

# **Downey of the Mounted**

**By JAMES B. HENDRYX**

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# Downey of the Mounted

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By **JAMES B. HENDRYX**

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AUTHOR OF

“Oak and Iron,” “At the Foot of the Rainbow,” “The  
Gun

Brand,” “The Gold Girl,” “North,” “Prairie Flowers,”  
“The Promise,” “Snowdrift,” “The Texan,” “Without  
Gloves,” etc.



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DOWNEY OF THE MOUNTED

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The Promise	Without Gloves
The Gun Brand	Snowdrift
The Texan	At the Foot of the Rainbow
The Gold Girl	North
Prairie Flowers	Oak and Iron
Downey of the Mounted	

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# **Downey of the Mounted**



## **BOOK I**

# CHAPTER I

## A CONSPIRACY

THE heat rose in crinkly waves from the hard-packed street and the wooden sidewalks of the little mid-Saskatchewan town. In the distance, the Touchwood Hills looked green and cool.

Cameron Downey's eyes were on the hills, and his thoughts were on the cool waters of the lake, as he stood in the doorway of his father's store and listened anxiously for the sound of wheels.

All the long forenoon, and the hour that had intervened since he had bolted a hasty dinner in the little white house across the street, he had spent in the stuffy back room of the store with a bag of coarse salt, a large wooden paddle, and a tub of butter. It was a nasty job—working over rancid butter for shipment—a job that Cameron Downey particularly detested. But, it was finished now, and, as he “tended store” while his father ate his dinner, he listened for the rattle of the dilapidated one-horse wagon that was to convey him and his three “pardners” on a two-weeks' camping trip into the hills. Two whole weeks! Never but once in the whole fifteen years of his life had he been to the Hills, and then only for a day. Almost since he could remember he had worked in the store.

Cameron Downey's life had been encompassed by walls—the four walls of the store, and the four other walls of the school house. The life he longed to live took no thought of walls, unless, perchance, the thick log walls of some outland trading post far in the unmapped North. True, he fished and swam evenings, in the river, and in the little lake whose waters lapped the edges of the town. But, now, he was going to camp! Nothing to do for two whole weeks but fish, and swim, and watch the birds and the bees—and maybe they would see a deer! And maybe, if they were lucky, they would fall in with a roving band of berry-picking Indians. Cameron had always envied the Indians who came to town and traded their berries at his father's store and drifted on. Where? Always the boy had wondered where, as he watched them disappear across the flats in the direction of the Touchwood Hills.

He wished his father would finish his dinner and come back to the store. If the boys came along first and found they had to wait they might not like it—might even drive on without him. He unconsciously knew, and as unconsciously recognized the fitness of youth's brutality to youth. The other boys had all been to the Hills before. The fact that his inclusion this year was the result of an accident, detracted in no particular from the joy of his anticipation. The other boys had simply known that Angus Downey—Pinchpenny Angus, he was called by his fellow-townsmen—would never allow a son of his to fritter away two weeks' time that could be turned to profit.

But, this year they took a chance! Cameron remembered, as he waited, the thrill that shot through him that day, two weeks before, when Stub Warring leaned across the counter and abstracted a handful of prunes from the package the boy was tying up. “Say, Cam,” whispered Stub, one eye on the elder Downey, who was measuring calico from a

bolt on the back counter, “why don’t you ask old Pinch—I mean, yer dad, if you can’t go campin’ with us this year up in the Hills? Lew Evans busted his leg this mornin’, an’ Doc Severs says he’ll be laid up fer more’n a month. Me an’ Billy an’ Doodle don’t want to go, jest the three of us, an’ there’s only you an’ Red Rasnik, an’ we’d rather have you.”

“If I only could,” thought Cameron, as he glanced toward his father. Aloud, he said: “I’d like to go. I’ve never been campin’. I’ll ask him, an’ let you know in a couple of days.”

“We gotta know tonight. We’re goin’ to start in two weeks. It don’t cost nothin’, hardly. We all divide up on the grub, an’ my dad lets us take old Bill, he’s slow, but he’s willin’. An’ Sam Brant, he said we can take that old wagon that’s standin’ behine his blacksmith shop. All it needs is greasin’ an’ wirin’ up the shafts an’ the reach an’ it’ll run. An’ yesterday we took old Bill an’ snaked out that old row boat that was sunk in the mud. All it needs is a new bottom an’ sides, an’ some paint, an’ she’ll be good as ever. But it’ll take a lot of work.”

“I could help, evenings.”

“Sure, you could—you an’ Doodle both. He’s carryin’ water on the construction crew, but he’s goin’ to quit to go campin’. If me an’ Billy works daytimes, an’ you an’ Doodle evenin’s, we could get her done.”

“I’ll find out, an’ see you down by the lake tonight,” answered the boy, and as Stub went whistling out the door with his packages, he resumed his interrupted task of arranging canned goods on the shelves.

Several times during the long forenoon, the boy glanced toward his father, but never did he succeed in screwing his courage to the point of asking the momentous question. He decided to wait till noon, when, if there were no customers, his father would lock up the store and they would go to dinner together. It would be easier to ask with his mother there. She, too, loved the outdoors, and she would put in a good word for him.

The meal was half finished when the boy spoke: “The boys are goin’ campin’,” he said. “They’re goin’ in a couple of weeks.”

Angus Downey did not look up, and Cameron glanced toward his mother whose eyes lighted with interest: “That so, sonny, where are they going?”

“Out in the Hills. They’re goin’ to take a boat and everything, and stay two weeks. They want me to go with them.”

Angus looked up with frowning brow: “What! Fritter away two weeks in idleness! Living like a savage in the hills with evil companions!”

“It would be the best thing in the world for him,” ventured the boy’s mother. “And I don’t think the boys could be called evil companions.”

“It’s little enough ye know of them. Didn’t I see with my own eyes this very morning that brat of Warring’s reach out an’ filch a handful of prunes from the bag on the scales?”

“They were weighed out,” defended the boy.

“Stealing is stealing, no matter who is the loser. It is even worse after they were weighed than before, for not only does the boy’s mother lose the prunes, but I may be unjustly accused of giving short weight.”

“He’s only a boy,” answered the woman, “and what’s a handful of prunes? I’m sure he



didn't mean to steal."

"So much the worse if stealing has become second nature to him. Thieves are made, not born. It's prunes today, and a dollar tomorrow, and a thousand dollars the next day."

"Cammie has worked hard, Angus. And you know the old saying: 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.'"

"Aye, and another as good that says: 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.' Woman, I'm surprised that ye'd be defending thievery, and encouraging ye're own son in idleness!" The man rose abruptly and put on his hat. At the door he paused: "Hurry over as soon as ye're through—there's eggs to candle."

As Mrs. Downey removed the empty plate and substituted another, she noticed that a big tear dropped onto the flaky crust of the broad wedge of pie. She stroked the boy's hair: "There, there, sonnie, never mind. Your father does what he thinks best. Sometimes I wish he was more like his own father. Grandpa Downey is one of the most lovable men I ever knew. He's easy going, and he loves the wild country."

"He wants me to come and visit him—but pa'll never let me go. Grandpa knows all about Injuns, and bears, and deer, and beavers, and things. Why didn't pa stay in the North? Then we could live up there and I could hunt and fish and trap."

"Your father hated the wild country. He persuaded your grandfather to send him to school in Winnipeg, and he never went back. He worked in a store until he saved enough to move out here and start a store of his own. The store is what he lives for."

"I hate the store!" exclaimed the boy, bitterly. "An' I do want to go campin'."

"Of course you do, sonnie. And I want you to go, too. Perhaps we can find a way \_\_\_\_"

The boy pushed back his chair and reached for his hat. "No use tryin'," he said. "When pa says a thing he won't change his mind, no matter what we say. When I get big enough I'm goin' away. I hate stores and towns! I'd have gone long ago if it wasn't for you!"

"There, there—run along, now. Pa means well, but he's hard-headed. I'll try to think of a way."

The boy threw his arms about his mother's neck and kissed her: "Never mind. I don't care so very much. Anyway, it's no use. I got to let the boys know tonight."

From the doorway, the woman watched the little figure cross the street, and as he entered the store, another figure caught her eye. Warring, the banker, was returning from dinner. His round, jovial face showed red under the white brim of his straw hat. A sudden thought, and she stepped down the walk to the gate of the prim picket fence that surrounded the front yard. The banker raised his hat: "Hello, Mrs. Downey! Wheu! Ain't this a sizzler? Look at that gang of kids headin' for the swimmin' hole! My kid's burnt black as an Injun. Good for 'em. Wouldn't mind goin' myself. By Golly, I believe I will!" Laughing, he raised his voice and called to the half-dozen barefoot boys that were crossing a vacant lot in the direction of the river: "Hey, boys, got room for a fat man in the old swimmin' hole?"

"Oh, come on, dad!" cried the boy who had filched the prunes. "Bet I'll beat you undressed!"

“Sure, come on, Mr. Warring! Bet you could float fine!” This from the freckled-faced son of the section foreman.

“What d’you think of that?” laughed the banker, “beat me undressed—when he don’t wear nothin’ but a shirt an’ pants! An’ that other kid talks like I was a tub of grease! Well, good-bye, Mrs. Downey. The kids are waitin’, an’ I can’t afford to be the last one in—that’s an awful disgrace, you know!”

“Just a minute, Mr. Warring,” said the woman wistfully. “It’s about Cammie. He wants to go camping with the boys——”

“Fine thing for him!” exclaimed the man, heartily. “My kid was tellin’ me this noon they wanted him to go. Hope Angus’ll let him.”

“That’s what I wanted to see you about.”

“Me!” There was a note of surprise in the man’s voice.

“Yes—we—Cammie and I tried this noon to persuade him, but he says I’m encouraging the boy in idleness——”

“Oh, rot! The kid’s got it comin’ to him. He ought to be with that crowd of kids right now, instead of workin’ in the store vacation time. What’s vacation for, anyhow? The way to raise kids is to turn ’em loose—not work ’em to death!”

“I know—but, Angus can’t see it that way. I thought maybe you might persuade him to change his mind.”

The man laughed: “Wish I could, Mrs. Downey—but, you know Angus, once he’s got his mind made up. Might’s well argue with that hitchin’ post.”

“I know—but,” the woman paused and flushed and hurried on with her words. “It may seem kind of underhanded in me, but I do want Cammie to have that trip—Angus will be in to see you today or tomorrow about a loan to cover a deal on which he expects to make big profit——”

The banker interrupted with a laugh: “An’ you want me to sort of make the loan conditional on his lettin’ the kid go campin’—is that it?”

“Well, I thought, maybe there was some way you could fix it——”

The man removed his hat and dabbed at his perspiring forehead with his handkerchief. “Hum—let’s see, his collateral would be real estate—maybe we *are* kind of close to our limit on real estate loans. Of course as a special favor to a man that would let his kid go campin’—ha, ha, ha! Well—I’ll think it over—too hot to think, now—an’ besides the boys are getting fidgety—they won’t wait for me much longer. Good-bye, Mrs. Downey. I’m goin’ swimmin’.”

The woman watched the banker, surrounded by a half-dozen small boys, all talking at once, until they disappeared behind the screen of willows that fringed the river bank. Then she returned to her housework: “I guess Angus is as rich as Mr. Warring—maybe even richer—but, somehow, Mr. Warring seems to have such a good time just living. And it seems like boys naturally take to him.”

An hour later, with necktie awry, and pongee suit much the worse for contact with the wet marsh grass, Banker Warring walked with his son from the river. “There’s old Pinchpenny!” exclaimed the boy. “He just went into the bank.”

“I wouldn’t call him that, if I were you, son. It ain’t respectful.”

“That’s what everyone calls him,” defended the boy. “He’s stingy, an’ he makes Cam work all the time.”

“Maybe so, but callin’ him names don’t help matters out.”

“I bet he won’t let Cam go campin’ with us.”

“Don’t be too sure—he might fool you. Just you remember, son, there’s always a lot of good in a man that folks don’t see. Run along now, I’ve fooled away enough time for one day. Better get what nails, an’ lumber, an’ paint an’ stuff you need for that old boat at Downey’s an’ charge it up to me.”

The boy ran off, whistling, and Warring entered the bank: “Hello, Angus!” he greeted. “Been swimmin’! Great thing on a hot day—swimmin’. Come in an’ sit down. What’s on your mind? By the way—my kid’s just been tellin’ me Cammie’s goin’ campin’ with ’em, this year. Fine thing for ’em. I tell you a kid that goes to school eight, nine months a year needs a lot of outdoors in vacation. Makes ’em think right—an’ if they think right, they’re goin’ to live right. Glad you feel that way about it, too. Like to have my kid with Cammie—good boy, Cammie is. By golly Angus, you know if a man didn’t think that way, I—I’d kind of suspect him. If he didn’t think right, he couldn’t be right—that’s the way I figure it. I wouldn’t turn over my hand to do a man like that a favor. Wouldn’t handle any of his paper—wouldn’t touch it with a pair of tongs—wouldn’t want nothin’ to do with him no matter how much collateral he could put up. Ain’t it so?”

Angus Downey cleared his throat and shifted a bit in his chair.

“Well,” he admitted, haltingly, “looking at it that way maybe ye’re right, but——”

“ ’Course I’m right. It’s my business to be right in judgin’ men. Why, not long ago, talkin’ about campin’, someone says they’d bet Angus Downey wouldn’t let his kid go campin’. I just laughed at ’em. ‘You don’t know Angus like I do,’ I says to myself. An’ then when my kid told me today that Cammie was goin’, I knew I was right. But, here I am rattlin’ along an’ ain’t said a word about business. Anything I can do for you, Angus?”

“Yes. I want to borrow ten thousand dollars. Got a chance to make twenty, twenty-five per cent on it in about four months time.”

“Ten thousand, eh? Let’s see—what collateral would you be puttin’ up?”

“Well, there’s the old Bigbee Ranch that I bought in two years ago. A first mortgage on that ought to cover it.”

“Hum—yes—real property. Seems to me we’re pretty close to the edge on real property loans. Ah—what sort of a deal is it you’re makin’?”

“Lumber. Got a chance to buy low, an’ the way the prairie is buildin’ up, there’s a good big profit in it.”

“Yes. By the way, speakin’ of lumber—told my kid to get nails, an’ lumber, an’ paint from you an’ charge it to me. The boys are fixin’ up an old boat to take campin’—they want to go in a couple of weeks—that would suit you, wouldn’t it—to let Cammie off a couple of weeks from now?”

“Well, yes, I guess I could let him go then as well as any time.”

“That’s good. Nothin’ like gettin’ out in the wild country. Good for ’em physically an’ mentally, an’ morally, too. You bet! Look at your old dad—how old is he, now?”

“He’s goin’ on eighty-six.”

“Eighty-six! An’ look at him—carry a pack all day—shoot a canoe down through water that you or I wouldn’t dare to tackle in a steamboat! I’ve known him for thirty years, an’ he don’t look a bit older than the first day I ever saw him. There’s a man for you! An’ the wild country’s done it. He never got that way grubbin’ in a town like you an’ I do.”

“Aye,” answered Angus, with a frown, “but what’s he got out of life? Always worked on a salary, an’ none too good, at that. A few hundred dollars put by—maybe a few thousand. I doubt he could show fifty dollars saved for every year of his life.”

“Dollars be damned!” exclaimed Warring, banging the table with his fist. “He’s lived the way he wants to live. He’s one of the most respected and valuable men the Hudson’s Bay Company has got on its rolls. An’ he’s got the love an’ respect of everyone that knows him, white man an’ savage alike—an’ he’s got it because he’s earned it! If that ain’t gettin’ all there is to get out of life, I don’t know what is!”

“Well—maybe—maybe,” admitted Angus, doubtfully. “Folks look at things different. I suppose a man has a right to live his life as he chooses, so he fears God an’ obeys the law.”

A half-hour later Warring stood at the window of the bank and watched the tall form of Angus Downey pass slowly down the street. “Say, Vern,” he called to his cashier, “you’re educated—what do they call this heredity business, when it hops over one generation an’ lights on the next?”

“Atavism,” grinned the young man in the screened cage.

“Yup—that’s it. I hope for that Downey kid’s sake, it works.”

## CHAPTER II

### SERGEANT COSTELLO

SO it was, that, upon that hot, eventful day Cameron Downey stood in the doorway of his father's store and listened for the sound of wheels. Then, he caught it—the sound for which he had been listening. But—he knew every creak and groan of the ramshackle wagon upon which he had helped to load the bepatched and gaudily painted row boat. This was a different sound—a rattle of lighter wheels, and a staccato of hoofbeats that by no stretch of the imagination could be ascribed to Old Bill, the venerable buggy horse of Banker Warring. There was something sinister in this sound,—a forboding—a premonition of evil. The sound grew louder. A team of young horses rounded the corner and drew up before the hitch rail of the store.

The boy scowled as he watched fat Mrs. Hunnish climb wheezily from the seat of the spring wagon and snap the hitch rope into the bit-ring of the off horse. The boy particularly disliked Mrs. Hunnish, wife of the “king” of the Hungarian colony that had taken up many broad acres of land a few miles to the southward. The Hungarian trade was a growing factor in the cosmos of the little western town and there was keen rivalry between Angus Downey and Bjone, his Norwegian competitor, to curry favor with Hunnish. They were a clannish folk—these Hungarians, and where Hunnish traded, all traded. The scowl deepened as the boy's eyes rested upon a tub, and various crates that filled the box of the spring wagon.

The woman was on the sidewalk confronting him, her greasy fat face bestreaked with perspiration and the grey dust of the road, and her thick hands resting upon her ponderous hips. She looks big, and hot, and horrible, thought the boy, as he eyed with disfavor the white woolen stockings that overbulged the tops of the thick cow-hide shoes showing below the hem of the shapeless skirt which hung high above the sidewalk before, and all but swept it behind.

“Vat iss eggs?” demanded the woman, in a harsh, toneless voice. “Unt, vat iss budder?”

Eggs and butter! The boy's heart sank as his glance shifted from the woman to the crates, and from the crates to the iced car that stood upon the siding near the depot. Summer eggs, dozens and dozens of them to be carefully candled. And, Mrs. Hunnish's butter always had to be worked over and shipped. The local trade demanded good butter. All morning long he had toiled over rancid butter. No other iced car for a week, and Mrs. Hunnish's eggs and butter must be on that car in time for the evening train to pick it up.

A thought leaped into the boy's brain. He could name a price that would send Mrs. Hunnish to Bjone's in high dudgeon. But—his father might lose the Hungarian trade that was just beginning to swing his way. He played for time.

“How much you got?”

“Seexty dossen eggs, unt t'irdy pound budder.”

“Your butter will all be melted, drivin' in on a day like this,” objected the boy.

“Nah—dot iss not! Ve got it ice. Iss ice in de tub. Dot budder, he is goot.”

Across the street the gate latch clicked and Angus Downey stepped briskly toward them. The boy’s heart sank, for almost at the same moment Old Bill appeared walking sedately down the street drawing the rickety wagon with three boys perched proudly atop the load. Their farewell shouts were plainly audible as the outfit passed the bank where Mr. Warring stood in the doorway and waved his hat. Then the shouts were drowned by the voice of Angus Downey:

“Come, now! Ye’ve no time to stand idly by. Agin ye get the eggs candled an’ the butter worked over it’ll be train time an’ no iced car for a week!” The man turned and followed the Hungarian woman into the store.

The street blurred, the spring wagon became a swimming mountain of egg crates, and from some mysterious distance came the voices of the boys: “Come on, Cam! We’re off!”

Cameron gulped at the great lump that had risen in his throat, blinked his eyes to rid them of the tear-mist, and shook his head: “I can’t go. Anyway, not today. I’ve got to work.”

“But, yer dad promised, didn’t he?”

“Yes—but——”

“You bet, if my dad promised an’ then went back on it, I’d go anyway!”

“Come on, Cam, go anyway!”

“He can’t no more’n lick you when you get back.”

“An’ two week’s campin’s worth a lickin’ any day!”

“Jump on. We can be clean out of town before he knows yer gone!”

For an instant the boy hesitated—took a step toward the wagon, and then turned back to the egg crates. “No—I’ll stay. I can walk out tomorrow—or tonight, if I ain’t too tired.”

“It’s eighteen miles!”

“That’s all right. My granddad can walk further than that in just a little while.”

“Yer ’fraid of a lickin’, that’s all! I wouldn’t be ’fraid of no lickin.’ All right fer you! We don’t care whether you come or not. We don’t want no ’fraid cat! Giddap, Bill!”

From the doorway of the bank, Warring saw the wagon stop, and then saw it drive on, and for several minutes he watched the boy who didn’t go unload egg crates from the spring wagon. When he stepped into his office and sat down at his desk it was to mutter unmentionable words to the discredit of Angus Downey.

Late in the afternoon, the boy looked up as a form darkened the doorway of the hot little back room where he was candling eggs. The boy eyed the trim, red-coated figure with distinct approval: “Hello, Sarg! What you doin’ down this way?”

Sergeant Costello of the Royal North-West Mounted Police answered with a wry grin: “Sure, there’s other places Oi’d raythur be thin here. But, orders is orders, an’ Costello’s a slave to jooty.”

A fast friendship had grown up between the fifteen-year-old boy and the Sergeant of police whose patrol frequently brought him to the little town in the rapidly settling community. It was the officer’s wont upon these occasions to put up his horse at the livery stable, and take lodgings in the small room over Angus Downey’s store. And many an evening the boy had listened for hours on end to the Sergeant’s tales of long patrols, by

canoe, and by dog-sled in the far North, and on horseback in the provinces. There were tales of starving Indians, of disaster, of hardship endured and conquered, and of death. There were tales of man-fights, and of fights against fire, and flood, and snow, and ice, and pestilence, and the seething waters of the unmapped rapids of rivers. From the tales of his grandfather, and of Sergeant Costello the boy had builded a wondrous fabric of dream-existence, which was his very own—unshared even by his mother, or by the boys who were his closest associates. The fact of his humdrum existence in school and in his father's store was a mere incident to be endured until such time as he could free himself and seek, in fact, the road to high adventure which he so often trod in fancy.

"There's other places I'd rather be than here, too," answered the boy, and the officer noted the disconsolate tone in his young friend's voice.

"Sure, an' Oi'm bettin' ye wud. Who the divil wud be candlin' aigs fer the fun av ut?" The Sergeant seated himself on a nail keg, leaned comfortably back against the door, and proceeded deliberately to fill his pipe. "Be the sound av yer words Oi take ut, there's wan place in particular ye'd rayther be at the moment. 'Tis the same wid meself. So, be way av passin' the toime we'll onboozum ourselves an' howld a two-handed wake over the corpse of our lost disappointmints. Out wid ut—where wud ye rayther be?"

The boy answered the officer's grin with a half-hearted smile: "I'd rather be campin' out in the Hills with the boys. They went this afternoon. I was goin', too—but just at the last minute that fat old greasy Mrs. Hunnish drove in with these eggs an' all that butter, an' I had to stay here an' get it ready to go in the iced car."

The officer nodded his sympathy; "Well, now, that's too bad entoirely. Mrs. Hunnish, ye say. Ut's Hunnish is king av the Hunkies down to the colony. 'Tis a serious charge ye've laid agin her, but unfortunately ut ain't in the manual. Oi'll bear ut in moind though, an' if she iver chops up her man wid an ax, or commits any loike misdemeanor agin the peace an' dignity av Saskatchewan, loike thim ferriners admires to do, Oi'll lock her up good."

The half-hearted smile expanded into a real laugh: "All right, Sarg. Now it's your turn. Where would you rather be than here?"

"Ye should know, then, that the bank at Yorkton was robbed the other night. 'Twas done be men who knew their business. Divil a thing did anyone know about ut till marnin', whin they opened the bank to find the big iron vault door standin' open an' all warped an' twisted be some high explosive—yet not a sound was heard by anyone doorin' the night. 'Twas a good job altogether, an' they was well paid fer their work, what wid the money pilin' up in the banks agin the comin' harvest. They're the kind av min, thinks Oi, when Oi hurd ut, that 'twill be a pleasure an' a privilege to have a hand in their capture. They'll hit south, thinks Oi, fer the States, an' Oi was goin' over in me moind the lay av the land whin a rooky comes in wid the Inspector's compliments an' he wants to see me. Oi reports an' salutes—official. The Inspector he looks me over. 'Oi've a daytail,' says he, 'that rayquires a man wid experience an' discretion.'

"'Oi think, sor, they've hit south,' says Oi.

"'Who?' says he.

"'Why, the bank robbers,' says Oi.

"'Doubtless,' says he, 'we'll pick 'em up in a day or two. They'll niver reach the line.

Ye're to ride west an' investigate these complaints'. An' wid that he up an' hands me a bunch av complaints, an' here they are." The officer drew a small sheaf of papers from his pocket and stared at them sadly. "Oi give him a look, an' saluted—official. Then, onofficial, Oi speaks out, man to man—fer he's a good fellow, Inspector McDonell—none finer. 'Oi take notice,' sez Oi, 'the list av horrible crimes ye've give me to investigate incloods, sellin' stray sheep, wife beatin', insultin' language, trespassin' on railway, false pretences, an' beatin' a board bill. 'Tis too bad,' sez Oi, 'that no wan has spit on a sidewalk between here an' Saskatoon. Oi'd admire fer some real rough work now an' thin, mixed in wid me jooty.'

"The inspector he grins—unofficial. 'Git on wid ye,' says he. ' 'Tis the handlin' av complaints loike these that calls for rare dayplomacy an' sound judgment. 'Tis no job for a rookie, an' well ye know ut. 'Tis the proper disposal of such matters that kapes a sweet taste in the mouths of the inmates av the glorious province of Saskatchewan,' sez he, or words to that effect.

" ' 'Tis proud Oi am to have rose to the dignity av a cud av molasses an' git daytailed to kape a sweet taste in the mouth av the Hunks, an' the Wops, an' the Persians, an' Dookabores that's lyin' the Governmint out av its claims,' sez Oi, an' salutes, official, an' departs wid a grin on the faces av both, though there's no grin in me heart as Oi goes to the stables an' saddles up an' watched Corporal Tyne ride south wid a bunch av rookies that don't know be lookin' ut in the face whether the ind av a gun is round er square."

"Gee! I'd like a chance to go after the robbers! I bet you hate that Inspector!"

"No, no, bye! Ut's all in a loifetime. 'Tis a poor man thot grumbles at the daytail he draws. An' a worsen wan yet that nurses a grudge agin his superior. 'Tis only a fool that grumbles at the breaks av the game. Things evens up in the long run. An', next toime it'll be me ridin' off on the trail av a real job, an' Tyne drawin' maybe it's a sick Injun daytail."

"Guess it's about the same, in the police, or out of it," said the boy, "but it's pretty tough on a fellow, sometimes."

"Sure, an' ut is," agreed the Sergeant. "But ut's the tough jobs that makes tough min. 'Tis the same wid the muscles an' wid the mind. A tough-minded man hangs to the job—an' if he's likewise tough muscled, he'll finish ut. 'Tis no good to be tough-minded an' flabby muscled, an' worsen yet to be tough muscled an' flabby minded. 'Tis what they call co-ordination, an' ut means that a taykittle is a domned poor tool unless you've got water to bile in ut." The Sergeant knocked the dottle from his pipe and refilled it. "There's an owld sayin' to the effec' that jooty has uts own reward. An' the funny part about it, it's true. Take me, now—today. Oi rides up to the farm av Nick Goryk, an Austrian. Ut was rayported he'd beat up his wife at a dance in the schoolhouse. They was both down be the barn an' Oi seen at a glance her face showed signs av raycent combat. There was a red blotch in the white av wan av her eyes, an' the skin around 'em looked loike ut was just comin' out av the black. Oi dismounts, an' begun readin' the riot act to um, loosin' soight av *her* as Oi got more interested in me sermon, when—blam! The she-devil sneaks up behind me an' knocks me clane off me feet wid a whack over the head wid a fork handle. Oi gits up reelin' dizzy, an' raycovers me hat an' then Oi makes her a bow, polite loike. Ave Oi do say ut myself, 'tis few Oirishmen ye can hit over the head wid a fork handle an' have um raytort wid a bow. Oi'm glad Oi wasn't a rookie, an' come back at her wid



me fist or the toe av me boot—t’would of done no good at all, an’ give the police a black eye in the community. So Oi bows, an’ Oi says to her: ‘A darlint blow, Mrs. Goryk—but futile entirety.’ Then Oi climbed onto me horse, fer Oi didn’t know how much English she had, an’ Oi turned to Goryk who stud starin’ loike he expected thim both to be executed on the spot be due process av law. He’d been in the country long enough to savvy somethin’ av the nature av an assault on the person av an officer of police. He was scairt to a pale green. Oi looks him square in the eye. ‘Goryk,’ says Oi, ‘Oi hope ye won’t consthroo anything Oi’ve said as interfearin’ in any way wid the proper chastisement av yer wife. But thry an’ confine yer activities to the bosom av yer family. Let the action take place on yer own farm, an’ not upon the highways, nor at public gatherin’s. Go to it,’ says Oi, ‘tooth an’ nail, fist an’ bludgeon—an’ power to ye’re strong right arm!’ An’ thin Oi turned an’ rode away, leavin’ him standin’ there gawpin’ loike he cud hardly rayalize he’d be’n let live.”

Cammie laughed as the officer gingerly fingered the lump on the back of his head. “He probably didn’t understand anything you said.”

“Maybe not,” grinned the Sergeant, “but, anyway, he onderstood as much av the last as he did av the furst—or maybe he just acted on his own natural impulses. For, whin Oi dismounted at the gate to let meself out onto the road, Oi give wan more look, an’ the soight that met me eyes filled me heart wid joy. For there was Goryk, whalin’ away wid a neckyoke thryin’ to knock the pitchfork from the hands av his bride—an’ her proddin’ an’ jabbin’ to reach his guts wid the tines av ut. ’Twas a happy scene av domestic life. ‘God bless ye, me children,’ Oi mutters as Oi digs up me pencil an’ writes across the back av the complaint: ‘Matter adjusted to the satisfaction av all concerned.’ So that’s what the Inspector meant be ‘experience an’ discession.’ An’ that’s what Oi meant whin Oi said that even the dullest paths av jooty are brightened, now an’ then, be little spots av happiness an’ amoosement.”

“Do you know the shortest trail to Crooked Lake, out in the Hills?” asked the boy, as he finished with the eggs and tackled the tub of butter.

“Sure, Oi do. Wid a wagon ye’ve got to kape on the main trail an’ ut’s a matter av eighteen or twinty miles. But horseback, or afoot, a man cud cut off half a dozen miles or more be leavin’ the trail at the old Johnson ranch, crossin’ the ford, an’ follerin’ up the river to where the trail crosses ut agin at the edge av the Hills. The trail has to swing miles out av the way to avoid the big muskeg, but this toime av year both man an’ horse can cross ut wid safety.”

“You mean the old Johnson place a half a mile up the river?”

“The same. Was ye thinkin’ av footin’ it out in the marnin’?”

“Tonight,” answered the boy. “There’s a full moon and it will be almost as light as day. Dad said I could go today—but I had to stay and get this stuff ready for the car.”

“ ’Tis a good lad ye are, Cammie. Tough minded an’ tough muscled—’tis the timber we nade in the Service.”

“The boys thought I stayed because I was afraid of a lickin’.”

The Sergeant thumped his knee with his fist: “What do ye care what they think? What do ye care what anyone thinks? Learn to do ye’re own thinkin’, an’ to pay no heed to what anyone thinks. Learn, too, that there ain’t wan person in tin thousan’ that knows how to

think—the rest av 'em thinks they think. When ye find wan that can think, he stands out conspicuous above the common run. It has always be'n so—an' always will. Take amusement from what others think—but give it no heed. Anyone cud ride out to Crooked Lake in a wagon in the daytime over a hot dusty trail—there is small comfort or pleasure in that. But, alone, afoot, in the moonlight—that's somethin' real—somethin' worthwhile in utself. 'Tis the bright spot that comes as jooty's own reward. Oi'd loike to be goin' wid ye, son, but me own jooty calls me westward. So Oi must start out in the marnin' to lay the heavy hand av the law on the shoulder av a man that sold a stray sheep to a butcher.”

## CHAPTER III

### AT THE FORD

**I**N the Downey household, the maxim, "Early to bed and early to rise," was strictly adhered to, and at half past nine, encouraged by the unmistakable sounds of slumber that issued from his parents' room, Cammie eased himself out of bed, slipped noiselessly into his clothing, and carrying his shoes, stole down the stairs. With the moonlit window-sill for a desk, he scrawled a note to his mother:

DEAR MA:

Dad said I could go today, so I'm going. I know the way. Don't worry. See you in two weeks.

CAMERON DOWNEY.

Slipping out the back door, the boy ignored the road, and followed the bank of the river. A strange sense of elation took possession of him. He breathed deeply of the cool night air, and gazed about him entranced. The world looked different in the moonlight. Different—and infinitely more interesting. Sergeant Costello was right—just to be alive out there in the moonlight was something worthwhile in itself.

The abandoned buildings of the Johnson ranch looked mysterious and pleasantly forbidding as he rounded a bend and approached knee-deep through the uncut wild hay. A faint breeze rustled the aspen leaves. Innumerable bats winged about him, and a great owl flapped silently from a post of the old horse corral to a higher perch on the sagging ridgepole of the barn. Far out on the muskeg a night bird squawked. A delightful prickling started at the roots of his hair, but with a self-reassuring laugh the boy proceeded to the ford where the river widened and purred knee-deep over a gravelly bar.

Seating himself upon a discarded wagon box, he proceeded to take off his shoes and stockings when suddenly a sound came to his ears that was not of the mysterious night-noises. It was the thud of horses' hoofs on sod. Shoe in hand, the boy listened. Who could be crossing at the abandoned ford at this time of night? Unless—Sergeant Costello had changed his mind and decided to ride out into the hills. But, no—the sounds came from upriver, and there was more than one horse. Cammie cast about him for a place of concealment. He would wait until they had passed before crossing and resuming his journey. The wild hay grew thickly about the overturned wagon box upon which he was sitting. The end-gate was missing, and, lying flat on his belly, the boy wriggled his way to the forward end where a broad crack in the rotting side board gave full view of the overgrown trail from the ford to the horse corral only a few feet away.

Ear to the ground, he listened. The muffled thud of hoofs on the spongy ground was followed by the metallic click of iron shoes on gravel, and then a splashing, and the long sucking sounds of horses drinking their fill. A man spoke in an undertone, and another replied. Then, more sounds of splashing, and three riders appeared suddenly into view. The leader drew up and swung from his horse: "Here we are," he announced, tersely, and,

as the bright moonlight fell upon his face the boy instantly recognized him as a cowpuncher who had hung about town for a day or two, a couple of weeks previous, hunting strayed horses for one of the ranches to the southward. The other two dismounted, and the boy noted that each deposited a canvas sack between his feet as he stood holding the bridle reins of his horse.

“Jest like I told you,” said the leader. “We’ll leave the cayuses here an’ slip in along the river afoot. I be’n over the ground careful, an’ it’s good hard sod all the way—won’t leave no trail with them moccasins we got off’n the Injuns. You, Johnnie, you plant the stuff where we can pick it up quick, an’ be sure you fetch along them empty sacks. This here bank’s got a wad of mazuma into it—an’ a damn sight easier to git it than Yorkton.”

Cammie Downey’s heart leaped into his throat. The Yorkton Bank robbers! The man called Johnnie hesitated: “Say Brek, who’s goin’ to stay with the horses? You hadn’t ort to shot Bill, ’cause that only leaves three of us, an’——”

“The hell I hadn’t ort to!” The cowpuncher turned on the man fiercely. “Who the hell do you think you’re talkin’ to? I’m runnin’ this outfit—if you don’t believe it, ask Bill—he’s in hell by now, an’ you’ll be right along with him unless you do like I say! They can’t but one man run this gang—an’ that’s me! Where’d we be’n if we’d listened to Bill an’ hit south with every damned redcoat in Saskatchewan watchin’ the line? We’d all be’n where Bill is now—that’s where! We’ll blow this can an’ double our pile, then we’ll lay low in the hills fer a month er so, an’ then it’ll be safe enough to separate an’ trickle acrost, one to a time.”

“But—you figgered on leavin’ one man with the horses an’ the—stuff—same as Yorkton.”

“What if I did? An’ I would of if I hadn’t had to bump Bill off. This here corral’s in good shape, an’ we can turn the cayuses in, saddled an’ bridled.” He spoke sharply to the third man: “You, Hominy, you turn them horses into the corral while I git out of these chaps an’ spurs. Then we’ll slip on them moccasins. This here’s a lot easier than Yorkton—there ain’t no police here.”

Hominy moved toward the corral, with the horses, and Johnnie picked up the two canvas bags and glanced uncertainly about.

“Cache ’em inunder that old wagon box. We’ll be back after ’em in three, four hours,” suggested the leader, and, as he tossed his chaps and spurs to the other, “stick these along with ’em.” As the man approached, it seemed to the boy as though he must certainly hear the pounding of his heart. Suppose the men should discover him. He knew that the unscrupulous Brek would not hesitate one moment in putting out of the way anyone who had overheard his conversation. Drawing his legs close up, Cammie waited, hardly daring to breathe. There was a fumbling at the aperture of the missing end-gate, then the patch of light dimmed as the man stuffed the bags and the chaps into the opening. The fumbling ceased. The man reappeared, and, seating himself beside the leader, began to exchange his boots for a pair of moccasins.

“It’s like this,” explained Brek, when Hominy had joined them. “There’s a train comes through at one-ten. The moon will be pretty well down by that time. Me an’ Hominy will hide inunder the depot platform till the train’s gone an’ then we’ll slip acrost to the bank an’ jimmy the back door. While him an’ me works on the inside, Johnny, you’ll be layin’

acrost the street inunder the sidewalk that's raised up about two foot. A man layin' in there with a shotgun full of buck could sweep the hull street. But, chances is it'll all come off without no rookus—like Yorkton. They ain't many of 'em can work the soup like me. Even if the town does wake up, they ain't goin' to put up no hell of a fight. A few rounds of buck an' the roar of a forty-five will send 'em huntin' their holes. Then, before they know we're gone we'll be back here an' off fer the hills. They'll be wastin' time on the roads an' the railroad. Gitaways in this here country ain't made afoot—that's what makes it the safest."

"I wisht we'd lay off'n this job," said Johnnie. "We got enough a'ready to last us the rest of our life."

"You git cold feet, now, an' I'll fix 'em so they'll stay cold!" growled Brek, savagely. "They might be enough in them sacks to last you—but they ain't enough fer me—not the way I'll roll 'em when we git back to Montana."

"It's ten after 'leven," announced Hominy, returning his watch to his pocket, "Le's git goin'. Might's well wait there as here."

