's end; "before we go any further, I've something to say to you. It shall be all straight and above board

between us this time, I've made up my mind to that. You shall know the sort of fellow with whom you have to deal before you enter on any transactions with him. But for my false pride you should have known the reason I cried off with you long ago."

Therewith I explained, in half-a-dozen sentences or so. He heard me out gravely and without a word until I had got to the end. He turned to me then, holding out his hand, and the tone of his voice, in its frank kindness, went straight to my heart.

"My dear fellow, if you had only placed a little confidence in me, there would not have been the slightest occasion for this. To begin with, I knew it."

"What?" I asked incredulously. "When? How?"

"Something of it, at any rate. Oh, the day before we landed. I heard a whisper of it, one of the first days I got on deck—trust the passengers on board a liner to get wind of any bit of scandal that's going—and when you wrote to me, I understood the reason at once. I should have taken the initiative then, but that letter of yours didn't leave me standing ground. However, that's all over now, and——"

"Not the old footing, though," I said, colouring hotly. "That's forfeited. Understand that?"

He stopped short, and stood looking at me across the table, his head up, his hands in his pockets, his lips parted as if in act to speak. Then—"Excuse me a moment," said he abruptly, and bolted across to an adjoining door.

I wondered what had taken him, though I was fairly well used to erratic movements on his part. But before I had had time to wonder long, he was back in the room again.

"I saw Walsh a couple of nights ago," he resumed, leaning against the window with his hands in his pockets, and looking out while he talked. "He was going on then, and thinking that in all probability I should see you before I left here, he gave this into my charge for you. I hunted the town for you yesterday, Careless, and I meant to put an advertisement in the papers to-day. Here you are, old fellow! All fair and square, and your own."

He brought out one hand and pushed a sealed envelope into mine. A couple of hundred pounds in notes and gold. That was what it contained. I looked up hastily.

"Hold on a moment," went on Neil quickly. "Staunton disgorged—that's the explanation. The fellow's a professional card-sharper, it seems, a regular trickster, a swindler to the backbone. Walsh found that out three nights back, from an admission he made when scarcely sober, and as soon as he felt sure of his ground, he taxed him with swindling you that night on board. He wanted a witness, so came for me, and I was present and heard it all. The fellow tried to bluster it out at first, but our Yankee friend struck to him like a leech, pressing him until he had no choice but to throw up the sponge and own that, apart altogether from what you have just told me, his play had not been all on the square. Upon that, Walsh threatened to expose him then and there, before all the fellows present, if he didn't

disgorge the amount he had done you out of, and this," pointing to the envelope, "is the result. 'You tell him that it's all on the square this time,' were Walsh's last words to me, 'only, if ever he comes across that fellow Staunton, give him a hint to mind his eye and let him have a wide berth. A mean skunk like that won't stick at playing the low down game on any one he's got a grudge against, you bet.' *Verb. sabb.* thought I, so there's his message to you, word for word."

"And that was all?" I asked, after a short silence.

"Yes," responded Colquhoun, smiling, "with the exception of a word or two respecting—well, ver-dure, which I need not repeat. They were kindly meant. Thanks! Nonsense! my dear fellow, not a word. You'd have done as much for me—besides, it was Walsh who pulled the thing off, not I. Now come along to breakfast, old man—we'll send for your traps, meanwhile, and as soon as I'm free we'll go up to the Agency, and settle up about the land at once. There's one thing I'll do before breakfast, though," he added, crossing to the writing-table, "and that is to send a line to the *Star* and tell them to withdraw my advertisement. Don't need it any longer; I've got my partner, and I mean to keep him."

And, not to dwell on this part of my story, this programme was carried out without loss of time. We took up our land from Government, signed the necessary papers, and having got all preliminaries settled, worked on our lot for close on four years.

in front of us now, before the great iron dogs that spanned it; and on the one side Colquhoun lay back in one arm-chair, his long legs stretched out to the blaze, smoking and meditating. I, on the other, was doing precisely ditto; the table between us—that is to say, in the rear of the two dogs, I mean the dogs of flesh and blood, Husky and Canuck, who lay sound asleep in the very forefront of the heat—was littered with the smoking-tackle and a pile of newspapers; and after the spell of rough work we had put in since before daylight that morning, neither of us felt inclined to do anything else.

I grunted by way of answer. We were not over voluble at times, Neil and I; but he understood that the grunt meant acquiescence, and went on.

“Not that I was thinking of getting quit of either of the other two, you know. They’re capital for saddle or harness, and I’d not willingly part with either one or the other for a good round sum. But the Honourable is a bit too heavy for that sort of work, and I’ve heard to-day of the kind of thing likely to suit us.”

“Where’s the hurry?” I asked, kicking the end of a blazing log back on to the hearth. “May’s young enough yet; and we’ve the whole summer before us, without needing to think about next winter.”

“Aye, but it would be short-sighted policy to miss a good thing when the chance comes round,” persisted he, swinging down his heels, and getting up to emphasize his words. “As I say, I heard something about a colt to-day, and if the tale told

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CHAPTER VI

COLLAR AND HARNESS

“**IRK** RANK,” Colquhoun said suddenly one evening, “it strikes me that next winter we shall want a fresh horse for the cutter.”

It was four years later; and spring was just coming in all her verdant beauty, to release the earth from the iron chains in which she had been held all that long winter. The weather was still cold enough though, for all that; and we did not find the biggest fire we could pile up on the hearth to be much amiss during those evenings, when winter seemed to be giving its last kick, and that viciously. Our log-house was every bit as well, built as the most of them; and taking it as a whole, it was a good deal more comfortable than you would have thought, judging by a merely outside view. The chimney, in point of size, was a caution, but it had not proved a jot too large for the fires we had been obliged to burn there that winter. There was about a quarter of a cart-load blazing

me was a true one, he's the very thing for our money. Bound to be snapped up if we don't look after him, however; no end of breeding there. I'd like to hear what you think of him, though, old man; you're a long way better judge of a horse than I am. If you could put in the time to-morrow, I wish you'd just go over and have a look at him."

"Right," I answered, getting up to throw a fresh log on the fire. "Where away?"

"You've heard of Garçon, an old French-Canadian, just come to settle here. Berry Flat is the name his place goes by; fifteen miles to the side of the cedar swamp, an old tumble-down barn, the first log-house built west of the river. That's the fellow who has the colt on sale; and Peters"—Peters was our nearest neighbour in one direction, and he lived a good twenty miles off as the crow flies—"told me to-day you couldn't want anything in the way of horseflesh that, only give him time enough, the old chap couldn't suit you with, down to the ground. Give you the bearings in the morning."

Four years had gone by in the interval, as I've said, and things were widely different with us now from what they had been. Take the place to begin with. Four years ago our lot had been just so many square acres in the woods, without a jot to distinguish it from the rest of the miles of waving forest; and now, that same section of forest land had given place to as trim and prosperous a little farm as ever two fellows could wish to own. Proud of it! I should just think we were proud of it. It's wonderful the pride a man gets to take in the

thing his own hands have worked at, that he has given strength, skill, and labour to produce; and there are few things so well calculated to repay him as the particular one I speak of. One works in double harness with Nature, as it were, in the way of producing results; and the old lady, so long as she gets fair play, is tolerably sure to do her part. As I had admitted at the Agency, my practical knowledge of farming, however it might be as to theory, was decidedly limited. But my chum had not had some experience as a Highland laird for nothing; and he knew a good deal more about the breeding and rearing of black cattle and sheep, to say nothing of the rotation of crops and all the rest of it, than any one would have suspected, to look at him; to the extent of being, as our neighbour Peters expressed it, "some pumpkins" on stock raising. Of course at times we had gone in for "bees," like our neighbours; and whenever we stood in need of hired labour we had it, but that was not often. Each of us had set his heart on making that farm pay its way, and with the same aim in view, we worked shoulder to shoulder, one in purpose and determination. The motive in each case somewhat differed, of course. Colquhoun worked with a will because, viewing his venture in the light of an experiment, and not having it in his nature either to fail, or show himself lukewarm in anything on which he had set his heart, he was determined to succeed in it; and I, for my part, stuck in doggedly, for the double reason, that my prospects lay in that quarter, and that I was resolved the old country, and those at

home, should see that the né'er-do-well had some grit in him after all. To a certain extent, I had had my wish; that is to say, I had never been able to rest until I had found myself in a position to return to my father the hundred pounds which, owing to his ignorance of the way it had gone, my conscience told me I had had in a certain sense on false pretences. During those four years it had been easy to do this; easier, indeed, to send the money than to find a plausible excuse for doing it. The opportune marriage of my younger sister had seemed to offer a most convenient pretext; though I have no doubt that pretty Rose lifted her delicate eyebrows in some surprise on receiving the substitute for a wedding present, sent by the brother whom she, in common with the rest of the family, had hitherto regarded as a hopeless failure. But even that didn't seem square and above board; and I ended by making a clean breast of the whole transaction in a letter to my father, after which I felt a good deal better in every way. Needless to say, the action was understood, and its motive appreciated; and when, at the end of a few lines of commendation and kindly advice, I read the words which I had believed could come only the way of my brothers, never to me—"I am proud of you, my son!"—Well, there were not many fellows in the Dominion happier than I.

So much for the farm and affairs in general, then; now for a word or two respecting ourselves. I've heard it said, that the Canadian climate does not as a rule suit those from the home country. If that is so, we were notable exceptions, for the

climate could not have suited us better. Neil had not altered much during those four years, except in the way of developing muscle, and health and strength with it, although he would remain a delicate-looking chap to the end of his days; but there was precious little resemblance now between myself and the raw lad who had allowed himself to be made the dupe of a professional gambler on board the *Leander*. Little fear of that sort of thing happening again. It had been a bad start, of course, a stumble on the threshold, and a nasty one at that; yet I honestly think that, like most of the discipline we come in for, it had been the making of me. For we had not struck untainted Eden by any means, out there, and temptation enough was about, if one had liked to get in the way of it; since, unfortunately, the vices of the white man don't stay behind when he takes his virtues abroad. But with me it was a case of "once bit, twice shy." I had found out that life had good enough in it short of drinking and gambling, or worse; and I kept clear of the lot.

In many ways we were an utterly dissimilar pair. Although Colquhoun was a Highlander to the backbone, you would not have thought it, until you heard him speak. Then his accent, his pronunciation, more particularly, which never left you in doubt, for example, as to whether he happened to be referring to the biggest among cetaceans or merely to the Principality; and the occasional use of some outlandish idiom, which he would employ in all good faith, lifting his eyebrows in manifest surprise when his hearer demanded abruptly what

in the name of common-sense he meant—left you under no mistake, whatever your preconceived notions of the Celt might have led you to expect. He ought to have been a big upstanding chap, with a chest like a lion's and a voice resembling that of a bull, red-headed too, for choice; and instead, when you looked at him you would see a slight, dark-haired, dark-eyed young fellow, with a dreamy reflective manner of speaking, and a trick of carrying himself at times as if he found it too much of a bore to live. Until he was roused. Then the dreaminess vanished in a flash, and in its place came a flood of resistless energy, a strenuous keenness of action and intensity of purpose that would make you imagine he must have fire pent up within him, only waiting its time to break out, and set you wondering that you could ever have thought him quiet, impassive. Quiet? Under that calm dreamy exterior there beat about the bravest, most generous heart, that ever throbbed in a human breast; and I, God forgive my utter unworthiness, was destined to prove it.

As the days went on, I was beginning to feel more and more certain that I had done a wise thing in coming there. Not alone because the work agreed with me physically, or because that under the free and healthy conditions attendant thereon, I had filled out and grown until my own mother, in whose memory her youngest born would remain the slender stripling upon whom her fond eyes had rested last, would not have recognized the bronzed, stalwart, six-foot odd settler, into whom that youngest born had developed. But the

life itself suited me as nothing else in the world would have done. Not that our work was all honey—far from it. The first year, with the chopping, clearing and burning, had been pretty stiff by itself, let alone what followed on; but if a man has not got his heart enough in his work to make him hold his tongue about its difficulties, it is pretty clear that he won't do much good in this world, in either one way or another. At any rate, however stiff my day's spell might be, it suited me a long sight better than endeavouring adequately to "define the unit of measurement of electro-motive force," or explaining clearly how electric currents might be measured by reference to a standard involving no arbitrary limits other than those of time, space, and mass. Such had been two of the simple questions presented at that memorable examination; questions which my respected father, in his first ebullition of wrath, had declared might have been floored with ease by an infant. I had been an infant—legally—at the time, it was true, but in place of my flooring the questions, the cases had been most decidedly reversed, and they had very literally floored me.

We had every advantage on that lot of ours, there is no denying that. If a brace of elephants for the plough had been looked upon out there as in any way conducive to successful Canadian farming, we should have had them imported direct, by the next steamer from Bombay. There never was a more free-handed fellow than Colquhoun in the matter of capital, whenever outlay was necessary, but he never threw away a penny either

in ostentation or for the mere sake of spending. There was no distinction between us, it was share and share alike. He took his part of the work gallantly, funking nothing, sticking at nothing that lay within his power to pull off, and game to tackle a good deal beyond it; and it took some little exercise of diplomacy on my part, at times, to arrange the work in such a way that the tougher portion thereof should come on my shoulders instead of his own, without his finding it out. Yet he was the pleasantest fellow to work with I ever came across; and shelving friendship altogether for the moment, that means a good deal. A good many of us know to our cost the meaning of being tied to a colleague, in whom caution runs cowardice fairly close, who is eternally magnifying a mole-hill into a mountain, and goes on his way fully resigned to the expectation of meeting a lion in the path at every turn he takes. There was nothing of that sort about my chum; the fault with him lay rather in being too go-ahead, too recklessly impulsive at times. Then the throwing of the cold water, the putting on of the brake of practical common-sense, would fall to my lot; and I used to do both unmercifully, whenever I judged the proceeding necessary. For quick-wittedness does not invariably go hand in hand with fore-sight, or even with prudence; he had not a grain of the headedness and far-seeing caution characteristic of the Lowland Scot; and in matters involving risk to himself alone, his enthusiasm and utter want of egotism would carry him forward to the borders of recklessness, even folly. As an

instance of what I mean—I have known him, on a Sunday afternoon, after lying in the shade meditating by the hour, suddenly advance some startling and original scheme for, say, the opening up of the North-West, or introducing some means of communication with the frozen regions of the North—well thought out, carefully planned, elaborated down to the smallest detail; and the whole fabric of the scheme would collapse like a house of cards, merely for want of some single but essential point, the need of which had made itself apparent to my duller but more practical understanding before he had put half-a-dozen sentences together. As he himself would say at such times, with a good-humoured laugh, the stock of practicality, when his character was in process of formation, had run short, or they had forgotten to put any in. Yet, just on that very account, possibly, his nature was an eminently lovable one. If he had been more cannily prudent, more coldly calculating, less impulsively warm-hearted and enthusiastic, in a word more perfect and less human—I should not have loved him one half so well. And now to come back from a somewhat long, but necessary retrospect.

It did not take me long to run up one of the horses next morning; and I was under way pretty soon after sun up, that is to say, as soon as we had got fairly through milking and breakfast. Most of the road—a main-line as it was termed, by way of distinction from the side-lines crossing it at right angles—lay through the dense swampy woods surrounding what had been the hard-wood ridge, on the slope of which our homestead stood. It

was what is known as a corduroy road. I've often thought that what the bison is—was, now unfortunately—to the Indian out West, a *sine qua non* of existence, so are the forest trees to the white settler in the East. House and homestead, fencing and fuel, the implements with which to till his land, the vehicle in which and the very road upon which the produce of that land is conveyed to market—he obtains them in whole or in part from the stately forest giants, whose wholesale destruction is the very first step in the onward march of civilization.

Trees, trees everywhere; nothing else visible except a vista of dark trunks and waving branches, until, looking aloft, the eye rested on the overarching span of blue sky. The rustle of the myriad dancing leaves and a lively chorus of bull-frogs from the swamp were in my ears; the sweet scent of fresh earth and fragrant wood came wafted on every breeze; Mother Nature had to all appearance decked herself that day in her greenest and freshest garments to do me honours; and it would have been hard to say which of the two of us went forward more willingly or light-heartedly, my horse or I. It was the brown horse I was riding that day, the "Honourable," we called him. He had been known simply as Brown Jack at first; but one day Colquhoun, watching him in harness, declared that something in his action reminded him irresistibly of an Honourable. Some one or other he had known in town, and the Honourable the horse was dubbed from that time on. He was a handsome, spirited, serviceable brute, equally good in saddle or harness; and, if he could not trot exactly like Maud S. or Flora Temple, he did not make a bad show in

either cutter or buggy. We had another, a chestnut five-year-old, whom Neil swore by. He would never cross anything else in the way of horseflesh when she was to the fore; but although she suited his weight to perfection, she was scarcely up to mine. A man of my build wanted something more in the way of bone and substance, and I always rode the Honourable, for choice.

Care behind the horseman? Well, to-day at all events the place of that unwelcome companion on a journey was unoccupied; and truth obliges me to state that the feelings of the boy were that day uppermost with me. I started a rival chorus to the blue birds, whistled to the chipmunks that scuttled away from the sides of the track, mocked the croakers in the swamp to right and left, shouted and threw up my hat whenever a blue jay whizzed with a scream and a whirr of white, black-barred wings from tree to tree, and, in short, behaved a good deal more like thirteen than three-and-twenty! No wonder. Ah! they were good days to look back at, through the dim mist of the years between then and now; when the work grew and prospered beneath hand and eye, when it was a joy merely to live and revel in the sense of life, ay! and a double joy to use and to rejoice in the abounding consciousness of strength and vigour, fresh, as one might have taken it, from the hand of God. But I came within sight of Berry Flat at last, and the road, as a glance told one, was completely overlooked thereby from the point at which it left the woods. Then I quieted down a bit, brought the Honourable back into his accustomed long, raking stride, and rode soberly forward, as befitted a man

bent on the serious business of coming to terms with a horse-coper.

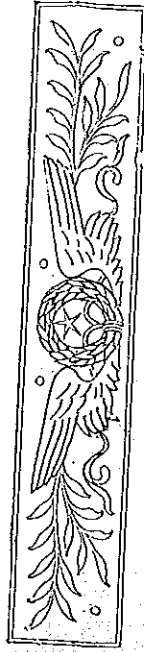
The place, as we found out later, was well named. You could not have wanted much in the berry line that did not grow within half-a-mile's radius of Berry Flat. Whortleberries, blueberries, black currants and red ones, junipers, gooseberries, and raspberries beyond all others, ran riot all over the place. The house itself, a low, tumble-down log-cabin, stood in the centre of the clearing, partly screened from view by its orchard and a solitary clump of trees, left standing, in all probability, for that very purpose, and on all sides, down to the bordering and surrounding woods, stretched pasture, nothing but pasture. No cultivated land, with the solitary exception of about half-an-acre of garden-patch, lying to the rear of the house, and extending between the latter and the barn and out-buildings, was to be seen. The very fences had a dilapidated, falling-to-pieces look about them, and I, contrasting them with the trim neatness of everything on our own lot, passed the usual severe judgment of intolerant youth upon them as I opened the gate—a piece of work which required somewhat delicate handling, for I was in terror of the wretched thing coming to pieces in my very grasp—and led my horse up the narrow path. Old Blaise Garçon, if that was the name he went by, must be a good bit more fond of solitude than I was ever likely to be, to have come to anchor in so out-of-the-way a hole and corner as this, I said to myself, as I knocked with the handle of my whip at the crazy door.

CHAPTER VII

HORSE-COPING

NO one appeared in answer to my first knock. But the second time the door was opened about the space of a foot, and an old negress, her great eyes rolling like cannon-balls in their sockets, a fearful and wonderful turban surmounting a curly crop of hair that was liberally besprinkled with grey, put out her head to reconnoitre. The sight of a bronzed and booted apparition on the door-step, of the male sex, presumably white, and with a horse in the rear, appeared to scare her, and she looked half-inclined to slam the door in her visitor's face, had not the apparently accidental interposition of the whip handle between the hinges put a stop to any such polite and hospitable intention on her part. I took off my slouch hat to her, a mark of respect which apparently reassured her, and at which she grinned in high delight, and then I asked to see her master.

“Him not to hum, sah.”



This was a pull-up, a contingency neither of us had reckoned upon. But after a fifteen-mile ride I wasn't to be done in that fashion, so I asked next when he would be likely to be at home. The old woman shook her woolly head in answer.

"Dat me no can tell, sah."

There seemed nothing for it but to go, after that, and having done my best to impress on her the necessity of acquainting her master with the nature of my errand immediately on his arrival—for I had no mind that any other fellow should have first nibble at the Morgan colt—I was turning to lead the Honourable down the path again, when I heard a door open in the interior of the building, and some one else enter, evidently from an adjoining room.

"Who is that, Matty?" asked a fresh young voice. "Some one to see father?"

The old woman who, save for the limited space I have named, had kept the door all this time jammed fast by means of her foot, turned her dusky face away momentarily, to make some communication in a voluble whisper. Upon that, though assuredly not from the old negress, came a light ringing laugh, followed by a "Now, Mis' Louise," uttered in tones of remonstrance.

"One white buckra, missy," I heard the old woman go on to say, in much the same tone as might have been used to convey the intelligence that a sinister-intentioned grizzly was waiting outside.

"Well, if he is I suppose he won't eat me," the same clear voice announced with decision. "Come

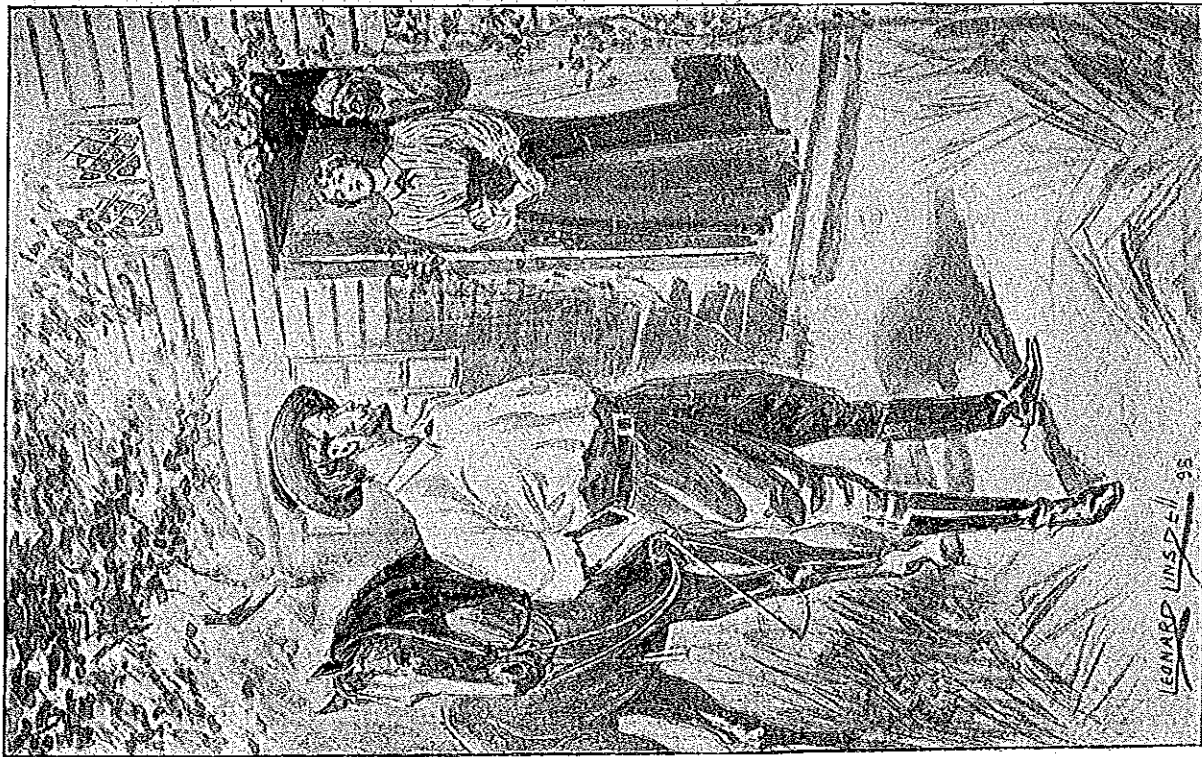
away from the door, you silly old thing! You make me quite ashamed, yes, you do."

The speaker evidently carried her point there, for the door opened wide and suddenly, to give me a glimpse of the very prettiest girl I had ever seen in my life. It was so long since I had seen a girl in any way resembling her, even distantly, so long since I had seen a girl at all, indeed, that the sight of her brought me up in a moment all standing, and my errand went for that moment clean out of my head. Until I remembered myself, to tell the honest truth, I'm afraid I must have shown my admiration pretty plainly in my eyes, and stared unwarrantably. But before I had had time to go beyond the limits of good manners, I remembered both myself and the errand on which I had come, although it was Garçon's daughter who spoke first.

"I am sorry that you should have had cause to think us so rude and inhospitable," the girl said, standing on the door-step, her frank, clear eyes meeting mine unhesitatingly as I saluted her. "My father is not at home just now, and I suppose your business is with him. Perhaps there is some message that I can give him from you on his return. I am expecting him back to-night."

Upon that, I explained my errand briefly.

"The Morgan colt," repeated the girl easily. "Oh, yes. My father will wish to speak about him himself to you, of course. I have little to do with the business, but I know he is still unsold. But if you are thinking of buying him you would wish to see him first, naturally, and I can show him to you, if you like."



"My father is not at home just now, and I suppose your business is with him."
[page 79.]

LEONARD LINSSELL '98

Of course I liked, and that for more reasons than one. She stepped back into the house for a moment, and flinging a shawl round her pretty shoulders, tripped along the garden path in front of me as lightly as a bird. I hitched my horse to the rail and followed, half inclined as I went to rub my eyes and wonder whether on opening them I should not find that the vision had vanished. It seemed to me unaccountably strange to come upon a creature so utterly at variance with her surroundings in such a place as that. I looked at the miserable, tumble-down building we had just quitted, at the melancholy, equally dilapidated barn and out-buildings we were approaching, from these to the dainty, pink-hued vision fitting before me, its graceful head protected only by its dark clustering hair, and felt again that I must surely be dreaming. Poor and commonplace metaphors, of course, to say that her eyes were the eyes of a deer, and that her step was the step of a fawn; but those were the notions that tumbled one over another in my mind as she walked in front of me, erect and lithe, to the stable.

The stable was, as I have said, another tumble-down shanty, built to the rear of the first, and you would have thought, to look at it, that such a place could have sheltered nothing more than a grunter at best. But I had already found one jewel in a rough enough casket, and who was to know whether that might not be the case as regarded another? And so it turned out, for as I stepped forward to put the key she handed me, into the lock, thereby permitting the heavy bolts to be shot back, and a

flood of light to be thrown into the dingy interior, there was a hollow stamp of a horse's hoof on the floor, the rattle of a chain, a welcoming whinny, and one of the handsomest colts I had ever set eyes on turned round his fine lean head to look at us.

"This is the colt," his mistress said, flitting up to the manger to which he was tied and stroking down the glossy neck. "Roanoke, Roanoke, *mon cher*, turn round and show yourself off."

Of course I saw pretty quickly that Colquhoun had not been at all out in what he had said about the horse. He was a clipper, I saw that by the look of him, and it did not take me long to get his points by heart. I wasn't quite brute enough, naturally, to set about overhauling the eyes and hoofs and teeth of her pet in the girl's very presence, she looking on meanwhile, but that part of the proceedings could very well wait until her father came on the scene. Garçon's daughter stood by in silence as I went round and round him, taking in the low forehead, deep chest, sloping shoulder, fine short coat, while the noble brute himself, turning his shapely head to bring the dark lustre of his full prominent eye to bear on me, lifted one fore-foot after another to stamp it on the floor, as if he himself wished to call my attention to the delicate pasterns and well set-on hoofs. I praised what I saw openly—the gallant beast deserved it; and his fair owner was pleased, that was evident. A softer light came into her own dark eyes, the red lips parted, and she smiled—a smile that lit up the dingy stall like a ray of sunshine.

"You will have to ask my father most of the questions, monsieur," she said, as soon as I came to a standstill beside her. "I do not even know the price he means to ask for him. But I can tell you that he is rising four, and this is his pedigree, if you care to see it. I was to be sure to show that to any one who came after him."

Of course the moment I looked at the papers she handed me, I knew that the thing was as good as settled, as far as the purchase of the colt was concerned. The name of his sire was amply sufficient to prove the stock he came of, and I knew that Colquhoun would have him straight off at a word from me.

"You like him, yes?" the girl said, confidently rather than questioning, and for the first time, her mode of addressing me excepted, I noticed a little foreign turn in her speech. Nothing marked, merely the faintest tinge of an accent, giving piquancy to the most ordinary of sentences, and sufficing to prove that she came of a foreign race.

I told her heartily that I did, and she smiled, well pleased.

"But," I added, "he is yours, mademoiselle, and you are fond of him. Parting with him will be a thing that you will scarcely care about."

"Oh," she responded frankly, "I do not mind, not at all, if he is to go to one who will use him well. Naturally, we could not keep him; we never do. My father buys his horses to sell again, and," she smiled a little sadly here, "I have only time to grow fond of them, that is all. But you will treat him well if you have him, I can see."

"How?" I asked, awkwardly enough.

She laughed, and answered with prompt decision. "When you hitched your horse to the rail there, you patted his neck before you left him. When he saw you going he whinnied after you. Neither of you would have done that unless you had been fond of and habitually kind to him. And," looking down critically at the heels of my riding-boots, "there is no blood on your spurs, and I saw no marks on his flanks. Oh no, I am not afraid for you to have Roanoke."

Upon that, I explained to her how matters stood, giving her to understand that I should not alone be the actual owner of the colt. Her face fell slightly at first, but the cloud did not remain on it long.

"Is he a kind-hearted man, this other?" she asked anxiously, with the same quaintly foreign turn in her speech as before.

"Colquhoun? He is the best fellow in the world. You need have no fear for your favourite in his hands."

"And you will have the care of him, too?" she asked, with a smile. "That will be just the same then. Oh yes, it will be quite right—I am not afraid. This other—he is your friend, is he not? You trust and love him, I can tell by the way you spoke just now. Then I may tell my father that the colt pleases you, and you will ride over, you or the other one—for indeed the name is a hard one to say—to settle with him to-morrow? That will be right, yes? It is arranged then, Monsieur——, Monsieur——"

"Carless is my name," responded I. Then after a moment, for I did not wish to intrude longer upon her in her father's absence, I added, "And now I will bid you good-day, mademoiselle."

"Carless," she repeated. "Ah, that is less hard than the other. I can say it quite well, listen. I wish you a very good day, Monsieur Carless."

And never had my plain, unpretending name sounded better in my ears than it did now, when pronounced by a pair of lips beside which to my eyes the ripest of cherries would have made a poor show.

The old negress, who all this time had hovered dragon-like outside the stable door, attended us back along the garden path to where I had left the Honourable. It struck me that she regarded me with no favourable eye, did not think I was to be trusted, indeed, and the suggestion was not flattering. I began to wonder whether by any possibility I bore the stamp of a ruffian about me. If so, it was my beard that was to blame for it, giving me the appearance of a stage villain. What on earth did I want to grow a beard for at three-and-twenty? and for about the fortieth time within the last hour I wished that I had followed Colquhoun's example and carried a smooth chin.

My fair guide swept me a little curtsy in response to my parting salute, and I got to horse and rode the Honourable back in a sort of dream. Another element had come suddenly into my life, and its spell lay unconsciously on all around me. Over the heavy cedar swamp land, where the horse floundered and scrambled through one mud-hole

after another, through the long reach of forest lying on this side of our clearing, where the trees were swaying and curtsying to the measure piped by the breath of the new life of spring. I rode with a loose rein and a light heart.

Neil, who was splitting rails for a new fence we had on hand, to keep the cattle off the fresh spring wheat, heard the ringing beat of the hoofs as I came along at the gallop, and sending his axe with a dexterous swing into the heart of the big cedar log on which he was at work, came to the fence to meet me.

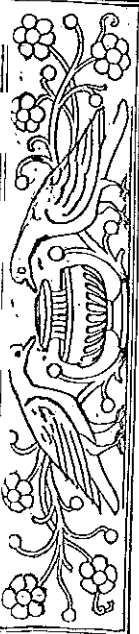
"Well?" was all he said, and I didn't take long to answer, as I sat there on horseback above him. "Colquhoun, if we don't jump at that colt we're a brace of the biggest idiots in the Dominion, and that's all about it."

Neil laughed.

"Thought you'd find him a good one," said he, swinging the mall and wedges in his hands. "Well, since I've no particular ambition to play the part you mention, we'd better settle it. What's his figure?" Upon that I explained how matters stood, my head beneath the saddle-flap meantime, while I unsaddled the Honourable.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said he. "Didn't know the old fellow had a daughter. You'd no chance to try him, then? Well, we'll have to wait till Gargon puts in an appearance, I suppose, that's all."

So that was how the matter was settled, and Roanoke changed hands without much delay. For after a fair and satisfactory trial, buy him we eventually did.



the sides, and humming operatic airs as he did it. At first I was too intent on my work to notice anything else; but, happening to glance up for a moment, the incongruity between the singer, the refined intellectual face, the delicate, well-shaped hands, the accompanying air of "*Là ci darem*," and then the raw sides of pork, struck me suddenly with a sense of the ludicrous, of the utter unfitness of things, and I laughed outright. I couldn't help it.

"What's the joke?" asked Neil, lifting his eyebrows as he turned to look at me.

"Why, you," responded I, and I told him what I had been thinking. "All very well for me—sort of thing that's in my line, you know; but what on earth possessed you to do it?"

"Nature-sickness, for the most part," he answered briefly, picking up his knife and starting on his work again.

"Nature-sickness?"

He laughed, colouring slightly.

"Aye, that's what I always call it to myself, and whether I ought to be ashamed of the thing or not is a point on which I'm not very clear. I used to lead an idle enough life once, you know," he went on, "for the simple reason that I'd nothing else to do, and it was a dreary enough job, trying to kill time somehow. But at last the conviction dawned on me, what a rotten sham that sort of a life was in reality. I turned dead sick of the whole thing, of being a drone among working bees, beyond all the rest, and a sort of fever took me to get away from civilization, to Nature herself, to the very back of things, just to see if life would have anything better

CHAPTER VIII

HOW I WON ROANOKE

IT was just about a couple of months later. Spring had come and gone, and we were fairly into summer. The season was as warm a one as they had had for many a year, we were told, and it was hot enough and no mistake. Neil took kindly to the heat; I didn't. At times I used to think a stranger might have fancied he had southern blood in his veins, the glow of the summer seemed to suit him so well. You might have gone so far as to say he revelled in it, and I often wondered—for a fellow gets into the habit of turning things over a good deal when his work lies in a solitary spot—what in all the earth, cut out as he was for a civilized life, should have first put the notion of Canadian farming into his head. At last, one day, when we happened, which was not often, to be working side by side, I put the question to him straight. I was cutting up a porker at one end of the yard, and he stood at the other, salting down

in it to offer one, after all. They talk about fellows turning homesick, you see," he explained after a pause, "and that's why I say nature-sickness. There's no other word to express the feeling I mean, though I've a notion that it's precisely the same sort of longing that drives most men to the colonies, although they may give it a different name. Life's more genuine here, with less artificiality and sham about it, and that's what I wanted. At home, a man's estimated as a rule according to his balance at his banker's, or to the precise height he stands in the social scale—out here, his worth lies more in what he is. Standing or siller won't serve his turn over much when he finds himself set down in the primæval forest with an axe in his hand—sand, grit, if he's got any in him, will."

"I understand. Well?"

"Oh, nothing else of any moment. Except that you see results here, you know. You're not merely going over old ground that others have worked, dry, with the knowledge pressing on you all the time, that if you drop out there are dozens, aye, hundreds, eager and ready to fill up the gap, joined to a sneaking consciousness, too, that most of them could do your work a long way better than you can yourself. A fellow stops his own gap here. If we don't fulfil the conditions on which we hold our land, old man, it goes back to Government, that's all, no one else is likely to snap it up. Then there's another feature; every square yard won from this virgin soil means a victory for the race; and when a man's debarred from service

to his country in another way, that consideration is bound to count for something with him."

And that was all he ever said on the subject, either then or later.

That visit of mine to Berry Flat had results in many ways, apart from the mere purchase of the colt Roanoke. By the way, his name, as I've forgotten to mention, had been bestowed on him simply out of compliment to a Carolinian progenitor, and had of course nothing at all to do with his colour. In point of fact, he had nothing roan about him, being a bright bay, with black points, and only a few white hairs on the off hind foot. Well, as I say, that visit had had results; this story of mine would not have been written otherwise. One of them had made itself apparent only a day or so later; and that was when Neil, after hallooing himself hoarse after me all over the place, ran me to earth at last, far too intent to heed him, since I was busy in the throes of getting rid of a beard of a couple of years' growth.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated, and stopped short, staring.

"Yes," asserted I unblushingly. "It's so wretchedly hot, and besides, I don't for the life of me see that because a fellow happens to have gone to the backwoods, it's therefore necessarily incumbent on him to turn himself into a bear."

Now, there was rank heresy on my part, if you like. Only two months back the tune I had whistled had been a different one altogether. What on earth was the use of shaving out there?

It only took up time and gave the flies a better chance; and I had chafed Colquhoun unmercifully because, having notions of his own on the matter, he would turn out as well-groomed generally as if he had been due in the City instead of our barn-yard. Roughing it would never knock the self-respect out of him in any sense; and for my part, I don't see why it should with any man. Yet I have known young fellows, born and brought up well, lads who might have been inclined to go to the other extreme at home in England, who as soon as they got abroad seemed to lose all sense of self-respect, living after a fashion that would have gone near to break their mothers' hearts, had they seen them, and would have made their fathers ashamed to own them as their sons. Roughing it is all very well, and a man who has any sand in him won't make much of a howl over hardships—if he is not prepared to face them he should sit at home in the lap of luxury and leave emigration alone—but to rough it and to pig it—the word is not a pretty one, but there is no other to express my meaning—need not be synonymous terms; and the fellow who makes them so brings disgrace not only on himself but on the country that has given him birth. That is a good bit afield from the point I had in hand, however, the shaving. The days, since my former expression of opinion, had not grown one second longer; and the flies were, as a matter of fact, in fuller force than ever; yet there I was, getting that beard off just about as fast as I knew how. I don't say that the two things were in any way connected, of course; but in point of fact, it

happened that I was to ride over next morning to the Flat to fetch the bay colt away.

