

The Rising of the Red Man

John Mackie

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THE RISING OF THE RED MAN
A Romance of the Louis Riel Rebellion

by JOHN MACKIE

Author of "The Heart of the Prairie," "Tales of the Trenches,"
"The Cannibal Island," "Daring Deeds in Far Off Lands,"
"The Prodigal's Brother," "The Man Who Forgot," etc.

TO E.M. DAVY.

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PROLOGUE

The 16th of March, 1885, was a charming day, and Louis David Riel, fanatic and rebellion-maker, was addressing a great general meeting of the half-breeds and Indians near Batoche on the Saskatchewan river in British North America. There were representatives from nearly every tribe; Poundmaker and his Stonies, who were always spoiling for trouble, being particularly well represented. Round the arch malcontent were a score of other harpies almost as wicked if less dangerous than himself. Among them were Gabriel Dumont, Jackson, Maxime, Garnot and Lepine. Riel's emissaries had been at work for months, and as the time was now ripe for a rising he had called them together to decide upon some definite course of action.

The weather was comparatively mild, and the Indians sat around on the snow that before many days was to disappear before the sudden spring thaw. Their red, white, and grey blankets against the dull-hued tepees [Footnote: Wigwams.] and the white wintry landscape, gave colour and relief to the scene. Two o'clock in the afternoon and the sun shone brightly down as he always does in these latitudes. Riel knew exactly how long it would continue to shine, for had not the almanac told him and all the world--with the exception of the ignorant half-breeds and Indians whom he was addressing--that there was to be an eclipse

that day. The arch rebel knew how strongly dramatic effect appealed to his audience, so he was prepared to indulge them to the full in this respect, and turn the matter to account. Being an educated man there was a good deal of method in his madness.

The red-bearded, self-constituted prophet of the _metis_ [Footnote: Half-breeds.] stood on a Red River cart and spun out his pleasant prognostications concerning that happy coming era in which unlimited food, tobacco and fire-water would make merry the hearts of all from the Missouri in the south, to the Kissaskatchewan in the north, if only they would do as he told them. As for Pere Andre and his fulminations against him, what did they want with the Church of Rome!--he, Louis David Riel, was going to start a church of his own! Yes, St. Peter had appeared to him in a vision, and told him that the Popes had been on the wrong tack long enough, and that he--Riel--was to be the new head of all things spiritual and temporal. He promised them a good all-round time when this came about, as it certainly would before long.

He wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and looked anxiously at the sun. What if, after all, the compilers of the almanac, or he himself, had made a mistake, and he had called this his most vital meeting on the wrong day? The bare idea was too terrible. But, no, his keen eyes detected a dark line on the outer edge of the great orb, and he knew that the modern astrologers had not erred. His grand opportunity had come, and he must seize it. He stretched out his hands and dramatically asked--

"But O, my people, tell me, how can I make manifest to you that these things shall be as I say? Shall I beg of the Manitou, the Great Spirit, to give to you a sign that He approves of the words his servant speaketh, and that these things shall come to pass?"

From the great crowd of half-breeds and Indians there went up a hoarse, guttural cry for confirmation.

Yes, if the Manitou would give a sign then no one in the land would doubt, and those who were feeble of heart would take courage.

Riel bowed his head, lifted off his beaver-skin cap, rolled his eyes about, and by his melodramatic movements claimed the attention of all. He, however, found, time to shoot a quick glance at the sun. Those almanac people were wonderfully accurate, but he must hurry up, for in another minute the eclipse would begin. In a loud voice he cried--

"You have asked for a sign, and it shall be given unto you; but woe unto those to whom a sign is given and who shall pay no heed to the same. Their days shall be cut short in the land, and their bodies shall burn for ever in the pit of everlasting fire. The Great Spirit will darken the face of the sun for a token, and a shadow,

that of the finger of the Manitou Himself, shall sweep the land."

The knavish fanatic closed his eyes and raised his face heavenwards. There was a rapturous look on it, and his lips moved. He was calling upon the Almighty to give them the sign which he obligingly indicated. The new head of the church was already distinguishing himself. As for the half-breeds and Indians, they sat around with incredulity and awe alternately showing upon their faces. It was something new in their experiences for the Manitou to interest himself personally in their affairs. A great silence fell upon them; the prophet mumbled inarticulately and proceeded with his hanky-panky.

Then a great murmur and chorus of "Ough! Ough's!" and "me-was-sins!" [Footnote: Meaning good or approval.] arose from the Indians, while many of the half-breeds crossed themselves. Incredulity changed to belief and fear, and the simple ones raised their voices in wondering accents to testify to the potency of the "big medicine" that was being wrought before their eyes. The hand of the Manitou was slowly but surely passing over the face of the sun and darkening it. The shadow of that same hand was already creeping up from the east. The rapt prophet never once opened his eyes, but he knew from the great hoarse roar of voices around him that the almanac had not erred. And then the clamour subsided, as the face of the sun was darkened, and the ominous shadow fell like a chill over them ere passing westward. The Indians shivered in their blankets and were thrilled by this gratuitous and wonderful proof of their new leader's intimacy with the Great Spirit. But what if the Great Spirit should take it into His head to darken the face of the light-giver for ever! It was a most alarming prospect truly. Louis David Riel opened his eyes, glanced at the sun, and said--

"The Manitou is pleased to remove His hand and to give us light again."

Then, as it seemed more quickly than it had been darkened, the blackness was removed from the sun's face, and the shadow passed.

The murmur and the shout that went up from the wondering throng must have been as music in the ears of the arrant fraud. He looked down upon the deluded ones with triumph and a new sense of power.

"The Great Spirit has spoken!" he said with commendable dramatic brevity.

"Big is the Medicine of Riel!" cried the people. "We are ready to do his bidding when the time comes."

"The time has come," said Riel.

Never perhaps in the history of impostors from Mahomet

to the Mahdi had an almanac proved so useful.

CHAPTER I

IN THE GREAT LONE LAND

It was the finest old log house on the banks of the mighty Saskatchewan river, and the kitchen with its old-fashioned furniture and ample space was the best room in it. On the long winter nights when the ice cracked on the river, when the stars twinkled coldly in the blue, and Nature slept under the snows, it was the general meeting-place of the Douglas household.

Henry Douglas, widower and rancher, was perhaps, one of the best-to-do men between Battleford and Prince Albert. The number of his cattle and horses ran into four figures, and no one who knew him begrudged his success. He was an upright, cheery man, who only aired his opinions round his own fireside, and these were always charitable. But to-night he did not speak much; he was gazing thoughtfully into the flames that sprang in gusty jets from the logs, dancing fantastically and making strange noises. At length he lifted his head and looked at that great good-natured French Canadian giant, Jacques St Arnaud, who sat opposite him, and said--

"I tell you, Jacques, I don't like it. There's trouble brewing oh the Saskatchewan, and if the half-breeds get the Indians to rise, there'll be--" he glanced sideways at his daughter, and hesitated--"well, considerable unpleasantness."

"That's so," said Jacques, also looking at the fair girl with the strangely dark eyes. "It is all so queer. You warned the Government two, three months ago, did you not, that there was likely to be trouble, but still they did not heed? Is not that so?"

"I did, but I've heard no more about it. And now the Police are beginning to get uneasy. They're a mighty fine body of men, but if the half-breeds and Indians get on the war-path, they'll swamp the lot, and--"

"Shoo!" interrupted the giant, again looking at the girl, but this time with unmistakable alarm on his face. "Them Injuns ain't going to eat us. You've been a good friend to them and to the metis. So!"

Jacques St. Arnaud had been in the rancher's service since before the latter's child had been born down in Ontario, some eighteen years ago, and followed him into the great North-West to help conquer the wilderness and establish his new home. He had a big heart in a large body, and his great ambition was to be considered a rather terrible and knowing fellow, while, as a matter of fact,

he was the most inoffensive of mortals, and as simple in some ways as a child.

"Bah!" he continued after a pause, "the metis are ungrateful dogs, and the Indians, they are mad also. I would like to take them one by one and wring their necks--so!"

The rancher tried to conceal the concern he felt. His fifty odd years sat lightly upon him, although his hair was grey. His daughter had only been back from Ontario for two years, but in that time she had bulked so largely in his life that he wondered now how he could ever have got along without her. She reminded him of that helpmate and wife who had gone hence a few years after her daughter was born, and whose name was now a sacred memory. He had sent the girl down East to those whom he knew would look after her properly, and there, amid congenial surroundings, she grew and quickened into a new life. But the spell of the vast, broad prairie lands was upon her, and the love for her father was stronger still, so she went, back to both, and there her mind broadened, and her spirit grew in harmony with the lessons that an unconventional life was for ever working out for itself in those great, unfettered spaces where Nature was in the rough and the world was still young. She grew and blossomed into a beautiful womanhood, as blossoms the vigorous wild-flower of the prairies. When she smiled there was the light and the glamour of the morning star in her dark hazel eyes, and when her soul communed with itself, it was as if one gazed into the shadow of the stream. There was a gleam of gold in her hair that was in keeping with the freshness of her nature, and the hue of perfect health was upon her cheeks. Her eighteen years had brought with them all the promise of the May. That she had inherited the adventure-loving spirit of the old pioneers, as well as the keen appreciation of the humorous side of things, was obvious from the amount of entertainment she seemed to find in the company of Old Rory. He was an old-timer of Irish descent, who had been everywhere from the Red River in the east to the Fraser in the west, and from Pah-ogh-kee Lake in the south to the Great Slave Lake in the north. He had been _voyageur_, trapper, cowboy, farm-hand in the Great North-West for years, and nothing came amiss to him. Now he was the hired servant of her father, doing what was required of him, and that well. He was spare and wrinkled as an old Indian, and there was hardly an unscarred inch in his body, having been charged by buffaloes, clawed by bears and otherwise resented by wild animals.

"Rory," said the girl after a pause, and the softness of her voice was something to conjure with, "what do you think? Are the half-breeds and Indians going to interfere with us if they do rise?"

"Thar be good Injuns and bad Injuns," said Rory doggedly, "but more bad nor good. The Injun's a queer animile when he's on the war-path; he's like Pepin Quesnelle's tame

b'ar at Medicine Hat that one day chawed up Pepin, who had been like a father to 'im, 'cos he wouldn't go stares wid a dose of castor-oil he was a-swallerin' for the good of his health. You see, the b'ar an' Pepin used allus to go whacks like."

The girl laughed, but still she was uneasy in her mind. She mechanically watched the tidy half-breed woman and the elderly Scotchwoman who had been her mother's servant in the old Ontario days, as the two silently went on, at the far end of the long room, with the folding and putting away of linen. Her eyes wandered with an unwonted wistfulness over the picturesque brown slabs of pine that constituted the walls, the heavy, rudely-dressed tie-beams of the roof over which were stacked various trim bundles of dried herbs, roots and furs, and from which hung substantial hams of bacon and bear's meat. As she looked over the heads of the little group on the broad benches round the fire, she saw the firelight and lamplight glint cheerfully on the old-fashioned muskets and flintlock pistols that decorated the walls--relics of the old romantic days when the two companies of French and English adventurers traded into Hudson's Bay.

She had an idea. She would ask the sergeant of Mounted Police in charge of the detachment of four men, whose little post was within half-a-mile of the homestead, what he thought of the situation, and he would have to tell her. Sergeant Pasmore was one of those men of few words who somehow seemed to know everything. A man of rare courage she knew him to be, for had he not gained his promotion by capturing the dangerous renegade Indian, Thunder-child, single-handed? She knew that Thunderchild had lately broken prison, and was somewhere in the neighbourhood waiting to have his revenge upon the sergeant. Sergeant Pasmore was a man both feared and respected by all with whom he came in contact. He was the embodiment of the law; he carried it, in fact, on the horn of his saddle in the shape of his Winchester rifle; a man who was supposed to be utterly devoid of sentiment, but who had been known to perform more than one kindly action. Her father liked him, and many a time he had spent a long evening by the rancher's great fireside.

As she thought of these things, she was suddenly startled by three firm knocks at the door. Jacques rose from his seat, and opening it a few inches, looked out into the clear moonlight. He paused a moment, then asked--

"Who are you, and what you want?"

"How!" [Footnote: Form of salutation in common use among the Indians and half-breeds.] responded a strange-voice.

"Aha! Child-of-Light!" exclaimed Jacques.

And into the room strode a splendid specimen of a red man in all the glory of war paint and feathers.

CHAPTER II

TIDINGS OF ILL

"Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadow'd livery of the burnished sun."
Merchant of Venice.

"How! How!" said the rancher, looking up at the tall Indian. "You are welcome to my fireside, Child-of-Light. Sit down."

He rose and gave him his hand. With a simple dignity the fine-looking savage returned his salutation.

"The master is good," he said. "Child-of-Light still remembers how in that bad winter so many years ago, when the cotton-tails and rabbits had died from the disease that takes them in the throat, and the wild animals that live upon them died also because there was nought to eat, and how when disease and famine tapped at the buffalo robe that screens the doorways of the tepees, he who is the brother of the white man and the red man had compassion and filled the hungry mouths."

"Ah, well, that's all right, Child-of-Light," lightly said Douglas, wondering what the chief had come to say. He understood the red man's ways, and knew he would learn all in good time.

But the chief would not eat or drink. He would, however, smoke, and helped himself from the pouch that Douglas offered. He let his blanket fall from his shoulders, and underneath there showed a richly-wrought shirt of true barbaric grandeur. On a groundwork of crimson flannel was wrought a rare and striking mosaic in beads of blue and yellow and red. The sun glowed from his breast, countless showy ermine tails dangled from his shoulders, his arms and his sides like a gorgeous fringe, and numerous tiny bells tinkled all over him as he moved. His features were large and marked, his forehead, high, and his nose aquiline. His Mongolian set eyes were dark and full of intellect, his expression a strange mixture of alertness, conscious power, and dignity. He was a splendid specimen of humanity.

He filled his pipe leisurely, then spoke as if he hardly expected that what he had to say would interest his hearers.

The half-breeds, led by Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, had risen, he said, and large numbers of the Indians had joined them. Before twenty-four hours there would hardly be a farmstead or ranche in Saskatchewan that would not be pillaged and burnt to the ground. He, Child-of-Light,

had managed to keep his band in check, but there were thousands of Indians in the country, Crees, Salteaus, Chippeywans, Blackfoot, Bloods, Piegans, Sarcees, renegade Siouxs, and Crows who would join the rebels. Colonel Irvine, of the North-West Mounted Police at Fort Carlton, had already destroyed all the stores, and, having set fire to the buildings, was retreating on the main body.

Douglas the rancher had "sat quietly while the chief told his alarming news. He hardly dared look at his daughter.

"I have been a fool!" he said bitterly. "I have tried to hide the truth from myself, and now it may be too late. Of course it's not the stock and place I'm thinking about, Dorothy, but it's you--I had no right---"

"Oh, hush, dad!" cried the girl, who seemed the least concerned of any. "I don't believe the rebels will interfere with us. Besides, have we not our friend, Child-of-Light?"

"The daughter of my brother Douglas is as my own child," said the chief simply, "and her life I will put before mine. But Indians on the war-path are as the We'h-ti-koo, [Footnote: Indians of unsound mind who become cannibals.] who are possessed of devils, whose onward rush is as the waters of the mighty Saskatchewan river when it has forced the ice jam."

"And so, Child-of-Light, what would you have us do?" asked Douglas. "Do you think it possible for my daughter and the women to reach the Fort at Battleford?"

But a sharp tapping at the door stopped the answer of the chief.

Rory shot back the bolt and threw open the door. A fur-clad figure entered; the white frost glistened on his buffalo-coat and bear-skin cap as if they were tipped with ermine. He walked without a word into the light and looked around--an admirable man, truly, about six feet in height, broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, and without a spare ounce of flesh--a typical Rider of the Plains, and a soldier, every inch of him. In the thousands upon thousands of square miles in which these dauntless military police have to enforce law and order, the inhabitants know that never yet has the arm of justice not proved long enough to bring an offender to book. On one occasion a policeman disappeared into the wilderness after some one who was wanted. As in three months he neither came back, nor was heard of, he was struck off the strength of the force. But one day, as the men stood on parade in the barrack square, he came back in rags and on foot, more like a starved tramp than a soldier. But with him he brought his prisoner. That was the man, Sergeant Pasmore, who stood before them.

He inclined his head to Dorothy, and nodded to the men around the fire, but when he saw Child-of-Light he extended

his left hand.

The Indian looked straight into the sergeant's eyes.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Ough! Ough! I see; you have met Thunderchild?"

The sergeant nodded.

"Yes," he said, with apparent unconcern, "Thunderchild managed to put a bullet through my arm. You may give me a hand off with my coat, Jacques. Luckily, the wound's not bad enough to prevent my firing a gun."

When they removed his overcoat they found that the sleeve of the tunic had been cut away, and that his arm had been roughly bandaged. The girl was gazing at it in a peculiarly concentrated fashion.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Douglas," he said, hastily turning away from her. "I had forgotten it looked like that, but fortunately the look is the worst part of it. It's only a flesh wound."

The girl had stepped forward to help him, as if resenting the imputation that the sight of blood frightened her, but Jacques had anticipated what was required. She wanted to bring him something to eat and drink, but he thanked her and declined. He had weightier matters on hand.

"Mr. Douglas," he said, quietly, "I've told my men to move over here. You may require their services in the course of the next twenty-four hours. What I apprehended and told you about some time ago has occurred."

"Pasmore," said the rancher, earnestly, "is there any immediate danger? If there is, my daughter and the women had better go into Battleford right now."

"You cannot go now--you must wait till to-morrow morning," was the reply. "It's no use taking your household goods into the Fort--there's no room there. Your best plan is to leave things just as they are, and trust to the rebels being engaged elsewhere. I believe your warriors, Child-of-Light, are in the wood in the deep coulee just above where the two creeks meet?"

"That is right, brother," said the Indian, "but what about Thunderchild, the turncoat?"

And then Pasmore told them how he had gone to Thunderchild's camp that day to arrest the outlaw, and warn his braves against joining the rebels, and how he had been shot through the arm, and only escaped with his life. He had come straight on to warn them. In the meantime he would advise the women to make preparations for an early start on the morrow. Food and clothing would have to be taken, as they might be away for weeks.

Then, while Dorothy Douglas and her two women-servants were already making preparations for a move, a brief council of war was held. Child-of-Light, when asked, advised that the Mounted Police and those present should next day escort the women into Fort Battleford, while he and his braves ran off the rancher's fine herd of horses, so as to prevent its falling into the hands of the enemy.

Pasmore said that this was exactly the right thing to do. He also intimated that there was a party of half-breeds, the Racettes and the St. Croixs, coming by trail at that very moment from Battleford to plunder and pillage; they would probably arrive before many hours. He had, however, taken the precaution of stationing men on the look-out on the neighbouring ridges.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Jacques, springing to his feet. "It is the neck of that St. Croix I will want to wring. It is two, three years ago now he say he will wring mine; but very good care he will take to keep away. Ah, well, we shall see, my friend, we shall see!"

Child-of-Light stole out to his men in the coulee, and Jacques and Rory went to the stables and out-houses to make certain preparations so that they might be able to start at any moment. The windows were boarded up, so that if the half-breeds came no signs of life might be observed in the house. Douglas saw that certain loopholes in the walls commanding the lines of approach, which he himself had made by way of precaution when danger from the Indians had threatened in the old days, were reopened and plugged in case of emergency.

As for the sergeant, he had not slept for three days, and was too utterly tired out to be of any assistance. He had done what he could, and had now to await developments. The fire was good, and he had dropped, at the rancher's request, into a comfortable high-backed chair in a corner, where he fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE STORM BREAKS

Midnight, and the rancher had left the house to assist Rory and Jacques with the sleighs, which had to be packed with certain necessaries such as tea, coffee, sugar, bread and flour, frozen meat, pemmican, culinary articles, snow-shoes, and ammunition.

Dorothy, having made all the preparations she could, had re-entered the kitchen. The first thing that drew her attention was the sleeping figure of the sergeant in the chair. She was filled with self-reproach. Why had she forgotten all about this wounded, tired-out man? Why did she always seem to be holding him at arm's-length when

there was, surely, no earthly reason why she should do so? His manner had always been perfectly courteous to her, and even deferential. He had done her father many acts of kindness, without as much as referring to them, and still, with a spice of perversity, she had always shrunk from appearing to notice him. She shrewdly suspected that his present life was not the sort of one he had been accustomed to, that, in fact, he belonged by birth and upbringing to a state of things very different from hers. He looked wretchedly uncomfortable and, doubtless, as his limbs seemed cramped, they were cold. She would find a rug to throw over him.

She picked up one, and, with a strange shyness that she had never experienced before, placed it carefully over him. If he awoke she would die with terror--now that he was asleep and did not know that she was looking after his comfort, she experienced a strange, undefinable pleasure in so doing. It was quite a new feeling--something that filled her with a vague wonder.

And then he suddenly opened his eyes, and looked at her for a few moments without stirring.

"Thank you," he said simply, and closed his eyes again.

She could have cried with vexation. If he had been profuse in his thanks she would have had an opportunity of cutting him short with some commonplace comment.

"Hadn't you better lie on the couch, Mr. Pasmore?" she said. "You don't look as if you fitted that chair, and it makes you snore so."

She had hardly thought herself capable of such perfidy, but she did not want him to think that she could be altogether blind to his faults. He sat bolt upright in an instant, and stammered out an apology.

But she cut it short. She resented the idea that he should imagine she took sufficient interest in him to be put out by a trifle.

At that very moment there rang out a rifle shot from the ridge just above the wood hard by. It was followed by another at a greater distance.

"There!" said the girl, with a finger pressed against her lower lip, and a look as if of relief on her face. "Now you will have some work to do. They have come sooner than you expected."

He scanned her face for a moment as if to note how this quick call to grim tragedy affected her. A man of courage himself, he instantly read there possibilities of a very high order and exceptional nerve. There was nothing neurotic about her. Whatever the wayward imaginings of her heart might be, she was a fresh, wholesome and healthy daughter of the prairie, one whose nerves were in accord

with her mind and body, one for whom there were no physical or imaginary bogeys.

"It won't frighten you, will it, if we have to turn this kitchen into a sort of shooting gallery?" he asked.

She smiled at the very familiarity with which he handled his subject.

"It will be unpleasant," she replied simply, "but you know I'm accustomed to rifles."

"You don't seem to realise what a rising means amongst savages," he continued. "You must never lose your head, whatever happens, and you must never trust any one outside your own family circle. You must never let yourself fall into their hands; you understand me?"

"I understand," she said, facing him unflinchingly, "and I have my rifle in case of emergencies."

"You are stronger than I thought," he said thankfully, looking at her for the first time with unmistakable admiration.

The rancher entered the room. He had always been noted for his coolness in time of danger. He looked quickly at his daughter, and was wonderfully relieved to see her take the situation so quietly. He kissed her, and said--

"Now, my dear, you'd better get into the other room till this affair is over. There's no need to be alarmed."

How he wished he could have believed what he said!

"I'm not frightened, dad, a little bit, and I'm going to stay right with" you and load the guns."

"Lower the lamp," cried Pasmore, suddenly.

In another minute each man was glancing along the barrel of his rifle out into the clear moonlight. They faced the entrance to the valley up which came the enemy. It was a dimly-defined half-circle, with a deep-blue, star-studded background. A fringe of trees ran up it, bordering the frozen creek alongside the trail. Stealthily stealing up, they could see a number of dark figures. Every now and again, from the heights above on either hand, they could see a little jet of fire spurt, and hear the crack of a Winchester as the Mounted Police on the look-out tried to pick off members of the attacking body from their inaccessible point of vantage. But the half-breeds and Indians contented themselves with firing an odd shot in order to warn them off. They would deal with them later. In the meantime they came nearer.

"Ah, St. Croix, old friend! It is my neck you will want to wring, is it? Eh, bien!" And Jacques chuckled audibly.

"Now, hold hard, and wait until I give you the word," said Pasmore, quietly.

The rebels, of whom there might be some thirty or forty, now came out into the open and approached the house until they were abreast of the out-buildings. In the clear moonlight they could be seen distinctly, clad in their great buffalo coats, with collars up over their ears, and bearskin and beaver-caps pulled well down.

At a signal from their leader they raised their rifles to send a preparatory volley through the windows.

"_Now then!_" thundered Pasmore.

Four rifles cracked like one, and three rebels dropped where they stood, while a fourth, clapping his hands to the lower part of his body, spun round and round, stamping his feet, reviling the comrades who had brought him there, and blaspheming wildly, while the blood spurted out between his fingers. At the same moment, several bullets embedded themselves in the thick window shutters and in the walls. One only found its way through the dried mud between the logs, and this smashed a bowl that stood on the dresser within two feet of Dorothy's head. She merely glanced at it casually, and picking up the basket of cartridges, prepared to hand them round. With fingers keen and warming to their work, the defenders emptied the contents of their magazines into the astonished half-breeds and Indians. It was more than the latter had bargained for. They made for an open shed that stood hard by, leaving their dead and wounded in the snow.

"What ho! Johnnie Crapaud, you pig!" cried Rory, withdrawing his rifle from the loophole, and applying his mouth to it instead. "It's the Red River jig I've bin dyin' to tache ye for many a long day."

At the same moment Jacques caught sight of his old _bete noire_, Leopold St. Croix the elder, and, not to be outdone by his friend Rory in the exchange of seasonable civilities with the enemy--although, when he came to think of it afterwards, he might as well have shot his man--he was applying his mouth to, his loophole to shout something in the same vein when the quick-eyed Leopold fired a shot at the spot from which the gun-barrel had just been withdrawn. So lucky or good was his aim that he struck the mud in the immediate neighbourhood of the hole, and sent the _debris_ flying into the French-Canadian's mouth. Jacques spent the rest of his time when in the house watching for a long-haired half-breed with a red sash round his waist, who answered to the name of St. Croix the elder.

Ping, ping, ping, zip--phut--cr-runck! and the bullets played a very devil's tattoo upon the walls and windows. The enemy were still five to one, and if they could only succeed in rushing in and breaking down the doors, victory would be in their hands. But to do that meant death to

so many.

Another half-hour, and the firing still continued, though in a more desultory fashion. It was a strange waiting game, and a grim one, that was being played. The defenders had shifted their positions to guard against surprise.

Douglas had in vain begged his daughter to leave the room and join the women in an inner apartment, but she had pleaded so hard with him that he allowed her to remain.

As for the sergeant, he was outwardly, at least, his old self. He was silent and watchful, showing neither concern nor elation. He moved from one position to another, and never pulled the trigger of his Winchester without making sure of something. With the help of Douglas he had pulled on his fur coat again, as the fire was going out, and he was beginning to feel the cold in his wound.

"I can't make out why Child-of-Light hasn't come up with his men," he said at length, "but, anyhow, he is sure to turn up--"

He paused, listening. Then all in the room heard the _chip-chop_ of an axe as it steadily cut its way through a post of considerable size. The rebels were evidently busy. Suddenly the sound stopped.

"They're preparing for a rush," observed Rory. "What I'm surprisit at is ther riskin' their ugly carcasses as they do."

"Sargain Pasmore--Sargean?" cried some-one from the shed.

"Aha! he has recognised your voice," said Jacques. "He is as the fox, that St. Croix."

"Well, what is it?" shouted the sergeant.

What the half-breed had to say rather took the sergeant aback. It was to the effect that unless they surrendered within a few minutes, they would all most assuredly be killed.

Then for the first time that night Sergeant Pasmore betrayed in his voice any feeling that may have animated him.

"Go home, Leopold St. Croix," he cried, "go home, and those with you before it is too late! Go on to the Fort and ask pardon from those in authority, and it may yet be well with you; For as soon as the red-coated soldiers of the Great Queen come--and, take my word for it, they are in number more than the fishes in the Great Lake--you will be shot like a coyote on the prairie, or hanged by the neck, like a bad Indian, on the gallows-tree. That is our answer, Leopold St Croix; you know me of old, and you also know how I have always kept my word."

There was a dead silence for a minute or two, and whilst

it lasted one could hear the embers of the dying fire fall into ashes. On a shelf, an eight-day clock ticked ominously; the girl stood with one hand upon her father's shoulder, motionless and impassive, like some beautiful statue. There was no trace of fear of any impending tragedy to mar the proud serenity of her face. At length the sound of voices came to them from outside. It grew in volume and rose like the angry murmur of the sea. Pasmore was looking through a crack when the noise of the chopping began again. In another minute there was a crash of falling timber.

The sergeant turned to the girl.

"Miss Douglas," he said, "will you kindly go into the other room for a minute! They have cut down one of the large posts in the shed and are going to make a battering-ram of it so as to smash in the door. Come this way, all of you. Two on either side. That is right. Fire into them as they charge!"

CHAPTER IV

HARD PRESSED

The half-breeds and Indians, keen and determined as they were to effect an entrance to the house at any costs, were not without considerable foresight and strategy. But their feint failed, and when they did make a rush with their ram two or three of them were picked off. The survivors dropped the ram, and made a dash across the open for the stable.

Pasmore telling the others to remain at their loopholes, went to a room at the end of the long passage, Dorothy following him.

The rebels must have applied a match to some of the inflammable matter, for in another instant the growing, hissing roar of fire was audible.

"It will spread to the house in a few minutes more," remarked the sergeant, quietly, "and I'm afraid that will be the end of it."

But he had already seized an axe and was opening the door.

"Shut the door after me and go to your father," he exclaimed. "I'll cut down the slabs that connect it with the house. Child-of-Light may come up yet. Good-bye--in case of accidents."

She caught him by the arm and looked into his face.

"You can't do that--you must not do that! You are sure

to be shot down."

"And I may be shot if I don't." Forcibly, but with what gentleness the action permitted, he disengaged her firm white hand.

"You can't use an axe with that arm," she pleaded, all her old reserve vanishing.

"I can at a pinch," he replied. "It is good of you to trouble about me."

He slipped out and pulled the door behind him. The look he had seen in her eyes had come as a revelation and given him courage.

She stood for a moment speechless and motionless, with a strained, set expression on her face. It was old Rory who aroused her to the gravity of the situation. He came running along the passage.

"Come hyar, honey, and into the cellar wid ye," he cried. "There's more of the inimy comin' along the trail, but there's still a chanct. Nivir say die, sez I."

As if roused from some horrible dream her feverish energy and readiness of resource returned to her.

"Come into the next room," she cried to Rory; "we can see the oil-house from the window. He is out there pulling down the stockade and we can keep them back from him. Quick, Rory!"

Like one possessed she made for the first door on the left of the passage.

Along the trail came the new lot of half-breeds and Indians to the assistance of their fellows, or, perhaps it would be more correct to say, to see to it that they did not miss their full share of the plunder. Roused to fresh efforts by the sight of the others, those on the spot fairly riddled the doors and windows of the house. The bullets were whizzing into the kitchen in every direction, splintering the furniture and sending the plaster flying from the walls until the room was filled with a fine, blinding, choking dust. It was impossible to hold out much longer. The final rush was sure to come in a very few minutes--and all would be over.

Pasmore had cut off the house from the burning shed by hewing down the connecting wall, while Dorothy Douglas and Rory, by firing from a side window, had kept the enemy from approaching; After what seemed an age, Pasmore rejoined them.

There was a pause in the firing, then a hoarse murmur of excited voices came from the sheds. It rose like a sudden storm on the Lake of the Winds. There was a wild volley and a rush of feet. A dark body smashed in the casement

and tried to follow it, but Rory's long knife gleamed in the air, and the intruder fell back in his death agony. Rory seldom wasted powder and shot at close quarters. The sergeant looked at the girl strangely.

"Come with me to your father," he said hoarsely.

"Is it the end?" she asked.

"I fear it is," he replied; "but we'll fight to the finish."

He opened the door and led the way out.

"I must go to the others," he continued. "Rory can guard this end of the house. Will you come with me?"

"Yes, and remember your promise--I am not afraid."

"I am," he admitted, "but not of them."

They reached the kitchen, but he would not let her enter.

"Stay where you are for a moment," he commanded firmly.