"Come on. Leave Bill's shotgun here. We won't need it, an' it's only that much more to pack. Stick it an' the boots in with the rest of the stuff. You take the other gun, Johnnie, an' when we git to the edge of town you circle around an' come in from back of the livery barn, an' me an' Hominy'll hit straight fer the depot."

Again there was a fumbling at the wagon box, as the man added the gun and the boots to the cache, and a moment later the boy watched all three disappear around the corner of the barn.

The Yorkton bank robbers—on their way to rob Mr. Warring's bank! And their horses right here in the old Johnson corral! And those two canvas bags! The loot from the Yorkton bank! And most of the men of the police watching the line, miles to the southward! Under the wagon box, the boy wriggled in a fever of excitement. What should he do? What could one small boy do against three armed robbers? If Sergeant Costello were only here! But the Sergeant was snoring away in the little room over the store—perhaps dreaming about these very robbers! He must do something. He couldn't lie there and let the robbers get away, and rob Mr. Warring's bank besides.

Cautiously, he began to wriggle toward the aperture. His feet came in contact with the obstruction. There was a clinking sound—the gold from the Yorkton bank—or, maybe, only the discarded spurs of the leader. He pushed with his legs and a few moments later was sitting upright in the moonlight. He reached out and touched one of the canvas bags. It clinked and he raised it from the ground. It was heavy—perhaps a third full of loose coins, and on top of the coins the bag was filled to the mouth with squarish bundles—bundles of bills such as he had seen in the grilled cashier's cage of Mr. Warring's bank. Dropping the bag, the boy glanced about him in terror. What if the robbers should change their plans and come back to the corral?

In a panic of fear, he stampeded into the thick shadows of the aspen grove. Then, he halted. Running away! He, Cameron Downey was running away because he was afraid! Running away, when he might be the means of helping to capture the Yorkton robbers, and save Mr. Warring's bank at the same time. What would Sergeant Costello say? Costello, who had told him only today that he was tough-minded! He would run as fast as

he could and wake up the Sergeant! He would know just what to do. But—what if the robbers should return and mount their horses and make for the hills? The man called Johnnie might persuade the others to give up the project. No—he must do something first—must make it impossible for the robbers to get away. He must hide the canvas bags and turn the horses loose. Returning to the wagon box, he drew out the shotgun, made sure it was loaded, cocked it, and laid it across the upturned bottom of the box ready for instant use.

Cammie had a shotgun of his own, and possession of the weapon loaded with buckshot gave him a vast confidence. He would hate to shoot a man—but—these men were outlaws, and had not the leader shot one of his own men? He raised the bags one at a time. They were too heavy to carry very far. His foot came into contact with a tangle of bailing wire and as he stooped to release it he heard a sound from the direction of the barn. It was a strange, blurred sort of a sound, followed instantly by a string of curses in a high, shrill voice. Flat on his belly in the tall grass behind the wagon box went the boy and at the same instant he reached for the shotgun. At the corner of the barn a man was scrambling to his feet. It was Johnnie, who limped toward him, muttering. The boy took in at a glance the reason for the sound and the curses that followed. The man had been running, and had tripped over the tongue of an old mowing machine concealed by the tall grass. He was alone—and evidently half-paralysed with terror. What had happened? The man paused for a moment at the gate of the horse corral and shook his fist toward the town: “Damn ’em I won’t do it!” he whimpered. “We’ll git caught—mebbe! Brek’ll kill me if he ketches me—but he won’t. I’ll turn their horses loose an’ go south with the swag—to hell with ’em.”

The man had discarded his shotgun. He was empty handed as he hurried toward the wagon box. Now or never, thought the boy as his finger gripped the trigger. He rose to his feet and levelled the gun at the man’s middle. “Stop!” The word cut sharply on the night air, and not twenty feet away Johnnie halted in his tracks, stared for a split second, and reached both hands high above his head.

“Don’t shoot!” he yammered. “I’ll turn witness! I’ll squeal! I’ll tell everythin’ I know! Don’t shoot—Brek made me do it!” The boy eyed the man in disgust: “Unbuckle your belt,” he commanded, taking courage from the fact that of the two, the man was by far the more frightened. “Don’t make a move for your gun—I’ll blow you in two if you do. Let it drop, belt an’ all, then walk three steps back.”

The man complied, keeping his right hand elevated. The belt with its cartridges and heavy revolver thudded to the ground, and he stepped backward. Cammie’s brain was in a whirl. What should he do, now? He hadn’t the slightest notion—but do something, he must. “Keep on walkin’ back till I tell you to stop,” he commanded. As the man retreated, the boy advanced till he reached the gun. “Stop.” Johnnie stopped, and again the boy’s foot touched the tangle of the bailing wire. “Lay down on your belly and keep your hands stretched out,” he ordered, and loosening a piece of wire, approached. Laying the shotgun aside, he picked up the revolver and cocked it, and with a caution against a single move, proceeded to wire the man’s hands together.

“Ow! Yer cuttin’ clean through my hide!” he whimpered, as the wire was drawn tight. “Quit! Yer hurtin’!”

“Can’t help it,” answered the boy as he continued to wind the wire round and round

the man's wrists, pulling each wrap tight as he could. At length, he twisted the ends, and securing another length of wire bound the man's feet. After which he rolled him over against the corral fence and wired him, hands and feet, to the lower pole.

"You got my blood cut off—I'll die!" whined the man. "An' when Brek comes back, he'll kill me! He killed Bill—an' he don't like me as good!"

"Brek ain't comin' back," answered the boy, struggling to keep the nervous excitement from his voice, and wiring the two bags together, he dragged them to the corral. Opening the gate, he entered the enclosure where the three horses stood, bridle reins hanging. Selecting one, he succeeded in swinging the bags across the saddle so that one hung upon either side. Catching up the other two horses, he mounted one, and, tying the reins of the others, slipped his arm through them, and gripping the outlaw's revolver in his right hand, moved slowly down the old Johnson lane toward the main road.

A quarter of a mile from town, he halted. Shod hoofs make a noise, and the street was gravelled in spots. What if Brek and Hominy in their hiding place under the depot platform should hear him coming. He glanced about him. He had stopped almost exactly opposite the gate of Old Man Popum's pasture. Slipping to the ground, he led the horses to the gate, opened it, and closed it behind him. Then, swiftly, he proceeded to strip off the saddles and bridles. Finding themselves free, the horses trotted off a short distance and fell to cropping grass.

The boy dragging the saddles and bridles and bags into a patch of brush, and still gripping the revolver, ran toward the town as fast as his legs would carry him.

## CHAPTER IV

### BANKER WARRING SPRINGS A TRAP

WITH a heart pounding like a trip hammer and a mouth sticky with excitement, young Downey climbed the stairs that clung precariously to the outside wall of his father's store. The Sergeant's room was at the front, and, groping through the black hall, he tapped gently on the door. He tapped again.

"Who's there?" came a sleepy voice, and Cammie's heart gave a great bound of relief:

"It's me—Cammie!" he half whispered the words. "Lemme in! Don't make a light! They're goin' to rob the bank! I caught one! An' all the horses! An' the money from the Yorkton——" There was a sound of bare feet on the floor, a click of a key and the door was thrown open:

"What the divil ye talkin' about, at all? Banks an' horses!" The big Sergeant stood in his night shirt, an indistinct blur of white, as his hand reached the boy's shoulder.

"Hurry! Get your clothes on! They're under the depot platform—an' one wired to the corral!" Breathlessly, Cammie continued in fragmentary and incoherent sentences to detail the night's happenings, and, when he had finished, the Sergeant was dressed and leading the way through the dark hall. "Ut's a darlint, ye are, Cammie, me lad!" he rumbled, as they made their way hurriedly down the stairs. Far in the distance a train whistled.

"Hurry, Sarg," whispered the boy, excitedly, as he led the way, cross lots, to the Warring residence a few doors up the street.

Costello scratched at the screen of the sleeping porch.

"Don't strike a light, sor," he cautioned, "just pass me the keys to the bank. The Yorkton robbers are goin' to pay ye a call after the train goes by, an' Oi want to be on hand to give 'em a proper rayception."

"The Yorkton robbers—*here*?"

"Sure, an' they're inunder the daypo platform this minute, but Oi want to git 'em rid-handed in the bank, an' have two charges agin 'em instead av the wan."

"Be with you in a minute!" whispered the banker and in an incredibly short time stood beside the two in the darkness.

"There's two loaded shotguns and two revolvers in the bank, and I've got a first class dark lantern here, all lighted and ready—come on!"

"Maybe, sor, ye better lave the job to me," suggested the Sergeant. "Ut's a single man, Oi am—an' ut's all in me day's work."

"You'll have to make that a flat order, Sergeant—an' I'd rather you wouldn't. Who's that with you?" he added, striving to pierce the darkness as they hastened toward the bank.

"Sure, ut's Cammie Downey, no less. An' a grand lad he is, sor."

"But—this is no place for a boy! Here, you, Cammie! Run along home, now. There's liable to be trouble ahead."

"Beggin' yer pardon, sor—the bye's earnt the right to choose his own place in this



night's doin's, havin' already caught wan av the outlaws an' wired him up wid balin' wire, an' not only that, but he's got all the Yorkton loot away from them, an' their horses besides—on top av which he listened to 'em layin' their plans fer robbin' yer own bank."

They had reached the rear of the bank building, and paused while Warring inserted his key in the lock. Noiselessly they entered, and by the light of the slide lantern the Sergeant glanced about.

"I think," suggested Warring, "that if we all go into my private office and shut the door we can give these gentlemen a surprise party that they'll remember for quite a while."

"But—how in the divil——"

The banker interrupted with a laugh. "Come on in an' I'll show you a little trick I figured out for myself. There's port holes in the office that command the vault an' the cashier's cage—but I don't think we'll have to use 'em."

After a whispered explanation in the darkness of the little office, the Sergeant chuckled aloud to himself. "Sure, ut'll be fun if ut works—an' if ut don't we'll have 'em covered anyway." His words were interrupted by the roar of the train as with shrieking whistle it tore through the village. "Ut won't be long, now," whispered the officer, "av' they foller out their plans." But, it did seem long to Cammie, waiting there in the darkness, between the big Sergeant and the banker. It seemed hours and hours—and then it came—the sound for which they had been waiting. The knob of the back door rattled lightly. There was a low, indefinable sound as of metal rasping on wood, then a sharp crack and a splintering as the door flew back upon its hinges. Followed a moment of silence, then stealthy footsteps, and a bright spot of light appeared, sweeping the walls and the door of the vault. A hand tried the office door and the three waited in tense silence as a low-voiced growl reached their ears: "Come here with the light. To hell with that—the vault's what we want!"

Through the port holes the watchers could see the door of the vault as the light from the bull's-eye lantern played upon it. "It's a cinch," whispered a voice. "Gimme the drill." Both men were directly in front of the vault, one standing, fitting a drill, the other crouching, holding the dark lantern.

Cammie felt a quick movement of the banker's arm. On the instant, the room was plunged into darkness, and there was a tremendous splash, followed by a medley of splashes, frightened gurgles and splutterings.

Sergeant Costello laughed aloud: "A foine scheme, sor!" he approved. "That trap door business is a new wan on me! How dape did ye say the cistern is?"

"Twelve feet—seven feet of water, an' smooth cement walls above the water line \_\_\_\_\_"

"Help! I'm—glub—glub—drownin'—glub——"

Cammie flashed on the light, and Warring, unlocking the door, took two life preservers from a shelf and tossed them into the open cistern. "Thim'll kape ye afloat till ye soak a while an' think things over," called the Sergeant. "Ut'll be daylight in couple av hours. We hope ye rist well."

"I can't hang onto this thing fer two hours—I'll drown!"

"Me, too—it's murder!"

“Drown av ye loike—ut’s the same to us, an’ save a hangin’. But, av ye’d rather, ye can tie them contraptions onto ye an’ stay on top. Better drop yer guns to the bottom—they make more weight. We’ll be back afther awhile.”

The moon had set, and, procuring lanterns, the two men followed Cammie to the old Johnson ranch where it took a good half-hour to restore circulation to the benumbed hands and feet of the third outlaw. Whimpering and complaining, he was handcuffed, and the three proceeded to the Popum place, where the Yorkton plunder was secured from the brush where the boy had cached it.

“Oi’ll bet thim robbers has got all the fight soaked out av um be this toime,” grinned Costello, as they again approached the bank.

This time they entered by the front door, and, locking the prisoner in the office, Warring lighted the lamps. Costello stepped to the trap in front of the vault. “Will ye be good-byes av Oi pull yez out?” he asked.

“G-get us out! We’re f-freezin’!”

“Where’s yer guns?”

“On the bottom.”

“Oi’m takin’ no chances,” Costello replied. “Git holt av this rope. There’s a knot in the ind an’ Oi’ll haul ye to the top. When ye git there ye’ll grip the floor wid yer two hands an’ wiggle out. Oi’ll give ye a lift whin Oi see ye’re impty handed.” And so the outlaws were hauled out, one at a time, and a more dejected pair of human beings could not well be imagined as they stood, shivering and half-exhausted, with teeth chattering like castanets.

“Y-you think yer damn smart, Costello. But you’d never of caught me if——”

“O-ho!” said the Sergeant, for the first time scrutinizing the face of the leader, “av’ ut ain’t me old friend the Cowboy Kid! An’ a swaye pleasure ut is to meet ye agin! Oi moind the last toime Oi seen ye, ye give me the slip be ridin’, full tilt over a cutbank into Milk River. Ye’re a good horse thief, Kid, but bankin’ ain’t in yer line. Ye’ll not be the furst man to lose out fer over-playin’ his hand.”

“Is that so! Well you didn’t catch me—an’ neither did any of the Mounted! You think you’re smart as hell, but I can tell you you’re overlookin’ a big bet right now.”

“You mane that?” asked the Sergeant, pointing with a grin to the two canvas bags on the counter of the cashier’s gate.

The two outlaws stared, open mouthed. “It’s that damn Johnnie!” roared the cowboy. “He got cold feet an’——”

“You lie!” came a shrill voice from the office. “If you’d listened to me we’d be safe acrost the line by now! Yer a hog, Cowboy, tryin’ to steal all Canady!”

“How’d they git them bags, then? An’ how’d they git you? Who in hell ever heard tell of a rube banker figurin’ out a trap——?”

“Banker be damned!” came from behind the partition, “It’s that kid!”

“You don’t mean a little runt like that——”

“Sure, Kid,” soothed Costello with a broad grin. “Ut’s the kind we breed in Canada. Ut was only a bye’s job—goin’ afther the likes av ye, so Oi laid in me bed, an’ turned ut over to me assistant. An’, be the way, Kid, ye better look him over good. Oi’ve a hunch ye

two will meet agin. Fer, be the time ye're turned loose after these two jobs, the lad'll likely be Inspector Downey, av the police."

"To hell with the police!" growled the cowboy, savagely. "I can outguess the police—but there ain't no one that can outguess the breaks of the game that throws a man up agin rube bankers with sense enough to build cisterns in front of their safes, an' kids that prowls around nights when they ort to be to bed."

"That reminds me, Cammie," said the banker, "why ain't you out campin' with the boys? I saw 'em stop for you yesterday, an' then drive on without you. What's the trouble?"

"Mrs. Hunnish brought in some butter an' eggs that had to go on the iced car," explained the boy, "an' I had to stay an' get 'em ready. An' then, when I started to walk out to the hills in the moonlight, I heard these men comin' an' I crawled under an old wagon box beside Johnson's ford an' heard what they said. Then they went away to rob your bank an' I crawled out, an' that one come back, an' I was so scairt I didn't know what to do——"

"An' so ye done jest the right thing," interrupted the Sergeant, "an' done ut so good no one cud done ut better. Ut's the kind av stuff we need in the Service. Jest you think ut over, like Oi told ye, an' when ye're old enough——"

"It's the kind we need in bankin', too," interrupted Warring. "When you get old enough if you want a job just you come around to me."

"I—I guess I'd rather be in the police," said the boy. "I—don't like stores, an' banks, an' towns. I want to get out an' see things that Sarg an' granddad tell about. I want to see places other people don't see, an' run rapids, an' trail through snow, an' learn all about bears, an' deer, an' Injuns, an' things." The boy paused and looked earnestly at the officer: "Oh, do you think I ever could get in the Service—really?"

Costello grinned: "Feelin' like ye do, son, I don't see how ye're goin' to kape out av ut. 'Tis either the Service or the H. B. C., an' t'would be a pity to waste the likes av ye on the Company. Jest you plug along, doin' the thing that's put to you to do—like Hunnish's butter an' eggs—an' the day ye're twinty-two, jest file yer application wid the Commissioner at Regina, mentionin', by way av reference, Sergeant Costello, av he's still alive an' kickin', an' av he ain't, tell thim to read over Costello's rayport av the capture av the Yorkton outlaws."

"An', if they want any more references, just you tell 'em to ask me!" added the banker. "But, look here, it's breakin' daylight. Cammie, you better trot along home an' get you some sleep. I guess the Sergeant can handle the prisoners. I'm goin' home an' have Mrs. Warring send him over a good hot breakfast. Come on, sonnie, I'm goin' your way."

The boy shook his head: "No, I guess I'll start for the Hills. I ain't very tired, an' I don't want to miss any of the campin'."

"You mean walk? On an empty stummick—an' you up all night!"

"I ain't very hungry or tired," insisted the boy, "an' it's my vacation. It's the first one I ever had, an' pa promised."

"You're just right he promised!" exclaimed the banker. "An' by golly, you'll get your vacation! But, you ain't goin' to walk out there—not by a long shot! Tell you what we'll do—you come along with me, an' we'll get an early breakfast down to my house, an' then

I'll hitch up to that light runabout an' drive you out there. That new horse of mine'll make it in two hours. Glad of an excuse to take a drive, mornin' like this. We'll get out there before the kids are up, an' roust 'em out an' make 'em give us another breakfast."

On Warring's return he dropped into the store where the elder Downey was prying the head from a keg of nails: "Heard all about the doin's last night, I suppose!" he greeted.

"Doings?" repeated Downey, pausing in his work to stare at Warring over the tops of his steel rimmed spectacles. "You mean Sergeant Costello's catching the Yorkton Robbers?"

"Sure, that's what I mean! Didn't you hear the part Cammie played? Why, if he hadn't overheard their plans at the old Johnson ranch, they'd have blowed my vault same as they did Yorkton. An' not only that, but he captured one of 'em single handed!"

"Aye, I heard tell that Cameron was mixed up in it, some way or other. I've not seen the boy. When I do, I'll have som'at to say to him." The thin lips hardened to a straight line. "It's sore grievous, banker, that a son of mine should be prowlin' about all night when he should be in bed, an' spending his days in idleness when there's work to be done."

Banker Warring lost his temper: "Look here, Angus Downey, you're a fool! Why, if my kid had done half as good a job as Cammie done last night I'd be so doggone proud of him I'd bust all the buttons off my vest! An' he could camp all the rest of the summer if he wanted to! I tell you, Downey, you're handlin' that boy wrong. You'll never make a storekeeper out of him. The wild country's in his blood, an' you can't change it. I've had my eye on him, an' I'm predictin' he's goin' to make a good man—high grade man, I'd call it—as good a man as your own father is. An' if you don't know why he was out to the Johnson ranch last night I can tell you. It was because you promised him he could go campin' yesterday with the boys, an' then went back on yer word—that's why! An' after workin' like a dog all day he still had the nerve to tackle the trip afoot, at night. But you bet your life, after what he done, I wasn't goin' to see him foot it eighteen, twenty miles. I hitched up an' took him out there myself, this mornin'. I suppose I've gone an' offended you for good an' all—but anyway I've spoke my mind out."

The storekeeper shook his head, slowly: "No, banker, you haven't offended me. Every man to his own way of thinking. You've had your say out, and I've listened, but it hasn't changed my way of thinking, not one jot nor tittle. Once my mind's made up it's made up for good and all, and there isn't anything, nor anyone that can change it."

Warring left the store abruptly, and proceeded up the street, where he joined the throng of curious citizens that surrounded Sergeant Costello, who was escorting his trio of prisoners to the train.

## BOOK II

# CHAPTER I

## IN THE SERVICE

"I, Cameron Downey, solemnly swear that I will faithfully, diligently, and impartially execute and perform the duties required of me as a member of the Royal North-West Mounted Police Force, and will well and truly obey and perform all lawful orders and instructions which I shall receive as such, without fear, favour, or affection of or toward any person. So help me, God."

GRAVELY and solemnly young Cameron Downey repeated the words that inducted him into the Service. A silence followed, broken by the voice of the Commissioner: "It has given me unusual pleasure to administer this oath. The name of Cameron Downey is no new name to me. For many years I have known your grandfather as one of the best men in the North. Your name appears with credit in Sergeant Costello's report of the capture of the Yorkton bank robbers, some seven years ago. And, in the matter of application, Inspector Costello has referred to you in the highest terms, as have the president of the bank and others of your townspeople. Experience has taught me that native blood in men, and horses, and dogs has a marked advantage over imported blood. There will be times when the demands of duty will call forth every atom of your strength—mental, moral, and physical—and the man who builds up a reserve of strength, is the man who goes to the top."

Two hours later, spick and span in his new uniform, "Regimental Number 0750, Cameron Downey," as he was entered upon the records, reported for duty in the "awkward squad," the youngest and the proudest recruit of them all.

Thanks to a high order of intelligence, an insatiable ambition to learn, and the fragmentary, but efficient coaching of Sergeant (now Inspector) Costello during the years that had elapsed since the Yorkton incident, young Downey easily outstripped the other recruits, who were satisfied to absorb what they might of police education through the regular channels of drill, lectures, and practice of the regular curriculum.

There was much to learn. Cavalry drill of high order, care of horses and dogs in health and in sickness, carbine and revolver practice, instruction in the duties of constables, in the Criminal Code procedure, the laws of the different Provinces, cooking, first aid, and a thousand and one tricks of the trail and bits of information that make for the efficient policing of a rapidly developing frontier.

Cameron Downey was learning his trade.

Proficiency in the saddle worked him rapidly into Number One Ride, and his scores with carbine and revolver won the appreciation of his superiors. "Likeliest lad in the bunch," observed Inspector Church one day to the Commissioner as the two watched Number One Ride conclude its drill.

"You mean?"

"Young Downey. Make a good man if he don't get spoiled. The boys all like him, too—all but——"

"Grandson of old Cameron Downey of Fort Chipewyan. That breed won't spoil. You

were saying the men all like him except——?”

“Number 0687, Crossley. Been in the awkward squad longer than any of ’em. No. Crossley don’t like him.”

“Why?”

“I couldn’t say, sir. I’d noticed it when they were in the awkward together—nothing I could lay hold of. Just now and then a little sly thing, but, I noticed. Then, a couple of weeks ago I happened to be passing through the stables just before inspection. Downey was putting a velvet finish on his mount. Shortly afterward, I stood near the stable door, and, inside, I heard someone accuse someone of befouling his horse. The voice was quiet and low—but, the words bit like a steel point drill. Then the other voice, sneering, it was, and thick, gave him the lie, and an obscene name thrown in. There wasn’t anything else said, but there were some funny sounds——”

“Funny sounds, Inspector?”

“Yes, sir, that is, they sounded funny to me. Sort of like this,” he paused and smote, in rapid staccato, his open palm with his fist—“and the sounds were sort of mixed with other sounds—like quick breathing, and a heavy grunt or two, and then a sound sort of between a howl and a yelp, and a sound like someone had dropped a sack of oats on the floor. It was inspection time, and I moved on. A little later when they showed up for drill, I noticed a dampish stain on the flank of Downey’s mount, and Crossley worried through the drill with one eye swelled shut and sort of turning black.”

“You mean, young Downey attacked him?” The Commissioner’s voice was stern, though possibly his lips trembled ever so slightly at the corners, as his keen eyes searched the Inspector’s face. It is also possible that the lid of the Inspector’s left eye flickered ever so lightly as he replied: “I couldn’t say, sir. I really couldn’t say.”

A full year’s instruction would seem a short time indeed to turn out an officer competent to perform the duties of a constable of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, when one considers that this mere handful of men efficiently police a territory reaching from Hudson Bay to the Alaskan frontier, and from the international boundary to the shores of the Arctic, and beyond;—considers also that the provinces are rapidly being settled by a heterogeneous hodge-podge of aliens, good, bad, and worse; and that the vast northern reach of this territory is thinly peopled by savages, Indian, and Eskimo, who understand no word of the white man’s tongue, and have no comprehension of his laws. And yet, a constable, whose duties involve from time to time those of cavalryman, sheriff, attorney, coroner, surgeon, veterinarian, detective, scout, and explorer, is fortunate if he gets six months’ instruction before assuming his active duty! Truly, a marvelous performance, and doubly so when one considers that from the very nature of these duties, the constable is thrown a great deal of the time upon his own initiative, far removed from the advice and counsel of his superiors. Yet, year by year the feat is accomplished. Year by year a squad of capable and efficient young men go into the North to take the place of the squad of capable and efficient old men whose work is behind them. And, year by year the morale, the *esprit de corps*, remains at the same high level that has marked the force from its inception.

Cameron Downey spent four months at Regina barracks. Then, one autumn day, he returned from his Saturday ride across the golden prairie, to find orders awaiting him to

report for duty at Prince Albert.

It was with beating heart and high resolve that, a few hours later, with his neatly packed kit beside him, he settled back in his seat in the car and watched the lights of Regina twinkle and fade in the distance. It was the day he had looked forward to for—years and years. He was a full-fledged policeman, now—the rest had been merely a matter of schooling. The lights of Regina disappeared, and save for the tiny flash from an occasional settler's shanty, the world into which his train was rushing was a mysterious black void. Vaguely, the boy wondered what of life the black void held for him.

His thoughts drifted backward, touching the highlights of his life. It seemed a long, long time ago—that moonlight night beside the old Johnson ford, and the two weeks' camping trip that followed. And, a long time ago, that day when the whole town turned out to pay its last respects to his mother. He was sixteen, then, and never to his dying day will he forget that ride in the carriage with his father and the minister. The first carriage behind the hearse, it was, and a grim and silent ride. He remembered watching the long line of carriages and buggies, and wagons—even a sulky or two, as they slowly turned the corner at the foot of the hill. Every wheeled vehicle in the town had been pressed into service, for the wife of Angus Downey had been beloved by the entire community. Even old Doug Campbell, the drunken drayman, was there—his superannuated roan pony and skinny white mule, hitched to the lopsided dray, brought up the rear of the long procession. It was Doug whose voice, thick and shaken with animal-like sobs, had broken in on the words of the minister as the body was being lowered into the grave: “God ha’ mercy—a gude woman, theer—” and was escorted out of earshot by some of the men, followed by the glares of the scandalized community.

There were no highlights on the next three years, during which he stuck grimly to the store, working like a slave with never a word of commendation or comment from his father. For, after the death of his wife, Angus Downey relapsed into a dour silence that was broken only by the necessary conversation of business. “Stingy with his words as he is with his pennies,” some one had said—and spoke truly.

Then came that other day, when he and the minister rode once again to the cemetery in the carriage. The body of Angus Downey was in the hearse ahead, and, following the carriage was one other vehicle—a three-seated spring wagon in which rode the pall-bearers. At the corner, the minister noted that the boy's eyes turned back, as they had turned that other day to watch the long procession. “ ’Tis cauld an’ raw, an’ muddy,” he observed. “Folks fear the lung fever.”

Cammie nodded. He remembered that that other day had been colder and muddier.

At the grave, the minister preached at length concerning the extreme improbability of a rich man entering the Kingdom of Heaven. The Downey will, opened the day previous, had, it seems, made no provision for the church. The March wind soughed and swirled among the rattling branches of the cottonwood trees, the voice of the preacher droned on, Cammie, collar upturned and hands deep in pockets, made patterns in the mud with his new rubbers, and the pall-bearers, collars upturned and hands deep in pockets, watched two coyotes caper on a distant skyline.

At last, the ordeal was over and the vehicles headed for town, the horses' feet making dismal sucking sounds, and the wheels dropping into chuck holes to rise jerkily, shedding great chunks of mud from their spokes and felloes. It was a dreary ride, during the course



of which the minister made several pointed offers to accept a large donation in behalf of his work, while Cameron answered nothing, but stared out across the sodden prairie, his eyes on the Touchwood Hills.

He remembered that life had seemed a drab thing as his glance shifted from the hills to the ugly little town with its mud-churned streets and its wooden buildings huddled in the middle of the ugly prairie, beside the parallel rails that narrowed and disappeared in the distance. He hated the town. He didn't want to go back to the store. For three days the door had been locked. Idly he had turned the key over and over in his pocket. He would like to drop the key into the mud and never, never unlock that door again. He didn't want to go back to the house across the street, where he knew the widow MacFarlane, who had kept house for them since the death of his mother, would be waiting to recount, gasp by gasp, the last illness of his father, his mother, her own two lamented husbands, and a goodly spattering of a defunct progeny. He didn't like Mrs. MacFarlane. He didn't want to hear Mrs. MacFarlane talk—about anything. He would get rid of Mrs. MacFarlane and do his own cooking, and make his own bed, and sweep the floors, and——

Then, the carriage stopped in front of the livery stable, and he stepped out to find Banker Warring waiting for him on the sidewalk. Banker Warring had been one of the pall-bearers, and, as the boy reached his side, the man linked his arm through his and led the way to the bank. It was after hours, and, unlocking the door, he took the boy into his private office. "Take off your coat an' sit down. That raw wind sure does get to a man's bones. Mama wants I should bring you home to supper this evenin', but it's early yet, an' I didn't know but what there'd be some things we could kind of talk over together. Mind you, I don't want to pry into your affairs. It's none of my business, an' I won't get mad if you tell me so. But, the fact is, you're on your own, now, as they say. I know Angus wasn't much of a hand to talk an' maybe you an' him hadn't sort of planned things out—for the future, I mean."

The boy shook his head: "No," he answered. "We hardly ever talked about—anything."

For an hour or more they talked, and then the boy accompanied the banker home to supper. Next morning he opened the store as usual, and, during the next three years, he operated the establishment, first with the aid of one clerk, then two, then three, and in those three years made more money than had his father in the ten years preceding. Then he sold out to Bjone, banked his money with Mr. Warring, and, on his twenty-second birthday, showed up at Regina barracks.

Thus, the sequence of events that had shaped his life arranged itself in the boy's mind as the train roared through the darkness. And, now, he was actually reporting for duty! He took out his manual and began to read. He almost knew it by heart and as his eyes traveled the familiar pages, he heard scraps of conversation from across the aisle where a drummer and a man, evidently a ranchman, were seated together: "——finest outfit of police in the hull world——" "But, he's just a kid——" "Huh—kid, eh! If you know'd 'em like I do, you'd ruther have a hull regiment of soldiers after you than that one kid. They work mostly alone—an one's enough. The worst desperado in the world looks jest the same to 'em as an old lady with a lap full of knittin'. Them boys goes out an' gets their men every time, an' don't you fergit it! I'll tell you, mister, them red coats means somethin'!" The train stopped, the rancher got off, and with a vast pride in his heart, the boy read on, and

on, aware, now and then, of the interested glance of the drummer.

## CHAPTER II

### ON PATROL

“WELL, look who’s here!” The voice of Inspector Costello boomed hearty welcome as the boy reported for duty. “Regimental Number 0750, Cameron Downey,” he repeated aloud as he wrote down the words, “Rayported for jooty October the fifteenth.” He laid down the pen, and glanced with approval at the trim young figure before him. “An’ whin Oi holler fer a good man they sind me a rookie so bran’ new he don’t know a manual from a martingale. Did ye gather in any bank robbers along the road?”

“No, sir.”

“‘No, sor,’ says he. Jist come breezin’ in impty handed, loike he owned all Canady. Ye can onglue yer heels, now. An’ don’t stand there like ye’d a ramrod shoved down yer back. How are ye, Cammie, me bye? Ut’s glad Oi am to see ye.”

“And I’m glad to see you, Sarg—Inspector, I mean——”

“That’s right—don’t belittle me rank,” grinned Costello, “wouldn’t be a fair deal, bein’ as Oi couldn’t do the likes be yersilf.”

“And, I’m glad you’re the man I had to report to.”

“Ain’t ut queer, though! Wid a dozen Superintendents an’ Inspectors hollerin’ fer min, faster than they can turn out the rookies, ye’d be the wan Oi’d git.”

The boy detected a twinkle in the Inspector’s eye. “I’ll bet you asked ’em to send me so you could kind of help me get broken in.”

“Whisht, now—’tis not for a raycruit to be questionin’ the acts av his superiors.”

“Anyway,” grinned the boy, “you’re wrong about my not knowing the manual. I can almost repeat it by heart.”

“Well, thin, the first job ye’ve got is to fergit ut. The manual, son, is like the dictionary—a handy book to run to fer riference, but a blame poor wan to learn be heart. The sayin’ goes that possession is nine points av the law—an’ ye’ll learn that common sense is nine points av inforcin’ the law.”

“When do I get my first detail?”

“Up on the bit, an’ rarin’ to go,” grinned Costello. “But don’t worry, son. From now on, the least av yer worries will be drawin’ daytails. Be the way, did yer vaccination take holt good?”

“I guess it did. My arm was sore for a week.”

“Oi might of know’d ut, or they wouldn’t of sint ye.”

“Is there smallpox up here?”

“Ut ain’t so bad in town—a dozen cases, maybe, an’ two dead. There’s doctors here, an’ medicine. But the plague flag is flyin’ in the back country. There’s no doctors, there, nor medicine except what we’ll carry wid us. Winter’s comin’ on an’ the Injuns scattered on the trap-lines. Oi’ve mapped out a patrol that’ll take in twinty tradin’ posts, but the trappers—we’ll never see the half, nor the quarter av thim. There’s work fer a rigiment on

this patrol alone—an' there's the two av us to do ut. Ye'll come face to face wid death, an' starvation, an' misery—an' little to do to prevint ut. 'Twill be a grim patrol, son—an' unless Oi was goin' wid ye, no job at all fer a rookie. What wid fumigatin', vaccinatin', an' buryin' an' the hundred an' one jobs no man can foresee, we'll be busy maybe till Christmas, maybe till spring."

"When do we start?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"In the grey av the marnin'. We'll go now and get yer winter outfit together."

On an evening, three weeks later the two drew their chairs to the roaring stove in the trading room of the Moon Lake Post, and talked with MacMurtrie, the factor. Winter had come suddenly, and with vengeance. The wind roared in the spruce tops and soughed and whistled about the eaves of the log building, as it drove the powder-fine snow in an opaque white smother.

"'Tis a fine job ye got here the night, Costello," said the hearty old Scot, as he tamped his pipe with his thumb. "Since noon a mon could scarce see the length of his arm past the door."

"'Twas tough goin' an' no mistake, but we was already on the river when the storm broke, an' 'twas only a question of followin' it up to the lake."

The Scot turned to the boy with a smile: "An' how now do you think of policin'? For, I tak' it ye're new to the business. An' what wad ye done an' ye'd be'n alone?"

The youngster returned the smile: "I like it. I didn't know the trail, an' if I'd been alone, I'd have camped till the storm was over."

"Well spoken, lad. 'Twould be the best judgment of a mon older than ye. Ye're an outlander, born, I tak' it?"

"No, all my life I have lived in a town. This is my first real trip."

The factor turned a puzzled face toward the grinning Inspector: "Losh, Costello, d'ye tell me ye're facin' what's likely before ye with a raw recruit—an' a townsman, at that!"

"Sure, Mac," laughed the Inspector, "but, mind ye, Oi picked me raycruit." He paused, abruptly, and grinned at Cammie: "There, 'tis no use lockin' the stable door after the cat is out av the bag. Unofficial, Oi did sort av hint to the Commissioner that av ye wasn't too blamed raw, ye'd be more welcome thin somewan Oi didn't know who he was, nor where he come from." He glanced again toward the factor: "Ye see, Mac, Oi've know'd um since he was knee-high to a rabbit. We cilebrated his first pair av britches together wid a ride on my horse through the town. Townsman he is, as ye say, but the blood's there. The lad's grandson an' namesake to owld Cameron Downey——"

"Cameron Downey!" MacMurtrie was on his feet, reaching for the boy's two hands. "Ah, lad ye've a name to live up to! Cameron Downey—I've know'd um fer fifty year. 'Tis a name 'twill carry ye far in the outlands. No good man, white nor red, knows aught but good of its owner. An' 'twill put fear in the hearts of the others. How's ye're father—Angus, I recollect, his name was? An' what does he think of ye're joinin' on with the police?"

"He's dead," answered the boy, "he died soon after grandfather did."

"Aye, 'twill be three years agone. 'Tis too bad Cameron couldn't have lived to see his breed return to the North. He took it hard when Angus settled down in the provinces."

“What’s the news of the plague, Mac?” asked Costello, as he refilled his pipe.

“No news, here. We heard ’twas in the settlements.”

“Ut is, an’ we got rumours of ut in the North. A mail carrier said they had ut at Owl River post.”

“Mebbe,” answered the Scot, his brow drawing into a frown. “I hope not. ’Tis a turrible thing, with the Injuns dyin’ like flies. I recollect fifteen year ago when it swept from the Bay to the Pacific. You mind it, Costello.”

“I do. ’Twas hell. An’ from what little we can find out, ut may be the same thing over again. How ye fixed, here?”

“Weel, theer’s five of us. Me an’ the clark, an’ the woman, an’ the two Injuns—her brothers.”

“How about vaccination?”

“I had it done the time of the last plague. I don’t know about the others. My second wife was livin’, then. This is my third. I’ll ask ’em.”

He rose and opened the door leading to the living compartments. “All of ye come out here!” he called, “an’ come quick!”

The woman, the clerk, and the two Indians crowded into the room. MacMurtrie spoke first to the Indians in their own tongue. He turned to the Inspector: “They never had it.” He spoke to the clerk, a burly young Dane who had been in the country two years. “How about it, ye ever be’n vaccinated?”

“Na, ay ain’t, Ay ain’t git vaccinate. Ees beeg foolishness. More peoples die vaccinate vat dies smallpox.”

Big as was the clerk, MacMurtrie overtopped him, as he stepped forward with clenched fists. “Ye’re an ignorant Gilly an’ a dumb headed fool!” he roared. “Bare ye’re arm! Befoor I vaccinate ye’re face with my two fists! These lads are police an’ if ye don’t move lively ye’ll never live to die of either one—ye’ll kick out on the end of a rope fer a plague spreader!” Even before the factor stopped speaking the clerk had his arm bared and extended while Costello, none too gently, scratched the virus in. The Indians submitted without complaint, and then the factor submitted his own arm. The ordeal over, MacMurtrie issued his order to the clerk and the Company Indians: “Clean out the old cabin down by the boathouse as soon as this storm lets up. Get all the trash out of it, see to the chinkin’, an’ batten the window an’ door. Put up a bunk an’ a table, an’ set up a stove. If anyone comes along make ’em put up in the cabin till I have a chance to look ’em over an’ question ’em. If the plague is loose in the land, ’twill be as well to take no chances. Mayhap the cabin will find use as a hospital.”

