

# Dick Kent *at* Half-Way House



MILTON RICHARDS

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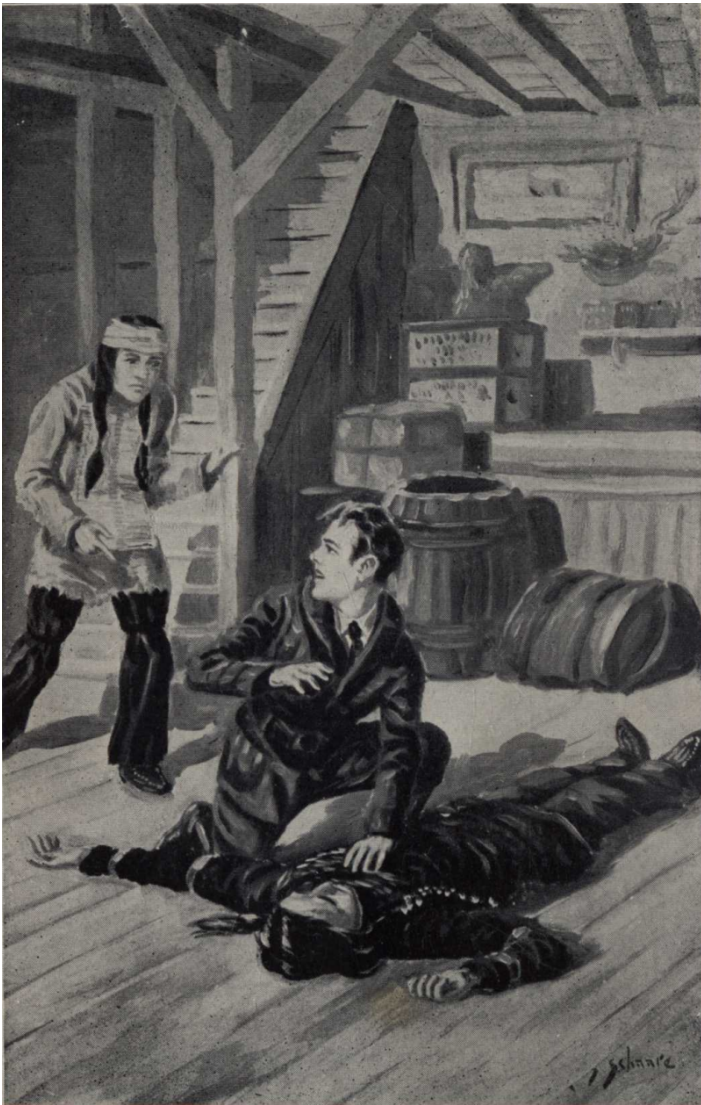
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(Page 174) (Dick Kent at Half-way House)  
“Dick,” he trembled, “What happen? You shoot this man—you—”

# DICK KENT AT HALF WAY HOUSE

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By MILTON RICHARDS

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AUTHOR OF

“Dick Kent With the Mounted Police,” “Dick Kent  
in the Far North,” “Dick Kent With the Eskimos,”

“Dick Kent, Fur Trader,” “Dick Kent With the  
Malemute Mail,” “Dick Kent on Special Duty,”

“Tom Blake’s Mysterious Adventure,” “The  
Valdmere Mystery,” etc.



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**DICK KENT, FUR TRADER**  
**DICK KENT WITH THE MALEMUTE MAIL**  
**DICK KENT ON SPECIAL DUTY**  
**DICK KENT AT HALF WAY HOUSE**

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**DICK KENT AT HALF WAY HOUSE**

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# DICK KENT AT HALF WAY HOUSE

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## CHAPTER I.

### DINOSAUR'S ISLAND.

JUST before dusk, riding in on a slight swell, the canoe touched on the leeward side of the island. It was a wooded island, similar to a score of others that dotted that lake. There was little to differentiate it from its brothers except that in its very center the fir and balsam had graciously withdrawn to permit a huge shaft of solid rock to raise its head loftily and majestically skyward.

The three young men who disembarked from the canoe, stood looking toward the shaft with something like eagerness in their eyes. Then one of them spoke:

"There it is! The rock of the dinosaur!"

Another of the trio, a stockily built boy with light blue eyes and sandy complexion, removed a battered felt hat that had been crammed down over his well-shaped head and ran his fingers through a mop of corn-colored hair.

"Bones! Toma—bones!"

The remaining member of the party, swarthy, dark, soft-footed, agile as a panther, grinned as he stooped down to tie the strings of one of his moccasins.

"Mebbe this not right place after all," he said.