Well, as I said, it was about a couple of months later. I had been down at the far end of what we called the twenty-acre lot, fixing up a fence there that had given way under the attentions of a "breachy" cow we had the good fortune to own,—that is to say, a cow given to the laudable practice of breaking fences, and so giving the rest of her mates a lead into our best fields of wheat and maize,—and was on my way back to the homestead, one broiling afternoon in July. I was thinking—well, to tell the plain unvarnished truth, I was thinking about Louise Garçon. Without beating about the bush any more, I may just as well own, that for the last six weeks I had thought of little else; and the result had been bad for my peace of mind. For all that, I was coming along jauntily enough, swinging the axe and mallet on my shoulder, and whistling as most of us, when young, active, and full of life, are bound to whistle, the thought of anything being wrong never entering my head, when, as I turned into the barn-yard, I almost knocked against Colquhoun. He was coming from the house at a run, his rifle was lying across his shoulder, and, upon my word, he looked as white about the face as I had ever seen a fellow look in my life.

"Hallo!" I cried, for I saw in a moment there must be something up. "What's to pay now?"

"It's the colt!" he gasped hoarsely. "He's suffering horribly. I'm going to put a ball through his head and finish him!"

"What colt? Great Scott! You don't mean Roanoke?" Yet before the words were well out of my mouth I knew that the question was a needless one. He was the only colt we had got.

He nodded.

"Staked himself down in the twelve acres! There's no hope for the poor brute! It's a horrible sight!"

The pasture seemed to swim momentarily before my eyes, and for an instant I could neither see straight nor get a word out.

"No! look here," I cried when I could speak. "You're never going to do that."

"Tell you there's nothing else to do," he repeated hoarsely. "Come and see for yourself."

Well, it was a sickening sight, and no mistake, when we had run shoulder to shoulder a furlong or so down the pasture. I didn't wonder at Colquhoun; he always was a delicate, nervous sort of a chap and couldn't stand anything of that kind at all. I knew now what the second thing was that he could not bear; the sight of blood invariably knocked him over. It was not his fault; there was something hereditary in it; and as for cutting up a pig, not to mention killing one, he could no more have done it than have flown to the moon. That sort of thing fell to my lot; and though it wasn't a job I particularly hankered after, still, some one had to do it; and I'd have done more than that to spare him. One of the chief reasons that had induced him to let the deer-forest, as he told me himself, before the notion of Canada entered his head, was that when he had brought

his stag down, he hated having to be unsporthmanlike enough to walk away while his gillies broke up, or, as he termed it, "gralloched" the deer. Compared with him I was about as hard as nails; but I don't mind owning that I felt a bit queer myself when we had got to the place, and I saw the good horse standing half across the snake fence, his big, half human eyes fixed on us, asking in their mute eloquence, dumbly for help. The stake had gone right into his brisket; and I say candidly, that I felt more than half sick when I saw the crimson stream trickling down the wood, and knew what I had got to do. I had set that fence myself, and could gauge almost to an inch how much of the ugly stake had gone home; and for an instant I felt as if the best and most merciful course would be to let Colquhoun have his way and shoot him. Only for an instant, and then, swifter than a flash of light came the thought of the one to whom that colt had so lately belonged. Neil looked at me, and his very lips had turned white.

"Told you so," he said hoarsely. "Stand clear!" And he brought up the Winchester to the sight.

But I struck the muzzle up only just in time.

"No; not yet. Let the poor brute have a chance for his life. Time enough for that if we have to come to it."

Then I went forward for a nearer look. The job promised to be an ugly one—but, it was *Roanoke*; and I had made up my mind that for *her* sake I must pull him through.

"I'll do it," I said, "but I shall want help." I looked at his white face and the quivering hands resting on the muzzle of the grounded rifle: "Hadn't you better——"

He understood me, and his lips tightened. You would not have found a cleaner-lipped fellow than himself in a day's ride, but he brought out some strong language pretty smartly then.

"No!" he answered between his teeth. "I may be a—fool, but I'm no coward! Go ahead! I won't fail you!"

And he didn't; he helped me like a good one. People talk a lot about heroes and heroism, I know, and to my mind the shoddy comes in at times for as much in the way of praise as the real thing. But to my thinking there was something not far off heroic about the young fellow before me, as I saw his blanched face and lips, and knowing what I did,—that the cause had taken place before he was born, and was a thing he could no more help than he could help the colour of his eyes or hair,—could estimate the force of the strong constraint he had put on himself to overcome the sense of shuddering aversion, as he stood to his task like a brick, quiet, steady, prompt, handing me all I wanted, ready to lend a hand at any moment, and neither faltering nor flinching. If he had not owned a will of iron, and held about the strongest grip of himself of any man I had ever known, he could never have done it—for these antipathies, part of their subject's very being, are scarcely to be conquered by one out of a hundred. Upon my word, I honoured him then, as I have not felt

inclined to honour many men either before or since.

The colt had evidently struggled a bit before Neil found him; for the stake had broken in such a way as to make it possible to get a purchase on it, and so to withdraw the loosened fragment from the wound, if one had coolness and strength enough to do it. Had Roanoke plunged or struggled, or my helper lost his head at that moment, it would have been all over with the colt then. But the game brute stood like a rock; and Neil kept his nerve and his word, and did not fail me till the work was done and the wound safely plugged; and then I was not a bit surprised to see him suddenly stagger and then go over like a nine-pin. I had lived long enough with him to know him pretty well down to the ground, so I just stretched him out very comfortably on the grass,—it was a glorious day, and there was nothing in the world to hurt him there,—loosened his shirt at the throat, and then walked off with the colt to stable him, leaving Neil to come round at his leisure, knowing pretty well that was what he would have thanked me to do. And sure enough, before I had got Roanoke well settled in a stall, there he was looking in at the door, just as if there had been no interval at all.

"Think he'll get over it?" he asked, surveying the colt anxiously.

"You bet," I answered with confidence. "He isn't going to take the trip this time, not if I know it." With that I left him in charge, and went off to wash and change; for it struck me, when I came

to consider my own appearance, that the process was necessary.

However, I was a trifle too cocksure that time, in taking it for granted that we were out of the wood; for there is no denying that I thought the tables turned and the poor brute fairly gone, a few days later. He went on all right for about a week, the wound healing kindly and promising well, and then a sort of fever took him, until at the last it came to be just touch and go. We saw to him turn by turn all day, the two of us, and as the hours went by his strength went with them; until at last, about 10.30, when my watch fell due, I began to have strong doubts as to whether he would live to see the morning. But I had made up my mind to pull him through if it lay in man's power to do it, or failing that, to fight tooth and nail anyhow with old Small-back for his life. So I carted out a whole doctor's shop, with a rug or two, to the stable, rigged up a sort of hearth on the stone floor, and there I sat all night, with the colt's head between my knees, dosing and doctoring him, as the slow hours dragged away. Neil saw to all the rest single-handed; and the last thing before he turned in, came to the stable to look at Roanoke.

"Bet you you don't," said he, and shook his head.

"Bet you I do!" retorted I, though in my heart I was a long way from feeling sure on the point myself.

"Well, old fellow," rejoined he, after he had stood for a minute or two longer looking at him,

"if you do pull him through he's yours out and out, from this time on. Remember that I hand over my share in him to you, and that's only fair. Mind you pull me up if he gets worse or if you want anything." Then he yawned portentously and went off. Poor chap! it was all he could do to keep his eyes open; the calves were beginning to come, and he had been up a couple of nights running. I may as well explain here that the pulling up to which he referred was literal. The stable was pretty close to the log-house; both our rooms were on the ground-floor; and it had been simplicity itself to run a length of twine across from window to window, one end hanging down close to my hand, the other loop being slipped over Neil's arm. Naturally, supposing that the twine held, I had only to pull hard enough in order to haul him half out of bed before he was well awake, had I wanted him. A primitive arrangement, I know, but it answered our purposes.

Well, I had a stiff time of it, for the poor brute was far through; and more than once or twice even, when a shivering fit took him, I made dead certain he was going. But it never came to *quite*; and by the time the grey dawn came peeping in at the window, I knew that the turn had come, and I think I never had felt more glad in all my life. Of course I wanted to save him on account—well, on account of some one else. But that was far from being the only reason, for the man must have a queer twist about him who does not love a good horse for his own sake; and by the time I had got to be tolerably certain that the worst was over, I

could have thrown up my hat like a school-boy and shouted for very happiness.

Neil came in with the dawn. His first glance was at the colt, and his face told me in a moment all that I wanted to know.

"You've won this time, old fellow!" he cried heartily, clapping me on the back till my shoulders ached, "won fairly, and the colt's yours, out and out. I wish you joy of him, with all my heart!"

"Said I would," responded I; and I got up and stretched myself, yawning like a hippopotamus, for a man gets to be tolerably stiff by morning when he's been sitting in one position all night.

Neil laughed.

"I'll go and brew you some coffee," said he. "You're a cool hand, Frank, and no mistake. If the colt could understand it he would know that he owed his life to you twice running; for I'd have shot him a week back, as sure as fate. You be off now. I'll see to the milking."

And that was how I won Roanoke. In a few more chapters I'll have to tell how I lost him.



CHAPTER IX

BUSH WORK.

SUMMER went on after that pretty much in the same way as the other summers had done since we came out to Canada, and yet to me, there was a difference somehow. There seemed to be a difference in life of which I had never been conscious before; and the very breath of the season struck me as being charged with an essence, undefinable, yet eminently pleasing and delightful. There was something in the air; in fact, the whole world seemed to have altered, and I had no notion why. Looking back now, it strikes me as odd that I should never have tried to define this consciousness to myself, or even to wonder at it. But unless one is morbidly given to the practice of self-dissection, he does not as a rule, when fairly happy, begin to inquire too deeply into the cause of his happiness; and it was a thing that never entered my head, to endeavour to get to the root of mine.

That summer we saw a good deal of the

dwellers at Berry Flat. The purchase of the bay colt had been the first breaking of the ice; and from that time on first one pretext and then another had served to further and strengthen the acquaintanceship. Roanoke's accident was one. His mistress got to hear of it; and as a natural thing one could not do less than ride him over as soon as he was fit, in order to let her see for herself how completely he had pulled through, and into what a grand upstanding horse he was developing. After that it would be her father's turn; and he, in an unwonted burst of hospitality, would invite Colquhoun and myself over to have a look at the drove of prime beauties he had just brought in from the Western ranches; whence he obtained his stock, not pitching bronchos, but well-bred and fairly broken colts, which the old fellow would sell later on to eager customers at prices which could not be called low, and might even have been termed extortionate. For weeks at a time he would be absent in the West, leaving his daughter meanwhile to the care and companionship of the old negress Matty, who, to do her justice, certainly did her best to show herself worthy of the confidence reposed in her. It must have been uncommonly dull for a girl like that to be shut up in that lonely fashion from day to day; but there seemed to be no help for it, under the circumstances. Then again, the old French-Canadian would announce his intention of setting to work to rail in a new field, to repair or rebuild an old snake fence, to clear a half-acre or so of bush, by way of making the necessary improvements on his lot; and it was scarcely likely that

my chum and I, a couple of active young fellows dexterous by this time in the wielding of the Canadian axe,—a different tool altogether from an English one,—should be disposed to allow the old man to set about any of those jobs single-handed, when it only meant a couple of hours' ride on our parts to come to his help. There were about fifteen miles between our lots, it was true; but we had grown accustomed to things on a big scale, and thought no more of a thirty-mile evening ride than our horses did. So it happened, that when the day's work for ourselves was over—when we were not spearing fish on the Sand River, or shooting 'coon, or black, grey, and red squirrels, all destructive creatures to the settler—or, in a word, when there was nothing to keep us at Union Station, it came to be the most natural thing in the world that we should ride over to Berry Flat to spend an hour or so there before dark.

I don't fancy this same clearing and fencing business—our sharing it, I mean—found much favour in the eyes of Garçon's daughter, however. Riding over one evening as usual, we had reached Berry Flat before sundown, to find the old man smoking his pipe under the stoop of the log-house with his daughter sitting at work beside him. We hitched our horses to the rail and joined them; Neil, to whom the old fellow had seemed to cotton from the very first, taking a place at his invitation on the bench beside him, while I established myself on a low stump at the other side, from which position it was possible to obtain a good view of the play of Louise's little hands, or catch a

glimpse of the flash of light from a pair of lustrous eyes, whenever a word from me had the good fortune to induce their owner to lift them and so to meet my own.

She did not sit there long after we came, however. Having first retired indoors in order to speak to Matty, a proceeding which resulted presently in the appearance of that dark-skinned Ganymede with certain refreshments, she herself emerged from the house, carrying a basket of apples, for the express delectation of her equine guests. I went to help her to carry them, and together we fed the horses, who, knowing by experience what was coming, were already lifting their heads and whinnying with eager expectation as they saw her approach. She conducted the proceeding with strict impartiality, however; Roanoke, for all the rascal might stamp and neigh, coming in for not an atom more in the way of attention than Neil's chestnut mare, Deerfoot, as pretty and spirited a bit of horseflesh as you could wish to see.

"Ah! my frents, you come in one good hour," the old man was saying when we got back to the stoop; and I, my attention keen to notice the varying expressions fitting over a certain person's face, began to wonder at the sudden flush that overspread it at her father's words. "I say to my daughter just now, '*Hélas!* to-morrow it is necessary that we begin to clear that patch, and there is none save one feeble old man to do it. Then I hear the sound of horses, I lift mine eyes, *et voilà!* my two friends, ready to help, ready to—"

"As we most certainly are," cut in Neil, hastily and heartily. "Command us in any way you please."

He said it purposely, of course, to cover the girl's embarrassment, which must have been fully evident to a far less keen observer than himself. What he said was true enough, naturally; although all the same, had we been as unwilling as we were the other thing, to put whatever skill and strength we possessed at the old man's service, he had yet thrown out hints so broad that we must still have done so, without being able to help ourselves.

"You see!" exclaimed Garçon triumphantly, turning to his daughter, and waving his pipe as if to emphasize his words. "What have I said to you, *ma petite?*"

"Father!" broke in Louise, hurriedly and nervously, her eyes bent on her work, which she had resumed in the meantime, the colour deepening in her sweet face every moment. "Father! it is not right, when you know quite well that you——" She came to a halt there, in increasing confusion.

"*Hein?*" inquired the old man, turning round on her sharply. "You spoke, *ma petite*, I think. It is not right, that was what you said. What is not right, may your father ask?"

"You know quite well what I mean, father," answered his daughter, flushing painfully, but speaking out with boldness.

Old Garçon looked at her slowly for a moment, as if taking time to consider and turn over in his own mind what she had just said. I glanced

across at Colquhoun. He had risen, and was standing with his back against the door-check, tapping his boot impatiently with the handle of his whip. I suppose he felt the awkwardness of our position as much as I did, and liked it as little. After a moment's uncomfortable silence the old man turned again to us, spreading out his hands with a deprecating gesture.

"You see how it is, my frents. This is what it means to have a dutiful daughter. She would rather see her old father, her poor father—who, poor though he is, would cut off his right hand before she should feel pinch or slight—straining his back over this work, which yet must be done, than have him accept the willing assistance of two generous Englishmen"—I saw the blood mount to Neil's forehead there, though he did not speak, for, like most Scots, he split on the rock of *Britain*—"whom he is proud to call—"

"I did not mean that at all," flashed out Louise, her nostrils quivering. "No! please say not a word, either of you—you cannot understand why I speak. *You* know quite well what I meant, father!" Then, having thus checked the words which each of her two unwilling auditors had at his tongue's end, and before Gargon himself had time to get out another syllable, she had taken up her work-basket and fled.

"Strikes me we've made rather a hash of it there, somehow, Frank," Neil observed to me somewhat gloomily, as he and I were riding back from Berry Flat presently, both of us being too much disgusted with our hosts' conduct with

respect to his daughter to stay longer than the barest civility demanded. "Can't make it out, for the life of me."

He made no more direct reference to the matter, and neither did I. But I knew his meaning well enough; and it was not pleasant, certainly, to reflect that we had in some way not only occasioned manifest embarrassment to Gargon's daughter, but in a sense actually driven her from the field.

"However," he went on after a minute, "we're booked for this job, and there's no getting out of it now. Best way will be to get to work and put the thing through as quickly and unobtrusively as possible, and then clear out, that's all. I don't show up at the house yonder to-morrow," with a backward nod over his shoulder towards Berry Flat.

"Nor I," I echoed moodily, and we rode home in unthought silence. But although we did not discuss the matter further, each of us, to judge by myself, could not but feel a little sore to find that the girl, who had hitherto borne herself with such frank unaffected cordiality towards us both, should now appear so singularly unwilling to accept a trifling service at our hands. What did she mean by it? Was it pride pure and simple? Or—and the mere notion sent me down into the depths—had her quick wits read the secret of one of us, and did she intend that one to regard her present behaviour as a discouragement, to understand that his presence was distasteful to her? It was queer, anyhow, since the very customs of the colony, based upon a mutual rendering of assistance given by settler to settler, as evidenced in

"logging," and every other kind of "bee," ran counter to both her words and conduct. As for Neil, though he didn't say much, he presumably thought the more; and when we had got home, in place of sitting to smoke and chat on the stoop as usual, he whistled the dogs to heel and went wandering away across the twelve acres, and down towards the swamp, not coming back again until long after moon-rise. And then the directions he gave to the old negress who kept house for us, as concerned next day, were such as told me that the result of his meditations had not been a determination to alter his intentions with respect to intruding ourselves on the dwellers at Berry Flat.

According to arrangement, then, we started next morning at sun-up, and having reached the Flat, turned Neil's mare and Roanoke into the pasture, after which, without giving any direct notice of our arrival, the pair of us set to at once on the belt of timber the old man had indicated. The sound of the axes announced our presence, however, bringing the owner himself down before very long to make a pretence of shouldering an axe and starting work on his own account. But that was a thing we were not likely to allow, and we soon induced him to leave that part to us, setting him to the easier task of lopping the boughs from the felled trees instead. Work was never much to the old French-Canadian's taste, however, and after pottering about for a bit, he left us, on some pretext or another; and we next caught sight of him making tracks for the house.

We had been at it for about a couple of hours after that, I should say, when I, who happened to

be working nearer to the edge of the open ground, saw a shimmer of something pink coming down the stretch of pasture that lay between the log-house and the spot where we were making a clearing; and presently made out the slight figure of Louise Garçon, stepping along towards us, carrying a pitcher in one hand and a basket in the other. A light broad-brimmed straw-hat, not very dissimilar to those we ourselves were wearing—or had been until we got among the trees—crowned her dainty head; and her gown of printed calico was trying its best to look as fresh as her face. I threw down my axe, and went to relieve her of her burden.

"It is very hot," the girl said, looking up at me with her singularly frank gaze as we met, and giving me her hand, without the least sign or shadow of the embarrassment of last night. "I felt quite sure that you must need some refreshment by this time, and I have brought a little down. Our cider is good this season, I think; the apples were very fine last year."

She paused there, and without apparently noticing what I was saying by way of remonstrance for troubling or burdening herself on our account, looked round at the evidences of our labour. We had made fair havoc in the belt of timber; the lumber was lying about pretty thickly, and at the far extremity of the newly-made clearing, Neil, his blue shirt showing as a bright spot of colour against the dark trunks and shady background, was making the chips fly beneath the vigorous strokes of his axe. I cannot

tell whether the sight of our work pleased her or not; but she certainly contemplated it very seriously.

"You are very good, both of you, to take so much trouble on our account," she said presently. "We—my father and I—ought to be extremely grateful to you."

Now that remark, coming from her, was, all things considered, natural enough, I suppose. But in my then frame of mind it nettled me; and by way of setting matters straight, I forthwith proceeded to make them worse, and to put my foot in it altogether. I certainly possessed an eminent faculty for doing the latter.

"If that is the way you take it," I began inanely, "you must allow me to apologize for my awkwardness."

"Your awkwardness?" She looked at me in surprise.

"Exactly. Because," I went on impetuously, "I must have to all appearance conveyed the impression of regarding as a toil that which I count only a pleasure—a privilege rather."

But that didn't seem at all the right thing to say, somehow. She looked distinctly troubled now, nay, downright embarrassed. Moreover, she would not take my meaning, not a bit of it.

"You are too enthusiastic," she said, with a smile. "I have never heard bush-felling spoken of as pleasure before. Most Englishmen look upon it as very hard work. Indeed, I have known of a great many who have been obliged to give it up, simply because they found it too much for them."

She was determined not to see my meaning, then. I felt angry, hurt, mortified, as I stood leaning on my axe, looking after her retreating figure, although for the life of me, when I came to think things over, there seemed in reality nothing to be angry about. She had declined to read another meaning in the few commonplace words I had spoken in answer to a sentence of the most ordinary courtesy, that was all; and if the significance I had meant to convey thereby had fallen short, it was not her fault, but mine. I would have given my head for the privilege of escorting her up the pasture, but, with the remembrance of last night present with me, I was reluctant to force my company on her. So I left that pleasant duty to Gaspard, a nondescript flapping-eared mongrel, one quarter of him bloodhound, and the rest any breed you please; and instead, took up my axe and crossed over to where my chum was at work, remarking that, since it was getting pretty hot, we might as well slack off for a breathing spell.

It was pleasant enough there in the shade, with the sun glancing in between the whispering branches, and chequering the grass beneath with dappled light and shadow; very pleasant—barring one thing. Eden had its serpent, and our Eden had its flies, its "skeeters." Their name was legion, and they defied us; even tobacco smoke failing to keep them off. Nell lay on his back under one tree, his hat over his eyes; and I sat up against the next, one eye at intervals on a red-headed woodpecker that kept peering at me round a

neighbouring stump; but for the most part watching the distant log-house, in the faint hope of catching a glimpse of a pink cotton skirt, and wondering how long it would be before that same pink skirt should come once more waving and fluttering down the ten-acre pasture that lay between, or if it would come at all.

It did not come; but in its place appeared old Matty the negress, to prove herself the bearer of a message.

"Mis' Louise sent her compliments, and would the white buckras be good 'nuff to come for a little time to the house?"

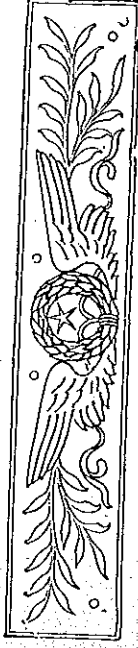
Neil gave me a somewhat comical glance as he prepared to obey the summons; probably, like myself, he was thinking of last night's expressed determination, and of the way in which it was being at present adhered to. For we went—went as meekly as lambs—we were so excessively afraid of hurting the feelings of Garçon's daughter, you see—in spite of the resolution of last night, in spite of our own carefully-planned arrangements, to accept the hospitality of Berry Flat, at which the young mistress herself presided, doing the honours with a simple grace that was natural to her. Just the new rendering of an old saying, that was all. "Man proposes—and woman—does the rest."

CHAPTER X.

BERRIES AND BRUIN

NE put in a good spell of work that afternoon; in fact, by the time evening began to come on, all the big trees—thanks to the help they had themselves given to our axes, by bringing others with them in their fall—were down in the patch that Garçon had wanted cleared; and when the old man, accompanied by his daughter, came down to look at them, it was to throw up his hands in wonder, and express his satisfaction in garrulous delight.

I scarcely know how it came about, that a few minutes later we should have thrown down our axes and set off on a ramble in the woods. The mention by the old French-Canadian of a strange-looking, oddly-shaped stump a quarter of a mile or so distant, started us, I believe; but at all events that was what it came to, Louise and I finding ourselves presently strolling side by side in the rear, while old Garçon, who had made a prisoner of



Neil, conveyed him on ahead, talking and gesticulating with his wonted vehemence of speech and gesture.

It was strangely silent and lonely there in the woods, after their figures had passed out of sight, and we had lost the sound of the voice of one of them. At any time, and under any circumstances, there is something impressive in the sense of being surrounded by trees, as if, in truth, the Spirit of the Woods threw his spell over one at the instant of stepping across his borders. In the Canadian forests the impression of solemnity is intensified, if that be possible, for the tall trunks that shoot up on every side, not throwing out branches until at some distance from the ground, give to the dim far-reaching vistas beyond the appearance of a thronging forest of pillars filling the court of some ancient temple, reared in the days when the world was young.

That afternoon, however, we gave little heed to any such suggestions as these; our attention was occupied with less exalted ideas altogether. The raspberries were just at their best, every bush was simply swarming with them, and Louise and I—we were neither of us very old—lingered to gather them like a couple of children. We never thought of keeping count of time or distance; and for direction, simply followed in the track of the other two, guided by the trees Neil had taken the trouble to blaze with his knife as he went along. Louise had brought a little wooden pail with her; and I went on gathering raspberries and bringing them to her in a mullein leaf, for the ostensible purpose

of filling the said pail, though in reality we might have done that a dozen times over in as many minutes. But she ate, and I talked and lingered beside her, and—and it was really wonderful how long that pail took to fill, after all, as we strolled along together.

Of course I knew well enough by this time the way things stood with me. But had I any chance? That was the question. For the life of me I could no more have told if she felt any particular interest with regard to my humble self than I could have flown. As far as I could see, she regarded me as chum and myself in precisely the same light, and as being on an exactly similar footing; and her bearing towards both of us all along had been just that which might have been looked for from a girl of her stamp with regard to a couple of young fellows, each of whom, from the very first, had been bent on showing her, as the only white woman within a good many miles, all the attention that lay in his power. But this afternoon, for some reason or other, her former frank friendliness seemed to have vanished, and in its place appeared an unwonted constraint, increasing rather than lessening as the minutes passed. At last—we had come to a standstill before a bush of berries, and the little pail was for the first time in a fair way to filling—my companion looked up suddenly and spoke.

"You are remembering last night," she broke out quickly, flashing one searching glance at me with her dark eyes. "Ah, yes, I know it; I have felt it there between us all the time, as we walked

along. And you think me a proud ungracious girl, who has not courtesy or grace enough to accept a service willingly and generously offered at the hands of her father's friends——”

“And not her own?” I put in reproachfully.

She coloured, and lifted one little hand to catch nervously at a trailing bough just beyond her reach. I put up an arm, and bending the store of ripe juicy fruit down to her, held it there; and she began pulling off the berries hastily.

“Her own then. Yes. Why not? But believe me, what you think, what you cannot help but think is not the case, altogether. If I could speak and explain, or—or if it had to do with myself alone, you should soon understand. But if one must explain in all points, where is the reality of friendship?—and—I will only ask you not to misjudge me—— Yet, perhaps it is better as it is, after all.”

“Believe me,” I was breaking out impetuously, with the earnestness of desperation. But she interrupted me with a smile and a little foreign gesture.

“We understand each other, is it not so? And there will be no need to say another word. Then we will shake hands; and now, if you please, we will follow my father. We have always been very good friends, you and I, and I trust nothing will occur to prevent our continuing so.”

There was a douche of cold water for me, if you like. The reference to her father evidently meant to recall my attention to the distance we had fallen behind the other two, and so warn me to put

a check on my tongue, and say nothing which might render the rest of our *tête-à-tête* in any sense uncomfortable, was bad enough in itself. A man could not have gone on to declare himself after being put on his honour like that. But the last sentence sent me down to the depths with a vengeance. If she had said in so many words, “Friends, remember, only friends, and if you please, no love making,” she could not have snubbed me more effectively. The mist of happiness hitherto swimming before my eyes had suddenly vanished, and where I had lately seen only colour, light, and beauty, nothing showed now but shadow, darkness, and gloom. The spell had been ruthlessly broken, and the woods were a paradise no longer.

“They have turned,” Louise said suddenly, breaking the silence that had fallen between us.

“They are in sight now, coming back. And my father! How excited he looks.”

Old Garçon looked excited indeed as he came towards us, not running exactly, but ambling along in a furtive frightened fashion, casting stealthy backward glances over his shoulder in the meantime, beyond Colquhoun, who was some paces in the rear, as if in dread of something following in pursuit. I looked from the old fellow to Neil. He too appeared excited, but his eyes were flashing with an eager light, and it was pretty evident that the cause, whatever it might be, had gone home with him in another way altogether.

“I say, Frank,” he broke out, hailing me before they got up to us, and sending his voice in a low but clear call over his companion's head. “Better

be going back, if we're to square up to-night, you know."

Louise was bending down over a raspberry bush at the moment, and the quick expressive sign he made told me at once that something had gone wrong.

"Right you are," I answered, carelessly turning as I spoke. "Suppose we take the lead this time."

But the old man had got within speaking distance by now, and he showed himself by a long way less considerate than his companion had been.

"Bears!" he gasped as well as want of breath would allow of, rushing up to us and clutching his daughter by the arm. "Two of them over at the berries yonder, not two hundred yards away! I saw them, I, with my own eyes! Monsieur et Madame, I take it. And it is not with berries they will remain content, alas! it is my hog-pens they will visit next. Was ever such misfortune thrown in the way of a poor and miserable old man!" He flung out his hands with a theatrical gesture, and wound up with a sort of long-drawn wail.

"In place of lamenting possible future danger to your hogs, don't you think it would be better worth while to avoid alarming your daughter, and see about getting her home?" struck in Neil, the coolness of his tone not attempting to veil a ring of contempt. "Believe me, there is no actual danger," he added earnestly, stepping up to Louise, who, although she had not uttered a word, had naturally turned somewhat pale. "The brutes were both busy with the berries yonder, and would be most unlikely under any circumstances to leave

them in order to attack a party of four. In any case, trust us to see that no harm should come to you."

"No danger?" quoth old Garçon with a grunt, as he seized his daughter by the arm, and hurried her back in the direction of the clearing at the best pace to which his short legs were equal. "Come faster, Louise! vite, vite, ma petite, je te dis! No danger! pah! and not one of us with so much as a weapon on him!"

He was right there. Colquhoun and I, in only the customary summer rig-out of cotton shirt and trousers in which we had been doing the clearing work, had nothing on us in the way of defensive weapons except a knife hanging from the belt; and our axes were at present where we had left them an hour ago, fast in the trunk of the last tree we had felled. Old Garçon's case was pretty much the same with our own, and we had not, in truth, so much as a revolver among the three of us.

"What a brace of asses we were to come out like this," Neil remarked to me, as he and I brought up the rear in our enforced retreat, old Garçon hurrying his daughter on ahead in the meantime at the best speed he could make. "To have to sneak off in this style from a couple of stolid brutes like those over yonder, merely because not one of us had the common-sense to carry anything on him except a knife. Not that we could have risked a shot under present circumstances, of course," with a significant glance towards the pink cotton skirt ahead. Then he laughed outright. "After all, when you think of it, old fellow, it seems a cowardly trick, doesn't it, to start off for a couple

of rifles in order to wage war on a brace of inoffensive brutes, merely because we daren't tackle them without."

"Well, if you are keen on going for them with your bare hands, do it," responded I sarcastically, for I was used to hearing him talk in that strain at times. "The individuals principally concerned would not object, I dare swear, and their greeting would be affectionate enough, that's certain—bound to meet you with a hug. Speaking merely as a friend, though, you had better let me be there to see fair play; and, not having any hankering myself after the Quixotic, I'll take the precaution of bringing a rifle with me. Might come in useful in the way of preventing you from getting your hair lifted before your time."

"Like the poor beggar Peters was yarning about," finished he, with a good-humoured laugh at his own expense. "Do you know, though," he added with a sudden seriousness, baring his head as he spoke and running his fingers through his dark thick hair, "I've an impression that is the fate in store for me one day."

"Don't be an idiot," said I gruffly.

"An idiot, eh? Well, that's what I am, I suppose, to have given the thing a thought. Seriously, though, the notion came from an outside quarter and is no mere fancy of my own. It was this way. The first night we got ashore, Walsh and I—he had offered to pilot me round the city—were taking a short cut down a side-street, when we came on a party of Indians, Hurons, coming along in their silent fashion. They were the first I

had seen, of course, and I was standing still to stare at them, when they started jabbering to each other; and one, a hideous old squaw in a dirty blanket, began to point at me and to squeak out a vile song of a tune. Walsh, who understood some of their gibberish, told me to come on, and afterwards I found out what the refrain of the old lady's chant had been. 'Go not West, go not West, you with the dark-brown hair. Indian covet him hair, Indian take him scalp, hang it at Indian belt,' and a lot more to the same effect. *Abst emen*, thought I. An agreeable and enlivening anticipation, that. Anything prophetic in it, d' you think?"

"Look here," I retorted seriously, "don't you be a morbid ass, and a sentimental duffer. Hallo! that's not, yet it must be—Hurrah! it's the clearing, and Garçon's reached it. Didn't know we were so near."

"She's safe, then," Neil said, drawing a long breath of such evident relief that I asked him, chaffingly, how that squared with his confident assertion regarding the absence of danger a few minutes ago.

"Exactly," he agreed. "I'm an arrant humbug there, I'll admit. Not that for one moment I believed the brutes would attack us, as I said; but one is apt to regard a possibility of that sort in a different light, according to whether he's got any weapons about him or not. Upon my word, I'll tell the next fellow who begins to expatiate to me on man's undoubted superiority in every way to the brutes, just to try the experiment of finding himself within a few paces of a couple of full-grown bears, a woman in his company, and nothing in

his hand. It's possible he might find occasion to alter his views on that head. By the way, I wonder what kind of shooting-irons Gargon is likely to have on hand to offer us."

We did not have to wonder long. The old French-Canadian did not own much in the way of an arsenal; and we looked somewhat dubiously at the couple of old double-barrelled shot-guns which were the best he could give, thinking ruefully of the brace of Winchesters fifteen miles away. However, the thought of the rifles would not give them wings to bring them to us, and the circumstances did not admit of delay. Having a good axe of his own to grind on the score of his hogs, old Gargon had showed himself so far generous, as not only to place the said smooth-bores at our disposal, but to insist upon our taking with us his dog Gaspard, that nondescript mongrel, with nothing about him to give a clue to the breed of which he came, except his sweeping ears and deep heavy chops. Louise looked somewhat anxious on hearing that our intention was to spend the night in the woods in pursuit of the bears; but she was too well used to that kind of thing to make any attempt either at remonstrance or dissuasion. Perhaps, considering that we had to do with not one alone, but a couple of the brutes, there might have been some recklessness in the thing. But that was the last consideration to enter our heads, and we got the dog in a leash and started off back on our trail with as little delay as possible, only fire-hot to come up with the bears and get a shot at them.



CHAPTER XI

CLOSE QUARTERS

IT was dusk already when we entered the woods again; hence we had little to depend upon for guidance except the dog, and it was by no means easy to get him to work the back trail. Not until we had spent some hours in the forest did we reach the neighbourhood of the spot where, as we conjectured, we had first fallen in with Monsieur and Madame Bruin. The odd-looking stump already mentioned afforded a clue both to direction and distance, in addition to the hanging branches here and there which Colquhoun had blazed as he went along.

"Seems to me this must be pretty near the place we spotted them," he said in a whisper. "I remember yon branch perfectly, and we spied the pair a couple of hundred yards further on."

He pointed as he spoke to a broken bough on a sapling close at hand, the already fading leaves and the split wood showing ghastly white as the light caught them. All round extended the silent reaches of forest; the giant trunks standing up

straight and motionless like ebony pillars against the cold clear brilliancy of the moonlight, the tangle of undergrowth and bushes showing beyond, a shapeless wilderness of shadow. Not a sound, not a cry came out of that world of blackness. It might have been a region peopled by the dead; and so oppressive had been the silence that I started at the sound of his voice.

"Right," I muttered, and then suddenly—"Look at the dog! He's got wind of something."

He certainly had. The sudden change in his bearing and behaviour proved that. Every hair in his body quivered with excitement, he uttered low eager whines, and finally, after a minute's anxious quivering of the ground, he hit off the trail and dashed forward through the undergrowth, hauling Neil after him, straining hard against his collar, and giving both of us enough to do to keep up with him. On we went, as noiselessly as we might through the dark silent forest; not a sound coming to our ears except that occasioned by our own movements, and now and then a low intense whine of impatient eagerness from the hound. But he was too well trained to give tongue, and followed the trail up for the most part in silence; Neil, the leash over his left wrist, in advance, and I hard on his heels.

"Yonder," muttered my chum under his breath, coming to a sudden halt, and I ranged up alongside and looked where he pointed. The moon shone out at that moment and lit up the scene before us almost as brightly as day. Beyond the spot where we half crouched in the shadow of the spruce

pinetrees, extended a comparatively open space, it might almost have been termed a glade, the trees were scattered over it so sparsely. Just where the shadow of the pines beneath which we stood cut the moonlit space, something was crossing it, slowly, lumberingly, something black, huge, and shapeless in the semi-darkness. Beyond that, further over towards the far side of the clearing, another object, just as huge and just as black, went moving slowly, emitting at intervals low grumbling noises, not unlike the grunting of a pig. One might almost have taken them to be a couple of enormous black hogs rooting there; and for an instant, as I stood gazing at the peacefulness of the scene, a sort of reflection of Neil's words came to me, and I almost found it in my heart to regret the necessity of having to send death and destruction in to mar its peace and quietness. But this was the ruthless war of civilization against savage nature, in which pity finds no place; the score was one on which settlers have as a rule little room to spare for compunction, and with probable future depredations to be taken into account, the feeling was one that did not last long.

Well, I was a bit excited, and small wonder, I take it. We had joined once before in a bear hunt, but that had been under very different conditions, six of the nearest settlers turning out in a body to rid the district of a bear, that had been committing depredations upon certain gardens and fields of maize; and the thing had seemed to both of us, in the utter absence of any existing chance for the other side, more like murder than anything else.

"No," Neil had said determinedly, as he threw down his rifle that night; "the next bear I shoot shall have a chance anyhow! I'm blessed if the hide of that poor brute wasn't riddled like a corn-sieve, by the time those fellows were through with him. Fair play for man and beast, say I; and I don't budge from that." No more he did, either, from that day to this. And, taking things one with another, the conditions all round now were about equal, so that we and our adversaries might have been fairly reckoned quits. It promised to be nothing else than a fight at close quarters; and the excitement of the mere anticipation sent the blood leaping and tingling at galloping pace through my every vein. Neil, on the other hand, was just about as cool as ever. Except when unnerved momentarily by the sight of the single thing of which he had an instinctive horror, I never knew a fellow who had himself, barring impulsiveness, better in hand in every sense of the term. He was a dead shot, too, and I felt pretty confident of the outcome as far as the bear he was to tackle should be concerned.