“Good work, Mac,” approved Costello, “an’ they’d all do the like, ’twould go a long way towards stoppin’ the spread.” He glanced at young Downey: “Ye’ll take notice, son, how a good man reaches out an’ takes the bull by the horns before the milk is spilt.”

For three days, the blizzard raged with varying intensity, and on the fourth, the occupants of the trading post stepped out into a glittering white world. From the fifteen police dogs that MacMurtrie had been boarding during the summer, Costello selected five of the best—strong, willing brutes, wise in the way of the snow-trail. Inch by inch, he inspected the harness, and cast his eye over the half-dozen sleds and toboggans that were stored in one end of the boathouse. Selecting a toboggan, he inspected it as carefully as he

had the harness, keeping up, the while, a running comment for the boy's benefit upon the weak points of dogs, harness, toboggans and sleds. "Oi'd ruther use a sled," he explained, "but the way the snow is a toboggan is better. We'll maybe change ut fer a sled somewheres else."

But before noon the outfit was ready for the trail, and, leaving a few vaccination units with MacMurtrie, the two officers struck northward with Owl River Post, a hundred miles distant, as their objective.

The second day out they came upon an Indian trapper. The man knew nothing of the red death. He had seen no one for five or six weeks. He led the policemen to his camp where he and his wife and two children submitted to vaccination—the latter fighting like little wild cats as the point scratched their arms.

"I should think they'd all die, living in tepees in the winter," said the boy.

The Inspector shook his head: "Ut's the way they should all live. Ut's the ones that builds cabins an' tries to live like white min that dies. White man's grub, an' white man's houses has killed more Injuns than the plague ever did. 'Tis the fault av the missionaries—not all av thim, mind ye—fer there's fine min amongst thim, an' min that know. But, the most av thim don't know. Takin' ut all in all, Oi know be experience, that wid a few prominent exceptions, the Injuns av the North would be better off if they'd never seen a missionary."

Travel was slow. The days were short, the snow soft, and twelve or fourteen miles was good going. But young Cameron Downey was enjoying every minute of it. And, with the passing of the hours, he learned tricks of trail and camp that were to stand him in good stead upon hundreds of long patrols.

One day, at the junction of two nameless rivers, they came upon the cabin of a white man. The cabin was new, but incredibly filthy, and its owner shiftless and disreputable. A cast in one eye imparted a shifty, sinister expression to his bearded face. The Inspector questioned him sharply:

"What's yer name?"

"Bill Berry."

"Where'd ye come from, an' whin?"

"I come this summer. From—Montreal."

"Montreal, is ut! An' what street did ye live on in Montreal?"

"Why, I lived on—on Third Street——"

"Ye lie! They ain't no Third Street in Montreal! Come on, where'd ye come from—an' ye better tell the truth or ye'll wisht ye had!"

"I come from Chicago, then," answered the man, sullenly.

"What ye doin,' here?"

"Trappin'."

"Trappin'!" snorted the Inspector. "I suppose ye trade wid Hume at Owl River?"

"No, I don't. I trade with Mueller on Many Point Lake."

"O-ho, so ye're wan av Mueller's crew, are ye? I thought as much. An' how much rot-gut has Mueller got cached for tradin' stock?"

“I don’t know nothin’ about Mueller. Nor no rot-gut, neither. I don’t use it. I jist trade there.”

“Maybe, but while Oi’m here Oi’ll jest hunt around a little.”

The man leaped to his feet: “You can’t search this cabin without a warrant! Police or no police, I know my rights! Show a warrant or git out!”

“Oh, ye know ye’re rights, do ye—an’ ut’s a warrant ye want? All right, me hearty—here’s yer warrant.” The officer doubled his fist and held it before the other’s face. “All due an’ rigular, ye’ll notice, an’ behind ut is the authority av the Dominion av Canady, an’ the British Empire, incloodin’ Oirland, Injia, Australia, an’ New Zealand, to say nothin’ av other bits av countries scattered here an’ there about the world. Is ut enough, er do ye want to feel ut wid yer jaw?”

The man subsided muttering, and the Inspector turned to the boy: “All right, son, search the cabin, an’ do a good job while Oi kape an eye on Bill Berry.”

“Y’aint got no right to search,” growled the man. “How do I know you’re police? You ain’t got no uniform, an’ y’aint show’d no papers.”

“Ye’re welcome to ye’re doubts,” assured Costello, and proceeded to fill his pipe as Constable Downey explored the room. From beneath the blankets of the bunk he drew a flat flask half-filled with whiskey.

“I keep that in case of sickness,” snarled the man, reaching for the bottle which Downey handed the Inspector, “I got a right to. My stummick’s ailin’.”

“Av ut ain’t, ut will be,” remarked Costello, as he sniffed at the contents. “But, we ain’t huntin’ medicine—av this is all ye got we’ll not be confiscatin’ ut.”

The boy finished his inspection and turned to the loft of poles that ceiled half the room. Seeing no ladder, he mounted the table and clambered up where for several minutes the two in the cabin could hear him shifting canned goods and sacks of supplies.

“Here’s something!” he called, presently, “a keg—two of them!”

“Roll ’em out, an’ pass ’em down,” ordered the Inspector, with a glance at the owner of the cabin. “Two kegs, eh? Enough tradin’ stock to last quite a while—an’ plenty more at Mueller’s whin ut’s gone.”

“It’s a lie! It’s fer my own use—fer medicine.”

“Ye must be an awful sick man, Mister Berry,” said the Inspector, as he lowered the kegs to the floor, “twinty gallon—forty, or fifty gallon whin ye got ut watered fer the Injuns—a nice profit fer yer winter’s *trappin’*. Ut’s sorry Oi am to deprive ye av yer medicine. But havin’ liquor in possession will hold yer fer quite a while—an’ maybe we can git an Injun case on ye, yet—Oi see wan av the kegs has had some draw’d off.” As Costello rolled the kegs to the door, the man once more leaped to his feet. “You leave them kegs alone!” he whimpered. “It’s all I got in the world—an’ I owe Mueller now!”

“Ye should of invested in somethin’ less perishable,” advised the officer, “but, av ye do well wid yer trappin’ ye’d ought to be able to pay Mueller.”

“Trappin’ be damned! I don’t know nothin’ about trappin’! I can’t even walk on snowshoes! Mueller said the police never come by this way.”

“Oh, he did, did he?” grinned the Inspector. “Well, ut wouldn’t be the first time Mueller’s took all a man had fer a batch av liquor an’ then tipped him off so he wouldn’t

have the competition in gettin' rid av ut."

"Tipped me off!" screamed the man. "You mean, Mueller tipped me off to the police?"

Costello shrugged: "Oi didn't say he did, or he didn't."

"Damn Mueller! I'll fix him! I'll show the double-crossin' bastard he can't fool with Bill Berry!"

As the man raved, Costello demolished the kegs with an axe, while Constable Downey watched the proceeding with interest. When the last stave had been smashed beyond all possibility of repair, the Inspector again turned to Berry. "How about the smallpox? Have ye be'n vaccinated lately?"

"Smallpox be damned! I've hed it—years ago. I like to died. I'm all pitted to hell—can't you see my forehead?"

"Is thim pock marks? Oi thought it was dints in the dirt."

"I hope Mueller gits it an' dies! He's afraid of it, too! Damn him! I hain't afraid of him. I'll learn him to tip me off to the police! I'll show him two kin play that game! What with a hundred gallon hid in under the floor of the cabin where the smallpox Injuns is. An' him spreadin' the smallpox around——"

"What do you mean—spreadin' smallpox?" cried Costello, seizing the man by the arm.

To the officer's surprise the look of rage upon the man's face changed suddenly to one of fear. He shrank from the grip on his arm, and his words came haltingly: "Did I say 'spreadin' smallpox'? I didn't mean nothin'—I don't know nothin'—I didn't say spreadin' smallpox—I was mad, an' I didn't know what I was sayin'."

"Ye lie! Out wid ut! What did ye mane?"

"Nothin'—I tell ye I never said it! I don't know nothin'!"

"Have they got smallpox at Mueller's?"

"I don't know what they've got! I hain't be'n there, fer goin' on a hell of a while."

Seeing there was nothing to be gained by further questioning, Costello turned away: "Come on, lad—we'll be mushin'."

At a word of command, the dogs rose to their feet, and the man called from the doorway: "You got to wait! I hain't dressed for outside. An' I got to ride. I hain't got no snowshoes."

"That ain't none of our business," answered Costello. "What do you mane—wait?"

"You've arrested me, an' you got to take me along. I know my rights! I'll only git four or six months fer havin' licker, an' I'll git my time served by spring."

"O-ho, so that's it, is it? Well, Oi'm sorry to disappoint ye, but ye ain't under arrest. We'll pick ye up whin we want ye—which ain't now."

"But—what'll I do? I hain't got no licker——"

"Trap," suggested the officer.

"Trap—hell! I hain't got no traps, an' I wouldn't know what to do with 'em if I hed a million. I hain't got no snowshoes, an' I wouldn't know how to use 'em if I hed. I can't go nowhere's, I'll git lost!"



“Stay here thin,” advised the Inspector.

“What if I’d git sick here all alone—what would I do then?”

“Do what anyone else does—die, or git well—there’s only the two things ye can do.”  
He called to the dogs, “Mush! Git along, you Kammix!”

“Which way?” asked the boy as he took his place ahead of the dogs.

“Northeast. We should hit Owl River in twinty or twinty-five miles. Oi judge this river hits Many Point Lake at Mueller’s.”

## CHAPTER III

### YOUNG DOWNEY TAKES COMMAND

AFFAIRS at Owl River Post were in a bad way. From the flagpole before the long buildings situated at a sharp bend of the river, the scarlet plague flag whipped and writhed in the wind, while at the top of the steep bank, Hume, the factor, stood frantically waving them off.

“Ut’s all right, Hume, me bye!” called the Inspector. “Ut’s me—Costello, fresh vaccinated, an’ out av harm’s way. How ye farin’?”

“Bad enough. My clerk, an’ a Company Injun have got it. I’ve got two other Injuns in a tent for observation. The sick men are in my quarters, an’ I’m livin’ in the tradin’ room.”

“Who’s tendin’ ’em?”

“I am.”

“Have ye had ut?”

“No.”

“Vaccinated?”

“A long time ago—so long I don’t remember.”

Costello proceeded immediately to vaccinate Hume and the two Indians who submitted to the ordeal in dumb terror, which no amount of explanation served to abate.

“Be’n flyin’ quite a while, be the wind-whipped look av ut,” opined Costello, pointing to the patch of scarlet at the top of the pole.

Hume nodded and leading the way into the trading room, moved behind the counter and produced a book. “I raised it the twelfth an’ it’s the twenty-seventh, now. The clerk was the first to come down. He’s dryin’ up now. But, the Injun’s bad. I think he’ll die.”

“Who brought ut here?”

Hume shook his head: “I don’t know. There’s be’n a sprinklin’ of Injuns——”

“Any of ’em come from Mueller’s?” asked Costello, recalling what Berry had said about spreading the disease.

“I don’t think so. Have they got it at Mueller’s?”

“I don’t know. I’m goin’ there, now. There was no one else? No white men?”

“Only one. He was here, let’s see,” Hume consulted his book, “it was the third. He bought two pounds of tobacco.”

“He wasn’t, be chance, a cock-eyed man with a red beard showin’ grey?”

“He was that. I kep’ close eye on him, for I figured him for a rum peddler. But, I guess I was wrong. He seemed harmless an’ good-natured enough—for all his looks. Hung around half a day, hobnobbin’ an’ wrastlin’ with Johnnie Bean, the clerk, but never once did he mention liquor.”

“Where’d he come from, an’ where’d he go?”

“He come in from the east—had only a light backpack. Said he’d left his outfit eight

or ten miles down the river. He was huntin' Mueller's, an' when I told him the way, he headed back down the river again."

Costello nodded: "He wrestled wid the clerk, an' the clerk was the furst to come down?"

"But he didn't come down till nearly two weeks after that," said Hume.

"That's as ut should be, accordin' to the books. Ut takes that long to take holt. We'll be goin' now. Av the Injun dies, burn the body—ut's safest. Here's some medicine, though little faith I've got in ut. Av ye've be'n exposed as long as ye have, the chances are ye won't get ut. Some folks don't—ye're lucky."

"What ye thinkin' about, son?" queried the Inspector, as the two sat that evening over their camp-fire, half way between Owl River post and Mueller's.

Young Downey grinned: "I was just thinkin' what a lot of different things a man has to know to be a good policeman."

"Ut often surprises meself that Oi carry ut all in wan head," chaffed Costello.

"I really mean it," answered the other, seriously. "I've kept my eyes and my ears open, and the more I see and hear, the more I wonder."

"'Tis the way to learn," approved Costello. "'Tis the ability a man's got to profit be his experience an' observation that makes the difference between a wise man an' a fool. 'Tis what min call common sense—an' ut can't be learnt out av books. Take this patrol, ye've seen an' heard nothin,' barrin' maybe a few tricks av the trail, that ye're own common sense wouldn't have told ye to do."

"Yes, but there's a lot of information a man must have that all the common sense in the world couldn't teach him. For instance, you knew just how long it takes smallpox to take hold of a man. And, when Bill Berry told you he lived on Third Street in Montreal, you knew he was lying because you knew there wasn't any Third Street."

Inspector Costello grinned a grin. "Two weeks before we started Oi knew no more of smallpox than Hume knows. Whin Oi knew Oi had the smallpox to fight, Oi pestered the doctors wid questions, an' borried all their books on smallpox till Oi can rattle off its symptoms, its kinds, an' raysults. 'Twas but common sense to find out all Oi cud about the disease Oi had to fight."

"But, how did you know there was no Third Street in Montreal?"

"Oi don't know. Fer all Oi know, there may be a half a dozen Third Streets in Montreal. 'Twas common sense told me he was lyin,' an' Oi grabbed the furst thing Oi cud lay me tongue to to let him know that Oi know'd ut. An' 'twas common sense told me to throw in a hint that maybe Mueller had tipped him off. From what he said, an' what happened at Owl River, I know that fer some rayson Mueller is spreadin' the red death \_\_\_\_\_"

"But, what possible good would that do him?"

Costello shrugged: "Maybe he figured that if some av the posts nearby was wiped out he'd have less competition, fer he carried a general trade line besides his hooch. They're small posts, an' he prob'ly figured the Company wouldn't bother wid startin' 'em up again. We're almost sure Mueller's spreadin' ut—but unless we can get a deposition, or

make wan av them talk on the witness stand, we'll never be able to prove ut. Anyhow, we'll know tomorrow. 'Tis time we was gettin' some sleep."

Mueller had built his trading establishment upon the highest point of a small wooded island in a lake whose many jutting points gave it its name. As the two officers approached, they noticed that smoke arose from only one of the three buildings, a small cabin built near the larger log trading room. Save for a half-dozen snarling dogs that huddled in the lee of the log wall, no sign of life was visible. There was no plague flag flying. Ignoring the cabin from which the smoke rose, Inspector Costello walked directly to another cabin and threw open the door. "It would be here where Berry said he had the liquor cached," he said. The cabin was windowless, and peering into the black interior, as their eyes became accustomed to the darkness a sight presented itself that caused even the hardened Costello to utter an exclamation of horror.

Sprawled upon the floor were the frozen bodies of three Indians, their emaciated faces hardly recognizable from disfigurement of the dread disease. On a pole bunk at one end of the room lay another body—a woman, partially covered by a tangle of filthy robes and blankets. Costello entered the room. "That's Mueller's wife," he said, and turned away in disgust. Moving one of the bodies he shifted a floor puncheon, and stooping, lighted a match and held the flickering flame in the aperture. When the match had burned itself out, he rose to his feet and replaced the puncheon. "Ut's there," he announced, "ten or a dozen kegs like them we smashed fer Berry. An' now, we'll go an' see Mueller."

Passing around the trading room, the two noticed that the snow was drifted against the door. Also, it was drifted against the door of the building from which the smoke rose. Costello hammered on the door with his fist, and receiving no answer, hammered again.

An indistinguishable sound came from the interior, as though someone were trying to speak through half-closed lips.

"Open the door!" demanded the officer, "ut's Inspector Costello, av the Royal North-West Mounted Police."

Again came the indistinguishable sounds.

"Open, or Oi'll smash ut in!" roared Costello, and the demand was followed by a peculiar shuffling, scraping sound from the interior, and a moment later the door swung inward to reveal a sight that, to his dying day, Downey will never forget. A great blond giant of a man, his two hands gripping the back of the chair he had pushed ahead to steady him on his journey from the bed to the door, stood swaying while horrid toneless sounds that were hardly distinguishable as words poured from his swollen lips. Thick saliva flowed from the corners of his mouth and clung to the matted yellow beard, and two eyes, burning with fever, glared from beneath a forehead blotched fiery red and spotted with great yellow pustules the size of peas. The fetor from the tightly closed, super-heated room swept past the man like a blast from Avernus, causing the two involuntarily to step backward.

The act seemed to rouse the giant to fury. Reeling he released his grip, to shake a ponderous fist, while a jumbled torrent of obscene abuse poured from his lips in hoarse, guttural croaks: "You lie! I ain't got it! I ain't—I can't—I had it—long time ago! I tell you I ain't—I ain't—I ain't! God—my head—my throat's all raw, an' my mouth—got it all over—inside an' out—Christ—I'm burnin' up! Gimme——"

“Git back there!” commanded Costello, “back to yer bed!”

The man obeyed. Shoving the chair before him, swaying and reeling, missing the hot stove by inches, he sank muttering upon the robes of his bunk.

“Oi’ve be’n, an’ Oi’ve seen,” said the Inspector, sniffing the putrid air in disgust, “but niver a cesspool like this—whiskey, smallpox an’ human filth! We’ll let air in before we cross the doorsill. A lungful of yon would poison a wolf.”

On the bunk, the man tossed and mumbled in the semi-delirium of intoxication and fever. After a few moments, Costello entered the room. From a nail beside the door, he took a large key which he tossed to Downey: “Go to the tradin’ room an’ get some new blankets,” he ordered. “We’ll waste no time fumigatin’ here. We’ll get him out an’ kick the stove over an’ let her burn.”

As Downey disappeared with the key, he heard Mueller in a fresh outburst of raving: “You lie! I ain’t got it! You’ll not burn——”

“Shut up!” commanded Costello. “Ye’re rotten wid ut—an’ serves ye right! Lavin’ yer wife die like a dog, an’ tryin’ to spread ut through the North——”

“It’s a lie!” croaked the man, swinging his feet to the floor and half rising. “Shut that door! I’m freezin’—burnin’ up, an’ freezin’!” Reaching for a dipper he plunged it into a pail of whiskey and water and swallowed its contents in great painful gulps. Coughing and retching, he blurted his words: “She ain’t dead—she got it—made her go with the other dam’ Injuns—you lie—I didn’t spread it——”

“That’ll do,” said Costello. “Where’s yer plague flag? An’ how about sendin’ Bill Berry to Owl River Post——?”

Mueller was sitting up, now, upon the edge of the bunk, his eyes glaring like the eyes of a wounded beast: “It’s a lie! Dam’ the plague flag! Where’s Bill Berry?”

“He’s safe an’ sound with the two kegs av liquor he got from ye, all smashed an’ beyond harm. ’Twas him told av yer spreadin’ the smallpox to Owl River Post.”

With a roar, the man lurched to his knees, and the next moment was on his feet, a cocked carbine in his hands. As Costello leaped forward the gun roared, and the Inspector crumpled in a heap in the middle of the floor.

Half way from the store to the cabin young Downey halted abruptly at the sound of a shot. Hurling his armful of blankets to the snow, he dashed forward, remembering that both revolvers were in the pack on the sled. In the doorway, he paused to see Mueller working frantically at the lever of his carbine, the mechanism of which had jammed. At sight of the younger man, the crazed giant raised the gun to club Costello, who was struggling to rise. Snatching a heavy billet of firewood from the pile Downey hurled it with all his strength. It caught Mueller fair in the face, and he crashed backwards, carrying the stove with him, scattering coals and blazing brands upon the grease-soaked floor. Gasping in the smoke that instantly filled the little room, the youngster reached Costello and, grasping him by the feet, pulled him out into the snow. Then he returned for Mueller. But, already the room was a holocaust. The light spruce floor, saturated with the grease of years, and the tinder-dry spruce boughs that served as a mattress for the bunk were a fury of red blaze that leaped through the smoke and threatened momentarily to engulf the lad in a fiery embrace. In vain he tried to reach the spot where Mueller had fallen. Flames scorched his face, singed his eyebrows, and the fur of his cap and mittens. His lungs

seemed bursting, and his eyes were nearly closed with the sting of the smoke when he finally reached the door where Costello lay with his head upon the sill roaring for him to come out.

Dragging the Inspector to safety, Downey built a fire in the stove of the trading room and, half-dragging, half-carrying, succeeded in getting him onto a pile of new blankets close beside the stove. Examination revealed a badly shattered shoulder—a job which, on the face of it, clearly required the service of an expert. Undaunted, young Downey set to work with a will and at the end of an hour had completed a very creditable job of first aid.

“ ’Tis a pretty kettle of fish, altogether,” growled Costello, as he lay propped against a pile of bolt goods. “An’ the patrol only jest begun! Who’d thought the crazy divil would shoot, or could shoot, an’ him nine-tinths dead wid the smallpox! He must have had the gun hid in his bed—the first Oi seen av ut was end on. ’Twas a grand shot ye made, lad, wid the fire chunk. Wan second more an’ he’d of bashed me head in.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get him out of the cabin,” said the youngster, with a glance toward the window that gave view of the smoking ashes.

“ ’Twas a merciful death fer um,” opined the Inspector. “He had his ticket. Ye saved um days av sufferin’.”

While Downey prepared supper, the Inspector dozed fitfully on his blankets. “Where ye be’n?” he inquired, as the other entered the door, stamping the snow from his feet, “an’ what the divil got into them dogs?”

“They’re Mueller’s,” explained Downey. “There’s six of ’em—good ones, too, but pretty well gaunted up. They haven’t been fed for days. There’s two deer carcasses in the fur room, an’ I gave ’em a good big feed of deer meat and salt pork. I’ve got some nice cuts of it ready for us.”

After supper the Inspector filled his pipe. “What’s yer idea av the thing to do now?” he asked, as the boy seated himself beside him.

“You’re in command,” reminded Downey, with a grin.

“True, lad, but I’m minded to see what ye’ve done in the way av figurin’, fer I know yer wits has not be’n idle.”

“Well—you’ve got to get to a doctor, and I’ve got to carry on the patrol. I figure that with Mueller’s dogs, I can get you to Owl River, and Hume can get some Indians to take you back to Prince Albert. Then, I’ll go on.”

“Ye’ll go on, eh? Cover around twelve hundred miles av winter trail alone on yer first patrol—an’ ut’s not only coverin’ the trail—there’s things to be done.”

“An’ only me to do ’em,” smiled the boy. “But, the patrol has got to go through. I’m goin’ to do the best I know how. I can get directions from one post to the next—maybe some of ’em can lend me an Injun—but whether they do or not, I’ll get through.”

“Aye, Cammie, bye, Oi think ye will—though ’tis a tough daytail fer a rookie. Ye’ll take over the patrol from now on. What’s yer plans—between here an’ Hume’s?”

“The other cabin, the one with the—Injuns in, I’m going to burn tonight—bodies, whiskey, an’ all. In the morning I’ll shut this place up tight, an’ burn some of those sulphur candles in it. Then, I’ll harness Mueller’s dogs, put you on his toboggan, an’ strike out for Owl River Post. Our dogs, with our outfit, will follow along.” The boy paused, and

the Inspector nodded, as he slowly puffed his pipe. "Is that the way you'd do it?"

Costello blew a cloud of smoke from his lungs: "Ut is, except maybe, my first thought would be to burn this tradin' room along with the cabin. But, fumigatin' might do as well—ut's what fumigation is for. Anyway, ye're judgment stands. The destruction av property should be avoided whinever possible. An' now, bye, ye'd better be about yer burnin' an' git to bed. Ye've a hard day befoor ye—an' many a hard day—an' here's a bit av advice that may stand ye in good stead—on a long trail never cut down on ye're rest. A man can cut down on his grub amazin' an' keep goin'—but not his sleep."

"I'll remember that," answered the boy, and picking up a kerosene can, he stepped out into the night.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARGOT MOLLAIRE

IT was after many weary and trying days, that young Downey, rounding an abrupt bend of a small river, stopped and stared at the girl who stood on the snow-covered ice beside a three-dog team and an empty sled. In her hand she held an axe, and upon the snow beside her lay a small spruce tree from which several of the lower branches had been lopped. She was regarding him with a questioning stare, and he thought that never had he seen eyes of so deep a blue. Then she smiled, and he caught the flash of white teeth behind curving red lips.

The girl was the first to speak: "I heard you coming, and I wondered who you were. No one ever comes from the east. Not many people come, anyway, and then only from the west. They come up the Clearwater from the Athabasca."

"I'm Constable Downey, of the Royal North-West Mounted Police," the boy found himself returning her smile. "I'm looking after the smallpox. But, who are you? An' what are you doin' way out here by yourself?"

"I'm not way out. Only about two miles. I live at Lashing Water Post. I am Margot Mollaire. My father is the factor."

"I'm headin' for Lashing Water," answered the boy. "Have you had it there—the smallpox?"

The lips became grave: "No. We heard it was to the southward. They had it at Owl River Post, an Indian told us, and some of the trappers, but it was way off—not near here. Have you been to Owl River Post?"

Young Downey breathed a sigh of relief: "Yes, I have been there. It was there the first snow hit us. I was with Inspector Costello, then, but he got—hurt, and had to be sent back, so I came on alone. I guess it is not spreadin' North. The last case I found was at Ile à la Crosse. Have you been vaccinated?"

"When I was a very little girl. I have a big scar here," she indicated her upper arm. "There was smallpox that year and everyone was vaccinated."

"You've got to be vaccinated again. It's the way to keep it from spreadin'."

"Does it hurt so very much? I don't like to be hurt."

"No. Just a little scratch, an' then in a few days a sore arm. But that don't last long. It's better than havin' the smallpox. It's terrible. You're awful sick, and mostly always you die, and if you don't you're all pitted up. I'm glad it didn't get up here—glad you didn't get it."

The girl laughed, a silvery laugh that was altogether good to hear: "Why should you care if I got it?"

"Why, because—you are beautiful. It would be a shame if you—died—or got pitted."

Again, the silvery laugh: "Anyway, you are not bashful, like Murdo. Come, we will go home. My father will be glad to see you."

"Who's Murdo?" asked Downey, as the girl swung her dogs about.



“Murdo MacFarlane. He’s father’s clerk. He’s from Scotland. He just came here in the spring, and he talks so funny that sometimes you can hardly understand him. And, he’s so bashful he will hardly talk to me at all.” The girl stooped to load the tree onto her sled, but Downey forestalled her, securing it with a hitch of babiche. “What’s the idea of haulin’ the tree home?” he asked.

“Why—don’t you know—tomorrow is Christmas! We always have a tree on Christmas. And, candles and pretty things to hang on it, and presents for everybody. And in the evening we light the candles. And father and I sing Noel, and Holy Night, and things—can you sing?”

“No, I never learnt to sing. But, I’d like to hear you sing.”

“You will hear me tomorrow night. You will stay with us over Christmas—stay as long as you want to—as long as you can. We love to have visitors—we have so few. And there will be a present on the tree for you, too. You see if there isn’t. Don’t you love Christmas?”

They were walking side by side, the dog teams trailing in single file. “Why—I used to. I can remember we used to have a tree. When I was little. My mother used to fix it all up. An’ there were presents—but, since she died there hasn’t been any Christmas—my father didn’t care for such things.”

“My mother is dead, too,” said the girl. “I can’t remember her. But my father always has Christmas. He used to cut the tree, but since I have grown up, I always pick it out myself.”

“Looks like you could have found a tree closer home,” observed Downey, eyeing the surrounding spruce scrub.

“I could get lots of trees right at the post—but, the Christmas tree must be nice and even all around, and then, it’s more fun if you go farther for it. I pick out the tree in the summer time. I look at hundreds and hundreds of trees till I find just the one I want, and then, the day before Christmas, I go and get it.”

“Kind of a game you play,” smiled the boy.

“Yes, I love to be out doors. I do most of the hunting for the post. Do you like games? Father loves whist, but we don’t play very often because Murdo can’t seem to learn—he won’t ever finesse, and the Indians won’t even follow suit—not even Tom Shirts—and he’s been at the post for years—so, mostly father and I play piquet, and Murdo reads books. Can you play whist?”

“I have played, a little. I don’t know much about it, but I think it’s a good game.”

“Oh, you will play better than Murdo, I know. You and I will play against father and Murdo, and we shall beat them, too—see if we don’t. You can stay over Christmas, can’t you?”

“Yes, I expect I’ll have to stay several days. I want to rest up my dogs and doctor the feet of two of them.”

“That’s good. There’s the post. You can see the flag. It’s two more bends from here, but we’ll leave the river and follow the dead stream, and then we’ll not have to climb the steep bank.”

At Lashing Water Post, the young officer was warmly welcomed by old Molaire who

had a hundred and one questions as to conditions to the southward.

That evening they played whist until far into the night, and on Christmas Day Margot and Downey hunted ptarmigan among the ridges.

They returned at dark, the candles were lighted upon the tree, and, as they burned, father and daughter sang carols, the old man playing the accompaniments upon an accordion. Followed another long evening at whist, and in the morning the boy and girl set out in search of a small band of caribou whose trail they had crossed the day previous. But, the deer had strayed far, and it was long after dark before they returned to the post without having sighted them, to find Molaire impatient for his game. The following morning Downey harnessed his dogs, and bid good-bye to Molaire and to Murdo MacFarlane. Margot volunteered to accompany him for a few miles out to the portage onto the Clearwater. It was nearly noon when the portage was reached and the two sat down to eat their lunch.

An awkward silence was broken by the girl: "I am sorry you're going away," she said. "I like to hunt with you. It is nicer than hunting alone. Do you like to be alone?"

Young Downey pondered the question: "No," he answered, "I never cared before, but now I—I wish you could go with me."

The girl laughed: "Oh, but I couldn't do that!"

"No, you couldn't do that. I just said, 'I wish you could.' "

"Why?"

Downey paused, at loss for words. "Why, because—because I like you, I guess. I never cared for girls—but, somehow, you are different."

"Am I different from other girls?" her face was alight with interest. "Why am I different?"

"Oh,—I don't know. Just because I like you—you are—nicer than other girls—they always seemed kind of—of silly."

"And, I'm not silly?"

"No, you're not silly."

"Are you coming back to Lashing Water?"

"Yes—I'm coming back."

"When?"

Young Downey smiled: "I don't know. You see, a policeman has to go where he's ordered. Maybe soon, an' maybe a long time."

"Next year?"

"I hope so. Do you want me to come back?"

"Yes, I do. I like you, too. Do you always have to go where they send you?"

"Sure, you do."

"But, I mean, don't you ever get any vacation? So you can go where you want to go?"

"I don't know. I never thought about that. Seems to me I've heard about 'leaves,' but I never asked. I didn't think I'd ever want one—there was no place I wanted to go."

"But, now there is a place?"

"Yes—now there is a place."

"I'm glad. You are not stupid like Murdo, who always wants to be reading books. I'll be waiting for you here. And will you write me a letter?"

"Why, yes—I never wrote a letter to any girl, but—I'll write to you."

"We get mail twice a year, and sometimes oftener, if someone comes up from Fort McMurray. And I'll write to you, too, if you will tell me where to send it."

"Constable C. Downey, R. N. W. M. P., Prince Albert. If I get transferred, they'll forward it. I must be goin', now. An' you've got to start, too. It'll be dark before you get home."

"I'm not afraid of the dark," she smiled. And then, very shyly, with her eyes on the toes of her beaded moccasins: "You—you can kiss me good-bye, if you want to."

The next moment she was in his arms and, as he pressed her close, and closer against him their lips met in a long, long kiss. The boy could feel the pounding of his heart, his eyes closed, and through his whole being surged a mighty pulsing of life: "Oh, I—I love you," he whispered, and releasing her suddenly stepped back and stood facing her there on the snow.

Their eyes met. The girl's gaze faltered, and dropped. Once more she was in his arms, and young Downey felt her arms steal upward and close about his neck. "And I love you," she was saying, "and I don't want you to go away. Come back to the post, and father will send Murdo to some other post, and—we will be married, and live there always."

Another long kiss, and the boy released her: "No," he said, and his voice was very grave. "I'm on patrol."

"But, you could quit being a policeman. We'll tell father and he will make you his clerk. A clerk gets enough to be married. It doesn't cost much to live."

Downey smiled: "It isn't that. I've got lots of money of my own—enough, I guess, to keep us all our lives. But—it wouldn't be playin' the game. I've always wanted to be in the Service an' now I'm in, I must do my duty."

"But, it's so hard—all alone—and dangerous—what if something should happen to you, way off from anyone?"

Downey shrugged: "I'd either get out of it, or I wouldn't," he answered. "Anyway, I'd play the game right up to the end. I wouldn't *quit*."

"Do they pay you lots of money?"

"Not much. I don't care about the pay—it's the game."

"Anyway, you can come back to the post for a few days. We can tell father. And, besides your dogs' feet are not all well. I saw one limping."

"I'll make a moccasin for him when I camp, tonight. He's not bad. No, I can't go back. I'd rather go back than do anything else in the world. I wish I could be with you always—every minute—but I'm on patrol. Two or three days might make a lot of difference, somewhere. Even if it didn't, it wouldn't be playing square to take longer than necessary to finish my work."

"You care more for your old policing than you do for me," pouted the girl.

"No, that is not true—that is, I don't think it is true. But, I do care more for duty than I do for anything. You will see that I am right, when you think about it. You could not love a man who was a quitter."

“No. But——”

“A man that didn’t do what he had to do just the best he knew how wouldn’t be much of a man. It’s like candlin’ eggs.”

“Like what?”

Downey laughed, and the laugh was infectious: “Oh, that’s just a thing I think of when I’ve got to do one thing and want to do another. I had to candle eggs once, when I wanted to go campin’. I stayed and did it, an’ got paid by havin’ the biggest adventure I ever had. If I’d gone campin’ I’d have missed it. It always pays in the long run to do your duty. Inspector Costello taught me that—and he’s been in the Service for years and years.”

“I suppose you’re right,” admitted the girl, “but—it’s harder that way.”

“Sure it is. If it wasn’t it wouldn’t be worth anything. But, we must be goin’. I want to make this portage an’ reach the Clearwater before dark, and you’ve got to hurry home.”

Another long embrace, and the girl’s eyes raised to his: “Do they let policemen marry?” she asked.

“Why—some Inspectors are. I haven’t been in very long. I don’t know. I guess maybe they wouldn’t care if they knew a man had money enough. I’m goin’ to work hard for promotion. We wouldn’t want to be married before I was at least a Corporal, would we?”

“I guess not,” admitted the girl, half reluctantly, “but, you will work hard, won’t you? And you will write to me? And you’ll come to Lashing Water as often as you can?”

“Yes, Margot. As often as I can—an’ I’ll write to you—an’ work hard for promotion. Good-bye.”

At the bend of the river the girl paused and, turning, impulsively reached out her arms to the boy who stood watching her retreating figure. The next moment she disappeared around the bend. Young Downey spoke to his dogs, and began the ascent of the ridge.

Six weeks later, his long patrol finished, Constable Downey reported to Inspector Costello, at Prince Albert.

“So ye’re back, Cammie, me bye! An’ ut’s glad Oi am to see ye. Ye done a rare good job—the hardest patrol, far as Oi know, ’twas ever made be a rookie. Oi’ll be goin’ over ye’re rayport, now, an’ ye’re diary. How’s things beyant Owl River?”

“Not so bad. A few cases. The last one at Ile à la Crosse. I didn’t run across any after that, but I vaccinated everyone I saw till I hit Fort McMurray. From there in, they’d done the work.”

“Ye’ll take a couple av days’ rest, now, an’ then Oi’ll have to send ye up after our old friend Bill Berry. There’s no one else Oi’ve got except Corporal Sneed, an’ he’s too bad wid rheumatism to tackle the trip.”

The boy saluted: “I can start in the mornin’ just as well,” he said. “I’m not tired. How’d your shoulder come out?”

“Fine as a fiddle. Oi was on juty again be Christmas, an’ ut’s be’n gittin’ better ever since. But, ye better wait, anyway, till day after tomorrow. Ye’ve had a long tough trip, bye. Av Oi had anyone else Oi wouldn’t send ye out.”

“I’m glad you haven’t anyone else, then,” grinned the boy. “I want to go.”

When the youngster left the room, Costello fingered the report: “In from a long patrol jest rarin’ to go on another. Oi knew ut—Oi knew he’d make a policeman. Oi knew ut the day he was candlin’ thim eggs. Av he ain’t a Corporal befoor he’s two year in the Service, Oi’ll eat me shirt, an’ call ut gravy.”

“Hu-um,” he mused, a few minutes later. “Christmas at Lashin’ Water, an’ three days at the post ristin’ his dogs an’ doctorin’ their feet. Let’s see—that gurl av Molaire’s, now—she’d be around eighteen, or nineteen, maybe. She’s purty as the divil, but—she’s French.” And, later when the outgoing mail carried a letter addressed to Miss Margot Molaire, Lashing Water Post, Saskatchewan, via Fort McMurray, he again muttered “Hu-um,” and added: “An’ he only stayed three days. Wouldn’t of blamed um av he’d stayed a week. Beats hell how sore dogs’ feet can git—sometimes.”

## CHAPTER V

### CORPORAL DOWNEY

AFTER Inspector Costello and Constable Downey had left him to his own devices, Bill Berry alternately sulked and raged in his cabin. Storm succeeded storm, and it was nearly three weeks after the departure of the officers before he dared attempt the journey to Mueller's Post on Many Point Lake. When he did arrive there, it was to find the store building tenantless, and two other cabins destroyed by fire. Digging under the snow, he uncovered the fire-blackened, twisted hoops of the liquor kegs among the ashes of the plague cabin, and when, after a thorough search of the store building, he realized that the liquor cache had been destroyed, he launched into a tirade of blasphemous anathema that included the whole North, and the inhabitants thereof, their progenitors, and their heirs and assigns forever. Then he calmed down and took stock of the situation. Here was a perfectly good trading post, fully stocked, and with no owner. He reasoned that Mueller's cabin had caught fire in the night, destroying its owner with it, and the flames had communicated to the plague cabin.