He found Douglas and Jacques still holding the doorway, though the door itself, and the table which had been placed against it, were badly wrecked. A breed had actually forced his body through a great rent when they had rushed, but Jacques had tapped him over the head with the stock of his rifle and cracked it as he would have done an egg-shell. The lifeless body still filled the gap.

"Bravo, gentlemen," cried the sergeant, "we shall exact our price. If we can only stand them off a little longer--"

The words died on his lips as a rattle of musketry awoke somewhere in the neighbourhood of the surrounding ridges. It grew in volume until it seemed all around them. Several bullets struck the house that did not come from those immediately attacking. A series of wild whoops could be heard from among the pines on the hillside, and they came nearer and nearer.

"It's Child-of-Light and his Crees!" cried Pasmore. "He saw the new lot approaching and waited until they fell into the trap. Now he has surrounded them."

"Thank God!" cried the rancher, and never had he breathed a more sincere thanksgiving.

The breeds and Indians made back for the out-buildings; then, realising that sooner or later these must prove untenable, they scurried for the pine wood on the hillside. But now Child-of-Light and his braves were on the ridges and a desperate running fight ensued. Not more than a dozen of the enemy managed to get safely away. For hours afterwards they held their own from the vantage of the rocks and pines.

When those in the house realised that all immediate danger was over, they took the change of situations characteristically. The rancher went quietly to find his daughter. She showed no signs of any reaction, although perhaps she had a hard struggle to conquer her feelings. Jacques wanted to sally out and seek for Leopold St. Croix, so that they might settle once and for all their little differences, but Sergeant Pasmore vetoed this. There was other work to do, he said. It was no use remaining at the ranche; the women must go into the fort at Battleford--if, indeed, it were possible to get through to it. As for Rory, he had gone to the stables and seen to the horses and the dogs that were to pull the sleighs; these latter, by the way, were a remarkable lot, and comprised as many varieties as there are different breeds of pigeons. There were Chocolats, Muskymotes, Cariboos, Brandies, Whiskies, Corbeaus, and a few others. During the fight they had kept wonderfully quiet, but now they seemed to know that it was over, and began, after the playful manner of their kind, to indulge in a spirited battle on their own account. Rory snatched up a whip with the object of seeing fair play.

An hour later and a strange scene that kitchen presented, with its wounded, smoke-stained men, its shattered doors and windows, and splintered tables and dresser. The four Mounted Policemen had come down from the ridges where they had so harassed the enemy and were now receiving steaming pannikins of coffee.

Child-of-Light had just come in, and told how to the north Big Bear and his Stonies were lurking somewhere, not to speak of Thunderchild and one or two others, so it would be as well to try Battleford first. His braves at that moment were pursuing the fleeing breeds and Indians, but he had ordered them to return soon in order that they might remove the dead and wounded from the ranche, and then see after the stock belonging to their brother Douglas. It had been as Sergeant Pasmore had said--they had seen the fresh enemy coming up and delayed their attack until they could surround them.

But grey-eyed morn had come at last; the sleighs were packed and brought round to the door. It was time to make a start.

CHAPTER V

TO BATTLEFORD

It was quite a little procession of jumpers and sledges that set out from the rancher's that morning after the fight. First went the police, each man on his little box-like jumper with its steel-shod runners drawn by a hardy half-bred broncho. Next came Rory in a dog-sled

cariole, with his several pugnacious canine friends made fast by moose-skin collars. They would have tried the patience of Job. They fought with each other on the slightest pretext from sheer love of fighting, and knew not the rules of Queensberry. If one of them happened to get down in one of their periodical little outbreaks, the others promptly abandoned their more equal contests to pile on to that unfortunate one.

The rancher and Dorothy came next in a comfortable sleigh, with large buffalo robes all around them to keep out the cold. Then came the two women servants in a light wagon-box set on runners, and driven by Jacques. A Mounted Policeman in a jumper formed the rear-guard at a distance of about half-a-mile. The wagons were well stocked with all necessities for camping out.

It was a typical North-West morning, cold, bracing and clear. The dry air stimulated one, and the winter sun shone cheerfully down upon the great white land of virgin snow.

There was a sense of utter solitude, of an immensity of space. There was no sound save the soft, even swish of the runners over the snow, and the regular muffled pounding of the horses' hoofs.

Within the next hour so buoyant were Dorothy's spirits, and so light-hearted and genuine her outlook on things in general, that Douglas began to wonder if the events of the previous evening were not, after all, the imaginings of some horrible nightmare.

On, on, over the plains of frozen snow. The sun was so strong now that Douglas was obliged to put great goggles over his eyes, and Dorothy pulled a dark veil down over hers, for fear of snow-blindness. They had left the flat prairie behind, and were now in the bluff country which was simply heights and hollows lightly timbered with birch, poplar and saskatoon bushes, with beautiful meadows and small lakes or "sloughs" scattered about everywhere. They passed many pretty homesteads nestling cosily in sheltered nooks; but no smoke rose from their chimneys; they all seemed to have been deserted in a hurry. Their occupants had doubtless fled into Battleford. What if they had been too late to reach that haven of refuge!

At noon the travellers stopped in a little wooded valley for dinner. It was more like a picnic party than that of refugees fleeing for their lives. The Scotswoman actually made a dish of pancakes for the troopers, because she said there was one of them who reminded her of her own son, whom she had not seen for many a long day. The sincere thanks of the hungry ones were more than recompense for the worthy dame.

They all sat down on buffalo robes spread on the snow, and Dorothy was immensely taken with the gentlemanly, unobtrusive way in which the troopers waited upon the

women of the party. But they were all mostly younger sons of younger sons, and public school men, so after all it was not to be wondered at. The high standard of honour and duty, and the courage that was a religion animating the force--the North-West Mounted Police--was easily accounted for. She began to understand how it was that some men preferred such a life to that of the mere quest for gold.

Every one seemed in the best of spirits. Wounds were not mentioned, so it went without saying that these, owing to the healthy bodies of their owners, were giving no trouble. The only interruption of a non-harmonic nature was when a burly Muskymote dog of Rory's team took it into its head that a little *tete-noire* dog had received a portion of frozen fish from its master out of all proportion to its inconsiderable size, so, as soon as Rory's back was turned, showed its disapproval of such favouritism by knocking the favoured one down, and trying to bite off the tips of its ears. As the other dogs, with their peculiar new Queensberry instincts, at once piled on to the one that was getting the worst of it, Rory had to put down the chicken leg he was enjoying to arbitrate with his whip in the usual way. He gave the jealous Muskymote an extra smack or two for its ill-timed behaviour as he thought of that chicken leg.

To Dorothy's no little surprise she found Pasmore unusually communicative. Despite his seeming austerity, he possessed a keen vein of humour of a dry, pungent order that was eminently entertaining. To-day he gave vent to it, and she found herself laughing and talking to him in a way that, twenty-four hours before she would not have deemed possible.

Dinner over, the horses were watered--they had now cooled down--the culinary articles were stowed away, pipes lit, and preparations made for a fresh start. It would be necessary to move with extreme caution, as they were not more than twelve miles from Battleford, and the enemy were pretty sure to have their scouts out.

On again through the still air, and between the winding avenues of birch, poplar and saskatoon bushes. Nothing to be heard save the occasional call of the grouse in the bracken, and the monotonous chafing of the harness. At dusk they arrived within a mile or two of the little town, and halted.

A fire was lit in a deserted farmhouse, and a good drink of hot tea put fresh life into them. There was trying and dangerous work to be done that night; they would require to be well prepared.

An hour later, when the moon began to show over the tree-tops, the entire party moved out silently by a little-used by-path towards Battleford. A couple of troopers went on some considerable distance in front, and one on either flank, with strict instructions to

create no alarm if possible in meeting with an enemy, but to at once warn the main body.

And now on the still air came a weird, monotonous sound, rising and falling, as does that of the far-off rapids, borne on the fitful breath of the Chinook winds. _Tap, tap, tap_, it went, _tum, tum, tum_, in ever-recurring monotones. As they stopped to listen to it, the girl realised its nature only too well. It was the tuck of the Indian drum, and the Indian was on the war-path. As they walked on they could hear it more plainly, and soon the sound of whooping, yelling human voices, and the occasional discharge of fire-arms, fell upon their apprehensive ears.

"They've bruk into the stores, an' are paintin' the town red," explained Rory. "Guess they're hevin' a high ole time."

And now they could see a red glare tingeing the heavens above the tree-tops. They ascended a hill to the right, and looking down on the valley of the Saskatchewan, a truly magnificent but terrifying sight met their gaze.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRIM BLOCKADE

The great chief Poundmaker and his Stonies had broken loose, and, after looting the Hudson Bay and other stores in Battleford, were indulging in a wild orgie. Some of the buildings were already burning, and the Indians, mad with blood and fire-water, were dancing wildly around the spouting flames that lit up that pine and snow-clad winter scene for miles?

Some of the warriors, more particularly round the burning buildings, had donned uncanny masks that took the shape of buffalo and moose heads, with shaggy manes, horns and antlers, and, horror of horrors, some of them, silhouetted blackly against the fierce glare, showed themselves to be possessed of tails that made them look like capering demons.

Pom, pom, pom, went the hollow-sounding drums. Round and round danced the wildly-gesticulating imp-like crowds. They yelped and howled like dogs. They brandished tomahawks and spears, all the time working themselves into a frenzy. It more resembled an orgie of fiends than of human beings.

"It is horrible," exclaimed Dorothy, shivering, despite her resolve to face bravely whatever might come.

Within half-a-mile of the burning township, looming up dimly over there among the trees, was the new village of

Battleford, and further back still, hardly discernible, lay the Fort. Within several hundred yards of the latter, under cover of hastily-improvised trenches of bluff and scrub, was a cordon of half-breeds and Indians, by no means too strong and not too well posted, for one of the Police had already managed to elude the careless and relaxed watch, and join the besieged ones. Under the circumstances it was impossible for the defenders to make a sortie, as this would leave the bulk of the refugees unprotected. All they could do was to hold their position and wait patiently until help came from Prince Albert and the south.

What the rancher's party had to do was plain, i.e. separate, and endeavour, in ones and twos, to pass the rebel lines and enter the Fort. Fortunately they could all speak the curious patois of English, French, and Cree that the enemy used, and therefore they had no need to be at a loss. Moreover, with beaver-skin caps, and long fur coats down to their heels, with the addition of a sash round their waists, they were in no way different from hundreds of others. Dorothy noticed that even the Police had adopted means to conceal their identities so far as appearances went.

Sergeant Pasmore did not take long to make his plans. He did not ask for any advice now, but gave his orders promptly and explicitly. It would be better that they should all endeavour to pass through the enemy at the same time, so that in the event of an alarm being given, some of them at least might be able to push on into the Fort.

Mrs. Macgregor and the half-breed woman were sent away round by the right flank under the charge of Jacques, who was to go ahead and try to pilot them into the Fort in safety. The Police were to move round on the left flank.

As for Douglas and his daughter, they were to go down separately to the foot of the ridge, walk leisurely through the scattered houses, evading as much as possible the straggling groups of rebels, and make towards a certain point where a series of old buffalo-wallows would to a great extent prevent their being seen. He warned Douglas against keeping too near his daughter. He, being so well-known, would be easily recognised, and their being close together might lead to the capture of both.

Douglas at first demurred, but presently saw the force of this advice. It was a hard thing to be separated from Dorothy, but he realised that otherwise he might only compromise her safety, so he kissed her and went in the direction the sergeant pointed out. Pasmore and his charge were now left quite alone. There was a dead silence for some moments.

"I think we'd better go," he said, at length. "Now, do you feel as if you could keep your nerve? So much depends

on that."

"I'm going to rise to the occasion," she answered smilingly, and with a look of determination on her face. "Let us start."

"One moment--you mustn't show quite so much of your face--it isn't exactly an everyday one. Let me fix you up a little bit first."

She looked at him laughingly as he pressed her beaver-cap well down over her smooth white forehead until it hid her dark, arched eyebrows. He turned up her deep fur collar, and buttoned it in front until only her pretty hazel eyes and straight white nose were to be seen. Then he regarded her with critical gravity.

"I wish I could hide those eyes of yours," he said, with whimsical seriousness. "You mustn't let any young Johnny Crapaud or Indian see them any more than you can help."

They descended the bluff and walked silently together for some little distance through the thicket of birch and saskatoon bushes. They were now close to the garden of the first straggling house, and they could see dark figures moving about everywhere. He pointed out to her the way she would have to take.

"Now, au revoir," he said, "and good luck to you."

They shook hands, and she wished him an equal luck. "You have been very good to us," she added, "and I hope you will believe that we are grateful."

He took off his cap to her, and they went on their separate ways.

Now that the girl had gone so far that there was no turning back, she rose to the occasion as she said she would. She faced the ghastly sights with much of her father's old spirit.

She put her hands in her large side pockets and lounged leisurely past the gable end of a house. A half-breed woman, carrying a large armful of loot, met her on the side-walk. In the moonlight the girl caught the glint of the bold, black, almond-shaped eyes and the flushed face. The woman was breathing hard, and her two arms encircled the great bundle. She shot a quick glance at Dorothy. She was more Indian than white.

Only that the rebels that night did not see with their normal eyesight, the girl realised that she would have been detected and undone.

Two drunken Indians came walking unsteadily towards her, talking excitedly. Though quaking inwardly, she kept straight on her way, imitating a man's gait as much as she could, for with those long buffalo coats that reach

to the ground, it was impossible to tell a man from a woman save by the walk. The moccasins made the difference even less. But the Indians passed her, and she breathed more freely. Several people crossed and recrossed her path, but beyond a half-curious look of inquiry, they did not trouble about her. She passed a store in flames, and saw a number of breeds and Indians yelling and whooping and encouraging an intoxicated metis to dash into it at the imminent risk of his life to fetch out some article of inconsiderable value as a proof of his prowess. As she passed on she heard a dull thud; and, looking back, realised by the vast shaft of sparks which rose into the air that the roof had fallen in. Jean Ba'tiste had played with Death once too often.

Sick with horror, the girl hurried on. A few hundred yards more, and she would be clear of that awesome Bedlam. She had to pass between some, huts, one of which she could see was in flames. Hard by she could hear the sound of a fiddle, and the excited whoops of dancers. The Red River jig was evidently in full blast. She turned the corner of a corral and came full on it. Several people were standing apart round a bare spot of ground. A capering half-breed, with great red stockings reaching above his knees, with blanket suit, long crimson sash, and red tuque on his head, was capering about like a madman. His partner had just retired exhausted. He caught sight of Dorothy, and peered into her face.

"My faith!" he exclaimed; "but we shall dance like that--so? Bien!"

He made a grotesque bow, and seizing her by the arm, pulled her into the clear space facing him.

CHAPTER VII

DETECTED

For the moment a horrible sickening fear took possession of Dorothy when she found herself thrust into such a very prominent position. It was quite bad enough to have to pass through that scene of pillage and riot, but to pose as the partner of an excitable half-breed in the execution of the Red River jig was more than the girl had bargained for. The fantastic shuffling and capering of the long-legged metis were wonderful to behold. The tassel of his long red tuque dangled and bobbed behind him like the pigtail of a Chinaman trying to imitate a dancing Dervish. His flushed face, long snaky black locks, and flashing eyes all spoke of the wild fever in his blood and his Gallic origin. Still, the girl noted he was not what might be termed an ill-looking fellow; he did not look bad-natured, nor was he in drink. He was merely an excited irresponsible.

The barbaric, musical rhyme on the cat-gut took a fresh lease of life; the delighted spectators clapped their hands in time, and supplemented the music with the regulation dog-like yelps. The Red River jig consists of two persons of opposite sex standing facing each other, each possessed with the laudable ambition of dancing his or her partner down. As may readily be imagined, it is a dance necessitating considerable powers of endurance. When one of the dancers sinks exhausted and vanquished, another steps into the breach. When Dorothy had made her appearance, a slim and by no means bad-looking half-breed girl had been unwillingly obliged to drop out of the dance. The bright eyes of the new arrival had caught Pierre La Chene's fancy, and, after the manner of his kind, he had made haste to secure her as a partner. Pierre was a philanderer and an inconstant swain. The dark eyes of Katie the Belle flushed with anger as she saw this strange girl take her place. She noticed with jealous eyes the elegant fur coat which the other wore, the dainty silk-sewn moccasins, the natty beaver cap, and felt that she, herself a leader of fashion among her people, had yet much to learn.

Dorothy stood stock still for a moment while her partner and the spectators shouted to her to begin. A wrinkled old dame remarked, in the flowery language of her people, that, as the figure of the girl was slender as the willow, and her feet small and light as those of the wood spirits that return to the land in the spring, surely she could out-dance Pierre La Chene, who had already out-worn the light-footed Jeanette and the beautiful Katie. Pierre shouted to his partner to make a start. Surely now she must be discovered and undone!

Then something that, when one comes to think of it, was not strange, happened--Dorothy rose to the occasion. She had danced the very same fantasia many a time out of sheer exuberance of spirits, and the love of dancing itself. She must dance and gain the sympathy of that rough crowd, in the event of her identity being discovered. There was nothing so terrible about this particular group after all. They were merely dancing while the others were going in for riot and pillage. There was something so incongruous and ludicrous in the whole affair that the odd, wayward, fun-loving spirit of the girl, of late held in abeyance, asserted itself, and she forgot all else save the fact that she must do her best to dance her partner down.

Her feet caught the rhythm of the "Arkansaw Traveller"--that stirring, foot-catching melody without beginning or ending--and in another minute Dorothy was dancing opposite the delighted and capering half-breed, and almost enjoying it. With hands on hips, with head thrown back, and with feet tremulous with motion, she kept time to the music. She was a good dancer, and realised what is meant by the poetry of motion. The fiddler played fairly well, and Pierre La Chene, if somewhat pronounced in his movements, was at least a picturesque figure, whose soul

was in the dance. So amusing, were his antics that the girl laughed heartily, despite the danger of her position.

It was evident that Pierre was vastly taken with his partner. He rolled his eyes about in a languishing and alarming fashion; he twisted and wriggled like a contortionist, and occasionally varied the lightning-like shuffle of his own feet by kicking a good deal higher than his own head. He called upon his partner to "stay with it" in almost inarticulate gasps. "Whoop her up!" he yelled. "Git thar, Jean! Bravo, ma belle! Whoo-sh!"

It was a very nightmare of grotesqueness to Dorothy. The moonlight night, the black houses and pines looming up against the snowy landscape, the red glare in the immediate foreground caused by the burning buildings, the gesticulating figure of her half-breed partner, the excited, picturesque onlookers, the vagaries of the fiddler and the never-ceasing sound of the Indian drum, all tinged with an air of unreality and a sense of the danger that menaced, made up a situation that could not easily be eclipsed. And she was dancing and trying to make herself believe she was enjoying it, opposite a crazy half-breed rebel! She recognised him now as the dandy Pierre, the admiration of the fair sex in his own particular world on the Saskatchewan. If only any of her people could see her now, what would they think of her?

But was this wild dance to go on for ever? Already she was becoming warm in her fur coat, despite the lowness of the temperature. There was a limit to her powers of endurance, albeit she was stronger than the average girl. The onlookers, charmed with the grace of this unknown dancer, were noisy in their applause. She must feign fatigue and drop out, letting some one else take her place.

With an inclination of her head to her partner she did so, but he, doubtless captivated by the dark, laughing eyes he saw gazing at him above the deep fur collar, did not care to continue the dance with some one whose eyes might not be so bewitching, and dropped out also. The half-breed girl, his former partner, who up till now had contented herself by gazing sulkily from lowering brows upon this strange rival, was at last stirred by still deeper feeling. She came close up to Dorothy, and gazed searchingly into her face. At the same moment they recognised each other, for often had Dorothy admired the full, wildflower beauty, the delicate olive skin, and the dark, soulful eyes of this part descendant of a noble Gallic race and a barbaric people, and spoken kindly to her. The half-savage Katie had looked upon her white sister as a superior being from another world, and had almost made up her mind that she loved her, but she loved Pierre La Chene in a different way, and when that sort of love comes into one's life, all else has to give place to it. With a quick movement she drew down Dorothy's fur collar, exposing her face.

"_Voila!_" she cried; "_one of the enemy--the daughter of Douglas!_"

It was as if the rebels had suddenly detected an embodied spirit that had worked evil in their midst, for the music stopped, and the excited crew rushed upon her. But Pierre La Chene kept them back. Those proud, defiant eyes had exercised a singular charm over him, and when he saw her face he almost felt ready to fight the whole crowd--almost ready, for, like a good many other lady-killers, Pierre had a very tender regard for his own personal safety. Still, he cried--

"_Prenez garde_--tek caar! _Ma foi_, but she can dance it! Let us tek her to Louis Riel. He is at the chapel. We may learn much."

With her keen instincts, Katie saw the ruse.

"She has the evil eye, and has bewitched Pierre!" she cried, and made as if to lead her old lover away.

But Pierre's response was to thrust her violently from him. Katie would have fallen but that Dorothy caught her.

"Oh, Katie, poor Katie!" was all she said.

And then the half-breed girl realised the evil she had wrought, and shrunk from the kindly arms of the sister she had betrayed.

"To Riel with her!--to Riel with her!" was the cry of the fickle malcontents, and, with a yelling following at her heels, Dorothy was led away.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE JUDGMENT HALL

Now that Dorothy knew the worst was about to happen, she, strangely enough, felt more self-possessed than she had done before. These rebels might kill her, or not, just as the mood swayed them, but she would let them see that the daughter of a white man was not afraid.

In that short walk to the chapel she reviewed her position. She hoped that by this time the others had managed to reach the Fort. If they had, then she could face with comparative equanimity what might happen to herself. Her only fear was what her father, in his distress on hearing of her capture, might do.

Fortunately it was not far to the chapel which Riel had converted into his headquarters. Indeed, he was only paying a hurried visit there to exhort the faithful and long-suffering metis and Indians to prompt and decisive

action. He intended to go off again in a few hours to Prince Albert to direct the siege against that town. Only those who had witnessed the wantonness and the capture of the "white witch" followed. Most of the rebels were too busy improving the shining hour of unlimited loot. A half-breed on one side and an Indian on the other, each with a dirty mitt on Dorothy's shoulder, led her to the Judgment Hall of the dusky prophet, Louis David Riel, "stickit priest," and now malcontent and political agitator by profession. This worthy gentleman had already cost the Government a rebellion, but why he should have been allowed to run to a second is one of those seeming mysteries that can only be accounted for by the too clement policy of a British Government.

Dorothy and her captors entered the small porch of the chapel and passed into the sacred edifice. For one like Riel, who had been educated for the priesthood in Lower Canada, it was a strange use to put such a place to. The scene when they entered almost defies description. It was crowded with breeds and Indians armed to the teeth with all manner of antiquated weapons. Most of them wore blue copotes and kept on their unplucked beaver caps or long red tuques. Haranguing them close to the altar was the great Riel himself, the terror of the Saskatchewan.

He did not look the dangerous, religious fanatic that he was in reality. He was about five feet seven in height, with red hair and beard. His face was pale and flabby, and his dark grey eyes, set close together, glowed when he spoke and were very restless. His nose was slightly aquiline, his neck long, and his lips thick. His voice, though low and gentle in ordinary conversation, was loud and abrupt now that he was excited.

He was so carried away by the exuberance of his own eloquence when Dorothy and her captors entered, that he still kept on in a state of rapt ecstasy. His semi-mystical oration was a weird jumble of religion and lawlessness, devout exhortation, riot, plunder, prayer, and pillage. He extolled the virtues of the murderous Poundmaker and Big Bear. He said that Mistawasis and Chicastafasin, the chiefs, and some others, were feeble of heart and backsliders, for they had left their reserves to escape being drawn into the trouble. Crowfoot, head chief of the Blackfoot nation, was protesting his loyalty to the Lieutenant-Governor, and his squaws would one day stone him to death as a judgment. Fort Pitt, Battleford and Prince Albert must shortly capitulate to them, and then the squaws would receive the white women of those places as their private prisoners to do with as their sweet wills suggested. Already many of the accursed whites had been slaughtered, as at Duck Lake, for instance, but many more had yet to die. They must be utterly exterminated, so that the elect might possess the land undisturbed.

At this point he caught sight of the newcomers. At a sign from him they approached.

"Ha!" he said, with an unctuous accent in his voice, and rubbing his hands like a miserable old Fagin, "Truly the Lord is delivering them into our hands. What are you, woman?"

But beyond her name Dorothy would at first tell him nothing. Her captors briefly stated the little they knew concerning her presence in the town. The self-constituted dictator tried bombast, threats and flattery to gain information from her, but they were of no avail. His authority being thus disputed by a woman, and his absurd self-esteem ruffled, he gave way to a torrent of abuse, but Dorothy was as if she heard it not. It was only when Riel was about to give instructions to his "General," Gabriel Dumont, and more of the members of his staff and "government" to instantly cause a search to be made in the camp for those who might have been with the girl, that she said he might do so if he chose, but it would be useless, as her friends must have entered the Fort an hour ago.

"Hear to her, hear to this shameless woman!" cried the fanatical and self-constituted saviour of the metis, gesticulating and trying, as he always did, to work upon the easily-roused feelings of his semi-savage following. "She convicts herself out of her own mouth; she must suffer. She is young and fair to look upon, but she is the daughter of Douglas, the great friend of the English, and therefore evil of heart. Moreover, she defies me, even me, to whom St Peter himself appeared in the Church of St. James at Washington, Columbia! Take her hence and keep her as a prisoner until we decide what fate shall be hers. In the days of the old prophets the dogs licked the blood of a woman from the stones--of a woman who deserved better than she."

With a wave of his hand the arch rebel, who was yet to pay the penalty of his inordinate vanity and scheming with his life, dismissed the prisoner and her captors. He instructed an Irish renegade and member of his cabinet, called Nolin, to see to it that the prisoner was kept under close arrest until her fate was decided upon--which would probably be before morning. Nolin told some of Katie's relatives to take charge of Dorothy. He himself, to tell the truth, did not particularly care what became of her one way or the other. Already this gentleman was trying to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare.

Dorothy looked around the improvised court-house in the vague hope of finding some one whom she might have known in the days of peace, and whose intervention would count for something. But alas! the vision of dark, cruel and uncompromising faces that met her gaze, gave her no hope. They had all been wrought up to such a high pitch of excitement that murder itself was but an item in their programme. Her heart sank within her, but still her mind was active. She was not one of the sort who submit tamely to what appears to be the inevitable. She came of a fighting stock--of a race that had struggled much, and

prevailed.

Katie's male kinsman, the huge half-breed and the officious redskin, again seized Dorothy and hurried her away, followed by the curious, straggling mob. Arrived, at length, at a long, low log-house on the outskirts of the town, they hammered on the closed door for admittance.

CHAPTER IX

THE DWARF AND THE BEAR

Dorothy noticed that there was a light in the windows of this house, and wondered how it was that the occupants seemed to be quietly staying at home while evidently all the half-breed inhabitants of the town were making a night of it. She also noticed that when her guides had knocked they drew somewhat back from the doorway, and that the motley crowd which had been pressing close behind followed their example. They also ceased their noisy talk and laughter while they waited for the door to be opened. Only Katie, the flouted belle who had been following them up, did not seem to possess the same diffidence as the others, but stood with one hand on the door, listening. Dorothy became strangely curious as to the inmates of this isolated house.

A strange shuffling and peculiar deep breathing were heard in the passage; a bolt was withdrawn, Katie drew quickly back, and next moment the door was thrown open. A flood of light streamed out, and two weird and startling figures were outlined sharply against it. Instinctively Dorothy shrank backwards with a sense of wonder and fear. Standing on its hind legs in the doorway was a bear, and by its side a dwarf with an immense head covered with a great crop of hair, and with long arms and a broad chest which indicated great strength.

"Whur-r! What you want here and at this hour of night, you cut-throats, you?" asked the outspoken manikin in a voice of sufficient volume to have equipped half-a-dozen men.

"A sweetheart for you, Pepin. A sweetheart, _mon ami_" answered the big breed, in a conciliatory voice.

Dorothy nearly sank to the ground in horror when she heard this rude jest.

"Bah!" cried the manikin, "it is another female you will want to foist off upon me, is it? Eh? What? But no, _coquin_, Pepin has not been the catch of the Saskatchewan all these years without learning wisdom. Who is she--a prisoner? Eh? Is not that so?"

"That is so, Pepin, she is preesonar, and Riel has ordered her to be detained here. Your house is the only quiet

one in the town this night, and that is why we came. Tell Antoine to be so good as to stand back."

Antoine was the bear, which still stood swaying gently from one side to the other with a comical expression of inquiry and gravity on its old-fashioned face.

Pepin surveyed the mob with no friendly scrutiny.

"What you want here, you _canaille, sans-culottes?_" he demanded. And then in no complimentary terms he bade them begone.

The crowd, however, still lingered, with that spirit of curiosity peculiar to most crowds; so the dwarf brought them to their senses. Suddenly poking Antoine in the ribs, he brought him down on all fours, and then, brushing past Dorothy and her captors, and still leading the bear, he charged the mob with surprising agility, scattering it right and left. It was evident that they stood in wholesome dread of Pepin and his methods. Then, coming back with the bear, he put one hand on his heart, and with a bow of grotesque gallantry, bade Dorothy enter the house. The Indian he promptly sent about his business with a sudden blow over the chest that would probably have injured a white man's bones. The red man looked for a moment as if he meditated reprisals, but Pepin merely blinked at the cudgel, and Man-of-might, with a disgusted "Ough! ough!" changed his mind and incontinently fled. Dorothy's captor, Pierre La Chene, and Katie, alone entered the dwarf's abode.

It suddenly occurred to Dorothy that this was the Pepin Quesnelle of whom and of whose tame bear Rory was wont to tell tales. Dorothy noticed that Katie had a brief whispered conference with the truculent Pepin before entering. The result of it was somewhat unexpected; the half-breed girl took Dorothy by the arm and led her into a low room, which was scrupulously clean, at the end of the passage. There was no one in it. Katie seemed strangely nervous as she shut the door, and the girl wondered what was about to happen. Then the half-breed turned suddenly and looked into her eyes, at the same time placing one hand upon her wrist.

"Listen," she said, "I thought I loved you, but you have made me mad--so mad this night! Now tell me true--_verite sans peur_--you shall--you must tell me--do you love Pierre?"

If it had not been for the tragic light in the poor girl's eyes, Dorothy would have laughed in her face at the bare idea. As it was, she answered in such an emphatic way that Katie had no more doubts on that point. Then Dorothy asked the latter to send Pierre to her and to be herself present at the interview.

Katie at first demurred. She was afraid that the interview might prove too much for the susceptible frail one. But

she brought him in, and when Dorothy had spoken a few words to him, the fickle swain was only too anxious to make it up with his real love. This satisfactory part of the programme completed, Katie packed him off into the next room, and then, with the emotional and demonstrative nature of her people, literally grovelled in the dust before Dorothy. She stooped and kissed her moccasined feet, and called on the girl to forgive her for her treacherous conduct. But Dorothy raised her from the ground and comforted her as best she could. To her she was as a child, although perhaps her passion was a revelation that as yet she but imperfectly comprehended. But Katie was to prove the sincerity of her regret in a practical fashion.

"Where are your friends?" she asked. "Tell me everything--yes, you can trust me. By the Blessed Virgin, I swear I will serve you faithfully!" She raised her great dark tear-stained eyes to Dorothy's.

The girl instinctively felt that Katie was to be trusted. The only question was, could she count upon her discretion? She felt that she could do that also; she knew that in a matter of intrigue the dusky metis have no equals. The chances were that the others had reached the Fort; if so, no more harm could be done. Briefly she told Katie about those who had started out with her to steal through the rebel lines to the English garrison.

"If Jacques and the women went in the direction you say," said Katie, "the chances are they have got to the Fort. It matters not about the Police and Rory--they can look after themselves. I doubt, however, if your father and the sergeant have got through. You will stay in this house while I go and see. I have many friends among our people; the hearts of some of them not being entirely with Riel, they will help me. I shall take Pierre. Pepin and his mother you need not fear--they are not of the rebels; they have lived too long at Medicine Hat with the whites."