The first speaker turned swiftly at this and regarded the stooping figure. What had induced Toma to make that remark? The description that had been given them by Mr. Donald Frazer, factor at Half Way House, fitted this island exactly: an island in a lake of many islands, an island with a tall rock. Dick Kent remembered as well as if it had been only yesterday.

"It's three hundred miles northwest of here in a country of innumerable lakes," the factor had directed them. "These lakes all drain into the Half Way River. They are all very close together, forming a sort of chain. Most of the lakes are dotted with a few islands, but there is one lake, near the center of the chain, that has more islands than all the rest—scores of small wooded islands. On one of these you will find a tall, spindling rock. The island with that rock is the island of the dinosaur."

So remembering this conversation, Dick could not believe with Toma that they might have come to the wrong place. Here was the wooded island. Here was the spindling rock. Here was the lake of many islands.

"Why don't you think it's the right place?" he demanded.

The young Indian straightened up quickly, his eyes twinkling.

"Why you get so worried, Dick?" he inquired blandly. "I no say this the wrong place. Mebbe so, mebbe not. Plenty islands I see in other lakes an' plenty rocks too."

“But not a rock as tall as that one,” objected Sandy.

Dick nodded his head.

“Yes, and most of the other lakes we explored had only a few islands. This one tallies exactly with the description Mr. Frazer gave us.”

Toma grinned again.

“All right,” he waved their arguments aside. “What you say, we go see?”

The three boys pushed forward. The island was scarcely more than four or five acres in area. In a few minutes they reached the center, coming to a full stop near the base of the pinnacle. They found a peculiar formation here. In some prehistoric time a gigantic upheaval had thrust the underlying strata to a position very nearly perpendicular. In other words, layer upon layer of substratum had been lifted up out of the earth and exposed to view. Embedded in one of the layers of rock was the huge fossil of a prehistoric reptile. Its immense frame could be seen very distinctly from where the boys were standing. Supported by the rock, much of which had crumbled away, the skull of the dinosaur rested lightly against the side of the pinnacle and the bones of the rest of the body, still joined and intact, extended downward to the edge of a deep pit.

The effect of all this was ghastly. Staring at it, one was conscious of an indescribable feeling that the fleshless body of the dinosaur still retained life and that it had clambered out of the deep pit beneath it and was now endeavoring to climb the tall, spindling spire of granite. So lifelike and terrible indeed, did the primeval monster appear, that for a full five minutes the three boys stood there without as much as moving a muscle.

Suddenly the tension snapped as Dick burst into a roar of laughter. He laughed until the tears came into his eyes and coursed down his cheeks. He roared and slapped his thigh and sat down on a rock, swaying back and forth in a paroxysm of uncontrollable mirth.

Toma and Sandy stared at their chum in utter amazement. They surveyed each other blankly. They looked quickly over at the dinosaur in the belief that possibly they had overlooked something.

“See here,” began Sandy, “what in the name of common sense are you yowling about? If you can possibly see anything funny in that gruesome mass of bones your sense of humor is warped. Stop it, Dick! Stop it, I say before you drive me daft. Stop!”

Dick raised his head and wiped his eyes. He was still choking.

“You—you see nothing funny?” he gasped.

“I do not!”

“What do you think of our friend, the dinosaur?” and Dick indulged in another convulsive chuckle.

Sandy’s eyes flashed fire.

“Say—”

“Look at it! Look at it!” shrieked Dick. “Its size! Must weigh tons—tons, Sandy. And—we’ve come—three hundred miles—laboring under impression—going to carry it back on a raft.”



“Well—”

“On a raft,” continued Dick. “That thing on a raft. If you can, just get that picture in that slow mind of yours.”

Toma was grinning broadly now.

“The portages,” he wondered.

“Yes, think of carrying that huge skeleton over the portages.”

“Why it—it can’t be done,” stated the young Scotchman, beginning to see the light. “Absolutely out of question. We’ve come on a fool’s errand. Mr. Frazer must have—”

“Known it!” Dick took the words out of his chum’s mouth. “Of course, he knew it. Can’t you see, Sandy, we’ve been victimized, made the butt of one of the worst jokes I’ve ever heard of. No wonder they all grinned and acted so queerly when we left the post. By this time, half the people in this north country are laughing up their sleeves. It’s all a hoax. I’ll bet that London museum Mr. Frazer told us about hasn’t even made an offer for this dinosaur.”

“You mean the whole affair from beginning to end was planned by that fool and his friends?”

“Exactly.”

“And that we’ve not only lost what we thought was a chance to make a few hundred dollars but have become the laughing stock of—of—” Sandy choked and gurgled.

“Right again,” grinned Dick. “You’re learning fast.”

Sandy’s color drained from his cheeks and he sat down quickly, endeavoring to control the fierce gathering storm within.