He looked at me, and I knew that he was giving me first choice. I pointed to the far one and touched his arm, then from the nearer one to myself. He nodded, and brought up the old double-barrel to the sight. We had agreed to fire together; for the couple, crippled at least, promised to be less formidable than one possibly merely wounded and the other unhurt, since in that case, the latter would be certain to come to the rescue of its mate.

"Ready?" muttered Neil, and as I nodded back, both our pieces spoke together. Then, at that very moment, in the instant before the report rang out, I saw Gaspard the dog, attached as he still was to the leash, spring forward with a sudden bound, jerking my chum with him, and spoiling his aim. "Missed! by Jupiter!" came from the latter, and that moment the moon went behind a cloud, leaving the forest as dark as pitch.

It might have gone badly with at least one of us then, but for that plucky dog. The cord had slipped from his neck; and the moment he found himself free the game brute rushed in on the nearer of the two bears, the male, as it turned out to be, crippling and hampering him in his furious backward charge. My ball had broken his shoulder, but there was enough of him still lively to make him a formidable antagonist as he came shuffling and snorting towards us. We could only hear him though, seeing was out of the question; and although both fired again in the direction from which the sound came, there was no knowing for the life of us whether he was hit or not. An awful scuffle seemed to be going on close at hand, but which of the pair was causing it neither of us could tell. But by the time we were loaded out shone the moon once more, giving a full view of the glade, just as a savage yell came from Gaspard, and we saw the huge he-bear rise on his hind-legs and parry the open-mouthed attack of the hound by meeting him with his terrible hug. Another piteous yelp, half-stifled this time, from the dog, clutched between the bear's breast and arms, and

the sound proved too much for Neil. That any one or anything that had once done him a good turn should suffer for it was more than he could stand at any time; and pausing only to fire both barrels in desperation at the bear's head, he clubbed the gun and ran in on him, without stopping to reload, shouting to me at the same time to look out for the other. Both balls told this time, crashing through the skull into the brain; and the great beast, with a last choking snarl, staggered forward and fell dead. But there was the she-bear yet to be reckoned with, unhurt and furious, who had come up by this time to the help of her mate; and as the huge male rolled over and lay motionless, she rose up from behind him and made straight at Colquhoun, her eyes blazing, and her half-open jaws showing a formidable array of teeth.

It was terribly close quarters, for though he swung up the double-barrel and let her have the butt full on the head, he missed the muzzle, the most tender part of a bear, and the blow, far from checking her, only made her more furious. I, for my part, didn't dare fire, since he was directly in my line; and when at last I got my chance and let fly, that was not until I had seen him stagger and go down under a blow from the outstretched paw, just before the great black mass heeled over on the top of him, both coming to the ground together. In desperation I sent my remaining ball into the place where I took it that the bear's head must be, and then ran forward in my turn, scarcely daring to hope for anything but the worst.

Strong as I was, it took me all my time to drag

the huge inert mass of the dead bear off Colquhoun, and when by sheer strength I had flung the carcass to one side, and saw him lying there motionless beneath it, I dropped on one knee beside him, an awful terror at my heart. He was lying face downwards, his arms extended, just as he had fallen; and as I got hold of him to lift him, I could feel that the shirt covering his shoulders was drenched in blood. To many it would be no light thing to lift a senseless man, but I was about as strong as a horse in those days, and made nothing of his weight. I got him up in my arms as if he had been a child, and carrying him away a pace or two, laid him down on the grass, turning the white set face to the moonlight.

"Neil, old man!" I muttered huskily, and all the love I had ever felt for him seemed to surge up in one great rush of agony as it realized its loss. "For God's sake, old chap, speak to me!"

The experience is one that I am never likely to forget, and the memory of the scene comes back to me even now. The white moonlight flooding the glade with silver, within the silent solemn circle of the black watching trees; the huge shapeless masses of the dead bears to right and left; and I kneeling alone there, miles away from any human help, by the side of one of whom I knew not whether he was living or dead, with nothing conscious near me but the moaning, bleeding hound, pressing shudderingly against my arm. No sound, no movement in answer to the earnest appeal; and then, cursing my own folly and want of nerve, I stooped over him again and felt for the beating of

his heart. Thank Heaven! the evidence of life was there, and with that certainty my presence of mind came back to me. I got out the flask I carried, drew the stopper, and forcing his teeth apart, poured a measure that would have horrified a teetotaler down his throat. The spirit did its work. His eyelashes flickered, his breath came stronger, and in another moment he gasped and opened his eyes.

"Hallo!" he muttered. "That you, Frank. What's to pay now? You look as queer as a scared rabbit." Then, as recollection came back, "The bears," he murmured, and tried to get to his feet.

"Dead as door-nails, both of 'em," said I hastily. "Never mind them—let's see to yourself. Where are you hurt?"

"Nowhere," he answered coolly. "Nothing but a scratch or two," and he tried again to struggle up. But I held him down, incredulous.

"A scratch or two? All that blood didn't come from only that?"

"No, but it's the bear's blood, not mine," said Neil gravely. Then he got to his feet and stood looking down at the dead bears, somewhat dizzy still with the knock-down blow the brute had given him, but otherwise unhurt, with the exception of a nasty scratch that had scored his right arm from elbow to shoulder. Had he been wearing anything thicker than a shirt, I scarcely think he would have come in for even that amount of damage, or that the claws would have done much more than draw blood; and considering the

terribly close quarters, I think we had got off uncommonly well. I've heard of more than one poor fellow who has been completely scalped by a blow from a bear's paw, the skin being literally torn from the skull and brought down over the eyes by the sheer force of those terrible claws. For, although the black bear is, comparatively speaking, a tolerably inoffensive brute when left alone, he becomes, like most other quiet characters, a dangerous customer when roused.

"A pretty near thing," Neil said, after surveying the two huge carcasses in silence for a few moments, going down on one knee as he spoke to lift the massive paw and note the length of the claws. "Talk about the *peine forte et dure*! I thought my ribs were broken when she came down on the top of me. Five hundred pounds, if she's an ounce, and the old fellow there would turn the scale at more than that."

Poor old Gaspard had come off the worst by a long way, having been a good deal mauled and knocked about in the scuffle; but we dressed his hurts as well as we could, and presently the poor chap ceased to lick his bleeding sides, and creeping close to our feet lay down and went to sleep. We waited there until the dawn came, and then

Neil, taking the hound with him, started off back to Berry Flat in order to get help to bring the bears away. Thanks to the presence of a creek not far distant, he had managed to get rid of the traces of the tussle; and his blue shirt, in the half light at any rate, showed but little of the blood-stains. I remained behind, meanwhile, to set about the work

of skinning, and to see that no harm came to our prizes. Setting aside the value of the skins, grease, etc., we had made up our minds to try our hands at curing bear ham, and had therefore no intention of letting the wolves get first bite.

In about three hours or so, Neil came back with reinforcements in the shape of a yoke of oxen, brought up through the tangle of undergrowth by what had once been an old logging road. With him came old Garçon himself, who, being a skilled hand at that business, set to work side by side with me, pouring forth, meanwhile, an unceasing stream of compliments and congratulations on our success. Neil, it struck me, was a good deal more silent than was usual with him; but he utterly scouted the notion of having sustained any serious injury, and I had some difficulty in inducing him to allow the old French-Canadian, an authority on such matters, to examine the wound occasioned by the bear's claws. Seen by daylight, it turned out that more damage had been done than I had at first supposed, the arm being somewhat badly lacerated.

"*Ma foi!* Madame had claws and knew how to use them," commented the old hunter. "But it will be nothing if——"

"Told you so," interrupted Neil, with a laugh, from where he sat on the skin of the defunct he-bear. "A cat's scratch; and if it had been a lion's you fellows couldn't have made more of it."

"But it might have been more than nothing," went on Garçon unheeding, "and for all I have said it will not do to neglect it, *mon brave*. See you," he added, turning to me, "I did think it

something this morning. When I looked out at the window and see one figure only come up the pasture with the dog, when we are looking for two, what am I to think otherwise but that the one of you has been killed by the bears? My daughter thinks so too, and she in one terrible fright, until——"

"A fright of which I am sorry that my negligence should have been the cause," interposed my chum at this point hastily. "I ought to have signalled 'All's well!' as I came up the pasture, but, as a matter of fact, I was so utterly stupid as never to think of it. You'll have to repeat my apologies at Berry Flat, Frank."

Very naturally I wondered what he meant, and I said as much.

"My dear fellow, I'm scarcely fit to appear in public at present, not in civilized society certainly," rejoined he, glancing down with a shrug at his torn and blood-stained shirt. "To tell the honest truth, too, my head rings a trifle yet after that knock, and as soon as we reach the pasture I'll get Deerfoot and make tracks for home."

"No, no, nonsense!" interrupted old Garçon hospitably. "You will come back to Berry Flat, both of you, that of course. The women shall get you some breakfast, and we will dress that arm, *hem?* It will be nothing, as I told you, *mon ami*; but that will not be so unless you are careful."

"You are very good," responded Neil, with a trace of obstinacy that did not show itself often in his manner. "But, at the risk of seeming ungrateful, since I am clearly not fit to present myself before your daughter, I must do as I have said."

He had his way eventually, any further attempt at dissuasion either on Garçon's part or on mine proving utterly useless. For my own part, my condition by the time we had got through the skinning being not far removed from that of a butcher, I merely helped to get the oxen into the barn-yard, not going near the house at all. Then I got Roanoke from the pasture, and putting him to the gallop, overtook my chum before he had ridden three miles on the way back to our lot.



CHAPTER XII

'HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY'



HINGS went on after that for about a couple of weeks pretty steadily, much in the same old, or, rather, in what I had better now call the new old way.

By which I mean my acquaintance with Berry Flat, and the changed feelings with which I had by this time come to regard one of its inmates.

Heaven knows that in a hundred ways I felt myself to be unworthy of her. I had little enough to offer her either, if it came to mere worldly wealth. But I was presumptuous enough to believe that youth and health, an honest love and a strong arm to fight for her, were enough in themselves to offer any woman; and there was something now and then in the shy glance of Louise's dear eyes, and the tones of her sweet voice, that led me to hope she was not altogether indifferent to me. Con-
fessing her bearing towards me now with what it had been—during that afternoon in the woods, for example—I had every reason to hope. Yet it was



only at times that I took that view ; at others, I used to go down in the depths entirely, and would find myself wondering, with the kind of modesty that comes to a good many of us under similar circumstances, what chance I, only a great strong six-foot fellow, with little enough to commend him except his strength and his English honesty, would be likely to stand with a girl like that, when half the men within a radius of fifty miles were pledging Garçon's daughter nightly, and she might have had her choice out of the lot. Because, although on looking back it occurs to me that I may have unwittingly conveyed an impression that Berry Flat was favoured with but few visitors, such was not the case, by any means. The business of the father drew many strangers there, and the beauty of the daughter was a thing by no means calculated to repel them ; the house being a regular place of call, indeed, for miles around.

There was one fellow who used to show himself there pretty frequently, on one pretence or another, a French-Canadian, just come to the settlement, a big, fallow, ill-favoured chap bearing the name of Chassepôt. From the very first, even before any apparent reason showed itself, he and I had taken an instinctive dislike to each other. What jealous pangs I suffered then ; and what agonies of self-torture I used to go through, those days, at work on the farm fifteen miles away—at the thought of those fellows there having all the opportunities I coveted, while I . . . Why didn't the fool ask her, then, and know his fate at once, instead of hanging off and grizzling over it at a

distance? some one asks. Exactly ; I was a fool, no doubt. But I wasn't the first man, nor am I likely to be the last, who, sane enough and not wanting in courage on ordinary occasions, has yet found himself converted into the sorriest of cowards at the mere suggestion of meeting with a refusal from the woman he loves. The old story again, you see, from the days of honest old Miles Standish onwards.

"I'm not afraid of bullets, nor shot from the mouth of a cannon,

But of a thundering 'No !' point-blank from the mouth of a woman,

That I confess I'm afraid of, nor am I ashamed to confess it !"

So, when the down-hearted mood was strongest on me, I used to find myself contemplating gloomily what the probable result would be, if some day I should pluck up courage and offer myself to her, heart and hand. It had not been exactly a case of over head and ears at once, you see. I got in gradually, and I never knew how far I had gone until I came to look back. And then I did not want to get out ; in fact, the deeper I sank the better I liked it. In a word, the prospect I dreaded most was that of finding myself high and dry again, and the very fear of such a prospect made me act like a fool. However, I got handsomely punished for shilly-shallying in that fashion at last.

So, during that fortnight, although each successive morning on waking I vowed to myself that the evening should see me off the tenter-hooks in

either one way or the other, the evening invariably saw me ride back from Berry Flat in moody silence, with things just as far on as ever. My rides were solitary now; for from the time that we had gone to put in that spell of bush-felling—after that bout with the bears, I mean—Neil had been obliged to keep clear of all that sort of thing, and for some weeks he saw nothing of either Garçon or his daughter. On the first evening after the sport, I had gone over to square up the rest of the work, and to ask acceptance of the defunct bears, with the skins, hams, grease, and all thereto appertaining, on behalf of the two of us; and that had been the beginning. I had had to leave him at home then, and little wonder; since he was scarcely up to either a thirty-mile ride or further bush-felling, with a splitting headache as a souvenir of the blow from Madame's paw, and his right arm badly swollen and about as stiff as a poker. On that occasion I had made the best excuse that suggested itself; and since the scratch showed itself slow in healing, and neither he nor I wanted that tender-hearted girl to know that either of us had come in for any damage at all, there had been nothing for it but to keep up the fiction. Had I only had an idea of the misunderstanding to arise out of all that! but I was never one to look far ahead or to calculate chances too nicely, and animated only by the desire to spare my sweetheart's feelings, and to do as I would have been done by with respect to my chum—knowing as I did that he, keenly, almost morbidly sensitive on such a point, would not have thanked me to represent him as an

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object for compassionate inquiries—concealed the true state of the case as best I could, and, while condoling with Louise over the misfortunes of poor Gaspard, nay, even while dressing the dog's wounds, never "let on," as Neil would have termed it, that he himself had in any degree come to grief at all.

Well, I paid pretty dearly in the long run for that piece of well-meant concealment. I've heard it said, many a time, and by some who ought to know better, too, that one finds events hanging on and growing out of trifles—only in the pages of books. I only know this, that sort of thing never happens half so often in fiction as in fact. Trifles! why, they are the very pegs upon which fortune hangs the history of individuals, of nations. That is just where what one might call the cussedness comes in; for there is no denying that, speaking generally, we could most of us handle the big things of life easily enough, if only these beginnings, these trifles, did not get on our blind side and throw us off our guard at the outset.

Neil knew nothing of all this, be it remembered. As a matter of fact, he was pretty keen on his work those days, hence there was nothing odd in the lack of interest he showed in other respects, Berry Flat among the rest; and the idea of inquiring whether his absence had occasioned remark of any kind over yonder, was the very last to have entered the head of a fellow like himself. A couple of articles sent by him to one or two of the London magazines on the subject of Canadian farming prospects had met with some favour, we

heard just about that time, over at the other side, and he had followed up this his first success with all his wonted ardour, availing himself of his enforced respite from more active work to throw himself heart and soul into this new pursuit. For my own part, I was somewhat silent and pre-occupied myself; for which reason, I take it, I neither noticed nor saw anything singular in the fact that since that first night, when he had called out to me jestingly not to forget an apology for our sudden disappearance, he had neither mentioned nor alluded in any way to Berry Flat.

But one evening, an evening on which Louise had welcomed me so kindly, smiled so sweetly, that I had ridden back home in the seventh heaven, telling myself that, but for her father's persistent and most inconvenient liking for my company that evening, I should have won her as surely as there was a sun in the sky,—when I was roving about restlessly, now down the pasture, now into the living-room, then out on the stoop again, Neil, who was hard at work indoors, suddenly lifted his head and looked at me. I was just wandering into the room again, and seeing by the gesture with which he pushed aside the papers on which he had been working, that he had got through, I came forward and sat down on the side of the table opposite to him. For the first time, it struck me that he looked uncommonly seedy.

"Look here, old man," I said bluntly, looking across at him, "you'd better be a bit more careful, eh? You know what Garçon said, and a thing like that doesn't heal in no time."

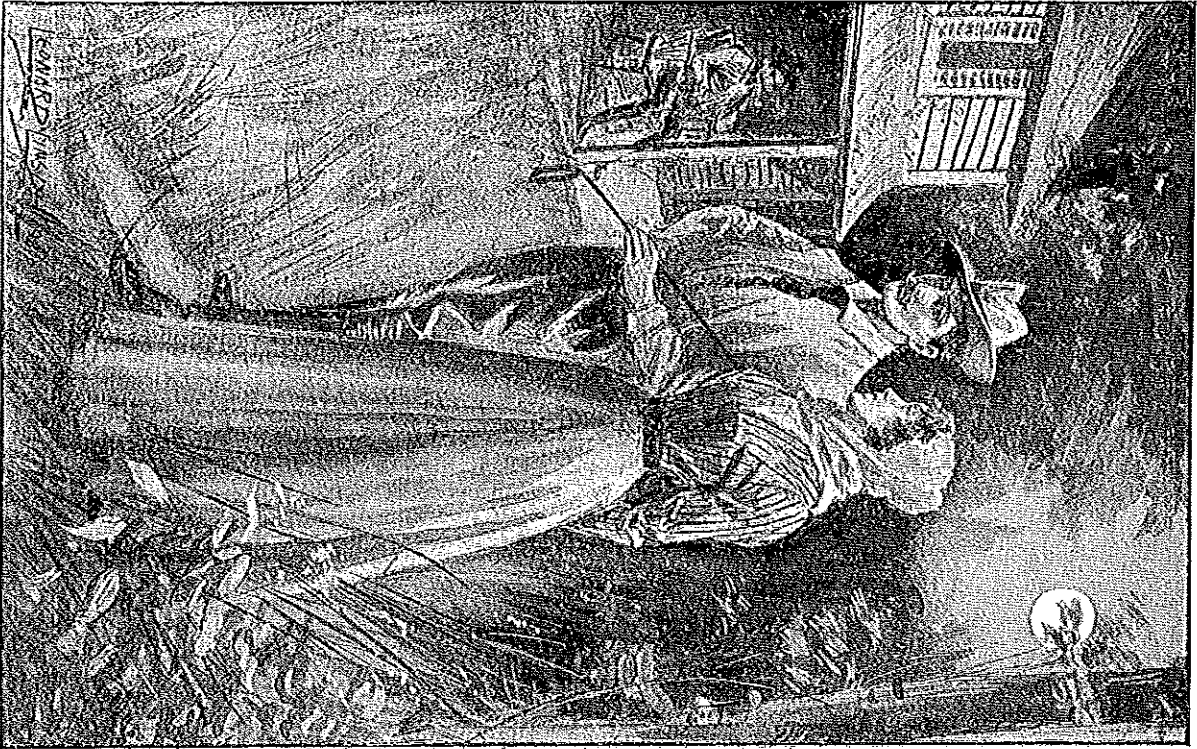
"You shut up, and don't start croaking," he answered, with a laugh. Then his expression changed suddenly, his whole face softened, and leaning forward, he held out a hand to me across the table. "Tell me when you've got it all settled, Frank, old fellow, and let me be the first to wish you joy!"

Well, that unloosed my tongue, and from that time on, that evening in particular, I'm afraid I played the part of the customary bore under circumstances like those. Perhaps my father's estimate of my capabilities in general had not been so far out, after all; and certainly, not in one connection alone has love been truly declared to be blind. But I drew fresh hope from the good fellow's cheery words; things seemed surely to be going the right way for me at last; and the next night, when old Garçon sat placidly smoking on the stoop, and Louise and I were strolling side by side in the moonlight up and down the little strip of pasture opposite the door, I plucked up heart of grace, and the question, that question which should decide my happiness or misery, was trembling on my very lips when—

"Mis' Louise! Missy Louise!" and enter old Matty, panting, dishevelled, turban hanging in a crazy fashion over one ear, and bearer of an eager message. "Massa done call you, honey."

"My father!" exclaimed Louise, turning quickly. "Does he want me?"

"Him wake up sudden and call you, missy," repeated the old negress, positively pressing close to her young mistress's side.



"Louise and I were strolling side by side in the moonlight." Page 139.

I'm afraid I said something under my breath that would be better omitted, since it was of a nature hardly complimentary to Matty. Well! it was hard! To be interrupted for a triviality at a moment like that, and lose the opportunity for that evening. For lost it was, there was no doubt of that. To ask my darling the most important question of life for both of us, with an old sharp-eared negress trotting alongside, hearing every word I said? No, thank you. And the best, or rather the worst of it was, that it turned out to be only a false alarm. Old Garçon was, snoring peacefully in the corner-seat when we reached him, and had not the slightest recollection of having called his daughter at all. But then he had a trick of waking up suddenly with her name on his lips, and that, it seemed, had been the case at present.

"Done call her, massa," persisted the old negress, obstinately though submissively. "Missy walking with white buckra and not hear, so Matty tink better tell her."

Had she only known how that white buckra was blessing her officiousness in his heart!

"It is quite right, *mon père!*" rejoined his daughter affectionately. "You always want me, is it not so?"

And what could I say? aloud at least, although to myself I said enough. Just my luck, of course; and as it was past eleven by this time, and I could not decently stay longer, I got my horse and rode home in an exceedingly bad temper. However, although I went the first few miles under a cloud,

it did not stay with me all the way. There would be a day longer of uncertainty for me, that was true; but after all I had not much to fear. I had had as much encouragement as any man dare hope for, I flattered myself, and felt tolerably sure of my standing ground; and—and—another day should see us betrothed, and myself the happiest fellow in the Dominion. Nothing else should stand in my way to-morrow—I had made up my mind to that.

Neil had turned in by the time I had got back—at least, as there was nothing to be seen of him, I concluded he had—and old Liza, our black factotum, had likewise disappeared; so the house was quiet enough when I let myself in. It was close on one o'clock, but the ride had freshened me up thoroughly, besides that, I felt in little mood to sleep; and I lit my pipe and leaned out at the window, looking into the still solemn beauty of the night, planning the future, dwelling on the sweetness of the present, and letting the past go. As I sat there smoking and thinking, the sound of the opening door caught my attention, making me turn smartly, and then bring head and shoulders suddenly into the room, in some surprise at what I saw.

Our log-house had been built on a plan of our own, and although we had the intention of ultimately replacing it by what is known as a "frame-house," that had not come off yet, and the place remained as it had been originally built—our rooms opening off the living-room in the centre, one on each side, the other apartments

being located either at the back or above, in the angle of the roof. The incomer was Neil, and his behaviour was odd, to say the least of it. He was in his trousers and shirt; and at first I thought nothing more than that he had happened to be awake, and noticing the smell of smoke, had got up and come in to chat a bit. Nothing of the kind. He did not take the slightest notice of me, did not seem to be conscious of my presence. Without uttering a syllable he came forward, sat down in the chair opposite to mine, and taking the box of matches I had left on the window-ledge, began to try to light a cigar, I sitting meanwhile staring hard, expecting a word from him every moment. Suddenly something strange in his appearance struck me, and as he lifted his head and the moonlight caught his face, I saw that his eyes were wide open, with a queer, vacant expression in them. He was walking in his sleep.

It was the first time I had known him to be given to that sort of thing; and the discovery startled me for an instant, for to me, somnambulism has always had something uncanny about it. However, the last thing in the world I'd have done would have been to wake him, naturally; and I sat there pulling at my pipe in silence, intending just to watch him quietly and see him safely back to his room, speculating meanwhile on the possible cause of his present behaviour. I came to the right conclusion in about five minutes with respect to that—no one who watched his movements could have done otherwise. He tried about a dozen things during those few minutes as he

wandered round the room, from lighting that cigar to loading his rifle, and he could not manage one out of the lot. How long we should have gone on in this way I don't know; but accident did at last what I had held back from doing. A big moth swooped suddenly through the open window, and in the course of its wanderings round the room, flew right in his face. He woke at that, and sat staring at me, rubbing his eyes.

"Hallo! old chap," I said, leaning forward to look at him. "Didn't know you were given to the Sylvester Sound sort of business. When did you start it, eh?"

He answered with a blank look, then stared round him at the room.

"How on earth did I get here?"

"Exactly," I said, with a laugh; and then I told him.

"Must have gone over after all, I suppose," he answered wearily. "I remember sitting down by the window in yonder, nodding towards his room, and that's all. The truth is," and he laughed a trifle shamefacedly, "that wretched scratch has started bothering me again; and I couldn't get to sleep, somehow."

"I thought it was worrying you a bit," said I. "Seemed going on all right when I saw to it this morning, though. Let's have a look," and I struck a light. "When did you notice any change?"

I asked the question carelessly. I didn't want to say anything to him, but there is no denying that I scarcely liked the look of things, read by the light of what I saw.

"Last night—no! to-day—all day," he muttered

lying back in his chair with an involuntary shiver, the words coming confusedly, as if he hardly knew what he was saying; and I glanced at him sharply and slipped my fingers further down his arm.

"You go and turn in," I said promptly, "and I'll come and attend to that." Then I went to the medicine-chest for some lint, and at the same time I got out the strongest fever remedy we had there, and compounded a draught with no sparing hand; anathematizing meanwhile my own want of foresight in not having anticipated some such consequence as this, and praying in my heart that it might not be already too late. But it was too late; and the mischief was done.



CHAPTER XIII

HOW I WENT FOR THE DOCTOR

WAND so the course of events had worked out altogether in a different way; and next day I had something else on my hands in place of courtship and love-making. For life, in all its happier and more joyous aspects, was for the present set completely aside, to bring me face to face with the grim reality of sickness and the near view of death.

The explanation was simple enough; there was nothing strange about it. The time of year was a busy one, we had had a lot on hand, a dozen things had seemed pressing for attention at once, he was as unsparing of himself as are most men owning more grit than reserve strength to fall back on—and there it was. We had been getting in the corn those last few days; and he had worked side by side with me in the harvest-field, under the scorching sun, counting himself fairly out of the wood with his arm only half healed, before it had so much as skinned over, indeed, meeting my

remonstrances with a good-humoured jest, and although I had interfered to some purpose at last, my interference had come too late. Things would not have turned out like that with every fellow, of course; with myself, for example. Both those bears might have exercised their claws on me to their hearts' content, I honestly believe; and I could have worked for days on end afterwards, and come up smiling after it all, without being, as the Jackdaw of Rheims has it, "one penny the worse." Not so Neil Colquhoun. It wasn't the thing itself one had to fear with respect to him—it was the man. People talk about living from hand to mouth; and that was what he seemed to do, in another connection, every day of his life. I don't know if I've made my meaning very clear; so I may as well say that I never saw the thing put better than in a line of a certain poem, in which the words occur—"I charge my soul to hold my body strengthened for the sun." Put spirit instead of soul, in the sense of mettle, grit, "spunk," he would have called it himself, and there you have my meaning with reference to him. I read that poem—for the first time—one Sunday on the stoop of our log-house, with Neil swinging half asleep in a hammock within arm's length of me, waking at odd moments to deal death among the legions of mosquitoes besieging him; and, as I looked at him lying there, and contrasted the slight physique with the force of the iron will that I knew dwelt behind it, I told myself that the spirit of the words was embodied before my eyes. I read it—for the second time—years afterwards, when I

was in the storm and stress of middle life, and he, God help me, had crossed to the other side; and once again, swifter than lightning's flash, my memory went back across the years to the golden days of youth, of early manhood, when the thought of him was not yet attended by the sharpest pain, a recollection that must go with me to my life's end.

I did not go to bed after leaving him, that night—or rather morning. In a couple of hours or so it would be daybreak, light enough at all events to allow of getting about; and I knew pretty well what lay before me that day; unless, indeed, the measures I had taken should prove more effective than I dared hope for. So I took what sleep I wanted by fits and starts in a chair, and by the first glimmer of light I was back in his room. And my first look at him left no doubt in my mind as to what was to be done.

"Don't worry about me, old man," he said wearily, waking from a restless sleep at my entrance. "I shall pull through all right, no danger. 'I old she-bear that's going to knock me out, you bet, and we Colquhouns are a tough set and take a tremendous lot of killing.'" Yet his eyes were bright with fever, and his hands hot as fire to the touch; while the very words had a significance of their own.

As I had observed once, all that I had learned during my two years' course as a prospective medico, was little likely to prove of much use to myself or to any one else, unfortunately; but I knew enough at all events to feel pretty anxious on the score of my chum, although I took good care

to keep my uneasiness from him. But we were not in England, with perhaps a dozen doctors within a radius of as many miles, some of the number no further off, probably, than the next street; and I don't think the disadvantages and drawbacks of colonial life, as evidenced in this kind of isolation, ever came home to me so forcibly as then. However, there was no time to be lost; and as soon as I had attended to the arm and made him as comfortable as I could, besides squaring up all that was absolutely necessary to be done outside, I left the old coloured woman to look after him, took our two saddles on my shoulders, and started for the pasture to take up a couple of the horses. It was safe to leave old Liza in charge; she was a good old soul, devoted to both her masters, particularly to Neil, although his steady refusal to allow her to, as he termed it, "old woman" him, had been a standing grief to her for the last four years, and she would be simply in her glory now, when she had got him to nurse and mildly tyrannize over to her heart's content. So I paddled the "dug-out" across the Sand River, the couple of saddles aboard her, with Roanoke and the Honourable half swimming, half wading in her wake; tied the canoe to a stump on landing, hid the paddle beneath the alders fringing the stream, and riding one horse and leading the other, started off by a side-line through the woods to Baker's Corners to get the doctor.

It was a forty-mile ride, over a "corduroy" as usual, with a mud-hole located at every hundred yards or so. Every one knows what a corduroy

road is, I suppose, in these enlightened days; and it is at the risk of incurring the charge of officiousness, that one ventures to explain the name as given to a road leading through the swamps, formed of logs laid side by side, and thereby presenting a sort of ribbed appearance. I counted the mud-holes as I came to them, and got tired at last. We floundered and splashed through one after another, but at the end a big one brought us up standing. It was about twenty feet from lip to lip, a pond of black slimy mud, with an undrained swamp to right and left—altogether a far less inviting prospect than the river.

"All right," I said to myself and the horses after a moment. "We weren't born in the woods to be scared by an owl, so come on, my boys."

They shook their ears a bit, but they did come on, and we floundered through somehow. However, as the upshot of all this scrambling in and out of one hole after another, we looked so disreputable a trio, that on reaching the doctor's cabin he took fright at the prospect ahead of him and didn't want to come. He was as good-hearted a fellow as are most of his profession, and, had he been sober, would have stuck at nothing, but drink did not render him in any sense pot-valiant; and I had been unlucky enough to catch him that way. Perhaps he might have been forgiven for looking askance at me, all things considered. On ordinary occasions, I looked no less reputable than my fellows, I trust; but at present, plastered with mud to the shoulders and splashed to the eyes, I've no doubt I appeared rowdyish enough, a suspicious

character altogether; and Barton being, as I say, in no condition to discriminate, declined both my company and the prospect of the ride to which I invited him. Although this was the first time I had ever had occasion to seek his help, I knew he had a failing that way; and under the circumstances, there were perhaps excuses for him. Hard lines for an educated man to be condemned to a lonely existence in an out-of-the-way settlement in the backwoods, compelled for the most part to associate with fellows with whom he had not a thought in common; and it is not every nature that has strength enough in itself to resist a temptation constantly in its way. However, I was not going to be done by a trifle like that. I had come for that doctor, and I meant to kidnap and carry him off by main force, if need be. That was the reason I had brought the Honourable, in case anything should have gone wrong with the old man's sorrel mare.

"Road or no road!" I said in answer to the first objection he advanced. "You've got to come, and that's all about it. Get the things you want together, and look sharp, please! I've a horse outside fit to carry you and a doctor's shop into the bargain."

He went to the window to reconnoitre at that, and the sight of the Honourable scared him, because, viewed by comparison with the undersized weedy mare he owned, the big upstanding horse must in stature and substance have seemed like a mammoth.

"I can't come," he whined feebly. "Broke an axle

this morning, and the mare's lame. I'm not going to ride that brute."

"All serene," I responded cheerfully. "We'll soon square that. I'll tie you on if you can't back him—only you're coming, that's all."

He began to see that he was not going to be on the winning side this time.

"How far is it?" he croaked, beginning to fence a bit. "I forget."

"Forty miles west," I told him. "You'll have to stay the night, of course. But that won't matter. Put you up all right, you know."

Upon that, he struck positively, vowing he wouldn't come. Then, for I was getting savage at the loss of precious time, thinking of Neil away yonder, with the sands of his life and strength running out fast, I took to slanging Barton in good earnest.

"Tell you what," said I with candour, "you're a disgrace to the profession. You want kicking out of it, and that's a fact. I backed out myself four years ago, because I didn't suppose I'd make a good enough hand at the work, but I'm blessed if I don't think I'd have turned out more of a credit to it than you are, after all.—Man alive! Don't you understand? It's my chum, my friend! The man who's more to me than all the other fellows in the world lumped together—put him in one side of the scale and the rest in 'other and he'd weigh down the lot. It's life or death with him now, and d'you suppose I'll stick at anything to serve him?"

That finished him. He saw that the game was up. Besides, a man must be pretty far gone when

he can't be shamed out of trying to funk his duty.

"It's Colquhoun, isn't it?" he croaked, for he knew us both well enough. "What's the matter with him?" And he began to stir about and get his things together.

I told him succinctly, as I stood on guard. As soon as I came in I had spotted the place where he kept his whisky, and knew better than to let him come near that again. So I had got my back to the cupboard, accidentally, and in spite of one or two feints on his part to get round me I kept it there.

"Clawed by a bear a couple of weeks back," I explained briefly. "Inflammation set in again—fever—no strength to fight 'em. That's about all I can tell you.—Ready? *Thanks*, Doctor. Here, hand me those traps. Got a rope outside to fix them—or you," I added *sotto voce*.

But he didn't need the rope. He found his hands and his seat on horseback as soon as I had got him safely mounted; and the Honourable went under him like a lamb. I knew that the forty-mile ride and the mud-holes would sober him without fail, as they did; and I landed my prize across the river and topped the summit of the ridge behind which our log-house stood a good bit before sundown. The sound of the horses brought out old Liza, visible relief on her face at the sight of me.

"'Fraid Massa Neil bery sick, Massa Frank. Hide eyes from light, lie all day talkee-talkee—not know what me say to him."

I was out of the saddle and into his room in a moment. There was an awful change in him since morning. Then, however feverish and weak, he had been at all events clear-headed enough. Now, when I bent over the bed and spoke to him he only stared up at me with unnaturally bright eyes, without a particle of recognition in them; then, as if finching from the light, turned away his head, muttering unintelligibly to himself.

To do the old doctor even bare justice, the sight of Neil put him on his mettle and brought all the good in him to the surface. Having pumped me pretty dry on the road, he had few questions left to ask; and one of the first things he did, almost as soon as he had looked at Neil, and taken in the state of matters with respect to him, was to turf to me and tell me curtly to shear off his hair. There was little he could have set me to that would have gone harder against the grain; but it was my turn to obey orders now, and I went out of the room and to the back of the house without a word. Old Liza, sitting by the fire in her own special domain, rocking herself to and fro and moaning, her head covered by her apron, stood up and came eagerly forward as I called to her.

She guessed what I wanted with the things I told her to get me well enough, I knew. Her face told me so, when she came to me presently in his room, although she handed them to me without a word, and then stood trembling and gasping, awaiting further orders. Not a syllable did she utter when I put a light into her hand, briefly bidding her stand by the bed, not even

when she saw me kneel to test the sharpness of the blades on a racoon skin lying on the floor. But when she next saw me stoop over him, the scissors in my hand, she knew my purpose without a doubt, and broke into a remonstrating, moaning cry.

"Lord sakes, Massa Frank, you ain't neber gwine to do dat—to cut off his hair! Oh! de good Lord hab mercy, is he so powerful bad? Oh, Massa Neil, Massa Neil! Oh, my boy, my boy!"

"Hold your tongue, you old idiot," I retorted roughly, all the more roughly because the stern necessity went home so keenly to myself. "Steady now! Keep the light as I gave it you—do you hear? Give me enough to let me see what I'm doing, but don't let it glare in his eyes."

Then, as tenderly as I could, I did the work, cropping the thick brown hair as close as I could get to the poor fellow's head; and the old woman stood without a word, just giving a sort of gasp when the first cut dropped the dark mass from his temples in a noiseless shower, leaving only a line of white to mark where the sunburn had ended beneath the shadow. Its removal made a striking difference to him—far more than it would have done with most, and I looked at him remorsefully when all was done, seeing the change made in him. And the hardest bit about it was his lying so utterly unconscious and still. If he would only have resisted, have opposed me ever so slightly, I should have felt the doing of it less, I think, have felt at least less like a heartless brute than I did then, as I knelt over him, while the merciless shears did their work cropping round ears, temples,

and neck until every shred was gone, and only the towel full of a soft brown mass remained for Liza to carry away and ruthlessly burn. I found the old woman sobbing and moaning over it when I came back a few minutes later, and—perhaps I was only a soft-hearted, sentimental fool, but it is the simple truth—while she was getting the things Barton wanted, I took the chance to select one dark curl from its mates and slip it into my pocket-book before going back to help the old doctor in his tussle against death. Who was to know whether that might not be the last I should ever have of him? I have that lock of brown hair now—and it would weigh down the scale against the wealth of all the Indies.



and in my heart I felt thankful, as I sat there turning things over in my mind, that she, tender-hearted and sensitive as I knew her, should have been kept in ignorance of what the true upshot of that bear hunt had been—and resolved anew that she should not know it before she need.