And then she went on briefly to explain how Pepin was a man renowned for his great wisdom and his cunning, as well as for the bodily strength which had once enabled him to strangle a bear. Still, his one great weakness was conceit of his personal appearance, and his belief that every woman was making a dead set at him. He also prided himself upon his manners, which were either absurdly elaborate or rough to a startling degree, as the mood seized him, and as Dorothy had seen for herself. His mother, whom she would see in the next room, was rather an amiable old soul, whose one providentially overpowering delusion was that Pepin was all that he considered himself to be. She regarded most young unengaged women with suspicion, as she fancied they looked upon her son with matrimonial designs. Katie knew that the old lady was at heart a match-maker, but, with the exception of herself, who, however, was engaged, she had found no one good or beautiful enough to aspire to an alliance with the

Quesnelle family.

Dorothy felt vastly relieved at hearing all this. Then Katie took her by the hand, and, telling her to be of good courage, as she had nothing to fear led her into the next room.

"A good daughter for you, mother," she said smilingly to the dame who sat by the fire.

The old white-haired woman, who was refreshingly clean and tidy, turned her dark eyes sharply upon the new arrival. Whether it was that Dorothy was prepossessed in her favour and showed it, and that the old lady took it as a personal compliment, or that the physical beauty of the girl appealed to her, is immaterial; but the fact remained that she in her turn was favourably impressed. She motioned to a seat beside herself.

"Sit hyar, honey," she said. "I will put the kettle on the fire and give you to eat and drink."

But the girl smilingly thanked her, and said that she had not long since finished supper. In no way loth to do so, she then went and sat down next the old dame, who regarded her with considerable curiosity and undisguised favour. Katie, seeing that she could safely leave her charge there, spoke a few words in a strange patois of Cree and French to Pepin, and, calling Pierre, left the house.

Dorothy glanced in wonder round the common sitting-room of this singular family. It was a picturesque interior, decorated with all kinds of odds and ends. There were curios in the way of Indian war weapons, scalping knives, gorgeously beaded moccasins and tobacco pouches, barbaric plumed head-dresses, stuffed birds and rattlesnakes, butterflies, strings of birds' eggs, and grinning and truly hideous Indian masks for use in devil and give-away dances. At the far end of the room was a rude cobbler's bench and all the paraphernalia of one who works in boots, moccasins, and harness. Thus was betrayed the calling of Pepin Quesnelle.

But it was the man himself, with his extraordinary personality, who fascinated Dorothy. He was standing with his hands behind his back and his legs apart, talking to the sulky, uncompromising half-breed who had brought her there. He was not more than three feet in height, and he seemed all head and body. His arms were abnormally long and muscular. He had a dark shock head of hair, and his little black moustache was carefully waxed. His forehead was low and broad, and his aquiline nose, like his jet-black, almond-shaped eyes, betrayed an Indian ancestor. His face betokened intelligence, conceit, and a keen sense of sardonic humour; still, there was nothing in it positively forbidding. To those whom he took a fancy to, he was doubtless loyal and kind, albeit his temperament was of a fiery and volatile nature. In this he showed

the Gallic side of his origin. It was very evident that, despite his inconsiderable size, his hulking and sulky neighbour stood in considerable awe of him.

"Pshaw! Idiot! Pudding-head!" he was saying. "But it is like to as many Muskymote dogs you are--let one get down and all the others attack him. What, I ask, did your Riel do for you in '70? Did he not show the soles of the moccasins he had not paid for as soon as he heard that the red-coats were close to Fort Garry, and make for the States? Bah, you fools, and he will do so again--if he gets the chance! But he will not, mark my words, Bastien Lagrange; this time the red-coats will catch him, and he and you--yes, you, you chuckle-head--will hang all in a row at the end of long ropes in the square at Regina until you are dead, dead, dead! Think of it, Lagrange, what a great big ugly bloated corpse you'll make hanging by the neck after your toes have stopped twitching, twitching, and your face is a beautiful blue. Eh? _Bien!_ is not that so, blockhead?"

And the dwarf grinned and chuckled in such a bloodthirsty and anticipating fashion that the girl shuddered.

Bastien Lagrange did not seem to relish the prospect, and his shifty eyes roamed round the walls.

"But the red-coats, how can they come?" he weakly asked. "Where are they, the soldiers of the Great Mother? Riel has said that those stories of the cities over seas and the many red-coats are all lies, and that the Lord will smite the Police and those that are in the country with the anthrax that kills the cattle in the spring. Riel swears to that, for St. Peter appeared to him and told him so. He said so himself!"

"Bah, idiot!" retorted Pepin, "if it is that Riel is on such friendly terms with St. Peter, and the Lord is going to do such wonderful things for him, why does not the Saint give his messengers enough in advance for them to pay the poor men who make for them the moccasins they wear? Why does he suffer them to steal from their own people? Pshaw, it is the same old tale, the same old game from all time, from Mahomet to the present down-at-heel! But courage, _mon cher_ Bastien! I will come and see you ch-chk, ch-chk!"--he elongated and twisted his neck, at the same time turning his eyes upwards in a horrible fashion--"while your feet go so ... so,"--he described a species of _pas-seul_ with his toes. "Is that not so, Antoine? Eh?--you beauty, you?" and here he gave the great bear, that had been gravely sitting on its haunches watching him like an attendant spirit, a sudden and affectionate kick.

To Dorothy's horror the great brute made a quick snap at him, which, however, only served to intensely amuse Pepin, for he skilfully evaded it, and, seizing his stick, at once began to dance up and down. The cunning little black eyes of the beast watched him apprehensively and

resentfully.

"Aha, Antoine!" he cried. "Git up, you lazy one, and dance! Houp-la!"--the huge brute stood up on its hind legs--"Now, then, Bastien, pick up that fiddle and play. That's it, piff-poum--piff-poum! Houp-la! piff-poum!" and in another minute the man and the bear were dancing opposite each other. It was a weird and uncanny sight, the grotesque dwarf, with his face flushed and his hair on end, capering about and kicking with his pigmy legs, and the bear with uncouth waddles waltzing round and round, its movements every now and again being accelerated by a judicious dig in the ribs from Pepin's stick. Bastien Lagrange fiddled away as if for dear life, and the old dame, her face beaming with pride and admiration, clapped her hands in time to the music. Every minute or two she would glance from her son to Dorothy's face to note what impression such a gallant sight had made.

"Is it not _magnifique?_ Is he not splendid?" she asked the girl.

"He is indeed wonderful," replied Dorothy, truthfully enough.

Despite the suggestion of weirdness the goblin-like scene created in her mind, the grimaces and antics of the manikin, and the sulkily responsive movements of the bear, were too absurd for anything. She thought of Rory's story of how the "b'ar" resented being left out of its share in Pepin's castor-oil; and was so tickled by the contrast of their present occupation that, despite herself, she broke out into a fit of laughter. Fearful of betraying the reason of it, she began to clap her hands like the old lady, which action, being attributed by the others to her undisguised admiration, at once found favour in their eyes. Dorothy began to imagine she was getting on famously.

"Honey," cried the old lady, raising her voice and stooping towards the girl, "I like yer face. Barrin' Katie, you're the only gal I'd like for Pepin. I reckon we'll just stow you away quietly like, and then afterwards you kin be his wife."

But the prospect so alarmed Dorothy that her heart seemed to stop beating again. At the same moment Pepin showed signs of fatigue, and the music stopped abruptly. Antoine, however, in a fit of absent-mindedness, kept on waltzing around on his own account, until Pepin gave him a crack over the head and brought him to his senses.

"Come hyar, Pepin," cried the old dame. "Mam'selle is took wid you. I think she'd make you a good wife, my sweet one."

Dorothy grew hot and cold at the very thought of it. She really did not know what these people were capable of.

Pepin approached her with what he evidently intended to be dignified strides. For the first time he honoured her with a searching scrutiny. Poor Dorothy felt as if the black eyes of this self-important dwarf were reading her inmost thoughts. She became sick with apprehension, and her eyes fell before his. In another minute the oracle spoke.

"No, *_ma mere_*, <no," he said. "She is a nice girl upon the whole; her hair, her figure, and her skin are good, but her nose stops short too soon, and is inclined to be saucy. Though her ways are sleek like a cotton-tail's, I see devilry lurking away back in her eyes. Moreover, her ways are those of a *_grande dame_*, and not our ways--she would expect too much of us. She is a good girl enough, but she will not do. *_Voila tout!_*" And with a not unkindly bow the *_petit maitre_* turned his attention to Antoine, who, during the examination, had taken the opportunity of seizing its master's cudgel and breaking it into innumerable little bits.

Dorothy breathed again, but, true to the nature of her sex, she resented the disparaging allusions to her nose and eyes--even from Pepin. What a conceited little freak he was, to be sure! And to tell her that she *_would not do!_* At the same time she felt vastly relieved to think that the dwarf had resolved not to annex her. The only danger was that he might change his mind. His mother had taken his decision with praiseworthy resignation, and tried in a kindly fashion to lighten what she considered must be the girl's disappointment. Meanwhile Lagrange, judging by his lugubrious countenance, was evidently pondering over the pleasant prospect Pepin had predicted for him. The dwarf himself was engaged in trying to force the fragments of the stick down Antoine's throat, and the latter was angrily resenting the liberty.

Dorothy was becoming sleepy, what with the fatigue she had undergone during the day and the heat of the fire, when suddenly there came three distinct taps at one of the windows.

CHAPTER X

THE UNEXPECTED

It was fortunate for Antoine the bear that the taps at the window came when they did, for Pepin with his great arms had got it into such an extraordinary position--doubtless the result of many experiments--that it would most assuredly have had its digestion ruined by the sticks which its irate master was administering in small sections. To facilitate matters, he had drawn its tongue to one side as a veterinary-surgeon does when he is administering medicine to an animal. On hearing the taps the dwarf relinquished his efforts and went to the door. The bear

sat up on its haunches, coughing and making wry faces, at the same time looking around for moccasins or boots or something that would enable it to pay its master out with interest, and not be so difficult to swallow when it came to the reckoning.

The dwarf went to the door, and, putting one hand on it, and his head to one side, cried--

"Hello, there! _Qui vive?_ Who are you, and what do you want?"

"All right, Pepin, it's me--Katie."

The door was thrown open, and the half-breed woman entered. At her heels came a man who was so muffled up as to be almost unrecognisable. But Dorothy knew him, and the next moment was in her father's arms. The dwarf hastened to close the door, but before doing so he gazed out apprehensively.

"You are quite sure no one followed you?" he asked Katie, on re-entering the room.

"No one suspected," she replied shortly. "Jean Lagrange has gone to look out for the others. I fear it will go hard with the shermoganish unless you can do something, Pepin."

Dorothy had been talking to her father, but heard the Indian word referring to the Police.

"I wonder if Mr. Pasmore has got through to the Fort, dad!" she said suddenly.

"I was just about to tell you, my dear, what happened," he replied. "I was going quietly along, trying to find some trace of you, when a couple of breeds came up behind and took me prisoner. I thought they were going to shoot me at first, but they concluded to keep me until to-morrow, when they would bring me before their government. So they shut me up in a dug-out on the face of a bank, keeping my capture as quiet as possible for fear of the mob taking the law into its own hands and spoiling their projected entertainment. I hadn't been there long before the door was unbarred and Pasmore came in with Katie here. He told me to go with her, and, when I had found you, to return to where we had left the sleighs, and make back for the ranche by the old trail as quickly as possible. He said he'd come on later, but that we weren't to trouble about him. Katie had made it right, it seems, with my jailers, whom I am inclined to think are old friends of hers."

"But why couldn't he come on, dad, with you?"

There was something about the affair that she could not understand.

"I suppose he thought it would attract less attention to

go separately. I think the others must have got safely into the Fort. It seems that since they have discovered that some of the English are trying to get through their lines they have strengthened the cordon round the Fort, so that now it is impossible to reach it."

"It's not pleasant, dad, to go back again and leave the others, is it?"

"It can't be helped, dear. I wish Pasmore would hurry up and come. He said, however, we were not to wait for him. That half-breed doesn't look too friendly, does he?"

"Pepin Quesnelle is, so I fancy it doesn't matter about the other," replied Dorothy.

The rancher turned to the others, who had evidently just finished a serious argument.

"Pepin," he observed, "I'm glad to find you're not one of those who forget their old friends."

"Did you ever think I would? Eh? What?" asked the manikin cynically, with his head on one side.

"I don't suppose I ever thought about the matter in that way," said Douglas, "but if I'd done so, I'm bound to say that I should have had some measure of faith in you, Pepin Quesnelle. You have known me for many years now, and you know I never say what I do not mean."

"So!... that is so. _Bien!_" remarked Pepin obviously pleased. "But the question we have had to settle is this. If we let your daughter go now, how is Bastien here to account for his prisoner in the morning? He knows that one day he will have to stand on the little trap-door in the scaffold floor at Regina, and that he will twirl round and round so--like to that so"--picking up a hobble chain and spinning it round with his hand--"while his eyes will stick out of his head like the eyes of a flat-fish; but at the same time he does not want to be shot by order of Riel or Gabriel Dumont to-morrow for losing a prisoner."

"Yees, they will shoot--shoot me mooch dead!" observed Bastien feelingly.

"So we have think," continued the dwarf, "that he should disappear also; that he go with you. I will tell them to-morrow that the girl here she was sit by the fire and she go up the chimney like as smoke or a speerit, so, and that Bastien he follow, and when I have go out I see them both going up to the sky. They will believe, and Bastien perhaps, if he keep away with you, or go hide somewhere else, he may live yet to get drown, or get shot, or be keel by a bear, and not die by the rope. You follow?"

"Where ees ze sleighs?" asked the breed, taking time by

the forelock.

They told him and he rose with alacrity.

"Zen come on quick, right now," he said.

Douglas was pressing some gold into the old dame's hand, but Pepin saw it.

"Ah, non!" he said. "There are bad Engleesh and there are good Engleesh, and there are bad French, but there are also good French. The girl is a good girl, but if Pepin cannot marry her he will at least not take her gold."

The old dame as usual, seconded him.

"That is right, Pepin," she said, "I cannot take the monies. Go, my child; you cannot help that my son will not have you for a wife. Some day, perhaps, you may find a hoosband who will console you. Adieu!"

Dorothy had again put on her fur coat, and, bidding the good old lady an affectionate farewell, and also thanking Pepin, they prepared to set out again for the deserted homestead in the bluffs.

"You will send the sergeant on at once if he comes here, won't you, Pepin?" said Douglas to the dwarf. "Perhaps it is as well to take his advice and get back as quickly as possible."

"Come now," remarked Pepin, "you must go. If you wait you may be caught Bastien will lead you safely there. Adieu!"

He opened the door and looked out Antoine moved to the door with a moccasin in his mouth. Dorothy said good-bye to Katie, who would have gone with her, only Pepin would not allow it. As Dorothy passed the latter he was evidently apprehensive lest she might be anxious to bid him a demonstrative farewell, for he merely bowed with exaggerated dignity and would not meet her eyes.

"There are lots of other men nearly as good as myself, my dear," he whispered by way of consolation.

By this time the last of the frenzied mob was looking for somewhere to lay its sore and weary head, so the open spaces were comparatively clear of rebels. In a couple of hours another dawn would break over that vast land of frozen rivers and virgin snows to witness scenes of bloodshed and pillage, the news of which would flash throughout the civilised world, causing surprise and horror, but which it would be powerless to prevent. By this time the stores which had burned so brilliantly on the previous night were dully glowing heaps of ashes. The tom-toms had ceased their hollow-sounding monotonous so suggestive of disorder and rapine, and the wild yelpings

of the fiend-like crew had given place to the desultory howling of some coyotes and timber-wolves that had ventured right up to the outskirts of the village, attracted by the late congenial uproar. They were now keeping it up on their own account. Farther away to the east, in the mysterious greyness of the dreary scene, lay the Fort, while in the ribbed, sandy wastes around, and in the clumps of timber, the cordon of rebels watched and waited.

As the fugitives looked back at the edge of the bluffs to catch one last glimpse of a scene that was to leave its mark on Canadian history, a rocket shot high into the heavens, leaving behind it a trail of glowing sparks and exploding with a hollow boom, shedding blood-red balls of fire all around, which speedily changed to a dazzling whiteness as they fell. It was a signal of distress from the beleaguered Fort to any relieving column which might be on its way. Then away to the north, as if to remind man of his littleness, the Aurora borealis sprang into life. A great arc or fan-like glory radiated from the throne of the great Ice-king, its living shafts of pearly, silvery and rosy light flashing with bewildering effect over one half of the great dome of the heavens, flooding that vast snow-clad land with a vision of colouring and beauty that brought home to one the words--"How marvellous are Thy works." No wonder that even the Indians should look beyond the narrow explanation of natural phenomena and call such a soul-stirring sight _the dance of the Spirits!_

But there was no time to lose, for should they be taken now their lives would surely pay for their rashness. They threaded their way among the wooded bluffs, avoiding the homesteads, and once they nearly ran into a rebel outpost standing under the trees near which two trails met. They made a detour, and at last, on crossing over a low ridge, they came upon the deserted homestead where they had left the sleighs, horses and dogs.

Everything seemed quiet as they silently approached, and Bastien seemed considerably astonished when he caught sight of the signs of occupation by the enemy. He, however, felt considerably relieved, for Pepin's pleasant prognostications were weighing somewhat heavily upon his mind. As for Dorothy, she felt strangely disappointed when she found that Sergeant Pasmore had not put in an appearance, for somehow she realised that there was something mysterious in his having stayed behind. They were passing an open shed when suddenly a not unfamiliar voice hailed them.

"The top av the mornin' t'ye," it said, "an' shure an' I thought I'd be here as soon as you."

It was Rory, who, after many adventures in dodging about the village, and seeing Jacques and the two women servants safely past the lax cordon of rebels, without taking advantage of the situation to take refuge in the Fort himself, had come back to his beloved dogs with a

presentiment that something had gone wrong with the others, and that his services might be required. He was singularly right.

Bastien nearly jumped out of his blanket suit with terror when he heard this strange voice. He had seized poor Dorothy with reckless temerity on the previous night when he was surrounded by his own people, but now that he had to deal with a white man he was not quite so brave. But Douglas speedily reassured him, and he busied himself in hitching up a team.

The rancher and Rory speedily compared notes.

"It will be light in another hour," said Douglas, not a little impatiently, "and I can't make out why Pasmore doesn't come on, unless he's got into trouble. As you tell me, and as he would know himself, it would be useless trying to get to the Fort. I don't like the idea of going on ahead, as he told me to be sure and do, while he may be in need of help."

"It's mortal queer," observed Rory, "that he didn't come on wid you." He turned and addressed Bastien, who, having hitched up two teams, seemed in a great hurry to be off. "Eh, mister, an' what may you be sayin' to it?"

"I tink eet ees time to be what you call depart," was the reply. "Eet ees mooch dead ze metis will shoot us if zey come now."

He glanced apprehensively around.

"It's the other man who came with Katie to the place where they had me prisoner, and who remained behind," explained Douglas. "He told me he'd come on."

The half-breed looked surprisedly and incredulously at the rancher. Dorothy had now joined the group, and was listening to what was being said.

"_Mon Dieu!_" exclaimed Bastien, "but ees eet possible that you not know! Katie she haf told all to me. Ze man you declare of he will no more come back. Ze man who made of you a preesonar, have to show one on ze morrow, but eet matter not vich, and dey arrange to show _ze ozer man!_ He take your place; he mooch good fellow, and zey shoot him mooch dead to-morrow!"

And all at once the truth--the self-sacrifice that Pasmore had so quietly carried out--flashed upon them. It was a revelation.

Douglas understood now why it was the sergeant had told him to hurry on, and not wait.

CHAPTER XI

THE RETREAT

There was a dead silence for about thirty seconds after the half-breed had revealed the truth regarding Pasmore's non-appearance. Douglas wondered why he had not suspected the real state of affairs before. Of course, Pasmore knew that his guards had only consented to the exchange on condition that he was handed over to the bloodthirsty crew on the morrow!

As for Dorothy, she realised at last how she had been trying to keep the truth from herself. She thought of how she had almost resented the fact of Pasmore having more than once faced death in order to secure the safety of her father and herself, although the man was modesty itself and made it appear as if it were only a matter of duty. True, she had thanked him in words, but her heart upbraided her when she thought of how commonplace and conventional those words must have sounded, no matter what she might have felt. She knew now that Katie must have found and spoken to him, and that her father's liberty probably meant his--Pasmore's--death. How noble was the man! How true the words--"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

It was Douglas who first broke the silence; he spoke like a man who was determined on a certain line of action, and whose resolve nothing should shake.

"I feel that what this fellow tells us is true, Dorothy," he said; "but it is utterly impossible that I can have it so. Pasmore is a young man with all his life before him, and I have no right to expect a sacrifice like this. I am going back--back this very moment, and you must go on with Rory. Pasmore can follow up. You must go on to Child-of-Light, who will take you safely to some of the settlers near Fort Pitt. As soon as the soldiers get here they will crush this rebellion at once. After all, I don't believe they will harm me. As for Pasmore, if they discover that he is one of the Police, he is a dead man. Good-bye!"

The girl caught him by both hands, and kissed him.

"You are right, father, you are only doing what is right," she said, "but I am coming with you. I could not possibly think of going on alone. We will return together. You will go on and take Pasmore's place--it will be all one to his guards so long as they produce a prisoner--and he can make good his escape. Lagrange here, who had charge of me before, can imprison me along with you, and the chances are they will be content to keep us as prisoners. It will also save Lagrange from getting into trouble later on."

"Ah! that ees mooch good," broke in the breed, who had

caught the drift of the last proposal. "_Oui_, that ees good, and then they will not shoot me mooch dead."

Old Rory gave a grunt and eyed the hulking fellow disgustedly. "It's nary a fut ye'll be goin' back now, an' I'm tellin' yees, so it's makin' what moind ye have aisy, sez Oi."

He turned to the rancher and there was grim determination in his eyes.

"An' as for you goin' back now, shure an' it's a gossoon ye'll be takin' me for if ye think I'll be lettin' yees. It's ten chances to wan them jokers'll have changed their sentymints by the time ye git thar, and will hould on to the sarjint as well as to you. It's mesilf as is goin' back if ye juist tell me where the show is, for I knows the whole caboodle, an' if I can't git him out o' that before another hour, then Rory's not the name av me. You juist--"

But he never finished the sentence, for at that very moment two or three shots rang out on the still night. They came from the neighbourhood of the town.

"Summat's up," exclaimed Rory. "Let's investigate."

The three men seized their rifles and ran up the ridge that overlooked the bend of the trail. They peered into the grey moonlit night in the direction of the township.

At first they could see nothing, but a desultory shot or two rang out, and it seemed to them that they were nearer than before. At last, round a bend in the trail, they caught sight of a dark figure running towards them.

"It must be one of the Police or Pasmore," said the rancher.

At last they saw this man's pursuers. There were only three of them, and one stopped at the turn, the other two keeping on. Now and again one of them would stop, kneel on the snow, and take aim at the flying figure. But moonlight is terribly deceptive, and invariably makes one fire high; moreover, when one's nerves are on the jump, shooting is largely chance work.

"'Pears to me," remarked Rory, "thet this 'ere ain't what you'd 'xactly call a square game. Thet joker in the lead is gettin' well nigh played out, an' them two coves a-follerin' are gettin' the bulge on 'im. Shure an' I'm thinkin' they're friends av yourn, Lagrange, but they wants stoppin'. What d'ye say?"

"_Oui, oui_ --oh, yiss, stob 'em! If they see me ze--what you call it--ze game is oop. Yiss, they friends--shoot 'em mooch dead."

The tender-hearted Lagrange was a very Napoleon in the

advocating of extreme measures when the inviolability of his own skin was concerned.

"It's a bloodthirsty baste ye are wid yer own kith an' kin," exclaimed Rory, disgustedly; "but I'm thinkin' the less shootin' the better unless we wants to hev the whole pack after us. No, we'll juist let thet joker in the lead git past, an' then well pounce on thim two Johnnies before they can draw a bead, an' take 'em prisoners."

No sooner said than done. They ran down the shoulder of the ridge, and, just where the trail rounded it, hid themselves in the shadow of a great pine. In a few minutes more a huge figure came puffing and blowing round the bend. They could see he had no rifle. The moonlight was shining full on his face, and they recognised Jacques. He did not see them, so they allowed him to pass on. In another minute his two pursuers also rounded the bend. One of them was just in the act of stopping to fire when Douglas and Rory rushed out.

"Hands up!" they shouted.

One of them let his rifle drop, and jerked his hands into the air at the first sound of the strange voices. But the other hesitated and wheeled, at the same moment bringing his rifle to his shoulder.

But Douglas and Rory had sprung on him simultaneously. His rifle was struck to one side, and he received a rap on the head that caused him to sit down on the snow feeling sick and dizzy, and wondering vaguely what had happened.

On hearing the commotion behind him, Jacques also stopped, and turned. He came up just in time to secure the better of the two rifles. The gentleman who had sat down against his own inclination on the snow, was hauled on one side, and while Douglas, Jacques and Lagrange stood over the prisoners, Rory again ascended the ridge to find out whether or not any more of the enemy were following.

In a few words Jacques told Douglas his adventures since he had left them on the previous night. He and the women had reached the British lines in safety, and shortly afterwards the Police also arrived. The Fort, however, was most uncomfortable. There were about six hundred men, women, and children all huddled together in the insufficient barrack buildings. After waiting for a few hours, Jacques began to wonder what was delaying the others, and to think that something must have gone wrong. He was not the sort to remain inactive if he knew his services might be required, so he evaded the sentries and stole out of the Fort again to find his missing friends. Luck had so far favoured him, and he had wished many of the rebels good-night without arousing any suspicion as to his identity, when unexpectedly he stumbled against a picquet. It had doubtless got about that there were spies and strangers in the town, for when they challenged him his

response was not considered satisfactory, and they ordered him to lay down his rifle and put up his hands. He made off instead, and, by dodging and ducking, managed to escape the bullets they sent after him. He had lost his rifle by stumbling in the snow, but he was fleet of foot, and soon managed to get ahead of his pursuers. He knew where there was a rifle if only he could reach the sleighs. He had hardly expected such good fortune as to fall in with his party again, having feared that they had been captured by the rebels. He advised Douglas to get back to the ranche by a little-used circuitous trail, as now it was pretty certain that the whole township was aroused, and the rebels would be out scouring the countryside for them in another hour or less. The only consolation that lay in the situation to Jacques was that he would now have an opportunity of seeking out and finally settling his little difference with his *_bete noire_*, Leopold St. Croix.

Rory came down from the ridge and reported that it would now be madness to attempt to carry out their programme of going back, as the entire settlement was aroused, and there was evidently some little fight going on amongst the rebels themselves. Douglas, he said, could not return to Pasmore's guards and offer to exchange himself, trusting to their friendship for Katie, for every one now would see them; they might only precipitate Pasmore's fate, and probably get shot themselves. They must get back to Child-of-Light.

It was certainly a distressing thing to have to do after all they had gone through, but the worst part of the whole affair was the thought of having to return leaving the man who had risked his life for them at the mercy of the rebels.

But it was folly on the face of it to go back to Battleford. Still Douglas hesitated.

"It's too much to expect one to do to leave him," he said, "but I'm afraid we're too late to do anything else."

As for Dorothy, she looked sick of it all, to say the least of it.

"It's too terrible, dad; too terrible for words, and I hardly thanked him for what he had done!"

"Nonsense, Dorothy! He knew we were people who didn't go about wearing our hearts upon our sleeves. Besides, the chances are that Pepin or Katie will stand him in good stead yet. Besides, they may take it into their heads to hold him as a hostage."

"Pardon, *_mon ami_*," said Jacques. "I think it is this of two ways. Either we go as Rory here says, or we stop and go back. As for myself, it matters not which--see"--he showed some ominous scars on his wrists--"that was Big-bear's lot long time ago when they had me at the

stake, and I was not afraid then. But I think it is well to go, for if Pasmore is not dead, then we live again to fight, and we kill that idiot St. Croix and one or two more. _Bien!_ Is not that so?"

"That's the whole affair in a nutshell," said Rory. "Now the question is, what we're going to do wid them beauties? It would hardly do to leave 'em here, an' as for Lagrange, he knows that them in Battleford won't be too friendly disposed to him now, so 'e'd better come, too."

"That's it," said the rancher, "we'll make these two breeds drive in front of us with the spare sleighs--they can't leave the trail the way the snow is--and anyhow we've got arms and they haven't, so I fancy they'll keep quiet. When we get some distance away we may send them back as hostages for Pasmore. Let us get ready."

The horses were speedily got into the sleighs, and in a few minutes the procession was formed. As for Rory, he had some little trouble in starting, for his dogs, in their joy at seeing him, gave expression to it in their own peculiar way. A big Muskymote knocked down a little Corbeau and straightway began to worry it, while a Chocolat did the same with a diminutive _tete-noire._

The order was given to pull out, and away they went again in the early dawn. Rory had not gone far in his light dog-sleigh before he pulled alongside the rancher.

"I say, boss," he said, "I ain't juist agoin' wid you yet awhile. I know iviry hole an' corner of them bluffs, an' I'm juist makin' for a quiet place I knows of, close by, where I'll be able to find out about Pasmore, and p'rhaps help him. As for you, keep right on to Child-o'-Light. I'll foller in a day or so if I kin, but don't you trouble about Rory. I'se know my way about, an' I'll be all right, you bet."

CHAPTER XII

A MYSTERIOUS STAMPEDE

Before Douglas could make any demur, Rory had switched off on to another trail and was driving quickly away.

"Rory is as wide awake as a fox," said Douglas to his daughter. "He's off at full speed now, and I don't suppose he'd turn for me anyhow, if I did overtake him."

"Let him go, father," said the girl. "Rory would have been dead long ago if there had been any killing him. Besides, he may really be of some use to Mr. Pasmore--one never can tell. Do you know, dad, I've got an idea that somehow Mr. Pasmore is going to come out of this all right I can't tell you why I think so, but somehow I feel

as if he were."

The rancher's gaze seemed concentrated on the tiny iridescent and diamond-like crystals floating in the air. There was a very sober expression on his face. He only wished he could have been honestly of the same opinion.

The sun came out strong, and it was quite evident that Jack Frost had not many more days to reign. Already he was losing that iron-like grip he had so long maintained over the face of Nature. The horses were actually steaming, and the steel runners glided smoothly over the snow, much more easily, indeed, than they would have done if the frost had been more intense, as those accustomed to sleighing very well know.

There was a great silence all round them, and when on the open prairie, where the dim horizon line and the cold grey sky became one, they could almost have imagined that they were passing over the face of some dead planet whirling in space. Only occasionally, where the country was broken and a few stunted bushes were to be met with, a flock of twittering snow-birds were taking time by the forelock, and rejoicing that the period of dried fruits and short commons was drawing to a close.

And now Dorothy saw that her father was struggling with sleep. It was not to be wondered at, for it was the third day since he had closed an eye. Without a word she took the reins from his hands, and in a few minutes more had the satisfaction of seeing him slumbering peacefully with his head upon his breast. The high sides of the sleigh kept him in position. When he awoke he found it was about eleven o'clock, and that once more they were in the wooded bluff country.

"You have let me sleep too long, Dorothy," he said. "It's time we called a halt for breakfast. Besides, we must send those breeds back."

He whistled to Jacques, who called to Bastien, and in another minute or two the sleighs were pulled up. The prisoners were then provided with food, and told that they were at liberty to depart. By making a certain cut across country they could easily reach the township before nightfall.

One would have naturally expected that the two moccasined gentry would have been only too glad to do as they were told; but they were truculent, surly fellows, both, and had been fretting all morning over the simple way in which they had been trapped, and so were inclined to make themselves disagreeable. Bastien Lagrange, who had always known them as two particularly tricky, unreliable customers, had preserved a discreet silence during the long drive, despite their endeavours to drag some information out of him. From what they knew of Douglas they felt in no way apprehensive of their personal safety, so, after the manner of mean men, they determined to take advantage of

his magnanimity to work out their revenge. Of Jacques, however, they stood in awe. They knew that if it were not for the presence of the rancher and his daughter that gentleman would very soon make short work of them. The cunning wretches knew exactly how far they could go with the British.