“And *you* call that a good joke,” he inquired bitterly, “a friendly, decent joke that sent us packing through a hundred dangers at the risk of life and limb? *You* can laugh at that?”

“Well, what would you have me do? Sit down and cry? Not I. Might as well make the best of it. I’ll go back and laugh with ’em.”

“I laugh too,” said Toma. And he did.

Sandy continued to glower. He looked up at the dinosaur. Then he put his head in his hands and groaned.

## CHAPTER II.

### TWO VISITORS.

DICK KENT had plenty of time that night to think about the crude joke Mr. Frazer, the factor at Half Way House, had played upon them. The factor must have known full well that the mammoth skeleton of the dinosaur could not be conveyed easily up the river on an ordinary raft. He must have known, too, of the utter impossibility of packing the huge creature over the thirteen portages that are to be found between the island of the granite shaft and the trading post, three hundred miles up the river.

Given sufficient leisure to think the matter over, Dick decided that he did not blame Sandy one bit for the anger and bitterness that Frazer's trickery had aroused. The young Scotchman had eaten his supper in a huff and later had retired to his blankets in a manner that was, to say the very least, thoroughly hostile and unfriendly. His actions indicated very plainly that he, for one, didn't consider this business of the dinosaur as the sort of joke that could pass unnoticed or unforgiven, or that could be laughed down or yet dismissed with a shrug. It rankled and cut deep. Some day Mr. Frazer would hear about it.

Dick turned his eyes toward the campfire and watched the shadows creeping up to the bright circle its glimmering light made. He lay quite still, listening to the monotonous beat of the water around the shore of the island. He was dimly aware of the tall granite slab that thrust up its pointed head in cold disdain of the lowly trees under it. Far away somewhere a loon called out mockingly and derisively to its mate.

Sandy woke on the following morning in a better humor. Over a hot cup of tea and a crisp rasher of bacon, he apologized for his behavior on the previous night.

"I had no reason to be angry with you, Dick," he stated contritely. "But you irritated me because you took it all so good-naturedly. It can't be denied that the joke is on us, but you surely know that he went too far with it. He never should have permitted us to start out. Our time is worth something and we paid the factor a good stiff price for our grubstake. Then there are all those cumbersome tools we brought along—rock chisels, pickaxes, hatchets and what not. We paid for them out of our own hard-earned money. A very expensive practical joke, if you ask me."

In the act of raising a cup of steaming beverage to his lips, Toma paused and his dark eyes fell upon Sandy's face.

"Mebbe not so much joke like you think. Mebbe Mr. Frazer him not want us to stay at Half Way House any longer. Mebbe he think your Uncle Walter send us fellows down to spy on him an' he no like that."

Both Dick and Sandy started. They had never looked at the situation from quite that angle. The young Indian's statement had induced a new train of thought. Come to think of it, why had Sandy's uncle, Mr. Walter MacClaren, factor at Fort Good Faith and superintendent for the Hudson Bay Company for all that vast northern territory, sent

them over to Half Way House in the first place? Sandy looked at Dick searchingly for another moment, then broke forth:

“Gee, I never thought about that. Toma, you’re too deep for us. I can begin to see now.”

Dick pursed his lips, scowling slightly.

“Mr. MacClaren said that the hunting was good up around Half Way House and that we’d enjoy our summer’s vacation there. He didn’t tell us that he was suspicious of Mr. Frazer. Naturally he wouldn’t. He wanted us to find that out for ourselves. Sandy,” he glanced eagerly across at his chum, “as far as you know, has Mr. Frazer a reputation for being much of a practical joker?”

Sandy put down his cup and proceeded to pour out his second helping of tea.

“No, I’ve never heard that he was. And certainly he doesn’t look the part. I wouldn’t call him frivolous. My impression of him has always been that he is inclined to be sort of taciturn, reserved and fairly uncommunicative.”

At this juncture, Toma again broke into the discussion.

“He not look like man that see anything to laugh about ever. I no like that fellow very much. I no like them friends he keep all the time hanging around the post. Look like bad men to me.”

On many occasions previously during their sojourn in the North, the two boys had come to place a good deal of reliance on the young Indian’s snap judgment. He had an almost uncanny ability to read character and of finding hidden traits, both good and bad, in the persons with whom he came in contact. Seldom did he err.

“He’s referring to Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum,” said Sandy. “Well, I don’t know as one could call them Frazer’s friends.”

“I see Mr. Frazer talk with them many times,” Toma wagged his head. “When I come close they hush up—don’t talk any more. An’ one time I see a light in Mr. Frazer’s room late, ’bout two o’clock, I think. An’ there through the window I see ’em. Wolf Brennan, McCallum, Frazer an’ two Indians I do not know.”

“Why didn’t you tell us this before?” demanded Dick.