But before long every thought and faculty was engaged in the task before me, to the utter exclusion, for the time being, of all other. Before going to the room I had given up to him, the old doctor had hinted at the probability of increased delirium; but I knew myself to be capable of mastering Neil however things might have gone with the poor chap, and kept my watch alone, deciding that it would be time enough to break my guest's sleep if the need came. Signs of excitement began to show soon after midnight, it was true—no more, however, than a quiet word or the touch of a hand would control; and I began to hope that things might after all be less serious than I had feared. In company with Louise, her father and myself he was tracking those bears once more through the woods, and the sense of inability to use his right arm made itself painfully evident to him, resulting in incessant appeals to me to act in his stead. I trust that the round dozen of—well, fictions—with which I burdened my conscience as I sat there beside him, assuring him unblushingly that I too saw that brace of bears distinctly, and would polish them off without loss of time, will not be recorded against me. They quieted him for the time, but worse delirium set in towards morning, and when I had roused Barton to look at him, the

CHAPTER XIV

LIFE OR DEATH

WHAT a long night that was, as I sat by the bed in that lonely room, keeping an anxious watch while the slow hours dragged away; marvelling all the time that the one to be spared least should be struck down invariably, while a thousand of less account go scot-free; cursing that she-bear in my heart, and wondering a hundred times why, if fate had demanded that she must claw one of us, the choice could not have fallen upon me. Of course my thoughts flew over to Berry Flat times without number, but in that quarter all was well; no cause for uneasiness was there. Louise would wonder at my absence that evening, naturally; under the circumstances it would have been odd if she had not: but she was too good and true a woman not to understand and sympathize to the full when I should be at liberty to explain all to her, and show the good reason that had kept me away. It was all too good a reason, unfortunately;

expression of the old doctor's face, read by the remembrance of my father's, told me his opinion even before he said a word.

Then came the long anxious day, with its waiting, watching, hoping. Well for me that there was work outside imperatively calling to be done, and no one except myself to do it; stock to see to, cows to milk, horses to dress and water, and all the rest. I did it, thankful for the slight relief it brought me, but with a heavy heart, and not daring to go more than a hundred yards from the house, lest old Liza should need me, or—a change should come. And the sight of his mare was little short of agony. It was about as much as I could stand when she came whinnying to the fence, expecting her master's voice and whistle; and I knew that he was lying yonder fighting for his life, and that with every successive minute it was just touch and go with him. If he could hold his own till morning, Barton held out just a hope that he might pull through; and by sundown, when the sorrel mare deposited her owner at the gate, I fancied I could detect the faintest shadow of improvement. He had one thing on his side, at any rate—the wholesome and regular life he had led since boyhood, and that was telling all in his favour now. The old man cautiously encouraged my hope, declaring, however, that the morning would bring the turning point, and my night-watch came on once more.

But it was of a different nature this time. The excitement had left him, and there was little to do but keep the bandages on his head cool and the mosquitoes off, as he lay in a sleep so deep that

more than once I laid a hand anxiously on him, to assure myself that he had not gone from me without my knowledge. I was fairly hard-bitten myself; but the strain of the last three days and nights must have told on me somewhat, for towards morning I dropped unconsciously as I sat into a sort of dog-sleep. A slight movement roused me; and on rubbing my eyes open I saw that Neil was awake, and lying there looking at me. He smiled his old smile as our glances met, making a feeble attempt to put out his hand, and a single look told me that the light of reason was shining in his eyes.

"Scalped at last," he whispered, scarcely above his breath, with a trace of his old fun, indicating his shorn head by a gesture; and there was that in the words and smile which, together with my own gladness at seeing him thus far his old self again, so worked me that I was unable to say much, and I only gripped his hand silently. He was perfectly clear-headed, although it was evident that he did not fully comprehend the circumstances or his own condition, since he tried his best to whisper a question or two. But I would not stand any talking, and after conveying to him in a sentence or so all that I judged necessary, ordered him off to sleep again, and then finished out my watch, thanking God and man more fervently in my heart than I had ever done in my life before. To put it shortly, Barton, the doctor, by God's help had steered Neil in safety round the most dangerous corner of his life; and there were not many men to whom I was likely to show myself more grateful than to him. I felt profoundly sorry to have found myself under

the necessity of insulting him; but the old man was not one to bear a grudge, and took my candid apologies in very good part. Fact is, I believe he had been too far gone that day to remember a single word I had said to him.

"Look here," I told him a few days later, on his saying to me that unless Neil lost ground in some unlooked-for fashion, he might almost be regarded now as out of danger, "if you should happen to see anything of Garçon, don't let him get wind of what a near thing this has been for Colquhoun, you know. He's pulled through the worst, thanks to you; and we don't want to have it get to their ears over yonder that those bears were in any sense concerned. Sec?"

"All right," he nodded knowingly, and he kept the counsel I gave him. So the days went on; and with first one thing and then another that week slipped away, and I didn't get over to Berry Flat. In bodily presence, I mean—my thoughts were drawn there as by a magnet every hour of the day. But I had thought the thing well out, and to stay away seemed the only course open to me then. Not alone because I had to work nineteen to the dozen those days, to keep things going; but, although no idea of the actual state of affairs had ever occurred to me, I felt that I had got myself into a slightly awkward position, which would necessitate a straightforward explanation, with the clearing up of matters from the very beginning. And, out of a simple, perhaps overstrained wish to keep from Louise the knowledge of the slightest thing that might occasion her pain, I held back

from going to explain my absence until I could at the same time convey the assurance that all need for anxiety was at an end. That was not possible just yet. Neil picked up his strength slowly, seeming to slip back two days at times for the progress he made in one; and the danger of a relapse was not over for some time.

Then one day, in obedience to a certain sick longing of his, I got him up—and dressed, if the extreme airiness of backwoods' costume affected by us during those summer months could be dignified by such a term—after which I brought him out to the stoop, he leaning heavily on my arm, and established him in a hammock I had slung there for him. He was terribly weak, poor fellow, far more so than I had any idea of, and even those few steps exhausted him; but it looked like a beginning, an advance of some sort at least; and when I had got him fairly into the hammock, I stood to contemplate him with a good deal of satisfaction, trying not to see the havoc the fever had wrought, and to read only the evidence of returning health in the lines of the white changed face and the unnatural brilliancy of his eyes.

"Good to be out here again," said Neil softly, after he had lain for a minute or two silently looking round him, and taking in, with the eager appreciation of a convalescent, all the sweet sights and sounds of surrounding nature. From the stoop—our log-house stood high and commanded all the country round—you could see well-nigh all over our lot. The pasture, with the stock and horses grazing there, the fields of yellow standing corn,

the pale gold of the stubble; and beyond all, look in what direction you might, the vast unknown distances of the great watching woods, the dark masses of their greenery just beginning to answer to the first touch of the hand of autumn. We were in an oasis of a desert of greenness. Seldom is the sense of human and individual insignificance brought home to one as it is under such conditions, in the very face and presence of Nature's overwhelming magnificence; and I think each of us had a fair guess at the other's thoughts, as we gazed in silence at the glorious view stretching away before us.

"Almost worth it, this," Neil said, breaking the silence at last; and although I had the constitution of a rhinoceros and had never known a day's illness in my life, I could enter into his feelings well enough to nod a hearty assent. For I knew that, in order to appreciate a treasure at its right value, that treasure must have been all but lost. After a minute's silence he spoke again, turning his head and glancing up at me as he lay. "I say, did I talk much gas that time, when I—you know?"

"Pretty fair," nodded I, bending down to give him a light for the single weed, permitted to him as yet. "Bless your heart, we all do when Jack Fever gets the whip hand of us: there's nothing in that. You had bears on the brain, and went a-hunting in your dreams, like the dogs, that was all."

He looked at me again, his eyes—he had the finest eyes I ever saw in a man—scanning my face somewhat wistfully, as if, I thought afterwards, he had been about to ask something more. But the

morning hours were going on, and I had work waiting for me over yonder, where twenty acres of standing wavy corn kissed the meeting lips of the pastures. So I whistled up the dogs to keep him company there on the stoop; and charging old Liza to give an eye to her patient from time to time, left him there with a pile of English newspapers and letters, just come in by the last mail, within easy reach of his hand, and strode off to break the back of that day's work, glad in the knowledge that he was no longer confined to a bed of pain, but that the sunlight, the fresh air, and the sweet free breath of Nature were his to enjoy once more. However, the results of that experiment were far from satisfactory. It threw him back at least another week; and Barton, on his next visit, abused us in no measured terms as the biggest brace of young fools in Parker County; the one for taking the fancy into his head and the other for permitting and encouraging the carrying of it out. So things went on until the climax came.

One morning I had been obliged to go over to the Corners to see after some stores. I had been in the saddle by daybreak; and on getting back a shrill neigh greeted the clatter of Roanoke's hoofs as I rode up the ridge, resulting presently in the appearance of the sorrel mare, hitched up to the gate. I left the bay in her company, beyond kicking distance, and went in to find, as I had expected, the old doctor with his patient.

"None of my business, anyhow," the latter was saying with a laugh as I came into his room. "You can tell them that as far as I'm concerned

they've been wakening up the wrong passenger. Here's Carlless! You'd better hear what he's got to say about it."

"What's that?" I asked, nodding to Barton, as I sat down across the nearest chair, resting my arms on the back thereof, and wondering vaguely meanwhile, as I watched the deftness with which he handled the injured arm, whether, had I followed in my father's footsteps, I should ever have succeeded in acquiring a practised delicacy of touch like his. However, that was a subject on which I was not left free to ponder long.

Barton looked round at me sideways with a wink. He was a little sun-dried chap, with bright bead-like eyes, which, seen beneath the broad-brimmed hat he usually wore, gave him the appearance of an exceedingly wide-awake bird.

"Likely to be a wedding pretty soon over at Berry Flat, d'you know?" he asked with studied carelessness.

I felt myself colouring to the roots of my hair. I meant that there should be a wedding over at Berry Flat just as soon as kind Fortune would permit, of course; only, not having as yet put the most important question necessary to such a happy result, it would hardly do as yet to "acknowledge the corn."

"Who told you that?" I asked, tapping the back of the chair with the handle of my whip, while Neil turned his head as he lay to glance at me mischievously with his dark bright eyes.

"Peters," responded our visitor with a grin.

"Then you tell Peters from me to look after

his own potato-patch," retorted I, getting up, and Barton grinned again as he looked round at me.

"Tell him you said so, if you like, of course," he squeaked, "but d'you suppose he'll do it?" And I had to laugh in spite of myself, for I knew well enough that the neighbour referred to was the most inveterate gossip out. You might just as well have started to dam Niagara as have hoped to stop his tongue.

"Yes," went on the little doctor, as he deftly replaced the dressings, "that was how it was, then. One of you two fellows had been making all the running over yonder, we heard, and we couldn't tell which to drop on. I've got it now. Well, let us know when the wedding's going to come off, and give us a chance to be on time with the congratulations, that's all."

"Don't you go ahead too fast," I rejoined with a laugh. "Congratulations aren't called for yet. Going on all right?" and I nodded towards the bed.

"Yes," answered Barton, standing up as he finished his work. "Go on all right now if he gives it fair play. Look you up next time I'm round your way—don't know when that may be. No using that arm this side of a month though, my boy, in any case. Mind that."

"You bet he doesn't get the chance," I cut in. "You leave your orders, Doctor, and I'll see that they're put through all right. I'm boss this journey, and he knows it. Eh, old man, you do, don't you?"

Neil smiled. "Nothing for it but to acknowledge the powers that be, you see—and knock under," he said as he held out his hand. "Good-bye, Doctor. I've an awful lot to thank you for, I know, more than I can ever hope to return. I owe my life to you two fellows, that's certain; and although that may be precious little good to more than one or two, besides myself, it's all *Yuz* got—and I don't forget."

And he sighed a little wearily as he turned. Poor fellow, he was wonderfully patient, had been so all through; but he felt his weakness and helplessness pretty keenly at times.

"Nonsense!" responded Barton, almost roughly; but I saw him pause for a moment with an odd look on his face before he took the hand, gently, as one touches a baby's fingers. No wonder. That hand didn't look much like the fist of a fellow who had been roughing it in the backwoods for the last four years; it was so thin and delicate, for all the surface sunburn. Truly, its owner had been at terribly close grips with death.

"Had a near shave," the old doctor said gravely enough as he and I went down towards the horses a few moments later, nodding back towards the house as he spoke. "But he'll do now, and all the change will be in the right direction. Thought him in for something even worse at first, on my word," he added candidly, and although he vouchsafed nothing further in the way of enlightenment, I had a tolerably shrewd guess at his meaning.

I had too much on hand that morning to have any time to spare; so after riding alongside the

buggy for a quarter of a mile or so I pulled up and bade its driver good-day. I remember how fair the outside world looked to me that morning; I remember too, how, as I bent down to take leave of the old doctor, my heart was leaping like a grasshopper at the thought that now—at last, I could go over with a clear mind to Berry Flat, explain everything, set myself right in Louise's eyes, ay, and bring about the sweet consummation of all my hopes, delayed so long. For Barton was such a canny, cautious sort of a fellow; and the fear of in any way committing himself was so strong in him, that I knew he would never have expressed his opinion with such confidence had not things been pretty safe as regarded the well-being of my dear old chum. However, I had hardly got half-a-dozen horse-lengths off before I heard myself called by name, and on glancing back, saw that Barton had come to a halt and was looking after me. Thinking that he had overlooked some final directions with respect to Neil, I had Roanoke's head round in a twinkling, and half-a-dozen bounds put him once more alongside the sorrel mare. Her owner glanced up at me half-wistfully, half-reluctantly, as I sat there on horse-back above him. One might have taken it that he had something on his mind he didn't care to voice.

"Been over at Gargon's just lately, eh?" he began carelessly, staring up into the hemlocks above with an appearance of such deep interest that I too sent my eyes aloft, wondering what he spied up there. But nothing was visible beyond

a chickaree, gazing down solemnly at the pair of us.

"No," I answered, feeling a bit surprised at the question. "Not for three weeks or thereabouts. Couldn't get away for one thing, you know."

"Ah!" rejoined he absently, flicking a fly off the sorrel's crest. "Pretty girl that—old fellow's daughter."

"Very," I responded dryly. I liked Barton, but it goes without saying that I didn't intend to discuss Louise with him, for all that.

He glanced up at me again, evidently debating with himself whether to say something or not; and, to judge by his expression, he would have been best pleased to drive on and leave me to get at his meaning for myself. But Roanoke, standing right across the track, barred the way of the sorrel mare, and horse and man, we were too big a pair to be driven over.

"Who's the tenderfoot?" he asked abruptly. "Just taken up No. 110 away yonder," with a vague nod in any possible direction. "Given name Louis. Forget t'other."

"Oh, you mean Chassepôt," I rejoined, a light dawning on me. "Don't know much about him myself, and the little I do isn't overmuch to his credit, it seems to me. Room better than his company, I've a notion."

I was not talking without book; for out in settlements a man gets pretty soon sized up as to character, good or bad. At home things are different. You can pick and choose to a certain extent there in the way of associates; but out in the

colonies a fellow has to tumble up against all sorts, and to take them just as he finds them. Still, as Neil had observed one day, although the Jew and Samaritan principle didn't exactly answer in Parker County, and it would not do to be too offish, one had to draw the line somewhere, for all that; and he and I had mutually agreed to draw it a good bit north of Louis Chassepôt.

"Ah," commented Barton dryly again. "Thought you'd know something about the fellow somehow. Over yonder pretty often, from what I hear. Kick him out if I were Garçon, you know. Wouldn't let him near the place."

"I don't know!" I broke out savagely, bringing Roanoke with a sudden jerk alongside. "What d'you mean?"

"Thought you'd have known," he rejoined nervously; and that was an obvious lie, as his next words went on to prove. "But, as you say, you've not been over lately. Wonder at Garçon, . . . but . . . French-Canadian like themselves—might favour it—no saying." He glanced up at me sharply, shifted his whip into his left hand, and laid the other with a sudden movement on my knee. "Look here, my lad, I like you: and 'pon my word I like you all the better for sticking to me as you did that day—you know. It wasn't only your friend you saved then—you saved my credit too—ay, more than that. Never have forgiven myself if young Colquhoun had gone under just because I'd made myself too much of a beast—no, I'm wrong there, the beasts have more sense—to be able to take him in hand;—and I'll do you a good turn if I can. You take what I'm going to

say in good part, and . . . just you go over to Berry Flat as soon as you know how, that's all. Don't you let that sneaking cur of a half-breed get ahead of you and carry off the best and prettiest girl we have round here. Maybe it's only a bit of gossip, and it won't do to take any notice; but I've been told that some of those fellows at the Corners have been laying long odds on the Canadian's chances of cutting out all the rest and finding himself the old man's son-in-law before the winter. Steady!" and he backed his mare nervously. "Anything gone wrong with your horse?"

"Nothing!" I answered between my teeth. Roanoke had jumped, it was true; but that, poor brute, had simply been because I had inadvertently stuck the spurs into him; and Barton jerked the reins and started the sorrel off at a pace to which she was little accustomed, as if, having delivered his soul, he felt thankful to get away.

So that was how things were going, was it, I thought to myself as I swung the bay round and dashed back at a gallop, taking a short cut through the woods to reach the harvest-field, and recklessly clearing mudholes, lumber, and all that came in my way. A kindly-designed warning, meant to convey to me an intimation of there being an intending poacher on my preserves. Not that they were preserves of mine precisely, as yet, worse luck; although they should have been by this time, but for my own idiotic shilly-shallying and the intervention of cruel fate. And now, this was the sort of turn that fortune was serving me. In one sense I had nothing with which to reproach myself: the

apparent lukewarmness and negligence had been, Heaven knows, through no fault of mine. Of course, setting aside any other reason, it had been an uncommonly busy time. Everything had got behindhand; and with Neil crippled for the time being and come back from death's door with less strength in him than a child, apart altogether from the constant attention he wanted from me, it had been no easy task to get through the work of two single-handed; and a lot had come on me during those two weeks. Duty had seemed to lie for me chiefly in that field of waving corn; and I had worked there late and early, from dawn until long after moonrise, honestly believing that she would think none the worse of me for that, and at all events blindly, foolishly taking it that she would understand, or, failing that, at any rate trust me until I could explain. She was like the rest, I reflected bitterly, as I turned Roanoke loose into the neighbouring pasture, hung saddle and bridle on the rails, rolled up my shirt-sleeves and got to work; one of those women to whom a man's duty is nothing compared with the gratification of her own demands, the satisfaction of having him dangling round her all day, no matter who or what besides goes to the wall. She was that; and I, in my own mind, had been raising her to the higher and far rarer class of those who call out the very best that is in a fellow by holding up a high standard before him, and win easily for themselves the first place, by their very willingness to take the second if need be. I laughed bitterly to myself as the contrast between the ideal and the actual struck me, while I worked on with long steady

strokes, the golden grain falling with a whish at every cut of the sickle—for it was old-time farming in those days; and the sun's rays beating down hotter and hotter upon me, as the hours went on. But I felt nothing of his scorching heat; consumed by an inward fire of rage and jealousy; outward circumstances were little to me. And yet, had I a right to complain after all? urged my sense of justice. Had I spoken a word that should give her the right to think of me? And if another had shown himself only too eager to catch at the chances I had let slip, whose fault was that but my own? I had no one to blame except myself. She thought I had used her badly, played fast and loose with her, been simply amusing myself, in short; and now I was to be made to learn that two could play at that game. Sheer coquetry, that was it: yet I would not have believed that she would have acted in such a fashion as that in order to bring me to book, I said to myself, setting my teeth to keep down the pain of it, as I worked steadily on, nearly shoulder deep in the golden corn. Had I missed my chance? Had I a rival? I would go over that night and find out, I swore to myself, if it should mean spending the whole of the night in the cornfields in order to make up the time. I spent that day working at the harvesting for all I knew, got that patch of grain stooked, and came in dead tired. Then, as I sat down to the supper for which, in spite of a feeling of inability to touch a morsel, actual physical exhaustion cried out and would not be denied, old Liza came in to tell me that two men were waiting to see me.

“Walked from Baker's Corners, Massa Frank.

Mus' see you, sah. Say white buckra sent for them, way down to Carlyon.”

“Nonsense!” said I incredulously. “Must be a mistake. You get them something to eat,” for hospitality is one of the first virtues of colonial life, “and I'll come out right off.”

Just then I heard Neil calling to me, and I got up and strode out to the stoop where he was lying, picking up slowly in the sweet fresh air and sunshine.

“It's all right,” he said, looking up at me. “I sent for the fellows, and I'm precious glad they've turned up at last. Didn't say a word to you because I wasn't sure if we could get them. Awfully busy time now, not a man to be had round here. Wrote for them down to Carlyon, you know.”

“Wrote for them? You did?” And I glanced involuntarily at the bandaged right arm lying in a sling across his chest.

He nodded. “A week back. And Barton mailed the letter. Left-hand business of course; sort of spider just out of ink-bottle style, but they've made me out, I see. Told them to send on a couple of strong, steady fellows to help to put the harvesting through, that's all. Awfully rough on you, you know. You didn't think, because I'd made such a wretched hash of this bear business, that I was going to leave you to warstle through alone, old man, did you?”

That was the sort he was, not the man to turn his back on a friend or leave him in the lurch. As they say out West, he would never “go back on you.”



CHAPTER XV

'WHEN HE WILL HE SHALL HAVE NAV'

SO I went to Berry Flat, after all, that night. And whether my visit resulted in unmingled satisfaction for me, or the reverse, will be seen presently. To begin with, the old doctor had been right to a certain extent: Chassepôt seemed to like spending the evening at the Flat just about as well as I did; and although his presence did not necessarily imply—out there—anything further than mere acquaintanceship, still I could have dispensed with it easily, without being conscious of any sense of loss. But it was in search of one person only that my eyes went the moment I entered, and the sudden flash of unmistakable, unconscious, joyful welcome, tinged with an evident and visible relief, sent my heart sky-high with a single bound, and, in spite of the unwelcome presence of my would-be rival, cured me at once and completely of my incipient jealousy. Probably, nay, almost certainly, to judge by the sequel, she had not intended me to see all that; but her face

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had spoken for her whether she would or not, and it was a page that I was quick enough to read. She trusted me, that was clear, she had put no wrong construction upon my unexplained absence, after all; and I, abusing and despising myself for having on my side proved deficient in confidence, willingly allowed that relief to find its echo with me, and after that one unconscious avowal from Louise's sweet eyes, found my happiness again. Who was Chassepôt, that I should waste on him so much as a thought, once having seen and interpreted as I had done my darling's glance? And although once or twice, when Barton's words came to my remembrance, I was conscious of an ardent and almost over-mastering desire to horsewhip the fellow, still I had, to my sorrow, no decent excuse for doing it. I could scarcely lay violent hands upon him merely because he chose to spend his evening where I did; and he, for his part, showed himself exceedingly wary, and steered his conduct to a nicety to avoid collision with me. Each might know the other to be a rival, but there was absolutely nothing to go upon: and I, on my side, determined to dismiss the fellow from my mind, and while passing him over as beneath my notice, to sun myself to the full in the light of Louise's eyes. But my satisfaction was short-lived. For, after that one unconscious admission, I became gradually aware of a decided and unmistakable change in the bearing of Gargon's daughter towards me. She kept me at arm's length most decidedly, and for a long time, try as I might, I could not get a word with her.

Had I been wiser, or more experienced, I should at once have read the slight constraint in her manner merely for what it was, the natural reserve of a girl who fears she may have given her love too early, should have remembered too that in her complete ignorance of the cause of my strange behaviour she might well have taken it that I had meant nothing. But that view of the case did not strike me all in a moment; for although fully conscious that an explanation of some sort was due from me, I attributed her behaviour merely to simple pique, and looking at the matter solely from my point of view, resented in my own mind the implied want of confidence. Then all in a moment the true state of things struck me, and I recognized my own short-comings without any possibility of mistake. What a fool I had been, from first to last! She might well think I had used her badly, my poor little Louise! and, eager only to make what apology and atonement I might, I crossed straight over to where she sat and requested the favour of a word with her. She glanced at me indifferently, almost coldly, then looked towards the fire, where her father sat talking with Louis Chassepôt. And although the unconcealed aversion in her eyes was fully evident whenever he came beneath their range, that did not in any way diminish the coldness of her glance as she lifted it to meet my own.

"We can be quite private here," she answered indifferently. "And there is nothing you can have to say to me, I think, that cannot be said equally well where we are. Still, if you wish it——"

She complied so far as to accompany me out on

the stoop. But she declined to sit down, although I pressed her earnestly, and that was in itself a bad sign. I was not to be favoured by a lengthy interview, that was evident. Moreover, if she had kept me at arm's length before, she kept me, figuratively speaking, at three arms' lengths now. Naturally, that did not make things any more promising for me. But I had had enough of shilly-shallying and hanging back three weeks ago, and was determined now to go straight to the point. All the same I started lamely enough. Something about offering an explanation, making an apology with regard to my strange and unexplained absence, all these weeks, was the upshot of my speech: to which my companion listened in silence without interrupting me in any way.

For a minute afterwards, too, she said nothing. But I, as I leaned against the wooden railing, looking at her sideways, in the flood of light streaming out from the room within, saw the colour suddenly flaming in her cheeks. I knew the reason, and called myself by every abusive name I could remember at the moment. That was called up by the remembrance of our last interview, when that meddling old idiot of a Matty had broken in on us, and when I, as she could not but believe, had been perfectly well content to let the story remain at the point where it had been cut short, without making the slightest attempt to take it up again. What a brute I must be in her eyes! No wonder she must think badly of me. But now I—— She had begun to speak, however, and I listened eagerly for her words.

"There is no need to offer any apology to me, none whatever," she rejoined quietly, calling her pride to her aid, and putting a slight, possibly unconscious emphasis on the pronoun. "My father and I are simple people, we know little of what you call society in England, and it is not strange that you should find the Flat dull. Besides," she added, in time to check an indignant and emphatic denial on my part, "you were in all probability better employed."

"I was—that is—no—I mean," I explained, floundering desperately now, "I was employed in a way that would have met with your entire approval, had you known it." Then, for I owed it to her, I went on briefly to explain everything, and the true cause of my absence. She let me tell her all; and I, as I saw her whole face soften, and the sympathy shining in her dark lustrous eyes, knew that I had estimated her rightly with respect to that, and loved her more passionately than ever. But, alas for the futility of my hopes and expectations.

"But this is surely strange," she said at the end, with some wonder. "I have seen you several times since you shot the bears, and you mentioned nothing of this, not a word. I did not even know that either of you had been hurt at all."

"Because I concealed it from you," I answered bluntly. "Blame me if you will. It was well meant, and that is the only excuse I have to offer."

She stood for a moment thinking. "And you have been nursing him all that time?" I nodded. "He needed it. He was pretty bad,

you see, mademoiselle, and I would not trust the old negress in an emergency. It was only to-day that I felt easy in leaving him." I did not tell her that he had been so nearly gone. Why should I? If love is worth anything, it will surely do its utmost to spare its object pain. That was the line upon which I had gone; and a nice hash I had made of things all round by following it up, too. At least, that was the conclusion at which I ultimately arrived that night.

There was a moment's silence, and only that silence spoke. Louise's face was averted from me, but I could see her lips quivering in the dim light, and as she turned her head, the glitter of unshed tears showed itself, overflowing at her sweet eyes. I stepped forward a pace, hastily, eagerly. Surely I had the right at last to win back my lost standing ground; surely I was free to take her hands in mine, to lift my dropped love-story at the very point at which it had been flung down so abruptly, just three weeks ago, to pour forth into her ears the ardent words held back so long. But she repelled me, and that with words I had little thought ever to hear from her lips.

"Oh, it is not that!" she broke out with a sudden intensity, as if stung by a recollection forcing itself upon her, or in answer to some train of reflections of her own: and I saw her little hands trembling, as they grasped the railing in front of her, with the force of strong feeling. "That was well and kindly meant, and I could understand, could appreciate and thank you for the motive—if—if only I could—if you would let me believe it true."

I started, and looked at her in indignant amazement. At first I thought I could not have heard aright.

"Believe it! Have you not my word, mademoiselle?" I demanded proudly, the blood rushing to my forehead in an instant. But she too was angry now, and her anger was a fair match for mine. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling as she turned and looked me full in the face.

"Yes, I have your word, it is true, but . . . Why do you make it of so little account? Why do you take such pains—go out of your way, to induce me to believe one thing, when all the time you know, as I know, that the case is—otherwise? Why do you think it necessary to go on deceiving me, Monsieur Carless?"

"Deceiving you! In what way am I deceiving you, mademoiselle?"

Her clear eyes flashed proud, indignant scorn back into mine as I stood looking down at her.

"Did you not tell me, even now—that, setting aside the other consideration you named—you had been unwilling to leave your friend all these weeks? Did you not say that, here, to me? I am fair—I ask you."

I laughed bitterly. "I said it, mademoiselle, because it was the simple truth."

"The truth," she repeated scornfully. "The truth! You tell me *that*—and—yet, all the time—all the time, you know that was no bar in hindering you from going over frequently, constantly, to Baker's Corners."

"To Baker's Corners?" repeated I, staring at her blankly.

"Yes, Baker's Corners," she rejoined with a bitter little laugh. "Oh, it is no secret, I assure you—it is known only too well, though I—I tried hard not to believe it, even when Mat——" She caught herself up there, with a gasp that sounded like a sob, but the slip had been enough to betray the channel through which that piece of gossip had reached Berry Flat; and it is scarcely strange that my feelings towards the old negress just then should have been the reverse of charitable. "Do you deny it?" she went on, and there was a little quiver of hopefulness in her tone that in itself was very pitiful, and went keenly home to me, in spite of my anger. It said, as plainly as words could have done, that, had I denied it, she would have been ready, eager, to take my word in the face of all.

"Deny it? No. But a word will explain. Mademoiselle—Louise—will you not hear me?"

"Pardon me," she rejoined coldly. "I do not know that I have given you any right to address me so familiarly. And for explaining, we have had enough of explanations for one evening; and I think them scarcely satisfactory when they only come under compulsion. We are of a different race, my father and I, and perhaps we do not understand English ways; but—but—we are well able at least to be quite independent. There is little use in prolonging an interview which can only be disagreeable to both, and I wish you a very good evening, Monsieur Carless."

She swept me an elaborate old-fashioned curtsy

before disappearing indoors; and I, after standing for a moment staring blankly after her retreating figure, went with one stride off the stoop, unhitched Roanoke, threw myself on his back, and started off at the gallop, in a white heat of rage. The bay did not find his best pace any too fast for me that night. I rode the first few miles almost at racing speed; and it was not until we had covered a good third of the distance that a dawning consideration for his wind prompted me to draw bridle at last and moderate the pace. I don't mean that I made him feel the spur, for it seems to me a coward's trick to take it out of one's horse the way I've known some fellows do; but the only relief to me that night lay in swift motion, and you would have taken it that the good beast knew as much, and put his strength and speed generously at his rider's service, to give him that of which he stood in need.

If I could only have known, if I could only have seen her an hour later—when a chance word of her father's, to whom a couple of sentences from me had been enough to explain everything—had put her in full possession of the truth, sobbing alone in the little room in the angle of the roof!

"And it is true, quite true, my father says so—he has never deceived me in any way. It was only for my sake, lest I should feel vexed for him, that he did not tell me of his own anxiety, and kept away. And now I have driven him from me with hard and cruel words, and he will never know that I understand now—he will never come back any more. Oh, how hard I have been, how cruel, how harsh, and—and now, it is too late!"

But I knew nothing of that; and I rode home through the darkness in a tumult of passion, cursing the luck that had brought me into such a hole; and vowing, as many another man has vowed in a position like mine, that all the women in the world were not worthy to count beside the friend of years. All of which, of course, although I declared to myself that I would think no more about her, only meant that I thought in reality a hundred times the more. Baker's Corners! That was the last straw, I said to myself bitterly, striding up and down in the moonlight outside the silent house, and pausing now and again to grind my heel into the ground in fruitless anger at the thought of how that bit of slander had told home. Of course I had been over there, often enough; for the good and sufficient reason that the necessaries for which I had written down to Carlyon, the nearest town in communication with the Lakes, were invariably left until called for at the mail-office at the Corners; besides that, the very wine on which my sick chum had depended so largely during his convalescence had been obtainable nowhere nearer than at the tavern there. That was to tell against me too, it seemed. Well, there was little wonder at that, or that she should think the worst of me either, as things were. For Baker's Corners, the nucleus, so to speak, of our civilization, did not boast the sort of society that would be likely to say much for a man's credit should he be known to frequent it overmuch, and I, while showing up there pretty often, as I say, had taken good care to keep my true business

dark. Had I only had the slightest suspicion, had I even dreamed of the under-current of conspiracy already at work, and destined to be so far-reaching in its effects! But I was accustomed to fair dealing myself, and in no way given to bestowing back-handers in the dark; and the idea of possible collusion between the retailer of that bit of malicious gossip, old Matty, and any other, never entered my head. All I knew was that, as I told myself bitterly, my love-dream was over; henceforth Louise Garçon and I could be nothing to each other. Ah! pride is an ill thing to get between two human beings at any time: but it is worst of all when it comes in the way of a woman and a man, to whom each in reality makes the world of the other one.

Yet the odd thing was that, however often I might tell myself that all was at an end between us I never could bring my mind seriously to believe it.

However, things were in a pretty bad way with me those days, and it was little wonder that I went about feeling a good bit down-hearted, although, not being quite brute enough to let a suspicion of how things actually stood come to Neil's knowledge, I did my level best to buck up and put on a good face when in his company. I've no doubt that he used to wonder a good bit at times over the sudden silence I had so lately developed; but, as I've said, he was not the fellow to try to get at things, or to interfere in another man's business. More than that, he had never had the chance of suspecting anything to be amiss, not having ever thought otherwise than that I had been

over at the Flat every evening as usual. It had been a sort of pious fraud that I had practised on him those days, as soon as I had smoked a pipe beside him, and settled him up for the night; and he had never imagined that in place of being, as he took it, over yonder, I had been working instead at the harvesting until long after midnight, when there was moon enough.

Well, things went on somehow until one day well on in the autumn, near the end of the Indian summer. One of us had to go over to the Flat that day on business connected with a yoke of oxen, which Garçon wanted to sell, and we to buy; and as Neil—besides having nothing on his head as yet beyond what he styled a prison crop—was a long way from fit and could not have stood a thirty-mile ride, I should have had to go in any case. Not that I was unwilling to go, trust me for that. I hovered round Berry Flat—whenever any decent excuse offered itself—as a moth hovers round the candle; although what precise result I expected from that it would have been hard to say. But it was something to catch a distant glimpse of her; and although when on two separate occasions we came across each other we met as mere acquaintances and nothing more, still, the future always held possibilities.

Hence it came about that soon after eight a.m. on the day I speak of, I was on my way through the cedar-swamp, to make what might very literally have been termed a morning call. Not in the way of pleasure, of course, although business or pleasure it was all pretty much the same to me. I would

have ridden that road willingly, at any hour of the day or night.

We had had the first frosts, and the woods through which I rode were glorious to look at. A stranger seeing them for the first time might very pardonably have taken them to be on fire, with the blaze of the orange glow flung back from birch and elm, oak and walnut, flashing along the line of forest, and the burning crimson glory of the maple flaming through it all. The woods at home, with the splendour of the autumn upon them, are glorious in their beauty; I grant that willingly, but one has to lay on the colours more thickly, to paint the picture with a brush charged with tints ten times more vivid, to make a pretence at doing bare justice to the glories of the woods in a Canadian fall. An artist—I mean a true artist, not a self-conceited colour-mixer—would have been driven wild with the consciousness of passionate longing—and the conviction of useless impotence—to represent; a poet struck into silence at the sight of the glorious vista of gold, olive, and deep shadowy green, of orange, copper, and vivid, burning fiery red, through which I rode that day, an intoxicating wealth of beauty of colour flung with a bounteous hand on leaf and twig and tree. And yet—and yet—shall I admit it? I was thinking more of one pair of soft sweet eyes that had once smiled on me so kindly; of the clustering dark hair of a single woman—of one only, than of all the ravishing luxuriance of nature lying round me. And that is just human nature, and has been and ever will be, to the very end of the chapter, the way of the world. I came in sight of the Flat at last, and I

remember thinking, as I rode with a slackened rein up the track that had by this time grown so familiar, of the first day I had come there in the early spring. Had I made much progress since then? I scarcely thought so, at least if I had it had run back again; and the reflection was one that scarcely tended to cheer me.

I had just hitched Roanoke up in the stable as I usually did, and was shutting the door on him, preparatory to going in search of Garçon, turning things over in my mind the while, when a sound came to my ears that drove everything else for the moment clean out of my head. The sound was a woman's scream of terror, and that was enough of itself naturally to send me like a shot in the direction whence it came. But that was not all. The scream was Louise's.

I was across that barn-yard and into the living room in about less than half a second. And what I saw there was a sight that sent the blood from my heart to rush wildly to my head, and thence to surge in a flood of wild mad passion through every vein. Louise, my Louise, she whom I already regarded as mine—for I had made my mind up dead certain that, come what might, I would win her one day—struggling as best she might against my rival Chassepôt; while the scoundrel, his evil yellow-tinted features writhen into a would-be grin of reassurance, was doing his best to win from her the kiss, of which she was trying to baulk him.

She was striving to keep him at arm's-length, fighting him off with both her slender hands, turning her face from him, struggling as best she

might in the grip of his powerful arms. But of what avail was her strength against his? and in spite of all she could do, he would have had the kiss he wanted, had my lucky star not brought me at that very moment to the door.

"Father! father! Matty! where are you?" cried the girl appealingly. Then she turned on him, with the courage of desperation. "Let me go, monsieur! What right have you to touch me?"

"The right of loving you, *ma petite*," responded the half-breed with a leer. "Eh! but what a silly little dove it is. One only, a single one, I swear. What would you have, *ma belle*? It is your own fault that——"

He didn't get out any more, for I was over the threshold and had reached him in about a couple of strides. It is at moments like that, and I am speaking plain and sober truth, that murder is done. Until now, I had been inclined to look upon the awful tragedies I had heard and read of as taking place out West, as the evidence and outcome of an existing brutality that belonged to the conduct of devils rather than of men. No such consideration struck me then; I own that frankly. Not that I felt inclined to lynch Chassepôt exactly: I just took those two strides in his direction, got him by the collar, and shook him as I had seen one of our dogs shake a wretched chipmunk, two days ago. He turned his face up to mine, fearful with its expression of baffled rage, chattering and mouthing like some enormous ape, but he was like a child in my grasp, and his arms fell away from his beautiful prisoner as if they had been dislocated at the shoulder. Then, while she

flashed like a fairy from the room, I doubled the whip that I had been all this time unconsciously holding, and laid it across the scoundrel until the handle broke in my grasp and my arm dropped powerless to my side. After that I dealt him a parting kick that lifted him half across the room, and without waiting to see what became of him or where he crawled to, went to see after Louise.