They began by grumbling at having been forced to accompany their captors so far, and asked for the fire-arms that had been taken from them. One of them even supplemented this modest request by pointing out that they were destitute of ammunition. Jacques could stand their impudence no longer, so, taking the speaker by the shoulders, he gave him an unexpected and gratuitous start along the trail. The two stayed no longer to argue, but kept on their way, muttering ugly threats against their late captors. In a few minutes more they had disappeared round a turn of the trail.

The party proceeded on its way again. After going a few hundred yards they branched on to a side trail, which led into hilly and wooded country. Passing through a dense avenue of pines in a deep, narrow valley, they came to a few log huts nestling in the shadow of a high cliff. There was a corral [Footnote: Corral = yard.] hard by with a stack of hay at one end. They approached it cautiously. Having satisfied themselves that the huts concealed no lurking foes, it was resolved that they should unhitch, give the horses a rest, and continue their journey a couple of hours later.

Jacques put one of his great shoulders to the door of the most habitable-looking log hut and burst it open. Dorothy entered with him. The place had evidently belonged to half-breeds. It was scrupulously clean, and in the fairly commodious kitchen, with its open fire-place at one end, they found a supply of fuel ready to their hand.

Whilst Jacques assisted the rancher and Lagrange in foddering the horses, Dorothy busied herself with preparations for a meal.

It was pleasant to be engaged with familiar objects and duties after passing through all sorts of horrors, and Dorothy entered cheerfully on her self-imposed tasks. She quickly lit a fire, and then went out with a large pitcher to the inevitable well found on all Canadian homesteads. She had to draw the water up in the bucket some forty or fifty feet, but she was no weakling, and soon accomplished that. To fill and swing the camp-kettle across the cheery fire was the work of a minute or two. She then got the provisions out of the sleighs, and before the three men returned from looking after the horses she had laid out a meal on the well-kept deal table, which she had covered with an oilcloth. The tea had been made by this time, and the four steaming pannikins filled with the dark, amber-hued nectar looked truly tempting. The rude benches were drawn close to the table, and the room assumed anything but a deserted appearance.

It would have been quite a festive repast only that the thought of Sergeant Pasmore's probable fate would obtrude itself. Certainly they could not count upon the security of their own lives for one single moment. It was just as likely as not that a party of rebels might drive up as they sat there and either shoot them down or call upon them to surrender. Dorothy, despite her endeavours to banish all thoughts of the situation from her mind, could not free herself from the atmosphere of tragedy and mystery that shrouded the fate of the captured one. Her reason told her it was ten chances to one that the rebels would promptly shoot him as a dangerous enemy. Still, an uncanny something that she could not define would not allow her to believe that he was dead: rather was she inclined to think that he was that very moment alive, but in imminent peril of his life and thinking of her. So strongly at times did this strange fancy move her that once she fully believed she heard him call her by name. She put down the pannikin of tea from her lips untasted, and with difficulty suppressed an almost irresistible impulse to cry out. But there was no sound to be heard outside save the dull thud of some snow falling from the eaves.

They had just finished their meal when suddenly a terrible din was heard outside. It seemed to come from the horse corral. There was a thundering of hoofs, a few equine snorts of fear, a straining and creaking of timber, a loud crash, and then the drumming of a wild stampede.

The men sprang to their feet and grasped their rifles.

"The horses!" cried Douglas; "some one has stampeded them! We must get them back at any cost."

"Don't go out that way," remonstrated Dorothy, as they made for the door. "You don't know who may be waiting for you there. There is a back door leading out from the next room, but you'd better look out carefully through the window first."

The wisdom of the girl's advice was so obvious that they at once proceeded to put it into execution.

CHAPTER XIII

ROOFED!

The back windows commanded a view of the horse corral, and they could see that one side of it had been borne down by the rush of horses. But what had frightened them was a mystery. There was nothing whatever of a hostile nature to be seen. They could detect no lurking foe among the pines, and when they passed outside, and went round the scattered huts, there was nothing to account

for the disastrous panic.

"_Parbleu!_" exclaimed Jacques, looking around perplexedly. "I think it must have been their own shadows of which they were afraid. Do you not think that is so, m'sieur?"

"It looks like it," said Douglas; but we must get those horses or the rebels will get _us_ to-morrow; they can hardly overtake us before then. If I remember rightly, there's a snake-fence across the trail, about half-a-mile or so up the valley, which may stop them. Now, if you, Jacques, go to the right, and you, Lagrange, to the left, while I take the trail--I'm not quite so young and nimble as you two--I dare say we'll not be long before we have them back. But I'd nearly forgotten about you, Dorothy. It won't do to--"

"Nonsense, dad! I'll be perfectly safe here. The sooner you get the horses back, the sooner we will be able to consider ourselves safe."

This view of the case seemed to commend itself to Bastien, for without further ado he strode away to the left among the pines.

"I'm afraid there's nothing else for it," said Douglas. "I think you'd better go inside again, Dorothy, and wait till we return."

"And in the meantime I'll pack the sleighs," observed the girl. "Leave me a gun, and I'll be all right"

The rancher leant his gun against the window sill, and then departed hastily.

The deserted huts seemed very lonely indeed when they had gone, but Dorothy was a healthy, prairie-bred girl, and not given to torturing herself with vain imaginings.

She went indoors, and, for the next few minutes busied herself in cleaning up and stowing away the dinner things. This done, she resolved to go outside, for a wonderful change had come about in the weather. It was only too obvious that a new Spring had been born, and already its mild, quickening breath was weakening the grip of King Frost.

Dorothy walked over towards the pines. She could detect a resinous, aromatic odour in the air. Here and there a pile of snow on the flat boughs would lose its grip on the roughened surface and slip to earth with a hollow thud. She skirted the outhouses, and then made for the long, low-roofed hut again. She was passing a large pile of cord-wood which she noted was built in the form of a square, when, happening to look into it, she saw something that for the moment caused her heart to stop beating and paralysed her with fear. It was a great gaunt cinnamon bear, which, seated on its haunches, was watching her with a look of comical surprise upon its preternaturally

shrewd, human-like face.

Dorothy's heart was thumping like a steam-engine. Fear, indeed, seemed to give her wings, for she gathered up her skirts and ran towards the house as she had never run in her life.

But the bear had just an hour or so before risen from his long winter's sleep, influenced, doubtless, by those "blind motions of the earth that showed the year had turned"; feeling uncommonly empty, and therefore uncommonly hungry, he had left his cave in the hillside lower down the valley to saunter upwards in search of a meal. The horses had unfortunately scented him before he was aware of their proximity, and, with that lively terror which all animals evince in the neighbourhood of bears, had broken madly away, to Bruin's great chagrin. If he had not been half asleep, and therefore stupid, he would have crawled upon them from the lee side, and been on the back, or at the throat, of one before they could have divined his presence. The noise of the men's voices had startled him, and he had gone into the wood heap to collect his thoughts and map out a new plan of campaign. The voices had ceased, but there was a nice, fresh-looking girl, who had walked right into his very arms, as it were. It was not likely he was going to turn up his nose at her. On the contrary, he would embrace the opportunity--and the young lady.

He must, indeed, have still been half asleep, for he had given Dorothy time to make a start, and there was no questioning the fact that she could run. Bruin gathered himself together and made after her. Now, to look at a bear running, one would not imagine he was going at any great rate; his long, lumbering strides seem laboured, to say the least of it, but in reality he covers the ground so quickly that it takes a very fast horse indeed to keep pace with him.

Before Dorothy had got half-way to the hut, she knew she was being closely pursued. She could hear the hungry brute behind her breathing hard. At length she reached the hut, but the door was shut. She threw herself against it and wrenched at the handle, which must have been put on upside down to suit some whim of the owners, for it would not turn. The bear was close upon her, so with a sob of despair she passed on round the house. Next moment she found herself confronted with a log wall and in a species of _cul-de-sac_. Oh! the horror of that moment! But there was a barrel lying on its side against the wall of the hut. Afterwards she marvelled how she could have done it, but she sprang on to it, and, gripping the bare poles that constituted the eaves of the shanty, leapt upwards. Her breast rested on the low sod roof; another effort and she was on it. The barrel was pushed from her on springing, and, rolling out of harm's way, she realised that for her it had been a record jump. The vital question now was, could the bear follow?

She raised herself on hands and knees among the soft, wet snow, and looked down apprehensively at the enemy.

What she saw would at any other time have made her laugh heartily, but the situation was still too serious to be mirthful. There, a few paces from the hut, seated on his haunches and looking up at her with a look of angry remonstrance on his old-fashioned face, was Bruin. His mouth was open, his under jaw was drooping with palpable disappointment, and his small dark eyes were gleaming with an evil purpose. That he had used up all his superfluous fat in his long winter's sleep was obvious, judging by his lanky, slab-like sides. His long hair looked very bedraggled and dirty. He certainly seemed remarkably hungry, even for a bear. There was no gainsaying the fact that he was wide awake now.

Dorothy rose to her feet and glanced quickly around. Particularly she looked up the trail in the direction taken by her father and the others, but the dark, close pines, and a bluff prevented her from seeing any distance. She could hear nothing save the twittering of some snow-birds, and the deep breathing of Bruin, who seemed sadly out of condition. The steep sides of the valley and the dark woods close up all around and shut in that desolate little homestead. There was no hiding the truth from herself; she was very much alone, unless the bear could be regarded as company. Bruin had her all to himself, so much so, indeed, that he appeared to be taking matters leisurely. He had the afternoon ahead of him, and, after all, it was only a girl with whom he had to deal. As he watched her there was even an apologetic expression upon his face, as if he were half ashamed to be engaged in such an ungentlemanly occupation and hoped it would be understood that he was only acting thus in obedience to the imperative demands of an empty stomach.

Dorothy wondered why the bear did not at once begin to clamber up after her. As a matter of fact, bears are not much good at negotiating high jumps, particularly when their joints have been stiffening during the greater part of the winter. But they have a truly remarkable intelligence, and this particular one was thinking the matter over in quite a business-like way.

Dorothy caught sight of a long sapling projecting from the eaves. It was really a species of rafter on which the sod roof rested. She cautiously lent over, and, grasping it with her two hands, managed with some considerable exercise of force to detach it. It was about six feet long and nearly as thick as her arm, making a formidable weapon.

Bruin regarded her movements disapprovingly, and resolved to begin operations. The barrel which had helped the girl to gain the roof was naturally the first thing that attracted him. With a mocking twinkle in his dark eyes, he slouched towards it. He was in no hurry, for, being an intelligent bear, he appreciated the pleasures of

anticipation. He placed his two fore feet on it, and then, with a quick motion, jerked his cumbersome hind quarters up after him.

But the bear had never seen a circus, and his education, so far as barrels were concerned, had been neglected. The results were therefore disastrous. The barrel rolled backwards while Bruin took a header forward. Never in the days of his cubhood had he effected such a perfect somersault. In fact, if it had been an intentional performance he could not have done it in better style. It was such an unexpected and spontaneous feat that his thoughts went wandering again, and he looked at the barrel in a puzzled and aggrieved sort of way, as if he half suspected it of having played him some sort of practical joke.

In spite of the peril of her situation Dorothy could not restrain a peal of laughter. A town-bred girl would doubtless have been still shaking with terror, but this was a lass o' the prairie, accustomed to danger. Besides, she saw now that to reach her would cost the bear more skill and agility than he appeared to possess.

The barrel, being in a species of hollow, rolled back and rocked itself into its former position.

The bear walked round it, sniffing and inspecting it in quite a professional manner. Then, not without a certain amount of side--also quite professional--he prepared to have another try.

He sprang more carefully this time, but he did it so as to put the momentum the other way. The result was that he rocked wildly backwards and forwards for about a minute, and managed to stay on the barrel as a novice might on a plunging horse, until the inevitable collapse came. The barrel took a wilder lurch forward than it had yet done, and Bruin dived backwards this time. He came down with such a thud, and in such an awkward position, that Dorothy made sure his neck was broken. To tell the truth, Bruin thought so himself. He actually had not the moral courage to move for a few moments, lest he should, indeed, find this to be the case. Even when he did move, he was not too sure of it, and looked the very sickest bear imaginable.

But a bear's head and neck are about the toughest things going in anatomy, so after Bruin had carefully moved his about for a little to make sure that nothing serious was the matter, he again turned his attention to the girl. His stock of patience was by this time nearly exhausted, and he glared up at her in a peculiarly spiteful fashion. Then, suddenly seized by a violent fit of energy, he leapt upon the barrel again with the determination to show this girl what he really could do when put to it. But, owing to the previous hard usage the barrel had received, some of the staves had started, the result was that it collapsed in a most thorough manner.

In addition to the surprise and shock sustained by the bear, his limbs got inextricably mixed up with the iron hoops, and he looked for all the world as if he were performing some juggling feat with them. One hoop had somehow got round his neck and right fore leg at the same time, while another had lodged on his hind quarters. He fairly lost his temper and spun round and round, snapping viciously at his encumbrances. The girl laughed as she had not laughed for many a long day. To see the dignified animal make such an exhibition of himself over a trifle of this sort was too ludicrous. But at last he managed to get rid of the hoops, stood erect on his hind legs, and then waddled clumsily towards the hut.

Dorothy was not a little alarmed now, for his huge forepaws were on a level with the eaves, while his blunt, black snout was quite several inches above the sod roof. What if he could manage to spring on to it after all! He opened his mouth, and she could see his cruel yellow jagged teeth and the grey-ribbed roof of his mouth. He moved his head about and seemed preparing for a spring. Dorothy raised the stout pole high above her head with both hands, and, with all the strength that was in her supple frame, brought it down crash upon the brute's head.

Bruin must assuredly have seen stars, and thought that a small pine tree had fallen on him, for he dropped on all-fours again with his ideas considerably mixed--so mixed, indeed, that he had not even the sense to go round to the other side of the house, where there was a huge snowdrift by which he might possibly have reached the roof. But, being a persevering bear, and having a tolerably thick head, not to speak of a pressing appetite, he again reared himself against the log wall with the intention of scrambling up. On each occasion that he did this, however, the girl brought the influence of the pole to bear upon him, causing him to change his mind. Dorothy began to wonder if it were possible that a blacksmith's anvil could be as hard as a bear's skull.

But at last Bruin grew as tired of the futile game as Dorothy of whacking at him with the pole, and, disgusted with his luck and with himself, withdrew to the neighbourhood of the corral fence, either to wait until the girl came down, or to think out a new plan of campaign.

As for Dorothy, she seated herself as best she could on an old tin that had once contained biscuits, and which, with various other useless articles, littered the roof. She was quite comfortable, and the sun was warm--in fact, almost too much so. She was conscious, indeed, that her moccasins were damp. In future she would wear leather boots with goloshes over them during the day, and only put on moccasins when it became cold in the evening. She knew that in a few days the snow would have disappeared as if by magic, and that a thousand green living things would be rushing up from the brown, steaming earth, and brooding with the promise of a still fuller beauty the

quickenings boughs.

But what was delaying her father and the others? Surely, if the fence and slip-rails were across the trail where they said they were, the rush of the horses must have been checked, and they would be on their way back now. But she could neither see nor hear anything of their approach. It was stupid to be sitting up there on the roof of a house with nothing save a bear--fortunately at a respectable distance--for company, but perhaps under the circumstances she ought to be very thankful for having been able to reach such a haven at all. Besides, the day was remarkably pleasant--almost summer-like--although there was slush under-foot. Everywhere she could hear the snow falling in great patches from the trees and the rocks. The bare patches of earth were beginning to steam, and lawn-like vapours were lazily sagging upwards among the pines as the sun kissed the cold cheek of the snow queen.

Dorothy's head rested on her hands, and she began to feel drowsy. The twittering of the snow-birds sounded like the faint tinkling silver sleigh-bells far away; the bear loomed up before her, assuming gigantic proportions, his features at the same time taking a human semblance that somehow reminded her of the face of Pepin Quesnelle, then changing to that of some one whose identity she could not exactly recall. Stranger still, the weird face was making horrible grimaces and calling to her; her eyes closed, her head dropped, and she lurched forward suddenly; she had been indulging in a day dream and had nearly fallen asleep. But surely there was some one calling, for a voice was still ringing in her ears.

She pulled herself together and tried to collect her senses. The bear assumed his natural proportions, and Dorothy realised that she was still seated on the roof of the log hut. And then a harsh voice--the voice of her dream--broke in with unpleasant distinctness upon her drowsily-tranquil state of mind.

"Hi, you zere?" it said. "What for you not hear? Come down quick, I zay."

Dorothy turned, and, glancing down on the other side of the hut, saw the two objectionable rebels whom her father had released nearly a couple of hours before. There was an ugly grin upon their faces, and the one who had addressed her held in his hands the gun which Douglas had placed against the wall so that it might be handy for his daughter in any emergency.

CHAPTER XIV

A THREE-CORNERED GAME

It was now a case of being between the devil and the deep sea with a vengeance, and Dorothy, as she surveyed the two vindictive rebels on one side and the hungry bear on the other, was almost at a loss to determine which enemy was the more to be dreaded. Upon the whole she thought she would have the better chance of fair play with the bear. If the latter succeeded in clambering on the roof, at a pinch she could get down the wide chimney, a feat which it was not likely the bear would care to emulate. True, it would be a sooty and disagreeable experiment, not to speak of the likelihood of being scorched on reaching the fire-place, but then she could at once heap more fuel on the fire, which would make it impossible for Bruin to descend, and barricade herself in until the others returned.

It was fortunate that the girl's presence of mind did not desert her. Her policy was to temporise and keep the foe waiting until the others returned with the horses. Moreover, she noticed that Bruin sat on his haunches, listening, with his head to one side, as if this new interruption were no affair of his.

A brilliant idea occurred to her, and already she almost began to look upon Bruin as an ally. As yet the half-breeds were unaware of the bear's proximity.

The girl, without rising, picked up the pole and placed it across her knees.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked the taller of the two rebels. "Don't you want to return to Battleford?"

"Eet is too late how, and we want you," explained the first villain. "Come down queeck. Eet is no time we have to waste. Eef we have to fetch you eet will be ver' bad for you."

"Dear me!" remarked Dorothy, outwardly keeping cool, but not without serious misgivings. "I can't think what you can want with me. But, as you're so anxious, I'll come down--in a few minutes--when my father and the others return."

"Ze horses they in big snowdreeft stuck and ze man cannot leaf. Come down now--we want you!"

It was obvious to Dorothy that the two rebels, in taking a circuitous route to the hut, had come upon the horses stuck fast in a snowdrift, and that her father and Jacques and Bastien were busily engaged in trying to extricate them. Knowing that the girl must have been left alone with the fire-arms, the two rebels had hurried back to secure them, with wild, half-formed ideas of revenge stirring their primitive natures.

Dorothy's policy was to keep cool, in order not to precipitate any action on their part.

"Co-om," said the taller one, whose villainous appearance was not lessened by a cast in his right eye, "we want you to gif us to eat. Co-om down."

"Goodness! have you eaten all we gave you already? You must have wonderful appetites, to be sure. If you look in the sleigh--"

"Pshaw! co-om you down and get. What for you sit all alone up there? Eet is not good to sit zere, and you will catch cold."

"Oh, don't trouble about me, thanks. I'm all right; I don't catch cold easily--"

What the cross-eyed one ejaculated at this point will not bear repetition. He actually so far forgot himself as to threaten Dorothy with bodily violence if she did not at once obey him. But as the girl only remained seated, with apparent unconcern, upon the biscuit tin, and gazed mildly into his face, it became evident to the big rebel that he was only wasting words in thus addressing her. He prepared to ascend the snow bank, jump thence on to the roof, and fetch her down by force.

Dorothy, like Sister Ann of Bluebeard fame, gazed anxiously around and listened with all the intensity born of her desperate state; but there was nothing to be seen or heard. Only Bruin had risen again and was coming slowly towards the hut. A bright scheme suggested itself to the girl; but she would wait until the cross-eyed one discovered how utterly rotten and soft the snow-bank had become before putting it into practice. She must gain all the time she could.

The rebel managed to reach the top of the drift, which was nearly on a level with the roof of the hut, without sinking more than an inch or two into the snow; but when he braced himself preparatory to springing across the intervening wind-cleared space, the crust gave and down he went nearly up to the waist. The more he struggled, the deeper he sank. His flow of language was so persistent and abusive that even Bruin, on the other side of the hut, stood still to listen and wonder. It was as much as Dorothy could do to keep from laughing heartily at the fellow's discomfiture, but she restrained herself, as such a course might only drive him to some unpleasant and desperate measure. She, however, thought it a pity that only one of them should be struggling in the drift. She must drive the other into it also. She therefore rose and called to the second villain, on whose evil face there was an unmistakable grin. Like Bastien, and most of his kind, he had no objections to seeing his own friends suffer so long as he himself came by no harm.

"Ho, you there!" she cried in apparent indignation. "Don't you see your friend in the drift? Why don't you give him a hand out? Are you afraid?"

But the second villain was too old a bird to be caught with chaff, and replied by putting his mitt to one side of his nose, at the same time closing his right eye. He bore eloquent testimony to the universality of the great sign language.

"You are a coward!" she exclaimed, disgusted with the man, and at the failure of her little scheme.

"A nice comrade, you! I wonder you ever had the spirit to rebel!"

This was too much for the rogue's equanimity, and he launched into such a torrent of abuse that the girl was obliged to put her fingers in her ears. He, however, went to the trouble of crawling over the snowdrift and picking up the gun which his worthy mate had dropped when he broke through the crust. By this time the first villain had managed to extricate himself, and had moved into the clear space opposite the front door of the hut. The eyes of the two were now fairly glowing with rage, and they prepared to storm the position. One of them was in the act of giving a back to the other when Dorothy appeared on the scene with the sapling.

"Don't be silly," she cried. "If you do anything of that sort I shall use the pole. Go round to the back; there's a barrel there, and if you can set it up on end against the wall, I'll come down quietly."

They looked up at her; they did not quite understand all she said, but the girl's face seemed so innocent and unconcerned that they strode round the hut, still keeping their evil eyes upon Dorothy and her weapon of defence. It must be confessed that Dorothy had some qualms of conscience in thus introducing them to Bruin, but her own life was perhaps at stake, and they had brought the introduction on themselves. Still, they had a gun, and there were two of them, so it would be a case of a fair field and no favour.

Bruin heard them coming and stood on his hind legs to greet them. Next moment the three were face to face. It would have been difficult to imagine a more undignified encounter. The big breed's legs seemed to collapse under him; the other, who carried the gun, and was therefore the more self-possessed of the couple, brought it sharply to his shoulder and fired.

Bruin dropped on his knees, but speedily rose again, for a bear, unless hit in a vital place, is one of the most difficult animals to kill; and in this case the bullet had merely glanced off one of his massive shoulder-blades. Being ignorant of the resources of a magazine rifle, the half-breed dropped it, and ran towards a deserted outhouse close to the horse corral.

Thoroughly infuriated now by the bullet-wound, the bear made after him. As he could not annihilate the two men

at once, he confined his efforts with praiseworthy singleness of purpose to the man who had fired the shot. It was lucky for the fugitive that bullet had somewhat lamed the great brute, otherwise it would not have needed to run far before overtaking him.

It was an exciting chase. The breed reached the hut, but, as there was neither open door nor window, he was obliged to scuttle round and round it, after the manner of a small boy pursued by a big one. Sometimes the bear, with almost human intelligence, would stop short and face the other way, when the breed would all but run into him, and then the route would be reversed. On the Countenance of the hunted one was a look of mortal terror; his eyes fairly started from his head, and his face streamed with perspiration. It seemed like a judgment upon him for breaking his word to the rancher and interfering with the girl, when he might now have been well on his way to Battleford.

While this was going on, the cross-eyed ruffian endeavoured to clamber on to the roof of the hut by jumping up and catching the projecting sapling as Dorothy had done, but the girl stopped him in this by tapping his knuckles with the pole.

"Pick up and hand me that gun," she said, pointing to it. "When you have done so, I will allow you to come up."

The cross-eyed one looked sadly astonished, but as he did not know the moment when the bear might give up chasing his worthy comrade to give him a turn, he did as he was bid. The rifle would be of no use to the girl, anyhow, and, besides, her father and the others must have heard the shot and would be on their way back to see what the matter was. It would therefore be as well to comply with her request and try to explain that their seemingly ungrateful conduct had only been the outcome of their innate playfulness. If they had erred it was in carrying a joke a trifle too far.

As soon as Dorothy found herself in possession of the rifle she knew that she was safe. She even laid the pole flat on the roof, allowing one end of it to project a foot or so beyond it so as to aid the cross-eyed one in his unwonted gymnastic feat. In a few moments the discomfited villain stood on the roof in front of her.

Dorothy lowered the lever of the Winchester so that he could see it and pumped another cartridge into the barrel. The half-breed realised the extent of his folly, but saw it was too late to do anything.

"Now stand over in that far corner," said the girl to him, "or I will shoot you."

But the cross-eyed one was humility itself, and protested that he could not for all the gold in the bed of the Saskatchewan have lifted a finger to do the dear young

Mam'selle any harm. In his abject deference he was even more nauseous than in his brazen brutality. He did as he was bid all the same, and the two turned their attention to the unlucky man who was having such a lively time with Bruin. Dorothy, however, did not forget to keep a sharp eye on the man near her.

Had there not been such tragic possibilities in the temper and strength of the bear, the situation might have been eminently entertaining. The position of the two principals in the absorbing game of life and death was not an uncommon one. Bruin stood upright at one corner of the hut and the half-breed stood at another: each was watching the other intently as a cat and mouse might be expected to do. The man's mitted hands rested against the angle of the wall and his legs straddled out on either side so as to be ready to start off in any direction at a moment's notice. Whenever the bear made a move the half-breed slightly lowered his body and dug his feet more securely into the soft snow. They resembled two boys watching each other in a game of French and English. After standing still for a minute or two and regaining their wind, they would start off to their positions at two other corners. Sometimes the bear would be unseen by the man, and this state of affairs was generally a very puzzling and unsatisfactory one for the latter, as he never knew from which direction Bruin might not come charging down upon him.

When the two spectators on the roof turned their attention to the two actors, the latter were in the watching attitude, but almost immediately the game of "tag" began again. The pursued one was evidently in considerable distress; his face matched the colour of his knitted crimson tuque, at the end of which a long blue tassel dangled in a fantastic fashion. His whole attitude was that of one suffering from extreme physical and nervous tension. Dorothy's first impulse was to try and shoot the bear, but owing to the distance and its movements she realised that this would be a matter of considerable difficulty. Besides, unless the bear-hunted rogue were fool enough to leave the friendly vantage of the hut, it was obvious that he would be quite able to evade the enemy until such time as her father and the others came. This would serve the useful purpose of keeping him out of mischief and rendering him a source of innocent entertainment to his friend, for it must be admitted that the latter, now that he was safe, or considered himself so, adopted the undignified, not to say unchristian-like, attitude of openly expressing a sporting interest in the proceedings.

But the fugitive had grown tired of the trying device of dodging the bear round four corners, and, thinking that if he could only get to the horse corral and squeeze between the posts, he could, by keeping it between himself and Bruin, gain the hut at the far end and mount on to the roof. He determined to put his scheme to the test. So, when for a moment he lost sight of Bruin behind the

other corner, he made a frantic bolt for the fence. But his enemy happened to be making a dash round that side of the house from which Leon reckoned he had no right to make, one, and the result was that in another instant the beast was close at his heels. It was an exciting moment, and Dorothy, despite the fact that the hunted one was a dangerous enemy, could not restrain a cry of horror when she saw his imminent peril. She would have shot at the bear if she could, but just at that moment it happened to be going too fast for her.

As for the cross-eyed one, it was indeed a treat to see Leon, who had laughed at him when he sank into the snowdrift, flying for his life with a look of ghastly terror on his face. It was a case of retributive justice with a vengeance. His sporting tendencies were again in the ascendant, and he clapped his hands and yelled with delight.

The hunted half-breed managed to reach and squeeze through the fence ahead of the bear, but the latter, to Leon's dismay, succeeded in getting through after him, lifting up the heavy rails with his strong snout and great back as if they were so many pieces of cane. Then for the next three minutes Leon only managed to save himself by a very creditable acrobatic performance, which consisted of passing from one side of the fence to the other after the manner of a harlequin. He had lost his tuque, and the bear had spared time to rend it to shreds with its great jaws and one quick wrench of its forepaws. His stout blue coat was ripped right down the back, and altogether he was in a sorry plight.

The cross-eyed one had never witnessed anything so funny in all his life, and fairly danced about on the roof in his glee. There was every chance that Leon would be clawed up past all recognition in the next few minutes, so he shouted encouragement to Bruin for all he was worth.

Then to the girl's horror she saw the hunted half-breed stumble in the snow, and the bear grab him by his short blue coat just as he was wriggling under the fence. Dorothy did not hesitate to act promptly now. If she did not instantly put a bullet into the bear the man would be torn to pieces before her eyes, and that would be too horrible. True, she might just possibly kill the man by firing, but better that than he should be killed by Bruin. Fortunately she was accustomed to fire-arms, and was a fairly good shot, so, putting the rifle to her shoulder, she took aim and drew the trigger.

It was a good shot, for the bullet penetrated a little behind the left shoulder, in the neighbourhood of the heart, and the bear, releasing his grip upon Leon, lurched forward and lay still, while the breed crawled, in a very dishevelled condition, into the horse corral.

Dorothy was congratulating herself upon her success, and was in the act of heaving a sigh of relief, when suddenly

the rifle, which for the moment she held loosely in her right hand, was snatched from her grasp. At the same moment an arm was thrust round her throat, and she was thrown roughly on the snow.

CHAPTER XV

CHECKMATED

For a minute or two Dorothy struggled to free herself from her burly captor, but it was the struggle of the gazelle with the tiger, and the tiger prevailed. He laughed brutally, and put his knee upon her chest.

Even then she managed to slide her hand down to her side, where, after the manner of most people in that land, she carried a sheath-knife. This she succeeded in drawing, but the half-breed saw the gleam of the steel and caught her wrist with his vice-like fingers.

"Ho, Leon!" he yelled; "coom quick, and bring ze rope!"

It was a wonderful change that had come over the cross-eyed one. A few minutes before and he had been an abject coward; now he was the blustering bully and villain, with his worst passions roused, and ready to take any risks to gratify his thirst for revenge.

As for Dorothy, she saw the futility of struggling, and lay still. What could have happened to her father and Jacques that they did not come up? Surely they must be near at hand. Was God going to allow these men, whose lives she and her father had spared, to prevail? She did not doubt that they meant to put her cruelly to death. She breathed a prayer for Divine aid, and had a strange presentiment that she was to be helped in some mysterious way.

In a minute or two Leon was also upon the roof. In his hand he held some strips of undressed buck-skin and a jack-knife. He seemed to have forgotten all about his late peril in the paramount question of how they were to revenge themselves upon the girl who a short time before had outwitted them. The cross-eyed one hated her because she had rapped him over the knuckles and given him a bad five minutes when she had possession of the gun. Leon was furious because she had brought about his introduction to Bruin so cleverly, and given him beyond doubt the worst ten minutes he ever had in his life. Like most gentlemen of their stamp, they quite lost sight of the fact that they themselves had been the aggressors, and that, had it not been for the girl's goodness of heart, they would in all probability have both been killed.

Perhaps the strangest feature of the situation to Dorothy was that Leon did not seem to resent his worthy mate's

late secession from the path of loyalty, or, to put it more plainly, his cold-bloodedness in laying him the odds in favour of the bear. Probably they knew each other so well and were so accustomed to be kicked when down that Leon took the affair as a matter of course. Dorothy rightly concluded, however, that this seeming indifference was merely the outcome of the cunning half-breed nature, which never forgot an insult and never repaid it until the handle end of the whip was assured.