"Damn glad the store didn't ketch," he muttered. "'It's a bum wind that don't do no one no good,' as the feller says. Looks like I've fell heir to a hull damn tradin' post." Whereupon he spent hours clumsily imitating Mueller's handwriting which he copied off the account books. Satisfied, he drew a bill of sale, purporting to have been signed by Mueller, which conveyed to him, Bill Berry, for the sum of ten thousand dollars in cash, all right, title, and interest in the Many Point Trading Post. And, having established his legal tenure to his own satisfaction, he opened the post for business.

Indians, customers of Mueller's, came, demanding liquor. Berry explained that he had none, showed them the burned cache, and took their furs in exchange for other goods, and sent them back to their trap-lines with a promise to run in plenty of liquor when the rivers broke up in the spring.

Thus, Berry settled down to enjoy his newly acquired opulence, and thus young Downey found him when he appeared early in April.

Berry greeted him heartily, and with no hint of animosity.

"You're under arrest for havin' liquor in possession in prohibited territory," announced the boy, "an' I warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

"That's all right, Constable," agreed Berry, with alacrity. "I figgered you'd be along, sometime—er someone would. I'm ready to go with you. Tradin's bad right now, but I want to git back agin the break-up, when the Injuns'll be comin' in fer the spring tradin'."

"How do you come to be here?" asked Downey, "instead of at your own cabin?"

"Well, you see, I bought Mueller out—yup—bought him out, lock, stock, an' bar'l, as the feller says. Here's the bill o'sale he give me when I forked over the cash."

Gravely, Downey studied the document: "I thought you said you were broke when we visited you in the cabin."

Berry grinned: "Yes, I said that—thought mebbe you'd kind of take pity on me an' not

smash them kags. But I had the money, all right—ten thousan' dollars in bills right in my pocket.”

“When did you buy Mueller out?”

“There’s the date on the bill of sale,—December the twentieth.”

“Where is Mueller, now?”

“Mueller, pore cuss, he’s dead—yup—burnt to death in his cabin—an’ I didn’t know nothin’ about it till next mornin’.

“It’s like this: I slep’ here in the store—Mueller wanted I should bunk with him in his cabin till spring, when he figgered on goin’ out. But, it was too dirty fer me, an’ it stunk in there, so I slep’ here in the store. Well, one night after supper, a few nights after I’d boughten him out, we set here talkin’ an’ smokin,’ an’ I says to him how I guess I wouldn’t handle no lickier. I says I got a big investment here an’ I can’t afford to take no chances with the police. He know’d about you bustin’ them kags, but he says, how there’s more in the lickier than in the other goods, an’ I says there’s enough fer me in it without the lickier, an’ it hain’t right nohow—tradin’ hooch to the Injuns. He laffed at me, but I stuck to it. I’d be’n doin’ some studyin’ sence you fellers was along—an’ ’taint right, is it?”

“No,” answered the boy, “it isn’t.”

“There, wha’d I tell you? So, I says how I’m a-goin’ to burn up the cabin that had the lickier cached under the floor, an’ it would be a good thing, ’cause it would git red of them dead Injuns—you see, they was four or five Injuns died of the small poxt, an’ Mueller, he had ’em corded up in the cabin agin’ spring come so’s he could bury ’em. But I figgers burnin’ ’em was better’n buryin’ ’em. Well, Mueller he begged one kag offen me if I was goin’ to burn it up, to last him till spring, so I give him one, an’ he tuck it to his cabin. That’s the last I ever see of him. It was a still night, an’ I figgered it was a good time to burn the cabin, so I went out an’ touched her off. I waited around till the roof fell in, an’ then I went to bed an’ let her burn. The wind come up in the night, an’ it must of blowed sparks agin’ Mueller’s cabin, an’ he probably had laid to that kag till he was soused, an’ never woke up no more’n what I did.”

As the man talked, Downey made notes in his note book. “When did this fire take place?” he asked.

“Jest two or three nights after I’d boughten him out,” answered the man, “an’ this here lickier in possession business—they two kags that you fellers busted up on me in the cabin—looks to me like they hadn’t ort to go hard on me fer them two kags, seein’ how I hadn’t traded none of it to the Injuns, an’ seein’ how I burnt up them other ten, twelve kags that was in the cache. Looks to me like when you an’ me comes to tell ’em just how everything happened they’d let me off easy, bein’ the first offence, an’ all. First, I want you should search the hull store an’ fur room, so’s you’ll know I handed it to you straight—an’ if you find even a drop of lickier I’ll give you the hull outfit, jist as she stands.”

Perfunctorily, the boy searched the premises and finding nothing, returned to the stove: “Wha’d you think?” asked the man, eagerly.

“I think maybe, you’re right,” he answered. “I think when they’ve heard the whole story, they won’t bother very much about those two kags in possession.”

“That’s usin’ yer head, son,” approved Inspector Costello, when the youngster had turned over his prisoner in Prince Albert, and related the man’s fabricated story of the trading post. “Av ye’d of hauled off an’ told um that Mueller was dead before ye left Many Point, ye’d av had an unwillin’ prisoner on yer hands that might of give you a heap av trouble. But the way ut was, he was dead anxious to git back an’ answer the charge. We got enough on um now to hold um fer a spell—ut’s the first time I ever heard av a man stealin’ a whole tradin’ post!”

Busy months followed for the young policeman. Detail after detail he drew, and performed his duty in a manner that showed not only a devotion to the best tradition of the Service, but a very high order of initiative as well. And, always, when not occupied with his official duties, the boy’s thoughts were of Margot Molaire. The miles of long patrols were shortened by the endless fantasies he wove about her. His mind leaped the untracked wilderness to the little post, and he lived over each hour of his stay at Lashing Water. Each word she had spoken, each glance of her deep blue eyes—but, most of all, the hour of their parting at the head of the Clearwater portage. His dream girl, he called her, and times there were without number when the heart within him seemed bursting with love of her, with the thought that one day she would be his very own.

Fate was very kind to young Downey during his first year in the Service. Pulsing with life, and youth, and love, he tore into the work with an avidity that won the respect and regard of all who came into contact with him. But, not once during the year did he draw a detail that took him anywhere near Lashing Water. For Inspector Costello, the wise, had noted other letters in the outgoing mail addressed to the girl at Lashing Water, and, too, there had been letters in the incoming mail addressed to Constable C. Downey, and written in a feminine hand. “He’s too young fer such nonsense,” said Costello, to himself. “Wimmin an’ policin’ don’t mix, an’ t’would be the spoilin’ av the likeliest recruit in the whole blame Force.”

The second year of his service was drawing to its close when Cameron Downey won his promotion. He was made a Corporal, and, with the promotion, came an order transferring him to “M” division, with headquarters on Hudson Bay. Costello growled at losing his best constable, but orders are orders, and the one note of comfort he got out of the matter was the thought that the boy would be farther than ever from Lashing Water. The Inspector really loved this youngster he had known from babyhood, and he determined that if it lay within his power, the boy should experience no duplication of his own shattered romance of years ago, when the inconstancy of a woman had driven him from the “owld sod” to find his life-work in the policing of the last great frontier.

The boy received his promotion with a vast pride in his heart, and his transfer with the stoicism of a born soldier. The night before he left, he indited a long long letter to Margot Molaire, and in the morning, finding a half-breed outfit that was headed for Fort McMurray by way of the old Methey Portage, he intrusted the missive to one of their number, hoping thus to beat the regular northern mail by at least a month. That letter was never delivered. It lies rotting in the pocket of its bearer in the silt of a river bottom after his canoe had crashed on the saw-tooth rocks of a rapid.

Nine months later, Inspector Costello smiled a wry smile of satisfaction, when he



heard from a passing trapper that old Molaire's daughter had married her father's clerk.

At the expiration of a year's service on the Bay, Downey again reported to Costello, and was ordered on patrol to Fort McMurray.

"An', be the way, son, ye'd better swing round be Owl River Post on yer way back, an' see av there's any complaints from the Injuns in there. Ye'd best hit up the Clearwater, an' make Owl River by way av Lashin' Water Post. Ye'll be raymimberin' old Molaire; av Oi recollect, ye stopped there an' vaccinated the outfit, on yer first patrol."

"Oh, yes, I remember him," answered the boy, "I'll stop there, sure."

The Inspector noted the eagerness in the tone, and his lips pressed hard: "Oi raymimber yer dog's feet was sore, an' ye laid over to doctor 'em."

"Yes."

"Well—better luck, this time, son," he said, and when the boy had left the room, he brought his fist down on the desk-top with a bang. "'Twill be hard on um—but, ut's better to learn about wimmin now than later—like Oi done!"

# BOOK III

# CHAPTER I

## SUNSET—AND A GIRL

A CANOE floated swiftly down the Athabasca, its single occupant, now paddling leisurely, now pausing to trail his paddle as he watched the wooded shores of spruce, birch, and poplar sweep solemnly past, seemed contented with life as he found it. The sun hung low in the west, and the shadows of the trees crept longer, and ever longer across the stream in walls, and battlements, and far-flung spires, that danced and writhed grotesquely on the surface of the swiftly moving water. He rounded a wide bend, and from the top of a bank, a mile ahead, leaped a dozen dazzling points of flame—the glory of the setting sun, caught and hurled back by the windows of the Roman Catholic Mission that stood proudly upon the east bank of the great river. The man in the canoe smiled: “I wonder how it is with the good Father Giroux?” he muttered. “It’s a long time since I’ve seen him.”

At the foot of the bank, he beached the canoe with a deft turn of his paddle, and, pulling it onto the rocky beach, ascended the bank by means of a well-worn path. On the wide grass plot that surrounded the flag pole in front of the buildings, a score of children of assorted sizes and bloods were playing at games. Full blooded little Indians of varied tribes, fractional bloods, and a scattering of white children all played together under the watchful eye of the good Sister Agatha, a worthy member of the devoted order of Grey Nuns.

The Sister smiled and nodded a greeting, as the man passed on up the path toward the porch, where a tall man in priestly garb, holding in his hand a long tobacco pipe, rose from his chair and peered beneath shading hand. A brave figure he presented, standing tall and erect despite his seventy years, with his delicately chiselled features, and the light of the setting sun touching his long locks with the sheen of molten silver.

As the man approached the two wooden steps that gave onto the screened porch, the good priest swung wide the door: “Ah, who but Corporal Downey! Welcome, my good friend! It is long since we have met.” As always, Corporal Downey noted the peculiar timbre of the voice—a voice that neither whined to its God, nor thundered against the sins of his people—a voice that could soften to a caress, or harden to the temper of thin steel—a voice low of pitch, but mighty of word in the lone land beyond the outposts. The voice of Father Giroux.

“Yes, Father—too long. Three years, or is it four? Anyway, not since the reorganization of the Force.” He seated himself and produced pipe and tobacco.

“And, how do you like the change?”

“For the better,” answered the officer, as he held the flame of a match to his pipe.

The old priest smiled: “I thought, when time went on and I did not see you, that when the change came they had made you an Inspector, or even a Superintendent, and had given you a soft berth in the provinces.”

Downey broke the match stick between his fingers, and slowly shook his head: “No. For nineteen years I have been Corporal Downey—an’ Corporal Downey I’ll be—to the end. I want no promotion. I’ve been in Ottawa, an’ later in the Maritime Provinces. Some

of the older men were needed in the territory where the Force was not known. But, my heart was not in it. I was homesick for this,” he swept the timbered horizon with his arm, “an’ when the chance came, I asked transfer, an’ got it.”

“Yes, son,” answered the priest, “I know. Ten years ago, it was, after I had been thirty years in the North, I was called to Montreal.” There was a momentary twinkle in the keen old eyes. “Doubtless, Montreal, too, has need of God—but there be others more fitted to do His work in the cities. I, too, grew homesick for this, and I, too, asked transfer, and got it.”

“It gets into a man’s blood.”

“Yes—into his blood, and his heart, and his soul. In your heart, and in mine, Downey, our wilderness has taken the place of love of woman. It chains us to its bosom with invisible chains, as the love of woman chains men to their hearths and their firesides. And it is wondrously like a woman—this great North of ours—with its passions, and its storms, and its unutterable longing. With its pitiable helplessness, and its unreasoning demands. But, demanding much, it also gives much—to those whose love it holds. The man has yet to live who understands woman—and the man has yet to live who understands the North. For forty years, I have lived with her, have fought with her, and have loved her. She has surrendered to me as the bride of my bed, has tolerated me with the cold indifference of a stranger, and has fought me with the blind ferocity of the tiger. For forty years, I have sought to learn her innermost secrets, and the secrets of her children—and I have failed—as the man must fail who would seek to learn the true soul of a woman.”

The officer laid a friendly hand on the elder man’s knee: “But, Father—you have not failed. The North is richer by the forty years of your service.”

The priest nodded, slowly. “Yes, son, I do not mean that I believe my years have been wasted. The good God would not waste the lifetime of a man who has honestly tried to further His Kingdom upon the earth. It is in seeking to understand the soul of the North, that I have failed.”

“Has it got a soul?” The words came slowly—almost a growl. “Has a woman got a soul—or a man?”

The eyes the old priest turned upon his friend were softly compassionate. “Son, it grieves me to hear those words from the lips of the man who, by the worth of his deeds, I have come to hold in higher regard than any other. Not the grief of my calling that such a doubt should exist—but, a very personal grief that deep within your heart there lies a touch of bitterness. A canker spot that time has failed to entirely heal. I remember that in the earlier days of your service, it flared more often to the fore.”

Downey answered nothing. Indeed it is doubtful if he even heard the softly uttered words of the priest. Around the corner of the house had stepped a girl. She halted, and unconscious of the two who were seated upon the porch, she gazed long and intently upon the glory of the crimson sunset. Then, impulsively, she stretched out her arms toward it. Downey sat as one petrified, his eyes drinking each line and lineament of the lithe young figure. The girl stood in perfect profile, the wind fanning lightly a truant lock of raven hair. That face! That gesture—that unconscious thrusting out of her arms toward the setting sun! Youth outstretching eagerly to grasp the glory—the mystery of the unknown.

Nineteen years vanished as though they had never been—and young Downey—Constable Downey—stood upon the snow at the upper reach of the Clearwater portage and—His pipe clattered noisily upon the floor, and as he stooped to recover it, the girl faced the porch, for the first time aware of its occupants. Her lips curved into a smile as her eyes sought those of the priest: “Isn’t it beautiful, Father—the sunset? Don’t you love it?”

“Yes, my daughter. I love the sunset, and the sunrise, and the times between. It is good to live, Marie.”

The smile broadened. “Yes, Father—it is good to live.”

“And, how are you coming on with the work? Sister Agatha tells me you have far outstripped all others in your studies, and that she is allowing you to help the little ones.”

“They are so cute—those babies. I love them all—and they try so hard to learn their little lessons. Most all of them can say words—and some of them already know many letters. I must go, now—it is time to help put them to bed.”

For a space of moments, gripping his pipe in his hand, Corporal Downey sat staring at the spot where the girl had disappeared. Unnoting the other’s abstraction, the priest gazed into the afterglow.

“Who is she?” The voice sounded flat, and toneless, so that the good Father glanced in surprise at his friend.

“Eh? Who? Marie? She is the daughter of a trapper who lives over on Eaglenest Lake. She has been with us, now two years—a good girl, and bright—the smartest, I have found in many years of teaching. She was eighteen years old when her father brought her into this country, and already, she loves it. For one not born to the life of the wilderness, that is in itself remarkable. Most young women would hate it.” Once again a twinkle crept into the keen old eyes and the lips smiled: “A fine wife she will make for some man, Downey. Is it that you are looking for a wife? She deserves a better man than the most who pass this way.”

The priest was quick to note that there was no answering smile on Corporal Downey’s lips as he answered: “No, Father. Once—long ago—but,—for many years I have been trying to forget.”

A strong, thin hand reached out and rested lightly upon the speaker’s shoulder, and the words of the priest came as if from afar: “I too, son—for many, many years.” A long silence fell upon them. The afterglow faded from the sky, and the deep twilight that is the summer night-dark of the North, settled gradually upon them.

The following morning, the priest accompanied Downey to his canoe. They were fast friends, these two, the veteran officer holding the good priest’s opinions and estimates in high regard. Drawing a note book from his pocket, he thumbed its pages. “Know an Injun called Luke Red Stone, or Luke Red Rock?” he asked.

“Yes, Luke Red Rock. I know him. He should be on Hay River now.”

“We got word that he abandoned his blind wife in a storm last winter.”

The priest nodded: “I think that is the truth. But I doubt you could prove anything on him. The woman was picked up, badly frosted, by some other Indians. She pulled through,

and Luke Red Rock has taken her back. They would probably say that she wandered away and got lost.”

“It won’t hurt to throw a scare into him, though,” opined Downey, and the priest agreed. “How about a white man—Henry Harder? Know anything about him?”

“Yes, he is a bad man. I should like to see the North well rid of him. He worked here as a carpenter when we built the addition to the school. We caught him stealing lead, and sent him about his business. Later he sold an oil location, and has a trading store down river. I know he sells liquor to the Indians, but have not been able to get proof. He brought a Cree girl with him from a trip upriver last fall, and I made him marry her.”

“Didn’t he want to?” asked Downey, with a suggestion of a smile on his lips.

“No—but, I changed his mind for him. They are married.”

Downey’s smile broadened to a grin. He would have liked to hear the story behind that simple statement, “I changed his mind for him,” but, forebore to ask. Father Giroux knew his North—its vicissitudes, its needs, and its requirements. Long experience, and an infinite understanding had taught him to meet its emergencies, by preference, in ways orthodox—but meet them he would, if by necessity, in ways that needs must. For, the bold heart knew no meaning of fear, and despite his three score years and ten, the muscles of the slender, upright body were of the temper of spring steel. When Father Giroux struck, he struck for the right—and many are the stories one may hear of him at camp-fires in the land of the lakes and the rivers.

“I’ll take him on upriver with me when I go. We want him for desertion of his wife an’ two minor children in Calgary. An’ now, with bigamy against him, too, I guess you won’t be bothered with him any further. Just once more. C. Biggs—ever hear of him?”

“Yes. Came down the river with Harder in a canoe. He worked on the new building, too. Was implicated in the theft of the lead. But, I was satisfied it was the older man’s doings, Carl Biggs is only nineteen or twenty, so I kept him here when I bade the other be gone. He stayed all winter, chopping wood, and doing odd jobs. I broke my ankle and he waited on me hand and foot. While I was still laid up, word came of an Indian family in dire distress, some seventy or eighty miles inland. What must the boy do but go to their assistance, although, mind you, he knew nothing of winter travel—and it was very cold. He made the trip and found that the man had been killed by his own gun that he was trying to rig as a spring gun. He brought the woman and three children, through the cold and the storm—and that was a storm—three days of it. This spring I found him employment on the Company steamboat. He is doing well. Always brings presents for those three little Indians when he comes this way. I have my eye on the boy, and I know there is a good man in the making. I am sorry he has run foul of the law. Is it of a serious nature? What is there against him?”

Very deliberately Corporal Downey produced from his pocket the stub of a pencil, and drew some lines across the page of his notebook.

“There’s nothin’ against him,” he answered, as he returned the book and the pencil to his pocket. “What there *was* against him was more of a prank than a crime. If the lad’s makin’ a good man, we’ll let him go ahead an’ finish the job.” Downey stepped into his canoe and pushed it out into the current, and the old priest stood watching until he was swept out of sight along the bend of the river.

As the old man turned toward the path, he was surprised to see Marie standing at the top of the bank, her eyes fixed upon the point where the canoe had disappeared. He moved to the ascent of the steep path, and her eyes met his. She was smiling, an illusive sort of smile—more the hint of a smile.

“That man of the police,” she said, her eyes again on the distant bend, “I have not seen him before.”

“No. That is Corporal Downey, for many years my friend. He is very wise—one of the best men of the police, and he knows the North, and loves it.”

“But,” there were little wrinkles of perplexity between her eyebrows, “he is not old.”

“He has been twenty years in the service. And, his hair is grey.”

“But his eyes are young. The grey hair—it is, maybe, that he has lived some great trouble, or has known some very great sorrow.”

“It was long ago, then, for in the sixteen or eighteen years I have known him his hair has been grey, possibly a little greyer, now—but, not much. But why are you not at your studies? And, why do you ask about Corporal Downey?” Was it a slight flush, or touch of morning sunlight that brushed her cheek?

She answered quickly: “Why, it is not time yet, for the studies? And, oh I don’t know—I like him—so straight, and so strong looking—and so—clean.”

“Yes, he is clean—mind and body. He should be an Inspector, or a Superintendent.”

“And, why isn’t he, then?”

“That is his secret—and the answer, he alone knows. Men know that he has steadfastly—stubbornly refused promotion. Mayhap it has to do with the greying of his hair—who knows? But, run along, now, my daughter, and attend yourself to your studies.”

As the girl strode swiftly away, Father Giroux passed slowly along the path to his own quarters, filled his long pipe, took a book from its place, seated himself, and thoughtfully turned its pages. For a long time his eyes followed the printed page, but his mind took no heed of the words his eyes read. The good Father would have been pained had he realized that he was smiling benignly over the words of an austere Saint.

## CHAPTER II

PIERRE MOLAIRE

ON the river, Corporal Downey trailed his paddle more than usual as the shores slipped smoothly past. God! Could there be born into the world two people so nearly alike? A trifle taller, this one, a trifle softer of voice, maybe—twenty years is a long time to preserve each tiny minute detail of—a memory. But the hair, the eyes, the lips—and that impulsive throwing out of her arms to the sunset! Her age, too, would be about the same as she stood that day on the snow at the head of the Clearwater portage. “Margot,” the name forced itself from between his lips, and again—“Margot.” It was always thus that he thought of her. Not, as he first saw her, standing beside her three dogs, with her axe in her hand and the Christmas tree lying on the snow. Nor, as she had looked while they had hunted together. Nor, seated opposite him at the whist table. Nor, as she had looked that tragic day he had hastened so eagerly to tell her of his promotion—only to have her explain, with tears in her eyes, and a pitiful quaver in her voice, that she was the wife of Murdo MacFarlane. Nor, as he had seen her when duty took him to Lashing Water, after that day—once when she was heavy with Murdo MacFarlane’s child—and once on the day the wandering Indian woman had left the nugget of gold that sent Murdo northward into the unknown, taking Margot, and the little Margot—she was little more than a year old, the baby—on the fatal journey from which none of them ever returned.

Years later, Downey had found a rotting cabin, far in the barren lands to the northward, beside the waters of a nameless lake, and hard by the cabin, on a high knoll that gave out over the lake, a single grave with a small wooden slab, and burned into the wood was the single word: MARGOT. Miles from the cabin on a stretch of treeless plain, he had come upon bits of bleached and wolf-gnawed human bones and a weather-wrecked sled that he knew for MacFarlane’s. Whereupon, he had returned to the grave, cleared it of berry bushes and scrub, and transplanted wildflowers upon its half-sunken mound. And there he established his shrine, and there he returned whenever circumstances would permit, cutting the bushes, renewing the wildflowers, lying beside it by the hour—thinking—thinking— And, when, upon one of these visits, he found the wooden slab rotted off, he did not replace it, but left it lying there, half buried in the mould among the wildflowers.

But, always, he thought of her as she stood that day at the portage, with the words of love warm on her lips, and her promise to wait for him warm in his heart.

“I’ve been tryin’ for years to forget,” he muttered, as he dug his paddle savagely into the water, “an’—then—last night—she stood there not quite just the same—But, God! How like her! Who is she? I don’t believe he even told me her name—Marie—he said—the daughter of a trapper over on Eaglenest Lake. Marie—that’s a good name—French name—Margot was French. What is it they believe in India about reincarnation, or whatever they call it—damn nonsense. There can’t any religion prove that when you’re dead you ain’t dead. Where’s the good of all this heaven an’ hell an’ reincarnation, an’ souls, an’ stuff? A man gets all the heaven an’ hell that’s comin’ to him right here on this earth. Mine’s been mostly hell—but—it could be—different. Look at Gus Janier, an’



young Davey Fallon, Davey Gaunt, he should be—look at the fine women they got—an' they're happy. If happiness isn't heaven—an' unhappiness hell, I don't know what you'd call it. But—I'm a fool—an old man like me—old enough to be her father—thinkin' stuff like that. I'll keep away from the mission—that's what I'll do. Her eyes got kind of dark an' soft, an' she smiled when she was talkin' about those little kids she was teachin'—an' putting to bed—she loves little babies—tell by the way she talked—You damned *old* fool! You're forty-two years old! You'll never see her again. Can't you ever forget anything?"

Ten miles farther on, high hills showed to the westward. "Birch Mountains," he murmured to himself, as though testing his memory of the geography of the country. "Just in behind them lies Eaglenest Lake. Damn Eaglenest Lake! Wonder what sort of an outfit this trapper's got over there? Didn't know there was any white trapper over around Eaglenest. Wonder what kind of a fellow her father would be? An' what her mother's like. She's all white—any one can see that. Wouldn't hurt just to slip over an' see—ought to know as much as you can about the folks up here—might come in handy, lots of ways." And so, Corporal Downey turned his canoe shoreward, and, an hour later, was poling up the Moose River, somewhere about the headwaters of which lay Eaglenest Lake.

Three days later, he pushed out onto the waters of the lake that lies next but one to the end of the chain which forms the headwaters of Moose River. It is a small lake—a beautiful lake, with its background of highland and spruce swamp merging into the distance. Downey lighted his pipe, and, picking up his paddle, began leisurely to skirt the shore. A mile farther on, he found what he was seeking—a canoe drawn up on a strip of shingle that lay between the water's edge and a high bank. Drawing his own canoe beside the other, he followed the path that ascended the slope at an easy grade. "Quite a bit of work to cut this path," he muttered. "Most of 'em wouldn't have bothered." At the top of the bank he paused, and stared about him in astonishment. Corporal Downey had lived many years in the North, and this cabin was like no trapper's cabin he had ever seen. More nearly it resembled the cabins he had seen on the shores of Ontario lakes which had become famous as summer resorts. Fifty feet back from the edge of the bank it stood in the centre of an area of perhaps an acre from which the underbrush had been carefully removed, and the trees left standing. A miniature park which effectively set off the lines of the cabin. Of peeled logs, it was, beautifully fitted and cornered, with broad projecting eaves, and—wonder of wonders, a porch, cosily screened. The windows were screened also, and Downey noticed that they stood open to allow a full sweep of air through the house. "Kind of figured it would be different—bound to be different—but nothin' like this."

He approached the porch door and tapped lightly with his knuckles. There was no response, and he seated himself upon a rustic bench artistically fashioned from white birch, and removing his hat, allowed the breeze to ripple his hair. He had sat thus for, perhaps, a quarter of an hour, when suddenly, as if from nowhere, a man stepped before him. The officer, trained by long experience to catch the slightest sound, had no intimation of the other's approach. The man, smiling, bowed low: "Welcome, sir, to my *château*. I am honored by a visit from a man of the soldier police. Of your accomplishments I have heard much. Your organization is feared and respected through the land."

Downey, who had risen to his feet, acknowledged the compliment with a smile: "We do—what we do," he answered. "I suppose there's nothin' that couldn't be done better."

“Such modesty! But, I do not admit that. For myself—I like to think that what I do, could be done better by no man.”

The officer’s smile broadened. As this cabin was like no trapper’s cabin he had ever seen—so was this man like no trapper he had ever seen—this man who looked thirty—but may have been sixty. “I guess when it comes to cabin buildin’, you’re about right, at that.”

“So you like it—my little cabin? And, I like it. What is to do, is to do well—or not at all, eh? Yes—it is a good cabin.”

“Build it all alone?”

“No, no—my daughter, the little Marie—she is now at the mission of the good Father Giroux—she helped me. A long time it took—for we did our work well. And we laughed, and we sang, and we rested, and we talked, and were happy—for were we not building our home? It is long since we had a home—very long—never a real home—for a *cabaret* is not a proper home. We come from France. But, here I stand, gabbling like a silly woman, and forgetting entirely that we should be talking over a glass of wine. You do not disdain a glass of wine? It is good wine—I, myself, made it from berries that grow. Not strong wine—but good. Only the juice of the berries.”

In the cozy living room, the man paused with an air of pardonable pride: “Everything, you see, we ourselves made with our hands—only the windows are the work of others—the windows and the stoves—the cooking stove in the kitchen, and the two small stoves for the bedrooms—for, in winter it is very cold.” He excused himself, leaving Downey to an inspection of the room. A door standing open at either end revealed the interiors of the two small bedrooms, while the door through which the man had passed evidently led to a kitchen. In the center of the rear wall was a huge fire-place of stone, with a broad mantle shelf above, and over that, a pair of caribou horns set into the mortar to serve as a rack for a half-dozen guns of different calibres. The floor was of whip-sawed lumber, planed, and beautifully polished, and the ceiling beamed in natural wood. All furniture, chairs, tables, beds, were of hand manufacture, and their fashioning showed the trapper to be a craftsman of no mean ability. “An’ she helped to build it,” was the thought uppermost in Corporal Downey’s mind, “helped cut, an’ peel, an’ roll up the logs—helped whipsaw the flooring, an’ the tops for the tables—man’s work—an’ her, a girl like that!”

His host returned bearing a pitcher and two glasses. “Is it not that we should sit on the porch? I love to sit and to look out over the lake. It is very lonely here when my little Marie is away. This lake of mine—it talks to me of many things when I am lonely.”

Downey nodded understanding. “How long have you lived here,” he asked.

“It is now three and a half years since I left France. I have lived here more than two years.”

“But your speech—you don’t talk like one who has so recently come from France.”

“Ha!” The man snapped his fingers with a peculiar outflinging of his arm. “But I have spoken the English as much as the French tongue for twenty—thirty years. I have not lived in France except for the two years before I came here, since I was a small lad.”

Corporal Downey instinctively liked this man, with the merry, devil-may-care twinkle in his eye, and who, despite his loneliness, laughed easily, and often. As they sipped the wine he encouraged his host to talk: “But, why should you leave France an’ build a home in the middle of the bush, far from the companionship of men? You are no trapper.”

As if glad of the opportunity to talk, the Frenchman laughed and refilled the glasses: "My name is Pierre Molaire, and——"

"Molaire!" The name exploded upon Downey's lips—and he stared unseeing at the man before him. In his brain rose two pictures—the girl beside the porch of Father Giroux's cottage, with her arms outstretched to the sunset—and the other girl—years before—on the snow at the head of the portage.

"Yes, Molaire," the other answered, glancing curiously into his face. "Is it a name you know?"

"Aye, a name I know," answered Downey, sombrely. "Rather, a name I once knew—well. But, its owner is dead these many years. Jules Molaire—he was factor at Lashing Water."

"My brother," announced the man. "He was many years older than I. He left home when I was but a baby. I never knew him, save through the letters he wrote at rare intervals to our mother. I was a reckless lad—the Molaire blood is reckless,—restless blood. I left home when but a lad to seek adventure. I had read of the adventures of many men—of Pizarro, of Vasco de Gama, of Balboa, of the Buccaneers, and of that greatest of all adventurers—Napoleon. These are men who have lived! Who fought and conquered, or who were themselves conquered by the turn of inevitable circumstance. And whether they conquered, or were conquered, makes no difference to them now. They loved life. They *lived*—drank deeply of life in its fullness—and are gone, as we all must go.

"I, too, would live—and so I ran away to seek adventure among the ships of the sea, and among the peoples of many lands. I have travelled far and yon. In Algiers, in China, in South America, and among the islands of Polynesia, I sought adventure. Were I to tell of the sights I have seen—of the things I have done, most men would say 'here is one who has found adventure.' But, it seems not so to me. Always there has been something beyond—something of higher adventure of which I have never tasted. Always there has been the craving within me to do that which I have not done. To find the great adventure that should satisfy my soul. On my body are the scars of wars—and other scars in the receiving of which most men would have found satisfaction of their love of adventure. And in parts of the world are men who carry scars of my infliction. Also, some men are dead, that died at my hand—but, always in the fairness of open fighting. I have looked death in the face many times, and have laughed, and have called it good. Yet, I have never been satisfied. I married—but, there was no adventure in that. I was off again upon my world chasing. When my daughter was fifteen I returned to France, and bought a small *cabaret* and for two years I lived the life of a *marchand de vin*. But that was no adventure, and my heart longed to be away from there—to find its great adventure.

"Whether the tales I had told had fired her blood, or whether it was but the desire to be with me, I do not know—but my wife, too, would go with me out into the world—she, too, would seek adventure by my side. Well enough—it was a sorry business, and dull—the little *cabaret*—and only a bare living.

"It was then I bethought me of my brother Jules, and of the letters I had heard read as a boy. I remembered he had written of many strange things in the Northland. I could not recall exactly of what he wrote—the mother was dead, and the letters gone. But there were tales of fighting the cold, and of being lost—of Indians, and the romance of the fur trade—of searching for gold, and of wild brave doings in the camps. 'Maybe,' I said, 'maybe,

we shall find the great adventure in that land of cold and snow, among the camps of Indians, and of the men who dig for gold.' So we sold out the little *cabaret* and made ready to sail for Canada, and almost upon the eve of our departure a small mouse ran out from behind the stones of the fire-place, and my wife screamed and jumped upon her chair, and the chair toppled over and she fell, striking the back of her head—and died. Thus, she found her great adventure in the fear of a small mouse—which is a great adventure, after all—a greater than I have known.

“So, with the little Marie, I came to Canada. At the offices of the Hudson’s Bay Company they told me my brother had been dead for many years. They would give me no work to do, for I knew nothing of fur. My money was almost gone, so I worked here and there. But there was no adventure in spiking down the rails of a railroad, nor yet in driving the early morning wagon of one who sells milk—I, who have fought in wars, and have seen men die, could not end my days thus. It was then I remembered the gold that was said to lie in the sands of the rivers of the North. I came away from the settlements, and am now seeking adventure in the search for gold. Also, I trap, having learned something of the art from the Indians. But, there is no adventure in trapping—only a living—but, one must live. And there is small adventure in the search for gold—only hard work. But when I find gold, maybe I shall find, also adventure—if not in the finding, maybe in the spending. What think you, may adventure be bought at a price?” The keen eyes were twinkling, and the man’s lips smiled. But Downey did not smile.

“Yes,” he answered, gravely, “always at a price. But not for gold. Often the price is paid in lives.”

The man shrugged, and with the peculiar outfling of his hand, which Downey had noticed before, he snapped his fingers. “And a fair price for a truly great adventure. Is it not fitting that a man’s great adventure should be his last?”

“Why, I suppose so,” smiled Downey. “But, if it costs him his life, he don’t get much time to enjoy the adventure.”

“Wrong! Wrong! The joy of adventure comes of living the moments of that adventure. A bygone adventure is—ashes. To think upon it is but to wish in vain to recall it. To boast of it is but the vapid mouthing of a braggart. Of the adventures I have had, I cannot recall one to live its scenes again, except in memory—and memory is—ashes. Only in the seeking of new adventure does one live. You, who know this land—tell me—is there adventure here, or there?”

“I suppose there is,” smiled Downey. “I’ve never hunted it, outside the general run of duty.”

“A-ha, there you have it—in the run of duty! You, too, love adventure, else you would not be in the police. Tell me, do you love this travelling afar in the wild places—or, do you desire a more comfortable desk at some detachment in the settlements?”

“They kept me down there for quite a while,” grinned Downey, “I asked for transfer.”

“Because in you, too, is born the love of adventure! Which would you rather do, match your brain and your nerves against the machinations of some super-rogue, whose wit and resource, and boldness matched your own—or go fetch in some sniveling youngster whose heart had turned to water at sight of a uniform?”

“A man acting under orders, must take his duties as they come,” answered the officer,

noncommittally.

“Most certainly. However, if there should be choice——”

“Why, then a man would naturally take the detail that held the more of interest.”

“Which means the greater chance for adventure—is it not?”

The officer smiled: “Puttin’ it that way, I suppose so—yes.”

“Ah, yes—for love of adventure, alone, a man might even break the laws of the land, eh?”

“Laws are broke for greed, or for revenge, not just for sport.”

“But he who would break a law that another should lose to his own gain would be but a sorry wight in whose soul would be no room for love of great adventure.”

“He’d be takin’ too long a chance,” Downey hazarded, “breakin’ the law for sport—the game wouldn’t be worth the candle.”

“But men risk their lives gladly for the sport of adventure, and consider the game well worth the candle even if they lose.”

“Aye—but, mind you—losin’ life is one thing, and spendin’ long years in prison is another. For such a man, prison would be hell.”

“And he would never go to hell! Such a man would play the game to the end—he would never be taken alive.”

“Maybe not,” admitted the officer. And so the chat ran on till the shadows lengthened, and Molaire went into the kitchen to prepare supper, for it was agreed that Downey should remain at the cabin until morning, before resuming his journey. “You shall have the room of the little Marie. Always when you come this way there will be a room and a hearty welcome from Molaire—and I hope you will come often, for I am a lonely man—yet a man who enjoys friends.”

And as Downey sat alone on the porch and smoked, staring out over the lake toward the sunset, he pondered many things. His liking for his host had grown with the passing of the hours, and he wondered at the vagary of mind that would impel a man of intelligence and of broad understanding to bury himself in the wilderness to seek gold—not for gold’s sake nor for what gold could bring—but purely for the sake of adventure.

Corporal Downey departed the next morning, and, during the days and weeks of the long river trail, his thoughts turned often to Pierre Molaire—but most of all to “the little Marie.”

## CHAPTER III

### MARIE

**D**ESPITE his oft reiterated vow that he would henceforth avoid the mission, Corporal Downey swung his canoe inshore upon his return upriver. He must see Father Giroux, he told himself (like one who cheats himself at “solitaire”)—the good man would be glad to know that he had warned Luke Red Rock concerning future treatment of his wife;—that he approved of the way young Biggs was making a man of himself;—and most of all that the river would soon see the last of Henry Harder. . . . And, maybe she’ll come and stand there the way she did before, with her arms reaching out to the sunset. . . .

Aloud, he spoke to Harder, who was sullenly paddling bow: “We’ll stop over night at the mission. Save makin’ camp.” Had anyone suggested that Downey had killed time, in order that he might arrive just at sunset at the mission he had sworn to avoid, he would have frowned at the implication. Nevertheless, he had camped longer than his wont at noon, and not once during the afternoon had he urged his prisoner to greater effort with the paddle. In his heart, Downey knew these things to be true, and arraigned by his conscience, pleaded guilty boldly and unashamed.

At the top of the bank, they were greeted by Father Giroux, who had noted the approach of the canoe: “Back again so soon, my friend—and brought your man with you! I trust he gave you no trouble?”