Guided by the flutter of a skirt among the bushes, I made my way to a favourite haunt of hers in the garden patch, and there I found her, her face buried in her hands, sobbing bitterly. She did not see me, was not even conscious of my presence near her; and I, as I stood among the bushes there, although only at the distance of a few yards, felt further away from her than I had ever done in my life. It was just this way: my heart was yearning to tell her of its honest love, and yet for very shame's sake I could not force myself upon her then. I was not gifted with finer feelings than most men, and I knew little about women; yet the consciousness was strong upon me that after what had just passed I was likely to be the last in the world whom she would care to meet, and that conviction held me back. Perhaps with some fellows the late occurrence might have seemed an additional reason for urging my suit just then, but I didn't see it in that light. Besides, I wanted Louise's love for myself alone, untrammelled by any sense of gratitude or obligation. Presently, however, the notion came to me that it was rather a mean trick to be standing there watching her, and she utterly unconscious of my presence; and after a minute or so I turned away,

got to the stable, led out Roanoke, and rode off. Had I not heard old Matty singing to herself in a cracked treble as I passed the house-door, wild horses should not have drawn me away until I had known some protector was at hand to take my place. Gaspard had trotted up too during the interval, to bask in the sun beneath the stoop; and I knew a single word from his mistress would be enough to send him at the throat of anything or any one, brute or human, so I felt satisfied on that score for the present.

Well, fate had put an additional bar to the gate of Paradise, by way of silencing me for the time being, so it seemed to me; yet, hard though it might be to reflect on that side of the subject, I could not do less than rejoice, as I rode home, at having been able to be in some way of use to her. Thinking thus, with my heart all the time filled with a savage resentment at the mere recollection of what had just occurred, I let the bay take what pace he pleased, and carry me on at an easy hand-gallop till we had covered a couple of miles or so. Then a recollection came to me, making me fetch up pretty smartly. The oxen! It was the first time that the thought of the blessed brutes had entered my head.

"Pretty man of business you're turning out," I said to myself sarcastically, swinging Roanoke round in his tracks. "About as smart as they make 'em, my lad, and no mistake. Nice hash you're making of things all round this morning, don't you think?" And calling myself by every complimentary epithet I could lay my tongue to, I started to ride the two or three miles back again.



CHAPTER XVI TO THE TOUCH

LD Matty opened the door to me this time, and I could not help thinking, as she drew back the wooden latch and saw me standing outside, that a sudden swift sinister expression crossed her face at the sight of me. It vanished in a moment, however, leaving me to wonder whether my fancy had not been to blame, and the dusky visage wreathed itself in its wonted smiles as the old woman told me that Massa Blaise was down the pasture. For a moment I had it at my tongue's end to give her a warning with regard to what had taken place an hour back, but just in time I remembered it was hardly my place to do that; and I strode off instead in the direction indicated, to find the old man, in shirt-sleeves and broad-brimmed straw hat, pottering about with an axe and mallet, making a pretence of mending a fence. I took the mallet from his hand and drove in the stakes for him, arranging as I did so the price of the yoke of oxen

I had come to see about, the old man standing by meanwhile and watching me with his keen eyes. Then all in a moment the sudden determination to put my fate to the touch then and there got the better of every other consideration. I flung down the tools I had been using, walked up to him, and out it all came in one great rush. My love for his daughter, the hopes I held with regard to her, my belief that she herself was—at all events had been—not indifferent to me, and—and all the rest. No doubt I talked some nonsense, we usually do at such times, from the point of view of a dispassionate onlooker, though Heaven knows it is far from being nonsense to us; and the old fellow stood listening in silence to the passionate outburst, with his head cocked to one side like an owl's, and his little keen, bead-like eyes peering round at me.

"You want to marry my daughter?" he inquired at last, when I had come to a standstill from sheer lack of breath. "That is very well. But is it so well if I tell you that there are one, two, three other men who have asked me for her, and who are quite as ready to marry her as you? You are not the only one, my young friend; and I cannot divide my daughter into pieces and deal her out to you, one morsel all round to each."

Then I fired up and told him, as well as the heat of my love and passion would let me, that while I counted the hand of his daughter as the most precious thing on earth, yet, without the certainty of her love given with it, I would not take that hand at a gift. Old Garçon chuckled and rubbed his hands.

"You like not much what I have told you, *hein?*" he questioned, still peering round at me in the same odd fashion. "*Eh bien, écoutez, mon ami.* This love you talk of—pah!—in France they marry first, and the love it comes or it stays, *n'importe*,—but you English are as strange in your love-making as in all else. Now, listen," and he laid one skinny hand on my arm, "I have known long time, see you, that my daughter must marry one day, and I say to myself, 'She shall marry no man but one who can show himself able to protect her.' Aha!" as I started and coloured, "you see I know it, *mon gars*, and he, that swine," here the speaker's face grew dark, "will know better than to come again near the log-house of old Blaise Garçon. Patience, listen still. I see my daughter care much for some one, and I had thought, for it matters not to say now, I had thought it might be another, see you? and I say to myself, 'It is well, this or that,' for I, on my word, I care little. But the old man blind one time and see the next; and one day—*comprenez-vous?*—that day you kill the bears, I found out one thing I not know before,"—here he looked preternaturally cunning. "Well, well, if my daughter is willing, it is to you I will give her. *Voilà*, go and find her, and hear what she says."

A good deal mystified, and scarcely knowing whether to take his words in the light of encouragement or the reverse, I set off to put my fate to the actual touch without loss of time. I was in no mood for delay or dalliance; the time for that had gone by, and come what might, I was resolved

to learn the truth then and there from Louise's own dear lips. Yet, look for her as I might, high and low, up and down, in every nook of the garden or orchard, in every one of her favourite and accustomed haunts, I was unable to find her. During the progress of my search I passed the house-door twice; and it struck me that old Matty, at work in her sanctum within, was watching me with something akin to malice in the expression of her big rolling eyes, but she vouchsafed no word. To appeal to her was the last thing I was willing to do; but she was the only one who could help me, and up I went to the door at last. One way or the other, I meant to know my fate.

"Is Miss Louise in the house, do you know?"

The old negress, seated at the table engaged in paring apples, looked up at me without offering to move.

"Not have done see her, Massa Frank."

"Do you know where I should be likely to find her, then?" I asked, leaning one hand against the door cheek, and sending my glance wistfully round the room within.

"S'pose she in her room, sah."

The answer came doggedly, and I asked nothing further. That was it, then; and I turned away from the door, heavy-hearted, the new-born hopes that had so lately lifted me to a level with the clouds sinking down to hurl me with cruel malice earthwards. She was purposely keeping out of my way: and in view of that consideration, the best thing I could do would be to take myself off and clear the place of my unwelcome presence. Full

of that intention, I strode off to the stable where I had left Roanoke, chewing the cud of my bitter reflections. Pea-time for me was over—in other words, no chance remained: and that was where my shilly-shallying at the outset had landed me.

But as I got near the stable, I heard a sound that made me quicken my steps somewhat and, when I did reach it, peer round the door in place of entering right off. For the stable was not empty. Of course I knew it was not, in one sense, but I don't mean that; and for a moment or two I stood entranced, spell-bound, looking on at the prettiest picture I had seen in all my life.

She was there, my love, my darling, my queen, standing close up against the horse, one round white arm thrown over the shining neck, her forehead pressed against the glossy mane that crowned its arch; while the noble beast, whimpering and pawing his delight, had curved round his fine clean-cut head in order to snuggle his nose down into the other little hand. The picture was so charming, I say, that I was reluctant to move and spoil it; and I stood there in silence, looking on, my heart in my eyes, while she, all unconscious of my presence, went on caressing and fondling the good bay, lavishing upon him a hundred endearing games. But there was one little sentence that she kept on murmuring over and over, and for the life of me I could not make it out, at first. Either I must be mistaken, or my hearing at fault, for the words for a minute or so conveyed nothing intelligible to me. Then the meaning suddenly flashed upon me. She was saying to the dumb horse what

she could not say to me, endeavouring through him to convey her gratitude to me for the poor mean service I had done her.

The consciousness stung me to the quick in one sense, even while the sight itself gave me courage. I plucked up heart of grace and stepped in over the threshold. Louise started, and turned her head at the sound of my step on the stable floor. The colour rushed to her face, and her eyes, meeting mine for an instant, drooped and went down. Yet, in spite of her evident embarrassment—rather, on account of it perhaps, it was she who spoke first. And her tone, whether consciously or unconsciously, was the old frank tone I knew so well.

"I can never resist the temptation," she said, with a little nervous laugh, stroking down the glossy mane and speaking hurriedly. "He always knows me at once, and—and I have never cared for one of the colts so much as for him. That is one reason," and here her colour deepened, "why I am glad you should have him. I see him so often—I—I mean—" She saw her mistake, and caught herself up, blushing painfully.

I came close up to the two and stood, my arm on the horse's shoulder, looking down at the sweet shy face. I wanted to take the speaker in my arms and shower kisses on that face and the dusky softness of the hair above it, but the time for that had not come yet. I had first to win the right.

"I shall not own him much longer, I hope," I said, with what must have been brutal bluntness "I mean to give him away."

Louise glanced up at me now with a start, her lips parting in dismayed surprise.

"You mean to give him away?—Roanoke?"

"Aye, Roanoke."

Her eyes went down, the colour mounting once more to cheek and brow. Perhaps that was at the evidence of the love burning in my own. Did she understand? Would her next words prove that she took my meaning? Apparently not.

"I—I thought you cared for him," she said, stretching out one hand to stroke down the glossy mane; and there was a ring of reproach in her tone.

"I care for him more than I could well tell you. But I care incomparably more for the one to whom I mean to give him."

She glanced up at me swiftly, eagerly now. "Ah! I understand. You are going to give him to Neil Colquhoun. He is kind of heart—he will use him well."

"Colquhoun doesn't want him," responded I. Then, before I had time to say another word, Roanoke suddenly curved round his head to where I stood, and began to whinny and snuggle his nose in my hand, and next to punch my pockets in search of the apple I usually had there for him. Louise looked from one to the other of us in mute expressive silence, and there was reproach in the tone in which she spoke again.

"How can you have the heart? See how much he cares—how fond he is of you."

"He is fond of his prospective owner as well," I answered doggedly, pulling the horse's ears as I spoke.

Silence for a minute or so.

"Will he—will he use him well, this one to whom you are going to give him?" she asked at last, a slight tremor in the even tone of her voice.

"If I did not believe that, rest assured I should not give him," answered I. "However, I am not sure yet whether he will be accepted. If so—well, although I mean to give him away I intend to keep him all the same, for——" And then I knew that the time had come to set aside fencing, and to win my love in the world-old way.

"To give him away, and yet to keep him," I repeated steadily, "for the one who takes him must take me with him. Louise!" and I came forward a pace, and taking the small hands into my own, sought to obtain a glimpse of the sweet eyes that strove to veil themselves beneath the long shadow of lashes, "you know my meaning now. I have spoken to your father, and now I speak to you. He is willing, if you are willing too. Say the word, my love, my darling, and give me the right to cherish and protect you to the last hour of my life."

I looked in her eyes, for my answer, and found it. Then, as the sweet face bent forward to hide its mantling blushes, I caught the murmured word of assent, and held my dear love in my arms, wooed and won at last . . .

And Roanoke looked on at it all, a highly interested spectator, whinnying and pawing at the end, when he thought he had been set long enough on one side, in order to attract attention. But he was the sort of third party we did not mind, and

for a long time we paid no heed to him, utterly engrossed the one with the other. There were so many things to say, so many to explain; so much, and yet so little, to forgive; so great occasion for self-reproach, so little reason to blame the other; so many questions to be asked, so many answers to be given—a time of smiles and tears, of quick-coming joy and swiftly-vanishing pain, with the rainbow light of youth and love and hope shining through it all.

Ah! how the golden hours sped by that day, too swiftly for our new-born happiness. All too soon came the time for parting, when I bade my darling farewell beneath the white moonlight, and forced myself away. Down the slope up which I had ridden in such despondency that morning, through the dreary stretch of cedar swamp and the long reach of forest, across the open clearing, and up the ridge down which Roanoke had carried me a few hours ago so heavy of heart. Then the gloom within had turned the burning gold and crimson of the woods to somb're grey, and now the intensity of happiness that had taken its place robbed the night of its shadow, changing the gloomy dusk of the silent forest into a golden glory as the good bay carried me home at his long swift easy stride. Along the track, as we called it, between the trim fences, set by our own hands, that bounded it to right and left, the ring of the hoof beats striking ever sharper and clearer as we got on firmer ground, until Roanoke breasted the rise on which our log-house stood. Then, in the midst of the clamour of welcome from the two

dogs that announced my arrival, a hail came out of the darkness, and I found Neil at the gate, leaning over the top, the red light of his cigar burning through the gathering dusk. The moon sailed out just then from behind a cloud, and her cold, clear-sheeted light fell around us, and lit up the place as brightly as day, as I rode up to where the tall dark figure showed beyond the gate.

"Well," he asked abruptly, "how speeds the wooings, Frank?"

There was a strange expression in his eyes, a wistful, anxious, eager light. The tone told me he understood all, that there was no need to explain, and I jumped off my horse and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Wish me joy, old friend. The best and sweetest woman on God's earth has promised to be my wife."

One moment's silence, barely that. The steam rose from Roanoke in a cloud, and his deep breathing alone broke the stillness of the autumn night. Then Neil's hand gripped mine across the gate, and his clasp was that in which soul goes out to soul.

"With all my heart I wish it you, dear old fellow. God bless you, Frank—and her."

Then he stood back to open the gate for Roanoke, and we went in arm-in-arm together.



CHAPTER XVII

MY STIRRUP CUP

HAT was only the first of many blissful days. Love's golden harvest lay ready to our hand for the gathering, and we acted up to the permission graciously dealt out to us by my prospective father-in-law, and were happy together. All through that autumn we lived in a mist of happiness, my love and I; each morning bringing with it the anticipation of the evening's joy, and every evening, when the parting came, only awakening the keen expectation of next day's meeting. Ah, those evenings, short, all too short, when Louise and I sat side by side talking together in the low window-seat, while her father, established as close to the great log fire as he could get, dozed and smoked alternately, occasionally waking up during the former proceeding to croon over to himself some *patois* ditty, or to mutter a word or two in a low grumbling tone to the old negress Matty.

She was a queer figure, this old coloured woman, as she sat opposite to her master, with fingers never

idle, her grey woolly hair contrasting so oddly with the dark wrinkled face, resembling an ancient monkey's in shape and hue, and surmounted by a turban gorgeous in colouring, and wonderful to look upon. There was something witch-like and uncanny about her, I used to think at times, when, glancing up suddenly, I would find the great rolling balls of eyes fixed intently upon me, an odd kind of subdued glow in them, that somehow made me feel ill at ease. Perhaps I was scarcely inclined to be fair to the old woman, since it was impossible to forget altogether that her gossiping tongue had done a good deal of mischief, and might have done more; but I was certainly by no means prejudiced in her favour. More than once, although I took myself to task pretty strongly afterwards for permitting the thought to find standing ground, I could not get rid of the notion that the gaze fixed from time to time on my sweetheart and myself had something sinister about it, and it was on the tip of my tongue to ask bluntly what the old witch was staring at. Once, when the idea had taken a stronger hold of me than usual, I asked my sweetheart one or two downright questions concerning the old negress. Louise, however, soon reassured me on the point. Matty was a dear, faithful old soul, she declared warmly, and deeply attached to both her father and herself.

"We could not get on without Aunt Matty," she told me with a smile, and a loving glance in the direction of the old woman, "oh no, not at all. She is a most wonderful old person, and really very wise. She knows how to cure sicknesses, and

understands all about roots and herbs and simples, and—and—oh, I could not tell you what besides; and you are very rude and unkind, *mon François*, to call my dear old Aunt Matty a witch. I dare say she was a very handsome negress when she was young, but she cannot remain young for ever, you foolish boy, any more than other people. I suppose," with a little pout, "when I am old and ugly, you will call me a witch too." And the answer that speech called forth from me does not need to be chronicled here.

Hitherto I have been speaking only of the autumn, but before very long the first signs of winter began to come creeping over the country. Yet, in spite of the increasing cold, Louise and I still lingered on the window-seat, reluctant to come nearer the fire, and so to bring to an end the talk meant only for the ears of each. But on the first night that the cold drove us there, Louise produced an Indian work-basket, dyed in various colours, and the sight thereof recalling an incident of the summer, I took the chance of requesting a long-delayed explanation, to wit, the behaviour of a certain person on a certain night.

"I had a very good reason for it," she answered demurely, with a blush that I thought the most bewitching thing in the world.

"Well, am I not to hear this good reason?" asked I.

"Why should you?" she retorted with a toss of her head. "It does not concern you now."

"But it did concern me once?"

"Perhaps."

"Then I'll hear it," said I with decision.

"You are very positive, Monsieur. How do you know that I shall tell you?"

But I knew how to get my own way on such a point, and the right arguments to use too, and it was not long before I prevailed.

"It was just because the thing did not seem—what is the word you English use?—fair, ah, that is it," she explained, dropping her eyes on her work. "I—I knew—I could see what your hopes and wishes were, and that anything you could do you would do, for love of me; and how could I accept all at your hands when I was not sure if I might not have to say No to you after all? Besides—I could not tell you this then, but you know it now, so it matters not—my father makes much money through the horses, and—and he is well able to obtain hired labour whenever he needs it. How could I allow you both, generous and ready to help as you were, to believe that he was very poor, knowing as I did besides that it was a busy time for you at Union Station? That was why I acted so strangely that day. Perhaps it was foolish, and, yes, I must have seemed proud and ungracious, but that was the reason. There was no one to advise me; I had to think it all out for myself," with a wistful little smile, "and what was I to do?"

"Then you saw through me?" I asked, after an interval.

"Of course I did," scornfully. "Did you imagine not? You men are all very much alike in that, *mon* François. It is not often that you find one like your friend Neil Colquhoun."

"Like old Neil?" I asked in surprise. "He's the best fellow in the world, but I don't understand what you mean."

"I mean in the way of self-command, self-repression," answered Louise with promptitude. "You can see it in a great deal with him, and I do not think the woman he marries will even suspect he loves her until the time he chooses to let her know it. That is not the case very often, you know; and then—well, if she is not as happy as I am, I think it will be her fault, not his. Yet I do not think, somehow," she added quickly, "that he is ever likely to marry now."

Somewhat surprised at the conviction with which she spoke, I asked her meaning.

"Because," answered my betrothed, blushing deeply, the shy lovelight in her own sweet eyes revealing the clue by which she had threaded the puzzle, "when you are happy yourself, *mon* François, you begin to look round, to notice others, and to wish happiness for them. With him—well, I fancy at times that he has loved some one once, and lost her, and I think he is not the man to care for any woman more than once in his life. I have wondered too if that can be the reason he comes here so seldom now; because, seeing us together, you and I, might make him remember all the more. You see, I cannot tell how it might be with you men, Frank, but with me—yes, that is how I should feel, I know. You say he does nothing every evening but write, write, write, and perhaps that is only to make himself forget. For, if I am right, it must be very hard for him."

"He's never given a sign of it, if that's so," rejoined I with conviction, "though, after all, there's nothing to wonder at in that. He's not the fellow to talk much about his own concerns, or himself?"

Yet for a minute I sat silent, wondering if a notion that had crossed my mind once with respect to my chum, could have had some truth in it after all. From what I knew of him, there was no denying that he was just the sort of fellow who, having met with a disappointment, would be likely to rush off all over the world, if possible, to get over it as best he might; and I remembered that, when explaining the reason of his coming to Canada, he had made a slight reservation. Only, as I had just said to my darling, if the case had been so, he had given uncommonly few signs thereof, either when on board the *Leander* or since. Besides, no hint of cynicism had made itself evident: with him regarding either his fellow-men in general or women in particular; and that, it would appear, is an almost inevitable symptom with fellows who have got crossed in love. I mean that cheap kind of cynicism with which a good many men—aye, and women too—do their best to make the whole of humanity smart for the slight put upon, or wrong done them, by one solitary and particular individual; a mode of procedure which, to say the least of it, is not grounded in fairness.

So that was how it was with Neil, then. And I, living with him for close on five years, had never guessed at that which the quick perception of my little sweetheart had detected in one-tenth part of the time.

"And when," I asked after a minute or so, "did you feel that I was no longer an object of aversion to you?"

"You are laughing at me," pouted Louise. "And you are asking far too many questions to-night. Do not be so curious."

"I'm going to have this one answered, anyhow," I rejoined stubbornly. And I was not long in getting my way.

"It was that day you shot the bears," she confessed, looking down as she spoke. "All the afternoon before that—you remember—we were in the woods together, you and I; and I was afraid every moment that you were going to speak to me. If you had, *mon Frangois*, I could not have answered you then: I should not have known whether to say Yes or No. Then next morning—the fog was thick, and Matty cried out that only one man was coming up the pasture. I cannot tell you how I felt then. It was to me a certainty that one of you must have been hurt or killed, and—and then I knew, all in a moment. Ah yes, the instant I believed you dead I knew the truth, as I had never known it till then—does that seem strange to you? I cried with joy, I could not help it, when I knew you were safe; and I was afraid that he, Neil, must have thought that I was just what my father called me, a foolish, nervous girl to have been so frightened. But he did not seem to do that; he only kept on taking the blame himself for having given no warning, and assuring me all the time that you were not hurt. I think," she added soberly, "that if I had actually hated him before that, the way he

behaved to me then would make me think well of him all my life."

Then, declaring it to be her turn, she proceeded to read me a severe lecture upon my own iniquitous conduct during the early autumn, to which I listened meekly, knowing that it was all well understood now, and having a tolerably fair guess at the way in which she would end. But to-night she struck a new note, and there was a little tremor in her tones as she said almost in a whisper—"And yet I am not going to scold you too much for trying to keep your own trouble from me, *mon François*, because you see, but for that, I—I should not have been able to feel so proud of you as I do now. . . . How cold it is getting. Let us go over to the fire."

So the time went on. The first snow fell, the frost laid its icy hand on the earth, and winter had the whole country fast once again in a grip that would hold for months. And, more than once, standing at the window after dark, when the moonlight lay cold on the sheeted snow, Louise would catch her breath and press closer to me, pointing silently to two or three dark shadows stealing phantom-like across the ghostly whiteness that lay round the house like a great bridal veil, knowing the shadows to be the forms of wolves, attracted by the scent of the stock, and driven close to the outbuildings by hunger. For the settlement was, comparatively speaking, a new one, and the wild creatures to whom the forests had for ages belonged were reluctant to give back before the onward march of progress, to retire as they must eventually do in the face of the young colony. Civilization

may knock at Nature's door loudly enough, but her savage children are not always willing to hear or to heed the call.

Those first three winters we had not been much troubled by the wolves. This year, however, we did begin to hear something of them, and that a good bit sooner too than was seasonable. A cold snap set in early; and that brought the boys in grey down from the north-west in packs. Away at Manitoba they were becoming somewhat more than a nuisance; and we in Parker County were beginning to hear of them, even although at first they did not intrude themselves so much upon our notice. The only way in which we had been bothered those first winters had been by their coming out at nights to howl on the edge of the swamp below our lot; and a dismal row they made of it. The sound was one Neil could not bear to hear; I never knew him get so riled over anything: and at first, the instant the weird opening yell rang out on the still night air, no matter what he might be about, he would leave it to go out and loose every dog we had, by way of, as he termed it, setting up a rival chorus in the gallery and so drowning the row in the pit. After we had lost a good dog in that way, however, by the plucky brute's venturing too far, he gave up the practice, but the sound was one he never could bear from first to last.

The wolves had not learned enough of men to stand in a wholesome dread of them, you see; and as the winter drew on, more than one ugly story came to hand about belated travellers being followed along the roads. Rumour had it, too, that a neigh-

bouring settler, on his way to the mill with a sack of corn on his back, had had to drop the sack, and, as he expressed it, "streak it like greased lightning ter save his bacon." The rest of us took that story down with a good deal of salt, however. Not that it was by any means impossible; the thing has been a common experience in many settlements, only, somehow, we round there were slow to believe the story of our Yankee friend, and "gas" was the mildest term applied by most of us to Simpson's statement. However, there was no doubt that the brutes were beginning to show round the settlement in fuller force than usual; and I could tell that Louise did not half like it when I used to get up at night from my seat at her side, and the thought would come to her of the long lonely run back through the miles of gloomy frozen forest lying between her father's lot and our own. I knew it by the wistful anxiety that would shine in her sweet eyes, although her lips said never a word. But I, for my part, never bothered my head about the matter. On foot, or even with an inferior horse, things would have been altogether different, of course; but not when I had a clipper like Roanoke in the cutter before me.

Great Scott! how fond I got of that horse, although after all there was little to wonder at. To my way of thinking there is something elevating about the love a man ought to bear towards the brave beast that carries him, spending strength and speed so generously in his service—a comradeship that at times runs human friendship pretty close. I have seen a man who had had his horse shot

under him, sob like a child for the loss; and I know this much, I have thought none the less of him for it. Little did I ever think that I . . . But the time has not come for that yet.

So the days went on until Christmas was pretty near. The frost had set in harder than ever, and the cold was intense, the thermometer standing at times at forty below zero. It was a snapping night when I got up to leave Berry Flat, one evening not long before the festive season set in. All the night there had been no moon, but a faint glimmer shone out shortly before ten-thirty, and with a fifteen mile run ahead of me I could not well stay longer. So I rose at last from my place by my sweetheart's side, and prepared reluctantly to bid her farewell. The movement roused her father, who had been half-asleep all the evening in his corner, and he too got up and stretched himself, yawning.

"You go, *mon gars*?" he inquired, rubbing his eyes. "*Sacré!* I had not known it was so late. *Ma foi!* but it is cold! I go to get a light," and he hobbled off towards the stable.

"Do not be too quick, *mon François*; I have something to show you," Louise said, and she fitted like a fairy out of the room to the foot of the rough wooden ladder, the only means of ascent to the loft which she was accustomed to regard as her own room. How often I used to vow to myself that she should know better lodgings when the happy time should come to claim her for my own.

No danger of my being too quick; and I fear that my prospective father-in-law for once found himself left to the task of putting in Roanoke

single-handed. But, linger as I might over the process of inducting myself into the furs indispensable for a sleigh drive during a Canadian winter night, neither Louise nor her father had returned by the time I got back; and I found myself alone except for the presence of old Matty the negress. She was sitting at the spinning wheel, making it turn in a slow, dreamy fashion; and I felt the gaze of her big saucers of eyes on my face as I came back to the fire. So much accustomed was I to the maintaining on her part of an almost constant silence, that when her voice sounded suddenly, I started.

"It bery cold night, Massa Frank."

I assented dreamily. The night was cold enough, it was true, but the strong vitality of my young vigorous manhood cared nothing for that, and the weather had no share in my thoughts as I stood in front of the fire, slowly pulling on the fur gloves. Presently Matty must have risen and glided out of the room. I say must have, for I never noticed her absence, being only vaguely conscious that the droning murmur of the wheel had ceased, and I started again when, a moment later, I found the gaudy turban and dusky face at my elbow. She reached little higher, upon my word.

"It terr'ble cold dis night, Massa Frank. Take him, honey, fore you goes out in dat cold."

What was it that led me to hesitate, I wonder? Was it some instinct, some premonition, for which I could not have accounted, had I tried? I know not. In the ordinary course of things nothing

would have been more natural than for me to have accepted without hesitation the proffered hospitality of Berry Flat, in the shape of the steaming compound of rum and water, in other words, a "sling," carried by the old woman. Yet I did not, somehow. My guardian angel must have held me back, for assuredly I know of no tangible reason that would have accounted for the refusal.

"Mus' drink him, honey, fore him goes out in dat cold. Keep cold out, sah; nuff to freeze blood dis night," went on old Matty coaxingly. "Mis' Louise mix him own self, Massa Frank. Maica rum. Him bery good."

"Yes, but it is, not a bit good of Matty to say things that are not true," interrupted a laughing voice at that moment, and Louise's little hand was laid on my arm, and her sweet face looked roguishly up into mine. "Mis' Louise did not mix it, at all, *mon* François; but Matty did, and for that reason it ought to be so much better. There, go, you dear old thing, and see if father has got out the cutter yet." Then, as the old woman trotted obediently away on her errand, the speaker turned with a mischievous but decided glance to me. "Quick! stand just where you are, Frank; and be sure you kick that piece of unburnt log down on the top of the blaze immediately I throw this on it. She is sure to have put some strong spice or something of the kind in it, and you would not like it one bit.—There! see how strong she has made it! I felt sure she had," as the flames

catching at the ardent spirit flung upon them, leaped up with a fierce roar, to be instantly stifled, however, as the result of a dexterous kick on my part. "I can smell the spice she has put in distinctly. Hold that bottle, please, and the hot water, pour it in here; there, that is right. It seems terribly deceitful, I know," she went on, dexterously stirring the steaming mixture, "but I would not hurt dear old Aunt Matty's feelings for the world, and I choose not to have her make you ill. There," sweeping me a mock curtsey as she handed the glass to me. "I have the honour to wish Monsieur a very good health, and—Here she is, coming back, we were only just in time! Now," in a whisper, "you must let her see you drinking it, and mind you say it is very good!"

Both of which directions I carried out to the letter, the old negress watching me with a gratified smile as I drank to my sweetheart's health, standing with one arm round her and the glass in the other hand.

"Good-night, my darling, good-night," I said, holding her in my arms. "No—not a step further," for the cold, even in the room, was bitter, away from the neighbourhood of the fire. "Only until to-morrow night, my dearest. Why, Louise, my darling, what is the meaning of this?" For my little sweetheart, so lately animated by the spirit of mischievous roguery, was clinging to me now, hiding her face on my shoulder, trembling violently, and struggling hard in the endeavour to keep back her tears.

"I—I don't know," she whispered shamefacedly,

not venturing to look up. "It is silly, of course. I know it is, but—but the fear has been with me all the evening, and I cannot drive it away. I cannot bear to have you go to-night, *mon* François. I am afraid, frightened for you!"

"Frightened—and for me? Frightened of what, my darling?"

"Of the—the long dark forest," she answered with a shiver, burying her face still deeper in the soft fur of my coat. "You are laughing at me, Frank, I know: but indeed I cannot help thinking of—dreading it!"

Comforting and reassuring her took a few minutes, and I was still engaged in that congenial occupation, when the door opened, and a head—or to speak more correctly, a fur cap surmounting a pair of eyes, since nothing else was visible—was thrust into the room.

"*Venez, mes enfants,*" remarked a thin dry voice.

"I wish not to hurry you in your leave-taking, no. I—I would merely observe that the colt is harnessed, and if he is not to freeze where he stands the sleigh will want a driver. That is all."

"Coming, sir, coming!" I kissed the smile back to those dear eyes, caught up my cap, and springing down the steps, reached the barn-yard, where Roanoke stood ready harnessed in the sleigh, his breath, even since leaving the stable, already frozen solid on mane and breast.

"*Ma foi!* I envy you not your ride, I," quoth my prospective parent bluntly, as he stumbled alongside in order to open the gate. "*Sacré!* it is enough to freeze my old blood to-night: I know

not that I have ever felt it so cold. Ha! it would take more than the smile of a woman to bring me fifteen miles on such a night as this. The very dumb brutes suffer:—the colt there," old habit seldom allowed him to refer by any other term to Roanoke, "on my life, one would have taken him to be stiff and benumbed when I brought him out. A warm mash, or something stronger when you get him stabled, would not be thrown away—but you do not listen."

"I am listening," said I hastily.

"At least, if you listen, you do not look," was the dry rejoinder. "You have all but sent the runner of the cutter against the gate-post there. Were I a stranger now," added the old fellow mercilessly, "and could I see no more of the driver than the back of his head, I should still have known him to be a young man, and not an old one."

"How?" I asked in some confusion.

Garçon chuckled, and rubbed his hands as well as the lantern would allow him.

"My young friend, an older man would have had the sense to keep his eyes on the ears of his horse and the runners of his sleigh, without being content to take it for granted that where the one could go there would be ample space for the other, and only a young man would turn his head instead to watch for the shadow on the window. Well, well, we were all young once! There, the sleigh is clear of the gate. *Peste!* I have yet to visit the other horses, before I can return to the fire. Your hand, *mon gars, et bon voyage!*"



CHAPTER XVIII

HOW I LOST ROANOKE

N ID-WINTER, midnight, and mid-forest. How intensely still it was, and how cold! Garçon had been fully justified in declaring that he had never known a colder night. The keenness of the frost struck home even to me, through the piled buffalo robes that heaped the sleigh, despite the warm vitality of the young blood coursing through every vein, as we glided on past the pastures, lying white and cold in their winter dress beneath the moonlight, down the long straight road I had ridden countless times, through the frozen cedar-swamp, and on towards the shadowy fringe of forest that stood rigid and white against the black line-of night sky.

I was in the forest now. Ghastly white, except where the black trunks stood out, pillars of ebony against the sheeted snow, it stretched away on all sides, a region of utter silence and desolation. Not a sound, not a breath, not the faintest whisper came back out of all those miles of distance to give evidence of life. Strange to know that these

motionless snow-covered columns, standing there in ghastly stillness, should be the very trees that had lately worn so gorgeous a livery, shrouded now, with the rest of the summer's glories, beneath this rigid drapery of death.

I was not over sensitive to outside influences, not so much so as many men, at least; yet so powerfully did the sense of solitude and silence impress itself upon me after a few miles that I drew rein, and halted the cutter for a moment to listen. Not a sound, not a whisper, not a breath. The crackle of the frozen snow beneath the tread of a living creature, the fall of dropping masses from the heavily-laden boughs, although brushed from them by merely the wing of a bird, the faintest rustle of wind, by lessening the tension somewhat, would have been a welcome relief. Not one of these was to be heard however. Nothing except the strenuous breathing of Roanoke, and the corresponding creak of the harness, with now and then the rending noise of a tree splitting with the frost, struck upon my listening ears; and I shook the reins and sent him forward again, with an impatient eagerness to break the oppressive silence by the thunder of galloping hoofs on the hard frozen surface of snow. I didn't go in for bells. I never cared to have the incessant jingle-jingle in my ears; and in other respects they would, in our sparsely settled district, have been of little use. Yet I almost wished I had had them, that night, to have lost in some degree the oppressive weight given back by the dead world of silence lying around me and beyond.

Garçon had been right in his remarks: Roanoke was certainly off colour that night. Whether he was benumbed by the cold or not, it was evident that on first starting from Berry Flat he had seemed to move with difficulty; and although the stiffness vanished after he had got fairly into his stride, he was strangely unsteady on his legs, somehow, and more than once during those first few miles he staggered and seemed to recover himself by a convulsive effort. At last, when a stumble so decided had been within an ace of landing him on his nose, I pulled up, sprang out of the sleigh, and went to his head to see what was amiss. Nothing, so far as I could tell; except that his head drooped a bit, and he struck me as being somewhat dull, and showing less than usual of his wonted fire and mettle. He was all in a lather too, but that was scarcely surprising, considering the pace at which he had come. Round came the fine head, as, after a close inspection of his hoofs, I stood at his shoulder, looking him critically over, and the velvet muzzle was pushed against my arm.

"So ho, old lad! What's to pay with you tonight?"

A low whinny in answer, and the soft nose was snuggled with a caressing gesture down into my hand. It was as if the gallant beast were trying in his dumb way to ask pardon for behaviour so singularly at variance with his customary free and steady bearing. Ah, Roanoke, Roanoke!

How still it was as I stood there by the motionless sleigh, the silence unbroken except for the deep panting breath that came from the horse.

Overhead, the centre of a shimmer of silver clouds the moon was sailing through a sky of inky blackness, in which the stars sparkled like gems, and below, the trees standing up stark and gaunt on each side of the track, cast long weird shadows over the cold white deadness round. Suddenly, as I stood there beside the horse, the trailing reins and whip in hand, there fell upon my ears, coming from somewhere out of the long reaches of unknown distance that made up those miles of lonely woods, the faintest echo of a breath, for it could be called nothing more, a long, low distant moaning sound. Silence once more for an instant; and then it broke out again; and this time the sound was nearer.

"Confound the brutes!" I muttered to myself; for I knew what it was well enough, and strange as the statement may sound to dwellers at home, I write only the truth in saying that the first feeling of which I was clearly sensible was one merely of annoyance, of resentment at the notion that a man could not so much as take an evening sleigh ride to see his sweetheart, without finding himself pestered on the way home by a lot of snarling curs of wolves yelping at his heels. I mean that was the first thing of which I was sensible after I had leapt into the cutter again; for at the earliest echo of that dismal complaining wail, Roanoke had plunged forward with so mad a start that, had I not kept a firm grip of the reins I must have lost horse and sleigh altogether. Well for me that I had, for if he had broken away from me then, it would to a certainty have been all up with me.

Taking to the trees would have been the almost inevitable alternative; and on such a night as that, without the possibility of keeping warm by means of physical exercise, in spite of my youth and strength I must have been frozen to death.

For a couple of miles or so all went well. On tore Roanoke at the gallop, reach after reach of motionless snow-covered trees, standing up stark and ghostlike in the dim white light, sliding past the sleigh like phantoms. There was little to be heard for the thunder of the galloping hoofs on the hard snow, yet once and again I did catch the echo of that dismal sound wailing through the trees behind us; and each time the snorting horse bounded forward with a mad access of speed, in a white cloud of his own breath, under the stress of the instinctive unerring antagonism placed for ever by Nature between horse and wolf.

So another mile or so went by; and as yet I had seen nothing of our pursuers, when it suddenly struck me that the mad pace for the last few minutes had been slackening somewhat. The trees were no longer gliding past with such phantomatic swiftness; and Roanoke, in place of keeping up his long swinging gallop, had subsided into the broken, half-stumbling, and altogether uncertain pace he had shown on first coming out. But it was not until a fierce sharp howl coming from the rear, no longer dulled and softened by distance, but instinct with the savage ardour of wild creatures that have both seen and scented their prey, told me how much even in that short space our pursuers had gained on us, that I began for the

first time to have the possible awkwardness of my position borne in on me. Let Roanoke miss his footing again, stumble as he had done at setting out,—though what should have induced so strange a way of comporting himself in the gallant beast I had no notion,—the chances would be . . . I did not finish out the suggestion, but, passing the whip into the other hand, while keeping a steady grip on the reins of the galloping horse, felt for the revolver buckled beneath my coat, that it should be ready to hand when called for. Since that bear episode, generally, and the Chassepôt incident particularly, I had as a rule taken care to go, to use a bit of Western slang, "heeled," in readiness for any emergency.