The first thing that the two villains proceeded to do was to tie Dorothy's hands, not too closely, however, behind her back. It was useless to attempt resistance, as they were both powerful men, and they would only have dealt with her more roughly had she done so. Then the cross-eyed one proposed that they should take her into the empty hut and tie her up. If they succeeded in getting another rifle, as they expected they would, they could wait inside and shoot the rancher and Jacques as they unsuspectingly approached with the horses. Bastien Lagrange could then be easily disposed of. It would be necessary to put something in the girl's mouth--Leon suggested his old woollen head-gear which the bear had chewed up--until her friends were ambushed, as otherwise she might give the alarm. Afterwards they could dispose of her at their sweet leisure. This and more they discussed with such candour and unreserve that had only the occasion and necessity been different, the greatest credit would have been reflected on them.

"Oh, you fiends!" cried the girl as the horror of the situation dawned upon her. "Would you murder the men in cold blood who spared your lives when they had every right to take them? You cowards! Why don't you shoot me? Do you think I am afraid of being shot?"

It was all like some horrible nightmare to her just then. Brief time seemed such an eternity that she longed for it to come to an end. She felt like one who, dreaming, knows she dreams and struggles to awake.

The cross-eyed one was evidently delighted to see that he had at length aroused this hitherto wonderfully self-possessed girl to such a display of emotion; she looked ever so much handsomer now that she was angry. His watery, awry eyes gleamed, and his thick underlip drooped complacently. He would see if she had as much grit as she laid claim to. It was all in the day's sport; but he would have to hurry up.

He seized the Winchester, and, holding it in front of him, jerked down the lever as he had seen Dorothy do, so as to eject the old and put a fresh cartridge into the breech. But the old cartridge, in springing out, flew up and hit him such a smart rap between the eyes that Leon at once seized his little opportunity and laughed ironically.

"Good shot, Lucien!" he cried. "Encore, _mon ami!_"

Lucien's eyes were watering and smarting, and he felt quite like shooting his sympathetic friend on the spot, but he kept his wrath bravely under, and resolved to show Leon in a very practical fashion how he could shoot on the first auspicious occasion. Yes, such a blessed opportunity would be worth waiting and suffering for.

And now they prepared to remove Dorothy from the roof, and take her inside the hut. Leon was to descend first, and then Lucien was to make her jump into the snowdrift, where she would stick, and Leon would be waiting for her.

Poor Dorothy knew that if help did not come speedily she would be undone. She prayed for Divine aid. She could not believe that God would look down from Heaven and see these fiends prevail. God's ways, she was aware, were sometimes inscrutable, and seemed to fall short of justice, but she knew that sooner or later they invariably worked out retributive justice more terrible than man's. This was to be made plain to her sooner than she imagined, and unexpectedly, as God's ways occasionally are.

Leon descended, and his comrade, with an evil light in his eyes and an oath on his lips, came towards Dorothy to force her to jump on to the snowdrift; but villain number two stopped him.

"Ze gun, Lucien," he said, "hand me ze gun first time."

The half-breed grasped the Winchester by the barrel and handed it down to his comrade, but as he did so he was unaware of the fact that the lever, in pumping up a fresh cartridge, had also put the weapon on full cock. Leon, in grasping it, did so clumsily, and inadvertently touched the trigger. In an instant the death-fire spouted from the muzzle, and Lucien fell forward with a bullet through his brain.

Not always slow are the ways of Him Who said, "Vengeance is Mine."

The girl sank back in horror at the sight. To see a man sent to his account red-handed is a terrible thing.

The fatal shot was still ringing in her ears when another sound broke in upon the reverberating air. It was the muffled drumming of hoofs and the hurried exclamations of voices which she recognised. It was her father and the others returning with the horses. She staggered to her feet again as best she could, for her hands, being tied behind her back, made rising a difficult matter. She must have presented a strange sight to the party, bound as she was, and with her long hair streaming behind her. She heard her father's cry of apprehension, and the next moment she caught sight of the remaining rebel scuttling like a startled iguana towards the dense plantation, where it would have been quite possible for him to have eluded pursuit. But before he reached it

there was a sharp ping. He threw up his hands and fell dead on his face. Douglas had made sure of him.

"It's all right, dad, and I'm not hurt," said the girl reassuringly, as her father ran towards her with a look of anguish on his face. "You just came in the nick of time; they were going to ambush you. Don't let the horses go too near the corral, as they will be stampeded again. A dead bear is lying there."

In a few minutes she had told her father what had occurred, and he had explained the delay. It had been as the two rebels had said. The horses had gone off the trail into a deep snowdrift, and it had required a great deal of hard work to get them out. They had not heard the shot which Dorothy had fired at the bear, for the very sufficient reason that two bluffs intervened, and the fairly strong chinook wind carried away all sound. They had not thought there was any reason to be apprehensive about her, but they had worked toilsomely to get back. Bastien had proved a pleasant surprise in this respect--he had, doubtless, by no means incorrect views regarding Riel's powers of pursuit and revenge. That the two rebels should have come back, and that a bear--a sure harbinger of spring--should have made itself so intrusive were contingencies the party could hardly have foreseen. As it was, Dorothy, save for the fright, was little the worse for the rough handling she had received, so they resolved to proceed on their way in about an hour's time, when certain necessary duties had been fulfilled.

Before the ruddy sun began to go down behind the pine-crested bluffs and far-stretching sea of white-robed prairie in a fairy cloudland of crimson and gold and keenest blue, the horses were hitched up into the sleighs, and the fugitives were bowling merrily up the valley so as to strike the main trail before nightfall.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FATE OF SERGEANT PASMORE

When Sergeant Pasmore was left in the dug-out, or, to explain more fully, the hut built into the side of a hill, he sat down in the semi-darkness and calmly reviewed the situation. It was plain enough.

He was a prisoner, and would be shot within twelve hours; but Douglas and Dorothy were probably now safe, and well on their way to friends. This, at least, was a comforting reflection.

He heard the talking of the breeds at the door; then he saw it open, and one looked in upon him with his rifle resting upon his chest. These were two of the sober crowd. There was no getting away from them. The leaders of the

rebels probably by this time knew they had a prisoner, and if he were not forthcoming when they were asked to produce him, the lives of his gaolers would more than likely pay the penalty. True, for Katie's sake they had made an exchange, but that did not matter--no one would know. Yes, they were ready to shoot him like a dog if he made the slightest attempt to escape.

And she, Dorothy--well, he didn't mind dying for her. Within the last twenty-four hours he had realised how fully she had come into his life. And he had striven against it, but it was written in the book. He could not altogether understand her. At one moment she would be kind and sympathetic, and then, when he unbent and tried to come a step nearer to her, she seemed to freeze and keep him at arm's length. And he thought he had known women once upon a time, in the palmy days across the seas. He wondered what she would think on finding out the truth about her father's release.

It was cold sitting on an upturned pail with his moccasins resting on the frozen clay, and breathing an atmosphere which was like that of a sepulchre. He wished the dawn would break, even although it meant a resumption of that awful riot and bloodshed.

Yes, they would certainly shoot him when they discovered that he was one of the hated red-coats who represented the might and majesty of Great Britain. Why they should now hate the Mounted Police, who had indeed always been their best friends, was one of those problems that can only be explained by the innate perversity of what men call human nature.

He was becoming drowsy, but he heard a strange scraping on the low roof over his head, and that kept him awake for some little time speculating as to whether or not it could be a bear. It seemed a silly speculation, but then, in wild regions, inconvenient prisoners have often been quietly disposed of through roofs and windows during their sleep. As he did not intend to be taken unawares like that, he groped around and found the neck yoke of a bullock. It would do to fell a man with, anyhow.

He could hear the voices of his two guards at the door only indistinctly, for, as has been said, it was a long, narrow room. He wished it were a little lighter so that he might see what he was doing. When the thing on the roof once broke through, he would be in the shadow, while it would be against the light. That would give him the advantage.

At length the unseen intruder reached the straw that covered the thin poles laid one alongside the other. The straw was scraped aside, and then against the dark grey sky Pasmore could see an uncertain shape, but whether man or beast he could not make out. To push aside the pole would be an easy matter. He held his breath, and gripped the neck yoke.

"Hist!" and the figure was evidently trying to attract his attention.

Pasmore thought it as well to wait until he was surer of his visitor. A Mounted Policeman knew better than to give himself away so simply.

"His-st, Sar-jean! Katie and Pepin she was send," said the voice again.

It flashed through Pasmore's brain that here now was the explanation of this strange visit. The half-breed (and it was Pierre La Chene himself) had been sent by his sweetheart to effect his rescue. It was, of course, absurd to suppose that Pierre was undertaking this hazardous and philanthropical job on his own account. What else save love could work such wonders?

"Sar-jean, Sar-jean, you ready now?" asked Pierre, impatiently, preparing to pull up the poles.

But Pasmore hesitated. Was he not imperilling the safety of Douglas and his daughter by following so soon after them? For, should they not have got quite clear of the settlement, the hue and cry would be raised and scouts would be sent out all around to cut off their retreat. He thought of Dorothy. No, he could not in his sober senses risk such a thing.

"Sar-jean, Sar-jean!"

But just at that moment, somewhere over in the village, there was a wild outbreak of noise, the sound of rifle-firing being predominant.

The straw was quickly pushed back over the poles and some debris and snow scooped over that. At the same moment the door was thrown open and his two guards entered; but they came no farther than the doorway. One of them struck a light, and immediately lit some hemp-like substance he carried in his hand. It flared up instantly, illuminating the long barn from end to end.

"Hilloa! you thar?" cried one of them.

But it was unnecessary to have asked such a question, for the light disclosed the form of the sergeant re-seated on the upturned pail, with his head resting on his hands. He appeared to be asleep.

Evidently satisfied with their scrutiny his guards again turned towards the door to find out, if possible, the reason of the firing. The whole settlement would be aroused in a few minutes if it went on, or at least those would who had not entered so fully as the others into the orgie. What could it be? It was in reality Jacques making good his escape, but Pasmore was not to know that.

To the sergeant the uncertainty was painful. Could the rancher and his daughter have been delayed until they had been detected by some vigilant rebels? The idea was terrible. But he noted that the grey wintry dawn was fast creeping over the snow-bound earth, and he concluded that the fugitives must have got through some considerable time before.

The firing ceased, and at last the thoroughly tired-out man laid himself down on some old sacking, and fell fast asleep.

It was broad daylight when he was awakened by a kick from a moccasined foot.

"Ho, thar!" cried some one. "Git up and be shot!"

The speaker did not repeat the kick, as he took good care to stand well to one side when the sleeper awoke.

Then the present, with all its lurid horror, crashed down upon the soul of Pasmore. He was to be shot--yes, but his heart glowed within him when he thought of Dorothy, for whom he had made this sacrifice!

He rose to his feet. There was a group of dirty, bleary-eyed breeds and Indians standing within the doorway. One or two who had known him before looked on sulkily and silently, for they knew that while he was a man whose hand was iron and whose will was indomitable in the carrying out of the law, he had ever a kindly word and a helping hand for such as needed help. Those who only knew him by the power he represented in the law, openly jeered and crowed over this big "shermoganish" whom now they had fairly in their grasp, and whom they must destroy if the metis were to own and govern the land. They also, however, kept well away from him, for had they not heard how he had taken three bad Indians single-handed on the Eagle Hills by wounding them in turn, and then driving them before him, on foot, like sheep, into the Fort?

The sun was shining brightly down on the scene of rapine and lawlessness, which looked peaceful and fair enough, in all truth, robed as it was in its snow-white vestments. Only here and there a heap of black and smouldering ruins spoke of the horrors of the previous night. From the scattered houses on the flat, wreaths of smoke were rising right cheerily into the sharp, clear air. Breeds and Indians, men, women, and children, were moving about everywhere, carrying with them, for purposes of display, their ill-gotten goods. Some of the lounging figures at the door even had resplendent new sashes, and odd-looking articles that did duty for them, wound round their waists and necks. At intervals Pasmore could hear an odd rifle shot, and he guessed that the Fort must be closely invested. His first thoughts, however, were for Dorothy and her father, whom he hoped were now safely back under the friendly protection of Child-of-Light.

"Sar-jean," said a big half-breed whom he recognised as one of his guards of the previous night, "will you haf to eat and drink?"

The fellow did not look such a callous fanatic as some of the others, and although this promise of breakfast was not particularly exhilarating, still, Pasmore had a healthy appetite, and he answered in the affirmative.

The big breed issued some orders, and in a few minutes, to Pasmore's no little satisfaction, a lad brought a tin of biscuits, a tin of salmon, a piece of cheese, and a spoon, all obviously supplied by the Hudson Bay Company on the previous evening free of charge--and against its will.

He sat down on the upturned pail once more and enjoyed the simple fare. It was queer to think that this meal in all probability would be his last on earth. His surroundings seemed incongruous and unreal, and his mind ran in a vein of whimsical speculation. It is strange to think, but it is a fact, all the same, that certain temperaments, when face to face with death, allow their thoughts to take an oddly critical and retrospective view of things in general. The fear of death does not affect them, although, at the same time, they are fully conscious of the momentous issues of their fate.

The crowd gathered around the door of the long building, and many were the uncouth jests made at the expense of the prisoner. One or two still half-drunk Indians pushed their way through and came close up to him, talking volubly and shaking their fire-arms in his face. But the big breed let out at them with his great fists, and sent them away expostulating still more volubly. Pasmore could easily have settled the matter himself under other circumstances, but he did not wish to precipitate matters. The crowd grew in numbers, and very soon he gathered something in regard to what was on foot.

He was to be taken to a certain little rise on the outskirts of the village, where the Police had shot a notorious malcontent and murderer some years before, and there he was, in his turn, to be executed. This would be retributive justice! Pasmore recollected with cynical amusement how some of these very same rebels had lived for years in dread of their lives from that desperado, and how at the time nearly the whole population had expressed their satisfaction and thanks to the Police for getting rid of the outlaw, who had been killed in resisting arrest. Now, when it suited their ends, the latter was a martyr, and he was a malefactor. He wished they would hurry up and shoot him out of hand, if he was to be shot. He did not know what horrible formality might not be in store for him before they did that. But how beautifully the sun was shining! He had hardly thought that Battleford could be so fair to look upon.

At last he saw several breeds approaching, and one of

them carried with him an axe and a quantity of rope.

And behind the breeds, greeted by lusty acclamations from the mob, came Louis Riel.

CHAPTER XVII

A CLOSE CALL

As the would-be priest and originator of two rebellions approached Pasmore, the ragged, wild-eyed, clamorous crowd made way for him. It was ludicrous to note the air of superiority and braggadocio that this inordinately vain and ambitious man adopted. The prisoner was standing surrounded by his now largely augmented guard, who, forgetful of one another's contiguity, had their many wonderfully and fearfully made blunderbusses levelled at him, ready to blow him into little pieces at a moment's notice if he made the slightest attempt to resist or escape. Great would have been the slaughter amongst the metis if this had happened.

"Prisoner," said Riel, with a decided French accent, "you are a spy." He fixed his dark grey eyes upon Pasmore angrily, and jerked out what he had to say.

"I fail to see how one who wears the Queen's uniform can be a spy," said Pasmore, undoing the leather tags of his long buffalo coat and showing a serge jacket with the regimental brass button on it.

"Ah, that is enough--one of the Mounted Police! What are you doing in this camp?"

"It is I who should be asking you that question. What are you doing under arms? Another rebellion? Be warned by me, Monsieur Riel, and stop this bloodshed as you value your immortal soul."

He knew that through the fanatic's religion lay the only way of reaching him at all.

But the only effect these words had upon Riel was to further incense the arch rebel.

"Bind him, and search him," he cried.

Pasmore knew that resistance was hopeless, so quietly submitted. Their mode of tying him was unique. They put a rope round his waist, leaving his arms free, while the two ends were held on either side by a couple of men. His late guard, the big breed, who could not have been such a bad fellow, discovered his pipe, tobacco, and matches in one pocket, but withdrew his hand quickly.

"Nozing thar," he declared.

Whether or not he thought the prisoner might soon require them on his way to the Happy Hunting Grounds is a matter of speculation.

They took his pocket-knife and keys, and in the inner pocket of his jacket they found the usual regimental papers and weekly reports pertaining to the Police Detachment. These are alike as peas throughout the Territories, and not of the slightest value or interest, save to those directly concerned, but to Riel it was a great find. He spread them out, scanned a few lines here and there, opened his eyes wide, pursed his lips, and then, as if it were superfluous pursuing the matter further, waved his hand in a melodramatic fashion, and cried--

"It is enough! He is of the Police. He has also been found spying in camp, and the penalty for that is death. I hear he is one of the men who ran down and shot Heinault, who was one of the people. Let him be taken to the same spot and shot also. He took the blood of the metis--let the metis now take his! Away with him!"

Such a wild yelling, whooping, and brandishing of guns took place at these words that Pasmore thought there would be little necessity to take him to the spot where "Wild Joe" of tender memory slept. When an antiquated fowling-piece actually did go off, and shot an Indian in the legs, the uproar was inconceivable. Pasmore thought of Rory's dogs having a sporting five minutes, and smiled, despite the gravity of the situation. But order was restored, and with Riel and two of his so-called "generals" in the lead, and a straggling crowd of human beings and dogs following, the prisoner was led slowly towards the spot fixed for his execution.

Past the piles of smouldering ashes, and tracks strewn, with all sorts of destroyed merchandise, they went. They had looted the stores to their hearts' content, and were now rioting in an excess of what to them was good living; but where those short-sighted creatures expected to get fresh supplies from is a question they probably never once put to themselves.

Silent and powerless in King Frost's embrace lay the great river. How like beautiful filagree work some of the pine-boughs looked against the snow banks and the pale blue sky! How lovely seemed the whole world! Pasmore was thinking about many things, but most he was thinking of some one whom he hoped was now making her way over the snow, and for whose sake he was now here. No, he did not grudge his life, but it was a strange way to die after all his hopes--mostly shattered ones; to be led like a brute beast amongst a crowd of jeering half-breeds who, only a few days before, were ready to doff their caps at sight of him; and to be shot dead by them with such short shrift, and because he had only done his duty!...

They were coming to the rise now. How like a gallows that tall, dead, scraggy pine looked against the pale grey! How the hound-like mob alongside yelled and jeered! One of them--he knew him well--he of the evil Mongolian-like eyes and snaky locks--whom he had spoken a timely word to a year ago and saved from prison--from some little distance took the opportunity of throwing a piece of frozen snow at Pasmore. It struck the policeman behind the ear, causing him to feel sick and dizzy. He felt the hot blood trickling down his neck, and he heard one or two of the pack laughing.

"He will be plenty dead soon," said one. "What does it matter?"

But the big breed, with a touch of that humanity which beats down prejudice and makes us all akin, turned upon the now unpleasantly demonstrative rabble, and swore at them roundly. In another moment Pasmore was himself again, and he could see that gallows-like tree right in front of him... And what was that hulking brute alongside saying about skulking shermoganish? Was he going to his death hearing the uniform he wore insulted by cowardly brutes without making a resistance of some sort? He knew he would be shot down instantly if he did, and they would be glad of an excuse, but that would be only cutting short the agony. The veins swelled on his forehead, and he felt his limbs stiffen. He made a sudden movement, but the big breed caught his arm and whispered in his ear. It was an Indian saying which meant that until the Great Spirit Himself called, it was folly to listen to those who tempted. It was not so much the hope these few words carried with them, as the spirit in which they were uttered, that stayed Pasmore's precipitate action. He knew that no help would come from the invested Fort, but God at times brought about many wonderful things.

As they led him up the rough, conical mound he breathed a prayer for Divine aid. It would be nothing short of a miracle now if in a few minutes he were not dead. They faced him about and tied him to the tree; and now he looked down upon the upturned faces of the wild-eyed, fiery-natured rebels.

Riel stepped forward with the papers in his hand.

"Prisoner," he said, "you have been caught red-handed, and the metis will it that you must die. Is it not so?" He turned to the crowd. "On the spot where he now stands he spilt the blood of the metis. What say you?"

There was a hoarse yell of assent from the followers of the fanatic.

Riel turned to one of his generals, who cried to some one in the crowd. It was the next of kin to Heinault, who had been shot on that very spot, and in very truth he looked a fit representative of the man who had perished

for his crimes. He was indeed an ill-looking scoundrel. There was a gratified grin upon his evil face. He knew Pasmore of old, and Pasmore had very good reason to know him. Their eyes met.

"Now you will nevere, nevere threaten me one, two, three times again," he cried.

Pasmore looked into the cruel, eager face of the breed, and he knew that no hope lay there. Then he caught the gleam of snow on the crest of the opposite ridge--it was scintillating as if set with diamonds. How beautiful was that bit of blue seen through the pillar-like stems of the pines!

Pasmore's thoughts were now elsewhere than with his executioners, when unexpectedly there came an interruption. There was a hurried scattering of the crowd at the foot of the mound, and Pepin Quesnelle, leading his bear, appeared upon the scene. That his short legs had been sorely tried in reaching the spot there could be little doubt, for his face was very red, and it was evident he had wrought himself into something very nearly approaching a passion.

Riel, who had at first turned round with an angry exclamation on his lips, seemed somewhat startled when he saw the weird figures before him, for he, too, like the breeds and Indians, was not without a species of superstitious dread of the manikin and his strange attendant. The executioner glared at the intruder angrily.

"Wait, you just wait one bit--_coquin_, rascal, fool!" gasped Pepin, pulling up within a few yards of him, and shaking his stick. "You will not kill that man, I say you will not! I know you, Leon Heinault; it is because this man will stop you from doing as your vile cousin did that you want to shoot him." He turned to Riel. "Tell him to put down that gun!"

But Riel had the dignity of his position to maintain before the crowd, and although he would not meet the black, bead-like eyes of the dwarf, with no little bluster, he said--

"This man is a spy, and he must die. He is of the hated English, and it is the will of the Lord that His people, the metis, inherit the land."

"And I say, Louis Riel, that it is the will of the Lord that this man shall not die!" reiterated the dwarf, emphasising his words with a flourish of his stick.

Then an uncanny thing happened that to this day the metis speak about with bated breath, and the Indians are afraid to mention at all. Heinault, who during the wrangle had concluded that his quarry was about to slip through his hands, took the opportunity of raising his gun to the shoulder. But ere he could pull the trigger there was

the whistle of a bullet, and he fell dead in the snow. Then, somewhere from the wooded bluffs--for the echoes deceived one--there came the distant ring of a rifle.

The perspiration was standing in beads on Pasmore's forehead, for he would have been more than human had not the strain of the terrible ordeal told upon him. From a dogged abandonment to his fate, a ray of hope lit up the darkness that seemed to have closed over him. It filtered through his being, but he feared to let it grow, knowing the bitterness of hope's extinction. But the blue through the pines seemed more beautiful, and the snow on the crest of the ridge scintillated more cheerily.

As the would-be executioner fell, something like a moan of consternation ran through the crowd. The dwarf was the only one who seemed to take the tragedy as a matter of course. He was quick to seize the opportunity.

"It is as the Lord has willed," he said simply, pointing to the body.

But Riel, visibly taken aback by this sudden *_contretemps_*, knew only too well that his cause and influence would be imperilled if he allowed this manikin, of whom his people stood so much in awe, to get the better of him; and he was too quick-witted not to know exactly what to do. He turned to his officers, and immediately a number of breeds started out to scour the bluffs. Then he called upon five breeds and Indians by name to step forward, and to see that their rifles were charged. Pepin waited quietly until his arrangements were completed, and then, looking round upon the crowd with his dark eyes, and finally fixing them upon the arch rebel, he spoke with such strength and earnestness that his hearers stood breathless and spellbound. The file of men which had been drawn up to act as executioners, and the condemned man himself, hung upon his words. It was significant that, after the fatal shot had been fired, no one seemed to be apprehensive of a second.

"Louis Riel," he began, "you are one bigger fool than I did take you for!"

Riel started forward angrily, and was about to speak when the dwarf stopped him with a motion of his hand.

"You are a fool because you cannot see where you are going," he continued.

"Can't I, Mr. Hop-o'-my-thumb?" broke out the rebel in a white heat, shouldering his rifle.

But the dwarf raised his stick warningly, and catching Riel's shifty gaze, held it as if by some spell until the rifle barrel sunk lower inch by inch.

"If you do, Louis Riel, if you do, the Lord will give you short shrift!" he said. "Now, I will tell you what

I see, and to you it ought to be plain, for you have been in Montreal and Quebec, and know much more than is known to the metis. I see--and it will come to pass long before the ice that is in one great mass in this river is carried down and melts in the big lakes, whose waters drain into the Bay of Hudson--I see the soldiers of the great Queen swarming all over the land in numbers like the gophers on the prairie. They have wrested from you Battleford, Prince Albert, and Batoche. I see a battlefield, and the soldiers of the Queen have the great guns--as big as Red River carts--that shoot high into the air as flies the kite, and rain down bullets and jagged iron like unto the hailstorms that sweep the land in summer time. I see the bodies of the metis lying dead upon the ground as thick as the sheaves of wheat upon the harvest-field. Many I see that crawl away into the woods to die, like to the timber-wolves when they have eaten of the poison. I see the metis scattered and homeless. I see you, Louis Riel, who have misled them, skulking alone in the woods like a hunted coyote, without rest night and day, with nothing to eat, and with no moccasins to your feet. But the red-coats will catch you, for there is no trail too long or too broken for the Riders of the Plains to follow. And, above all, and take heed, Louis Riel, I see the great beams of the gallows-tree looming up blackly against the grey of a weary dawn; and that will be your portion if you shoot this man. Put him in prison if you will, and keep him as a hostage; but if you spill innocent blood wantonly, as the Lord liveth, you shall swing in mid-air. And now I have spoken, and you have all seen how the hand of the Lord directed the bullet that laid that thing low. Remember this--there are more bullets!"

The dwarf paused, and there was a death-like stillness. Riel stood motionless, glaring into space, as if he still saw that picture of the gallows. While as for Pasmore, his heart was thumping against his ribs, for the spark of Hope within him had burst into flame, and he saw how beautiful was the blue between the columns of the pines.

CHAPTER XVIII

ACROSS THE ICE

Pepin Quesnelle's weird speech had worked upon the superstitious natures of the rebel leader and his followers alike, for they unbound Pasmore from the tree and hurried him away to a tenantless log hut, the big breed and two others staying to guard him. Riel, with some of his followers, started off on sleighs to Prince Albert, to direct operations there, while the remainder stayed behind to further harass the beleaguered garrison. Pasmore was now glad that he had not offered a resistance that must have proved futile when his life hung in the balance. He offered up a silent prayer of thanksgiving for his deliverance so far, and he mused over the strange little

being with a deformed body, to whom God had given powers to see more clearly than his fellows.

The big breed was remarkably attentive to his wants, but strangely silent. When night arrived, Pasmore was placed in a little room which had a window much too small for a man's body to pass through, and left to himself. He could hear his guards talking in the only room that led to it. Pasmore had slept during the afternoon, and when he awoke late in the evening he was imbued with but one idea, and that was to escape. The fickle natures of the half-breeds might change at any moment.

It was close on midnight, and there was not a sound in the other room. Pasmore had, by standing on the rude couch, begun operations on the roof with a long thatching needle he had found on the wall-plate, when the door silently opened and a flood of light streamed in. He turned, and there stood the big breed silently watching. Pasmore stared at him apprehensively, but the big breed merely placed one finger on his lips to enjoin silence, and beckoned him to descend. Wondering, Pasmore did so. His gaoler took him by the arm, and stealthily they entered the other room, their moccasined feet making no noise. There, on the floor, lay the other two guards, fast asleep. The big breed opened the door and they passed out. Pasmore's brain almost refused to grasp the situation. Was his gaoler going to assist him to escape?

But so it was. There was no one about. Every one seemed to be asleep after the orgie on the previous night. At last they reached a large empty shed on the outskirts of the village, and there his guide suddenly left him without a word. Pasmore was about to pass out, and make good his escape, when suddenly he was hailed by a voice that he knew well.

"Aha! villain, _coquin!_" it said, "and so you are here! _Bien!_ This is a good day's work; is it not so?"

"Pepin Quesnelle!" cried Pasmore, going towards him. "No words can thank you for what you have done for me this day."

"And who wants your thanks?" asked the dwarf, good-naturedly. "Come, the shake of a hand belonging to an honest man is thanks enough for me. Put it thar, as the Yanks say."

And Pasmore felt, as he obeyed, that, despite his extraordinary foibles, Pepin Quesnelle was a man whom he could respect, and to whom he owed a debt of gratitude that he could never repay.

"Now, that is all right," observed Pepin, "and you will come with me. Some friends of Katie's have found a friend of yours to-day in the woods, and I will take you to him."

But Pepin would tell him no more; his short legs, indeed, required all his energies. But after winding in and out of the bluffs for an hour or more, Pasmore found out who the friend was. Coming suddenly upon a couple of hay-stacks in a hollow of the bluffs, the dwarf put his fingers to his lips and whistled in a peculiar fashion. In another moment a dark figure emerged from the shadow.

"Top av the marnin' t'ye," it said.

"Rory, by all that's wonderful!" exclaimed Pasmore as they wrung each other's hands.

"That's me," said Rory. "Now, here's a sleigh. I fancy it was wance Dumont's, or some other gint's, but I'm thinkin' it's ours now. It's bruk the heart av me thet I couldn't bring them dogs along. If we have luck we'll be back at the ranche before noon to-morrer. Jest ketch hould av this rifle, and I'll drive."

In the clear moonlight Pasmore could see a team standing on an old trail not fifteen yards away.

"But just let me say good-bye first to Pepin," said Pasmore.

But Pepin Quesnelle had vanished mysteriously into the night.

"Rory," asked Pasmore a little later, when the team of spirited horses was bowling merrily along the by-trail, "was it you who fired that shot to-day and saved my life?"

"Young man," said Rory, solemnly, "hev yer got sich a thing about yer as a match--me poipe's gone out?"

And Pasmore knew that, so far as Rory was concerned, the subject was closed.

Next day about noon the two were to the north of the valley, where lay the ranche. On rounding a bluff they came unexpectedly upon three Indians in sleighs, who had evidently just cut the trail.

"Child-of-Light!" they cried, recognising the foremost.

A wave of apprehension swept over Pasmore when he saw the inscrutable expression on the face of the friendly chief. Was it well with the rancher and his daughter?

"Ough, ough!" ejaculated Child-of-Light, wonderingly, as he caught sight of Pasmore. He pulled up, jumped out of his sleigh, and shook hands cordially. "Child-of-Light's heart lightens again to see you, brother," he said. "His heart was heavy because he thought Poundmaker must have stilled yours."

"Child-of-Light is ever a friend," rejoined Pasmore. "But what of Douglas and the others?"

Then Child-of-Light told him how on the previous morning Douglas and his daughter had reached the ranche. But as Poundmaker's men were hovering in great strength in the neighbourhood, he, Child-of-Light, had deemed it advisable that they should take fresh horses and proceed in an easterly direction towards Fort Pitt, and then in a northerly, until they came to that secluded valley of which he had previously told them. They had done this, and gone on with hardly a pause.

In the meantime Child-of-Light had sent some of his braves to run off the rancher's herd of horses to a remote part of the country, where they would be safe from the enemy, while he and one or two others remained behind to cover his retreat. But alarming news had just been brought him by a runner. Big Bear had perpetrated a terrible massacre at Frog Lake, near Fort Pitt. Ten persons had been shot in the church, and two brave priests, Fathers Farfand and Marchand, had been beaten to death. If Douglas and the others kept on they must run right into their hands. It was to catch them up, if possible, and fetch them back before they crossed the Saskatchewan, that Child-of-Light was on his way now. Better to fall into the hands of Poundmaker and his braves, who probably now realised that they had gone too far, than into those of Big Bear, who was a fiend. Of course, he, Pasmore, would come with them.

"But are there no fresh horses for us, Child-of-Light?" asked Pasmore. "If the others have got a good start and fresh horses, can we catch them up?"