“No, no—he’s no fool—just the usual stuff. Claimed first he’d never seen Calgary, and then, that the squaw was just workin’ for him—that he hadn’t married her. But when he found out I had the goods on him, he came along without any trouble.”

Harder interrupted with a snarl, addressing the priest: “It’s your fault! You made me marry her. I’d never marry no squaw, or no other woman, without I was made to. I had enough of women ’fore I ever seen her! They can’t do nothin’ to me when I was forced into gettin’ married.”

“You did not tell me you were already married,” retorted the mild voice of the priest, “else I should have taken the girl away, and left you with your sin.”

“How did he force you?” asked Downey, knowing he would never hear the incident from the lips of Father Giroux.

There was hate in the man’s eyes as he answered: “He dam’ near choked me to death—that’s how he done it! Look at him! He looks like an old man, an’ he talks soft an’ easy. He come in the store, an’ he asks me is I an’ the squaw married. ‘Who wants to know?’ I says. ‘I do,’ says he. ‘Find out then, an’ be dam’ to you!’ says I, ‘an’ I don’t need no priests nosin’ round in my business.’ ‘I’m goin’ to,’ says he, an’ then he begun follerin’ me around, a-talkin’, an’ a-argerin’, till I got mad. ‘No,’ I says, at last, when he’d dam’ near drove me crazy with his talk. ‘I ain’t married to her! Now what the hell are you goin’ to do about it?’ I’d walked right up to him an’ stuck my fist under his nose. ‘I’m a-goin’ to make you marry her,’ says he, an’ ’fore I know’d what was happenin’ he retch out an’ had me by the throat. God—them long, skinny fingers! I kin feel ’em yet. They clamped down like steel claws. I tried to hit him—to smash him to hell—but I couldn’t—an’ then my

lungs was a-bustin', an' they was a roarin' in my ears, an' my eyes an' tongue felt like they was a-bulgin' out of my head. I'd dropped by then, but he never let go his holt. I was a-dyin', I tell you—an' then he eased up—jest a little—jest so's I could pump a little air into me. 'Will you marry her now?' he says. 'No!' I tries to yell, but I didn't have wind enough to yell, an' it sounded a mile away. Then, he clamps down on me again. By God! I'll marry any one 'fore I'll git choked to death, so I agreed, an' when I could stand up, he pulls out his book, an' marries us."

"I should not have choked you to death," explained the priest, softly. "But, had you not acceded to the demands of right, I should have choked you for a long, long time. It is mortal sin thus to live with a woman in open adultery, and is a bad example to others. I was thinking more of the girl than of——"

"Why'n hell didn't you choke her then?"

"That would not have accomplished my purpose. Had you listened to entreaty, to argument, or had you the welfare of your eternal soul, and the soul of the girl, at heart, I should not have been forced to so extreme a measure."

"I don't believe in no soul!" growled the man. "An' if I did—to hell with it!"

"That, I am afraid, will be its ultimate destination, unless you hearken to the voice of the Master, and turn from your ways of sin——"

"I heard all that onct—an' onct is enough," snarled the man. "Mind yer own business!"

"I am minding my business, son, in the endeavor to salvage a sin-torn soul——"

"You shut up!" roared Harder, goaded to red rage by the words. He whirled upon Downey. "An' what's more, if you want to do so dam' much arrestin', arrest him! I'm agoin' to have him arrested fer attempted murder. It's agin the law—more'n what I done. I know my rights!"

"You can lay your information before the proper authorities at the proper time," explained the officer, dryly. "I make no doubt it will be given proper attention."

"But, come, Corporal," invited the good Father, ignoring the raging prisoner, "we shall eat and have time to watch the sunset from the little porch. Each evening I watch it as I smoke my pipe and think—of many things."

"Got some place where I can cache yon scum for the night, an' find him there in the morning? I've no time to be chasing him round the country, if he should try to pull out."

"There is a small room in the basement of the chapel that will hold him. A room well suited for meditation."

Seated on the porch, the two friends talked as the sun sank low. "And, now, my friend, that you have had your fling at the wilderness, shall you go back to your desk in the provinces?"

"A man goes where he's ordered to go," answered the officer, slowly. "If I'm to be consulted in the matter, I'll not be goin' back to the provinces."

"And your choice would be the—rivers?—the Arctic?—the Yukon?—or the country about the Bay?"

"Any one of them would be good," answered Downey, noncommittally. "They've established new posts way north of the coast."

“But—your choice would be?”

A light footstep sounded, and the priest’s question went unheeded, as the form of a girl appeared at the corner of the porch, her eyes on the glowing western sky. The eyes of Corporal Downey no longer turned to the merely inanimate glory of the sunset, and his heart pounded riotously.

“Marie!” At the voice of the priest, the girl faced them, and, seeing Downey, smiled with the quick, naïve pleasure of a child. “Come, draw a chair beside us. This is Corporal Downey of the police.” And, as the girl stepped lithely to the screen door, the good Father wondered again whether the heightened glow upon the young cheeks were but the trick of evening sunlight. He turned to the officer:

“Downey, this is Marie Molaire. She is our best pupil. Her father is Pierre Molaire, a trapper, whose cabin is on Eaglenest Lake, beyond the Birch Mountains.”

“Oh! but he isn’t a trapper—really!” The blue-black eyes were laughing, as the smile deepened on the red lips. It was with a stab of poignant pain that Downey looked into those eyes,—so like . . . other eyes. . . . And then the low, rich voice; “He is—I don’t know what you would call him. He searches for gold—but it’s not the gold that he wants. It’s—life. Oh! I cannot explain. It’s adventure. He has always sought for adventure. Why, sometimes we would not see him for years,—my mother and I. But he always sent us his pay. It is not money he wants,—nor gold. Oh! sometimes I think he’s just never grown-up,—and then sometimes I think that I really don’t know him at all, even now,—when he is all I have. But oh! I love him! He is so good, and so kind, and so patient always—and always he laughs. If you could but know him——”

Corporal Downey’s lips were smiling into the laughing eyes, as he interrupted: “I do know him.”

“You know my father—you know him! And isn’t it then as I said? Don’t you like him? But, where—how——?”

Downey’s face became grave; he cleared his throat slightly, and avoided the eyes of the good Father Giroux, who watched the two in silence from behind the screen of blue tobacco smoke. “I swung up the Moose, after I left here. Kind of gettin’ acquainted with the country again. Long time since I’ve been through here. A man’s got to keep acquainted with the country, isn’t that true, Father?”

“Yes,” replied the old priest, with a quizzical smile, “it is what makes for efficiency, Marie.”

“And, of course, you came out on Eaglenest Lake, and found our cabin!”

“Yes—of course—that is—yes, it’s a fine cabin.” It was the first time in the long years of their acquaintance that Father Giroux had found Corporal Downey floundering among his words, and only stern pressure of his lips on his pipe-stem stifled the good man’s chuckle.

“Do you like it? We think it’s a nice cabin, too. It is our home. We built it with our own hands. And you found him there—my father?”

“Yes, I found him. Not when I first got there, but he soon came. An’ nothing would do but I must stop over night.”

“And you like him?” She leaned forward, with confident expectation in the answer, and Downey’s unruly heart leaped again.



“Aye—very much. As you say, he is one who loves life for the sake of living. He has travelled far, an’ has seen much;—an’ by the twinkle in his eye, the smile on his lips, an’ the laugh in his voice, he has taken his joy of life. His love for adventure we talked about.”

“Yes.” A wistful look crept into the great deep eyes, “And, yet—always he seems searching for more adventure—searching for something he has never found. Always, there is something beyond——”

“ ‘Never have I seen Carcassonne.’ ” The priest’s quotation broke in upon the girl; and she was quick to answer:

“Oh! but Father, it is not like that! We lived near Carcassonne—but a very few kilometers. He has seen Carcassonne many times. But, there is nothing in Carcassonne!”

“Aye—nothing!”

Both gazed questioningly into the imperturbable face of the priest, and, at that moment, a voice called from the direction of the dormitory.

“Oh! I must go! That is Sister Agatha,—she wants me. It is time to put the dear little babies to bed.” She extended her hand to Corporal Downey, who stood beside her—a handsome figure, thought the priest,—this officer with his clean-cut features, and the touch of dying sunlight on his greying hair. “Good-bye,” she said, simply. “I hope I shall see you again—many times.”

As her slim, strong fingers closed about his own, the man grew tense, as he resisted his great desire to draw her to him. Then—“Good-bye,” his voice sounded gruff to his own ears. “I, too, hope so. But, I’m afraid it’s not to be.”

The hand was slowly withdrawn from his, and the girl regarded him gravely: “No? You are going away again—far?”

“A man never knows. There’s times he would do one thing—but must do another.”

“I suppose that is true,” she answered, and Father Giroux noted that not only was the smile gone from the red lips, but that the blue-black eyes were unnaturally sombre. “Shall we not hope that they do not send you away too far? But, now I must run, or those little ones will be crying for their Marie. Don’t you love little babies?”

Downey cleared his throat harshly: “Why—yes—sure I do—I suppose—that is—I—I—never saw much of them—except papooses—they always look kind of—of—nice.” And then she was gone.

On the porch was a silence as crimson faded to rose, and rose to grey twilight. Downey’s match scratched harshly, and the flare of it lighted his features, throwing into relief the muscles of a tightly clenched jaw. The match went out, and in the further silence, and the deepening twilight, the good priest pondered.

At last, he spoke: “You have not answered my question. Your choice—would it be the rivers?”

“Aye—it would be the rivers. But there’s a reason it should be far from the rivers.”

The reply was in a tone of quiet conviction. “A man’s decision should be based, not alone upon that which, deep within himself, he believes fitting, but also upon the welfare of others.”

“Maybe, it was about the welfare of—others I was thinkin’.”

“If an old man’s advice be worth his words, I would say your place is on the rivers. Who of all the men on the force know the country from the Landing to the Arctic as you know it? If my memory serves me, it was on the rivers you made your first patrol.”

“It touched upon the rivers. It was out of Prince Albert. Aye—you might say it was on the rivers I made my first patrol—and, God knows, it would be upon the rivers I should like to make my last.”

## CHAPTER IV

### DOWNNEY REMAINS ON THE RIVERS

AS Corporal Downey proceeded southward with his prisoner, his thoughts were not upon the man who paddled sullenly in the bow of the canoe, nor upon the timbered banks of the river. They were upon the girl—the girl with the laughing, deep eyes, and the red lips that smiled. All the suppressed heart-hunger of the years surged in a warm glow within him, as his thoughts recalled and dwelt upon her every word—her every slightest gesture. He remembered the half-eager, half-wistful expression with which she had spoken of the strange young-old man who was her father,—and the light in her face when she told of her love for him. When she awoke to the *real* love for a man—God! what a miracle! A miracle—she was a miracle now—Margot, sleeping peacefully under the lonely mound by the lonely far away little lake—and Margot here, vibrant with young life. . . . Margot—Marie. . . . If she would love a man! . . . Damn Harder! Can't he paddle steady?

He remembered how the smile had faded from the eyes and the lips, when he had told her he would not see her again. Would the smile have faded if . . . ? Of course it would! What are you thinkin',—you fool? Think *she'd* look twice at a man old enough to be her father? They don't see many folks up here, an' she just hated to have *anyone* leave an' say they weren't comin' back. Father Giroux, now—what did he mean by “a man must think about the welfare of others?” Just kind of like to have me in the river division because he knows I know the country—that's all:—that I'd do a better job than a new man. But that twinkle in his eye, an' the little twist to the corners of his mouth—? He was watchin' us—both of us. Was he thinkin' too— No! You're goin' crazy! He asked me that last trip, if I was lookin' for a wife—an' I told him “no.” An' I'm not! Even if I was, I'm too old, much too old—for her. Lord! If she can think as much of them babies—Injuns, an' breeds, an' trash like that—what would she think of her own! If I thought I could ever mean anything to *her* welfare. I'd—I'd— There you go again, “Damn it!” The last two words were uttered explosively,—aloud. Harder turned his sullen face sternward:

“S'matter, ain't I pullin' strong enough to suit you?”

“You're steerin' in shore.”

“Where I come from, hind paddle does the steerin'.”

“Shut up!” growled Downey and relapsed into silence.

“I'll ask fer transfer soon as I get to Edmonton. I got to get away from here. It's best for—both.”

But, at Edmonton, he did not ask for a transfer. The Superintendent greeted him warmly: “Downey, old man, it sure takes half the weight of the world off my shoulders—having you here with me! What with oil activity along the rivers, and all, we've just about got our hands full. The lower end is well taken care of, and up here we're getting along—but, there's a long stretch between for the men we've got. There's no one knows the river country like you do. Lord! man, I'm glad they sent you over to me!”

All of which was a very unusual speech for a Superintendent to make to a Corporal.

But Corporal Downey was—different.

“Anything special?” he asked.

“Several things special. First place, we’ve got a new kind of crook on our hands. We’ll handle him from here, though. Sort of super hold-up man. Works alone, an’ laughs while he works. Then, tells his victims to tell the police to look for Tom Traverse. Got away with a pay-roll job on the river just above Old House, and, a couple of weeks later, walks in and calmly collects six thousand dollars from the cashier of the Crayton Bank at the point of a gun. Then in a week, he got away with the express money on the train between Smith and Sawbridge, and probably escaped into the Pelican Mountains. I’ve got two men up there, anyhow. In every case his work is the same. Just appears, chuckles behind his mask as he works, and then tells ’em to look for Tom Traverse. Haven’t had anything just like it since the days of Notorious Bishop;—but Bishop’s been in Stony Mountain for years.”

“Don’t know—never heard of Tom Traverse. Must know the country, the way he scatters his work around. Want me to get on the job?”

“No—anyway, not now. Got something else for you to investigate down river. Here’s a report we got of an oil worker of some kind that a trapper found with his head bashed in on Burnt River. Looks like a murder. Lord knows we’ve tried to keep the undesirable element out of the oil country—but some are bound to slip in. This looks like a real case.”

Downey examined the meagre report, and handed it back: “I’ll be pullin’ out for the Burnt River country in the morning,” he said; but the Superintendent did not see the peculiar smile that twisted the Corporal’s lips as he passed out the door. “Looks like what they call fate is takin’ a hand in the game,” he muttered to himself. “But, I couldn’t ask for a transfer, after what he said. Guess the old man really does need me.” And again the peculiar smile,—the name of the trapper who had found the body was Pierre Molaire!

Once again, Corporal Downey was drifting down the Athabasca; his eyes, unheeding, upon the familiar wooded banks. He was approaching the mission of Father Giroux. A dozen times in the past two days, he had told himself that he would not stop at the mission, but, now, with the mission one bend ahead, and sunset only a matter of minutes: “He’ll be sittin’ on the porch smokin’ his pipe,” he said, half aloud. “He might know somethin’ about this oil man case—might have heard somethin’ from the Injuns, or someone. He’s wise to what’s goin’ on along the rivers—dam’ good man. Better stop and see him—might overlook a bet if I didn’t. Might save a lot of time, later. Save makin’ camp, too.” And then the real reason—“Maybe she’ll come.”

The bend was rounded, and, like a welcoming beacon, the reflected rays of the low hanging sun flashed to him from the windows of the mission. He ascended the bank. Who was that watching the children at their romping games? No!—only Sister Agatha. Downey passed with a greeting, for Father Giroux had risen, and was holding open the screen door: “Come in, my friend, you are again just in time for the sunset.”

“Worth seein’ from here,” commented the Corporal, as he settled himself in his chair, and filled his pipe.

“Worth seeing from anywhere. A daily spectacle of grandeur and beauty,—perhaps, one can read there a promise of still greater glory and beauty.”

“Aye,” agreed Downey, though his thoughts were not those of the good priest. “An’,

from here you get a great view of it.”

“A grand view indeed,—a grand view indeed. . . . My friend, I am very glad you are still on the river.”

“A man goes where he is ordered. The Superintendent seems to think he needs me here.”

“You asked for transfer?”

The rim of the sun had just touched the timbered heights beyond the river. Without removing his eyes from it, the Corporal replied: “No—o—You see, I couldn’t very well after he had spoken——”

“No, of course you couldn’t,” broke in the priest, “and he is right. You *are* needed here. It is not like the old days. With the discovery of oil, many men have come into the country, good, bad, and indifferent—but, all men. They do not bring their women, and—you remember the days before the police went into the Arctic, the debauchery of the coast natives by the wintering whalers. I fear for the young women of my people. The case of Harder is the only one that has come to my notice, but there will be others—and, only God knows where the next blow will fall.”

The sun disappeared in a blaze of crimson and gold, and Downey nodded, slowly, but spoke no word.

Father Giroux’s lips clamped tighter about his pipe-stem. Three times in as many minutes, he had seen the eyes of the officer stray from the glory of the sunset for a quick expectant glance toward the corner of the porch, where the path led to the dormitory. The Corporal shifted his chair slightly, and relighted his pipe—which had not gone out. In the west, the color was fast fading—again that swift glance—and again. “H-m-m, maybe there won’t be any trouble.”

“It is bound to come—not one case, but many. Where has there ever been an influx of white men into a country that the natives have not suffered? It will be no different here from elsewhere.”

“Maybe you’re right.”

“You know I am right. But, my friend, with you and me both on the river, there will be less of it than were we not.”

Downey grinned: “As long as you keep the grip in your ten fingers.”

“And you hold your authority. Together we can do much.”

Perhaps it was the word, authority, that brought to Downey’s mind the dead oil man,—perhaps, because the deepening twilight had killed the hope within it, his mind was free to turn to his case: “Hear anything about an oil man bein’ murdered over on Burnt River?”

“Pierre Molaire was here three or four days ago, and he told me of finding the body. He had reported the incident to the police at Fort McMurray. He stopped here on his return.”

“I was sent up here to investigate.” Downey refilled his pipe, and hitched his chair. “H-m-m, that daughter of his—she likes the sunset, too.”

“She loves it, as I do. She is not here now.”

“Not here!”

“No, she has gone home for a short visit with her father.”

“Alone?” The word rang sharp.

“No, no! Though she has made the trip alone many times. But this time she went with Molaire.”

A few moments later, Downey recovered his hat from the floor, and rose to his feet. “Well, I’ll be goin’.”

“Going? Surely, you will spend the night here?”

“Thanks, not this trip, Father. You see, in a case like this, that might be a murder, the difference of a few hours might cut quite a figure.”

“Yes, yes, that is so, my friend. I can understand that moments may be very precious.” The twilight hid the twinkle of the kindly eyes.

“That’s dead right, Father,—and it’ll be plenty light for an hour yet, and by that time the moon will be up.”

From the top of the bank, the priest called, as Downey pushed his canoe into the current. “We’ll be seeing you often, I hope!”

“Kind of looks that way—now.” The canoe merged into the darkness, and for several minutes the good Father Giroux stood peering after it, a smile of contentment upon his fine lips,—the twinkle in his eyes replaced by a warm light of sympathy. “Yes, my friend, it looks that way—now.” He turned and walked slowly toward his cottage. “The inscrutable Downey—inscrutable no longer. And, I am very glad.”

## CHAPTER V

### AT EAGLENEST LAKE

FOR the second time, Downey ascended the path cut into the side of the bank before the cabin of Pierre Molaire. At the top, he paused, and, for a moment, stood looking at the two who were seated upon a rustic bench in the shade of a tree.

Pierre Molaire was reading from a book, and, beside him, sat Marie, her fingers busy with some needlework. Downey's pulse quickened at sight of her, and he advanced slowly. The girl was the first to look up. She leaped to her feet with a glad little cry, the needlework falling unheeded to the ground.

"Oh! it is Corporal Downey! See, father, Corporal Downey has come to make us a visit!"

Molaire, too, was on his feet advancing with both hands outstretched: "Welcome, welcome once more, Corporal Downey, to our home! It is then, that you have not forgotten us?"

"No—I have not forgotten." His answer was to Molaire, but his eyes were upon the laughing eyes of the girl.

"You know my little Marie! She has spoken much of the good friend of Father Giroux, for it seems the good Father has spoken much of you to her. It was Corporal Downey this, and Corporal Downey that. Did I not like Corporal Downey? Was it not a fine thing to belong to the police, and to help rid the country of the criminals, and of those who would work harm? To all of which I must answer 'yes.' It seems you have found a fast friend in the little Marie."

The hot blood rushed to Downey's face, and he cursed himself for the flush. He laughed to cover his embarrassment: "You must not believe all Father Giroux says. When he watches the sunset from his porch, he thinks only good things of people. We always watch it together when I can get to the mission, as we did the other evening when you were there."

The girl clapped her hands: "And do you not love it? My father loves the sunset, too. We always watch it from here. But not so well as from the mission. There it seems not so far away."

"Who does not love the sunset?" exclaimed Molaire. "One whose heart holds no love for the beautiful, would be a sorry wretch, indeed. Is it not so, Corporal Downey?"

"Aye—that is so."

"But, come," invited the Frenchman, "let us sit down and talk. See, the seat is plenty wide enough for three." He picked up the book, and held it in his hand as they seated themselves. "The Life of Marco Polo, in French," he explained. "I have been reading it aloud to the little Marie as she worked—for my shirts were sore in need of her needle." He paused, and his bright eyes twinkled: "I could sew them myself, but she will not have it so,—insisting that my stitches look as if they were rove in with a marline-spike."

"But, father, you know your stitches are not as small as mine, and even you cannot call

them neat.”

“Ho, ho! I should know it by this time! She has been telling me that for years. But, can a man better set his traps, or find more gold, if he have a neat-stitched shirt?”

Downey, with recovered composure, laughed, and solemnly lied that a man could.

“See there!” cried Marie, in glee. “Did I not tell you? One can do nothing so well, if he goes about in rags!”

Molaire threw up his hands in mock surrender: “A-ha! With the police on your side, I cannot hope to win—for I have heard that no one may successfully cope with the police.” And, with his peculiar, outreaching gesture, he snapped his fingers. “Is it not so, Corporal Downey?”

Downey smiled: “Well——”

The girl interrupted him with a laugh: “Do not mind, he is teasing you. One could believe he would tease the good St. Peter, himself.”

“And, why not?” countered the irrepressible Molaire. “ ’Twould do the old grey-beard good to laugh. Though I think he laughs often—in his sleeve—sorting out the good from the bad. If ’twere me had his job, I would do it with dice, and both heaven and hell would be as fittingly populated.”

“Father, father! How you do talk! What would Father Giroux say?”

“What could he say, except to approve, or disapprove? How think you, Corporal—could any man cope with the police?”

“Lots of them have tried it. There’s one tryin’ it now.”

“Ah, and is he, as they say, getting away with it?”

“Seems to be, so far,” grinned the officer, “but, he can’t keep it up very long.”

“And, what has he been doing—this man who dares defy the police?”

“Robbin’ a pay-roll, a bank, an’ a train,—all inside of three weeks. Works single handed, laughs all the time he’s robbin’ them, an’ then winds up by tellin’ ’em his name. The only thing he leaves out is his address.”

“Ho, ho. And what is the name of this wild man?”

“Tom Traverse. He always says, ‘tell the police to hunt for Tom Traverse.’ ”

“Tom Traverse,” repeated Molaire. “Ha! there is a man with imagination—a man who takes pride in his work. And, justly, for is it not different from the work of others? Tom Traverse—there is a devil-may-care rollick in the very name. It is no real name, Corporal, mark you that! It is a name of imagination—as his work is work of imagination.”

“There won’t be any imagination about it when we gather him in,” answered Downey, grimly. “Every man’s got about so much rope. Some men’s rope is longer than others,—but, long or short, every rope’s got an end to it.”

“Two ends, my dear Corporal,—two ends! But how now, if some man of imagination splice these ends together? A circle has no end.”

Downey, in his turn surrendered: “You’ve certainly got imagination a-plenty. Suppose you use some of it on the case I’ve got on hand.”

“The case of Tom Traverse?”

“No—the oil man you found dead. Do you think he was murdered?”



The Frenchman frowned: "I do not know. One side of his head is terribly mashed. I do not see how any man could strike so hard a blow—nor what sort of a weapon could have been used in the striking. And yet, if he was not murdered, how could he have come to his death? There is nothing near where I found him that could have inflicted the wound. I found the body upon a gravel-bar on the bank of the river. He may have floated down from above—but not far. For a short distance up river is a rocky rapid that would have battered the body, and bruised it—not as he was battered—one terrible blow—but many bruises. No—he did not come through the rapids. I buried the body shallow, and reported at once to the police at Fort McMurray."

"Did you examine the contents of his pockets?"

"No—that is the work of the police. I left him as nearly as I could as I found him. Had the police been near at hand, I should not have touched the body, but, as it was, the gnawing of small animals—a sudden rise of the river, and the work of the police would have been increased greatly."

"You did right," approved Downey. "When can we start for the place?"

"As soon as you please. It is fifty miles or so, and good going through the hills."

"The sooner the better. It's not a water trip then?"

"No. I do not think we could make it by canoe in less than a hundred and fifty miles—and much bad water. I will make dinner, and we can start within the hour."

"I will get the dinner," cried the girl. But Molaire shook his head:

"No, no. You stay and entertain the Corporal. It will not take me long, and you can clean up after we have gone."

The man disappeared into the house, and Marie glanced up into Downey's face: "Must you go so soon? Would not tomorrow do as well? Then, we could watch the sunset. See, there will be a beautiful one this evening."

"Aye, there will be. But a man cannot shove duty aside for a sunset," a moment's pause,—“much as he would like to.”

"Would you like to, really?"

"More than anything." Alone with the girl for the first time, he was surprised to find that the self-consciousness—the constraint he had previously felt in her presence was gone.

She quickly raised her eyes to his, and as quickly dropped them to her sewing, although the last of her father's shirts lay finished in her lap. "I am glad," she said softly, "for I, too,—love the sunset."

Inside the cabin, they could hear Molaire bustling about at the stove and at the table. Together they sat silent, while Downey fought his conscience and a great flame of hope. Then, the girl rose: "There, the shirts are done, and I have nothing now to do but play, until I must go back to the mission. Oh! but Corporal Downey, why, if you, and father, cannot stay with me to watch the sunset, cannot I go with you?"

"Why—I—I don't know. Going to be a sort of—of a nasty job—digging up a body with the head caved in——"

"Oh! but I wouldn't have to look at it, if I didn't want to."

"No-o."

“And, I love to travel through the hills.”

Molaire appeared in the doorway: “Just a few minutes and we shall eat. Would you like to wash, Corporal?”

“Father,” called the girl, “I am going with you!”

“What, you? A nice business for a girl! And, besides, we shall travel fast. We should be there by the evening of tomorrow.”

“Travel fast! I can travel as fast as you, and you have often said so. I’m young, *mon vieillard!*”

Downey winced at the words. Young—yes, that is it—she is young, and I am old—old. He stood, his eyes on the slim figure, every line of which spoke in beauty of radiant youth, and in his heart there rose a vast bitterness against the thing that is fate.

“It will not be a goodly sight to see when we get there,” objected her father.

“Then I shall not look. I shall play with the trees and the sky, and leave the poor body to you and the Corporal and the river. Anyway, my father, I am going, unless you absolutely forbid me. And, that you would not do without reason, would you?”

Molaire shrugged his shoulders, and turned to Downey: “This matter is in the hands of the police. We must take orders from our friend here.”

Downey grinned: “Shiftin’ the responsibility off on me, eh? All right. She goes, then.” To the girl, with a mock sternness which the joyous thought of at least three days in her company made difficult to maintain: “But, we can have no delays. You will have to make good your boast that you can travel as fast as two old men.”

“Two—? You are not old!”

Downey’s heart thrilled at the swift protest. The great deep eyes were flashing indignantly into his own. Deliberately, he ran his fingers through his hair.

“Ho! grey hair—that is nothing!” she cried. “Father Giroux told me your hair has been grey almost since he has known you.”

Father Giroux had told her that—they *had* been speaking of him then, those two! It was with a strangely light step that Downey passed around the house to the little wash bench beside the kitchen door. And Pierre Molaire turned back to his dinner preparations with a smile on his lips, and in his eyes a twinkle curiously like that of the good Father Giroux.

## CHAPTER VI

### A MAN OF IMAGINATION

ADMITTEDLY a good man on the trail, Downey marvelled at the pace held by Molaire, as, hour after hour, he traversed ridges, crossed small valleys, and plunged unhesitatingly through the icy waters of creeks and small rivers.

The Corporal travelled, for the most part, with his eyes on the girl, who followed immediately behind her father. She had insisted upon packing her own blankets, and demanded to be allowed to add to these one third of the rations, but this the two men would not permit.

Late in the afternoon, Downey pulled up beside her: "Let me take your pack for a while," he said. "He's headin' for yon slope, an' by the looks we've got a steep climb ahead."

But the girl refused: "I am *not* tired!" she flashed back with an emphasis that belied her words. "I said I could keep up, and I *can*!"

"Sure, you can," the man encouraged. "I know no other woman who could have stood this much of it. But the pack,—that's different. You've got to have weight under a pack, an' you haven't got it. Better let me take it."

"I weigh a hundred and thirty pounds."

"An' I weigh a hundred and seventy, an' there's a deal of difference. Besides, I've had some years of practice. A few more pounds of pack won't mean anything to me."

But, Marie remained obdurate. "No. It wouldn't be doing what I said I could do. If I let you carry my pack, I would be doing only half. My father is going very fast just to make me admit that I cannot keep up—that is his joke—and he would laugh and laugh at my—failure. But I am not going to fail," she concluded pluckily, "and then it will be my joke on him."

The Corporal nodded: "You're right," he said, simply; and, as the girl's heart warmed within her at the note of true understanding, he dropped back to his place, and followed, with a growing admiration for the dogged grit that held her to the rapid pace, even though every muscle was throbbing and aching. A suggestion of weariness in his own seasoned legs awakened even greater wonder at the indomitable spirit that forced forward the slim figure just before him. "A woman in ten thousand," he thought,—“an' a mighty good man."

Toward evening, they made camp upon the shoulder of a mountain that gave a far view to the westward "So, we are to watch the sunset, after all!" cried the girl, in delight. When Molaire had stopped, she had slipped from her pack, and had slumped wearily to a seat upon a fallen tree. Now she rose eagerly, the ardors of the trail forgotten. "This will be the third time, now, we have watched it together."

"Aye, three times," answered Downey, "an' if it were a thousand times three times, I would never tire of it."

"Of the sunset?"

“Of watching it—with you. You see,” he hastened to add, “you enjoy it so much that it is—it is more—beautiful—to—others.”

A sudden wave of she knew not what feeling seemed to sweep over her,—a strange sense of power sprang to life within her—and it was not little Marie of the mission school but a woman, who asked softly: “And you,—you are just—others?” Then, she turned suddenly away.

Molaire returned with a pail of water from a spring, to find Downey whittling shavings for the fire, and the girl busy with the contents of the grub packs. Both were awkwardly silent, and as he busied himself about camp, the peculiar smile again twisted the lips of Pierre Molaire.

Later, over the tea, the Frenchman chuckled: “Not so bad—for an old man, eh? I would say we had made twenty-five miles. What think you, Corporal?”

“It would be about twenty-five miles. You are a good man on the trail.”

The twinkling eyes of Molaire turned to his daughter: “And you, Marie, how did you enjoy the journey?”

She met the eyes squarely: “It was fair,” she replied, with judicious seriousness, “though, of course, we could have made five or six miles more if we had not camped so early.” And, a moment later, was forced to join in the laugh that broke simultaneously from the two men.

“Well spoken!” approved Molaire, as he eyed his daughter with pride. “Maybe, when the little Marie is grown up, Corporal, she, too, will be a good man on the trail.”

“Aye—maybe,” assented Downey, “when she grows up.” But he did not look at the girl as he spoke.

“And, I was glad, my daughter,” continued the Frenchman, “that you did not let the Corporal carry your pack. Then, should I have laughed at you to your shame.”

“Why—how did you know he offered to carry it? You were out of sight behind the rock ledge at the bottom of that long hill.”

“I did not know. It is only that I use my imagination. Is it not the duty of the police to protect and help the weak, as well as to rule the strong. And is not our friend of the police?”

“And what about me?—Did you *imagine* I am weak—did you *imagine* I would let him? You have too much imagination then, *mon père*,” she retorted, indignantly.

Molaire’s joyous laugh rang out: “No, I knew you would not. That I did not imagine—for I am always right in my imaginings. Tomorrow, we will travel more slowly. Today was the rebuke of old age to the—the—arrogance, yes, that is it—the arrogance of youth.”

It was mid-afternoon, when they reached the gravel-bar on the south bank of Burnt River. While Marie busied herself about camp, the two men set to the gruesome task of unearthing, and examining the body of the oil man. “You see,” said Molaire, pointing to the crushed skull, “the instrument that caused his death must have been at least three or four inches in diameter. It is hard to see how any person could wield a club of such proportions with force enough to crush in the whole side of a man’s head.”

“About three inches,” confirmed Downey, removing his rule. “But, it was a club all right; here are bits of bark crushed into the wound.” Methodically, he searched the dead man’s clothing, removing and listing the contents of the pockets. These yielded nothing of importance in establishing the man’s identity. A leather wallet contained upwards of eleven hundred dollars in American banknotes of large denominations, and a few scraps of paper blurred to illegibility by the action of the water.

“How long do you figure he had been dead when you found him?” asked the officer.

“Not more than two or three days. He was not yet bloated. What do you make of it?”

Downey considered, after concluding the noting of certain descriptive measurements. “He’s been in the water,—that’s sure, an’ the river put him up here. But, as you said, he never came through any bad rapids. Our work lies upriver, probably between here an’ the foot of the rapids. You take one bank, an’ I’ll take the other, an’ we’ll try to find the club that smashed his head.”

Two hours later, at a call from Downey, Molaire joined him, crossing at the foot of the rapids. The officer indicated a fresh portage trail, that led over the rock ridge flanking the rushing river. “A boat’s been dragged around the rapids—an’ more than a one man job.”

Molaire examined the trail, and nodded: “At least two men, and they must have had tackle.”

At the crest of the ridge, they came upon the boat, with her nose jammed against a projecting rock. Beyond, stood a crude capstan with its bar, a long stick of spruce, broken short off. As Downey examined the stick, an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him: “Here it is!” he cried pointing to a trace of dried blood and a few hairs. “But, where in the devil did they get the power to break this stick? An’ how does it come he got down the river? The way the stick swung, it would have knocked him back in the brush.”

“But, there were others—at least one other. No man could have done this alone.”

“Looks like an accident to me. But, where’s the rest of ’em? An’, why wasn’t it reported? They had time to reach Chipewyan before you found the body.”

As Downey speculated, Molaire walked over to a tree a few feet distant. “Here’s where they got the power,” he cried, picking up the other end of the broken capstan bar. “A double block on the end of a stick that length makes a powerful engine. I see, plainly, what happened: They hauled in on the tackle, till the lever pole bent when the boat caught against the rock. Then the man we just buried walked over to investigate the trouble, and while he stood directly in the sweep of the bar it broke——”

“But——” interrupted Downey, and Molaire silenced him.

“The boat is empty. They had already portaged their outfit. Come, we will go to the head of the rapids, and see what we find there. I think I know what has happened, and, if so, we may find another body or two to bury.”

“What do you mean?” asked the officer, as they made their way down the ridge.

“I think we shall find most of their gear, but no canoe. Yet they should have had a canoe, as well as a poling boat. I think it was a two-man outfit, and that the other dragged the dead man to the canoe and started down the river. He came to grief near the foot of the rapids and was drowned, while the dead man was washed ashore on the bar where I found him. I think that, tomorrow, our work will lie below.”

Corporal Downey eyed the man with admiration: "Sounds reasonable," he agreed. "With your imagination, you ought to be in the Service."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Frenchman, "imagination! My dear Corporal, sometimes that might prove a great detriment—in the Service. And, sometimes, also, a great asset—out of the Service."

They had reached the head of the portage, where numerous articles of gear were strewn about in confusion. A two-man outfit, they agreed, after a hurried inventory. There was no canoe, although an extra paddle or two showed that there had been one. Evidently, in his haste, the second man had stopped only to throw his blankets and a small amount of rations into the craft, before starting on his ill-fated journey to Fort Chipewyan.

Twilight was deepening, as the two reached camp, to find supper waiting, and Marie full of questions as to the result of their search. "Poor fellows," she said. "What a way to die."

"A good way," contradicted Molaire. "Swift death overtaking them in doing the thing they wanted to be doing. It is so, I hope, that I shall die—not tossing about in a bed with the hot hand of disease closing in on my vitals. Is it not so, Corporal?"

Downey nodded: "An' he were given the choice, 'tis the way a man would die."

Molaire turned in, and fell asleep early, but, for a long time, Downey and the girl sat beside the dying fire, and talked,—of Marie, at first—of her life at the mission—of her babies, as she called them—of her long ago days in France, when her father had roamed alone, a laughing vagabond as now, who never forgot them, her mother and her, but who could bear the constriction and the chafing of civilization no more then than now—of the dear, dead mother, who had forsaken even the few chances that offered to follow this wanderer, and to be near him and her heart which he always carried with him, to give proper care to her little daughter. The silent softness of the night breeze seemed to have blown away all restraint, and Downey, as he listened, grew to know the wonder of her wholesomeness.

It was not until the last embers of the fire were fading into grey ashes, that Downey realized that for once he too had talked. It had been so natural that she should know of his life that, almost unconsciously he had wandered along from tale to tale, of this patrol and that,—of his boyhood—his ambition to join the police,—of his happiness in his work since the great day he had first been sworn in. Of Margot, and the suffering he had borne silently for twenty years, he did not speak,—for that pain was forgotten. "But, you should have had great promotion, long ago," she had cried. And he had answered: "That I cannot say. Deserved or not, I have been offered promotion several times, but I would not take it." Something in his tone halted the girl's question, "Why?"

As they rose to go to their blankets, the girl stepped impulsively toward him: "Oh! it's been wonderful to talk with you—just wonderful."

"Aye," said Downey, "it has been wonderful."

A half-mile below the gravel-bar, Molaire's deductions were borne out in every particular. In the eddy of a deep bend, the fragments of the wrecked canoe turned slowly as upon a pivot, and, held fast in the clutches of the overhanging bushes was the bloated

body of a man. The contents of his pockets were removed, and he was buried.

After the noon-day meal, the three set out for the return to Eaglenest Lake.

It was with a distinct effort, that Corporal Downey took leave of the two before the little cabin on the morning following their arrival, declining the pressing invitation of both the father and daughter to remain with them for the week that would conclude the girl's vacation. "Duty's duty," he explained, "an' a week might make a lot of difference in finding out who these two men were."

"But," protested Marie, "suppose it had taken you a week or two weeks to find out how that man got killed? Surely, they didn't expect you to find that out in one day?"