Glancing back over my shoulder, I could see them now—a long straggling line of black flecks on the dead white of the snow in advance, and behind a dark shapeless mass, both coming on with lightning speed. I knew the latter to be the main body of the pack, and until then I had had no notion that they could have been so heavy in number. In spite of the ugly suggestiveness of the sight, however, I was still conscious only of that feeling of savage resentment. To respect a foe, one needs to know him, and mine was the indifference of ignorance as yet. After a few minutes, however, when the vanguard of the pack was so hard on us that the gleam of their eyes in the moonlight could be distinctly seen, it struck me that the quarters were getting somewhat too close to be pleasant; and I turned in the sleigh, and brought the long whip through the frosty air

with a crack that rang like a pistol-shot in the silent echoes of the forest, accompanying the action with a yell that might have been heard a mile off. Individually, the wolf is the most arrant of cowards; danger in connection with him results from his numbers, and for the life of me I could not help laughing grimly to see how the dastardly brutes gave back at the mere sound of the human voice. I repeated the experiment with a similar result, being unwilling to throw away a cartridge, in view of a more pressing need; and, since I did not want to lose the advantage thereby gained, for the first time Roanoke felt the whip. The indignity roused the latent spirit in him, sending him forward at so fleet a gallop that no wolf or horse could have matched him; and my spirits rose at the thought that another three miles would see us clear of the forest. As long as the horse held to his present pace I might snap my fingers at the grey brutes behind, and . . . Then suddenly I felt the reins dragged, torn from my grip; a crash, a thud, a brief rapid storm of beating hoofs, a snorting gasp of terror, with one horrible short breaking crack that will ring in my ears for ever, sounding through it all, and the bay horse was down, the frozen snow flying in a rain of hard flakes from his struggling hoofs in his frenzied attempts to get on his legs!

I was out of the sleigh and at his head in a moment, and a single glance at the gallant brute told me all. He reared up, struggling wildly, a mad terror in his eyes as the savage yells from the rear sounded nearer, and he found the desperate

attempt to get on his feet prove useless. The great wistful eyes turned on me in frantic imploring dread, as if asking dumbly to be saved now, as I had saved him once before, and with the speaking evidence of what had taken place before me; I knew with a sharp throb of pain that only one thing remained for me to do. It meant one ball less for the fierce "dogs" that I could see and hear coming up behind, black shadows shooting along over the snow, the yellow gleam of their eyes showing in the moonlight, the scuttling rush of their feet sounding on the frozen surface like rain as they came along at racing speed; but that was nothing to me. Roanoke had merited a better end than the one threatening him now; and come what might, he should never know those savage brutes at his throat, should not have his life torn from him by those long, sharp, gleaming fangs!

"Good-bye, old friend!" I muttered, and though I could feel the hot tears dropping fast, my hand was steady and true to find the right place and pull. And as the head of the generous brute dropped, and with one convulsive shudder the frantic struggles ceased, I knew that the merciful bullet had gone home and done its work in time. Then I took to my heels and ran, not a moment too soon! It took me all my time, for although the main body was checked by the dead horse, a round dozen or so came on at my heels, with a fierce worrying snarl that sent the blood singing to my head; and I had to give them all the cart-ridges I had left, firing as I ran, to keep them off me until I reached an available tree. A near thing

even then, for the trunk shook beneath the impact of the rushing onset of the brutes as I shinned up it just beyond reach; and when I had got astride the first capable bough and looked down, there they were already below, two or three bounding up against the trunk, and the rest sitting round on their haunches, their bushy tails out on the snow, the long red tongues lolling out between white grinning fangs from their slavering jaws, and the wicked yellow eyes shining up at me with an expression that told pretty plainly how nearly it had been touch and go. Taken all in all, for downright inherent viciousness of expression, a wolf carries off the palm from any beast I know. Ferocity is another thing altogether. As far as ferocity pure and simple goes, a grizzly, a wild boar, or a Cape buffalo, is fairly good to instance by way of sample; and even the most pressing requirement can usually be met by a Bengal tiger. But even Stripes can look amiable on occasion, after dinner, for example; a thing to a wolf absolutely impossible, thanks to the oblique way in which his eyes are set in his head, and, although the fault is not his, still the point is not one in his favour.

According to all precedent, in fact or fiction, the fellow in the trees is as a rule besieged by the wolves until he either drops down inadvertently, is starved out, or frozen to death, one or other of the three; and, upon my word, I began to think that the last would be the case with me, for the night was so intensely cold. Whatever might be the outcome, however, there was one thing I had yet to

do, and that was to avenge Roanoke six times over; and my friends below there little knew, as they sat watching me so intently out of their yellow eyes, of the leaden supper I was getting ready up above for half-a-dozen of them. Before I had made an end of loading, however, it struck me that after all, the grim pleasure I had been promising myself would have to be deferred until later. I might have picked off the half-dozen easily enough as they sat grinning up at me, of course; but the certain result would have been to bring up the rest of the pack hot-foot to hold high carnival over the carcasses of their comrades beneath the tree, and that was the last thing in the world to suit me just then, my intention being to slip down from that tree and make tracks for Union Station as soon as the chance offered.

Fortune favoured me sooner than I had hoped for. The dead horse, with the sight and sound of savage, snarling contest over freshly-torn prey was too close at hand to be resisted; and after five minutes or so, my friends beneath evidently began to think it a pity to stay behind when there was anything good going, one after another rising from his haunches to slink off and take his part in the horrid feast a little distance away. As soon as the last had joined the main body, I slipped down from the friendly pine, and keeping well in the shadow of the trees, with many a backward glance over my shoulder, I lit out over the snow in the direction of Union Station for all I was worth. Thanks to the active outdoor life I had led for the last four years, I was in capital condition,

though the reverse was the case as regarded trim, the clothing rendered necessary by a sleigh drive, with the thermometer standing several degrees below zero, not being precisely adapted for a six-miles' run on foot; but for all that, I think I could have given points that night to any champion runner in the world. One thing I learned during that run for life, namely, how poor a figure a man cuts, brought face to face with the brute forces of savage nature, when he has been done out of all that he has been accustomed to depend upon in the way of arms and horse, and finds himself obliged to trust to nothing but his own strength and speed. Should any one feel inclined to question that conclusion, I would merely advise him to prove it for himself in connection with a pack of starving wolves; and one could safely lay long odds on the outcome. I ran for about three miles on end until I got clear of the woods, and as I ran, my heart was hot within me at the remembrance of Roanoke. The danger was not over, even when the trees had been left behind. In one sense, that very fact increased it, supposing that the wolves should have got through their horrid meal sooner than I had counted on; since in that case they would follow up my trail to a dead certainty, these brutes being able to hunt as well by scent as by sight, and with over a couple of miles of open ground yet to be covered, delay would have been madness. More than once I thought I could hear, wailing away back in the distance, the dismal echo of that horrible cry, and could see in fancy the long straggling line break from the forest and come

on at racing speed over the silent plain of snow. Even when the lights of the log-house were close at hand, the horror of the scene I had left behind was with me still; and when I reached the door at last, my knock and shout must have rung so strangely imperative that Neil, who had been smoking and reading over the great log fire, listening for the beat of the hoof-strokes on the frozen snow, came hastily out, the startled expression in his eyes of one suddenly roused from sleep.

"Must have been fairly over," he said with conviction. "I never heard the sleigh." Then, as his keen dark eyes shot a glance at me, "Why, old fellow, what on earth's gone wrong? Where's the horse?"

"Wolves' meat by this time," I answered hoarsely. The sight of the familiar surroundings of civilized life, the roaring fire on the hearth, the books and papers lying about, only brought home to me more forcibly the terrible contrast of that scene of devilry enacted in the forest only a few miles away. Then, in one or two brief sentences, I told him all.

"Came down all in a heap on the snow, and the cannon-bone cracked as if under a thirty-pound hammer. Good Heaven! shall I ever forget the terror in the poor brute's eyes as he heard them coming down on the sleigh, or the look he gave me before I took his life. Better that than the other, though. But *her* pet, her favourite, and to lose him like that . . . What a wretched idiot I am!" I broke down there, with a choking gasp, and dropped my head on the table. Coward! Aye, very probably, to those who have never realized for themselves such

incidents as those I have tried to describe. I never knew till then, when the tension was taken off, how much in one way and another I had come through that night, with a six-mile run for life to crown it.

Neil didn't say much; he had more sense. It was pretty much the same with both of us as on our first meeting on Canadian soil. He forced me into a chair and went off for a minute or so. Presently he was at my side again, speaking quietly.

"Here, take a pull of that, old chap. Shut up now—down with it, d'you hear? No, you don't stir—it's my turn now. Get that coat off; there, that's better . . . Now, then. What on earth was amiss with Ro—, with the horse, to make him come to grief like that?"

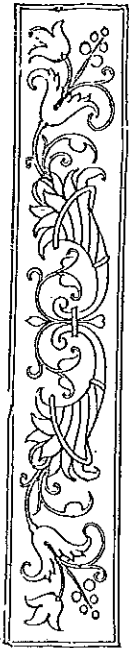
I sat up with a long-drawn breath.

"Amiss with him? Nothing. He was right enough when I got to Berry Flat."

"Queer," he said, pacing up and down the room with his hands behind his back. "You noticed nothing amiss with him when you brought him out?"

"Nothing! Only that he felt the cold a bit. Garçon noticed that too, remarked to me on it. That's all I saw, and that's all I know. Except that he's gone, and we're the poorer by his loss. Not his market value."

"Might have been a worse loss than that," muttered Neil huskily. "He held out his hand, his eyes shining, his voice trembling slightly. 'Thank God you're safe, old fellow!'" And neither of us said another word.



CHAPTER XX

IN SIGHT OF THE END

"FRANK," Neil said one evening after a long silence. "I'm going to chuck it."

Spring had come round once more, and the frosts were going. The sun's beams were shining with increasing power with every day that went by, and Nature was beginning once again to dress the woods in a summer livery of the softest, most tender green on which the eye could rest. Work was in full swing, and the farm coming on as it had never come on before—crops promising, stock thriving. And Louise and I were to be married in the late autumn! Altogether, the future wore about as rosy a glow to-night, taking one thing with another, as it ever could to the eyes of four-and-twenty; and that is saying a good deal.

We were together at Union Station this evening, he and I, just as we had been any time three years ago, and the old days seemed to have come back again to-night. The two of us had put in some stiffish work that day, darkness coming on, indeed,

IN SIGHT OF THE END

while we were still at it, forcing us to knock off at last; and I, for my part, fell pretty nearly asleep over the fire after supper. Not so Neil. He had got through as much work as I had that day, and he knocked up sooner, naturally; yet for all that, he seemed singularly restless somehow to-night, pacing up and down the room until his footsteps became part of my dreams, and I missed the regular beat when he halted to light another cigar or to gaze meditatively into the fire. A falling log woke me effectively at last, and I sat up rubbing my eyes. Then this announcement, made with sudden decision, roused me thoroughly and drove sleep far enough away.

"Chuck it! Chuck what? You don't mean the place here?"

He nodded.

"Yes," he answered slowly, letting the smoke trail away in long wreaths as he talked. "I've taken a notion to see what is going on at the other side of the duck-pond this winter, and how it is with all of them in the old country, that's about it. There's Kenneth's son, too," he added suddenly, "the hope of the Colquhouns according to present appearances, and I'd like to have a look at the little chap. Wonder what they're going to call him, by the way; though after all there's little need to speculate on that score. Kenneth's safe not to let the family go wanting a Neil Stuart Colquhoun in it.—The place here can pay its own way now, stand on its own feet, only needs one at the helm, which reminds me——" He halted there and turned to stare steadily into the fire.—"Since I'm shirking in

this way and leaving you to tackle it single-handed, during my absence as a matter of course you'll handle all incomings single-handed too. We can arrange all the rest later, you know. See what I mean?"

"Oh yes, I see," responded I dryly. "I understand. I can see as far through a stone wall as any other fellow, I suppose. You needn't keep on trying to pull wool over my eyes, old man, for it's no go. In other words this arrangement, while purporting to suit your convenience, has been carefully planned to suit mine and to benefit me. Like the plans for that new log-house, I suppose."

"Now, did you ever hear the like?" he asked, halting with his hands in his pockets to apostrophize the opposite wall. "Perhaps there's some other obstinate mule of a Sassenach blundering about somewhere not far off. If so, send him along, some one, for Heaven's sake, and we'll make the pair run in double harness. As for the log-house—can't a man make a wedding-present to his chum—the fellow who's worked in collar and harness with him for five years on end, aye! and stood up to the collar all the time, without backing or jibbing—if he likes? He can, and he's going to, so there's an end of that. Then this other thing—why, you idiot, don't you see that the arrangement, as you call it, is only common fairness? If we owned a factory, you and I, and wanted a man to run it during our absence, there would be no need to offer him any salary, according to your showing. He would do all the work and run the concern for sheer love of us, and keep himself and his family off it

into the bargain, naturally. Isn't the principle the same here in effect and——"

I rose, and crossing the room in a couple of strides, met him as he turned, and laying both hands on his shoulders, pressed him back against the wall. We were pretty much of a height, but the advantage lay with me, and in weight and strength I should almost have made two of him.

"Look here, old fellow, what's at the bottom of this? Fair and square, Neil. Out with it now."

He laughed, shrugging his shoulders as well as he could for my grip on him.

"My dear fellow, of all things in the world that I cannot away with, the inconvenient question is the worst. If you love me, old man, don't ask inconvenient questions."

"Hang inconvenience!" I retorted bluntly. "Is it the truth, Neil?" And I pinned him closer against the wall, staring him hard in the eyes. He gave me back look for look, half laughing still.

"Have I lied to you so habitually as to make that question necessary? Look here, Frank! you've the grip of a gorilla! Is what the truth? Take off your hands, d'you hear?"

"You know my meaning. Is this a genuine wish on your part to chuck the thing up, or only a dodge to take yourself off in order, as you suppose, to benefit me? If that's it——"

"Oh, the wish is genuine enough, if that's what you want to know. The rapture of pursuing is gone with the object thereof, attainment; and I'll have to start in search of another now, that's about it. In other words, the farm has paid its way an I

so solved the problem I wanted solved, namely, whether Canadian farming could be made an undoubted success. I've gone through all the books, and they offer indisputable evidence to assure me it can; so that's settled, and done with. Besides, the place here is getting settled up, and that makes it too civilized for me: I'm growing restless, I'll have to be off. As long as I'm sticking in at a thing, straining every nerve to put it through, I'm all right, you see; but success itself palls on me. Put the restlessness down to the Celtic blood if you like; I honestly believe that's at the bottom of it all. You Southrons are a hundred times more steady going; and the restlessness that keeps me on the move doesn't appear to trouble you. Have I bought a release yet? Thanks."

"Old man," I rejoined with conviction, "there's one thing you stand in need of, and that's a wife. Nothing like marriage in prospect to moor a fellow and take all the restlessness out of him. Take it from me that's the thing you want."

"Probably," he answered lightly, though an odd, half-wistful, half-questioning expression, tinged too with a faint shade of surprise, even wonder, which I could not understand in the least, flitted across his face as he spoke. "But in that case I'm afraid that, as they say at home, I shall have to want it." He turned away abruptly, pacing up and down the room in the shadow, and when he spoke next a strange constraint had come into both manner and tone. "Sorry. I can't take your counsel, old chap; but you see, that sort of thing is past and

done with, as far as I'm concerned. I never saw but one woman whom I would have made my wife," he added with sudden abruptness, "and she——" He broke off and came to a halt there.

"She threw you over—jilted you?" Louise's words were present with me as I asked the question, "jilted me? No!" he flashed out with sudden vehemence. "Don't blame her, even in thought. She was as good and true a woman as the world ever knew, and she never dreamed of me, never gave a thought to me, in *that* light." Then he laughed. "Oh, an everyday story, nothing romantic there. Her choice fell on another fellow, and I came to know it, in time—that's all. She had the right to choose, God bless her," he added earnestly, "and the man to whom she gave her love was a hundred times more worthy of her than I should ever have been. I didn't grudge them their happiness, God knows," he added simply, and yet I saw the sensitive mouth work slightly there, in spite of the smile; "and it wasn't for me to whine and play the cur because a good fellow won for himself. The prize I was blind enough once to hope might be for my winning, you know. Well, the leafs turned down on that, as I said, there's a long gap between then and now; and I'd not have intruded all this on you, old man, bored you with it, if you had not led up to it. But the dumb ass has spoken at last, and said his say."

He meant that to be final, I knew; the subject was evidently one from which his sensitive nature shrank painfully, and I said nothing more. So here lay the key to the reticence, reserve, for which,

in certain respects, you could not have matched him, all through the last five years. Louise's unerring instinct had divined the truth as regarded him, after all.

"And you mean to go off this autumn?" I asked regretfully, harking back to the former subject.

He nodded, "Aye. After you are married. See you through first, you know, stand at your back, as I promised. But before that time," he hesitated there, and seemed half unwilling to go on, "I've one thing to ask of you. That's what I've had present with me all the evening, and the murderer's as good as out now."

"My dear old fellow, you have only to name it, and if the thing's in my power——"

"In your power, eh? Rather. There's no other man in creation has it in his power. Well—I want some shooting this autumn, hunting as they call it over here—and I want you with me. Will you go?"

"Go! Go where?"

"To the Far West, old fellow, the green Far West!" he cried, clapping me enthusiastically on the shoulder. "What! after spending five years on the far side of the herring-pond, d'you think I'd have the face to come on Speyside again without so much as a head of elk or the skin of a grizzly to show for it all? No, sir! 'No, sirree, horse and buggy,' as our friend Walsh would put it, 'you kin bet your sweet life on that!' Where's the fun of wasting powder and ball on coon and bear up here in Parker County, I'd like to know, when there are elk and bison on the plains away yonder,

not to mention grizzly and mountain lion waiting for us in Colorado and Montana."

"And Apaches in Arizona and New Mexico," laughed I parenthetically.

"So come along, Frank. Let the place up here go to rack and ruin if it likes—if it does we'll fetch it back again—but we'll have one good spell of sport together at least, you and I, if it's for the last time! We'll turn the cold shoulder on civilization—get right up to the heart of the mountains, see how the world looks from the very back of things again, with the sun shining on the peaks where no white man has trod; and the earth as God left it once more before you settle down here as a Benedict and I clear out for good."

"What! No, I say, Neil, old fellow! Not that, surely?" And a swift, sudden pang of regret for the years of warm and loyal friendship, of cheery comradeship, of work done shoulder to shoulder, of difficulties and dangers faced in common, of the days that had been so good to live, aye! of chances of life and death gone through together, came to me like a stab of pain.

"Yes," he answered, sobering down somewhat. "Not likely that I shall ever come back, to settle, that is. Time enough to talk of all that, though. It's asking a good deal, I know, must be, from a fellow who's going to be married so soon, but it's for the last time. What d'you say? Will you go?"

"Will I? Won't I, that's all. There's nothing on earth I'd like better, as things are. Louise is going east for some weeks, and in the natural course of things I had looked for nothing else than

to stay on here. I'll go with you with all the pleasure in life."

"Thanks. I knew you would," he answered simply. Then his mood changed completely, his spirits rising to a pitch of wild excitement that would at times break out in him, declaring the Celtic blood of which he came, with all the romantic enthusiasm, the strong intensity of feeling, characteristic alike of race and temperament. He crossed to the fire, kicked the logs into a brighter glow, flung on half a cart-load more, and then, getting down a map of the Dominion and another of the States, threw them on the table, and began with eager excited interest to trace out our route.

"Here's the plan of campaign!" he cried as he bent over them. "West due west to Manitoba, then south-west for Montana, and after that west, south-west, south-east, or anywhere you please bar north; and hurrah for the green Far West!"

All the evening, as if to cover the recollection of his former depression, he kept at the same high pitch; and as we talked the subject over, discussing and making our plans, going over the route in detail and deciding on all the necessary arrangements, his excitement increased to fever-heat. His eyes shone like stars in the firelight, the colour mounted to his face, and as I caught his enthusiasm, we laughed, joked and sang unrestrainedly, until the two dogs asleep on the hearth awoke and sat up to stare at their masters, as if surprised to see them so far forgetful of their dignity.

"Faith!" said Neil at last, throwing himself into a chair. "I'm possessed to-night, I think. At home they would say I must be fey. D'you know the meaning of that?"

"I've a hazy sort of notion," I was beginning. "Isn't it——" when he cut me short with the brief explanation—"Death doomed."

I was silent. The words had fallen with a sudden chill.

"What if it be so?" he went on, throwing himself back in his chair and staring at the fire. "Let it come when it will. It's queer," he added thoughtfully, "the way some men seem to look on life and death. Now, to me, life has always presented itself just as a kind of valuable security, handed over to the safe keeping of every man living, to be guarded and watched over as a sacred duty and a sacred trust; and death as simply the fair and just summons to hand it back to its rightful owner. One wouldn't cling grudgingly to it, or question the right, and yet," he ended wisely, "I take it there never was a man yet who did not cherish the hope in his heart that when his time came he might find himself finishing in no worse style than the rest!" Then he started to his feet, his eyes shining as he cried—"Fill up your glass, old fellow, and to the winds with care and foreboding. I'll give you a toast. Here's to the health and happiness of my friend and his bride; and here's to the success of our trip! Let the glass never know a meaner toast!" and he sent it with a ringing crash to the floor.

So we settled the plan of campaign, and the

next day, when I went over to Berry Flat, I told Louise and her father of the scheme we had in view. Old Garçon laughed a good deal, and snorted somewhat contemptuously over that which he was pleased to term the folly of "*deux garçons*," who could not find danger enough at home but must needs go afield to seek it; but Louise, although she probably found it hard entirely to comprehend my enthusiasm in connection with grizzily and mountain lion, looked somewhat grave, indeed, when that phase of the subject came up, entered willingly into the arrangement. There are some women in the world—and my darling was one of them—who can and do recognize heartily the claims of friendship; and who, moreover, being perfectly content to have a man and not a slave for a lover, do not expect the masculine horizon to be bounded altogether by the incessant vision of themselves. The last day of all the two of us rode over together to Berry Flat.

Spring had fairly set in now, and things were just as they had been in the old, old days—I mean last year. Except that then there had been hopes and fears, and now, in place of these had come a blissful certainty. Old Garçon's welcome to Neil, whom he had not seen for some time, was characteristically demonstrative. With all a Frenchman's vivacity he hurried to meet his favourite, extending his arms to embrace him, and the latter was obliged to submit.

"Aha! *mon brave!*" he cried, "it is you at last. *Ma foi!* it is long since I have set eyes on you. And how is the shoulder, *hein?* You feel nothing

of it now? That is well. And now you come but to say farewell, is it not so? *Parbleu!* next time a bear catches you you escape not so lightly, no!"

Neil laughed. Then he sat down by the old man's side, and talked to him on the subjects he liked best, and Louise and I strolled away down the pasture to spend the last evening we should have together for many a month to come. But I was even more down-hearted and silent than the prospect of the summer's parting warranted, under the circumstances, and she was not long in noticing that, and in getting to the root of the matter—the result being, that when we returned to the stoop where the other two were sitting, Louise led me straight towards them.

"Monsieur Neil," she said, flitting on ahead of me, and appearing suddenly before him as he sat talking to her father, "is it true—I mean, have you quite made up your mind—that you are going to England shortly and do not mean to return to live here?"

He stood up and answered, looking down at her gravely. "Yes, mademoiselle, it is quite true."

"Bah, bah!" put in Garçon, lightly, with a short laugh. "He will come back, *ma petite*, one of these days, you will see, with a wife on his arm, to settle here. There is one over at the other side he goes to bring, that is all. Aha! *mon ami*, is it not so?"

He did not often lose his self-possession, but he lost it then. The colour mounted to his very temples, and I avoided looking at him, regretting

the lightness of the words, for I knew that they must have gone deeply home.

"Forgive us," Louise interposed hastily, seeing his confusion, although of course she knew nothing of its cause. "We ought not to have intruded: it was thoughtless of me to ask that. But indeed we cannot but be sorry, my father and I—is it not so, *mon père*?—that you should leave us, after we have seen so much of one another, and known you so well. New friends are not old ones, you know. Frank," turning to me with an air of proud possession as she stood with her little hands locked on my arm, "you have more influence with him than any one in the world. You ought to say to him that he is to come back."

"I've exhausted my eloquence," answered I sadly, "and it's useless. A wilful man must have his way, I fear. Come, old fellow, be persuaded! Remember Alexander, and let the other worlds go. What's the use of all this 'never ending, still beginning'?"

'If the world be worth thy winning,
Think, oh! think it worth enjoying.'

Bear that in mind and come back to us all, over here, when you've done with them on the other side."

"That is what my father says," went on Louise winningly. "He says so, you say so, we all say so. Surely Canada is large enough for us all."

"Not large enough for me, *mademoiselle*," he rejoined with a laugh. Then he came forward a pace or so to where the two of us, she and I, were

standing together. "Have I your forgiveness?" he asked, looking down at her.

"For what?" Her dark eyes met his own in frank inquiry.

"For robbing you, as I am about to do here," and he laid one hand on my arm. I laughed outright.

"Oh," rejoined Louise comprehendingly, and she too laughed a little. "I see. Oh, I am not selfish, I hope. He was yours first of all, you know; and I do not mind giving him up to you again for a little time, if——"

"If what?"

"If I could only believe that he—that you both, I mean, would come back safely," and there was a little quiver in the tone. The parting was coming very near. We all felt that, and for that reason precisely we began to make light of it, and to talk nonsense.

"Look here," I put in at this point, "it's about time I protested, I take it. Talk about goods and chattels and the liberty of the subject! One would think a fellow represented so much property belonging to the two of you, by the way you talk of his changing hands in this way."

"You belong to me at any rate," responded my betrothed calmly, "and I am not going to give you away to him unless he promises that you shall come back to me. One never can tell how far you men may roam when you get away together; and how am I to know," she added mischievously, "that when he goes to England himself he may not persuade you to go over with him?"

"Because," answered Neil with mock seriousness, "I promise you I won't. Trust me for that. He shall not go the way I go," and there was a gravity in his tone beyond the lightness of the words. "I—I'd blow the steamer up first. Will that satisfy you, mademoiselle?"

"Yes," she laughed, holding out her hand to him. "You have promised, and I know you always keep your word. What terrible nonsense we have been talking, have we not?"

But, laugh as we might, I knew it had not been all nonsense to her. Then, for it was already late, Neil, like the good fellow he was, conveyed Garçon away with him to get the horses; and when they had brought them up, continued to keep the old man talking, standing with their backs to us while Louise and I had those last few precious moments to ourselves in which to say good-bye.

"And you—you will remember—Oh, *mon François*, it is not that I am a coward, but you go to a strange wild land; and you will think of me, and not be rash—for my sake!"

It all seemed like a dream while she clung to me, trying to smile, and I held her in my arms, raining kisses on her forehead and lips, while the shadows of the trees danced and flickered before my eyes, and the figures of the two men and two horses close at hand assumed gigantic proportions, perhaps because I could not see them very clearly just then. Next, Garçon was wringing my hand, his hearty voice sounding in my ears as he wished us "*bon voyage*" and good luck with it; and

Louise was smiling through her unshed tears, while above in the tree-top a bird was singing shrilly, and to my ears the notes took the form of words of an old song—

"Sweet is it, sweet, for lovers to meet;
Keen is the smart, for lovers to part."

A dream until I found myself in the saddle, starting backwards at a white waving figure beyond the gate, until at the turn in the lane I lost it, and woke to find myself riding swiftly down the well-known track, the trees of the swamp gliding past on either hand, with Neil's chestnut, as he rode at my right, taking stride for stride with my grey, the successor to poor Roanoke, and Berry Flat lying behind us, as we left it, he and I, one of us never to look on it more.

I remember what we talked about, as we rode home, arguing the matter as if our lives depended thereon—the rival merits of hollow and solid bullets in shooting dangerous game.





Neil—he had been standing beside me while talking, one foot on an uncovered stone in the bed of the creek, his elbow resting on his knee and his chin on his hand, as he stared out across the monotonous stretch of arid desert before us, baked to a tawny yellow by the glaring sun of that hottest of hot states, stood up there with decision and looked to me for approval.

It was about three months later; and we had had about the jolliest time of it during those three months that any two fellows could wish for. We had headed steadily west first, and then struck south-west until reaching Montana. South again through that state, to hunt elk—by which I mean of course wapiti, since most people know that the deer we call elk goes by the name of moose in America—and big-horn, among the spurs of the Rockies. Then we had gone west once more, to thread the lonely cañons and gorges leading to unknown solitudes in the very heart of the mountains; and there Neil got his grizzly, more than one, by the way, though on a certain occasion one nearly got him. And now the hand of fate, closing upon us, had brought us down at last to the sun-dried desert of Arizona.

Certainly it was a queer place at which we had landed; this Mexican village. Perhaps it numbered a hundred inhabitants, all told; and a more superstitious, ignorant, generally debased set it would have been hard to find. Their chief amusement and occupation in life seemed to be cock-fighting; their highest ambition . . . I had yet to discover the existence of any ambition at all. Life with

CHAPTER XXI

' APACHES ARE UP !'

NOW of all the queerest, most deceptive, and, in a word, unsatisfactory holes and corners of this universe, I'm blessed if we've not struck about the worst."

"Why, you unconscionable dog," said I, looking up from the letter I was scribbling on a flat stone beneath the shade of the alder bushes, "isn't this uncivilized enough for you yet?"

"Too much so," he answered with a shrug. "That's to say, if the special article we've been sampling here is the product of uncivilization, which I'm inclined to doubt. I can stand flies well enough, all sorts and any amount of them, from sandflies to skeeters; and that's saying a good deal. But when it comes to putting *e* in place of *i*, and bringing *a* to follow on, why, I do bar the lively and interesting objects thereby named; and since we're not pachyderms, you and I, I vote we clear out of this in short order."

them meant simply a monotonous going forward from day to day, with nothing to break its dead level or to give colour to it but the interest to be drawn from the already mentioned pursuit, the most exciting outside incident being an occasional hunt after a mountain lion. Yet there was one thing that could rouse from their wonted apathy even these dwellers in heat and dust; could send the blood leaping at fever-heat through veins in which it had lately seemed to stagnate, and sting the impassive villagers into prompt action by the force of the lash of fear. The mere whisper "Apaches on the war-path!" would send them hurrying, with all for which they cared, to the nearest mining or construction camp of white men for defence against the terrible savages, all the more terrible because that to the cunning of the redskin they had learned to ally the death-dealing weapons of the white.

Into this community of yellow-skinned, lank-haired, fierce-visaged men, gaudily dressed, slovenly women, and staring, elfish, black-eyed children, my chum and I had ridden three or four days ago, with no other object than to allow our horses a few days of well-earned rest. Our spoil, in the shape of skins and heads, had been sent on by freight wagon to Denver, there to await our return. The villagers had showed themselves to be civil, friendly even, according to their lights; and barring the drawbacks Neil had distantly alluded to, with others of a kindred nature, there had been nothing to find fault with in the place. Certainly it might with advantage have had a little more

shade about it, but one cannot have everything in this world; and by this time I had grown to be thankful that the bed of the creek had a thread of water still left therein, and that there was wind enough astir to rustle the leaves of the cotton-wood above my head and the alders fringing the creek bed, as I sat in the coolest spot I could find, close to the water's edge, writing a letter to my sweetheart, with the occasional aid of the best French I could muster.

"Sorry to bore you, old man," went on Neil, leaning up against the trunk of the cotton-wood and taking off his hat to let the wind play over his forehead. "But Gunter will be coming out from Tucsonville with the mail before noon; and I was going to suggest that as soon as we've got it we should clear out of here, unless you've any wish to stay. What d'you say?"

"I'm there," I answered without looking up. "Since you ask me, I'd sooner push on for Fort Webster than put in more time here."

"All right," he nodded. "I'll let them know over yonder that we want to settle up, and then interview the Señor Cura with respect to our road, that's to say, if I can draw him away from his cock-fighting. By dint of a certain amount of bullying, seasoned with a little judicious flattery, it may be possible to get a word of truth out of his reverence."

He replaced his hat and went off with a laugh, the few Mexicans he met as he strode up the plaza showing decrepit and undersized by contrast with his upright, well-knit figure. The sun rose

higher, striking down hotter and hotter through the leafy screen of the cotton-wood, and what little breeze there was died away completely, leaving all nature parched and gasping beneath the heat of the fiery glow. I got through my letter, and had just risen from my cramped position on the stones, when I caught sight of my chum coming back. He was striding along as if in haste, and, putting my letter in my pocket, I walked off to meet him.

"Well?" I called, before we came up to each other. "Got it out of him?"

"Aye, though I honestly believe his reverence was lying. Fort Webster *must* be more than twenty miles off, though he swears it's not."

"Perhaps," suggested I with a laugh, "he's following the example of the Irish peasants, who always give their questioners the sort of answers they fancy will please them best."

"Perhaps. Let that go though. I've something else to say to you. Mail's not in, and——"

"Hallo! Has Gunter got back?"

"Aye. Says it's been delayed, and no wonder. Brought a bit of bad news with him, too."

"What's that?" asked I.

"Apaches are up!"

I whistled. "Moonshine, or truth?"

"True enough!" broke out Neil, with one of his rare oaths. "Left their reservations and come down north of Tucsonville. Usual programme, of course. Gunter had it at first hand. There's a man up there just come in, and—— Left his ranch-house yesterday morning, as trim and snug a little place as you'd care to see; wife waving good-

bye from the door, son, a lad of fifteen, left in charge of his mother. Came back at night,—house burnt to the ground,—wife and boy—the less said of how he found them the better. Rode in almost raving mad, Gunter says; swears he'll have the life of a redskin for every hair in the heads of his wife and son; and I'm with him in every word. And that's the Indian whom stay-at-home philanthropists, who know nothing of this sort of thing, would have us bear in mind is a man and a brother! I'm more inclined to put him down as a devil on the loose. Now then, what's to be done, Frank? Shall we stay on here, and give these poor creatures a hand in getting over to Tucsonville, or go on there at once, and help the fellows to hold the place against the reds in case they come down sooner than they're looked for?"

I considered for a moment.

"How many men are there at Tucsonville?"

"Fifty whites, all told, barring the women and children. Mining camp with some gilt on, that place; and they've come in from the construction camp up the river."

"Two won't make much difference there, then, and it may make all in the world here. Better stay on and give them a hand. Where's Gunter?"

"Streaked it back to Tucsonville. Only came in to give warning here, and is off again as hard as his mare can carry him. His wife's yonder. Says he expects they'll try to rush the place before dusk, and if he gets in without having his hair lifted he'll thank his lucky stars for it."

"A bad look-out for the Greasers here, then.

Do the beggars know the reds are up?" I asked, as we ran shoulder to shoulder up the deserted plaza.

"You bet!" answered Neil with emphasis. "The women have gone to the church to pray—that's why there are none about—and the men are cock-fighting! When they are through with the main they'll begin to think of clearing out. Then things will get lively."

"If these Mexicans had any pluck," said I, looking round at the natural defences of the village, "they could hold this place just as well as Tucsonville. Twenty determined fellows, with a good reserve of ammunition, might make a stand here against a couple of hundred."

"Aye," he agreed with a laugh. "Pity it's not possible to effect a transmigration of—well, if not of souls, of spirit—down on the grass yonder! If these fellows had one-third of the grit of their own game-cocks, they wouldn't budge an inch for all the Apaches in the reservation. But where's the good of talking? Come on. If we don't get the horses before these Greasers come up, we've seen the last of them, hair or hoof."

The plaza had been deserted when we hurried up it, but by the time we had got our horses saddled and ridden down again, it was filled with a crowd of frightened, crying children; and on nearing the church door we could hear the women shrieking and praying within, and calling upon every saint in the calendar for protection.

"We must get them out of that," cried Neil impulsively, his dark eyes flashing with excitement

as he threw himself off his mare. "If those fiends come down on us here the church there will be a veritable death-trap—they'll be simply butchered like calves in a pen! Catch hold of that, Frank, and hang on to her all you know how! Those yellow-skins will be up from below in a brace of seconds, and it'll be every man for himself. What's the Spanish for clear out? *Afuera—vamos—adelante!* anything'll do! Out they shall come, if I have to drive them!"

He threw me his bridle and dashed into the church, where, to judge by the shrill clamour that instantly rose, his appearance was evidently hailed as the first advent of the Apaches. To this day I don't know how he managed single-handed to clear the church, but manage it he did, and came out last of all, locking the door behind him, to keep, as he observed, any of them from bolting back.

"Here's your key, Señor Padre," he said, handing it over. "Now to get the flock under way for Tucsonville."

It was no easy task we had set ourselves, from first to last. The outset promised fairly, for the women and children, after Neil had hunted them out of the church, and we had got them all assembled in the plaza, proved manageable enough, and as soon as they were sufficiently reassured to understand our intentions, helped therein rather than hindered. The women collected their most treasured possessions, while the children got some of the live stock together, and in less than fifteen minutes we had them all in hand in readiness to start. Then

up came the men, fresh from the main, each with his bird, living or dead, under his arm, and our troubles began.

Only the married men, among the whole crew, were in any sense to be depended upon, and even they, in point of discipline, were a long sight harder to manage than the women. As for the rest of the fellows, the instant that the imminence of the danger and the pressing need for immediate flight forced itself upon them, they went a long way towards disorganizing our little band altogether. Without the slightest regard for ownership they made for the nearest *burro* or mule, dragged it by main force from the children who had it by the bridle, and lashing the poor brute into a gallop, started at the top of its speed for Tucsonville. The rest of the cowards ransacked the houses for weapons, and failing to find them, turned on the women, wrenching them from those who had secured them for their husbands, and savagely ill-using and striking them when they refused to give them up. The sight made us furious, all the more so because, hampered as we were with our rifles and horses, we were all but helpless to interfere. To have let go of either for an instant would have been simple madness; the cowardly wretches would have been off with them before we could have turned our heads; and the spirited brutes, for their part, only added to our difficulties by plunging and rearing until it was all we could do to hold them. I saw one cowardly thief of a Greaser steal up behind Neil as, his bridle over and his rifle occupying his left arm, he stooped to lift a child out of

the press, and make a dexterous grab at the revolver and cartridges in his belt. I could only shout out a warning, it was impossible to get near; but he felt the hand at his belt in time, and turned like lightning to send his fist straight from the shoulder right into the scoundrel's face, thereby considerably astonishing that young man, and sending him off a promising subject for the exercise of the ingenuity of a dentist. To do the little priest no more than justice, he came out like a man. He was here, there, and everywhere in the throng, his black gown flying, the sacred vessels under one arm and his beloved game-cock beneath the other, exhorting, rebuking, imploring, all in one breath, and it was, I honestly believe, mainly owing to his assistance as regarded the one and to that of the dogs with respect to the other, that we at last succeeded in getting the human and brute contingents under way for Tucsonville.