"I have said I have sent all the horses of Douglas away for safe keeping. We must overtake them with what we have. The Great Spirit is good, and may do much for us."

"Then let us push on, Child-of-Light, for it will be a grievous thing if evil befall our friends now."

For three days they travelled in a north-easterly direction, but the sun had gained power, and spring had come with a rush, as it does in that part of the world. The first chinook wind that came from the west, through the passes of the Rockies from warm southern seas, would render travelling impossible--their sleighs would be useless. The great danger was that Douglas and the others would have passed over the Saskatchewan, and the ice breaking up behind them would have cut off their retreat.

In those three days the party was tortured with alternative hopes and fears. Now it was a horse breaking through the softening crust of snow and coming down, and then it would be one playing out altogether. If in another day those in front were not overtaken, it was pretty certain they must run into Big Bear's band, and that would mean wholesale massacre. In order to catch them up they walked most of the night, leading their horses along the trail. On the fourth day they sighted the broad Saskatchewan,

now with many blue trickling streams of water upon its surface and cracking ominously. They scanned the opposite shore in the neighbourhood of the trail anxiously.

"Look, brother," cried Child-of-Light, "they are camped on the opposite bank, and away over yonder, coming down the plateau, are Indians who must belong to Big Bear's band. But the river is not safe now to cross. I can hear it breaking up and coming down at the speed of a young broncho away up the reaches. Before the sun sets this river will be as the Great Falls in the spring, when the wind is from the west."

It was as the keen-eyed and keen-eared Red man said. There were the rancher and his party camped on the other side, in all innocence of the Indians who, unseen, were stringing over the plateau. There was no time to be lost.

"You give me your jumper, Child-of-Light, and your pony--they are the best," Pasmore cried. "I shall be back with the others before long. In the meantime, look to your guns."

The others would fain have accompanied him, but Pasmore knew that would only be aggravating the danger. Without a moment's delay he jumped into the light box of wood and urged the sure-footed pony across the now groaning and creaking ice. And now there broke upon his ears what before only the Indian had heard. It was the coming down of the river in flood, miles away. It sounded like the roar of a distant Niagara. Here and there his pony was up to the fetlocks in water, and the ice heaved beneath him. Every now and again there was a mighty crackle, resembling the breaking of a thunderbolt, that sent his heart into his mouth. He feared then that the end had come and he would be too late. With rein and voice he urged the sure-footed pony across the ice. Would he never reach the opposite bank? But once there, would it be possible for the party to recross? Surely it would be as much as their lives were worth to try.

Long before Pasmore had reached the landing, Douglas and the others had seen him. It was no time for greetings, and, indeed, their meeting was one too deep for words. They merely wrung each other's hands, and something suspiciously like moisture stood in the rancher's eyes. As for Dorothy, she could not utter a word, but there was something in her look that quickened Pasmore's heart-beats even then.

"You must be quick," cried Pasmore. "Big Bear will be down upon you in ten minutes. Look! There they are now. There is yet time to cross."

And as he spoke there came a roar like thunder, travelling from the higher reaches of the river towards them; it passed them and was lost in the lower reaches. It was the "back" of the ice being broken--the preliminary to the grand chaos that was to come. The Indians had seen

them now, and were coming at a gallop not a mile away.

Douglas, Jacques, and Bastien ran and hitched up the horses into the sleighs.

"You are not afraid to tackle it, are you?" asked Pasmore, as he looked into the girl's face.

"I'd tackle it now if it were moving down in pieces no bigger than door-mats," she answered smilingly.

"Then will you tackle it with me?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Jump in, and I'll follow. Your sleigh is empty, and father's is full of all sorts of things --it's too heavy as it is. Here they come! Dad, I'm going with Mr. Pasmore," she cried; and the sleighs raced abreast of one another down the slope.

"Spread out there," cried Pasmore, "and don't bunch together, or--"

He did not finish the sentence, for just at that moment there came a _ping_ from the shore they had just left, and a bullet sent up a jet of water into the air alongside of them. There was another great rending sound from the ice that struck terror into their hearts. Their horses quivered with excitement as they darted forward. There was a roar in their ears that sounded as if they were close to a battery of artillery in action. _Ping, ping, ping!_ and the bullets came whizzing over their heads or skidding on the ice alongside. It was a lucky thing for them that the Indians were too keen in the pursuit to take proper aim. Separating, so as to minimise the danger, each team dashed forward on its own account.

"Stay with it, broncho! Stick to it, my son!" yelled Pasmore.

In the pauses of the thundering and rending there cut clearly into the now mild air the clattering of the horses' hoofs, the hum of the steel-shod runners, and the _ping, ping_ of the rifles. It was a race for life with a vengeance, with death ahead and alongside, and with death at their heels. A gap in the ice, or a stumble, and it would surely be all up with them.

"Go it, my game little broncho!" and with rein and voice Pasmore urged the brave "steed onwards.

"Hello! there goes the breed's pony!" cried Pasmore.

A bullet had struck Bastien's horse behind the ear and brought it down all of a heap upon the ice. There was an ear-splitting crack just at that moment which added to the terror of the situation. But the rancher pulled his horse up by a supreme effort, and Bastien, deserting his sleigh, leapt in beside him. Then on again.

Pasmore's pony was now somewhat behind the others, when suddenly there was a mighty roar, and a great crevasse opened up in front of them. It took all the strength that Pasmore possessed to pull up on the brink.

"We must get out and jump over this somehow," Pasmore cried to Dorothy. "It's neck or nothing."

So they sprang out of the sleigh, unhitched the plucky pony, and prepared to cross the deadly-looking fissure.

CHAPTER XIX

CAPTURED BY POUNDMAKER

The first thing that Pasmore did was to urge the pony to leap the crevasse on its own account; after a very little coaxing the intelligent animal gathered itself together, and jumped clear of certain death. It then rushed on with the others.

"Now, give me your hand, and we'll see if we can't find an easier place to cross," said Pasmore to Dorothy.

"It's lucky we've got on moccasins instead, of boots, is it not?" she said. She seemed to have dropped that old tone of reserve as completely as she might a cloak from her shoulders.

She gave him her hand, and they ran up the river alongside the jagged rent. Two or three bullets whizzed past them perilously near their heads.

"Why, there's Child-of-Light and Rory!" she cried. "I suppose they've come to keep back the Indians."

It was indeed the case. The sight of the advancing Indians had been too much, for them, and they had come out on the ice so as to check the foe. Their fire was steadier than the enemy's, for it did undoubted execution.

Soon Pasmore and Dorothy came to a place that seemed comparatively narrow, and here they essayed to cross. The other side seemed a terribly difficult spot on which to land, and the clear, blue water that ran between looked deadly cold. Once in there and it would be a hundred chances to one against getting out.

"I'll jump across first," said Pasmore, "so as to be ready to catch you on the other side."

He jumped it with little effort, although he fell on the other side, and then it was Dorothy's turn.

There was a flush on her cheeks and her eyes were strangely bright as she put one foot on the sharp corner of the

rent, fixed her eyes on him, and sprang. It was a dangerous and difficult jump for a woman to take, but he caught her in his strong arms just as she tottered on the brink, in the act of falling backwards, and drew her to him.

"Well done!" he cried, "another time I wish you'd come to me like that!"

"Let us run," she said, ignoring his remark, but without show of resentment. "Here is Jacques waiting for us with his sleigh."

And then a tragic thing occurred. The mighty waters of the Saskatchewan had been gathering force beneath the ice, and, pressing the great flooring upwards, at length gained such irresistible power that the whole ice-field shivered, and was broken up into gigantic slabs, until it resembled a vast mosaic. The horse attached to Jacques' sleigh was shot into a great rent, from which it was impossible to extricate it. They dared not stay a moment longer if they wished to escape with their lives.

Then for five minutes they held their lives in their hands, but they proceeded cautiously and surely, jumping from berg to berg, the man encouraging the woman to fresh endeavour, until at last they gained the southern bank. Had they slipped or overbalanced themselves it would have been good-bye to this world. Pasmore and Douglas had to assist Dorothy up the steep banks, so great had been the strain and so great was the reaction. Nor was it to be wondered at, for it would have tried the nerves of most men. They turned when they had reached a point of vantage and looked around. An awe-inspiring but magnificent sight met their gaze.

Coming down the river like a great tidal wave they could see a chaotic front of blue water and glistening bergs advancing swiftly and surely. At its approach the huge slabs of ice in the river were forced upwards, and shivered into all manner of fanciful shapes. It was the dammed-up current of the mighty river which at length had forced the barrier of ice, and carried all in front of it, as the mortar carries the shell. There was one continuous, deafening roar, punctuated with a series of violent explosions as huge blocks of ice were shivered and shot into the air by that Titanic force. Nothing on earth could live in that wild maelstrom. It was one vast, pulsating, churning mass, and as the sun caught its irregular, crystal-like crest, a lawn-like mist, that glowed with every colour of the rainbow, hovered over it. It was indeed a wondrously beautiful, but awe-inspiring spectacle.

But the most terrible feature of the scene was the human life that was about to be sacrificed in that fierce flood. The murderous members of Big Bear's band who had followed them up, led away against their better judgment by the sight of their human prey, had advanced farther over the

ice than they imagined, so that, when checked by the deliberate and careful shooting of Rory and Child-of-Light, they remained where they were instead of either rushing on or beating a precipitate retreat. Thus thirty of them realised that they were caught as in a trap. They saw the towering bulk of that pitiless wave coming swiftly towards them, and then they ran, panic-stricken, some this way and some that. They ran as only men run when fleeing for their lives.

"It is too horrible!" cried the girl, turning away from the gruesomeness of the spectacle.

The Indians had flung their rifles from them and were scattering in all directions over the ice, but that gleaming wave, that Juggernaut of grinding bergs, was swifter than they, and bore down upon them at the speed of a racehorse. It shot them into the air like so many playthings, caught them up again, and bore them away in its ravenous maw like the insatiable Moloch that it was. In another minute there was neither sign nor trace of them.

And now the party drew together to compare notes, and to deliberate upon their future movements. Whatever was said by Douglas to Pasmore about the sacrifice he had made on his behalf none of the party knew, for the rancher did not speak about it again, nor did the Police sergeant ever refer to it.

What they were going to do now was the matter that gave them most concern. They could not go on, and to go back meant running into Poundmaker's marauding hordes. They came to the conclusion that the best thing they could do was to camp where they were. They therefore drove the sleighs over to a sunny, wooded slope that was now clear of snow, and pitched Dorothy's tent in lee of the cotton-wood trees. The air was wonderfully mild, a soft chinook wind was blowing, and the snow was disappearing from the high ground as if by magic.

For three days they stayed in that sheltered spot, and enjoyed a much-needed rest; and perhaps it was the pleasantest three days that Pasmore had spent for many a long year.

"Don't you think we're understanding each other better than we used to do?" he asked of Dorothy one day.

"You don't insist on having quite so much of your own way," she replied stooping to pick up something. He, however, saw the smile upon her face.

On the fourth day Child-of-Light had ascended the rise behind the camp to look around before going back to his people, and to reconnoitre in the neighbourhood of the ranche, when, to his no little dismay, he saw a far-stretching column of Indians coming towards them across the plain. He cried to those in the camp to arm

themselves. In a few minutes more he was joined by Douglas, Pasmore, and the others. To their consternation they saw that they were gradually being hemmed in by a crescent-shaped body of warriors, who must have numbered at least several hundred.

"It is Poundmaker's band," said Child-of-Light. "They have been with the wolves worrying the sheep, and have grown tired of that and are anxious to hide. But they cannot cross the Kissaskatchewan for many days yet, so they will turn and go back to their holes in the Eagle Hills. The chances are they may be afraid to kill us, but they will certainly make us prisoners. Shall we fight them, my brothers, and then all journey together to the Happy Hunting Grounds beyond the blood-red sunsets?"

But there was Dorothy to be thought of, and they knew that Poundmaker, though he might possibly put them to death, would not practise any of those atrocities ascribed to Big Bear. As the odds were a hundred to one against them, and they would all inevitably be shot down, it would be folly to resist, seeing that there was a chance of eventually escaping with their lives. Discretion was always the better part of valour, and in this case it would be criminal to forget the fact.

They laid down their arms, and Pasmore himself went forward to meet them on foot, waving a branch over his head. This, amongst the Indians on the North American continent, is equivalent to a flag of truce.

In five minutes more they were surrounded, marshalled in a body, and marched into the presence of Poundmaker himself. The chief sat on a rise that was clear of snow, surrounded by his warriors. All the fire-arms the party had possessed were taken from them. Douglas had slipped his arm through his daughter's, and, no matter what the girl may have felt, she certainly betrayed no fear. It was Child-of-Light who first addressed Poundmaker. He stood in front of the others, and said--

"Poundmaker, it is not for mercy, but for your protection that we sue. If you have gone upon the war-path with the metis against the white people, let not those who are innocent of wrong suffer for those whose unwise doings may have stirred you up to the giving of battle after your own fashion. Thus will it be that the warriors of the Great White Queen, who will surely swarm over all this land in numbers as the white moths ere the roses on the prairie are in bloom, when they hear from our lips that you have been mindful of us, will be mindful of you. Douglas and his daughter you know; they have ever been the friends of the Red man. You remember the evil days when there was nought to eat in the land, how they shared all they had with us, and called us brothers and sisters? Ill would it become Poundmaker and his Stonies to forget that. As for the others, they but serve their masters as these your braves serve you, and is that a crime?"

"As for myself, Poundmaker, I have not gone on the war-path, because I believe this man, Louis Riel, to be one who hearkens to a false Manitou. For him no friendly knife or bullet awaits, but the gallows-tree, by which no good Indian can ever hope to pass to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

"If it is that one of us must suffer to show that you have the power of life and death over us, let it be me. I am ready, O Poundmaker! Do with me as you will, but spare these who have done no wrong. This is the only thing that I ask of you, and I ask it because of those days when we were as brothers, riding side by side after the buffalo together, and fighting the Sarcees and the Sioux. You have told me of old that you believed in the Manitou--show your belief now. I have spoken, O chief!"

It has been the fashion with those who have seen only one or two contaminated specimens of the Red man to sneer at that phrase, "the noble savage." This they do out of the fullness of their ignorance. Child-of-Light was indeed a noble savage, and looked it, every inch of him, as he drew himself up to his full height and gazed fearlessly into the face of his enemy.

A chorus of "Ough! ough!" was heard from every side, showing that not only had Child-of-Light himself considerable personal influence, but that the fairness of his speech had gone home.

Then the wily Poundmaker spoke. He was an imposing figure with his great head-dress of eagles' feathers, and clad in a suit of red flannel on which was wrought a rich mosaic of coloured beadwork. White ermine tails dangled from his shoulders, arms, and breast. He was in reality cruel and vindictive, but his cunning and worldly wisdom made him a master in expediency. He had intelligence above the average, but lacked the good qualities of such as the loyal Crowfoot, the Chief of the Blackfoot nation, who also had the benefit of Pere Lacombe, that great missionary's, sound counsel.

"Child-of-Light has spoken fairly," he said, "but it remains to be shown how much of what he has said is true, and how much like the ghost-waters that deceive the traveller in autumn, in places where nought but the sage-bush grows, and the ground is parched and dry. Douglas and the others must come with us. We shall return to the strong lodges in the Eagle Hills and await what time may bring. If the warriors of the Great Queen come to the land and molest us, then shall you all be put to death. But if they come and stay their hand, then we shall let you return to your own homes. As for the white maiden, the daughter of Douglas, nothing that belongs to her shall be touched, and she shall have a squaw to wait upon her. I have spoken."

He was a far-seeing redskin, and meditated grim reprisals when the time was ripe.

In a few days, when the snow had completely gone, they started back to the Eagle Hills. It was heavy travelling, and the men had to walk, but the Indians got a light Red River cart for Dorothy, and in this, attended by a squaw, she made the greater part of the journey. Their goods were not interfered with, for the Indians had a plethora of loot from the Battleford stores. But still the uncertainty of their ultimate fate was ever hanging over them. They knew that if Poundmaker thought the British were not coming, or that they were not strong enough to vanquish him, he was capable of any devilry.

They passed into the wild, broken country of the Eagle Hills, the "Bad Lands," as they were called, and there, in a great grassy hollow surrounded by precipices, gullies, and terraces of wonderfully-coloured clays, they camped.

It was now the end of April, and the prisoners were beginning to get uneasy. Had anything happened to the British, or had they been left to their fate? The situation was more critical than they cared to admit. But one day all was bustle in the camp, and the warriors stood to their arms.

The British column had moved out from Battleford, and was advancing to give battle to Poundmaker.

The critical moment had come.

CHAPTER XX

THE BATTLE OF CUT-KNIFE

When the Indians discovered that bright May morning that a British column had unexpectedly moved right up to their position, there was a scene approaching confusion for a few minutes. But they had studied the ground for days and knew every inch of it, so that each individual had his allotted post, and needed no orders to go there. Luckily for the prisoners, however, Poundmaker had not time to put into operation the elaborate plans he had contemplated. Moreover, the chief saw, to his no little consternation, that, as Child-of-Light had said, the soldiers of the White Queen were in numbers beyond anything he had expected. He therefore hurried the prisoners up a narrow terrace to a high headland from which it would be impossible to escape, and where a couple of Indians could effectually take charge of them. The latter followed close at their heels with loaded rifles. To the no little satisfaction of Pasmore and the others, the headland, or bluff, which must have been some two hundred feet high, commanded a splendid view of the operations. The British were approaching right across a species of scarred amphitheatre, while the Indians, and such half-breeds as had recently fled from Battleford on the approach of the

British and joined them, occupied the deep ravines and wildly irregular country in their immediate neighbourhood. They were protected by the rocks from rifle and shell-fire; the only danger would be in the event of a shrapnel bursting over them.

Dorothy's face was lit up with animation as she watched the stirring spectacle. The sight of British troops, with the promise of speedy release after weeks of continuous danger and apprehension, was surely something to gladden the heart. And now they were about to witness that grandest, if most terrible, of all sights, a great battle.

"Look," Dorothy was saying to Pasmore, who crouched beside her amongst the rocks, "there come the Police--"

"Down all," cried Pasmore.

He had seen a flash and a puff of smoke from one of the guns. There was a dead silence for the space of a few moments, and then a screech and a peculiar whirring sound, as a shell hurried through the air over their heads.

Following this there was a loud report and a puff of smoke high in the air; a few moments later and there came a pattering all round as a shower of iron descended. It was indeed a marvel that none of the party were hit. The two Indians who guarded them were evidently considerably astonished, and skipped nimbly behind convenient rocks.

"It will be more lively than pleasant directly if they keep on like that," remarked Pasmore. "Look, there are the Queen's Own extending on the crest of the gully to protect the left flank, and there are the Canadian Infantry and Ottawa Sharpshooters on the right. I don't know who those chaps are protecting the rear, but--"

His words were drowned in the furious fusillade that broke out everywhere as if at a given signal. There was one continuous roar and rattle from the battery of artillery, and from the Gatling guns, as they opened fire, and a sharp, steady crackle from the skirmishers in the firing line and from the gullies and ridges in which the Indians had taken up their position. Everywhere one could see the lurid flashes and the smoke wreaths sagging upwards.

"What a glorious sight!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes sparkling and her face glowing. "If I were a man I'd give anything to be there--I'd like to be there as it is."

"You're very much there as it is," remarked Pasmore, soberly. "If you expose yourself as you're doing, something is bound to hit you. There's not much fun or glory in being killed by a stray bullet. Move just a little this way--there's room enough for us both--and you'll be able to see just as well with a great deal less danger."

She smiled, and a slight flush dyed her cheeks, but it

was significant to note that she obeyed him unhesitatingly. A month ago she would have remained where she was.

And now the battle had begun in grim earnest. The Indians, dreading the destructiveness of the guns and the Gatlings, had made up their minds to capture them. As if by a preconcerted signal a large number of them leapt from their cover, and with wild, piercing whoops and war-cries, made a rush on the battery. Some of them were on horseback, and actually had their steeds smeared with dun-coloured clay so as to resemble the background and the rocks. It was indeed exceedingly difficult to distinguish them. Those on foot ran in a zigzag fashion, holding their blankets in front, so as to spoil the aim of the rifle-men.

"They will capture the guns," cried Dorothy, trembling with excitement, "look, they are nearly up to them now!"

Indeed, for the moment it seemed extremely likely, for the Indians rushed in such a way that those on the flanks were unable to render the gunners or the Mounted Police any assistance. If Poundmaker succeeded in capturing the guns, the flankers would soon be cut to pieces. It was a moment of the keenest anxiety for the prisoners, not only for the safety of the brave Canadian troops, but also because they realised that if Poundmaker prevailed their lives were not worth a moment's purchase.

"Well done, Herchmer!" cried Pasmore. "See how he is handling the Police!"

And in all truth the coolness and steadiness of the Police were admirable. They lay flat on their faces while the guns delivered a telling broadside over them on the approaching foe that mowed them down, and sent them staggering backwards. Then, with a wild cheer, the troopers rose, and, like one man, charged the wavering mass of redskins, firing a volley and fixing their bayonets. The sight of the cold steel was too much for the Indians, who turned and fled. The guns were saved.

But those precipitous gullies were filled with plucky savages, and not a few half-breeds, who, while they could effectively pick off and check the advance of the British, were themselves screened from the enemy's fire. For two hours and more the fight went on with little gain on either side. The day was hot, and it must have been terribly trying work for those in the open. The guns contented themselves with sending an odd shell into likely places, but owing to the nature of the ground, which presented a wall-like front, their practice was only guess work.

Suddenly the girl caught Pasmore by the wrist "Look over there," she cried. "Do you see that body of Indians going down that gully? They are going to attack the column in the rear, and our people don't know it. Is there no way of letting them know?"

"There is," cried Pasmore, "and it's worth trying. Our fellows are not more than a thousand yards away now, and I can signal to them. It's just possible they may see me. Give me that stick, Rory. Jacques, I saw you with your towel an hour or so ago. Have you still got it?"

In a few seconds he had fastened the towel to the stick and was about to crawl out on to the other side of the ledge in full view of the British, who had been steadily advancing.

"Do take care," cried Dorothy, "if any of the Indians should see you--"

"They won't be looking this way," he said, adding, "There's sure to be a signaller with Otter or Herchmer. They'll think it a queer thing to get a message from the enemy's lines"--he laughed light-heartedly at the idea. "Now, do keep out of sight, for there's just a chance of a bullet or two being sent in this direction."

Fortune favoured Pasmore when a shell came screeching over their heads just at that moment, for the two guards, who might otherwise have seen him, both dodged behind rocks. When they looked again in the direction of their prisoners they did not know that one of them was apprising the British leader of the fact that a body of the enemy was at that moment skirting his right flank in cover of an old watercourse, so as to attack his rear.

When the British signaller wonderingly read the message, and repeated it to the Colonel, the latter, before giving his troops any definite order, inquired of the sender of the message as to his identity, and Pasmore signalled in reply. Then the order was given to fix bayonets and charge the enemy in the watercourse. Silently and swiftly the regular Canadian Infantry bore down on it. Completely taken by surprise, and at a disadvantage, the redskins were completely routed.

But an ambush was being prepared for the British of which they did not dream. At a certain point the redskins fell back, but in a hollow of the broken country through which the British would in all probability pass to follow up their supposed advantage, were two or three hundred warriors mounted and awaiting their opportunity. If only the British could bring their artillery to bear upon that spot, and drop a few shells amongst them, great would be their confusion.

Pasmore rose to his feet again from behind the rock where he had crouched, for one or two bullets, either by design or accident, had come very near him indeed. Quickly the towel at the end of the stick waved the message to the officer in command. Just as he was going to supplement it, a bullet passed clean through his impromptu flag and grazed his serge. He went on with his message as if nothing had happened. But the moment he had finished, and was still standing erect to catch the glint of the

British signaller's flag, a voice hailed him. It was Dorothy's.

"Mr. Pasmore," she cried, "if you have done, why don't you take cover? The Indians have seen you, and you'll be shot in another minute."

"For goodness' sake, get down!" he cried, as he turned round and saw that the girl, unseen by the others, had come towards him, and was also exposed to the enemy's fire.

She looked him steadily in the eyes, but did not move, although the bullets were beginning to whistle in grim earnest all around them.

"Not unless you do," she said. "Oh, why don't you take shelter?"

Immediately he resumed his crouching attitude by her side, and then he turned to her, and there was an unwonted light in his eyes.

"Did you really care as much as that?" he asked.

"You are the stupidest man I know," she replied, looking away. "Do you think I'd have stood there if I didn't!"

There was a great joy in his heart as he took her hand.

"If we get out of this alive, will you say that again?" he asked.

"That you are the stupidest man I know?" she queried, with that perversity inseparable from the daughters of Eve from all time.

"No--that you care for me?"

And at this she looked into his eyes with a simple earnestness, and said, "Yes."

What more they might have said was cut short by the furious outburst of firing from the guns, which dropped shell after shell into the projected ambuscade.

And now the British were forcing the natural stronghold of the Indians in many places, and their guards looked as if they were undecided what to do with their prisoners.

"If we don't collar those chaps," said Douglas, "they'll be wanting to account for us before they go off on their

own. They look dangerous. Stand by me, Jacques, and we'll crawl up behind them when the next shell comes. They're too busily engaged below to pay much attention to us now."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before their ears

caught the eerie sound of a shrapnel shell coming towards them. The two Indians got down on their faces behind a rock. The next moment, regardless of consequences, the rancher was on the top of one and Jacques had secured the other. To take their rifles, and tie their hands and feet with belts, was short work, and then Rory told them that if they remained quiet all would be well with them. They were sensible redskins, and did as they were bid.

And now it was time for the prisoners to again make their presence known to the British, for should the Indians and breeds succeed in holding the gully beneath them against the invading force, it was tolerably certain they would discover how Pasmore and his companions had overpowered their guards, and swift vengeance was sure to follow. As they looked down the precipitous sides of the ravine they could see that only four men--two breeds and two Indians held the narrow pass. These men, while they themselves were comparatively safe, could easily hold a large number of troops at bay.

"_Mon Dieu!_ it ees ze metis, and it ees _mon ami_, Leopold St Croix, I can see," exclaimed Lagrange, as he peered anxiously over the brink. "Ah! I tink it ees one leetle rock will keel him mooch dead."

He did not wait for any one to express assent, but began at once to assist the British with dire effect. Lagrange never did things by halves. When he realised that he was compromised with the enemy, he at once started in to annihilate his old friends with the utmost cheerfulness.

No sooner had Jacques heard that Leopold St. Croix was below than he rushed down the terrace, rifle in hand, to have it out with him. There was no holding him back; he was regardless of consequences.

The others remained where they were. With one rifle they could command the terrace until the troops came to their relief. Lagrange continued to roll down rocks, to the great discomfiture of the holders of the pass, who kept dodging about from one side to the other in imminent fear of their lives. When one Indian was effectually quieted by a huge boulder that Lagrange had sent down on the top of him, the others saw that it was impossible to remain there any longer, so incontinently fled. Leopold St. Croix, being somewhat stout, was left behind in the headlong flight that ensued.

When Jacques reached the bottom of the terrace, he found that the Indians had left the coast clear for him. He was rounding the bluff amongst the rocks when he met his old enemy face to face.

"Ha! _coquin!_" cried Jacques; "and so, _mon ami_, I have found you! _Bien!_ Now we shall fight, like that, so!"

And putting his rifle to his shoulder, he sent a bullet through Leopold St. Croix's badger-skin cap. St. Croix

returned the compliment by shaving a lock of hair off Jacques' right temple. Both men got behind rocks, and for three minutes they carried on a spirited duel. At length, after both had had several narrow shaves of annihilation, Jacques succeeded in sending a bullet through St. Croix's shoulder, and that settled the matter.

The prisoners had now descended the terrace, and were every moment expecting to find themselves once more face to face with British troops, when something occurred which is always occurring when a civilised force, with its time-honoured precedent, is dealing with a savage race that acts on its own initiative--the unexpected happened--the inevitable slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. The British, thinking that their work was over, left their cover and rushed towards the various inlets in a careless, disorganised fashion. Quick as thought the rebels seized their opportunity. They rallied and poured in a withering fire upon the scattered troops. The unprotected guns were rushed by a mere handful of Indians who had been hiding in the watercourse, and the retreat was sounded to protect them. At the same moment Poundmaker found himself with one of his head men, who bore the picturesque name of Young-Man-Who-Jumps-Like-a-Frog, and these two, with a strong following at their heels, appeared round the corner of a bluff. A few seconds later Jacques was seized from behind, and the other prisoners were once more secured. It all happened so suddenly that there was no time to escape or make any resistance.

CHAPTER XXI

BACK TO CAPTIVITY

It was as well for the prisoners that Poundmaker was not aware of the fact that they had overpowered their guard and had been in the act of escaping when he came round the corner. It is only probable to suppose that he was surprised to find them all alive and unscathed by the shell-fire, and that he imagined some natural mishap had occurred to the escort during the progress of the fight. Lucky it was for that same escort that it was the British troops, and not Poundmaker's men, who afterwards found them bound hand and foot, for it is safe to say that in the latter case they would never have had an opportunity of being surprised again. They would have dangled by their heels from the bough of some tree while a slow fire underneath saved them the necessity of ever after requiring to braid their raven locks.

In point of fact, Poundmaker was in rather a good humour than otherwise, for the British were now withdrawing to take up a position on the open prairie, where they knew the Red men and metis would not attack them. True, the rebels had suffered severely, but so had the Government troops. Before the British could make another attack, he

would be off into the wild, inaccessible fastnesses of the Eagle Hills, where they would have to catch him who could. He had sense enough to know that the British must catch him in the long run, but he would have a high old time till then. Civilisation was a very tame affair, and a rebellion was a heaven-sent opportunity for resuscitating a picturesque past with lots of loot and scalps thrown in. His meditated revenge on the prisoners would keep--there was nothing like having a card up one's sleeve.

He straightway broke up the party. With a certain rude sense of the fitness of things, he put Douglas and Pasmore together. He assured the former that the same young squaw who had been in attendance on his daughter would continue to wait upon her in the future. His lieutenant, "Young-Man-Who-Jumps-Like-a-Frog," a very promising young man indeed, would be responsible to him for her safety. If anything happened to her, or she escaped, then Young-Man, etc., would no longer have eyes to see how he jumped.

It would have been madness for the party to have made any serious attempt to resist arrest, for they were simply covered by the muzzles of fire-arms. Still, Pasmore sent two Indians reeling backwards with two right and left blows, which made them look so stupid that Poundmaker was secretly amused, and therefore stopped the pulling of the trigger of the blunderbuss that an Indian placed close to the police sergeant's head in order to effect a thorough and equal distribution of his brains. The grim and politic chief, who was not without a sense of humour, ordered that a rope be tied round the waist of the wild cat--as he was pleased to term Pasmore--and that to the two braves who had been so stupid as to allow him to punch their heads, should be allotted the task of leading him about like a bear. He hinted that if Pasmore occasionally amused himself by testing the powers of resistance of their skulls with his hammer-like fists, no difficulties would be thrown in his way by the others.

Douglas had begged to be allowed to accompany his daughter, but Poundmaker said that was impossible, and assured him that no harm would come to her. Dorothy went over to her father and said good-bye, and then they were forced apart. To Pasmore she said--

"You need not fear for me. I feel sure that, now they know the strength of the British, they will take care of us so as to save themselves. It is madness for you to resist. If you wish to help me, go quietly with them."

"Yes, you are right," he said. "But it is so hard. Still, I feel that we shall pull through yet. Good-bye!"

He was too much a man of action and of thought to be prodigal of words. And she knew that a facility in making pretty speeches is in nine cases out of ten merely the refuge of those who desire to conceal indifference or shallowness of heart.

In another minute the men were hurried away. An Indian pony with a saddle was brought for Dorothy, and she was told to mount. The young squaw who had her in charge, and who was called "The Star that Falls by Night," mounted another pony and took over a leading-rein from Dorothy's. Poundmaker, after giving a few instructions, rode off to direct operations and to see that his sharpshooters were posted in such a way that it would be impossible for the British to advance until his main body had made good their retreat into the more inaccessible country. Of course, it was only a matter of time before they would be starved out of those hills, but much might occur before then.