"They expected me to find it out as soon as I could," Downey smiled. "If it had taken me all summer, I should have stayed on the job, an' have reported when I had finished. Now that I have finished in a short time, thanks to your father's imagination, I must make my report. Orders are orders. An' nothin' was said to me about a week's leave when I had finished this job. There may be another one waitin' for me now,—a more important one, an' the Superintendent may be waitin' to put me on it."

"The Corporal is right!" exclaimed Molaire, with the bright twinkle in his eye. "Perhaps the case of Tom Traverse waits for him. If I mistake not, he would not be sorry to have a go at this man whose imagination has set the police by the ears." His laugh was accompanied by that characteristic gesture of amused finality. "Is that not true, Corporal? And will you wager on your prowess? I will lay you, let us say, a pound of tobacco, that you will not catch Tom Traverse within the year."

Downey laughed: "I may not draw that detail."

"So much the better for my tobacco! Should you happen to draw it, I fear that same tobacco would be in dire jeopardy."

"You're dead right, Molaire, it would. An' I'd like the chance to win it. I'll take you. Dead or alive, I suppose."

"Ho, ho! No! Dead only! You need never think to take him alive? From what you tell me of him, my imagination knows that he will play the game to the end. To show you,—five pounds to your one, if you take him alive!"

"'Tis the way I'd prefer to take him," answered the officer gravely, "or any other man."

"I know. But, mark my words—'tis not the way he will be taken. Good-bye, my friend—and on the New Year's Day, I shall be smoking your tobacco with relish!"

Molaire went into the house, while the girl accompanied Corporal Downey to the beach. There, after he had launched the canoe, and had waved her a farewell, she stood looking after him, until man and canoe were but a speck in the distance.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN THE EXPRESS CAR

ON the trip down the Moose River to the Athabasca, Corporal Downey lived over again each hour of the days he spent with Marie and Pierre Molaire. He smiled at the thought of the young-old man, who loved life, and who laughed his way through it—the happy searcher after adventure,—and a good man on the trail,—no *chechako*,—and a fine companion. “ ’Tis like he will prove a good friend, as well,” thought the officer. “I must see to it that he becomes one.”

But, at thought of the girl, he did not smile. “If only I was younger,” he muttered. “But, she said I’m not old—that grey hair don’t mean anything—an’ she’s part right at that. . . . She’s game, too. It was all she could do to put one foot in front of the other, an’ she said ‘we could have made five or six miles more if we hadn’t camped so early’. . . . She didn’t seem like just a girl, that night at camp . . . she was like a woman . . . a great woman . . . Maybe I’m not so old. . . . There’s no one I’ve struck yet who can out-travel me on the trail, land or water . . . Maybe I’ve just been thinkin’ I’m old. . . . No, I’ve not begun to bog—an’, come to think of it, in feelin’s, I’m as young as I ever was. . . . But, maybe she would think I was old, if she knew I was thinkin’ about her the way I do. . . . I guess I’m just a dam’ fool. . . . But, she asked if I was just one of—the others. . . .”

And so it went on through the long hours, during which the thoughts of Pierre Molaire gradually faded and ceased, and his mind, if diverted for a moment by some attribute of the trail, a white-water rapid, a portage, a moose plunging startled through the shallows, returned always to the girl of the great deep eyes.

At Fort McMurray, Sergeant Blake greeted him with enthusiasm: “By the gods, Downey, old man—” the Corporal frowned slightly at the words. There it was again! He had always liked young Blake,—a likely lad. But, now, the “old man” rasped against the grain. For years, he had been known among the younger constables and officers of the Force as “Old Man Downey”,—he had rather enjoyed the appellation,—but, damn it! I’m not old! Old man, eh? I’ll show ’em! Young Blake was talking on, unheeding of the frown: “—pretty kettle of fish, with me here alone, and the river all messed up with oil outfits, and orders to keep an eye peeled for Tom Traverse, and other orders to hit up the Clearwater, and bring in an Injun that’s wanted for a witness in Edmonton——”

Downey grinned broadly: “Busy little job you’ve got, eh? Well, I’ve cleaned up my detail; maybe I can help you out. What’s your orders?”

Young Blake flushed a bit, and hesitated. Nearly all the younger officers, who ranked Downey, found themselves embarrassed when it came to issuing orders to him, for well they knew that it was only Downey’s stubborn and unaccountable refusal to accept promotion that had kept him out of a Superintendency; and that, as one Sergeant expressed it: “Old Man Downey has forgot more about policing than most of us would learn if we could live twice.”



"It's this way," explained Blake. "You can forward your report from here to Edmonton, and then you can either go up after this Injun, Ruben Lobstick, or else stay here and keep an eye on the river, while I go up and get him. You're just in off patrol, maybe you better stay here and rest up a bit."

"Huh!" grunted Downey. "Where'd you say this Injun is?"

"He trades at Lashing Water Post. If I'm lucky, I might find him there."

"But—if you wasn't lucky?"

"Well, then I'd have to go hunt him."

"Ever been up in that country?"

"No—but——"

"Better let me go after the Injun, son. You, not knowin' the country, if he shouldn't happen to be at the post, you might lose a lot of time that maybe I could save."

"Do you know the country out there?"

"Aye," said Downey, his eyes on the far skyline, "I know it—well."

Late in the afternoon of his third day out from Fort McMurray, Corporal Downey stood at the end of a portage, his eyes on the river that flowed dark and sullen beneath leaden skies. "Twenty years ago, come Christmas," he muttered. "It was two days after Christmas—we stood right here. The only time in my life I ever held a woman in my arms. An', then, I stood an' watched her till she rounded the bend, yonder—an' was gone—gone. . . . Cousins they are, an' like as two peas in a pod, an' yet there's a difference. Aye, a big difference. . . . If Marie had said she would wait, she would have waited. Love, to *her* will not be so small a thing as to be tossed aside upon the miscarriage of a letter. *She* would have waited until—I came."

Moment by moment, word by word, Downey lived again that scene of twenty years ago. But, strive as he would to summon the face and form of Margot Molaire, he could not. The girl who stood facing him there, who was in his arms, whose lips pressed passionately to his own was—Marie! Times innumerable, upon long, lone trails, he had relived that parting scene with Margot, and always had every feature, every look and word leaped clean-cut to his brain. And, now,—Margot was gone. Gone, too, was the sense of depression, the dull pain deep within, that had always been the aftermath of memory. All through the years, Margot Molaire had been to him a living entity, and,—vaguely he realized it,—now she was gone! As she herself had gone from out his life, so now had the image of her gone from out his heart. It seemed almost sacrilege, that this could be, and leave no pain. He had lived with her so long. And yet it was true,—there was no pain, until, the sudden realization of the impassable barrier that time had erected between him and his dream of happiness brought with it a bitter new pang. By every right, Marie should be to him also nothing but a memory.

"That is as it may well be," he said aloud, and, methodically made camp.

At Lashing Water Post, Downey learned that Ruben Lobstick had pulled out three weeks before with a party of Indians who were bound for the northward to establish their

winter's fish cache. The trader thought they could be found in the vicinity of Fond du Lac or Black Lake. Downey headed north by way of Cree River, and, two weeks later, he located the band on Chipman Lake, a few miles to the northward of Black Lake. He explained to the Indian in his own tongue the reason for the forthcoming journey to Edmonton, and the man agreed to accompany him, begging only a week's delay to complete his fish cache. They were on good fishing grounds—each morning the nets were full. To this delay, Downey readily agreed, knowing full well the importance of fish to the wintering Indians. And, leaving them to their nets, he once more turned his canoe northward, his destination a rotting cabin and a solitary grave that kept their vigil of the years upon a high cliff that rose sheer above the waters of a nameless lake beyond the height of land.

Early in the morning of the third day, he cached his canoe at the end of water, crossed the divide on foot, and so came to the lake, with its high cliff, and the grave that was—no, that had been—his shrine. Swiftly skirting the shore, he gained the crest of the cliff, and stood staring dully about him. Fire had swept the country since his last visit nearly three years before. Where the rotting cabin had stood was now only a heap of vine-covered ashes, and the grave he had so carefully tended upon his infrequent visits, now all but obliterated—its mound sunken to the level of the fireswept barren. For a long time he stood in the midst of the grey desolation. Here and there, in splotches of yellow and purple, wildflowers reared their heads. But, the man made no move to transplant them to the grave. He knew that he was looking at the spot for the last time. "Gone," he muttered, between clenched teeth, "—all—gone—nothing but ashes." He walked to the edge of the cliff, and for the space of a few moments stood staring out over the blue waters of the little land-locked lake. Turning his eyes once more he sought to trace the outlines of the obliterated grave. Instinctively, he lifted the hat from his head: "Good-bye, Margot, girl," and again, "good-bye." Abruptly, he quitted the spot, and retraced his steps to the canoe.

On Chipman Lake, he picked up his Indian, and, in due course, arrived at Fort McMurray, to be greeted by Sergeant Blake.

"What's on your mind, son?" queried the Corporal. "You look worried."

Blake grinned a wry grin: "And I guess you're the only member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police west of Winnipeg that don't look worried. And that's only because you've been out of the world for the past five or six weeks."

"What's the trouble? Ottawa figurin' on cuttin' us down?"

"No! They could double us, and we'd still look worried. It's that damn Tom Traverse!"

"Been showin' his hand again?"

"I'll say he's been showing his hand! Another bank, two pay-rolls, and a train—no two jobs within a hundred miles of each other—and all within the space of four weeks! It isn't so much the jobs he pulls—though heaven knows they're bad enough—but it's the way he pulls them that gets a man. It's always the same—laughing and chuckling behind his mask as he works, never a bit hurried or excited, and when he's finished, always the same polite bow, and: 'Tell the police to find Tom Traverse!' And then he just fades away."

"Got what they call a technic all his own, eh?"

“He has. And it gets on a man’s nerves.”

Corporal Downey scratched his chin: “Hurt anyone yet?”

“No. But there isn’t anyone—his victims, I mean—that is taking any chances. In spite of his laughing, and the easy way he works, he manages to put it across to them that the automatic they’re looking into isn’t just exactly an ornament.”

“Sounds interestin’,” mused Downey. “Maybe, if I go down an’ talk to the Superintendent, he’ll give me a special detail to go after this Tom Traverse.”

Blake grinned: “I think maybe he will. He was up here a week ago, and you ought to have heard him roaring for you. And, while he was doing the roaring, Tom Traverse pulled another job within twenty miles of here—pay-roll for the Tar Sands Oil Company—something over fourteen thousand in cash. People are getting restless about it, and it don’t help the old man’s peace of mind. He left word for you to report to him as soon as you showed up.”

When Downey delivered his Indian to headquarters in Edmonton, a Staff Sergeant greeted him with a low whistle: “Where’d you come from?” he asked.

“Just stepped off the train from Fort McMurray. Where’s the Superintendent?”

“Passed you on the road. He took the train for Fort McMurray yesterday, so as to save time—thought he’d catch you there when you came in.”

“Blake tells me this Tom Traverse has got lively again.”

“Lively’s right! A job a week’s his motto. An’ pay-rolls his meat. Grabbed off another one day before yesterday—makes five in five weeks. Eight all together—an’ still goin’ strong. You better wire Fort McMurray.”

“Guess so. Think I’ll ask for special detail.”

“You’ll get it, all right. I expect the old man’ll put you on this case, an’ pull off about a half a dozen constables. They won’t be so tickled, at that. The word’s been passed around, unofficial, that the man who brings in Tom Traverse ain’t goin’ to have to worry much about promotion.”

“Humph!” grunted Corporal Downey, and walked over to the telegraph office.

“Can’t get Fort McMurray,” informed the operator, after an hour’s fruitless attempt. “Trouble on the line somewheres beyond La Biche.”

“How long before the train leaves?”

“ ’Bout an hour.”

The day was uncomfortably hot, as Downey entered the smoking car and filled his pipe. Puffing and wheezing, the little train labored northward, while the coal smoke and cinders eddied in through the open windows, adding to the discomfort of the stuffy coach. At the second stop, Downey forsook the coach, and walking forward, sought sanctuary in the combination express and baggage car, where removing his coat and gun, he hung them upon a hook, and sprawled comfortably on a chest of express matter.

“Hot as hell,” opined the express man, seating himself on another chest, and filling his

pipe.

“Hot enough,” agreed Downey. “But this is better than the coach.”

“Yep—more air with them two doors open. Dirty as hell on a still day like this, what with the smoke an’ cinders. ’Tain’t so bad when the wind blows.”

“I’d rather travel in a canoe, where you don’t have to chew the air before you breathe it.”

“Never was in one. Looks like they’d tip over easy. I’ll take railroadin’ fer mine. I never learnt to swim.”

And so Downey passed the long hot afternoon in desultory conversation, interspersed with periods of dozing, while the other fumbled among his books and papers.

“Looks like rain, tomorrow,” prophesied the express man as he stood swaying in the open side door of his car, and pointed toward the west. “What with that there red sunset, an’ them streaky clouds, it almost always means rain. Trouble with rain is, it don’t never come when you need it. Take it along this spring, when the country was bone dry, an’ we was settin’ fires along the right of way every trip, it never rained fer goin’ on seven weeks, an’ now, when we don’t need it, it rains easy.”

“I’ve often thought,” grinned Downey, “it would be handy if you could turn it on an’ off when you wanted to.”

“Yep. But, you couldn’t suit everyone. Some would want it, an’ some wouldn’t. Trouble with this country is, it ain’t no good when it’s wet, an’ a dam’ sight worse when it’s dry. I wouldn’t be a linesman on this branch fer no money. Take it this spring—they was run ragged replacin’ poles that was burnt off, an’ now, when it’s wet, the swamp ground gits all mushy, an’ the poles tip over. Couple of ’em on the train now—telegraph ain’t workin’ beyond La Biche.”

“Where do you pass the train from Fort McMurray?”

“That’s accordin’. Sometimes one sidin’, sometimes another. When the wire’s workin’, we know where we’ll pass, but, like today, we jest nose our way along till we meet, an’ one of us backs to the nearest sidin’.”

“So, you think a pole’s tipped over somewhere in a swamp, an’ busted the wire, eh?”

“What else would it be. Unless——”

“Unless, what?”

The man glanced toward the open side door, where, in the deepening twilight, the spruce tops made a blur of motion. “Unless it was cut.”

“Cut! Who’d cut it?”

“Well, there’s this here Tom Traverse. Looks like, with all the police they is, an’ only one of him, you’d ort to picked him up ’fore this.”

Downey frowned: “We’re doin’ all we can,” he answered, “an’ we’ll pick him up before long.”

The man grinned: “Unless he gathers in all the money in Canady first. At that, I’m glad you’re in the car this trip.”

“Why?”

“Got a double pay-roll fer the Crown Oil Company.” With his knuckles, he rapped the

chest upon which he was seated. "Yes, sir! I'm right now settin' on better'n ten thousand dollars in cash."

"Why in the devil didn't you say so before?" growled the officer, as he rose to his feet, and stepped toward his coat and his revolver.

"SIT DOWN!" Corporal Downey whirled to look squarely into the muzzle of an automatic pistol. The man who held the pistol reached behind him, and closed the end door through which he had entered. Downey resumed his seat, his eyes drinking in every detail of the man who was chuckling audibly behind his mask.

Stepping to the wall of the car, the bandit slipped Downey's service revolver into his pocket, and addressed the express man, who sat with both hands elevated high above his head: "Unlock that box, and sit over beside your friend of the police," he commanded.

The man complied with alacrity, and, keeping the two covered, the outlaw stepped to the desk, and tossed a loaded revolver out through the open door. Then, laughing to himself, he raised the lid of the chest, and lifted therefrom two canvas bags, which he carried to the door through which he had entered, and deposited them on the floor. For a moment, he stood regarding the two seated side by side upon the other chest. "Ho, ho! This is the first time in my work that I have come in close contact with the police! And, if I mistake not, it is Corporal Downey himself—of whom I have heard much!" He bowed low. "Tom Traverse wishes you well."

"We'll meet again," growled the officer, meeting squarely the gaze of the masked eyes.

"A-ha—maybe—maybe— Who can tell? You will pardon me for borrowing your pistol. I shall return it you may be sure. And, now—adieu!" Corporal Downey started, and sat as one petrified. For, at the word, Tom Traverse had laughed aloud, and snapped his fingers—with a peculiar outflung movement of his arm. Opening the door, the outlaw raised the bags from the floor, and once more bowed: "Tom Traverse bids you adieu—till we meet again." The door closed with a bang, and the express man sprang for the bell-cord, which went slack in his hand as its cut end was jerked through the hole in the forward end of the car. Downey threw open the end door. The platform was empty. The outlaw had vanished into the darkness.

Inside the car, the express man was trying to light a lantern with trembling fingers, mumbling excitedly the while: "I knowed it—dam' it—didn't I say so—he cut the wire—Tom Traverse hisself—" He finished his task and, stepping to the side door, began swinging the lantern frantically back and forth, meanwhile yelling at the top of his lungs.

"What's the idea?" asked Downey, his lips close to the man's ear.

"Stop the train, of course! He's got them pay-rolls! Dam' it, why can't they look back onct in a while? He'll be to hell and gone!"

Downey grinned, ruefully, and pointed to the black blur of scrub timber: "Do you expect to follow him through that?"

"My Gawd! We got to do somethin'! He's got them pay-rolls! You're the one that ort to be after him, right now!"

"Yes," answered Corporal Downey, and the smile was gone from his lips, "yes—I'm the one. Get that lantern in here, and let the train go on. We'd only lose time if we stopped here. I'll pick him up—later."

An hour passed, as Downey sat in a brooding silence that discouraged the sporadic attempts at conversation on the part of the express man, whose audible mutterings ranged from self-exoneration for the loss of the pay-rolls, to the inefficiency of the police, and, later, to a sort of prideful boasting that he was now of the favored few who had been honored by a visit from the mighty Tom Traverse, himself.

And, on the chest across the car from him, Corporal Downey's new-found world was crashing,—and he knew he had lied to himself. Now, as it fell, he knew it was not merely the impossible dream he had insisted it to be, but that it was real, and being real its loss was irreparable. Sunset at the mission—Eaglenest Lake—the night at the camp-fire—one by one they passed, and with the passing came a strange certainty of the happiness that now was impossible. Marie was to have been his,—and now—! The young-old man who would seek the great adventure,—he whom he had wanted for a friend—Tom Traverse! And Marie, the daughter of Tom Traverse! And he, Downey of the police . . . ! A wild idea of tendering his resignation to the Superintendent flashed into his brain. He could marry Marie at once,—in his agony, he suddenly *knew* she loved him as he loved her—and they would go away—far away. The money Banker Warring had handled for him had grown into a formidable sum,—he recollected the statements sent to him from time to time. Maybe, even, Pierre Molaire would go with them—far away—and the police would never know.

Then very slowly, he shook his head. It was as the express man had said. It was his job, and he could not shirk it. He must play the game. The words of Pierre Molaire flashed, then, to his mind. “Tom Traverse will never be taken alive—he will play the game to the end.” God! the man's light-hearted banter as he had laid his bet of a pound of tobacco—five pounds to one if Tom Traverse were taken alive!

A sardonic smile twisted his lips, as he recalled the words of the good Father Giroux: “Deep within your heart is a touch of bitterness.” A *touch* of bitterness!—when, after twenty years, he had at last forgotten—Margot,—she, who despite the faithlessness of her puny love, had lived in his heart through every day, enshrined in the pain of memory—when at last his feet had found the path to happiness—and then—this . . . Yes, Corporal Downey's world was crashing, and the final crash would be that of a shot—his shot or the shot of Tom Traverse—Pierre Molaire, his friend, and the father of Marie! For in his heart, Downey knew that Molaire *would* play the game to the end,—in quest of the great adventure. Almost he hoped that it would be the shot of the Frenchman that rang down the curtain upon the end of this horrid play. Bitterly—fiercely, he repudiated the words of Sergeant Costello, spoken those long years ago, as the officer sat on the nail keg in the back room, watching him candle Mrs. Hunnish's eggs. “Duty is its own reward.” It's a *lie*! Seven years chained to the store—candling eggs—salting rotten butter. Twenty years in the Service, with never a job shirked—that's duty—and its reward is—*this*! Yes—Tom Traverse would play the game to the end—and Corporal Downey must play the game to the end—the big game that is life—those twenty-seven years had taken care of that. For the first time in his career, Corporal Downey took upon his lips the name of his Maker in profanity: “*God damn life!*” he cried aloud.

Across the car, the express man peered past his lantern: “Huh—?” The word was drowned in the shriek of the engine whistle, and the grinding of the brakes as the train slid to a jolting halt. Downey slipped into his coat, and peered out the door. Another whistle

sounded, and down the track he could see the headlight of the other train, approaching at a crawl. Without a word, he swung himself to the ground, and walked toward the approaching train.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DOWNEY TAKES THE TRAIL

THE Superintendent looked up, as Corporal Downey paused beside his seat and asked: "Lookin' for me?"

"You bet I'm looking for you! Thought I could save a little time by heading you off at Fort McMurray. Blake told me you'd left for Edmonton—passed you on the road."

"I want a special detail to go after Tom Traverse."

"You've got it! And, good luck to you, for you'll need it."

"Aye—," said Downey, somberly, "I'll need it, I guess."

"Though," continued the Superintendent, "if anyone can run him down, you can. But, you've got a job on your hands. It's positively uncanny, the way he slips through our fingers. I've got the reports here, and what little his victims have been able to turn in of his description. Eight successful hold-ups is going it a bit too strong, even for Tom Traverse—"

"Nine," corrected Downey, dryly.

"You mean there's been another since——?"

"Yes. Two or three hours ago. Double pay-roll for the Crown Oil Company—an' my revolver."

The train crews, in joint debate, had evidently settled the momentous question as to which train should back to a siding, for, with much jolting and jerking, the car began to move in the direction from which it had come. A brakeman passed through the car, and Downey ordered him to flag the northbound train at the siding. Then, turning to the Superintendent, he related the robbery in detail.

There was just the suspicion of a smile at the corners of the Superintendent's mouth, as the Corporal finished: "You don't need to look so glum about it. No one could have done any differently. Tom Traverse has stuck another feather in his cap, that's all. The office is already deluged with complaints and suggestions. Every man on the street feels called upon to make some facetious remark, until the mention of Tom Traverse to a member of the force is like waving a red rag at a bull. And, when this story gets out, it will be worse than ever. It's up to you, Downey—you've got to get him."

"I'll get him," said Downey, quietly. The words of calm conviction were as balm to the heart of the harassed Superintendent. Knowing Downey, he knew that the statement was no idle boast.

"You'll not be going to Edmonton, then?" he asked.

"No." The train slowed to a stand, and the Corporal abruptly quitted the car.

"He's got something up his sleeve," confided the Superintendent to himself, encouragingly, as he watched the silent figure resume his place in the express car of the Fort McMurray train. "While he's taking care of this end, I'll just keep a flying squad handy at Edmonton."



At the detachment, Corporal Downey snatched a few hours' sleep, replaced his revolver with another, and, at daylight, was upon the river in a canoe. This time, there was no leisurely drifting with the current. At each stroke of his paddle, the canoe leaped forward, the pace eating up the miles as the hours slipped by. At the mission, he paused for a few moments' chat with Father Giroux, who stood at the water's edge bargaining with an Indian for a boatload of fish.

"Surely, you will stop with me for dinner," exclaimed the priest, as Downey picked up his paddle.

"Not this trip. I'm in a hurry."

"But, it was only last evening that Marie and I were saying it was a long time since we had seen you. She will be disappointed, if you do not stop at least over the noon hour."

The good priest did not see the stab of pain in Downey's eyes, for the Corporal did not raise his head as he answered: "Not this time. Some other time I will stop—must stop. But—not now." Father Giroux wondered at the somberness of tone, and at the meaning of the words, but forbore to question. He sought to turn the subject by pleasantry: "Have they caught Tom Traverse, yet? We have heard that he has been more active than ever."

"No. Not yet." The curt reply was unaccompanied by a smile, and the priest realized that he had unintentionally touched upon a sore spot.

"One can almost respect a criminal like that—if reports we have of him are to be believed. A sort of a modern Robin Hood. A light-hearted, care-free rogue. It is a pity such a man should not turn his talents to a worthier cause. He is a man of brains."

"Aye," answered Downey, gloomily, "a man of brains, an' of—imagination."

"I've got a day, probably two days' start of him, even if he hits straight for his cabin," mused Downey, as he drove his canoe across the smooth waters of Eaglenest Lake. "That'll give me time to prospect round for his cache, an' if I find it, I'll sit tight till he shows up. Chances are, though, I won't find anything. He's too wise to cache the stuff anywhere round his cabin. An' if I don't find the cache—I won't have a thing on him that I could go to a jury with. You can't convict a man on the snap of his fingers."

The canoe beached on the gravel, and slowly, with a heavy heart, the officer ascended the path. As he gained the top, a man leaped to his feet from the rustic bench beneath the tree, and advanced, smiling, with hands outstretched: "A-ha, my good friend, Corporal Downey! Welcome! It is a long time since we have met!"

Downey stared at the man in astonishment, as he took the proffered hand. The consummate nerve of him—the fact that he had arrived first at the cabin—There was a note of frank admiration in the officer's voice, as he replied with a question: "A long time?"

"Ah, yes—so it seems to me. But, I am a lonely man. And, it is many weeks since you took leave of us here—of me, and the little Marie. But, come, be seated, and tell me of the news." Pierre Molaire paused, and his eyes twinkled with fun: "Surely, you have not come to collect your pound of tobacco?"

Downey shook his head slowly, as he stared from under drawn eyebrows into the twinkling eyes of Molaire: "No—not yet. But, I will collect it—some time."

"Bravo! Spoken like a man! And, if I am not here—when you have won your bet, you must collect it from the little Marie. I have it all ready for you—one pound of good

tobacco, all done up in a paper, with your name on it——”

“Why not five pounds?”

The eyes of the Frenchman did not falter, and his white teeth flashed into his merry smile: “No, no! Downey—not the five pounds! Should you win the five pounds, I shall make it a point to pay you myself.”

“Molaire,” said Downey, abruptly, “you would have made the greatest actor in the world.”

“Ho, ho!—an actor! Well, why not? Was it not your immortal Shakespeare who said:

‘All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts. . . .’

“And he is great, who plays his part well. How does it seem to you—this drama that is called life—a comedy, or a tragedy?”

“For me,” said Downey, looking steadfastly into the laughing face, “it is a tragedy.”

“Then, it is that you take life too seriously, my friend. For me it is one grand comedy! To live—to laugh! To seek the great adventure. For, when it is all said and done, for aught we know the lights go out forever,—the stage is for us eternally black,—the grave is the end. So, when the curtain drops, ’tis better to have played and laughed, than to have acted a sullen, serious part, that brings no joy to play nor joy to watch. But, there, I bore you with my poor philosophy. I have scant learning in it save what I have figured out for myself. Tell me, now, is this rogue Tom Traverse still at large? And have you, yourself, taken up his trail?”

“Aye, he is still at large,” answered Downey, with a grim smile, as he watched Molaire’s face, “and I have taken his trail.”

“Oh! my poor pound of tobacco! So you got the special detail.”

“I got the special detail.”

“And from now on, you will be hard on his heels?”

“Just so.”

“But, tell me, has he lately showed his hand?”

“Quite lately. In fact, he held up and robbed the express car on the Fort McMurray train only a few days ago—and I was in the car at the time.”

“And you were in the car! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!” Molaire smote his thigh with his palm, and rocked with laughter. “A good joke, my friend—a rare good joke! Come do not look so woebegone! It is to laugh!”

The man’s mirth was so genuine—so altogether unforced and contagious, that, to his surprise, Corporal Downey found himself grinning broadly. “I suppose it was,” he admitted, “a damned good joke on me.”

“Did I not tell you this Tom Traverse was a man of imagination? Ho, ho, ho—I could believe he is laughing now at the rare joke he played!”

“Yes, he is laughing, now.”

“And so you have actually seen this wild rogue who plays fast and loose with the property of others? Should you know him if you should see him again?”

“I should know him.”

“What think you then? Is he in the cities, scattering the gold he so easily earns?”

“No, he is not in the cities. In fact, I doubt that he has spent a penny of all the money he has taken.”

“Why, then, should he risk his life and his liberty to get the gold?”

“Well,—being a man of—imagination—let us say for the love of adventure.”

“How, now? It was only a few short weeks ago that you, yourself, told me that laws were broken for the greed of gain, or for revenge—and not for sport.”

“So I thought—then. Now, I am not so sure. What do you think?”

Molaire laughed again: “From what I have heard of him from you, and upon the river, I should say this Tom Traverse is a jolly dog, who, like me, sees in life one vast comedy. With you, I think he does not spend the gold. Once he has it, I believe he does not care the worth of a broken paddle for it. It is not gold he wants—but adventure. Why, I myself, have always sought adventure. Yes, that is it—he is like me, he seeks adventure. Don’t you think so?”

“Perhaps he is like you. Then, you should be able to imagine what he does with the gold? He wouldn’t toss it away.”

“No—probably he wouldn’t toss it away—Nor, do I think he would spend it. For all his robbery, this man may have scruples against spending gold that is not rightly his. Do you not believe such a man might have scruples of honesty?”

“Yes, I believe he might,” admitted Downey. “But, what would he do with the plunder?”

Molaire chuckled: “You will have to ask that of Tom Traverse—that is too much for even my imagination. What could he do with it?”

Frowning, Downey rubbed his chin: “He might, let us say have a son—no—a daughter. Possibly, he might cache the gold—for her.”

“No, no! my friend—you suppose wrongly. Not such a man! Had this man a daughter, he would scorn to have her spend gold he would not spend himself. No—that is not the answer.”

Under great protest from Molaire, Corporal Downey took his departure, without staying for supper. The sun was setting as he paddled across the lake. Could he ever again watch the sunset with Marie? Once more he *must* see her—when the job was done. He knew the love of the motherless girl for the strange boy-man who was her father, and his heart ached for the torture he must inflict upon her. He knew, now, that for weeks he had loved her, as he had not believed it in his power to love a woman, and, during those age-long moments after the hold-up there had come to him the feeling of certainty that she, too, was conscious of the great bond between them. Again, he ran back in his mind over the little things—a word here—a look—the shadow of sorrow at his departures—the quick lighting of the deep eyes as he came—little things—but things of mighty import to the heart of a man who loves.

Little things that had brightened and lightened the hours of the long trails—now,

recalled,—each with its stab of pain. In his mind he pictured those eyes blazing with hate for the man who, stern duty demanded, must terminate the career of devil-may-care Molaire. God! but fate had played a scurvy trick in selecting him for her tool of justice! He again thought of going away,—of letting her hear from other lips the passing of the outlaw, Tom Traverse. Father Giroux, with words of infinite sympathy, could soften the blow that must fall upon that anguished heart. And, he, Corporal Downey, when the job was done, could ask transfer to some far post, far, far from the rivers. But, again, no! He would play the game to the end, even as it was evident that Molaire would play the game to the end. From his lips she should hear that which would forever place himself beyond the pale of even her friendship, much less love. He, himself, must speak the words that would make the name of Corporal Downey a name of hate and loathing to her for all her life.

His thoughts swung to Pierre Molaire. He must know I know him. At times, though, it seemed impossible that he did. Whether he does or not, his nerves are of steel. He won't weaken; I'm afraid he's right—he'll never be taken alive.

Corporal Downey had reached the outlet of the lake. Behind a screen of scrub, he beached his canoe, and, eating his solitary supper, awaited the darkness. Under cover of the velvet dark of the over-cast night, he doubled on his course, and, at the upper end of the lake, spread his blankets in a black spruce swamp.

From the top of the bank, in front of his cabin, Pierre Molaire watched, until Downey's canoe disappeared into the mouth of the river. Then, he turned away with a laugh: "He knows. Corporal Downey is very wise. He will play the game—this game of wits—to the end. It may be that at last I am to find my great adventure—who knows? And when the game is played to the final trick—when the curtain falls upon the last act of our drama—a grand comedy for me—for Downey, he believes, a tragedy—then I leave the little Marie in better hands than mine. In their eyes I have seen it—those two!"

## CHAPTER IX

### CORNERED

“WHAT! Back again so soon?” Corporal Downey started perceptibly at the words, and turned his head to look into the smiling face of Pierre Molaire. From the dense cover of a long point, he had been for hours watching the premises of Molaire. A half-hour before, he had seen the Frenchman enter the door of the cabin. Now, the man stood within two steps of him, laughing into his eyes. He had heard no slightest sound until, out of the silence, had come the spoken words. He remembered what the Superintendent had said to him—he just appears, and then seems just to fade away.

“I haven’t been anywhere to speak of,” answered Downey, gravely.

“No, I thought you were on the trail of Tom Traverse.”

“I am.”

“And, do you expect to catch him upon Eaglenest Lake?”

“I might. Who knows?” Downey rose from his seat among the branches of a fallen spruce, and drew his canoe from its place of concealment.

“Are you going?” asked Molaire, in surprise. “But, see—you could not find a better place from which to sweep the lake with your glass. From one end to the other, its waters lie outspread before you. See—yonder. What is that—a canoe?” He pointed toward a small speck that had appeared near the main outlet.

Downey focussed his glass upon it, and nodded: “Yes—a canoe.”

“O-ho!” cried Molaire. “We are to have a visitor! It may be even the mighty Tom Traverse, himself. See—he is changing his course for my cabin. It is that he has seen the canoe upon the beach. Let us go and give him proper welcome.”

They stepped into the canoe, and, pushing off, headed for the cabin. The occupant of the other canoe had seen them, and was waiting upon the beach. It was an Indian, who greeted Corporal Downey with an excited jumble of English, jargon, and Indian. The officer listened patiently, and from time to time he nodded. When the man had ceased speaking, Downey stood for a few moments in thought. Then, he turned abruptly to Molaire, who had been an interested listener, although he understood scarcely a word the man had spoken: “This Injun says there’s a breed trapper gone bad over on Red River. He’s killed an Injun, an’ the rest of ’em over there are all hidin’ in the bush. He was headin’ for Fort McMurray, when he ran onto us here. I’ve got to get over there before he kills any more Injuns, an’ Tom Traverse will have to wait a while. I’ll be back, though, as soon as I get this cleaned up.”

“A-ha! and so it is—the life of a man of the police. It has much of interest—and of adventure, that the life of a poor prospector has not. Good-bye, and good luck to you, my friend.”

“Good luck with all my undertakin’s?” asked Downey, with a grim smile.

Molaire laughed loudly: “Ah, but no! For I must smoke your good tobacco on the New Year’s Day. And, see—the summer is even now drawing toward its close.”

“Aye,” answered Downey, “it is drawin’ toward its close. But it’s a long time yet to New Year’s Day.” And, turning abruptly, he motioned the Indian into his canoe, and headed for the portage that would let him onto the Red River.

Once more, Pierre laughed, and watched the canoes out of sight. An hour later, he was slipping swiftly down the Moose in his own craft.

Corporal Downey completed the third and last trip of the six-mile portage between the headwaters of the McKay River and a tributary of the Red. Methodically, he loaded his canoe, and, with the crazy man bound amidships, started down the river, as the long afternoon was drawing to a close. He had passed a hard, nerve-wracking two weeks, since taking leave of Pierre Molaire on Eaglenest Lake. For six days and nights, he had pursued the madman who had terrorized the Red River natives, until, at last, he had overpowered him in the tepee of the murdered Indian.

And, this pursuit had not been assisted by the natives. Even the Indian who had guided him to the crazed trapper’s cabin, had deserted upon first sight of the mad half-breed.

A lesser man than Downey would justifiably have shot the dangerous lunatic, who roamed the river armed with two loaded rifles, shooting at anything and everything that moved. But, that was not Downey’s way. And, although twice, the man had sent a bullet within inches of his head, he did not return the fire, but kept doggedly on the trail, until he wore the man down, and, crashing tepee and all about his ears as he slept, succeeded, after a terrific struggle, in binding him hand and foot. But, with the capture, his troubles were only begun. The man had to be transported by canoe to Fort McMurray on the Athabasca; and, bind him as you will, the transportation of a raving, able-bodied maniac in a canoe, is no child’s play, especially in a country where portages are frequent and rough, and the hundred and seventy pound prisoner must be backpacked every foot of the way. And not only backpacked across portages, but tended like a baby, and forcibly fed twice a day.

So, it was with a sigh of relief, that Downey, with the last portage behind him, let the canoe drift downward with the current toward the Athabasca. And, as he drifted, his thoughts turned almost for the first time in the past two weeks to Pierre Molaire. Had he remained at his cabin on Eaglenest Lake, or had he started out once more on the trail of his “great adventure”?

Hour after hour, the canoe slipped smoothly down the river, the Birch Mountains faded from sight, and to the southward, appeared the Thickwood Hills. With the sun low on the horizon, Downey scanned the banks for a camp site. With paddle poised for a stroke, he paused. What was it—that sound? Leaning tensely forward, he listened. Again he heard it, and this time unmistakably,—the sound of a far-off shot, and another—and another. The shots came from far downriver, and with long powerful strokes of the paddle, he sent the canoe forward. As the canoe rounded bend after bend of the river, the shots became more plain, but they were not on the river. He was abreast of them now. They came from the southward—from the edge of the Thickwood Hills.

Beaching the canoe, Downey carried the lunatic up the bank, and secured him to a tree. Then, without waiting to make supper, struck out in the direction from which an occasional shot still sounded.

A mile inland, he came upon Constable Peters, carbine in hand, lying on his belly

behind the stump of an uprooted tree. Beyond, in the center of a brush-grown clearing, he could see the outlines of a cabin. “What’s all the racket? Target practice?” asked the Corporal, with a grin.

Peters returned the grin: “Target practice is right. But we ain’t got much of a target—only that we can see him once in a while between the chinkin’. Looks like we’ve got him at last! There’s eight of us under Corporal James. An’ we run him down, an’ got him surrounded.”

“Got who surrounded?”

“Why, Tom Traverse! He’s in the cabin. The Superintendent called in a bunch of us, an’ held us in Edmonton as a sort of flyin’ squad, so if Tom Traverse pulled any more of his stuff, we could get on the job at a minute’s notice. An’ sure enough, he did. The bank at Brule Rouge, a week ago yesterday. We crowded him close, an’ run him down in the cabin here, which he must have planted it with rifles an’ ammunition, ’cause he’s sure be’n burnin’ it to us.”

“Hurt anyone?”

“Not yet, but he’s sockin’ ’em in dam’ close. He dodges around from one wall to another, shootin’ between the logs where the chinkin’s out, and we can’t never see more’n just a shadow.”

“Where’s James?”

“ ’Round on the other side, I guess. He was here a few minutes ago, an’ went on past.”