"Frank," broke out Neil in sheer admiration, when for one brief moment we came within speaking distance of each other, "I'll take back what I said about his reverence the Padre! He's white, every inch of him. Look at him now! No hypocrite, by Jove! as staunch to the sacred as to the secular, and his scalp in danger! Right you are, señor. Get to the front of 'em, and go ahead!"

The little man, the insignia of his sacred profession and the cock still clutched beneath his arms, got astride on his *burro*, his short legs dangling from beneath his cassock, and started in front to show the way; while Neil led his mare

alongside, with as many elfish, lank-haired children crowded on her back as saddle, croup and withers could accommodate, keeping a sharp look-out meanwhile on the edge of the grey horizon. Behind the crowd of terrified, sobbing, weeping, howling, and bleating creatures I brought up the rear, one of the weakest of the women on my saddle, and as many children crowded beside her on Comanche as the good grey's broad back could carry.

Tucsonville—not *the* Tucson, that had not yet come into existence, but a sort of foreshadowing thereof—was fully a dozen miles off; and with so many weak and helpless creatures in our charge, deprived as we had been of the help of the mules and asses, the pace we could make was of the slowest. The thought of that march, and of what must have been the evitable outcome of an Indian attack, sends a thrill through me even now. With but two fighting men available—for the little priest, whatever his spirit, could hardly have made one in that capacity,—the result must have been nothing short of a downright massacre. Every mile covered was so much gained, of course; but with each minute that went by I expected to see a cloud of dust on the edge of the horizon give warning of the approach of the bloodthirsty savages. On and on, over that dreary level stretch of arid desert, until at last the tents and *adobe* buildings of Tucsonville came into view above the flat surface of the plain, barely a mile away. Then Neil, the reflection of a great relief shining in his eyes, stood back from the van of our little troop

and waited until I came abreast of him, holding his chafing mare by the bridle, the last relay of children still crowding her withers and saddle. Our eyes met, and then, in spite of the anxiety still pressing, of the danger we were not yet clear of, I broke out in an irrepressible roar of laughter. Every inch of him, from spurs to crown, was deep in yellow dust, eyebrows, hair and moustache were dyed a cheerful ochre to correspond, and the only part of him unaffected and recognizable was his eyes.

"I've sent the little Padre ahead," said he, echoing the laugh with interest as he took stock of me. "No mistaking his identity, but if the fellows yonder should get into a panic and lose their heads, they might take this show for a bunch of Apaches, and open fire on us before they knew who we were."





CHAPTER XXI

THE WORKING OF FATE

IT was just as well that we had sent the little priest ahead in order to remove doubt as to our own identity, for we found the place, a "mining-camp with some gilt on," as Neil had truly termed it, pretty well in a state of panic. An attack might be expected hourly now, and the band of defenders, as represented by some forty or fifty white men, were still working all they knew, with the desperate dogged energy of those who know their lives are at stake, to strengthen the camp against the expected rush by the Indians. With the first breath of alarm the work had begun; every white in the place, not to mention the few Mexicans there, having toiled since daybreak, under direction of the sheriff, in the task of throwing up earthworks for the purpose of covering the defenders. And it was worth something to see that little band of resolute men, a dogged determination on every hard, weather-beaten face, working shoulder to

shoulder at their self-imposed task, a defenceless crowd of women and children in the space beyond them, while higher and higher rose the breastwork of sand, as the sun dipped lower and lower towards the west. A motley crowd they were, and among them some of all sorts; store-keepers, bar-tenders, prospectors, and miners, to whom the present was every-day work, and assay clerks who had never handled a pick or shovel in their lives. But the common danger had drawn them all together; and one and all they toiled and heaved in the trenches like horses, thinking nothing of rest or refreshment, while the torrid heat beat down on them, the drops standing on sunburnt foreheads, and coursing down bare muscular arms as the ceaseless work went on.

The sheriff, a tall gaunt citizen from the Silver State, who combined in his own person the double offices of sheriff and mayor, welcomed the two of us with cordiality as a couple of additional defenders. But the sentiment could scarcely be said to extend to the contingent of helpless creatures we had brought with us.

"More mouths to feed, and nary a stroke of work to be got out of them," he remarked discontentedly, as he sized them up. "Reckon you couldn't well leave 'em though," he added reflectively. "Right back to the centre thar with 'em, boys; they'll find the rest of their outfits thar a waiting for 'em. Got in safe, eh, is that what you're asking, gents? The yellow skins you mean? Oh no, I reckon not," and the speaker grinned. "Leave a Greaser alone to save his

bacon. Say, you must be considerable dry, you two Britishers. You'll find the bar over yonder, and then you can git to work in the trenches right off. Thar's none too many of us, and if we're to be on time with the red cusses we'll have to rustle."

The evening crept on, the sun sank lower in the sky, and still the band of desperate workers toiled on, until the line of defence had reached its appointed height, running breast high, measuring from within, all round the camp. Then the word was given to cease work, and the men swarmed out of the trenches like flies, to mount the earth-work, and scan with practised far-sighted gaze the vast surrounding stretch of arid, dusty plain. But nothing showed on its yellow surface, and the sun went down, and as dusk closed swiftly in it became evident, from the talk of the eager groups round me, that no attack would be made that night.

"I conclude that's so," observed Walton the sheriff, who, in the course of the rounds he made with tireless vigilance, had happened to pause near the spot to which I had been told off. "I reckon we've got till morning, boys. Every fourth man stand to his post, and the rest of you lie right down whar you air and git some sleep, so 's to be ready for duty at midnight. You keep your eyes skinned, you up thar, you hear me. Dawn's the time they'll try to rush us."

I was not a fourth man, as it happened, and, all things considered, I didn't feel sorry for that. By sundown, breakfast looks a long way off; and, even beneath the scorching sun of Arizona, four or five

hours' heavy and uninterrupted toil with pick and shovel has a strong effect on the appetite. As I scrambled up out of the trench, Neil, who, in company with about a dozen other fellows, had mounted the earthwork to survey the surrounding plain, hailed me from the top.

"Carless."

"Hallo!"

As he called to me by name, I noticed a man, standing somewhat apart from a group close at hand, step back as if to take a clearer look at one or both of us. In that same moment, an odd notion that there was something strangely familiar about him crossed my fancy. But the light was uncertain, and the idea was gone again in another instant.

"Off or on?" went on Neil, every line and limb of him, as he stood bare-headed on the top, sharply silhouetted against the paleness of the evening sky. "Off."

"Good!" he answered, leaping down to where I stood below. "Come on then, old fellow, and let's get something to eat! All very well to talk of sleep, but I'm about on all fours with a wolf just now, and that's a fact."

Two or three of the men standing near laughed at the candid avowal.

"You go right round the corner thar, boys, and you'll happen on our place—the hotel," said one of them, a sturdy, weather-beaten man of sixty or so. "My old woman's thar, and she'll fix you. Come with you myself, I would, but I'm on duty here; orders is orders, and the sheriff's a rustler."

Except for the sentinels on the earthwork, their

figures showing darkly against the opal-tinted sky, there were few of the men to be seen, even within those few minutes. The order had been obeyed without question or hesitation, and three-fourths of the town's stalwart defenders were lying down in the trenches in which they had just been working, under the protection of their comrades on guard, with rifle and revolver at hand, ready at a moment's alarm to spring to their feet. As we walked away together in the direction pointed out, we passed more than one motionless figure bivouacking at the foot of the earthwork. Neil looked down at them with an expression that was strangely earnest.

"They're a rough lot," said he, "some of all sorts among them, black sheep enough too, I'll be bound, but I'm blessed if they don't make one respect them more than any fellows I ever knew. See that chap we passed just now! Down he lies on the bare earth, to sleep till they kick him up at midnight, to stand and pump his Winchester at dawn, most likely, as long as his ammunition holds out, into a horde of yelling Apaches, knowing all the time that if the luck turns against him he's a prospect before him that might knock the courage out of any man. The notion of the slow fire and scalping knife isn't exactly one to commend itself to the imagination in cold blood—yet he sleeps on!"

As we passed along by the trenches, one of the men with whom I had been working, mounting again to his post as sentry, touched my arm.

"Say. See that galoot setting over thar? That's Rube Garfield. Him as had his old woman and boy killed by the — cusses yesterday."

One could almost have guessed as much by the mere look of the man. He sat on the summit of the earthwork, his knees drawn up till his chin rested upon them on his crossed hands, staring, with a horrible stony steadfastness of gaze, across the dry immensity of plain; never shifting the direction of his glance, never moving, except when his fingers went down, as if drawn by an irresistible fascination, to handle with a caressing gesture the rifle that lay by his side, or the six-shooter with which he was belted. We mounted the earthwork and approached to within a few yards of him; Neil, in the frank kindness of his heart, going forward to say a word or two. He glanced up then, and his face, by its mere horror of expression, made the onlooker shudder. Behind the faint momentary flicker of curiosity that recognized us as strangers, there showed nothing but a reckless despair, terrible because coupled with a savage ferocity of purpose, banishing all that was human from the human face, and leaving nothing behind except the mad, brute passion for vengeance. And a few hours had done that! Terrible to think of the possibilities dwelling in human nature! Till then, all untried as I was, I would not have believed that the passion for revenge could have brought a man to such a pass as that.

"That fellow's beyond comfort, Frank," said Neil to me in a low voice, rejoining me after he had stood looking on in silence, finding his words fell on deaf ears.

"Desper't!" inquired our companion, who had overheard the last word. "You bet he is. Nary

redskin as Rube Garfield crosses the trail of is likely to git quarter till he's gone up the flume." The speaker, being a miner by profession, spoke as such, using the metaphor suggested to him by his everyday work.

We had been allowed to stable our horses beneath the shelter of a rough shanty adjoining the hotel, and as we passed it now the well-known sound of our footsteps and voices called forth a welcoming whinny from within. A man's duty to his horse comes before that to himself, and in we went.

"Dark enough here," commented my chum as we stooped our heads and entered the low doorway. "Hallo! — what's that! Hi! stop him, Frank—don't let him slip past you. All right! I've got him. Now then, you young dog, what are you up to here?"

He marched his captive over to the door as he spoke, to look at him. The intruder, an undersized, unwholesome-looking lad of about fourteen, a Mexican, if appearances went for anything, finding himself to be completely in his captor's power, ceased to wriggle and stood sullenly motionless.

"No harm, señor," he protested earnestly. "Done no harm. Not have touched your horse."

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you?" repeated Neil, holding his prize in front of him and looking down at him quizzically. "Strikes me you are just a trifle premature with your answer, my young friend, since I'd not asked the question yet. You give a look round," he added to me, "and see that he's been up to no mischief before I let him go. What brought you here, you young rascal, eh?"

"Nothing, señor," repeated the lad with glib eagerness. "Only heard horses stamp and neigh, and came to look. *Nada mas, caballero.*" (Nothing more, sir.)

"Nothing amiss," said I, seeing at a glance that all was as we had left it, with nothing missing from either saddles or bridles.

"Get out with you, then, and don't let me catch you here again," said Neil, releasing his prisoner and dismissing him with a gentle cuff or two. "Now I wonder what on earth that young beggar could want here," he went on as the lad ran off. "No good, I'll be bound. A nuisance having him sneaking about scaring the horses, but I see no way of keeping him out."

The news of our arrival in Tucsonville had evidently preceded us, for we met with a hospitable reception at the little hotel, the landlady, a weather-beaten but comely dame, insisting on serving us with her own hands, talking volubly the whole of the time, without either waiting for or expecting an answer, an arrangement which, in our then famished condition, suited us capitally. Neil, however, seemed to be unable to get the notion of mischievous designs on the part of the Mexican lad out of his head; and as soon as he had despatched a hurried meal he rose and went off to water the horses, declaring at the same time his intention of spending the rest of the night in the shanty beside them. I was following, but lingered for a few minutes, detained by the voluble talk of my hostess. The awful tragedy that had taken place within the last twenty-four hours was on the

lips of every soul in the place; and whether I liked or not, there was nothing for it but to listen to the whole terrible story, in all its hideous details of incident.

"Yes, young man, and it won't be the last that'll be heard of in these parts, you kin bet your life," wound up the woman briskly. "When they bloodthirsty varmints gits on the war-path, as they call it, 'tain't one murder, nor two neither, as will put the devil to sleep they've got inside them. I reckon you're going back to the trenches now, ain't you? Wal, you'll hev it kinder quiet for a spell, I suspicion. The cusses don't attack at night, the boys calculate, only at dusk or dawn. It's dusk now, and nary one in sight, so I reckon we've got breathing time till morning. Then we'll see which way the luck's going."

"You take it pretty quietly," I said, won to admiration of the cool stoicism shown by this woman in speaking of a danger which would have put the courage of many men to the test.

"Hev to," she answered with a quiet laugh. "It's as folks are used to, you see. Say, I don't know what it 'ud be like to go to sleep nights if I didn't shet my eyes knowing that I mightn't hear first thing next morning as the Apaches were up. I was born and raised in a prairie schooner, you see, and I've lived in Arizony since I was as high as *that*, so I've been sorter used to the pesky varmints all my life. Skeery? Wal, no, I dunno as I'm patick'lar skeery. You out thar air safe to keep 'em out so long's you kin; and ef so be as the luck goes agin us and they rush the camp,

why, we looks to you men ter see as nary a white child or woman gits inter the claws of them red devils living, that's all."

She said it coolly, calmly, as if the terrible alternative shadowed forth by her words were simply the most ordinary of every-day occurrences. Then as she bade me Good-night she stood for a moment staring at me hard, apparently taking stock of my features with a lively interest; after which proceeding, as if impelled to the question by the force of unrestrainable curiosity, she inquired, with some eagerness—

"Say, you ain't brothers, air you?"

I stared in my turn.

"Brothers? Who?"

"You and f'other young feller. The dark one. Him as is gone ter fix the hosses."

The mere notion tickled me. It was the first time I had ever heard any such suggestion as that. In mere build and physique, apart altogether from cut of feature, colouring, and the rest, Colquhoun and I were so utterly dissimilar a pair that I laughed outright as I told her, No.

"I knowed you warn't," she rejoined with a comprehensive nod. "Knowed it as soon as I sot eyes on yer. Hedn't no savey, Susan, when she suspicioned as what that feller stuck to might be true."

This was getting complicated. What on earth was the woman driving at? Her words and manner both pointed to something in the background, but I was completely in the dark as to what that could be.

"What fellow?" I demanded in mystification. "Don't know for the life of me what you mean." She flashed a quick look at me.

"I reckon you don't," she was beginning coolly, when the sound of the opening door sent her head round with a jerk. "Sh!" she broke off sharply. "That's him now. You stay right where you air, and don't let on as you're thar, mind."

As she spoke, my hostess moved quickly away towards the door of the long bar-room, the presence of which, in the semi-darkness, was revealed only by the square of light coming from without. For my part, feeling a good deal mystified as to her meaning, but bearing in mind her parting injunction, I remained at the upper end, leaning against the small window there, and watching with some curiosity all that went on. A customer had just entered the bar, and suspecting that the woman's words had reference to him, although none the less fairly mystified thereby, I stared at the fellow as curiously and closely as the light would let me. And my first glance told me one thing, at least. The man was the same I had noticed before, outside, when that odd, undefined suggestion of a former acquaintance with him had momentarily come to me.

I would have given something to have got a clear sight of his face. But his back was towards me as he stood, resting one arm on the rough unplanned boards that formed the counter, and, try as I might, there was no getting a glimpse of his features. A miner, to all appearance, judging by the dilapidated overalls and get-up generally—and

miners were a class with which circumstances had brought me but little into contact—yet the sense of familiarity remained with me, refusing to be dismissed. On the contrary, it increased with every moment; nay, each time the fellow moved his arm on the counter, or shifted the position of a foot, I felt recognition so close at hand as to call for nothing but the name. Well, it might be so, easily enough, miner or no miner. I had come across too many fellows in one way or another within the last few years to be able to place with any certainty a possible chance acquaintance out of the lot, and a mere study of the lines of a man's back does not invariably reveal his personality. So I awaited my hostess's return in silence, impatiently eager to put a question or two and then to confront the fellow and satisfy myself on the score of his identity; wondering not a little, too, as I stood there, what had suddenly come to check the fluency of the rapid tongue so lately sounding in my ears. For not a single syllable, beyond a necessary question and answer, was exchanged between her customer and herself, as she served him with what he required.

"That's him," she volunteered, returning to my end the moment the door had closed behind the retreating guest, and bringing out the words before I had time to frame a question. "That's the feller as stood to it you were brothers, you and the dark one—Thar, you needn't git riled, thar ain't no sense in that. It's what he said, anyhow. Knew you agin soon as he glimpsed you, he swore. Met you both up north, and you were brothers then."

"What does he mean by his lies?" I broke out hotly. "Wants to make us out impostors, does he? That's his game, is it? He shall pay for his lying when I——"

"Thar, you needn't get riled," repeated the lady soothingly. "I knowed he was lying, bless you, all the time he was gassing 'bout yer both. Came out to the trenches to get a sight of the pair of you, I did, soon's I heard him, and a one-eyed buffalo could ha' seen as the two of you hev'n't come o' the same stock. Let alone that, I'd take the word of any man agin his'n. I would, you bet, ef I didn't know him from Nebuchadnezzar. That's the cuss as shot Long Jack last night. Ain't nary one on 'em told yer that?"

"Great Heaven!" I broke out, as much taken aback by the cool *insouciance* of the speaker as by the intelligence itself. "You mean to say yon fellow is a murderer?"

"Well, that's jus' what we can't tell yet, you see," explained my informant with coolness, and an utter unconsciousness of any contradiction in terms. "The inquest hev'n't been held, not yet. He killed his man, ef that's what you want ter know. You don't catch on," noticing my bewildered expression. "I'll tell you then, so's you kin savey. Two nights back one or two of them prospectors come in from the camps up the river, and yonder feller was along of them. I disremember how it come about; but anyhow they were all in the saloon up thar las' night, drinking and playing poker. My old man, him as sent you here, was thar with the rest, and he says they got to words, and then Long Jack

threw down his chips all to once crying out as tother was playing it low down on him. An' before you could have said 'Kerwhop' this cuss, tother one, you know, out with his derring'er and shot him dead. They'd have sot on him at sun up, for the inquest I mean, and things would hev been all fixed by now; but when the news came in about Rube Garfield's wife and boy, they concluded to git on wi' the digging and let the inquest stand over. So that's why that feller is loafing around for now, and——"

"And you mean to say," interrupted I, "that he, as good as a convicted murderer, is hanging about on the loose like that, waiting to stand his trial for his life?"

"Ain't that just what I've been telling you?" demanded my fair informant impatiently. "Say, you ain't deaf, air you? What's that you say? Might streak it out er here, is that what you meant, young feller? Sakes alive! and whar could he git to, I'd like ter know, and the Apaches up! Mighty keeful of his scalp, you bet, that sort o' varmint; ain't got backbone enough to skin out and risk it, let alone as thar ain't nary a man in Tucsonville but is kinder keeping one eye on him.—So you ain't brothers, ain't you, you and tother young chap? That's something, that is. I sorter sus-picioned it warn't all on the squar over that poker and so did my old man. Could lie in one way most as well as another, I reckon, and thet'll help the jury some in bringing in their verdict, you bet."

This might be all very well, and perfectly com-

prehensible as far as the speaker herself was concerned, interesting too, as showing for my benefit one or two of the peculiar local customs of Tucsonville. But it was the reverse of clear or satisfactory with respect to myself. As my fair informant would herself have said, I didn't "sense" it, and after a moment or so I bluntly owned as much. Whereupon the lady went on to explain, with a force and expressiveness of language in comparison with which the sample I have given above might have been truly described merely as water unto wine, that, the prevalent opinion throughout the camp attributing Long Jack's murder, not to the merely natural indignation of his assailant at an unfounded charge brought against him (in which case the result would in all probability be a verdict of acquittal!), but to the truth of the accusation and as a means of preventing exposure as a cheat—things would be likely to go hard with the prisoner could that suspicion be proved true.

"If that's so," wound up the woman positively, "if the boys kin get it proved that he first chiselled the poor fellow and then let daylight into him so's to keep his mouth shet, why, the cuss is a treed coon, you bet. Only you see, thar ain't nary a soul to speak to his character, and the only one as could ha' said a word is dead enough."

The only one! Was he? She little knew—little guessed that, unless the possibility existed of his wildly deceiving himself, the stranger now talking to her was as capable of speaking on that point as the murdered man himself could have been.

For like a flash, conviction, recollection had come to me, and I knew the fellow now. Knew him beyond possibility of mistake! Blindest of fools that I had been, most dull of idiots, not to have recognized him at a moment's glance.

"What's he like?" I asked with all the indifference I could muster. "I only saw his back just now." Yet in spite of my secret eagerness for her answer I broke off there to ask hastily—"What on earth is that?" For the silence had been suddenly broken in upon by a frantic, despairing cry, a wail of anguish, coming from the street without.

"Tain't nothin', I reckon," answered my hostess coolly, glancing carelessly out. "Only a Greaser woman a-hollering. They do holler terrible by and again, they Greasers, calling out to the saints, and such.—What's he like? Is that what you said? Big and black, with eyes that show a sight of the white about them, and——"

"Looks as if he had negro blood in him, eh?" I demanded with incautious eagerness.

She flashed a keen glance at me. "Sakes alive! I calculate you know him!"

"I met a fellow something like that once," answered I hastily, regretting the incautious words with all my heart the instant they were spoken. Devoutly too did I long to escape from the keen scrutiny of her woman's eyes. For the suddenness of the discovery had taken me all aback, and in that one moment I was sensible only of the pressing need for acting with caution, with circumspection.

"Met him yourself, you'd oughter say," rejoined

my hostess calmly, after bestowing upon me another searching glance. "I allow you know him. Your face talks ahead of your tongue, young feller, and tother can't catch up nohow."

"And if I did know him," interposed I defiantly, "that is no one's business but my own."

"Maybe not, you take it," responded the woman quietly. "But the boys here won't look at it that way, you bet; and when the inquest comes on you'll be subpoenaed to say what you know about the character of the prisoner, that's all. If you *don't* know him, you've only got to swear it; and if you do, it'll be a mighty convenience to the jury, and put the thing through, considerable for them. You ain't a fool, and you kin see that, I reckon. Sakes alive! who'd hev suspicioned it'd eventuate like this!"

I got away at last and out into the street. So that was what lay ahead of me. I had believed that chapter of my life to be closed and for ever done with, and here were the pages slowly unrolling themselves before my eyes once more. This was the way in which I was to reap my sowing on board the *Leander* five years ago.

It was the relentlessness of the thing, the restless working of fate, the utter inability to act in opposition to it, that staggered me then. I was being carried down with the stream, and must go with it, that was all. The casting die of Staunton's fate was mine to throw, willingly or unwillingly: I was to be compelled to pay off old scores against him, whether I would or not.

I don't think, speaking with modesty, that the

prig or the hypocrite is much in my line; and yet I am bound to state that I did kick at the course to which fate was trying so hard to tie me down—an attempt in which she was succeeding without a chance of my escape. I knew well enough, of course, that as a loyal and law-abiding citizen, I owed a duty to the State; and to some it may seem that, however abhorrent the course, that duty required me to come forward and state what I knew, in order to prevent a cowardly and cold-blooded murderer from being turned loose to work further mischief on society. But to my thinking, the personal element in the case went hard against that obligation. Guilty! Of that, knowing what I did, I had not a shred of doubt, and, that being so, the fate coming so inevitably upon him would be richly merited. Compunction might seem almost out of place; yet I fancy few men, standing as I did then, would relish the prospect of finding themselves forced to pay off an old reckoning in such a fashion as that, of being compelled to kick, aye, and kick unmercifully, a fellow who was down.

Retribution! Aye! Why on earth should the preacher's keep on at that as they do? One would think at times, to judge by the pains they are at to impress the law of retribution on their hearers, that they suppose themselves to have discovered a new truth. As if every soul among their listeners does not know for himself that he is bound to reap what he sows, aye, a hundred times better than they can tell him. My requital was coming to me, close at hand now, every minute bringing it nearer; coming, yet in a way I little dreamed of, even then. Had

I only guessed, only suspected, but I was blind—blind!

Easy to understand the brother fiction now. The guilty scoundrel had seen and recognized us, probably immediately on our arrival in Tucsonville; and knowing that upon the evidence in our power to give might depend his fate, the flimsy invention had been his last desperate throw in order to get beforehand with us, and so endeavour to induce incredulity among the Tucsonville fellows respecting the testimony which, judging us by himself, he took it for granted that we should be eager enough to offer. A proof in itself of his guilt, if further proof were needed.

As I crossed the deserted space outside, lying in semi-darkness now, on my way to the shack where we had put up the horses, I came upon two figures standing together in earnest consultation beneath the shadow of a deserted *adobe* hut. I was on them before they or I knew; and a word or two of their whispered conference, a question and answer, came distinctly to my ears as I approached.

"You have done the thing I told you?"

"Yes, señor, yes. It is done, as you said."

They saw and heard me there, and sprang apart; the shorter of the two, his voice and speech proclaiming him a Mexican, shrinking away into the shadow as I came abreast of them. But the other's face was turned my way, and the gleam of his eyes went straight into mine. It was Staunton, beyond a doubt, and I saw, although neither of us said a word or gave a sign, that he knew me, just as well as I knew him.

I didn't stop, even momentarily, but went straight ahead for the shanty, intent only on finding Neil and acquainting him with this the latest development in the way of events. It was barely a stone's throw from the hotel, and I reached it in about a brace of seconds. And what I found there drove Staunton, the murder, the inquest, a subpoena, and all the rest for the moment clean out of my head.

By this time it was fast getting dark, and the interior of the shanty was almost in shadow. Neil had got a lantern from somewhere, however, and by the faint light shed thereby as it swung from the beams above, I could see fairly well round the place as I came in. He was there, standing beside Deerfoot, his arm on the glossy shoulder, his back to the door, as he watched the mare walk into the last of her feed; but at the sound of my step he turned abruptly, his face showing pale in the dim light. Without a word he took his arm off the mare's shoulder, swung his saddle down from a beam above, dropped it on her back, and stepped round to her other side. I stood in silence, staring hard.

"What's the meaning of this?" I demanded in bewilderment at last.

He had stooped for a girth; but he looked at me now across the mare's back as he stood opposite, a hard glitter in his eyes, his face wearing an expression I had never seen there before.—A look of stern determination, fierce in its very intensity.

"Done my work badly," he said, with a bitter smile. "There's a Mexican girl missing, and she must be in the church out yonder!"



"Now?" was all I asked briefly then, as I carefully examined rifle and revolver.

"Aye!" he answered between his teeth. "If she's anywhere she must be in the church, and I locked the door. Those fiends are safe to take it that fugitives are there, and fire the place, and if they do no more than break it open . . . A helpless creature, and a girl!" He ground his teeth as he jerked the revolver from his belt and looked to the loading.

"Who told you she was missing?" asked I.

"The mother. I'd gone to get water for the horses, and was crossing the street there, when a Mexican woman rushed up and fell on her knees at my feet, shrieking and praying for the life of her child. I was thunderstruck, until I got at her meaning . . . And I, who thought my work done, and done, Heaven forgive me, as well as a man might! Yet I could have sworn I had got them all out! Come on, old lass!"

By this time, as I have done my best to explain, the hastily thrown-up entrenchments extended right round the mining camp, with the exception of a single space, twelve feet across or so, which, having been left untouched in order to serve as a means of entrance and exit, was now being barricaded for the night with everything at hand that could be pressed into the service. A huge wagon had been drawn across the opening, the wheels sunk half-way to the axles; and every remaining interstice, beneath or beyond, had been blocked by means of sand-bags, beams, and even boulders rolled up from the broken ground near the neigh-

HERE was no need for me to ask another question, after hearing that. Years of intimate friendship, of constant comradeship, had not been thrown away, and knowing him as I did, I could read his purpose now just as well as if his soul had lain open to my eyes. I, too, said nothing, asked nothing further, but stepping across to Comanche, swung down my own saddle in my turn and laid it on his back. The clank of the stirrup irons came to Neil's ears, and his head showed from beneath his saddle-flap in a moment. He looked at me sharply, his black eyebrows knitted, a suddenly softened expression crossing the set sternness of his face, and I saw his lips part as if in act to speak. But the change was merely momentary and died away in an instant, his mouth tightening as before into the same set lines of dogged determination. Then he went on girthing her up in silence, and not another word passed between us until that was done by both and the horses ready to leave the stable.

bouring water-hole. A dozen men, wiry, hard-bitten, determined-looking young fellows, were at work there now, putting the last touches in the shape of stopping up all holes and crevices; and the sheriff, passing to make his rounds, had halted to superintend and to give a direction or two. The sound of the hoofs as we left the shanty and approached, leading our horses, caught his attention, and he spun round briskly, staring hard.

"Whar you two Britishers off to?" he demanded sharply.

Neil, holding the chafing chestnut by the bridle, stepped forward and answered with cool decision—"I'm told there's one of the Mexican girls missing. If that's so, she must be in the church at San Diego yonder, and I've locked her in. I'm going to fetch her back."

The sheriff looked the speaker up and down for a moment or so in silence, measuring him with his eyes. Probably he saw that in point of determination he had met with more than his match.

"Oh, you air, air you?" he vouchsafed at last. "Wal, you ain't under my orders, so just dew as you like. It's none of my funeral. Got an almighty yearning after gitting your hair lifted, that's all."

Neil gave him no answer. He looked past the muscular Westerner to the men beyond, who had halted in their work to listen, fronting them squarely as he stood at the mare's shoulder, the clear crisp ring of his voice sending each word sharply home.

"Look here, you fellows! I've bungled my work

here, and I'm going to set it right if I can by the only means in my power. I can't say fairer than that. I ask no man who's done his duty already to risk himself now simply because I've been fool enough to make a hash of mine, re-member. But the more that go the better chance of saving her! I don't want the shrieks of a tortured girl ringing in my ears throughout eternity! Which of you fellows will go with us?"

A moment's interval, no more. Then Gunter stood out from the group by the wagon, and the rest to a man followed at his heels.

"She's got to be brought in," declared the former sententiously. "We're on, boys."

But here the sheriff, whom amazement and indignation together had for the moment rendered speechless, put in his word.

"Asking your pardon, gents," he observed sarcastically, "you ain't nothing of the kind. Why—yer," breaking out with sudden anger, "we've got more'n a hundred white women and children here, ain't we, and we want all the men we've got to hold the place if the reds rush us. Nary one of you quits this with my leave, you hear me; and the fust one as tries it 'll wake snakes, you bet. You, Jim Gunter, and the rest of you fellers, I deputize you. Stay whar you air."

A sullen mutinous growl came from the group of men.

"Ain't you got enough to look arter with your own womenfolk?" went on their leader sarcastically. "Hevn't hed no lesson, I reckon, not along o' Rube

Garfield's wife and boy. Thar ain't men enough," following up the advantage given him, as revealed by an angry quiver shooting through the group of his hearers, at a touch that had gone keenly home, "to go outer here cavorting arter Greasers. These two Britishers ain't under my orders, but the gate's shet for the night, thet's all, and nary man opens it agen, by thunder!" He turned to Colquhoun. "Must hev a mighty hankering arter hearing your ribs crackling to the music of a slow fire, since you're so desperit anxious to put yourself in the way of it. 'Tain't your blame the gal stayed behind. Oughter hev hollered out, and not hung back to let white men stand the chance of a roasting to fetch her."

For sole answer Neil set his foot in the stirrup and swung himself into his saddle. Gunter, standing in advance of his mates, swore with considerable fervour and fluency, and looked from the sheriff to the two of us.

"It's a blamed mean thing!" said he. "You two hev stood by us like squar men to-day, and ef I don't stand by you now my name ain't Jim Gunter!—Say, Buck Walton, one man ain't much more nor less, I reckon; and I'm going to see the Britishers through, you bet. Hold on till I get my hoss, you two. She's right over thar."

But just as the speaker turned to cross to the lines of haltered horses, a wild piteous shriek rang out on the still evening air; and a dark figure, springing from the open doorway of a shanty close at hand, rushed up to him and caught him by the arm. The light, striking just there, showed the

form and features of a young and exceedingly pretty woman. Pretty, as far as outline went, but now the face was blanched and strained, while the eyes were dilated by the shadow of a terrible fear; and I thought of Louise with a quick catching of the breath, as I looked on and listened.

"Jim!" she cried wildly, clinging to Gunter in a very agony of terror. "Oh, Jim, you ain't a-going to leave me here! I can't be left, I can't! Think how Rube Garfield found his wife last night when he got back! It'll be that with me, if you go and leave me. Oh, don't let it be like that for me." Her voice broke down with a gasp of agony there.

"It'll never be like that for you, Annie," answered Gunter, a stern ring in his voice that conveyed its own meaning. "And you'll be all right here, till I git back. It'll not be long gone; not more'n an hour or so, I reckon. One of them Greaser girls has been left at the village over thar, and that's who we're going to bring in. You wouldn't grudge her her life, would yer, dear?"

"Greaser! What's the Greasers to me?" cried the girl wildly, under the stress of the terrible overmastering selfishness that with some natures is the inevitable outcome of mortal fear. "You hev'n't married her, and you married me! Only two months back that was, and you swore you'd take care of me long's you lived! Is it taking care of me to go off and leave me for the Injuns to burn and torture to death like that other woman? Don't go, Jim, don't! I shall die if

you do!" And she clung to him with all the blind desperate passion of love and fear combined.

"Now I'm blamed if I see my way through here," avowed the young Westerner with an oath, and the drops stood on his sunburned forehead as he looked down at the pleading face of his young wife, and strove gently to loosen the clinging arms.

A touch of the spurs sent Neil's mare forward to where the sheriff was standing, and the rider bent down from the saddle.

"Sheriff," he said in a low tone, "you were right and I was wrong. Keep 'em all back to guard their women. I'll bail my own boat here. For the gate, we'll not trouble you to open it. Stand back, you fellows there!"

He was backing Deerfoot all the time he spoke, the spirited mare yielding an unwilling obedience to her rider's handling, the whites of her eyes showing viciously as she retreated yard by yard, churning the stones and sand beneath her hoofs. Back, further and further, until she was in line with Comanche, and her rider's eyes flashed into mine.

"*Place aux dames!*" he said almost jestingly. "Now, old lass, show the way!"

One moment the pawing, chafing mare had been reined backward, reluctant, yet yielding; the next, came the hurrying thunder of her hoofs on the hard ground and the quick sobbing snort of her breath as she tore past straight for the breast-high line of defence. The leap was a wide one to take flying, with the trenches both in front

and rear, but the mettled mare had done as much before in her time, and she would not funk it now. He sent her straight at it, and she rose to the leap as lightly as a bird. For a moment the pair remained as if poised in mid air, and then the crown of the rider's hat as he sat well back in the saddle showed above the waving plume of the mare's tail, flourished in a parting salute, while she half leapt, half slid, cleverly down the further side. Horse and man, Comanche and I were a far heavier pair, but the mare had given the grey a lead; where she went he would go after with all the blind unswerving devotion of his honest heart, and with a quick, frantic, eager snort, he followed in her wake. A wild cheer came ringing after us, and the echoes of it lingered with me as the grey, laying back his ears, tore on at the gallop to overtake his stable companion, and coming abreast of her, settled down into his usual long raking stride.

For miles we rode neck by neck over the stretch of plain, the thud of our horses' hoofs sounding muffled and dull on the soft shifting sand, accompanied only by the clank and jingle of stirrup and bridle. Neither of us said a word, and for many a mile all that I saw of my friend's face was the clear-cut profile against the darkness, as he kept his gaze fixed rigidly ahead, between the ears of his mare. Knowing him as I did, I could only too easily estimate the bitterness brought by that which he reckoned a stain on his honour to the intense pride of a nature like his—and knew too the utter impossibility of allaying that bitter-

ness by any spoken words. Forward still, and the darkness gathered and fell, until the blackness of night came down on us, bringing with it at least some measure of reprieve; and the snapping barks of the *coyotes*, wailing out of the distance far ahead, gave assurance that there all was as yet undisturbed. Then Neil turned the mare suddenly towards Comanche, and I caught the shining of his eyes in the darkness as he leaned over from his saddle and his knee struck against mine.

"Old fellow," he said—and there was a quiver in his voice, while the slight but nervous fingers that grasped my own had a quiver too in them, vibrating through all their firmness—"you've stood by me like a true friend to-day, and I'm dumb—I've no words to thank you! Many a man in your place might have held himself justified in standing back, considering all. You haven't— Give us a grip of your hand, Frank."

Then he settled down in his saddle again, and we held the pace on for the Mexican village. I scarcely think I could have found the road in the darkness of night; but Neil's instinct in that respect was akin to that of a dog or horse, and he hit it off without halt or question, as he galloped there beside me. So on across the plain, until the dark buildings of San Diego loomed up against the paler night sky; and on passing one of the outlying *adobe* huts the mare snorted and sprang aside from a white object by the wayside. It was a goat that had been left behind; and its presence, as it ran off with a sudden cry, proved that we must be close to the deserted village.



CHAPTER XXIII

GUNTER BRINGS THE MAIL

DESERTED indeed the village looked as we rode up the narrow straggling street between the *adobe* huts towards the *plaza*. There was no moon as yet, and the hill rising behind San Diego, its craggy rocks literally overhanging it, cast a deep far-reaching shadow at its base; but a faint after-glow still came from the west, and surrounding objects showed with a certain distinctness. Before us rose the dark mass of the little church, its roof silhouetted like black marble against the star-spangled sky, in the solemnity of silence, its heavy door shut close, just as we had left it, how many hours ago? The faint breath of the night-breeze rustled the leaves of the stunted trees in the *plaza* close at hand, but no other sound broke the oppressive stillness. The place was like a city of the dead. Suddenly, from out of the darkness, to the right came a snapping, snarling cry, and our horses started and quivered as two or three dark objects scampered away almost from beneath their hoofs.

"Coyotes," muttered Neil, drawing bridle. "Taken possession already. So much the better; proves the place is undisturbed by worse visitors. Now for the church."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed, as I pulled up in my turn. "We've brought no horse for her!"

"No horse," he repeated with a laugh. "Why, how old d'you take her for, then? A little creature, nine or ten, no more. They spoke of her as a woman over yonder, but that's her age, according to the mother. We can take her in front of one of us; our pair are good for more than that, you bet. No good bringing the horses nearer the church to scare her. You stay there with them, old man, and I'll go and fetch her."