The middle-aged brave who was handicapped with a name that suggested froggy agility, proudly took his place at the head of the little cavalcade, and a few minutes later they were threading their way through deep, narrow gullies, crossing from the head of one little creek on to the source of another, and choosing such places generally that the first shower of rain would gather there and wash out their tracks. When they passed the main camp, Dorothy saw that the lodges had been pulled down, and were being packed on travois, [Footnote: Two crossed poles with cross pieces trailing from the back of a pony.] preparatory to a forced march. She noted that the sleighs had been abandoned, as, of course, there were no wheels there to take the place of the runners. Her own slender belongings were secured on the back of a pack-horse, and the squaw saw to it that she had her full complement of provisions and camp paraphernalia such as suited the importance of her prisoner.

Poor Dorothy! There would, however, be no more tea or sugar, or other things she had been accustomed to, for many a long day, but, after all, that was of no particular moment. There was pure water in the streams, and there would soon be any amount of luscious wild berries in the woods, and plants by the loamy banks of creeks that made delicious salads and spinaches, and they would bring such a measure of health with them that she would experience what the spoilt children of fortune, and the dwellers in cities, can know little about--the mere physical joy of being alive--the glorious pulsing of the human machine.

They kept steadily on their way till dusk, and then halted for a brief space. The party was a small one now, only some half-dozen braves and a few squaws. Dorothy wandered with her jailer, whom she had for shortness called the Falling Star, to a little rise, and looked down upon the great desolate, purpling land in which evidently Nature had been amusing herself. There were huge, pillar-like rocks streaked with every colour of the rainbow, from pale pink and crimson to slate-blue. There were yawning canyons, on the scarped sides of which Nature had been fashioning all manner of grotesqueries--gargoyles and griffins, suggestions of many-spired cathedrals, the profile of a face which was that of an angel, and of another which was so weirdly and horribly ugly--suggesting

as it did all that was evil and sinister--that one shivered and looked away. All these showed themselves like phantasmagoria, and startled one with a suggestion of intelligent design. But it was not with the face of the cliff alone that Nature had trifled.

The gigantic boulders of coloured clays, strewn about all higgledy-piggledy, resolved themselves into uncouth antediluvian monsters, with faces so suggestive of something human and malign that they were more like the weird imaginings of some evil dream than inanimate things of clay. And over all brooded the mysterious dusk and the silence--the silence as of death that had been from the beginning, and which haunted one like a living presence. Only perhaps now and again there was a peculiar and clearly-defined, trumpet-toned sound caused by the outstretched wing of a great hawk as it swooped down to seize its prey. It was the very embodiment of desolation. It might well have been some dead lunar landscape in which for aeons no living thing had stirred.

But Dorothy had other things to think of. Her position was now seemingly more perilous than before. It was so hard to think that they had all been so near deliverance, and, in fact, had given themselves over entirely to hope, and then had been so ruthlessly disappointed.

But there had been compensations. Putting on one side the shedding of blood, for which nothing could compensate, there was that new interest which had sprung into glorious life within her, and had become part of her being--her love for the man who had more than once put himself in the power of the enemy so that she and her father might be saved. Yes, that was something very wonderful and beautiful indeed.

When the moon got up the party was reformed, and they started out again. In the pale moonlight the freaks of Nature's handiwork were more fantastic than ever, and here and there tall, strangely-fashioned boulders of clay took on the semblance of threatening, half-human monsters meditating an attack.

Dorothy had noticed by the stars that the party had changed its direction. They were now heading due north. With the exception of one short halt they travelled all through the night, and in the early grey dawn of the morning came out upon a great plain of drifting sand that looked for all the world like an old ocean bed stretching on and on interminably. It was the dangerous shifting sands, which the Indians generally avoided, as it contained spots where, it was said, both man and horse disappeared if they dared to put foot on it. But Poundmaker's lieutenant was not without some measure of skill and daring, and piloted them between the troughs of the waste with unerring skill.

When the sun gained power in the heavens and a light breeze sprang up, a strange thing took place. The face

of the wave-like heights and hollows began to move. The tiny grains of sand were everywhere in motion, and actually gave out a peculiar singing sound, somewhat resembling the noise of grain when it falls from the spout of a winnowing machine into a sack. It was as if the sand were on the boil. There was no stopping now unless they wanted to be swallowed up in the quicksand. Dorothy noticed that the squaws, and even the braves, looked not a little anxious. But their leader kept steadily on. The sand was hard enough and offered sufficient resistance to the broad hoof of a horse, but if one stood still for a minute or so, it began gradually to silt up and bury it. It was a horrible place. When at noon that devil's slough resolved itself into a comparatively narrow strip, and Dorothy saw that they could easily have left it, she began to understand their reason for keeping on such dangerous ground--_they did not wish to leave any tracks behind them_. In all truth there was absolutely nothing to show that they had ever been in that part of the country. At last they came to what looked like a high hill with a wall-like cliff surmounting it. They stepped on to the firm clayey soil where the sage-bush waved, and had their midday meal. As soon as that had been disposed of, they resumed their journey.

They now went on foot, and steadily climbed the steep hillside by the bed of an old watercourse. Dorothy wondered what was behind the sharply-cut outline of the cliffs, for it gave the impression that nothing lay beyond save infinite space. They entered a narrow ravine, and then suddenly it was as if they had reached the jumping-off place of the world, for they passed, as it were, into another land. Immediately beneath them lay a broken shelf of ground shaped like a horseshoe, the sides of which were sheer cliffs, the gloomy base of which, many hundred feet below, were swept by the coldly gleaming, blue waters of the mighty Saskatchewan. Beyond that, drowsing in a pale blue haze, lay the broad valley, and beyond that again the vast purpling panorama of rolling prairie and black pinewoods until earth and sky were merged in indistinctness and became one. It resembled a perch on the side of the world, a huge eyrie with cliffs above and cliffs below, with apparently only that little passage, the old creek bed, by which one might get there. Dorothy realised that people might pass and repass at the foot of the hill on the other side and never dream there was such a place behind it. Still less would they imagine that there was a narrow cleft by which one could get through. Moreover, a couple of Indians stationed at the narrow track could easily keep two hundred foe-men at bay. Dorothy realised that she was now as effectually a prisoner as if she had been hidden away in an impregnable fortress.

The party descended a gentle slope, and there, in a saucer-shaped piece of low-lying ground fringed with saskatoon and choke-cherry trees, they pitched their camp.

For the first three days Dorothy was almost inclined to give way to the depression of spirits which her surroundings and the enforced inaction naturally encouraged. Though the Red folk were not actually unkind to her, still, their ways were not such as commended themselves to a well-brought-up white girl. Fortunately, the Falling Star was well disposed to her, and did all she could to make Dorothy feel her captivity as little as possible. The two would sit together in a shady place on the edge of the great cliff for hours, gazing out upon the magnificent prospect that outspread itself far beneath them, and the Indian girl, to try and woo the spirit of her white sister from communing too much within itself, would tell her many of the quaint, beautiful legends of the Indian Long Ago.

On the third day, just as Dorothy was beginning to wonder if it were not possible to steal out of the wigwam one night when Falling Star slept soundly, and, by evading the sentries--who might also chance to be asleep--make her way out through the narrow pass and so back to freedom, there was an arrival in camp that exceedingly astonished her. She was sitting some little distance back from the edge of the great cliff with Falling Star near at hand, when some one behind her spoke.

"Ah, Mam'selle," said the voice, "it ees ze good how-do-you-do I will be wish you."

Dorothy turned, and to her surprise Bastien Lagrange stood before her.

Despite the jauntiness of his speech, and the evident desire he evinced to appear perfectly at his ease, Dorothy at once detected an under-current of shame-facedness and apprehension in Bastien's manner. His presence urged that he was no longer a prisoner with Poundmaker's band. What did it portend?

In her eagerness to learn something of her father, Pasmore, and the others, Dorothy sprang to her feet and ran towards Lagrange. But that gentleman gave her such a significant look of warning that she stopped short. He glanced meaningly at the Indian woman, Falling Star. Dorothy understood, and a presentiment that she was about to be disappointed in the feeble-hearted half-breed took possession of her.

"You can speak, Bastien," Dorothy said. "Falling Star will not understand a word. I can see you have come with a message to Jumping Frog, but first, tell me--what about my father and the others?"

"_ Helas_, I know not!" said Bastien, feeling vastly relieved that it had not been a more awkward question. "They haf go 'way South branch of Saskatchewan. They all right. I tink Poundmaker mooch 'fraid keel them. They--"

"But how is it you are here? Have you joined the enemy again?"

It had come at last, and Bastien, shrugging his high shoulders, spread his hands out deprecatingly.

"_Helas_, Mam'selle! What was there for to do? I say I Eenglish, and they go for to shoot me mooch dead. I say 'Vive Riel!' and they say, 'Zat ees all right, Bastien Lagrange, you mooch good man.' I tell them that I nevere lof ze Eenglish, that your father and shermoganish peleece she was took me pressonar, and I was not able to get 'way, and that I plenty hate the Eenglish, oh! yees, and haf keel as many as three, four, fife, plenty times. So they say, 'Bully for you, pardner! and you can go tell Man-Who-Jumps-Like-a-Frog to sit down here more long and ozer tings.' _Comprenez?_"

The peculiar and delicate line of policy the unstable breed was pursuing was obvious. Lagrange was one of those who wanted to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds simply because he did not particularly care for either, and it was incumbent upon him that he should do one or the other. When the proper time came he certainly wanted to be with the side that got the best of it, and he had a shrewd suspicion that that would be the English. He was delightfully immune from any moral prejudice in the matter, and already a brilliant scheme was developing in his plastic brain that promised both safety and entertainment. He, however, resolved to do whatever lay in his power to assist this charming young lady and her father.

"Bastien," observed the girl, after a pause, "you'd better take good care what you do. Take my word for it that all the rebels, both half-breeds and Indians, who have done wrong will have to answer for it. I do not ask you what message you carry to the Indians here, but it is unlikely that you will stay with us. Now, I know that Battleford is not so very far away; will you go and tell Pepin Quesnelle to come to me? The Indians are all afraid of him, so he will suffer no harm. See, give him this from me."

She turned and plucked a little bunch of blue flowers that grew close at hand, which in the Indian language signify "Come to me." Then she produced a little brooch which she had worn at her throat that night she had met the dwarf, and wrapping both in a small piece of silk, gave them to the half-breed.

CHAPTER XXII

ANTOINE IN TROUBLE

Four nights later Pepin Quesnelle and his mother were having their supper in the large common sitting-room, which also did duty as kitchen and workshop. The tidy, silver-haired old dame had set out a place for Pepin at

the well-scrubbed table, but the _petit maitre_, much to her regret, would not sit down at it as was his wont. He insisted on having his supper placed on the long, low bench, covered with tools and harness, at which he was working. He had a Government job on hand, and knew that if he sat down to the table in state, there would be much good time wasted in useless formality. His mother therefore brought some bread and a large steaming plate of some kind of stew, and placed them within reach of his long arms.

"Pepin," she said, with a hint of fond remonstrance, "it is not like you to eat so. If any one should happen to come and catch you, my sweet one, eating like a common Indian, what would they think? Take care, apple of my eye, it is ver' hot!"

She hastily put down the steaming bowl, from which a savoury steam ascended, and Antoine the bear, who was sitting on his haunches in evident meditation behind the bench, deliberately looked in another direction. What mattered the master's dinner to a bear of his high-class principles!

"Thank you, my mother," said Pepin, without lifting his eyes, and sewing away with both hands as if for dear life. "What you say is true, ver' true, but the General he will want this harness, and the troops go to-morrow to catch Poundmaker. And, after all, what matters it where I sit--am I not Pepin Quesnelle?"

Antoine, still looking vacantly in another direction, moved meditatively nearer the steaming dish. Why had they not given him his supper? He had been out for quite a long walk that day, his appetite was excellent.

"Mother," said Pepin again, "that young female Douglas, who was here some time ago, I wonder where she may be now? Since then I have been many times think that, after all, she was, what the soldier-officers call it, not half-bad."

"Ah, Pepin!" and the old lady sighed, "she was a sweet child, and some day might even have done as wife for you. But you are so particular, my son. Of course, I do not mean to say she was good enough for you, but at least she was more better than those other women who would try and steal you from me. _Mon Dieu_, how they do conspire!"

"So, that is so," commented Pepin resignedly, but at the same time not without a hint of satisfaction in his voice; "they _will_ do it, you know, mother. Bah! if the shameless females only knew how Pepin Quesnelle sees through their little ways, how they would be confounded--astonished, and go hide themselves for the shame of it! But this girl, that is the thing, she was nice girl, I think, and if perhaps she had the airs of a _grande dame_ and would expect much--well, after all, there was myself to set against that Eh? What? Don't you

think that is so, my mother?"

"Yes, Pepin, yes, of course that is so, my sweet one, and what more could any woman want? And that girl, I think, she was took wid you, for I see her two, three times look at you so out of the corners of the eyes."

While this conversation was proceeding, Antoine had more than once glanced at his master without turning his head. The plate of stew was now within easy reach of his short grizzled snout, and really it looked as if it had been put there on purpose for him to help himself.

When Pepin happened to look round, he thought his mother, in a fit of absent-mindedness, must have put down an empty plate--it was so clean, so beautifully clean. But when he looked at Antoine, who was now sitting quite out of reach of the plate, and observed the Sunday-school expression on the bear's old-fashioned face, he understood matters. He knew Antoine of old.

"Mother," he said, in his natural voice and quite quietly, "my dear mother, don't let the old beast know that you suspect anything. Take up that plate, and don't look at him, or he will find out we have discovered all. What have you got left in the pot, my mother?"

"Two pigeons, my sweet one, but--"

"That will do, mother. Do not excite yourself. Your Pepin will be avenged. The b'ar shall have the lot, _ma foi!_ the whole lot, and he will wish that he had waited until his betters were finished. Take down the mustard tin, and the pepper-pot, and yes, those little red peppers that make the mouth as the heat of the pit below, and put them all in the insides of one pigeon. Do you hear me, my mother dear? Now, do not let him see you do it, for his sense is as that of the Evil One himself, and he would not eat that pigeon."

"Oh, my poor wronged one, and to think that that--"

"Hush hush, my mother! Can you not do as I have told you? Pick up the plate quietly. _Bien_, that is right! Now, do not look at him, but fill the pigeon up. So ... that is so, mother dear. O, Antoine, you sweet, infernal b'ar, but I will make you wish as how the whole Saskatchewan were running down your crater of a throat in two, three minutes more. But there will be no Saskatchewan--_non_, not one leetle drop of water to cool your thieving tongue!"

And despite the lively state of affairs he predicted for his four-footed friend, he never once looked at it, but kept tinkering at the harness as if nothing particular were exciting him.

The good old lady was filled with concern for Antoine, for whom, as sharing the companionship of her well-beloved, she had quite a friendly regard. Still, had not the

traitorous animal robbed her darling--her Pepin--of his supper? It was a hard, a very hard thing to do, but he must be taught a lesson. With many misgivings she stuffed the cavernous fowl with the fiery condiments.

"Now, mother dear, just wipe it clean so that the fire and brimstone does not show on the outside, and pour over it some gravy. That is right, _ma mere_. I will reward you--later. Now, just place it on the bench and take away the other plate. Do not let the cunning malefactor think you notice him at all. He will think it is the second course. _Bien!_"

He turned his head sharply and looked at the bear with one of his quick, bird-like movements, just at the same moment as the bear looked at him. But there was nothing on the artless Antoine's face but mild, sentimental inquiry.

"Ha! he is cunning!" muttered Pepin. "Do you remember, my mother, how--_Mon Dieu!_ he's got it!"

That was very apparent. Antoine had nipped up the fowl, and with one or two silent crunches was in the act of swallowing it. So pressed was he for time that at first he did not detect the fiery horrors he was swallowing. But in a minute or two he realised that something unlooked for had occurred, that there was a young volcano in his mouth that had to be quenched at any cost. So he sprang to his feet and rushed at a bucket of water that stood in a corner of the room, and went so hastily that he knocked the bucket over and then fell on it. The burning pain inside him made him snap and growl and fall to worrying the unfortunate bucket.

As for Pepin, he evinced the liveliest joy. He threw the harness from him, leapt from the bench, and seizing his long stick, danced out on the floor in front of the bear. The good old dame stood with clasped hands in a far corner of the room, looking with considerable apprehension upon this fresh domestic development.

"Aha, Antoine, _mon enfant!_" cried the dwarf, "and so my supper you will steal, will you? And how you like it, _mon ami?_ Now, for to digest it, a dance, that is good. So--get up, get up and dance, my sweet innocence! Houp-la!"

But just at that moment there came a knock at the door. It was pushed open, and the unstable breed, Bastien Lagrange, entered. Antoine, beside himself with internal discomfort and rage, eyed the intruder with a fiery, ominous light in his eyes. Here surely was a heaven-sent opportunity for letting off steam. Before his master could prevent him he had rushed open-mouthed at Lagrange and thrown him upon his back. Quicker than it takes to write it, he had ripped the clothing from his body with his great claws and was at his victim's throat. The dwarf, with a strange, hoarse cry, threw himself upon the bear. With his powerful arms and huge hands he caught it by

the throat, and compressed the windpipe, until the astonished animal loosed its hold and opened its mouth to gasp for breath. Then, bracing himself, Pepin threw it backwards with as much seeming ease as when, on one occasion, he had strangled a young cinnamon in the woods. Bastien Lagrange lay back with the blood oozing from his mouth, the whites of his eyes turned upwards. He tried to speak, but the words came indistinctly from his lips. He put one hand to his breast, and a small packet fell to the ground.

"From the daughter of Douglas," he gasped. And then he lay still.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DEPARTURE OF PEPIN

After all, Bastien Lagrange had been more frightened than hurt by Antoine the bear. When Pepin Quesnelle had satisfied himself that there were no bones broken, and that the wound from which the blood flowed was a mere scratch, he, as usual, became ashamed of his late display of feeling and concern, and again assumed his old truculent attitude. He gave the breed time to recover his breath, then roughly asked him whom he thought he was that he should make such a noisy and ostentatious entry into his house.

"It ees me, Pepin, your ver' dear friend, Bastien Lagrange," whined the big breed, with an aggrieved look at the dwarf and an apprehensive one at Antoine.

"What, villain, _coquin_, _I_ your ver' dear friend? --may the good Lord forbid! But sit up, and let me once more look upon your ugly face. Idiot, _entrez!_ Sit up, and take this for to drink." So spoke Pepin as he handed Bastien a dipper of water.

In all truth the shifty breed had an expression on his face as he tried to put his torn garments to rights that savoured not a little of idiocy. He had been for the last three hours working himself into a mood of unconcern and even defiance, so that he might be able to repel the attacks of the outspoken Pepin. But now, at the very first words this terrible manikin uttered, he felt his heart sinking down into his boots. Still, he bore news which he fancied would rather stagger the dwarf.

"And so, _mon ami_ --"

"_Tenez vous la_, villain! You will pardon me, but I am not the friend of a turncoat and traitor! _Dis donc_, you will bear this in mind. Now what is it you have for to say? _Bien?_"

"_Parbleu!_ what ees ze matter wit' Antoine?" exclaimed the breed uneasily. "What for he look at me so? Make him for to go 'way, Pepin."

Pepin caught up his stick and changed the trend of Antoine's aggressive thoughts. The big brute slunk to the far end of the room, sat upon his haunches, and blinked at the party in a disconcerting fashion. Then Pepin again turned upon Bastien with such a quick, fierce movement that the latter started involuntarily.

"Bah! blockhead, pudding-head!" cried Pepin impatiently. "Antoine has only that fire in his mouth that you will have in the pit below before two, three days when you have been hanged by the neck or been shot by the soldiers of the great Queen. Proceed!"

"Aha! you ver' funny man, Pepin, but do you know that Poundmaker has been catch what zey call ze convoy--sixteen wagons wit' ze drivers and ze soldiers belongin' to your great Queen, and now zey haf no more food and zey perish? Haf you heard that, _mon_ --M'sieur Pepin?"

Pepin had not heard it, but then he had heard some awkward things about Bastien Lagrange, and he immediately proceeded to let him know that he was acquainted with them. The soldiers, with their great guns, were now swarming up the Saskatchewan, and it was only a matter of a few weeks before Poundmaker and Big Bear would be suing for mercy. This and more of a disquieting nature did the dwarf tell the unstable one, so that by the time he had finished there was no hesitation in Bastien's mind as to which side he must once and for all definitely espouse. So he told of the capture of the Douglas party by Poundmaker and of the fight at Cut-Knife. Then he called Pepin's attention to the packet he had dropped, and explained how it had been entrusted to him.

The manikin examined it in silence. A strange look of intelligence came into his face. He shot a half-shy, suspicious glance at the breed, but that gentleman, with an awe-stricken expression, was watching Antoine, as with sinister design that intelligent animal was piling up quite a collection of boots, moccasins, and odds and ends in a corner preparatory to having a grand revenge for the trick that had been played upon him. He would chew up every scrap of that leather and buckskin if he wore his teeth out in the attempt. The old lady, fortunately for him, had left the room.

Pepin opened the packet, and the sight of that plain little gold brooch and the bunch of prairie forget-me-nots moved him strangely. After all, his heart was not adamant where youth and beauty were concerned--he only realised the immense gulf that was fixed between a man of his great parts and graces and the average female.

He abruptly ordered Bastien into the summer kitchen to look for his mother and get something to eat, and then,

when he realised he had the room to himself, he literally let himself go. He sprang to his feet, and, waving the flowers and the brooch over his head, advanced a few paces into the middle of the room, struck a melodramatic attitude, and, with one hand pressed to his heart, carried Dorothy's tokens to his lips.

Then he turned and observed Antoine. This somewhat absent-minded follower had already begun operations on his little pile; but he had been so taken aback by the unwonted jubilation of his master, that he stopped work to gaze upon him in astonishment, and quite forgot to remove the half-torn moccasin from his mouth. When he saw he was caught red-handed, he dropped the spoil as he had dropped the hot potato, and crouched apprehensively. His master made a fierce rush at him.

"What ho! Antoine, you pig, you!" he cried; "and so you would have revenge, you chuckle-pate!" And then he punched Antoine's head.

Just at that moment his mother and Bastien re-entered the room; the former set Lagrange down at a small table in a far corner with some food before him. The dwarf lounged towards the fire-place with an assumed air of indifference and boredom, and, leaning against the chimney-piece, stroked his black moustache.

"What is it, Pepin, my son?" asked the old lady anxiously.

"Oh, nothing--nothing, my mother; only that they are at it again!"

"The shameless wretches!" she exclaimed; "will they never cease? Who is it this time, Pepin?"

"Only that young Douglas female we have spoke about"--he tried hard to infuse contempt into his voice--"she wants me to go to her! Just think of it mother! But she is a preesonar, and, perhaps, it is also my help she wants. And she was a nice girl, was it not so, _ma mere?_"

Between them they came to the conclusion that Pepin must go with Bastien to where Dorothy was kept a prisoner and see what could be done. They also wisely decided that it was no use notifying or trying to lead the Imperial troops to the spot, for that might only force the Indians to some atrocity.

Later on, when the moon arose, Pepin took Lagrange out and showed him the British camp with its apparently countless tents, and its battery of guns. It appeared to the unstable one as if all the armies of the earth must be camped on that spot. When the dwarf told him that there were other camps further up the river, to which the one before him was as nothing, Bastien fairly trembled in his moccasins. When a sentry challenged them, the now thoroughly disillusioned breed begged piteously that they should return to Pepin's house and set out early on

the following morning for the place where Dorothy was imprisoned up the Saskatchewan, before that army of soldiers, who surely swarmed like a colony of ants, was afoot.

Pepin knew that the approach of an army would only be the means of preventing him from finding Dorothy. He must go to her himself. He would also, for the sake of the proprieties, take his mother along in a Red River cart; his mind was quite made up upon that point. If he did not do so, who could tell that the Douglas female, with the cunning of her sex, would not lay some awkward trap for him? The girl had plainly said, "Come to me," and he was secretly elated, but his conviction of old growth, that all women were "after" him, made him cautious.

So next morning, before break of day, the Red River cart was packed up and at the door. Pepin and his mother got into it, Antoine was led behind by means of a rope, and Bastien rode alongside on a sturdy little Indian pony. It was indeed an outré and extraordinary little procession that started out.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE INDIANS' AWAKENING

Little Running Cropped-eared Dog of the Stonies sat smoking his red clay calumet at the narrow entrance of the gorge that looked out upon the wooded hillside, the only means of ingress to the shelf which constituted Dorothy's prison-house. He was keeping watch and ward with his good friend "Black Bull Pup," who also sat smoking opposite him. Their rifles lay alongside; they had finished a recherche repast of roasted dog, and were both very sleepy. It was a horrible nuisance having to keep awake such a warm afternoon. No one was going to intrude upon their privacy, for they had heard that the British General, Middleton, was in hot pursuit after Poundmaker, and it was unlikely that Jumping Frog, who was over them, would trouble about visiting the sentries.

Little Running Cropped-eared Dog laid down his pipe and folded his arms.

"Brother," he said to Black Bull Pup, with that easy assumption of authority which characterised him, "there is no necessity for us both to be awake. I would woo the god of pleasant dreams, so oblige me by keeping watch while my eyelids droop."

Bull Pup, who was a choleric little Indian, and, judging by his finery, a tip-top swell in Indian upper circles, looked up with an air of surprise and angry remonstrance.

"Brother," he replied, "the modest expression of your

gracious pleasure is only equalled by the impudence of the prairie dog who wags his tail in the face of the hunter before hastening to the privacy of his tepee underground. You slept all this morning, O Cropped-eared one! It is my turn now."

But Little Running Dog was renowned among the Stonies for his wide knowledge of men and things. Moreover, he loved ease above all, so, by reason of his imperturbability and honeyed words, he invariably disarmed opposition and had his own way. On the present occasion he said--

"Black Bull Pup will pardon me; he speaks with his accustomed truthfulness and fairness of thought I had for the moment forgotten how, when he took Black Plume of the Sarcees prisoner, and was leading him back for the enlivening knife and burning tallow, he watched by him for four days and four nights without closing an eye, thus earning for himself the distinction of being called the 'Sleepless One.' There is no such necessity for his keeping awake now. Let his dreams waft him in spirit to the Happy Hunting Grounds. As for me, I am getting an old man, whose arrow-hand lacks strength to pull back the string of the bow. It can be but a few short years before I enter upon the long, last sleep, so it matters not Sleep, brother."

But Black Bull Pup, as is often the case, was tender of heart as well as choleric, and hastened to say that his venerable comrade must take some much-needed rest, so that within five minutes the ugly Cropped-eared one was making the sweet hush of the summer noon hideous with his snores, whilst Black Bull Pup was beginning to wonder if, after all, he had not been "got at" again by his Machiavelian friend. It was not a pleasant reflection, and it really was a very drowsy sort of afternoon. Four minutes later he was sound asleep himself.

Slowly toiling up the stony, sun-dried bed of the tarn came Pepin the dwarf, and alongside him, showing unusual signs of animation--he had scented brother bears--came Antoine. Behind them walked the unstable breed, Bastien Lagrange, with a huge pack upon his back. The pack was heavy and the hill was steep, so that the human beast of burden perspired and groaned considerably. He also showed much imagination and ingenuity in the construction of strange words suitable to the occasion. Pepin's ears had just been assailed by some extra powerful ones when he turned to remonstrate.

"Grumbler and discontented one," he said, "have your long legs grown weak at the knees because you are asked to carry a few pennyweights on your back?"--the breed was resting his several hundred pounds pack upon a rock--"Bah! it is nothing compared to the load of things you will have to carry and answer for when you have to appear before the Great Court, when the bolt has been drawn and you are launched into space through the prison trap-door, and your toes go jumpety-jumpety-jump. Blockhead!"

"_Parbleu, M'sieur_ Pepin, _mais_ eet ees mooch dead would be more better than this, I tink it! _Helas!_ how my heart eet does go for to break! I would for to rest, Pepin, my ver' dear frient."

"Then rest, weak-kneed one, and be sure afterwards to come on. It is good I did leave the good mother with the Croisettes down the river! _Au revoir_, pudding-head!"

Pepin held Antoine by the neck while he surveyed the slumbering forms of Little Running Crop-eared Dog and Black Bull Pup.

"_Mais_, they are beautiful children of the tepees," he murmured. "It would be easy to kill, but that would not be of the commandments. 'He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.' No; no man's blood shall stain the hands of Pepin Quesnelle. Ah! now I have it. So!"

If the dwarf drew the line at killing, he was still as full of mischief as a human being could well be. He had an impish turn of mind, and hastened to gratify the same. He took the two rifles and at once proceeded to draw the charges, then with a smartness and lightness of touch that was surprising, he possessed himself of their sheath-knives. He placed Antoine on its haunches between them, and threatened him with dire vengeance if he moved. He himself clambered on to a rock over their heads, at the same time not forgetting to take a few stones in his pockets. His eyes gleamed and rolled in his head, and he chuckled in a truly alarming fashion. Then he dropped a stone on to the pit of Black Bull Pup's stomach, and the other on to the head of the Crop-eared one. Antoine watched the proceedings with much interest.

Black Bull Pup sat up and was about to remonstrate angrily with his comrade for having roused him so unceremoniously, when the latter also raised himself full of the same matter.

Their eyes fairly started from their heads and they were nearly paralysed with horror when they beheld a huge bear sitting within a few feet of them. It must be a very ogre of a bear when it could sit there so calmly waiting for them to awake before beginning operations. Pepin, unseen on the rock above them, fairly doubled himself up with delight. But they were both Indians who had borne themselves with credit in former encounters with bears, so, snatching up their rifles, they both fired at Antoine at the same moment with a touching and supreme disregard to the other's proximity. Antoine seemed interested. There were two flashes in the pan, and two hearts sank simultaneously. They searched for their knives in vain. Antoine appeared amused and looked encouragement. It was a very nightmare to the two warriors. Then, from the rock over their heads, they heard a deep bass voice of such volume that it sounded like half-a-dozen ordinary voices rolled into one.

"_Canaille!_" it cried, "cut-throats! villains! block-heads! pudding-heads! _mais_ you are nice men to sleep at your posts; truly, that is so! Shall I make this bear for to devour you? Eh? What?"

When the two men looked up and beheld the weird form of Pepin perched on the rock, it nearly finished them. They had heard of many strange monsters, but here was something beyond their very wildest imaginings. Of course, this bear was his attendant evil spirit, and it was a judgment upon them. The Crop-eared one and the Black Bull Pup grovelled in an agony of terror. Pepin never had such a time. What would have happened it is hard to say had not Bastien Lagrange appeared upon the scene. For Antoine, imagining that the movements of the Indians were generously intended as an invitation for him to indulge in frivolity, at once reared himself on his hind legs preparatory to dancing all over them. Pepin slid from the rock and called his absent-minded friend to attention. Bastien came forward wiping his forehead, declaring that he was all but dead, and the two worthy savages rose wonderingly to their feet. The unstable breed, who at once took in the situation, and, as usual, derived a secret pleasure from observing the abject discomfiture of the Indians, at once proceeded to explain to them that the strange gentleman before them, whom they had mistaken for a celebrity from the ghost world, was no other than the celebrated Pepin Quesnelle, of whom they must have heard, and that the bear, whose magnanimity and playfulness they had just been witnesses of, was his equally distinguished friend and counsellor. He also explained that, of course, no one in the land ever questioned Pepin's right to do what he liked or to go where he chose. There was no doubt that, in a different sphere of life, Bastien would have risen to eminence in diplomatic circles. The two warriors having been handed back their knives, swore by the ghosts of their illustrious grandfathers and grandmothers, that, so far at least as they were concerned, the little but mighty man, with his servant the bear, might go or come just as he pleased. Pepin and Bastien left the two now sleepless sentries at their posts, and passed through to the great wide terrace that overlooked the Saskatchewan, which, here describing a great half-circle, rushed like a mill-race between vast gloomy walls of rock.