Cautiously, Downey circumvented the clearing, passing three or four other constables, spaced at intervals in the scrub. A gun roared at the edge of the clearing, and the shot was immediately answered by one from the cabin.

Downey found Corporal James occupying a position opposite the closed door of the cabin. The officer greeted him with relief: “I’m sure glad to see you, Downey. This is your job from now on. You rank me, an’ I’m turnin’ it over to you.”

“Looks like you’ve done a pretty good job so far,” said Downey. “You’re the first man to get him cornered. Why not finish it?”

“Not with you here! I don’t mind telling you that our cornering him was sheer luck. He shows up at the cashier’s window of the Brule Rouge bank, and calmly gathers in what currency there was in sight, and then fades away. We get word of it at Edmonton ten minutes later, and pile out after him. I sent half the boys up to Fort McMurray on a special engine, and with the other half and another engine, I hit for Athabasca Landing. We figured he’s got a hideout somewhere along the river—after your gun that he took in the express car turned up at Fort McMurray, with a polite note of thanks tied to the barrel. So we got canoes, and started down the river. The next day, while we were eating lunch, we saw a canoe put out into the stream and immediately took out after it. Instead of holding to the river, the fellow beached his canoe, and hit it into the scrub. We fired at him, but couldn’t do any good from the canoes, so I sent one of the boys to pick up the Fort McMurray outfit, and, with the others, and old Jerry Blood for a tracker, took up his trail.

“He’s been twisting and doubling round in the bush for a week. The others came on, and, at last, we ran him down in this cabin this afternoon. He’s well armed—must have had a gun cache in there, because he had no rifle when he left the canoe. I scattered the boys around the edge of the clearing, with orders to shoot whenever they caught sight of

him through the cracks, but we don't seem to have much luck. Maybe, I ought to have rushed him right away at the start. But, he'd be almost sure to get two or three of us, and I hate to risk the men, when it's not absolutely necessary. What do you think?"

"You're right about not rushin' him. He'd sure clip off some one. But, I don't think you're goin' to have much luck tryin' to pot him through a crack, at least, not until mornin'. You might slip around, an' tell the men to hold their fire, till they're reasonably sure of somethin' to shoot at an' of making their shot count. The moon'll be up pretty soon, an' that'll give him the advantage if anyone shows himself. It looks to me like we've got a good chance to starve him out. It's a sure thing this cabin's not his regular or permanent hangout, an' this far back from the river, he prob'ly hasn't got it stocked very heavy with grub an' water. Tell the men to keep awake, so he can't give us the slip in the night, an' in the mornin' maybe we can have a pow-wow with him."

Corporal James shook his head doubtfully: "He's never going to give himself up, unless he's plumb starved into it—not with all he's got against him, he won't. If he had the lives of a cat, he'd have to serve 'em all in jail before he worked out the time he's piled up for himself."

"Maybe not, but, anyway, we can't do anything until mornin', except keep him surrounded. I've got to go back to the river, an' feed a crazy trapper I'm bringin' in. In the mornin' we'll send one of the constables on to Fort McMurray with him. Be back in a couple of hours."

Corporal Downey returned, and made a round of the men, cautioning each one not, for a moment, to relax his vigilance. Then, he joined James at the post opposite the door. The younger corporal pointed toward the cabin. "What the devil is he up to now? Look, he's lighted a candle." Almost with the words, a shot rang out from the opposite side of the clearing, and was promptly returned from the cabin, from a point, however, far removed from the burning candle.

Downey chuckled: "Might have known he wouldn't be sittin' round holdin' that light in his lap."

"It's young Garver. He's a rookie. Got a lot to learn. But, what in thunder does Tom Traverse want of a light?"

"There's a lot of questions that's been asked of Tom Traverse that haven't been answered," replied Downey, and relapsed into a moody silence that lasted until rudely shattered by the sound of a shot, fired toward the cabin from the shelter of a clump of bushes, midway between the building and the edge of the clearing. There was a spurt of red, and the roar of an answering shot from between the logs—a second shot from the clearing, and again, on the instant, another shot from the cabin. Corporal James leaned close to Downey, and pointed to a solitary figure, dimly visible in the moonlight, wriggling back through the bushes toward the edge of the clearing. "It's young Garver again," he whispered. "Thought he could slip in close, an' pot Traverse. He's a good boy—but a little too anxious. He's heard the talk that's been passin' round about promotion for the man that gets Tom Traverse, an' he don't figure on bein' left out of the runnin'."

"We were all rookies, once," reminded Downey. "I can remember when I was strainin' every nerve in me to get my promotion."

"You could have had all the promotions there are," ventured James, a note of half-



inquiry in his voice.

But Corporal Downey relapsed once more into silence, and the younger man felt himself rebuffed.

Shortly after daylight, Downey, ignoring the protest of Corporal James, tossed aside his gun, and walked out into the clearing. "Hello!" he called, "hello, in there, Tom Traverse!"

There was no answering hail, and again Downey tried. "Tom Traverse, you are under arrest for robbery of the Brule Rouge bank, and I warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

Silence profound greeted the announcement. For a moment, Downey stood rigid. Could it be that the last shot from young Garver's gun made an end to Tom Traverse? But, no, the last shot had come from the cabin. Even so, the outlaw might have been hard hit, and still have fired that last shot. Had another hand than his terminated that wild career? If so . . . Downey's brain was a chaos, but he quickly restored its accustomed order. Had Traverse managed to escape through that cordon of vigilant police—or was he merely lying low? With swift strides, he walked directly to the door, again ignoring the cry of caution that roared from the lips of Corporal James. The next instant, he was thundering upon the door with his fist: "Open, or I'll smash it in!" he threatened. There was no reply, and stooping, he applied his eye to a crevice between the logs. Then straightening abruptly, he hastened to the end wall, and stood looking down into an excavation that led beneath the sill log. Instantly, he was joined by every man of the party, and in silence they stared at the tunnel under the wall.

Corporal Downey led the way again to the door, and, after trying it with his shoulder, ordered a constable to fall a tree for a battering ram. When the door crashed inward, Downey was the first to enter, and, for several minutes he stood just within the threshold, staring intently about him. Behind him, the constables were whispering questions, which were answered by mystified head-shakes of other constables.

"But, when could he possibly have crossed that clearing?" asked James, stepping to Downey's side. "From the point where he dug out, both you and I, as well as two or three others could have seen him cross, and he must have passed within ten or fifteen yards of at least two of us to get through the line."

Corporal Downey grinned a wry grin: "Exactly," he admitted, "an' as a matter of fact, both you an' I sat there an' watched him go—an' talked about it."

"What do you mean?" cried James.

For answer, Downey turned to Garver, the rookie, with a question: "Did you fire a shot at the cabin last night?"

"Yes, sir—one shot."

"Where from?"

"Why, from my place in the line."

"It wasn't you, then, that fired the two shots from midway of the clearin'—about midnight—the last shots fired?"

"No, sir. I figured that was Constable Peters,—he was next to me in line."

"It wasn't me," cried Peters, "I thought it was you! Why sure it was! Didn't I set there

an' watch you crawl back——”

“What you talkin' about?” gasped Garver. “It was me set an' watched you crawl back to the edge of the clearin'!”

“It was both of you sat there and watched Tom Traverse crawl out and slip through the line between you,” said Downey, with conviction. “An' it was Tom Traverse that fired those two shots from the clearin'.”

“But,” protested James, “it couldn't have been! Don't you remember, Traverse answered both those shots from the cabin!”

“That's right, sir,” volunteered the crestfallen Peters, “the last shot come from within the cabin—jest a second before I seen Garver crawlin' back——”

“I tell you, it wasn't me——”

“The hell it wasn't——”

“It was Tom Traverse,” reiterated Downey, “an', you two boys don't need to quarrel, or to look so sheepish about lettin' him through, either. Both James an' I sat here an' watched him go, too. In twenty years of policin', this is about the cleverest get-away I ever saw pulled. Step inside, and I'll show you how he worked it. An' at the same time, I'll answer Corporal James' question about why Tom Traverse lit his candle.”

As the men crowded the door, Downey pointed to a rude table drawn up close against the wall, directly behind a chink. “Here's the way he worked it.” Downey pointed to a pair of rifles that lay on the table, their muzzles wedged between the logs. “You see,” he explained, “they're sighted on that clump of brush where the shots came from—but they're sighted high, so as to shoot over a man kneelin' down. See those two cans of beef danglin' by the strings off the back of the table? An' notice how each can has been tore up by a rifle bullet? Notice, too, that the cans have got the paper labels tore off one side—the side where the bullet hit? Well, it's plain enough. Tom Traverse lights his candle, an' sets it on the corner of the table—you can see where it burned down to grease. Then, he peels off the paper from his cans, an' ties 'em to the triggers, after sightin' the guns. Then, he sets the cans like this.” Downey placed the two cans upon the rear edge of the table at such an angle that the light of the candle reflected upon their bright tin surfaces. “After that, he digs out under the wall an' snakes his way on his belly through that bunch of weeds to the brush clump. Then he fires at the bright spot, an' knocks a can off the table. When its weight comes down on the string, it pulls the trigger of the rifle, an' an answerin' shot comes from the cabin, an' a bullet whistles over his head. Then, to make the play real good he repeats the performance with the other can. The second gun shoots back, an' we're all sure that Tom Traverse is still in the cabin. Then, without takin' much trouble to conceal himself, he calmly crawls out through the line, figurin' that each man would think it was the one next to him that had crawled out an' done the shootin', an' was crawlin' back again. An',” he concluded, with a wry smile, “it looks as if he figgered right.”

“What's this?” asked Corporal James, stepping to the wall, and removing a scrap of paper pinned to the log with a sliver. “Here, Corporal Downey, it's for you.”

Downey took the paper, and read:

CORPORAL DOWNEY,

Your unexpected addition to the force that has my future, and immediate, welfare at heart makes it advisable for me to leave this cabin at once. I regret that I shall not be here in the morning to enjoy with you my very good joke on the police. It is also with regret that I cannot honestly wish you better luck next time. I thank you for the use of your pistol, which, if you have not already done so, you may recover at Fort McMurray. I dare not remain to thank, in person, an officer gifted with your imagination. Till we meet again

---

TOM TRAVERSE.

Corporal Downey read the note carefully, and placed it as carefully in his pocket. Then, he turned to James: "Where's Jerry Blood?" he asked.

"I sent him, with Constable Nolan to McMurray for supplies. Didn't figure I'd need him, after he tracked Tom Traverse down in the cabin here."

"Better get him on the trail as soon as possible. If Traverse don't get hold of a canoe, he may be able to run him down again. Send someone to McMurray with my lunatic, an' for the rest of it, use your own judgment. I'm hittin' North."

## CHAPTER X

### A FEAST—AND A PROMISE

STRIKING due north, Corporal Downey crossed the McKay and the Moose, and, in the early evening, came upon the cabin on Eaglenest Lake from the rear. He had traversed some thirty miles of hill and swamp country at a pace that would have out-distanced most men,—hopelessly so; but, this time, he did not flatter himself that he had out-distanced Molaire. If the man had hit for the cabin, he would be here now; if not, he would be far in another direction. No smoke rose from the chimney.

Cautiously, Downey approached the building, and made his way to the front. As he stepped around the corner of the house, he came upon Molaire seated upon his rustic bench, an open book on his knees. It was Marco Polo, and Downey could not repress the heartfelt wish that all could be as it was when first he had seen that book in Molaire's hands,—when he read aloud to his "little Marie." The Frenchman quickly laid aside his reading, and rose to his feet with outstretched hand: "O-ho! who but the good Corporal Downey come to pass the time of day with his friend!"

Downey shook the hand, swung out of his pack, and, seating himself beside the other, proceeded to fill his pipe. Molaire laid a hand on Downey's shoulder, and glanced solicitously into his eyes: "Have you eaten? Wait, and I will get supper. For myself, I have given no thought to food. I have been lost in the adventures of the great Marco Polo. Ah! there was a man who lived!"

"I've had supper."

"But, where is your canoe? I did not see you on the lake."

"I came afoot—from the south."

"You did not go to Red River, then?"

"Yes. I was takin' that crazy trapper down to Fort McMurray, when I ran onto the trail of Tom Traverse."

If Molaire noticed that Downey was watching him narrowly, he gave no sign: "On the trail of Tom Traverse! So, then,—he is not on Eaglenest Lake as you thought."

"Yes," answered Downey, "he is on Eaglenest Lake."

"But—I do not understand," Molaire's brows knitted in a puzzled frown. "You came from the southward, you say. Did you follow his trail to Eaglenest?"

"No. As far as I could see, he left no trail."

"How, then, do you say you crossed his trail to the southward?"

"I heard shootin' south of the McKay, where a squad of police had got him surrounded in a cabin——"

"And, he got away!"

"Aye. He got away."

"But—how?—with all those police, and you, too?"

"Dug out under the wall, an' by a clever ruse worked his way through the line."

“Ho, ho! this Tom Traverse! A jolly dog! A man of infinite resource, eh? And of—imagination. One could say that he was finding adventure in life.”

“Would you say so?” asked Downey, his eyes on the man’s face.

Pierre Molaire snapped his fingers: “Well—more adventure certainly than the most of us. I would say that he enjoys life as best he may. But—I doubt that he has found the great adventure,—even the game he now plays, pitting himself against the world, against the police,—his one small imagination against the many snares and traps set for him; that is a good game, and a good adventure, but to me it would not be the great adventure. And we have agreed, have we not that this Tom Traverse and Pierre Molaire are very like in their philosophy.”

“And will he ever find his great adventure, do you think?”

Molaire shrugged: “Who knows? But, come, I will kindle a fire in the fire-place, and we can talk. Also, I shall prepare some food. One who has trailed in from the McKay can surely eat another supper. I, myself, am now hungry—and I have been but reading of travel.”

As Molaire disappeared into the kitchen, Downey sat before the fire-place, and watched the flames roar into the throat of the chimney. He smiled,—a grim smile yet one of admiration: “There never was another like him,” he whispered to the flames, “there couldn’t be.” And then, as his thoughts turned to the girl, the smile died on his lips, and he stared moodily into the fire.

A step on the porch startled him, and the next moment, the door was thrown open, and Marie, herself, stood upon the threshold, her eyes laughing into his own. Mechanically, Corporal Downey rose from his chair, as the girl came swiftly toward him, her face lighting with pleasure. Behind her, the form of Father Giroux stood framed in the doorway. Downey took the outstretched hands, and his whole being thrilled to the touch of her slim, strong fingers. She was speaking over her shoulder: “See, Father Giroux, it is Corporal Downey! Is it not fun to be here all together? But, where is my father?”

Molaire, himself, answered her question by throwing open the kitchen door, and gathering her in his arms, while Downey watched with longing envy: “A-ha, the little Marie! So you have come once more with your needle to sew the old man up for the winter! And, the good Father Giroux, also! Ho, ho! a jolly party we make—we four together! But—make yourselves comfortable while I add more victuals to the feast——”

“You’d better add a whole lot,” laughed the girl, “for I’m hungry as a bear. We haven’t eaten since noon, and Father Giroux, too, must be starved!”

“There will be plenty, and to spare,” promised Molaire. “And, while I prepare the food, you lay the table. We will eat in there before the fire. A jolly party, and a jolly feast we shall have. ’Tis lucky that no earlier than today, I killed a young deer.” He turned to Downey as he spoke, and the mocking light in his eyes shone impishly. The officer could not restrain the amused twist to the corner of his mouth.

“Come, Corporal Downey,” called the girl, rolling the sleeves of her flannel shirt from her rounded forearms, “you shall help me spread the table. We will let Father Giroux sit before the fire. See, he is already getting out his long pipe for a smoke. The poor man has not smoked since noon, either.”

Together, the two drew the table into place, and spread the cloth. Then, many trips

they made between the little built-in cupboard and the table. When the task was completed to the satisfaction of Marie, she stepped out on the screened porch. Downey followed, drawn irresistibly by his girl of the laughing eyes. But, the eyes were not laughing, as she pointed toward the west where the faintest afterglow still marked the spot where the sun had sunk behind the distant shore: "It is long since we have watched the sunset together," she said, regretfully, "and now it is too late."

"Aye—too late."

Something in the tone caused her to look quickly into his face: "Why are you so—solemn? I think maybe you are not glad to see me." The red lips pouted prettily: "And, why did you not stop—even for a moment—the last time you were at the mission?"

"I couldn't stop. I was—in a hurry."

"Oh, I know. Father Giroux told me. You were hurrying to find that Tom Traverse. And, have you not caught him yet?"

Downey noticed a mischievous twinkle in the dark eyes, as the pout changed to a smile. "No," he answered, "I have not caught him—yet."

The girl laughed aloud merrily: "There, I was just teasing you! We met Corporal James and his men on the river, and they told us about what happened at the cabin at the foot of the Thickwood Hills. He must be clever—this Tom Traverse—and brave. So far, he has outwitted the police. But, he cannot hope to continue to outwit them—to outwit you. So, do not look so solemn and downcast, just because he got away from you this once. You will catch him, I know."

Corporal Downey nodded slowly: "Aye," he said, "I will catch him."

Again their eyes met, and those of the girl were now troubled: "But, why are you so sad about it all? You speak almost as though you didn't want to catch him." Unconsciously, she rested her hand upon his sleeve, as she looked at him with anxious inquiry.

Corporal Downey took the hand in his own. The girl's pulse quickened joyously at the contact. Never before had he touched her hand, except in the formality of a greeting,—and this was—different. The surge of emotion that had swept over her that night at the camp-fire no longer puzzled her, though now there was no accompanying sense of power, and she—knew. This was her man,—this strong, erect figure beside her—and every fiber of her being knew that her heart had chosen wisely, and was glad. Her eyes rose quickly to his, seeking the light she knew must lie within them, and dropped before his intense gaze lest he read her all too easily.

For a moment, they stood silent,—and then, the man seemed to gather the will to speak. His voice sounded far, and even more somber than before: "Listen, Marie." It is the first time he has called me by name thought the girl. "Put yourself in my place, an' tell me what you would do. You are a police officer, with twenty years of service behind you. Durin' these twenty years you have, in so far as possible, performed your duty as best you might. Suddenly, the police are confronted with a series of robberies. Tom Traverse is carryin' out his campaign of crime. You realize that here is a man of great resource,—one against whom it would be a pleasure to match your wits. You determine to ask for special detail to run him down. Before you can see the Superintendent to ask this detail, you meet Tom Traverse—in fact, he robs an express car in which you are ridin', an', catchin' you

unaware, he escapes. But, before he escapes, you recognize him——”

“Recognize him!”

“Aye,—an’ as a friend—as one you have learned to hold in high regard, not only for himself, but for—well, for other reasons, also. Within a few hours, you stand before the Superintendent——”

“And, in spite of the pain that is in your heart,” interrupted the girl, “you ask for the detail.” Troubled as she was by the man’s problem and his evident distress in it, her own heart sang—Corporal Downey, the inscrutable, as Father Giroux called him, had brought his worry to her. What could it mean, but . . . And, the man, awaiting, saw the great, deep eyes raised once more to his.

“An’ that is what you would have done?” he asked.

“I do not know,—it is a terrible thing—I hope,” she continued, and her pride in him shone clear, “that I should have been strong enough to do—as you have done.”

“Even though it would destroy whatever life holds out to you in the way of—of happiness?”

Slowly, the girl nodded: “What else could you do?” she said, simply. “That would not change the obligation to do one’s duty—it would make it harder, that’s all. Sometimes, for instance, I think that Father Giroux has sacrificed happiness to duty.”

“An’, what has it got him?” asked Downey, with bitterness in his voice.

“Why, it has got him the love and the respect of all who know him. He is a man!”

“Aye,—he is a man—none better.”

“And, what more could a man wish than words like that from the lips of a man like you? Duty always carries its own reward.”

“I have heard that said before,” answered Downey, grimly. “All right. I’ll candle my eggs!”

The girl’s hand slipped from his, and she faced him with puzzled brow. “But,—if you know this man—know where to find him—why don’t you go and arrest him before he can commit another crime?”

“It’s a matter of evidence,” answered the officer. “I know to a certainty who this man is; but I cannot prove it to a jury. It is one thing to know——”

“Come, come! The venison steaks are steaming hot. There will be time for talk later.” The voice of Pierre Molaire from the doorway cut in on Downey’s words, and, as they turned to the lighted room, he whispered into the girl’s ear: “Say nothin’ of this to anyone.”

Beside each place, stood a glass filled to the brim with dark-red berry wine. Pierre Molaire raised his glass. “Before we eat,” he announced, with a smile, “it seems fitting that we should drink. To Father Giroux, we shall accord the honor of proposing the toast.”

Lifting his glass, the priest glanced about the board: “Inasmuch as we have with us one who is matching his wits against those of an arch-criminal, it seems auspicious that we should show our appreciation of his work. I propose that we drink to the success of Corporal Downey, and to the utter confounding of Tom Traverse.”

“Ho, ho!” laughed Molaire, his eyes dancing with fun. “The good Father would array us all upon the side of law and order! But, being a rover and a ne’er-do-well, myself, I

have taken a liking to this Tom Traverse—a jolly dog, he seems. One who gambols through life, and who gambles with life—who laughs when he wins, and who will not cry when he loses.” He paused, and turned his twinkling eyes upon Downey. “See, Corporal Downey is my good friend. He will not, I am sure, take offense should I drink my toast to a long life, and a merry one—for Tom Traverse!”

Despite his grim mood, Downey caught the infection of the Frenchman’s laugh. He shook his head: “No offense,” he smiled, “but manifestly, I cannot drink to the success of Tom Traverse, nor will modesty permit me to drink to my own success. Allow me to propose a toast we all may drink.” He paused for the chorus of assent. “May the best man win!”

“Fair enough!” cried Molaire.

“It is well,” agreed the priest, adding with a smile, “for then we drink to the Corporal.”

“But—wait!” Marie was smiling mistily. “You have all had your say, and I do not choose to be left out altogether. We will drink Corporal Downey’s toast, but I shall add another line.” As she met Downey’s gaze, the warm blood surged to her cheeks, and, for an instant she hesitated, then: “And in the winning, may he find not only success—but his happiness.”

They drank, and the meal thus opened, proceeded merrily, with talk of the outlaw and his daring exploits monopolizing the conversation. “What I cannot understand,” ventured Father Giroux, with a glance toward the officer, “is how this man gets his information in advance. If I have been correctly informed, at no time has he robbed a train, or a boat upon the river, or a bank, that was not carrying a large sum of money—at least a sum much larger than their general run of business.”

“I’ve wondered at that, too,” answered Downey, “I——”

“But, that is so easy, my friends!” interrupted Molaire. “I am surprised that you should ponder so simple a matter. Where is your imagination?” He was smiling at Downey, now. “If I make no mistake as to the doings of this adventurer, he has robbed only the pay-rolls of oil concerns doing business in the North. Am I right, Corporal Downey?”

Fascinated by the man’s audacity, Downey could but nod assent.

“Well, then, it would be the simplest thing in the world for this Tom Traverse to learn when these shipments were due. All he would have to do would be to mingle with the oil crews upon the river, and he would not be long in finding out when the pay-roll was due. Men can easily be induced to boast of their pay-days. Then, too, this would tend to substantiate our friend’s opinion that Tom Traverse spends his time north of the railways, rather than in the cities and towns of the provinces.”

“But the banks?” inquired the priest. “Is it not true that the banks had more money on hand than usual when this man paid his—calls?”

“Pouf! the banks! One does not have to be a shrewd economist to know that money flows westward in the fall. I have taken a liking to this jolly rogue, so great a liking that I find myself many times putting myself in his place,—just to figure out what he would do.” Molaire paused, and his infectious laugh rang through the cabin: “His latest escapade—! It is so much the rare kind of joke that I, myself, would like to play, though it is one that our friend the Corporal does not seem to relish. But, he is a good sportsman, and will not begrudge his friends their amusement at his expense. Who knows? Next time, the tables



may be turned, and we may be laughing over the misfortunes of Tom Traverse. And, I have no doubt that he, too, is a good sportsman, and would not begrudge us our laughter.”

“We heard the tale from Corporal James,” said the priest. “The ruse he used is the cleverest I have heard. And the audacity of the man in leaving a note to Downey, whom he seems to have recognized!”

“A note! Ho, ho, ho! Did he leave a note? You did not tell me of that, my good Corporal. And what did his note say? Surely, you did not destroy it? I should love to read it—or would that be carrying the fun too far?”

“Have your fun while you can,” answered Downey, lugubriously. “It will be my turn soon.”

He tossed the scrap of paper upon the table, and Molaire picking it up, read it aloud. “But, this pistol, of which he speaks? Surely, an officer of the police would not lend his pistol to an outlaw?”

“It was a forced loan. He took it from the wall of an express car in which I was riding. It is another little joke that Tom Traverse has played—on me.”

“But, with all his boldness, you do not expect he will dare to leave the pistol at Fort McMurray? That is but another of his jests.”

“The gun is at Fort McMurray.”

“Is it possible?” Molaire’s eyes widened with surprise. “Ah, my friend, and how do you expect to capture such a man?”

Downey countered: “How would you go at it? Your imagination worked well in the case of the dead oil men. How would you go about the capture of Tom Traverse?”

“I could never *capture* him! Nor, will you, nor any other man—of that I am sure. Tom Traverse will never be taken alive. As to running him down,” the man smiled regretfully, “I shall have to leave that to the police. I could not plot, or even help to plot his downfall. He is too much a man after my own heart—this rogue who plays fast and loose with life—who seeks adventure for adventure’s sake only. Why, even our good priest, here, could find much to admire in such an outlaw!”

Idly, Father Giroux’s fingers picked up the note from the table, and he scanned the written words before he spoke: “A thief is a thief. ’Tis a great pity that such a man as this should have turned to thievery. He is a man of brains, and of humor,—a man born to better fortune than a life of crime.”

“But,” expostulated Molaire, “can you not ignore the deeds, and admire the *man*? It is not his crime that I admire, it is the romance, the adventure of the life he leads.”

“I cannot admire one who places the lives of others in jeopardy to satisfy a whim, and who enriches himself wrongfully at the expense of others.”

At these words of the priest, Downey, who had been watching the face of Molaire, saw the man give an almost imperceptible start, as his glance rested momentarily upon the girl seated directly across the board. The next instant, he had relapsed into his attitude of respectful attention, and, out of the corner of his eye, Downey, too, turned his glance toward the girl. She had lifted the scrap of paper from the table where Father Giroux had laid it. Molaire’s voluble retort to the priest fell unheeded on his ears, as he watched the face of the girl, whose fingers were slowly unfolding the paper. Bravely, Molaire strove to

attract attention to himself, as, with fist-bangs, he drove home his points in defense of Tom Traverse. But, the eyes of Corporal Downey held to the face of the girl. She was staring, now, at the written words . . . staring . . . staring! The officer saw the smile with which she had listened to the argument fade from the lips that closed to a thin straight line, —saw her face pale to ashen grey as the blood slowly receded—saw the paper tremble ever so slightly as she read the last word; and, seeing, lived in those few moments the whole gamut of human emotion: compassion—deep—tender, for the pain in the heart of the woman he loved;—anger—almost hate—against the man who was the cause of the pain;—and, then, a surge of admiration, and of vast pride in the girl, who, with steady fingers, folded the note, and dropped it carelessly to the table.

The meal concluded in a gale of laughter from Molaire, who claimed to have triumphed in his debate with the priest. “And, now, Father,” he added, “we will leave the wreck of the feast to these two, while you and I pack in your outfit from the canoe.”

Upon the beach, the priest laid a hand upon the shoulder of Molaire: “Have you seen how it is with—those two?”

“Yes, Father. And it is well. Corporal Downey is a *man*—and when my time comes to go, I can go happily, knowing that all will be well with the little Marie.”

“You have spoken truly. Downey is a man—a good man—one of the best I have ever known;—a man who richly deserves the happiness which is to be his—for, in all the world, he could find no better wife than Marie.”

“She has been a good daughter. She will be a good wife.” Father Giroux noted a slight stiffening of the shoulders as the man added: “She is a Molaire. What the Molaire do, they do well.”

Inside the house, the dishes were removed to the kitchen in silence, and, in silence, they were washed and dried, and returned to their shelves. Together, the two stood before the fire-place, staring at the flames that flowed smoothly upward to disappear into the stone chimney. The brain of the girl was mazed and numbed, but one fact stood out in a horrible clarity; she was the daughter of a thief,—a criminal, hounded by the law! And swift came the torturing question: what man of the police can love the daughter of an outlaw? She must put that from her forever—oh! but that could not be—What could she do—what could be done—? And again, and again: “I am the daughter of a criminal!”

And, Downey, conscious to his inmost soul of her suffering, suffered in silence beside her, and fought with his conscience, and with his arms that ached to draw her to him and to hold her fast in a comforting embrace;—for how could she but loathe the touch, even the very sight, of the man who hunted her father? It was his voice that gruffly broke the stillness of the room: “I’ll be goin’ now.”

Slowly, the girl raised her pathetic face to him, and, in her tone was a peculiar listlessness: “Going? Where?”

The man unconsciously tensed, and his face set. Straight into her eyes he looked: “On the trail of Tom Traverse.”

The words seemed to clear her bewildered mind. For a moment, she stood with bent head, and Downey could just see the quivering lips, and the tear that trickled down one cheek; then, stepping quickly to him, she placed her hands upon his two shoulders. With head held bravely erect, she met his gaze squarely: “A man must do his duty, no matter

what the cost, nor to whom!”

“Aye—no matter what the cost, nor to—whom.” The words were almost a groan, and Downey turned away abruptly.

“Wait! I shall see you again?”

“Aye—” answered the man, once again. “When I have—have——”

“You promise to come to me—*then?*” Her hand rested pleadingly upon his sleeve.

“Aye,” he answered, and the word sounded hardly above a whisper, “I promise!” The next instant, he had seized the hand, crushed it to his lips, and, turning sharply, strode rapidly from the room.

With the spot where the man’s lips had pressed held tightly to her own, Marie Molaire stood in the darkness of the doorway, and watched him swing his pack to his shoulders, and disappear into the blackness of the woods,—Corporal Downey of the police on the trail of Tom Traverse! Running to her own room, she locked the door behind her, and, sobbing bitterly, threw herself on the bed, and buried her face in the pillow.

Far into the night, the girl lay—thinking—thinking—thinking—and dreading. What could she do? Why did he have to do these wild things? Wild? Think what they are all calling him now—even the good Father Giroux—thief! And, now, what good would it do for him to stop—? Unless he ran away, and that he would never do—every policeman in Canada against him—and, now, Corporal Downey! *I must* beg him to stop—to go away—to *run away*—no, it is of no use. It is too late—too late! I can *never* speak to him of this—he must never know I know—that would but cause him unhappiness and he is so happy—Oh, *mon père, mon père*, why have you done these things? You are no thief—nor can any robbing make you one. Yes that is it, I must play *my* game, too,—and pray. And Corporal Downey, whose kiss still burned on her hand—of him she dared not think.

The dawn was slowly breaking as she sobbed herself to a troubled sleep.

## CHAPTER XI

### DOWNEY LAYS HIS TRAP

WITH the utmost precision, Corporal Downey formed his plans, as he lay in his blankets, a half a mile to the southward of the cabin of Pierre Molaire. The presence of Marie and Father Giroux would hold Molaire on Eaglenest Lake for several days to come. Striking southward at daylight, the officer headed for the McKay, where, in the evening, he came upon Constable Peters, who, with the aid of old Jerry Blood, the Indian tracker, was endeavoring to pick up the trail of Tom Traverse.

The following morning, Downey, in Peters' canoe, dropped down the McKay, pushed up the Moose, and, two days later, established a wickiup camp in a swamp upon the west side of Eaglenest Lake. From a point of vantage on the shore, he daily scanned with his glass the waters of the lake, and the vicinity of the Molaires' cabin. These were the days of late summer calm, when the surface of the lake spread unruffled before him, like a vast mirror, which caught and held the image of each fleecy cloud, and inverted the shoreline into a mystic forest, whose spruce spires reached far downward as if to probe the illimitable depths.

And, on the lake, daily, after the evening meal, Marie Molaire would push out her canoe. And, from his hiding place, Downey would watch while the shadows lengthened, and the deepening twilight merged the light craft into the dimness of the farther shore. Then, he would return to his camp, and sit long beside the flames of his tiny fire.

On the morning of the fifth day, a canoe put off from the strip of shingle before the cabin, and headed for the source of the river. Father Giroux and Marie were returning to the mission. All that day, and the next, Downey watched the lake, and especially the upturned canoe of Molaire that was just visible through the glass upon the little strip of beach. When the darkness fell on the second evening after the departure of the two to the mission, he broke camp, and, loading his outfit into the canoe, paddled slowly across the lake toward the beacon light that shone from Molaire's window.

Beaching the canoe, he ascended the bank, and tapped lightly upon the door, which opened instantly to disclose the smiling face of the Frenchman: "Come in, come in! Always Corporal Downey is welcome in the home of Pierre Molaire! I had not expected you back so soon. You left us abruptly. The little Marie—it was she who told us you had struck out upon the trail of Tom Traverse."

"Aye," answered Downey, entering the room, where a fire crackled merrily in the fireplace. For, even in summer the nights are cool.

"The little Marie—she seemed downcast, and sad. It is not like her—she, whose heart is always so gay." The two seated themselves before the fire, and filled their pipes, Molaire laying aside his book—the inevitable Marco Polo. The Frenchman broke the silence: "Is it, Corporal Downey, that an old man can speak plainly, and without offense, to a younger?"

Downey eyed the speaker inquisitively: "Sure! But, you do not call yourself an old man?"

The other laughed, and snapped his fingers: "And why not? Yes, I am old. In the nature of things my course has not long to run. It is not that I do not enjoy life,—I do,—none better. But, men die—that's all. It is to be thankful that I did not die young."

The officer met the twinkling eyes squarely: "You could live long if you would—an' you know it."

"Yes, one could live long—if it could be called living. But, the mere adding of years to a lifetime is not living. Men have lived long, and have died at thirty, and others who may boast of ninety years, have never lived. But, it is not of the span of life that I would speak. It is of the little Marie. I have seen, and Father Giroux has seen, that she has come to hold you in high regard." He paused, and, receiving no reply, continued: "Since you so abruptly left Eaglenest Lake, she has been sad. It may be that she fears you will fail in your pursuit of Tom Traverse."

"Or, that I will not fail," answered Downey, grimly.

"Possibly. She may fear that when you two meet, you will come to harm."

"Or that he——"

"What is that?" Molaire glanced toward the open window, through which had floated a long, weird call.

"A loon, maybe."

"No. Not a loon. Listen."

Again it sounded, a long-drawn, wailing call—Wh-o-o-h-o-oo!

"A hail from one who is lost. But, from the lake, he should see our light!" cried Molaire. "Wait!" Swiftly, he lighted a lantern, and, together, the two walked to the edge of the bank, where the Frenchman swung the lantern to and fro.

A hail answered the swinging light. "He is not on the lake," said Molaire, "he is afoot. That call came from the shore, toward the river."

Hanging the lantern upon a tree limb where it could be plainly seen from the shore, the two returned to the cabin, where Molaire abruptly resumed his conversation: "What I would say, I have not yet said, and we shall soon be interrupted. In the life of a prospector for gold, are many vicissitudes. Such a man knows not when he shall go, nor when he shall return, nor, indeed, that he shall ever return. Many things may befall him in the course of his work—such as happened to those we found on Burnt River. What I would ask, is that, if anything should happen to me—you will look after the little Marie."

Staring at the man in astonishment, Downey found himself groping for words. "But—but—" A sudden anger flamed in the officer's heart. He turned sharply away. "That will be Father Giroux's job," he said, curtly.

The next moment, he felt a hand on his shoulder: "Ah! no, my friend. Do not be angry. You will go your way from your sense of duty, and that is right; I will go mine, from—well, let us say—choice. What will happen, will happen. It is kismet—as we would say, fate. But, the happiness of the little Marie—that is not the job of Father Giroux, it is yours! I have seen, and I know——"

The words were interrupted by a step upon the porch—a heavy step, and another. In the doorway stood a man clad in faded, oil-stained overalls, and a blue flannel shirt that hung about his shoulders in rags.

“Come in, come in, and welcome,” invited Molaire, heartily. “Sit down here before the fire. You are tired, man—and hungry. But, soon you shall eat your fill.”

The man crossed the room, and stood before the fire. For a moment he stared from one to the other: “No. I’m not hungry, though I am tired. I’ll be all right in a minute. I smashed my canoe yesterday, an’ I’ve been tryin’ to make the river afoot.” He paused, and asked abruptly: “How far is it to Fort McMurray? I’ve got to find the police.”

“Why do you want the police?” asked Downey quickly.

“It’s over west of here—” the man hesitated, and glancing inquiringly at Molaire: “Somethin’, I guess, only the police had ought to know.”

Molaire, taking the broad hint, moved over to the door of the kitchen. Downey bent close to the man, who whispered behind his cupped hand. Suddenly, the officer straightened, and, frowning with annoyance, spoke to Molaire: “I’ve got to go with this man right off,” he said.

The Frenchman laughed: “It seems you are never to be left uninterrupted in your detail.”

“It seems so,” answered Downey, gloomily. “But I’ll come back to take the trail where I leave it. This should not take more than a couple of weeks.” He turned to the waiting man. “Are you ready to go now? If so come on.”

“But,” protested Molaire, “have you no heart? You cannot go till this man has eaten. He must be hungry. See, he carries no pack.”

“No. I ain’t hungry,” assured the stranger, “an’ I left my pack at the foot of the bank. I’m ready to go, an’ dam’ glad I didn’t have to go clean to McMurray to find a policeman.”

Molaire followed the two to the door: “You will promise?” he asked, hurriedly, as Downey stepped from the room. “You will look after the little Marie?”

“Aye—I’ll—I’ll do what I can,” answered the officer, heavily, and followed the stranger out into the night.

At the source of the river, Downey and the stranger parted company.

“You did a good job, Peters,” approved the older man. “You can drop back now, and report to Sergeant James. I’ll carry on alone from here.”

Peters discarded his overalls and torn shirt, shouldered his pack, and struck southward for the McKay, by the light of the moon, while Downey concealed his canoe, spread his blankets, and lay down close to the stream.

In the early grey of the morning, he watched in silence, as a canoe shot past him down the river. It had a single occupant—Pierre Molaire.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE GREAT ADVENTURE

IT was with a sigh of relief, that Corporal Downey saw Molaire's canoe, far ahead of him upon the Athabasca. The descent of the Moose had been hazardous in the extreme for the officer's plans. Had Molaire stopped for any reason upon the winding, swift-flowing stream, Downey almost inevitably must have come suddenly upon him. But upon the broader river, with its wide, sweeping bends, he could follow upstream with small chance of detection.