He swung himself down as he spoke, threw the bridle to me, and strode off across the *plaza* to the church, I remaining behind meanwhile with the horses in the centre of the square. How strong a contrast that *plaza* offered now, compared with the time I had seen it last. Then, the ardent rays of the morning sun had poured down upon a tossing, excited, terrified crowd of human beings, a prey to the over-mastering passions of distress and fear: and now, the midnight ocean itself could not have lain more calmly peaceful, beneath the light of a summer moon. I heard the click as the door opened under my chum's hand, I caught the ring of the spurs on the stone steps as he mounted them; and I stood motionless between the horses, my ears on the stretch to catch, above the noise of their breathing and the faint jingle of steel, any sound which the night-wind might bring with it

across the plain. Once and again I heard the snapping bark of a *coyote*, now far away, now answered complacently by another close at hand, as if the little brutes, already counting themselves in possession of the deserted village, resented a human intrusion into their domain. A minute, two, five, went by, and still no sign or sound from the church. Aye! that was the opening door again at last; and now in another second I should hear their approaching footsteps—his, rather, for the Mexican girl would be bare-footed, and the steps of her rescuer would drown her own. Queer—only a low whistle out of the darkness.

I whistled in answer, and the signal was repeated. Upon that, fearing something had gone wrong, I took the horses across in its direction. I could see the outline of a man's dark figure against the stone-work; but he made no movement to come forward, and as soon as I had secured the bridles, I joined him on the steps.

"Can't make it out," he said breathlessly—and it would have been difficult to determine whether his tone betrayed more anxiety or relief. "She's not there!"

"Not there!" Until that moment, the idea of any such contingency as this had never entered my head.

"Not a living creature in the church," repeated Neil. "Come and see for yourself." Then I heard him mutter under his breath—"A mistake, possibly a mistake. If it were so—if I could but think it!"

His tone was puzzled, but his eyes shone with an eager light, and the thrill of an unconscious relief

went quivering through his voice. Another moment, and we stood together in the dark and silent church.

The moon had risen, and her light streamed through the windows and fell in sheeted whiteness on the clay floor of the little chapel, the black shadows of the objects within cutting across its brilliancy like the outlines of fantastic figures drawn by a giant's hand. After a moment, for we had no time to lose, at his wish I started to go through the little building in the darkness and make what search I could, he remaining to guard the door, and so prevent the possibility of the girl's giving us the slip, since naturally she could not be supposed to guess either our errand or intentions. But my search proved useless. Assuredly, as far as one could speak positively in the darkness, no living creature besides ourselves, no human being at least, was in the church.

"Don't seem to be any one about," said I, coming to a standstill beside him at last, "but she may be here for all that. Ten to one that if the poor little creature heard the door open she would hide herself as best she could in sheer fright. Precious little light in here, and for all she's to know to the contrary, we might be a brace of Apache braves. There's no saying that she's not fast asleep, either. It won't do to risk lighting the candles on the altar yonder: these lighted windows would show across the plain for miles. Nothing for it but to wait."

He nodded. "Right you are. She must be here, if she's anywhere, that's certain. There's no other way by which she could have got out—I made sure of that when I was bringing them off this morning.

And," he added with sudden determination, "if she's here, I've got to find her! I don't quit a thing till I'm through with it; and I'll not leave the place until daylight proves she's not in the church."

Out to the church door we went again, and waited there in the darkness and stillness, the latter broken only by the sharp snapping bark of the *coyotes*, near or distant, or the ring of an impatient hoof striking the stones. Neil stood on one side, his back against the door-post, his arms crossed on his chest; and I leaned against the other, with the horses hitched to the railings before us, watching and waiting for the dawn. Then my thoughts took flight away northward, and I wondered how all was at Berry Flat, after all these months of absence; what Louise would be doing now, and whether the days went fast or slowly with her, away up yonder, while the breadth of half a continent lay still between us. So the hours passed on, and still we kept that lonely vigil, with not so much as a sound coming from the deserted church behind us, and nothing but the yelping barks of the *coyotes* to stir the dead dull silence of the night.

"Odd how circumstances change a fellow," Neil said at last, breaking in on the stillness suddenly. "Away up north, you remember, I hated to hear a wolf howl; and now, every yelp from the little brutes yonder is music to my ears."

Up north! The words recalled another recollection, banished for the time, and as we stood there waiting for the dawn, I told him all I had learned from our hostess last night, and of my meeting

with Staunton in Tucsonville. Beyond a sudden and involuntary exclamation of surprise, he listened in silence.

"Aye," he said curtly at the end, "you're right. We didn't come down from the north to give a fellow's life away by swearing to what we knew of him once. He's had time enough to repent, and, as far as I'm concerned, he shall have the benefit of the doubt. A pull between justice and mercy, perhaps," he added with a pause, "but we'll let mercy weigh the scale down this time; and the Tucsonville fellows can bail their own boat. Well, old man, all said and done, it strikes me we're having our fair share in the way of adventure, eh? Queer that we should have run across that fellow down here, though, isn't it? Only proves how uncommonly small the world is, after all."

Then we dropped into silence again; until at last, far away to the east, a faint glimmer showed like a ribbon of light on the dark background of sky: the first early flush of the rose-tinted dawn began to creep up from the horizon, and the horses lifted their heads and shook themselves, looking eagerly towards the east. Each could see the face of the other now. I can't speak for myself, but the strain and anxiety of the past twenty-four hours had left their mark on him, and he looked haggard, ghastly in the morning light.

I had some brandy in my flask, and with that, some water from the creek, and a biscuit or two, we made what shift we could for a meal, while waiting until it should be light enough to search the church. The horses fared scarcely better than we

did. There was a little grass beneath the stunted trees in the centre of the square, and we unhitched the bridles and took them across to it, standing by them while they eagerly cropped the straggling blades.

"Pity we've nothing else for them, poor brutes," Neil said after a minute, as Deerfoot, finding the grass cold feeding, lifted her head to look at her master, in evident wonderment at not receiving her accustomed fare. "You've no corn left, old fellow, have you? I'm played out."

"Ditto," answered I. "Cleared out every grain for him last night. Sack's empty, worse luck."

"Empty, is it?" repeated he, stepping forward.

"Looks uncommonly solid, if that's so. Why, what's gone wrong with you, man? The thing's chockful!"

I stared, bewildered. To the best of my memory I had shaken out every grain of corn on giving Comanche his last feed overnight. Yet a faint recollection of having noticed its weight while saddling up was with me, for all that,—and there the sack was, indisputably, full, before my eyes. For the life of me I could say positively neither one way nor the other, and I owned as much. Whereupon my chum indulged in some mildly sarcastic observations at the expense of love-lorn swains in general, and of me in particular, as he got out the sack of corn from one of the *alforjas* or saddle-bags, carried by each of us for convenience sake at the pommel of his saddle, and proceeded therewith to feed the horses.

"Queer things, sacks," he commented. "No

knowing what's in them till you look, and that's a story as old as the days of Joseph. Never trust overmuch to the memory of a fellow in love, that's the moral. He'd declare black was white, if you'd let him, and then swear till all was blue that what he said had been just the contrary. Here you are, my beauties! Steady, lass! not so fast. The motto of all good comrades is 'share and share alike.'

Comanche, a Western-bred horse, used to hard living from foalhood, preferred grass when he could get it, and having been stalfed for the last week or two, barely sniffed at the corn. But the chestnut, used to daintier living, ate it greedily, consuming, since he showed no inclination for it, her comrade's share in addition to her own. It was fast growing light now, and away in the direction of Tucsonville, the red glow of the sunrise had begun to show beyond the stretch of level plain.

"What's that cloud of dust coming along yonder?" cried Neil, suddenly, as he went to replace the empty sack, staring over the back of the grey as he spoke.

We both gazed eagerly in the direction in which he pointed. At first only an advancing spurt of dust showed on the level surface of the plain. But, as it came nearer, it gradually resolved itself into the figure of a man on horseback, coming towards us at top speed. Nearer and nearer they came, until it was easy to see that the rider of the foam-flecked roan was swinging his wide hat round and round his head.

"Great Scott!" cried my chum, his keen sight standing him in good stead. "It's Jim Gunter!"

Gunter it was, and as he came on and he saw he was recognized, he ceased his wild gesticulations and advanced at a more leisurely pace.

"Took it you fellers might conclude I was an Injun," he panted, throwing himself off his labouring mare as he brought her to a standstill, and loosening her girths while he spoke. "Say, you two, it's all a blamed plant! That cuss has fooled you, by thunder! but he's paid for it now."

"What on earth d'you mean?" we cried together.

"You ain't found nary gal in the church, hey you? No, you bet not! She's safe in Tucsonville! He'd her *cached* there all the time, and sent you two out to bring her in, hoping to save his neck that way, see? 'Twas like this," he explained hurriedly. "Black Tom had gone to one of the shacks to git some corn for his hoss, when he heard a child moan like, and found her *cached* thar, right back. Said she'd been took thar overnight and told ef she hollered they'd kill her. Asked who done it, and she told us one of the Greasers, and the man as shot Long Jack. Heard what they'd said too, and knew why they'd done it, and she out with every word. The cuss knew that a word from you could hang him, see?—reckoned he didn't stand a chance for his neck so long's the pair of you are in Tucsonville, and he got this up so's to git you out, concluding the redskins ud look to it you didn't come back. Buck Walton he wanted to hold on till you two come in and hev you sub-

procured as witnesses; but the boys were so mad cause you'd been fooled and played low down on like that they resolutely not to give him an hour. The jury held thar was evidence enough to convict on, let alone that the Greaser the cuss hed got to stand by him, the feller whose beauty one on yer spilled yesterday, turned State's evidence and told all he knew. Passed in his checks, couple of hours back.—So I concluded I'd ride over and tell you, cause you'd never suspicion you'd been fooled that way. Wal, that lets me out, and now you know."

Moved by a mutual impulse, each of us held out a hand. "You're a good fellow, Gunter," said Neil, in a low voice. But a slight huskiness in his tone, and a momentary dimness in the brightness of his eyes told what the true meaning of the intelligence was to him. The work had been well done after all!

"Tain't so, nuther," responded the young Westerner, modestly, returning the offered grip with hearty goodwill. "Thar ain't nuthin in that. You stood by us like white men last night, and I'd be — if I'd go back on yer. Say, though, before they strung up that cuss he swore he'd left you suthin to mind him by yet, the pair of yer, and that's sorter made me uneasy. Ain't played no mischief with your hosses, hey? cut nary shines, and got at 'em, you know? Better look to your saddles, and see as he ain't cut the leathers or lamed the nags nuther. Thar's many a feller hed to pass in his checks along of a sinch giving at the wrong time; and it would be hard to say what a

cuss like that would stick at, when he was desperate like."

Neil looked across at me with significance in his glance.

"Not this journey," he answered. "Strikes me we were just in time to put a stop to that kind of little game last night though. Came in at about the right moment, old fellow, eh?"

"That's all squar, then," rejoined our visitor. "Wal, I guess I'll dust out, now.—Say, here's your mail, gents," he added, turning. "Came in three hours back, so I brought yours out, reckoned you'd want it, mebber. Things is tolerable quiet down to Tucsonville now, but the reds hev'n't gone back to their reservations, not yet; and I wouldn't swar thar warn't a considerable bunch of 'em hanging around up north. You ain't glimpsed none o' their signal fires?"

"Not a sign of them."

"Wal, they won't stand much more chance to signal, you bet," observed Gunter, as he leaned against his mare, mopping vigorously at his sunburned forehead. "We're about sick this time, had enough, I calculate, and suthin's got to be done. Thar ain't a man in Arizona who's not ready to make one in running the red cusses back or else cleaning 'em out, one or t'other; and I concluded I'd just go over to Fort Webster and see what help they'd send us. That's whar I'm off to now, so I reckon I'll slide. So long, gents."

"Hold on a bit," broke in Neil, who had been looking critically at the still panting mare. "That roan of yours is played out, man. She'll never

take you on to the fort." He turned to me. "I say, old fellow, are you at all keen on going back to Tucsonville?"

"Not a bit," responded I with heartiness. "Strikes me that, to parody the old rhyme, 'Of Tucsonville I've had enough.'"

"Tell you what, then," went on my chum, turning again to Gunter. "We're going on to Fort Webster; that's our way north, and we'll see to that business for you, if you like. That mare would break down with you before she had got half way."

Gunter pushed back his hat, and gazed reflectively at the roan.

"She's to'fable blown," observed he. "I've taken it out of her pretty considerable coming along, I reckon, and I suspicion you're about right. Wal, you'll know what to say to the soldiers, and what we want done, and ef you'll put that through for us I'd take it mighty kind of you. I reckon I'd better git a fresh hoss and then go to 'Iven the boys up at Yuma. You'll come in with the soldiers, mebbe? No? Wal, so long, then."

He shook hands, mounted, and rode off, urging his wearied roan to a gentle trot as he headed her back for Tucsonville; from thence to proceed to lay the first match to a train which resulted fifteen years later in so terrible a reprisal on the part of the white settlers and the military, that the effects thereof remain to this day. Neil, leaning up against his chestnut, watched him out of sight. I had already torn open my packet, and was glancing through it with eager haste.

"Precious good job he didn't go on to the fort," observed my companion, as the crown of Gunter's hat finally disappeared from view. "That mare would have stood a poor chance against Indian ponies if he had been jumped by the redskins. Hallo! old man! Anything gone wrong?"

He looked sharply at me as I stood staring mutely at the paper I was clutching mechanically. But to me, stunned and dazed by the shock of a sudden blow, his words, his voice sounded faint and far away.

"*Frank!* Hold up, old fellow! What's amiss?"

The strong friendly grasp on my arm recalled me to a sense of the present, and I turned and looked him in the face, the set calmness of my tone sounding horribly unreal to my own ears.

"D'you know what's going on away north? That scoundrel Chassepôt and the old witch nigger are in league together, playing into each other's hands, plotting against Gargon, against *her*—"

"What!" cried Neil, staring at me aghast.

"True enough. That's not all: listen here! Remember last winter, and Roanoke? It wasn't by accident we lost the poor brute, Neil, it was part of a fendish trick. That old hag tampered with him, as she believed she had drugged me, in order to play into the hands of her foster-son. And the pair of them are away yonder, where *she* is, making only Heaven knows what devil's plans between them—and I'm down here!"

him. Years ago, you know, Matty was a slave in the States; this man, I find, was her foster-son, and so she cares for him more than for any one in the world. He dares not come near the house, because of my father, but I know Matty sees him constantly; and though I firmly believe she loves me too well to let any harm come near me, yet I shudder whenever I see her, with the thought of all I know. For I have found out an awful thing, *mon François*, such as not one of us even dreamed of! She tried to drug you, *that* night, as she destroyed my poor Roanoke. Before he left his stall that terrible night she contrived something that would make him break down on the way, and oh! if the good God had not prevented it and saved you—you would have fallen a prey to the wolves too. When you come back I will tell you how I found it out; and oh, I hope that will not be so very long now. Do not be too anxious, but I know that you will come now as quickly as you can!" . . .

"Quickly! Yes!" I said with a gasp as I reached the end of the broken sentences. "My God! to think of it. Those two wretches up yonder, she in their power, and I hundreds of miles away down here!" I think I must have faltered and staggered in my blind helplessness and misery. To me it seemed that I was on the verge of madness, weighed down by the knowledge of all those miles of distance, and the crushing sense of my own powerlessness to help.

"Steady!" broke in Neil, though his own voice sounded strangely deep in tone, and his face was paler than its wont as his hand pressed hard on my

CHAPTER XXIV

NEIL COLQUHOUN—HERO

THE letter was not a long one, and very simply worded. But love is quick to read between the lines, and I knew, with a sinking of heart such as none but those who have gone through a similar experience can realize, that no common anxiety must have prompted Louise to write in such a strain.

"It is not that I am selfish in wishing you back, *mon François*, do not think that. But such strange things have come to light since you went away, and oh! I am a sad coward, I fear; for I wish, I wish with all my heart that you were here! Each day as it comes is a terror to me, for the dread of what may happen in it. And I dare not tell my father what I know. He would be so furious that I cannot tell what course he might not take, and I tremble to think that might only hasten their plans. . . . That man, I will not name him, for I know the mere mention of him makes you angry, is here again, and I have found out something about

arm. "Steady, old fellow! don't go that way. There's a God in Heaven still; she has her father, remember; and you're coming! Fort Webster's our nearest road. Brace up now and come on. Here! catch hold."

The sound of his voice broke through and cleared away the mist and confusion from my blinded eyes and reeling brain; and I caught at the rein he threw to me, and swung myself upon Comanche with a sense of thankful relief. How good it was to feel the powerful horse moving beneath me once more, and the blessed wind of Heaven blowing clear and fresh against my forehead. Action—action was what I wanted then—anything to know that I was in motion—on the way at least, however far distant! So we started, he and I, on our last ride together.

On we went across the plain for miles. The red sun showed a glowing disk, then rose aloft in splendour, his long level beams making a glorious carpet of the vast stretch before us. For the aspect of the landscape had altered now, and an expanse of rolling prairie lay ahead and all around. Mile after mile sped by, and still we kept the same even pace; steadily, for it would have been short-sighted policy to throw away our horses' strength and speed too soon, with not a sound but the pounding hoofs on the turf, half sand, half sward, and the occasional jingle of bit or stirrup. But as we rode there, neck and neck, we scanned the horizon closely to right and left; and time and again one or the other would turn in his saddle to throw a backward glance in the rear. For it was

broad daylight now, and the danger which night had laid to rest was stalking up and abroad once more, a demon of cruelty, ranging the plain with a keen, far-sighted glance, mad with the passion for bloodshed and murder. And whenever I looked to the right, the same pair met my eyes. The dash-ing beauty of the high-couraged chestnut, her waving mane, her tireless limbs, her wild eye; and the slight but well-knit figure of her rider, bestriding her with an easy grace, his dark keen eyes scanning the plain as they shone from the clear-cut, resolute face, the face that to look on meant to know he was to be trusted to the death.

"His eager face, in the clear fresh weather,
Shone out that last time by my side."

"Yonder's something hardly calculated to inspire the passer-by with pleasant anticipations," said Neil abruptly, breaking a long silence, as he rode beside me.

He was pointing to an object at the side of the trail, detected by his keen eyes long before we came up to it. A minute later, and I too saw what it was. A simple mound of turf, with neither enclosure nor headstone. Nothing to mark it except a rude cross of wood, and painted roughly upon it the significant words—"Killed by the Apaches!" There are—or were—many such simple memorials in the wild regions drained by the head-waters of the Gila.

Neither of us made any further comment, and another mile or so went by. Not until then did I begin to notice that his chestnut was visibly flagging.

He rode a good four stone lighter than I, and she was—at all events ought to have been—equally fresh with Comanche. Yet her rider seemed to have some difficulty in keeping her alongside the grey. To my eye, she seemed to be going mechanically, hanging heavily on her bit; and though a touch of the spurs or a word would send her forward with all her wonted dash and fire, the flicker was only momentary, and she dropped again into the same inertness—if I might call it so—of pace and bearing.

Neil noticed something odd about her as soon as I did. He pulled up smartly, and, springing down, went to her head. The mare turned round her restless bloodshot eye to look at him as he stood at her shoulder. Her girths slackened, the reins lying loose on her neck, her fore-feet planted wide apart, the breath coming in heavy snorting gasps through her distended nostrils, she stood panting, a strangely wild expression in the reddened ball of her eye. The foam was hanging on her chest and forelegs, dropping in heavy discoloured flakes from her muzzle, and her shapely limbs were bathed in sweat. So had Roanoke looked, and so had Roanoke been, on the night I lost him. The one should have given me a clue to the other: yet, for the moment, the idea of connecting the two never occurred to me.

I dismounted too, and stood with the grey's bridle over my arm, looking in perplexity at the mare. Neil took the bridle and led her forward a pace or two. She moved with evident difficulty, but the sound of his voice seemed to awake the

latent spirit in her, and for an instant a flicker of the old fire came back into her eye, although only to fade again, and to leave her trembling as before. Her rider pressed his hand against the throbbing neck, stooped his head to a level with her muzzle, and her breath steamed up into his face. Then he looked up at me, suddenly, sharply.

"Treachery!" he said between his teeth. "Gunter was right. She's been got at—drugged!"

"What?" I shouted. "Are you mad?"

"Not now," he answered with an oath. "I was mad—a fool—last night, not to see." He ground his teeth. "Don't you see it? That bag of corn, and the Mexican lad— You remember? She'll go the way the other went. My poor mare!"

I had no time to answer. As we stood there together, engrossed only by the mare, and giving no heed to anything beyond, the grey horse I held by the bridle suddenly lifted his head and neighed long and shrilly towards the west.

"Good God! Look yonder!"

The spot where we had halted, in the heedlessness born of inexperience and unsuspecting of danger, was the trough, the hollow between two upward rolling swells of the plain, the summits of which appeared to touch the blue of the glorious morning sky. That of the one, at least; with the other, something came between. Over the brow of the swell, on they came, feathered heads, glittering weapons, wild fantastic forms showing dark against the sky-line, as one after another rose into view from beyond, silently, swiftly, surely, like phantoms appearing from shadow. I was no more of a coward

than my fellows; I could have taken my chance in action with as much pluck as most men, I honestly believe; but that would have been a different experience, ay, widely different from this relentless tracking by a troop of death's messengers, coming down on us so silently and swiftly. Behind the seen lay the unseen, the hideous conjectured; and that held in it prospects and possibilities calculated to appal the stoutest heart.

One glance, and we were in the saddle. The Indians, the moment they saw themselves observed, sent up a wild yell of fendish menace, and urging their ponies to the gallop, came down like a whirlwind in pursuit.

Then began the race for life or death. It must have been the death flicker, for all her old fire and spirit had come back in that single moment to the chestnut mare. As her rider sprang to the saddle she lifted her fine head to send a long shrill neigh of defiance to the Indian ponies; and in the desperate race that followed she galloped neck by neck and stride for stride with Comanche, as the gallant beast charged up the rise at the best pace he knew. A dozen or more of the Apaches, seeing our object, raced their ponies like mad things along the slope of the swell in order to head us off, whooping and yelling as they rode like demons broken loose. But we had too good a start, and our gallant horses, as if knowing that the lives of their riders depended on their exertions, responded nobly to the call. Then, as we topped the ridge and swept along neck by neck towards safety, over the stretch of level ground showing beyond, there came a

sudden shout from Neil, a choking snort, a brief storm of struggling hoofs on the turf, and his mare was down, breathing her gallant life out in short breaking gasps, while a yell of triumph from the painted fends coming on behind made her requiem!

I pulled up in a moment, and sprang to the ground beside him. He had been riding her all he knew, and she had literally dropped under him; but he had come down on his feet with the agility of a cat, and was standing across the prostrate mare. A single glance told she was beyond hope; and he turned, a stern light in his eyes, to survey the crowd of whooping redskins coming down on us at breakneck speed.

"Come on!" I cried, and turned to the grey. "We'll double bank him!"

His glance went swiftly from the panting horse to right and left.

"Better get his wind first. He'll want it! Behind the boulders there! I'll keep these screeching fends off a few seconds, at least." He ran his eye over the troop as he brought the rifle to his shoulder. "Six, eight, twelve—over a couple of dozen! Give an account of a few of 'em anyhow."

He dropped on one knee as he spoke behind the friendly cover, resting his rifle-barrel on the edge of broken stone, and in another moment the *rip rap, rip rap* of his Winchester sent for each shot's deadly precision an Indian pony scouring riderless over the plain, or else kicking helplessly to the ground, in a sput of stones and dust, only to reel over its rider and then lie still for ever. Scarcely a shot but told; and the Apaches, in spite

of their savage courage, hung back and hesitated, fearing to come on, before the white man, the "pale face," kneeling there, with compressed lips and set teeth, before the keen eyes that marked their best, and the terrible accuracy of aim that sent them, horse or man, rolling in the dust of the plain. I was not idle meanwhile. Comanche would have to carry double as far as the fort; and I slacked his girths, turned his head to the fresh life-giving wind, and then, his bridle over my arm, sprang forward to my comrade's side. Then for a minute or two, as we knelt there behind the boulders, the play of our rifles did deadly work in the ranks of the Indians. It was no time to hold our hands. We were two men fighting for our lives—the alternative was a terrible one, and the enemy a foe to show no mercy.

"Cowardly trick to shoot the ponies, poor brutes," commented Neil, cool as ever in the very face of death, "but Comanche has got to have his chance: and the other beggars are backing the best of the nags as fast as we knock off their riders. I remember," he went on, the dreamy tone habitual to him when recalling a recollection contrasting sharply with the energy with which he crammed in some more cartridges—"an old Arab sheik once warning his followers against bay horses as stayers. Don't know how far his words were good for anything—but . . . that bay ahead looks a clipper . . . better get a sight on him . . . there he goes!"

Till now, the Indians, unwilling to come to close quarters, had hung off at some three or four



"We knelt there behind the boulders."

hundred yards distance, keeping up from thence a dropping fire from their muskets,—Comanche starting nervously every moment as the balls whined and whistled harmlessly above his head. But now, as if more than satisfied by the reception they had met with, the few that were left turned their ponies' heads and scoured away across the plain, still keeping up their demoniacal yelling and screaming. Neil fired his last cartridge and opened the breech of his rifle to cool, while I threw up my hat with a cheer.

"Well done, old fellow! Scotland for ever! The beggars have had enough."

He turned his head sharply to the left, towards the point for which the half-dozen remaining Apaches were heading; and I heard him draw his breath through his teeth with a hissing gasp.

"Have they? Look yonder." He rose from where he had been kneeling with the words; and I looked, and knew.

Over the brow of a neighbouring swell, coming on at a sure, steady, slinging gallop—a score—two score—a hundred at least, like phantoms rising from obscurity, followed by more, and more, and more! A single glance was enough for me.

"Come on!" and I sprang to the saddle. "Up behind me! It's our last chance!"

"No good," he answered quietly. His eyes went swiftly from the painted naked savages coming on to the horse beneath me. "He's only good for one. Go on, old man, and God bless you! You wouldn't for yourself, I know, but . . . you've some one else. It's different with me."

I looked at the wild savage horde so close at hand, thought of the awful nameless barbarities in store for a prisoner—of some one, up in Canada, waiting, waiting in vain; and I don't deny that for one single moment my brain turned dizzy and my head swam giddily. But for a moment only.

"For *her* sake!" Neil said curtly. The quirt he had dropped was lying at his feet, and as he spoke he struck the big horse with all his strength across the flank, and the brute bounded forward, madly! But I was master of him yet and of myself too, and I choked down the thought of Louise as if it had been a suggestion from the devil, and turning the grey in his tracks, brought him back to where he stood.

"Not without the pair of us!" I gasped hoarsely. His eyes flashed up at me. "Madness! He *can't*—and win!"

"Together! here or yonder!"

I had twice his strength and weight, and I brought Comanche close, and bending down, gripped him by the shoulder.

"Means two instead of one, man!"

"Better that than t' other thing!" I answered between my teeth. "Get up!"

He saw that my determination was a match for his own, and without another word set his foot on the toe of my boot and swung himself to the crupper behind me. The grey gave a wild plunge and tried a curvet or two at that; but the double weight sobered him, and dropping into his stride again in a moment, he started at a mad gallop to recover the ground that he had lost. I was not

going to keep him at his best, but at present the doing of that meant just life or death, and never had I taken pleasure so much in anything as in feeling the action of the great shoulders beneath me now, as the powerful brute tore up the ascent beyond, at all he was good for. And all the time—in spite of the fierce yells of our pursuers ringing in our ears, in spite of the closeness of the shave, in spite of all—with that strange involuntary persistence in dwelling on the trifling, which has been harped on by hundreds and yet comes with a terrible sense of novelty to the individual experience of every human being—for the life of me I could think of nothing then but a single sentence from Walter Scott, when Dandie Dimmont gives young Bertram a lift behind him, and so enables him to show a clean pair of heels to the fellows in pursuit. "The little spirited nag cantered away with two men of great size and strength, as if they had been children of six years old!" The words would ring in my head, and for a time they brought hope with them.

But Dumble had had to reckon with two-footed pursuers only, not with a pack of mounted demons, hot with the lust for blood and slaughter, and the comparison in our case did not hold good. The Indian ponies were fresh and unwearied, and Comanche had done a fair day's work already and was heavily handicapped now. Do what we would we could not shake them off, and the yells sounded nearer, and nearer, and nearer.

"Overhauling us," Neil said quietly from his post behind me. "Coming up hand over hand!"

My only answer was to urge the grey forward

for all he was worth, and the awful race went on, the generous brute responding nobly to the call on his strength and courage, going well and gamely under his double burden and exerting himself to the utmost. But the contest was too unequal, and could not last. One hour—half an hour's grace to the labouring horse carrying us would have meant safety, salvation for both. But the end had come at last, and that was not to be. He was bearing heavily on his bit as he galloped, the faltering, quivering limbs seemed barely able to carry him another hundred yards, and the gasping, labouring breath came painfully in our ears.

"Break his heart in another minute," muttered Neil under his breath, as if speaking to himself; and I, turning my head for an instant to see how near they were, felt his hand momentarily quit its grasp of my belt, and saw that he was looking to the loading of his revolver. Good need! We had fired our last cartridge as far as the rifles were concerned, and the six-shooters were all we had left. A hundred yards further, and Comanche came well-nigh to his knees; but, staggering forward a pace or two, the game brute recovered himself almost without a halt, and then stood still, utterly blown, running with sweat and trembling, as if knowing he had unhorsed one of his riders and was waiting for him to remount. I never knew at that moment whether the stumbling of the horse had flung Neil from the croup, or whether he had actually anticipated it by leaping down in time. I shall never know now.

He had got to his feet, and he turned round to

face the red devils as they came on at the gallop, charging us at breakneck speed, with wild whoops and yells of fendish exultation, sure of their victims now. The vision of his face is before me as I write. The dark hair blown back from the high pale forehead, the teeth hard set beneath the resolute lips, the glow of a stern determination in the steady light of the eyes. The blood of a long Highland ancestry, running in his veins, was telling in him; and with all the prospect and probability of a hideous death before him, never had he showed himself more dauntlessly cool than now—at bay.

"They want my scalp," said he coolly, "but I'll baulk them this time." He ran his fingers through his thick brown hair with a laugh of defiance. "Dead they may—but they shall never have me living!" And he faced the oncoming rush unflinchingly, revolver in hand.

Mechanically I did the same. Life had come into very small compass for both of us now. Swifter than lightning's flash a myriad thoughts, instinct, each one of them, with a single intensest pang of remembrance, of keen regret, surged through my brain—as I waited there, hard-breathing, fiercely reckless now, intent only on driving the last desperate bargain and selling my life as dearly as I knew how—side by side with him. A single instant, the drawing of a breath, and his voice sounded hoarsely beside me.

"Good for thirteen stone!" and he pointed to Comanche. "Not for three-and-twenty! Go on, will you!"

"No!"

The answer came like the snarl of an angry wolf, ground out through my set teeth. It had not come to such a pass yet, that I should turn tail like a coward cur and leave him there! And then his voice broke on my ear once more, the words coming in an earnest, breathless rush, as he turned his eager face, bright with the glorious light of loyal-hearted, unflinching devotedness, up to mine.

"Old fellow—I brought you into this hole, and I'm going to get you out of it—the only way I know! I swore that to myself as soon as I saw the way this game was going, and don't you let it just be chucked away! Had five good years together, you and I—that's all you've got to remember—and forgive me, will you—for it's hard lines for you. Living, you'd stand by me to the last, I know, but . . . You'll go now!"

And I went. I went because he was no longer there beside me, and because his own act had made it useless to stay.

"Don't let it be chucked away!" I knew the meaning of that last simple appeal now, as, after one moment's horror-stricken gaze at the sight before me, I mounted and rode for life. The wild yells of the Apaches, unsatisfied with one victim and seeing the other escaping from their clutches, rang in my ears like the frantic cries of demons half exultant, half defeated, as the spent horse stretched himself in one last effort, carrying me on to the fort. But I heeded nothing, cared for nothing then. I was reckless, mad! and I rode

that last desperate race under the stress of such blind despairing fury, such terrible heart-agonies, as I trust may never fall to the lot of any who read these words of mine.

Nothing of all that immediately followed was clear to me. A merciful confusion and oblivion came down on my senses, and it was more instinct on his part than guidance on mine that led the grey to carry me with his remaining strength to the fort. To carry me to life, to help and safety, to the light of friendly faces and the warm grasp of kindly hands, while he lay yonder behind me on the level plain, his life given to win mine!

They said at Fort Webster that I was like a madman when I came in, chased by a score of the yelling Apaches up to the very gates; that I rode at the head of the sallying party like one possessed, until we found him, lying just as he had fallen, his face to the oncoming savages, shot through the heart. He was not mutilated: the pursuit of the living had been too frantic to allow time for the desecration of the dead; and we lifted him, laid him on a horse-rug, covered him reverently over, and brought him in to the fort. They told me, the troopers with me, when I came to myself, that in the pursuit of the screeching painted fiends I avenged him a score of times over with my own hand. Probably I did—I have no recollection of it. A man is not himself at such moments, under provocation like that: and the tumult of mad wild passion raging within me then had made me utterly oblivious to all that was merely outward—deaf and blind to what was occurring round me. I re-

member nothing of the interval until I saw him lying there, covered with the stars and stripes of the Union, and found myself left alone with him; and for a long time I sat dry-eyed opposite, staring, staring with a sense of awful unreality at the motionless form beneath the flag, one thought, one remembrance only present with me, a memory that will go with me until death. Not to sadden the rest of life, to fill it with vain and morbid gloom and regret—God forbid! But a man whose life has been won by the deliberate surrender of that of another must of necessity look upon it thenceforth with other eyes, as if he held it by a different tenure from the rest. And, though I did come later to look on the other side, to find that the world still held consolation—happiness—in it, when I got back to Canada, and held my dear love, safe and well, in my arms, yet in that first rush of bitter nameless agony I loathed the life won at such a price, and would rather, aye! infinitely rather, have been in his place than mine. Yet so strong was the sense of unreality living with me, pressing on me then, that in sheer defiance, to give the lie to the other voice that strove to cry into my ears the terrible truth, I drew aside the flag at last and looked beneath. Then the lifeless form, the features, beautiful in the still beauty of death, the closed eyes, out of which the life-light had gone for ever, brought the reality home to me, and I flung myself on him, breaking down in an agony of grief, calling him by name, aye! until the very intensity of my love might by its strong compulsion have seemed powerful to reach him and bring him back from

beyond the gates of death. But he had for ever gone across this world's Great Divide; and no miracle was wrought there for me.

Our first-born bears the name Neil Stuart, and to any of our friends who may express surprise at his doing so in preference to any other, Louise is accustomed to explain, in a few simple words, that the boy has been called so in memory of one to whose generous self-sacrifice she is indebted for her own happiness, and to whom the lad's father owes his life. Memory with me stands little in need of quickening; and yet whenever I hear the call of "Neil! Neil!" in the sweet tones of her whom I love so dearly, there rises up again before me that unfading vision, and I see him once more, the other Neil, as I saw him then, when he left my side and went forward to meet his fate, giving up his own life for my sake, and to win happiness for the woman he had loved.

Aye, loved. He had loved Louise as well as I, and she never knew it, as I never knew it, until I came to look on him lying dead. Then, in searching for the address of his only living relative, his twin brother Kenneth, in order to acquaint the latter with the news of his loss—I came upon something which revealed to me inadvertently the secret of his love—the one love of his life. Only five words, and a date—a date long previous to the time of our betrothal, when the field had been open to us both: but that date was one that I too had good reason to remember, and my perceptions had been quickened now. Then by the light of that

date and those few words I came to understand how, on the eventful morning when we had shot the bears, and he had gone back to Berry Flat with the news, Louise, by her fear for me, and subsequent joyful relief, had unwittingly betrayed herself to his keen perception, and he, seeing that her love had been given to me, that the prize was for my winning and not for his own, had quietly effaced himself and stepped aside, never harbouring a single unworthy or disloyal thought. But Louise knows nothing of that. It was his own life secret, shut up in his own heart, never meant to come either to her knowledge or to mine; and as such I held it sacred, as a man is bound to hold the confidence of his friend—the unconsciously revealed secrets of the dead.

There is my story then, just as we lived it, fifteen, twenty—how many years ago? A sad story, some may count it, at all events a story with a sad ending, and take exception to it on that account, perhaps. But to me the term is an impossibility, applied to an ending such as his. For to my thinking all the sadness remains with the living only; not with the dead.

“That cross, Señor Ingles? Ah yes, you are right, it stands there in memory of a fellow country-man of your own. The spot was not far distant on which he came by his death; they buried him here, in the garden of the fort; and the other, the one he saved, erected that cross to his memory. An English custom, perhaps—what know I? But they are mad, these English, after all, mad or

fools, I know not which! And he was like the rest. You ask why I say that? Because it is true: this cross itself might tell you so, by the words it bears. I cannot read them, I—— But I ask your pardon, señor: I had forgotten that you too are English. You wish to know my meaning? Then I can tell you that in a few words; it will not take long.

“There were two, this and the other, you understand. The Indians chased them for miles, hunting them for their blood; they had but one horse between them at the end, and the brute broke down at last—he could not carry two. He could have saved himself, had he chosen, mark you, the one who lies there: he was light in weight, and the horse could have won easily with him. But, see you, there is one woman whom they both have loved, and she, as woman will, had chosen the strong one—the other. And this one, see you, he know that, and he tell the other to save himself, to go on, but he refuse to leave him, and would not. Then, señor, for her sake, and because, as they say, he loved his friend better than himself—when the one there know that the other not leave him while he live—to make him save his own life he tell him again to go on, run forward to meet the Apaches, and they shoot him down. And that, I say it again, was the act of a fool. Young and full of life, with the future all before him, and to throw away his life like that—the life that he could have saved. But they are mad, these Ingleses, always, as I said. They will die for a word, for one another, for a thing that will

do no good to themselves. *Siempre locos, los Ingleses.* Said I not so?"

And the speaker, a low-browed, sallow-faced Mexican, turns with a contemptuous shrug to contemplate the white monument that marks the resting-place of him whose mortal remains lie below; and to gaze uncomprehendingly at the words of the inscription, the spirit of which is as infinitely above his low grovelling conception as the carved characters themselves are unintelligible to his understanding.

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The English rendering is placed above, but the words stand in need of no translation here. The first two are "Greater love," and the last is "friends."

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