When they reached the camp in the hollow, Jumping Frog came forward to meet them. Pepin he had heard of, but had not seen before. It was quite evident he resented his presence there. He turned angrily upon the breed, whose joy at now having come to the end of his journey received a decided check from the reception he met with from the head man. Jumping Frog looked at Bastien scornfully, and asked--

"Brother, did I not send you on a mission? and what is this thing you have brought back?"

The unstable breed, whose mercurial condition was influenced

by every breath of wind, shook with apprehension, but Pepin came to the rescue. To be called "a thing" by an Indian was an insult that cut into the quick of his nature. He had taken off his slouch hat, and was leaning forward with his two hands grasping the long stick he usually carried. Antoine was squatted meditatively on his haunches alongside him. Pepin now drew himself up; his face became transfigured with rage; he took a step or two towards the head man, and shook his stick threateningly.

"Black-hearted and cross-eyed dog of a Stony!" he fairly screamed; "by the ghost of the old grey wolf that bore you, and which now wanders round the tepees of the outcasts in the land of lost spirits picking up carrion, would you dare to speak of me thus! I have a mind to take the maiden whom you now hold as a prisoner away from you, but the time is not yet ripe. But I swear it, if you molest her in any way, or speak of me again as you have done, or interfere with my coming or going, you shall swing by the neck on a rope, and your body shall be given to the dogs. Moreover, your spirit shall wander for ever in the Bad Lands, and the Happy Hunting Grounds shall know you not."

"Ough! ough!" exclaimed Jumping Frog uneasily; "but you use big words, little man! Still, there is something about you that savours of big medicine, and I do not wish to offend the spirits, so peace with you until this matter rights itself." He turned to Lagrange. "And you, O one of seemingly weak purpose, tell me what news of Poundmaker and Thunderchild?"

What Bastien had to tell was not calculated to encourage Jumping Frog in his high-handed policy. His face fell considerably, and Pepin, taking advantage of his preoccupation, walked off with Antoine to find Dorothy.

When the dwarf was looking into one of the tepees, Antoine created quite a flutter of excitement by looking into another on his own account. When the four Indians who were solemnly seated therein, handing round the festive pipe, beheld a huge cinnamon bear standing in the doorway, evidently eyeing them with a view to annexing the one in best condition, they bolted indiscriminately through the sides of the lodge, leaving Antoine in possession. But when they gathered themselves together outside, they were confronted by Pepin, whom they took to be some terrible monster from the ghost world, and the last state of them was worse than the first. Pepin enjoyed their discomfiture for a brief space, and then explained who he was and why he came to honour them with his presence. Calling Antoine off, he left them in a still more dubious and confused state of mind.

He had wandered almost half-a-mile from the camp on to the broken edge of the great canyon, where, nearly a thousand feet below, the ice-cold waters of the mighty Saskatchewan showed like a blue ribbon shot with white.

Right in front of him was infinite space, and the earth fell away as if from the roof of the world. It seemed to Pepin that he had never before so fully realised the majesty of Nature. Standing on the edge of the nightmarish abyss, with the Indian girl near her, he saw Dorothy. Neither of them observed him, and he stood still for a minute to watch them.

As he gazed at the slim, graceful figure of the white prisoner in her neat but faded black dress, it seemed to him that he had never realised how beautiful and perfect a thing was the human form. He had only in a crude way imagined possibilities in the somewhat squat figures of the Indian girls. There was a distinction in the poise of Dorothy's proud shapely head that he had never seen before in any woman. When she turned and saw him, her face lighting up with welcome and her hands going out in front of her, he experienced something that came in the light of a revelation. He wondered how it was he could have ever said, "she will not do."

CHAPTER XXV

A PROPOSAL FROM PEPIN

Dorothy approached Pepin as if to shake hands, but the dwarf artfully pretended that there was something the matter with Antoine's leading-rein, and ignored her. He had never before realised how really dangerous a despised female could be.

"Pepin Quesnelle," said Dorothy, "it was asking a great deal when I sent for you, but I knew you would come. You saved the life of Sergeant Pasmore when Riel was going to shoot him, and I want to--"

"Bah, Mam'selle! But it is nonsense you talk like that, so! The right--that is the thing. What is goodness after all if one can only be good when there is nothing that pulls the other way--no temptations, no dangers? It is good to pray to God, but what good is prayer without the desire deep down in the heart to do, and the doing? The good deed--that is the thing. So! As for that Pasmore, villain that he is--"

"He is a good man. Why do you say such a thing?"

"Bah! he is _coquin_ blockhead, pudding-head; still, I love him much"--Dorothy visibly relented--"and he is brave man, and to be brave is not to be afraid of the devil, and that is much, _nest ce pas?_ But what is it you want me for to do? The good mother is down at Croisettes and sends her love--Bah! what a foolish thing it is that women send!"

"Your mother is a good woman, Pepin, and I am glad to

have her love; as for you--"

"Mam'selle, Mam'selle! Pardon! but I am not loving--you will please confine your remarks to my mother"--there was visible alarm in Pepin's face; he did not know what this forward girl might not be tempted to say--"What I can do for to serve you, that is the question? I have hear that your father and Sergeant Pasmore--that pudding-head--and the others are all right. The thing is for you to get 'way."

Pepin, who in reality had a sincere regard for Sergeant Pasmore, had merely spoken of him in an uncomplimentary fashion because he saw it would annoy Dorothy. He must use any weapon he could to repel the attacks of the enemy. As for Dorothy, the delusion that the dwarf was labouring under was now obvious, and she hardly knew whether to be amused or annoyed; it was such an absurd situation. She must hasten to disillusion him.

"I don't think anything very serious can happen to me here, Pepin. They will be too afraid to harm me, seeing that they must know the British are so near. It is my father and the others that I am concerned about And Sergeant Pasmore--"

The girl hesitated. Could she bring herself to speak about it, and to this dwarf? But she realised that she must hesitate at nothing when the lives of those who were dear to her hung in the balance; and she knew that he was chivalrous. Pepin tilted his head to one side, and, looking up suspiciously, asked--

"_Bien!_ and this Sergeant Pasmore, have you also designs on him? Eh? What?"

"Designs! The idea!--but, of course, how can you know? No, and I will tell you, Pepin Quesnelle, for I believe you are a good man, and you have been our friend, and we are in your debt--"

"Bah! Debt! What is that? I am a man, Mam'selle, and beg you will not talk about debt! Pouf!" He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his great hands.

"Very well, this Sergeant Pasmore, I love him, and I have promised to be his wife."

She drew herself up proudly now, and felt that she could have said so before the whole world.

"_Parbleu!_" exclaimed Pepin, who did not seem to hail the news with any particular satisfaction. "You are quite sure it was not any one else you wanted to marry? What? You are quite sure?"

"Of course, who could there be?"

"Perhaps Mam'selle aspired. But who can tell? After all,

a woman must take whom she can get I dare say that he will do just as well as another."

Pepin Quesnelle, now that his own safety was assured, did not seem to value it as he thought he would. After all, if the girl's nose did "stop short too soon," it was by no means an unpretty one; its sauciness was decidedly taking, and if he saw mischief lurking away back in her eyes, he admitted it was an uncommonly lovable sort of mischief. Being only human, he now began to wish for what he had despised.

As for Dorothy, she could have rated Pepin roundly for his conceit and his sentiments. But it was all too absurd, and she must bear with him. She continued--

"Pepin Quesnelle, you have a good heart, I know, and you can understand how it is. If I had not known that you were not like other men, I would hardly have dared to ask you to come all this long distance to me. I know what you do is not for reward, so I am not afraid to ask you. Will you find out about my father and Mr. Pasmore and the others, and will you do what you can to save them? I feel sure there is no man on the Saskatchewan can do more than you."

Pepin drew himself up to his full height, smiled complacently, and stroked his black moustache. His dark eyes twinkled as he turned to gaze encouragingly at Antoine, who with his tongue out was seated on his hind quarters, watching him meditatively.

"Mam'selle has spoken the truth. I would be sorry to be like other men--particularly your Pasmore"--he grinned impishly as he saw the indignation on Dorothy's face--"but that is not the thing. Pasmore is all right--in his own way. He is even, what you might call, goodfellow. But why is it you should fret for him? He is all right. And even if anything should happen to him, it is not Pepin that has the hard heart--he might even console Mam'selle. He will not exactly promise that, but he may come to it. Perhaps Mam'selle will remember in the house when the good mother told how you would like to marry Pepin, and he said you would not do. Well, Pepin has considered well since then, and he has thought that if you tried to suit him, you might"

"It is too great an honour, Pepin. If you expect any one in this world to be as good and kind to you as your mother, you will find you have made a great mistake. Believe me, Pepin Quesnelle. I am a woman, and I know."

"_Bien! Oui_, the mother she is good, ver' good, and I know there is right in what you say. So! Still, I think you have improved since we first met, and the mother likes you, so you need not think too much of that you are not good enough, and if you should think better of it--all may yet be well."

But Dorothy assured him that, seeing she had given her word to Pasmore, and, moreover, seeing she loved him, it would be a mistake to change her mind upon the subject.

This, however, was not exactly clear to Pepin, who could not understand how any woman could be foolish enough to stand in her own light when he, the great Pepin, who had been so long the catch of the Saskatchewan, had graciously signified his intention to accept her homage. Perhaps she was one of those coy creatures who must have something more than mere conventionalism put into an offer of marriage, so under the circumstances it might be as well for him to go through with the matter to the bitter end.

"Mam'selle," he said, "the honour Pepin does you is stupendous; he is prepared to accept you--to make the great sacrifice. He lays his heart at your feet--he means you have laid your heart at his feet, and he stoops to pick--"

"You'd better do nothing of the kind, Pepin Quesnelle. It's all a mistake!--You utterly misunderstand--"

But Dorothy could say no more, for, despite her alarm, the situation was too ludicrous for words. What further complications might have arisen, it is difficult to say, had not just then the astute Antoine come to the conclusion that his master was developing some peculiar form of madness and wanted a little brotherly attention. He therefore came noiselessly behind him and with a show of absent-mindedness poked his snout between his legs.

In another moment Pepin had landed on his back on top of his four-footed friend, wherefrom he rolled helplessly to earth. Dorothy ran forward to help him up, but the dwarf could not see her proffered hand now--it was Antoine he had to do business with. He was already creeping on all-fours towards the interrupter. Dorothy's heart was in her mouth when Pepin, with an unexpected movement, threw his arms round the bear's neck and proceeded to force its jaws apart with his powerful hands. He had no twigs or old boots handy, but he meant to try the teeth in its inside by administering earth or young rocks or anything of a nature that could not exactly be called nourishing. To add to the confusion, the Indian girl fearful that something terrible was about to happen, at once began to indulge in a weird uproar.

What would have happened it is difficult to say had not their attention been suddenly claimed by a couple of shots which rang out from the direction of the gorge. Pepin released his hold on Antoine, and that resourceful creature took the opportunity of revenging himself by picking up his master's hat and trotting off with it in his mouth. He meant to put it where Pepin intended to put the little rocks.

CHAPTER XXVI

A BOLD BID FOR LIBERTY

It was midnight, and Poundmaker's prisoners, Douglas, Pasmore, Jacques, and Rory, were lying in their tepee under the charge of their armed guards. They knew the latter were asleep, and in answer to some proposition that Rory had just whispered to Jacques, the latter said--

"So, that is so. Keel him not, but to make that he cry not. The knife to the throat, not to cut, but to silence, that is the thing."

"S-sh! or by the powers it's your throat the knife'll be at. Now, you to the man at your feet, and I'll to the man beyant... Ow, slape, ye gory babes!"

If the wind had not been whistling round the tepees just then, causing some of the loosely-laced hides to flap spasmodically, it is extremely unlikely that either of the two men would have ventured even to whisper. But the tepee was dark, and Rory had managed to tell his fellow-prisoners that, if they wanted to put their much-discussed scheme of overcoming their guards and making their escape into execution, now was their time. They might never have such another chance. Rory, by reason of his experience of such matters in the past, had insisted on leading off with the work. He had also intimated his intention of securing the arms of some of the other Indians after their guards had been overpowered.

Rory rolled over on his right side and looked at the Indians. He could only see two dark, prostrate forms outlined blackly against the grey of the doorway. Luckily the moon was rising, and that would somewhat assist their movements.

One of the Indians turned over and drew a long, throaty breath. He had indeed been asleep, and perhaps he was going to awake. The thought of the contingency was too much for the backwoodsman. He crawled forward as stealthily as a panther, and next moment one sinewy hand was on the Indian's throat, the other was across the mouth, and a knee was planted on his chest. Simultaneously Jacques was on top of the other Indian; Pasmore and Douglas jumped to their feet. In less time than it takes to write it, the hands of the Indians were secured behind their backs, gags were placed upon their mouths, their fire-arms and knives were secured, and the latter were flashed before their eyes. They were told that if they remained still no harm would come to them, but if they showed the slightest intention of alarming the camp their earthly careers would be speedily closed. Neither of them being prepared to die, they lay still, like sensible redskins. Then Rory left the tepee and in two minutes more returned with two rifles, which he had managed to purloin in some mysterious way.

Pasmore took the lead, then came Rory, and immediately after him Douglas and Jacques.

It was a miserable mongrel of an Indian dog that precipitated matters. They came full upon it as it stood close to a Red River cart, with cocked ears and tail in air. The inopportune brute threw up its sharp snout and gave tongue to a series of weird, discordant yelps after the manner of dogs which are half coyotes.

"Come on!" cried Pasmore, "we've got to run for it now. Let's make a bee-line straight up the valley!"

With rifles at the ready they rushed between the tepees. It was run for it now with a vengeance. Next moment the startled Indians came pouring out of their lodges. Red spurts of fire flashed out in all directions, and the deafening roar of antiquated weapons made night hideous. Luckily for the escaping party they had cleared the encampment, so the result was that the Indians, imagining that they were being attacked by the Blackfeet or the British, at once began to blaze away indiscriminately. The results were disastrous to small groups of their own people who were foolish enough to leave their doorways. It would have been music in the ears of the fleeing ones had not three or four shots whizzed perilously close to their heads, thus somewhat interfering with their appreciation of the _contretemps_.

But their detection was inevitable. Before they had gone two hundred yards a score of angry redskins were at their heels. It seemed a futile race, for the Indians numbered some hundreds, and it was a moral certainty it could be only a question of time before they were run down. They knew that under the circumstances there would be no prisoners taken. It was not long before the pace began to tell on them.

"I'm afraid I'm played out," gasped Douglas, "go on, my friends, for I can't go any farther. I'll be able to keep them back for a few minutes while you make your way up the valley. Now then, good-bye, and get on!"

He plumped down behind a rock, and waited for the advancing foe.

Pasmore caught him by the arm and dragged him to his feet. The others had stopped also. It was not likely they were going to allow their friend and master to sacrifice himself in such a fashion.

"Let's make up this ravine, sir," cried Pasmore. "Come, give me your arm; we may be able to fool them yet. There's lots of big rocks lying about that will be good cover. There's no man going to be left behind this trip."

High walls of clay rose up on either side, so that at least the Indians could not outflank them. At first the

latter, thinking that the troublesome escapers were effectually cornered, essayed an injudicious rush in upon them, but the result was a volley that dropped three and made the remainder seek convenient rocks. Taking what cover they could the white men retired up the narrow valley. It was becoming lighter now, and they could distinctly see the skulking, shadowy forms of the redskins as they stole from rock to rock. Suddenly they made a discovery that filled them with consternation. They had come to the end of the valley and were literally in a _cul-de-sac!_ They were indeed caught like rats in a trap.

"I'm afraid we're cornered," exclaimed Douglas, "but we've got some powder and shot left yet."

"Yes," remarked Pasmore, "we'll keep them off as long as we can. I can't understand why the troops are not following those fellows up. There's no getting out of this, I fear,"--he looked at the crescent of unscalable cliff--"but I don't believe in throwing up the sponge. I've always found that when things seemed at their worst they were just on the mend."

He did not say that there was a very powerful incentive in his heart just then that in itself was more than sufficient to make him cling to life. It was the thought of Dorothy.

Half-an-hour more and the Indians had crawled up to within fifty yards, and might rush in upon them at any moment, and then all would be over. As yet, thanks to their excellent cover, none of the little party had been wounded, though the redskins had suffered severely. There were few words spoken now; only four determined men waited courageously for the end. And then something happened that paled their cheeks, causing them to look at one another with startled, questioning eyes. There was a growing fusillade of rifle fire over their heads and the sound of British cheers!

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Douglas. "It's the troops at last. They've come up overnight to attack the camp, and they haven't come a minute too soon."

"So, that is so," said Jacques, as he took deliberate aim at his late enemies, who, realising the situation, were scuttling in confusion down the ravine. "_Mais_, it is the long road that knows not the turn."

But as for Pasmore, as on one occasion when he had been snatched from the Valley of the Shadow, and realised how beautiful was the blue between the columns of the pines, he now saw the sweet face of a woman smiling on him through the mists of the uncertain future.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN ONLY WAY

When Antoine the bear so far forgot himself as to interfere in his master's affairs, he, as usual, had occasion for after regret--Pepin saw to that.

The Indians seized their rifles and ran up the slope to the narrow slit in the cliff that led to their eyrie, and which on the other side looked out upon the far-stretching prairie. Pepin, calling Antoine all the unpleasant names he could think of, told him to follow, and waddled uphill after the redskins as fast as his late exertions and his short legs would allow him. The Indians did not attempt to interfere with his movements. Once there, he immediately saw the reason of the interruption. Hurriedly retiring down the hill were three or four men, but whether whites or breeds it was difficult to determine. He rather thought he recognised one burly form, and determined to make sure of the fact that very night. He thought, however, it was quite excusable for any small party to retire. Twenty men could have been picked off by one before they got half-way up. It was as well for the strangers that the Indians had opened fire so soon, otherwise some of them might have been left behind.

That night Pepin disappeared without saying a word to any one. The strange thing was that none of the Indians saw him go. Two days passed and there was no sign or trace of him. On the afternoon of the third day, when the two Indians on guard at the entrance of the Pass were busily engaged in quarrelling over some sort of rodent, nearly as large as a rat, Pepin suddenly rose up before them as if from the earth. They flattened themselves against the sides of the cliff in order to allow him and Antoine to continue their royal progress.

Pepin sought out Dorothy. She was at her usual place on the edge of the precipice that looked down upon the deep, divided channels of the great river. She turned on hearing the deep breathing of Pepin and the shambling of Antoine as they passed over some loose gravel behind her. She rose to her feet with a little cry of welcome. There was something in the dwarfs face that spoke of a settled purpose and hope. Their late awkward meeting was quite forgotten.

There was a by no means unkindly look on the dwarfs face as he seated himself beside Dorothy, and told her how he had slipped out of the Indian camp unobserved three nights before, and how, going back to Croisettes down the river, where he had left his mother, he had fallen in with her friends, who had been rescued by British troops from Poundmaker's clutches and sent to stay there out of harm's way while the soldiers pursued the scattered and flying Indians. Pepin having told them that Dorothy was for the time being safe, though in Jumping Frog's hands, they of course wanted to start out at once to rescue her, but

that was promptly negated by Pepin. Such an attempt might only precipitate her fate. It had come to his ears that Poundmaker's scattered band was at that very moment making back to the strange hiding-place in the cliff, and that as it would be impossible for them--Douglas and party--to force the position, they must get Dorothy away by strategy. He had been to that wild place years before. There was a steep footpath at the extreme western end, close to the cliff, which led directly down to the water's edge. If a canoe could be brought overland on the other side of the river to that spot, and hidden there, it would be possible for him and Dorothy to get into it and escape. They could drift down with the current and land just above Croisettes. They would, however, have to take care to get into the proper channel, as one of them was a certain death-trap. It led through a horrible narrow canyon, which for some considerable distance was nothing more than a subterraneous passage. There were rapids in it, through which nothing could hope to pass in safety. To be brief, the canoe had been taken to the desired spot, but Pepin had been enjoined not to resort to it unless things became desperate. Jacques and Rory had gone off in search of the British troops, while Douglas and Pasmore remained where they were in case they would be required.

Dorothy was jubilant over the scheme and would have started off at once, could she have got her own way, but Pepin told her she must retire as usual to her tepee, where he would come for her if necessity arose.

One hour before dawn and a hundred horrible, pealing echoes rang out from the mouth of the Pass. The British had attacked without considering what results might follow their precipitancy. In point of fact, Bastien Lagrange, the unstable breed, alarmed by Pepin's unpleasant prognostications, had developed a sudden fit of loyalty to the British, and gone off ostensibly to carry a message to Poundmaker, while in reality he went to search for the former in order that he might lead them to Dorothy's prison. Hence the present attack.

Dorothy heard the firing and rose quietly from her couch of skins. For five minutes she waited in a condition of painful uncertainty as to the true state of affairs. Then some one lifted aside the flap of the doorway and Pepin entered with Antoine close at his heels. He was evidently perturbed.

"Mam'selle, Mam'selle," he cried, "you must come with me now. I have hear that Jumping Frog say something to two of his cut-throats of redskins! Come quickly!"

Without any interruption the dwarf and the girl headed down the gully that sloped westward. It was terribly rough travelling, and, but for following an old and tortuous path, it would hardly have been possible to steer clear of the rocks and undergrowth. Suddenly the gully stopped abruptly on the brink of the terrace,

looking down which brought a thrill of terror to Dorothy's heart. It was as if a great water-spout had burst on the hillside and washed out for itself an almost precipitous channel. A wan dawn-light was creeping on apace, and Dorothy could see that it was at least six hundred feet to the bottom of this appalling chute. Pepin muttered something to himself as he regarded it.

"Have we to go down there?" Dorothy asked, with white lips.

"So, that is so!" observed Pepin soberly. "If we go back there is the death that is of hell. If we go on, there is the death we know or the life which means your father or your Pasmore for you, and the good mother and the home for me. There is the canoe at the foot of this hill, and those we have spoken of down the river at Croisettes. It is for you to make up your mind and choose."

"Come, Pepin, let us go down," she cried.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

The dwarf seized her hand, and, stepping over the brink, they began their perilous descent. They lay on their sides, feet downwards, and at once the loose sand and fine pebbles began to move with their bodies. Down the long slope they slid at a terrific pace that fairly took their breath away. To Dorothy it was as if she were falling from an immense height. The earth rushed past her, and for one horrible moment she feared she was losing her senses. It was a nightmare in which she was tumbling headlong from some dizzy cliff, knowing that she would be dashed to pieces at its foot.

"Courage, my dear."

It was Pepin's voice that brought her to her senses. She felt the grasp of his strong hand upon her arm. Soon she became conscious that their rocket-like flight was somewhat checked, and noted the reason. Pepin who lay on his back, had got his long stick wedged under his arms, and, with the weight of his body practically upon it, made it serve as a drag on their progress. Dorothy felt as if her clothes must be brushed from her body. She hardly dared look down to see how much of the fearful journey there was yet to accomplish. Suddenly the sand and gravel became of a heavier nature. Their pace slackened; Pepin threw all his weight on to the stick, and they pulled up. Dorothy saw that they were now about half-way down--they must have dropped about three hundred feet in a matter of seconds. Then something that to Dorothy seemed to presage the end of all things happened. There was a roar as of thunder over their heads. Looking up as they

still lay prone they beheld a terrifying spectacle. A huge rock was bounding down upon them from the heights above. It gathered force as it came, rising high in the air in a series of wild leaps. _Debris_ and dust marked its path. It set other stones in motion, and the noise was as if a 15-pounder and a Vicker's Maxim gun were playing a duet. For the moment a species of panic seized Dorothy, but Pepin retained his presence of mind.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "It is that cut-throat and blockhead, Jumping Frog, who has been throw down that stone! But what need to worry! Either it will squeeze us like to the jelly-fish or the flat-fish, or it will jump over our heads and do no harm--"

He pressed her to earth with one strong hand as the great rock struck the ground a few feet short of them and bounded over their heads. A warm, sulphurous odour came from the place of concussion. An avalanche of small stones rattled all around them. It was a narrow escape truly, and the very thought of it almost turned Dorothy sick. She saw the rock ricochet down the steep slope and plunge with a mighty splash into the blue waters far below.

How they got to the bottom Dorothy was never able to determine. She only knew that when she got there her boots were torn to pieces, and any respectable dealer in rags would hardly have demeaned himself by bidding for her clothes. Pepin was a curious sight, for his garments looked like so many tattered signals of distress.

The two found themselves in a great gloomy canyon with frowning sides and a broad, leaden-hued river surging at its foot.

But the canoe, where was it? Had it been sunk by the rock from above? If so, they had absolutely no hope of escape.

But Pepin's sharp eyes saw it riding securely in a little bay under a jutting rock. Dorothy and he hurried down to it. There was a narrow strip of sand, and the water was shallow just there. The painter was wound round a sharp rock, and they pulled the canoe to them. Just at that moment a shower of rocks and _debris_ passed within a few feet of them and plunged into the water, throwing up a snow-white geyser.

"Jump in, my dear," cried Pepin, "we will escape them yet, and that fool of a Jumping Frog will swing at the end of a long rope or die like a coyote with a bullet through his stupid head."

Dorothy got in, and Pepin rolled in bodily after her. He seized the paddle, seated himself near the bow, and dipped his blade into the eddying flood. "Now then, Mam'selle, have the big heart of courage and the good God will help. One, two!"

The canoe shot out into the stream. Like a child's paper boat or a withered leaf it was caught up and whirled away. There was a look of exultation on the dwarfs face; his dark eyes flashed with excitement.

"Courage, my dear!" he cried again. "Move not, and do not be afraid. Think of the good father and the sweetheart who will meet you at the Croisettes lower down. Think of them, dear heart, the father and the lover!"

Dorothy did think, and breathed a prayer that God would nerve the arm of Pepin and give them both faith and courage.

But the river was in flood, and the current rushed like a mill-race. Dorothy fairly held her breath as the canoe rode over the surging waters. The river seemed to narrow, and great black walls of rock wet with spray and streaked with patches of orange and green closed in upon them. They came to a bend where the water roared and boiled angrily, its surface being broken with great blue silver-crested furrows. Suddenly Pepin uttered a strange, hoarse cry. There had been an immense landslide, and the entire channel had been altered. Right in their path lay a broad whirlpool. Pepin paddled for dear life, while the perspiration stood out in beads upon his forehead. His face was set and there was a strained look in his eyes. Dorothy clasped her hands, praying aloud, but uttering no word of fear.

"Courage, courage," Pepin cried. "The good Lord will not forsake. Courage!"

The muscles stood out like knots on his great arms. His body inclined forward and his paddle flashed and dipped with lightning, unerring strokes.

The canoe leapt out of the water, and then shot out of that swirling, awful ring into the headlong stream again.

"Houp-la, Hooray!" cried Pepin. "Thanks be to the good God! Courage, _mon ami!_"

And then the words died on his lips, and Dorothy perceived a sickly grey overspread his face as he stared ahead. She looked and saw a great mass of rock right in the centre of the stream, as if a portion of the cliff had fallen into it, dividing the passage. Pepin, who had somewhat relaxed his efforts, now began to ply his paddle again with redoubled vigour. His hair stood on end, the veins swelled on his forehead, and his body was hunched forward in a grotesque fashion. Once he turned and, looking swiftly over his shoulder, cried something to Dorothy. But the thundering of the waters was now so great that his voice was drowned. The canoe was heading straight for the rock, as an arrow speeds from the bow. Dorothy closed her eyes and prayed. There was a lurch, the canoe heeled over until the water poured in, she opened her eyes and clung to the sides for dear life,

and then it shot past the menacing death, just missing it by a hand's breadth.

But what was the matter with the river? It had contracted until it was not more than twenty yards in width. It flowed between smooth slimy walls of rock, the vast heights of which shut out the light of coming day. There was no roaring now, only the rapid, deep, tremulous flow of the sea-green waters. Dorothy looked upwards, but all she could see was the black, pitiless cliffs, and a narrow ribbon of sky. Pepin had ceased to ply his paddle, and was gazing fixedly down stream. A presentiment that something was wrong took possession of Dorothy. When the dwarf turned round, and she saw the look of pity for her upon his face, she knew he had something ghastly to tell. His expression was not that of fear; it was that of one who, seeing death ahead, is not afraid for himself, but is strangely apprehensive about breaking the news to another. And all the time the thin ribbon of sky was getting narrower.

The girl looked at the dwarf keenly.

"Pepin Quesnelle," she said, "you have been a good, dear friend to me, and now you have lost your life in trying to save mine--"

"Pardon, Mam'selle, my dear, what is it you know? You say we go for to meet the death. How you know that, eh? What?"

Despite the tragedy of the situation, and the great pity for her that filled his heart, he would not have been Pepin had he not posed as the *_petit maitre_* in this the hour of the shadow.

She pointed to the great black archway looming up ahead under which their canoe must shoot in another minute. It was the dread subterranean passage, which meant for them the end of all things. It was a tragic ending to all her hopes and dreams, the trials and the triumphs of her young life. It was, indeed, bitter to think that just when love, the crowning experience of womanhood, had come to her, its sweetness should have been untasted. Even the lover's kiss--that seal upon the compact of souls--had been denied her. Her fate had been a hard one, but Dorothy was no fair-weather Christian. Was it not a great triumph that in the dark end she should have bowed to the higher will, and been strong? And her love, if it had experienced no earthly close, might it not live again in the mysterious Hereafter? She thanked God for the comfort of the thought. She had been face to face with death before, but now here surely was the end. She would be brave and true to all that was best and truest in her, and she felt that somehow those who were left behind must know.

The dwarf faced her, and his hands were clasped as in prayer. His face was transfigured. There was no fear there--only a look of trust in a higher power, and of

compassion.

"Pepin," cried Dorothy, "you have been a good, dear friend to me, and I want to thank you before--"

"Bah !" interrupted the dwarf. "What foolishness is it you will talk about thanks! But, my dear, I will say this to you now, although you are a woman, there is no one in this wide world--save, of course, the good mother--that I would more gladly have laid down my life to serve than you! I am sure your Pasmore would forgive me if he heard that Good-bye, my dear child, and if it is the Lord's will that together we go to knock at the gates of the great Beyond, then I will thank Heaven that I have been sent in such good company. Now, let us thank the good God that He has put the love of Him in our hearts."

And then the darkness swallowed them up.

Back from the land of dreams and shadows--back from the Valley of the Shadow and the realms of unconsciousness.

Dorothy opened her eyes. At first she could see nothing. Then there fell upon her view the shadowy form of a human figure bending over her, and a slimy roof of rock that seemed to rush past at racehorse speed. It seemed to grow lighter. The canoe swayed; she heard the rush of water; then there was darkness again.

It was the splash of cold water on her face from a little wave that dashed over the side of the canoe that roused her. She opened her eyes. In the bow she could see Pepin kneeling; his hands were clasped before him; his deep voice ran above the surge of the current, and she knew that he was praying aloud.

The roof over her head seemed to recede. It grew higher. Pepin turned and seized the paddle. He dipped it into the water and headed the canoe into the centre of the stream.

"Mam'selle, my dear," he cried, "the good God has heard our prayer. He has guided us through. Have heart of courage, and all will be well."

Dorothy raised herself on to her hands and knees. It was as if she had been dead and had come to life again. The stream opened out. Suddenly there came a break in the roof.

"Courage, _mon ami!_" cried Pepin, and he was just in time to turn them from a rock that threatened destruction.

Then all at once they shot out into the great isle-studded bosom of the broad river, and the sweet sunshine of the coming day.

Half-an-hour later, and the canoe was gliding past the banks where the ash and the wolf-willow grew, and the

great cliffs were left behind. They knew that they were safe, and in their hearts was thanksgiving. Suddenly Pepin cried--

"Ah, Mam'selle, you Douglas female, look--don't you see it? There it is--Croisettes, and look--look, there is the good mother, and your father, and there your Pasmore, your pudding-head, Pasmore! Look, they run. Do not you see them?"

But Dorothy could not see, for her eyes were full of tears--like Pepin's.

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