Molaire proceeded leisurely, passed the mission after dark, and camped for the night at the mouth of a creek, a bend or two above. Downey camped on the opposite bank, and, at daylight, was watching Molaire's camp from a place of concealment. Through his glass, he could see the canoe drawn up on the beach, and, later, the thin plume of blue smoke that was Molaire's camp-fire. Downey munched a cold breakfast, as he watched the other plunge naked into the water, splash about for a few minutes, and return to his camp-fire. A half-hour later, the man launched his canoe, and loaded his outfit. As he was about to step aboard, a sound from downriver attracted his attention. Clear and sweet it floated upon the morning air—the pealing of a bell. Minutes passed, as, upon opposite sides of the river, the two men listened, Molaire, with the reverently bowed head of the devout Catholic, Downey with the thought, "It's Sunday,—she'll be goin' to church."

When the last note had died away, Molaire stepped into his canoe, and headed on upriver, and, when he had reached the bend, ahead, Downey followed.

It was high noon, when the Frenchman beached his canoe among several other boats and canoes that were drawn up before a straggling group of tents. A legend upon a strip of canvas stretched between two upright poles proclaimed the field headquarters of the BONANZA PETROLEUM CO., LTD. Carefully hiding his own canoe, Downey crept as close as he dared to the outfit, and, concealed by the branches of a prostrate spruce, watched from his point of vantage as the cook served dinner upon a rude table beneath a shelter fly.

The meal over, willing hands removed the dishes to the cook tent, and the men resumed their places, a deck of cards upon the table before them. It was evident that business of importance had been interrupted by the serving of the meal.

Molaire retained his place at the table, and the game proceeded. Downey's covert was not near enough for him to catch the conversation, but he could see that the game was poker, and that the stakes were not low. Alternately dozing and watching, he passed the long afternoon. Supper interrupted the game again, but it was resumed by lantern light, and Downey moved in closer where he could hear the talk.

Where there had been originally eight in the game, there were now but four; Molaire, who seemed to be holding his own, two others, who played with varying fortune, and one, Windy Welch, who was the big winner.

The game had assumed a certain intensity, Windy Welch alone being loquacious, the others confining themselves to cursing the run of the cards, or to churlish remarks to the

discredit of the voluble winner. "If you was to fall in the river, you'd come up with a pocketful of fish," came the time-honored growl from a disgruntled pot-loser.

"Mebbe I would. Be the best way to come up, at that. Youse guys prob'ly wouldn't use no judgement, an' wouldn't come up at all. 'Tain't luck that wins, gents, it's judgement, an' watchin' the run of the cards."

"Judgement—hell! Last deal, you go in on an ace an' a king, an' come out with a flush \_\_\_\_\_"

"Best kind o' judgement," exulted the other. "Watched the cards—know'd hearts ort to be due, an' went after 'em."

"I've heerd of fellers that could kind of help out their luck, er their judgement, er whatever you call it, on their own deal, too," suggested an onlooker, who had lost financial interest in the game. "Y'u tuk every dollar in the outfit last pay-day—an'——"

"I'll tell the world I did," exulted Windy, "an' that ain't all! If I do it this time, I'll be kissin' youse birds an' this dam' mosquito-rode country good-bye. Ol' Oklahomy looks good to me, where they's someplace a man kin spend money if he's got it on him." The man reached into the front of his shirt, and drew forth an enormous roll of paper money. "Here's yer last month's pay," he said, "jest as I got it. What good's money if you can't spend it? I might's well of lose las' month as win, fer all the good it done me! Oh, you open it, do yer? An' two stayers—" The man picked up his cards, and glanced with elaborate caution at the pips. "Well, let's make it unanimous—only I ain't goin' to play mine cheap. I've got a hunch I can fill to these four cards, an' if I do, it's so much nearer Oklahomy fer me! She's h'isted—ye're half in." The man picked up the deck, dealt to all who stayed for the raise, and then flipped a card on top of the four that lay face down before him. The bet was checked around to him, and, once more, he gave meticulous scrutiny to his cards. "She's there, gents—black as Toby's hearse!" He tossed a handful of banknotes into the pot. "Shower, brothers, shower! This pot calls for a through ticket to Tulsa."

"I'll call for the size of my pile," said the man at the dealer's left.

"I'll tilt it the size of mine, an' I hope you filled at that." The next man pushed in his last remaining bill, and Molaire, after another glance at his cards, tossed them away.

Windy Welch beamed on the man who had raised him: "That's playin' the game! Bet 'em when you got 'em, an' bet 'em when you ain't got 'em! Sorry you ain't got more of the long green. I need it in my business. Here's yer call. What is it ye're thinkin' so much of?"

"Nines full on tens," announced the other, spreading the cards out before him.

"An' you draw'd three cards!" exclaimed Welch, in mock reproach. "But you overplayed yer hand, son. You'd ort to stay out till yer get somethin'! I goes in on the dead man's hand—yessir—aces an' eights—they can't lose—an' I snags me my third ace! Read 'em an' weep! I'll be tellin' it to 'em in Tulsa in about two weeks." As the man talked, he gathered the money from the table, and added it to the roll that already bulged the front of his shirt.

"I figured on goin' down to Edmonton fer a week er so," said one of the losers, ruefully eying the huge roll, "but, now, I can't."

"Edmonton—hell!" scoffed Welch, "Edmonton ain't no good. I won't only stop there



long enough to buy me a through ticket to Tulsa. Save yer money, boy, like I do, an' hunt you up a real town. Me—I'm pullin' out in the mornin'."

"How you goin' to git to McMurray? They ain't no boat goin' up."

"Buy me a canoe off'n one of them Siwashes. Other folks paddle up,—why can't I? If it gits too hard work, I can foot it. They's a trail where they track-lines them scows, ain't they?"

"If Tom Traverse runs onto you, you ain't goin to git to no Tulsa," gibed one. "He's about due to show up agin, somewheres."

"Tom Traverse—hell! I don't look like no pay car, do I?" The man spread out his arms, and viewed his oil-stained shirt. "An' besides, he better not tackle me!" He paused, and laid a large revolver on the table with a thud: "See that rod? Look good, there on the butt—see them three notches? Well—they ain't fer no ground squirrels—even if one was a nigger. If this here Tom Traverse runs up agin' me, I'll file me a big notch along side of these, an' I'll wrap a few thicknesses of reward money around the outside of this here roll, to boot." He returned the gun to its holster, and yawned. "I'm goin' to bed, onlest some of you birds kin dig up some more jack. I b'lieve in givin' a man a run fer his money. How about you?"

He turned to Molaire. "Want to keep on, two-handed?"

The Frenchman shook his head: "No, not two-handed. And, anyhow, I must be going. See, the moon has risen."

"Don't youse guys that lives up here never sleep?"

"Oh, yes, I sleep much. But, I like to travel by the light of the moon. It is beautiful."

"Beautiful—hell! I'd ruther be poundin' my ear, than rubberin' at moonlight."

"Every man to his tastes," replied Molaire, rising, "I bid you gentlemen good-night. I have enjoyed your hospitality." His eyes roved about the little group, ignoring Welch. "And it may be that I can, in some measure, repay it." The next moment, he was gone, and when Corporal Downey stepped into his canoe he saw far ahead, Molaire, a tiny black dot in the moonlight.

Hour after hour, Downey followed. He had shortened the distance, keeping well within the shadows of the shore. Finally, at the foot of the portage trail that led around a bit of fast water, Molaire landed, unloaded his canoe, and carried it back into the scrub. His other effects followed, and, a few hundred yards below, Downey did likewise. Then, he spread his blankets and slept.

In the morning, he watched Molaire carry water in his teapot to the little fire he had built back in the scrub. He was a different man from the one who had sat the evening before, playing cards in the camp of the oil men. He was Tom Traverse—the man who had backed out the door of the express car after rifling the strong box of its cash. The same soft-brimmed black hat, the same corduroy trousers, and the same moccasins that made no sound, and left no heel-prints in soft ground. The same shirt of brown flannel—Tom Traverse, all but the mask.

For hours, Downey lay in the scrub, his eyes on the flowing water—thinking—thinking. The very success of his ruse,—and the apparent near ending of his pursuit of Tom Traverse made the cruelty of fate seem even harder to bear. "At any rate, she knows—and understands," he muttered gloomily. Then, as a canoe appeared from downriver

hugging the shore, he reached for his glass. With its aid, he recognized the winner of the poker game, and knew that the moment to act was close at hand. "God! if he'll only have sense enough to give up when I get him covered!"

The approaching canoe forged slowly upstream, to the awkward paddle strokes of its occupant. Red of face, puffing like a porpoise, Windy Welch was laboring mightily toward Tulsa, Oklahoma. He passed Downey's place of concealment, and, disregarding the portage landing, shoved the nose of the canoe against the fast water. His progress checked, and, after a few moments of prodigious effort, the canoe floated backward. A few yards downstream, the man discarded his paddle, and, picking up the pole, made a few futile jabs at the bottom. Then, he stood up, carefully balancing himself by the aid of the pole. Windy Welch was a pudgy man, and the bulging shirt front added to the effect of that pudginess. He teetered uncertainly, for a moment, then gingerly he shoved with his pole, and the light craft again breasted the current, and traversing the lost yards, nosed into the fast water. Suddenly, the bow was caught and whirled outward, there was a moment of frantic balancing, a loud splash and, puffing and blowing, Windy Welch swam clumsily ashore, to stare, wet and dripping, into the muzzle of an automatic pistol, held in the hand of a masked man, who was shaking with laughter. The canoe and its contents floated on down the river, as Corporal Downey crept noiselessly forward through the scrub.

The mirth of the man behind the mask had subdued itself to a quiet chuckle: "O-ho, do you not know better than to stand so clumsily in a canoe? I am indebted to you, though, for it was very funny to see the little boat express its opinion of you, and shrug you off into the river. And, why do you wear a gun?" As he spoke, he reached forward, and drew the gun from the dripping man's holster. "A-ha! a gun with notches, too. It is well I found this, instead of the police. But, see, we shall destroy the evidence!" He tossed the revolver far out into the river, as Welch leaned feebly against a sapling, and coughed some of the water from his throat. "Now, I must also take your money. That is my trade—to take money from those who have much. You should tell the police, when you report this matter, that they should look for Tom Traverse."

"Tom Traverse," gasped the other. "But say, you wouldn't rob a poor man! They tell me how you don't bother with nothin' but banks an' trains, an' stuff like that. You wouldn't bother to lift a man's wages!"

"Wages? And, how much wages have you got?"

"Just two months' wages, an' I'm takin' it to my wife an' kids in Edmonton—they need it."

The masked man, still chuckling, stepped close and, deftly ripping open the man's shirt, removed the huge roll of bills. "Two months' wages," he laughed aloud. "You must be a worker of value. But, you do not look like a worker of value, nor does this look like two months' wages, nor do you look as if you had a wife and some children in Edmonton, for I doubt much that any woman would bring herself to marry such as you. Therefore you will pardon me if I disbelieve you, and with a courteous bow, retain this money. Now, you may go on your way, and do not forget to tell my friends, the police, that it was Tom Traverse who relieved you of your—wages!"

The last sentence, Downey heard clearly, for he had crept close, and, almost within arm's reach, he covered the outlaw with his revolver. His throat was tense with hatred of what he must do, and even in his own ears, his voice was hoarsely unnatural: "DROP

THAT GUN!" The words cut hard, and quick as a panther, Molaire leaped sideways, seized the astounded Welch, and with a mighty push hurled him against Downey, who, caught unawares, crashed backward into the brush with the fat man atop of him. It needed but a few seconds to regain his feet, yet Molaire was gone. A glimpse of brown as it flashed past an opening in the trees, and Downey was after him. On the two rushed, and on. The day was hot, and, as he ran, Downey tore at the fastenings of his shirt. Once—twice, he chanced a shot, and once a return shot clipped a branch close beside his head. Bitterly, as he ran, he upbraided himself for being tricked. "It's him or me, now," he thought grimly, as he fired again where the man flashed around the corner of a small swamp. A moment later, as he passed the spot, the hat was hurled violently from his head, and in his ears rang the sound of a shot. Tom Traverse was playing the game to the end! The pace was beginning to tell. Downey was gasping for breath, as he ran, but, now, the timber was thinning, and, doggedly he held his man almost continually in sight. The course was directly away from the river.

Now, scarce a hundred yards separated the two, and Downey fired repeatedly—fired low, but missed—for he shot as he ran, not daring to halt and lose ground. The outlaw did not risk turning to shoot back. The land was rising slightly. Downey's feet were of lead, and his lungs were bursting. Only the knowledge that the other must be in the same plight, held him to the pace. Rocks appeared, grey outcroppings, singly, and in groups as high as a man's head. Suddenly the officer saw Molaire dodge behind one of these. He did not emerge from the other side. There was a puff of smoke, and a bullet fanned Downey's cheek. He, too, dodged behind a rock, desperately seizing the opportunity to rest.

Bathed in sweat, Downey lay panting behind his barrier, his eyes on the rock that sheltered his man. Every muscle of his body, wracked by the strain of tremendous effort, tortured him with ache and pain. A burning thirst assailed him—in a few moments, all but consumed him, it seemed—and his throat and mouth were harsh dry parchment. Flies and stinging insects swarmed about him, and bare-headed under the blazing sun, his temples throbbed in measured pulses of pain. Water! God! if he only had some water! And, then to his ears came the sound of water,—the tinkle of a tiny fall. He located the sound, and, drawing himself to a sitting posture behind his rock, studied the lay of the land, that slanted sharply to a little creek bed not a dozen rods from his shelter. Berry bushes, low scrub, and an occasional outcropping rock covered the slope to the water. Along the creek-bed vegetation grew more rank, affording excellent cover with its willows and scattering of small spruce. With the tantalizing tinkle of the little fall in his ears, Downey weighed his chances. It was possible that by wriggling snakewise upon his belly, he could reach the water without exposing himself to the fire of Molaire, who lay behind his rock a hundred yards away, and nearly parallel to the bed of the stream.

The lay of the land gave Downey an idea. Water he must have soon, at any cost, else he could not go on, and, if he could gain the cover of the creek-bed, he could drink his fill; then, instead of returning to his rock, could work his way up the creek, and, with only ten or twelve rods separating them, could come upon Molaire from behind. At least the plan was worth trying. Nothing could be gained by this inaction. Molaire could hold him behind this rock until nightfall, and then slip away in the darkness—another defeat for the police, and another adventure for Tom Traverse. But, if he could get the drop on his man from the cover of the creek-bed, it was possible, even, that he could force a surrender,

despite Molaire's repeated assertion that Tom Traverse would never be taken alive. Devoutly, Downey hoped that such might be the outcome, as he prepared to carry out his attempt.

Gun in hand, he lay flat, and, with his forearms and elbows pushed himself slowly backward, using the utmost caution neither to expose himself to a shot, nor to shake the bushes that furnished the scant cover of the slope. Inch by inch, foot by foot, he worked his way, pausing between each push, to survey the ground for the next. It seemed hours to the thirst-tortured man—that traverse of the bush-covered slope, but, at length, the ranker growth was gained, and his feet came in contact with the water of the little stream. With extreme caution lest he shake the bushes and betray his presence there, he turned—a feat more difficult and precarious than the snake-like journey from the rock—and, burying his face to the ears, sucked in great gulps of the clear, cold liquid.

From somewhere upstream, as he lay there on his belly, came the tinkle of the little waterfall. There was, now, nothing tantalizing in the babbling murmur—only one of the voices of the wilderness that Downey loved, even as he loved the mutter of her distant thunders, the roar of her winds through the forests, and the bellow of her rending ice. For several minutes he lay there listening, almost forgetting, in the peace of the surroundings and the comfort of the rest and of the longed-for drink; then, with an effort, he roused himself, looked to his gun, and crept slowly upstream, keeping well within the shelter of the screen of heavier vegetation that lined its banks. From time to time, he paused to peep through the bushes, and to scrutinize the rock that hid the outlaw. His progress was painfully slow, for, in the still air, the slightest movement of twig or bush could not fail to catch the keen eye of Molaire. He was approaching the waterfall, concealed in its thicket of stunted spruce and willow. A dry twig snapped sharply—a crashing and smashing of twigs—a violent thrashing of branches—Downey on his feet—and before him—ten yards—twenty—the figure of a man—a mask—the glint of a blued automatic—a shot—two shots—the acrid smoke of his own powder in his face—and, before him a man slowly sagging at the knees—pitching forward to the ground. It had happened with terrible swiftness, and the gaze of Downey's horror-widened eyes shifted from the figure of the prostrate man to the gun in his own hand. For, in that split second of action, when the two guns had roared simultaneously, the realization struck Downey with the force of a blow. *Tom Traverse had shot to miss!*

There was a strangling cough, the form moved, and, with a throaty half-sob, Downey crashed forward through the intervening bushes and dropped to his knee at the man's side. Very gently, he raised the shoulders, and propped the figure against a boulder. Again the man coughed, and, with an effort, raised his hand, tore the mask from his face, and laughed into the eyes that met his own. "At the last—the big adventure—and a good friend by my side—water—water—my friend—you interrupted—"

A moment later, Downey returned with his hat full of water, wiped the crimson froth from the chin, and held the hat to the parched lips. Greedily, Molaire drank, and, when he had finished, Downey tore open the shirt, the front of which showed a rapidly widening stain. Low on the left breast, red frothy blood welled from a wound, where the bullet had entered, smashing a rib and tearing the lung. With fingers that trembled, Downey applied his wet handkerchief to the mouth of the wound. Molaire laughed gently: "No use, my friend, 'Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill

serve’,” he quoted. “And it is as I have wished. At the last—the big adventure. And, there is no pain—this dying is but a pleasant numbness; always I have wanted to know about that! See, I have taken my fun along the road—and, now—the end—of—the—road—is—here—” A violent fit of coughing stopped the words, and Downey wiped away the blood from the lips.

“Don’t talk,” he ordered, but again the dying man laughed:

“You tell me not to talk—I, who have always talked much, and, now, have but so little time to talk! Yes; the end of the road is near,—the end of the long, long road. It is a grand thing to have lived—and grand to die as I am dying—it is the great adventure of all. Ah, my friend, I am glad I missed—back there—when we shot as we ran—and at the rocks \_\_\_\_\_”

“You shot to miss!” accused Downey. “You shot to miss—! You fired into the air! I—it was too late—” the officer broke off, and brushed at his eyes with his hand, for they had grown suddenly hot and moist.

“I did not shoot to miss, as I ran. I did not know it was you. The voice that called from the bushes was not like your voice. How could I know it was you, for I could not stop to see?” He smiled whimsically. “You shoot well, my Corporal, better than I.”

“But, at the last—you did shoot to miss! I saw——”

“And, why not? You are my friend. You have been a good friend. For a long time, now, you have known—and, you have played the game. And, I—for a long time I have known how it is with you—and—with the little Marie——”

“But—Good God, man!” The words were wrung in agony from between clenched teeth. “Can’t you see that—now—I can never—that—now——”

Almost fiercely Molaire interrupted: “And, what has this to do with love, and the little Marie? This is adventure! She is wise—she will understand—your duty—” Again the coughing, and the gush of crimson foam. The eyes closed, the man breathed heavily, as Downey bathed his face. “Never mind the blood, my friend—my time is not long—the darkness is coming—and the sun—is still—high—the plunder—it is all cached—each in its package—marked—no man shall pay—for my—fun—every dollar—back to its owner—I played—the game—for—adventure—not—profit—lift—my—head—so—the cache—is—” there was a heaving of the shoulders, a mighty retching, and a flood of bright red blood splashed upon Downey’s supporting hand. Fighting for consciousness, struggling against the strangling blood, the dying man strove bravely to speak. Words bubbled upon his lips, and Downey leaned close to listen: “Your—to-bac-co—Marie——”

Pierre Molaire was dead. Tom Traverse had played the game to the end!

With heavy heart, the officer roused himself to the work in hand. Collecting the dead man’s gun, the thick roll of banknotes which had fallen to the ground when he had opened the shirt, and the black mask that had changed the happy-go-lucky Pierre Molaire into the dare-devil Tom Traverse, and such other effects as he found in the pockets, Downey laid them aside, and, with his belt axe, scooped out a shallow grave, covered the body with earth, and, with loose rocks, built a great cairn over it. Then, through the gathering twilight, he made his way back to the river.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CORPORAL DOWNEY REPORTS

THE door of his office opened, and the eyes of the Superintendent lighted with pleasure, as he raised them from his desk, and saw who had entered. Then they grew serious, as they encountered the somber face of Corporal Downey, for, there the Superintendent read no gleam of victory, no flash of accomplishment. Had Downey failed? But—why, then, was he here? Why was he not still upon the trail of the man whose name had become the terror of every shipper or transporter of money in the province?

Slowly, the Corporal crossed the room, and stood beside the desk, upon the top of which he deposited a wrapped package. With a look of inquiry, yet without a word, the Superintendent cut the cord, and undid the wrapping. Then, he started, and once more his eyes lifted quickly to the silent officer standing before him.

“What’s this?” he asked, almost sharply, as he fingered a black mask that lay upon the desk-top, beside an automatic pistol and a roll of blood-stained banknotes.

“It’s Tom Traverse’s mask, an’ his gun, an’ the plunder from his last job.”

“His last?”

“Aye—it will be his last.”

“You don’t mean—you got him?” The Superintendent was upon his feet, now, facing the Corporal.

“I got him.”

“Bring him in—bring him in. I want to have a look at the dare-devil!”

“Tom Traverse is dead. I buried him—back from the river. What with the heat, an’ the ground I had to cover, I couldn’t bring him in.”

“Had to shoot him, eh?”

“There was no other way.”

In his elation over the solving of the problem that had puzzled the wits of the Force for months, the Superintendent had not been fully aware that this man before him spoke as from the very depths. Now, he regarded the Corporal with concern: “What’s the matter, Downey? I don’t doubt that it was a nasty job—devilish nasty, but I know you did your best to avoid it, and it couldn’t be avoided. Don’t let it worry you, man. You’ve rid the country of the most dangerous crook that’s ever shown up in it—you’ve done something everyone else has failed to do. Buck up! It’s a thing a man hates to do, but if it’s got to be done—it’s got to—that’s all.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s all.”

“Sure it is—and you oughtn’t to let it get on your nerves. Now, sit down and tell me how it happened.”

“I was on his trail, when he held up an oil man comin’ out with a bunch of money at a portage above McMurray. I covered him, but he shoved the man into me, an’ we both

went down, an' before I could get up he had a good start of me. I took after him, an' we ran for hours—shootin' now an' then, as we ran. It was hot—awful hot. He headed straight back from the river, an' kept goin' clean to the edge of the hills, where he dodged behind a rock, an' so did I. I needed water, an' crawled to a creek. He did the same, an' we met in the brush. We shot almost together—he just a hair quicker.—He shot to miss.”

“Shot to miss! What do you mean? Man—what are you talking about?”

“Just what I say. He shot to miss—I saw him jerk his gun up just as he pulled the trigger. But it was too late—I'd fired.”

“And killed him outright?”

“He lived ten or fifteen minutes, maybe.”

“And did he talk?”

“A little. It was hard for him—lung hemorrhages. He tried to tell me where the stuff was cached. He hadn't touched a penny.”

“Hadn't touched a penny? You mean of all the money he got?”

“Yes. Not a penny. He cached it all.”

“Laying it by for a get-away, when he figured he'd got enough, eh?”

“No—he never would have touched it.”

The Superintendent stared as though he thought Downey had taken leave of his senses. “What do you mean by that?”

“Just that. He played his game just for the fun of it—for the adventure of it—he told me so as he was dyin'. He didn't want the money. Somewheres there's a cache with every cent in it that Tom Traverse ever took,—an' it's all labeled with the name of the loser. He was no crook.”

“Do you believe that?” The Superintendent was regarding him curiously.

“I know it. He was no crook—he was just like a kid hookin' apples. Look at that roll of money. Read the paper that's tied to the cord. He only had a short time to write that in—wasn't behind his rock very long.”

The Superintendent examined the slip, evidently torn from the pages of a small pocket notebook. It read:

\$3540—paper. Windy Welch, Athabasca river. To be returned to workmen for Bonanza Petroleum Co. Welch cheated it from them at cards. I saw him do it.

TOM TRAVERSE.

He laid down the packet, and, for a long time, sat staring at it, thinking: “But, why did he shoot to miss,” he asked at last.

“He's never hurt anyone yet,” reminded Downey. “Maybe, he didn't want to. Don't you believe a—an outlaw can have a conscience?”

The older man pondered the words: “I—I don't know,” he said, after a moment. “This is an amazing case—never knew one like it. It looks, sort of, as if this one may have had. But, the cache? Have you any idea where to hunt for it?”

“No, he didn't tell me. He tried,—but the last hemorrhage came, an'—he couldn't make it.”

“There’s close to a hundred thousand dollars in that cache. I sure wish we could locate it. It’s great to get Tom Traverse out of the way, but the fellows who have been hit won’t be exactly satisfied unless we can get their money back for them.”

“I can try.”

“Do you know his haunts?”

“I’ve been trailin’ him ever since I got the detail.”

“Go ahead, then. The case is yours, and I certainly hope you have some luck. It would put us just right if you do!”

“Thanks. I’ll do my best.” The Corporal rose from his chair, and the Superintendent, rising also, stood smiling at him: “And, by the way, Downey, you’ve heard the talk of promotion for the man who got Tom Traverse. I’m afraid you’ll be offered a Sergeancy.”

But Downey did not smile. “I don’t want it,” he answered, and quitted the room.

The Superintendent stared with puzzled frown toward the door through which the Corporal had disappeared: “Now, what’s got into Downey? Never saw him quite like that before. Seems to take this killing of Tom Traverse very hard. I wonder—? Yes, that’s it. It’s because Traverse shot to miss—that would make a man feel bad—especially a good man, like him.”



## CHAPTER XIV

“AND IN THE WINNING——”

WITH the wires of all Canada singing the death of Tom Traverse, Corporal Downey headed northward, to carry the news in person far beyond the reach of wires—to the girl whose heart it would crush—to the only being in the world to whom that news would bring pain.

The rumor had spread quickly throughout Edmonton, and, on the Fort McMurray train, many people recognized Downey, a few congratulated him, and one demanded particulars. He knows better now. And, Downey was left to his thoughts. “How can I tell her? How can I tell her? What can I say—God! if I only could let someone else tell her—Father Giroux—someone who knows how. But she an’ I alone must know—I’ve got to do it. If I could go away—where she would never hear of me again. She would soon know then, that it was over. Why did I promise her to come back? It’s the hardest thing I have ever had to do—harder, even, than—than— He was all she had.”

With anguish in his heart, Downey pictured the two, happy in their work of building their home on Eaglenest Lake—talking, laughing, singing—they were always laughing till he came into their lives—revelling joyously in the fashioning of the little cabin, that was so different from the cabins of others. With terrible distinctness, he remembered the words of the girl, spoken that evening upon the porch of Father Giroux, and the light in her eyes: “But, oh, I love him! He is so good, and kind, and patient always—and always he laughs!” And, now, fate had decreed, and the immutable contrivance of fate had carried out, that, of all hands, his should be the one to still forever that heart which beat with patience and with kindness, and forever silence the laughter of the lips which spoke with malice toward none!

“I’ll tell her—that’s part of the game. He played it to the end, an’ so will I—God! he’s the lucky one! An’ I’ll tell her all—how he shot to miss—because he said I was his friend. I’ll candle my eggs!—An’ then, I’ll ask for transfer . . . But, I promised him to—to look after her—I said I’d do what I could. Well—what can I do, now? It’ll have to be Father Giroux’s job—as I told—him.” His mind suddenly thought of the statements that came to him now and then from the little Saskatchewan town. “I’ll turn the money over to Father Giroux. She’ll never know it came from me, an’ it’ll be his job to convince her that it didn’t come from any of Tom Traverse’s plunder. Yes—I can do that—an’ that’s about all I can do towards lookin’ after her.”

Turning an indifferent ear to the plaudits of Fort McMurray, Downey stepped into a canoe, and headed downriver. He did almost no paddling. The current would bear him all too soon to this thing that he must do. Mile by mile, hour by hour, he drifted nearer and nearer the dreaded end of his journey. And, as he drifted, his thoughts conned every moment of the too few they had spent together, as one about to say a long farewell scans each feature of a loved face. The two sunset evenings upon the porch of Father Giroux, the plodding hours of the trail, the long, wonderful moments at the camp-fire, and the evening in the cabin of Molaire, when the four had dined together. Infinitesimal fragments

of time—and yet, the wonder of it, sufficient to have opened a new world to them,—a world of beauty and of happiness,—a world which one sharp quick shot had wrecked.

That last evening—that was the evening she had learned that Tom Traverse sat across the table from her—her father, laughing Pierre Molaire! He recalled the shock with which she had recognized the handwriting of the pencilled words, and the fine, brave effort at recovery. He even remembered the splendid acting in the carelessness with which she had refolded the paper and dropped it lightly on the table. He remembered the toasts—his own “may the best man win,” and his face twisted in a bitter shame, as he thought of the shot to miss. And the added words of the girl: “And in the winning, may he find—his happiness.” “*Happiness—Good God!*” The words were wrung from his lips in anguish. “That was before she knew.—But—after she knew, she made me promise to come back—when—when the job was done.”

The canoe swept around a broad bend, and, with the force of a blow, his eyes received the light of the setting sun flaming in reflection from the windows of the mission.

With clenched teeth, Corporal Downey picked up his paddle, and drove the canoe fiercely toward the landing.

Drawing the craft up on the beach, he glanced upward. On the verge of the steep bank, beneath a small clump of trees, she stood—waiting. In the sunlight that struck aslant the trees, her face showed deathly pale—a face of chiselled marble.

In silence, Downey ascended the trail, and walked slowly toward her. The fingers of one slim hand clutched tightly the breast of her gown, the other gripped the bole of a small white birch. As he drew near, the man could see the drawn look of suffering that pinched in the cheeks, and had marked great circles beneath her eyes which pleaded their question. He met the pitiful look squarely: “I—I promised you I would come.” The words fell heavily, tonelessly upon the ears of the girl, whose eyes never left his face. Then, her lips moved: “I came down to watch the sunset, and I saw your canoe far out in the river. I felt—I knew it was you,—so I waited. And my father—he is—dead?” There were tears in the dark eyes, now, but the voice did not break.

“Aye—Marie,—he is dead. It was the only way.”

She nodded slowly, as the tears coursed unheeded down her cheeks: “Yes,” she answered, “it would be the only way—that I knew.” With the words her control broke, and she sank to the ground, her face buried in her hands, her whole body racked with great sobs: “Oh, *mon père—mon petit père—*”

In agony of soul the man knelt beside her. It was but a moment before she raised her head. Her lips still quivered, and the tears still filled her eyes, but, laying one hand on Downey’s bent knee: “Will you tell me about it,” she asked bravely.

“He robbed a man upon the river—of money the man had stolen by cheating at cards. I tried to capture him, but he was too quick for me. I followed him, an’ we ran on and on. Then suddenly, an’ at close range, we came face to face in a thicket. We both fired, an’—he fell.” He paused, as though choosing his words: “I would have given my life to have taken him alive!”

“Oh, no! no! Not that! Not my father in—*a jail!* Not he, who loved so to live unfettered! Oh, can’t you see—it would have been worse—a thousand times worse!” She paused. “Yes, it is for the best. He could not go on. Behind the—pain—the sorrow—I am

glad it is this way. He died—instantly?”

“No, he lived for ten or fifteen minutes. But there was no pain,” he added quickly, “thank God for that. He said he died happy—that now he had found the great adventure he always talked about. He died as he had wished to die. He told me that before—the end.”

“Yes, it is as he would have wished. And—he talked to you—till the last?”

“Yes. He tried to tell me of his cache. For he was no criminal, Marie—just a—a boy who never grew up. He never touched a penny of all the money he took. It was all to be returned to its owners. But, he—went, before he could tell me of this cache.”

“Then we must find it! That we must do for him.”

“To that, Marie, I have pledged my life. It is also now my special detail. I shall find it.”

The two sat silent as the sun dropped swiftly. In Downey’s heart there stole a great relief. Almost he might have known that she would understand, and would believe. Had not she herself said to him, when she had known: “A man must do his duty, no matter what the cost, nor to whom?” And yet, more than just understanding, was too much to ask, of that he must no longer think; though here beside her, the indignant words of the dying Molaire came to him: “And what has this to do with love, and the little Marie—she is wise—she will understand.”

It was the girl who broke the silence. “See, the sunset. How he used to love it! Perhaps he is even watching it, now. Surely, the good God would not take that from him. I have been thinking of him,—and I find that my sorrow is selfish. I shall be glad,—as I know he is glad. Tell me did he not talk of anything else? Did he not talk of—of me?”

Downey faltered with his words: “Yes—he—that is—he—he spoke of you—of course.”

The girl gazed at him steadily, until Downey could scarcely meet the deep eyes. “Now, I know,” she said, simply, “that he spoke of—us!” The pallor of her face gave way to the rising tide of the deep flush that swept slowly upward. “He knew,” she continued bravely, “he knew of our—of how it has come to be—with us! He knew, and I knew, and the good Father Giroux, and—you. Though you never so much as whispered of this—this—love that is in your heart for me, I have read it in your eyes, and in the touch of your hand, and in—in my—my own love— And that last evening in the cabin—when you left me—and you—kissed my hand—then I knew I had read the truth. It is of this that my father spoke. He did not see that it would be too late—that you are of the police,—and I am the daughter of an outlaw.”

Downey’s arms closed about the girl, and as he held her close for a moment, his brain in a mad whirl, something within him seemed to burst its bonds. Only for a moment that first embrace, and then he pushed her from him, to hold her face between his two hands and look deep into her eyes.

“Marie! Marie! Wait—you don’t know the worst. There, in the brush—Tom Traverse shot to miss! It was too late before I knew—I’d fired already——”

“He did that because he knew about us.”

“An’ I told him that, now, I could never—that you could never—that you must hate me for the thing I had done——”

“Hate you? Why? Can’t you see that he is glad that it was you? Can’t you see that it could be no one else but you. It was a kindness of the good God,—and the will of the good God—that it was you—and it was your duty—you of the police. *He* did not hate you—and I—I have—loved you almost since I first saw you—here on the porch in the sunset.”

The girl felt the strong hands tighten spasmodically. In her ears sounded the voice of the man she loved, a tense incredulous whisper: “Marie, do you mean that—you still love me? *Can* you still love me—after—Great God, girl—tell me the truth! It means—life—more than life to me. It means—everything. You don’t know what I’ve lived these last few days! I’ve wished a hundred times it had been his bullet instead of mine that—killed. Tell me, Marie,—tell me. Now!”

“But, I have told you, *my man*, and I am telling you again. Can you not see in my eyes what I see in yours? Never—never for one moment have I had anything in my heart for you but love, and a great pity—for I knew he was to you a friend—and I knew the terrible ordeal for you. I knew no other could do it—it had to be you. Oh, can’t you see? There is no cause for hate—there is nothing to forgive—for in your heart was nothing but honor, and a bitter pain.”

At the words, wild, riotous life leaped through the man’s whole being. With a great groan of happiness, he crushed her to him, her lips upraised to meet his kiss, and, as the red rim of the sun disappeared behind the western hills, the whole world held but these two.

A few moments later, as hand in hand, they stood and gazed at the glorious wonder of the western sky, the girl remembered suddenly: “Wait! There is something I have for you—he gave it to me, and he said I was to keep it very safe, and if anything ever—ever happened to him to give it to you. See, I put it in this tin, and buried it here.” As she spoke, she moved to the foot of a nearby birch, and, stooping, pushed away the loose earth with her fingers, and drew forth a tin from which she produced a small package, which she handed to Downey.

The officer stood, for a moment, holding it in his hand, staring at the wrapping. Then, as if the thing were loathsome to him, he raised his arm to hurl it far out into the river.

But, with both hands, the girl clutched his arm. “No, no! Do not throw it away. It is important—it must be—he charged me so carefully to let nothing happen to it, nor to let any eyes see it but yours! Surely, you will not disregard his—his last message to you?”

“But, I know what it is. It is the pound of tobacco we bet in jest. I can’t touch it. I couldn’t smoke it—it would choke me. He told me—his last words—I’ll never forget—: ‘Your—tobacco—Marie—’ Your name my girl, was the last upon his lips. You see I couldn’t—”

Marie interrupted him: “But, listen. At the last—a man—would not be concerned with so trivial a thing as a little bet. I feel it—oh, I know it—there is a message in there for you—for *us!*”

Very deliberately, Downey cut the string, and undid the wrapping. Upon the plug of tobacco, lay a leaf torn from a notebook. Slowly, Downey read the words:

TO MY GOOD FRIEND CORPORAL DOWNEY—

So—you have won—at last! I pay my bet, and hope you will enjoy my tobacco as I would have enjoyed yours—on the New Year’s Day.

Upon the other paper, you will find what you of the police are looking for. You will know what I would have you do.

Now, I am content. Life owes me nothing nor do I owe life.

Marie must hand you this, so I leave you two together. You will not forget your promise to look after the little Marie. It is my parting wish and blessing that each in the other may find the great adventure.

And, now—exit.

PIERRE MOLAIRE.

And beneath this sheet, another, which they both read together. “Look—look!” cried the girl,—“it is the location of the cache!” And below the location, the pencilled words:

No man shall pay for my fun.

TOM TRAVERSE.

“Where is he?” asked the girl, softly, as she stood with the man’s arm about her. “Did you take him to Fort McMurray?”

Downey shook his head: “No, dear one, I buried him where he fell. I thought he would have liked it better that way. Some day I will take you there.”

“And—no one saw his face—no one but you?”

“No one but me.”

“But—your report? Did it mention—Pierre Molaire?”

“My report was upon the death of the outlaw, Tom Traverse—why should I have mentioned the prospector, Pierre Molaire?”

“See, it is the good God who has understood. Through you alone could it have come so. Now, no others need know. But, then, what of my father—the prospector—the lovable Pierre Molaire? For all who knew him did love him—the good Father Giroux, the factors, the men along the rivers. Of his—*prospecting*, you and I alone know much. The others knew he went on long journeys—after gold. Many things can happen to a man in the North. Can it not be that he has gone on a prospecting trip from which he shall never return?”

“Aye,” answered Downey, slowly, “on a prospecting trip—from which he never shall return. An’ you an’ I, dear one—we shall forget Tom Traverse—but, never Pierre Molaire.”

“Pardon! I intrude.” Both looked around with a start, and stood in confusion before the beaming face of Father Giroux. “I was seeking Marie,” he explained, with lips that smiled benignly, “but, I see that another has found her—at last. God be with you, my children. A happy old man leaves you to your sunset.”

THE END

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[The end of *Downey of the Mounted* by James B. Hendryx]