That was the way with Toma—ever reticent. His uncommunicativeness often became a source of despair to his two chums.

“You no ask me.”

“But how did we know?” glared Sandy. “We weren’t up at two o’clock that night.”

“I no tell you that,” Toma explained, “because I think mebbe you no want to hear bad things about Mr. Frazer.”

“You cherub!” Sandy snorted.

“Sandy,” questioned Dick, “how does Mr. Frazer stand with the company?”

Sandy stirred the oatmeal, sugar and bacon grease together in what was to Dick an unappetizing mess.

“Uncle Walter never told me.”

“But haven’t you heard?” Dick persisted.

“No, I haven’t,” Sandy commenced to eat his favorite dish. “Uncle Walter never tells me anything about his business. He’s as close-mouthed as the average Scotchman, I guess.”

“There are some ways in which you do not resemble him in the least,” pointed out Dick, winking at Toma.

No more was said on the subject then. As soon as they had washed their breakfast dishes, Dick and Sandy went over for another view of the dinosaur, while Toma set out to explore the island. The dinosaur, in the bright morning sunlight, seemed to be as ugly and repellent as it had been in the evening’s shadows on the night before. Again they were awed by its presence. It seemed inconceivable that anything so huge and ugly had ever walked upon the earth.

“How’d you like to meet one of those things alive?” asked Sandy.

“Not for me. A bullet would probably flatten out on its scaly hide. At the best, it would feel like no more than a pin-prick. And Mr. Frazer told us we could bring that thing back on a raft. He must have known better, because he was here two years ago and saw it with his own eyes.”

“Of course, he knew better,” growled Sandy.

The bushes parted behind them. First Toma’s head was thrust through and then his body. He motioned to them eagerly.

“Come on,” he said. “I show you something. Come quick!”

They turned and followed him, finding it difficult to keep pace with him, so quickly did he go. They came presently to a fringe of willows not far from the western shore of the lake. The young Indian motioned them to be seated.

“Watch out there in the lake,” he commanded them. “Pretty soon you see something. Keep very quiet. No talk now.”

Both waited expectantly. Out ahead of them the lake rippled and sparkled. Suddenly a canoe glided within their range of vision—a canoe containing two occupants. Their paddles dipping in unison, the two men sat very straight, one in the center and one in the stern, two mackinaw coated figures, two bearded white men whom the boys recognized instantly. In the excitement of the moment, Sandy jabbed his elbow in Dick’s ribs.

“Cracky!” he blurted out. “What’s up now? Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum! They’re coming here.”

But in this Sandy was mistaken. The canoe did not pause, did not waver. It swept in fairly close to the island then, as if it had suddenly changed its mind, it swerved sharply and continued on its course. The two men sat like statues until they were thirty or forty yards away. Then Wolf Brennan craned his thick, bull-like neck and looked back.

Even at that distance the boys caught the expression that distorted the man’s coarse features. A leer, a mocking, unfriendly grin, a diabolical, fiendish sneer!

Abruptly he turned and the paddle, gripped in his huge ape-like hands, glinted in the sunlight as it smote the gleaming water.

## CHAPTER III.

### SUSPICION GROWS.

“Now what are they up to?”

Dick’s hands clenched as he spoke. He half rose from his kneeling position behind the willow copse and glared at Sandy as if he expected that that young man could answer the question.

“Yes, what are they up to?” he repeated in a low tense voice. “Messrs. Brennan and McCallum must be on our trail. And from the look that Wolf just now directed toward this island, they know we’re here. The whole thing is a puzzle to me. I don’t know what to think of it.”

“What I can’t understand,” said Sandy in a breathless voice, “is why they did not stop. They’ve gone right on. The reasonable and decent thing for them to do would be to come over and say ‘hello’. They might, at least, have shown that they were hospitable.”

“Wonder if Frazer sent them,” mused Dick.

Sandy pursed his lips and scowled as he looked out toward the flashing crests of water.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” he answered. “Now that we’ve found the little joker in this deal of the dinosaur, I’m inclined to think he has. Further than that, I’m prompted to believe that there was something more than the mere playing of a practical joke that induced Factor Frazer to get us to come out here. There must be some devilry afoot at Half Way House. Our presence there isn’t wanted. He sent us up here on this wild goose chase to get us out of the way, and, working on this hypothesis, the next logical inference is that Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum have trailed us all the way up here.”

Dick motioned Sandy and Toma to follow him to the opposite side of the island. Arriving at their camp, he turned upon his two chums.

“I’ve been thinking of what you’ve just said, Sandy,” he remarked, as he began packing their luggage. “I want to tell you that I believe you’ve hit the nail on the head. Something underhanded is taking place at Half Way House. We’ve been sent out here to be kept in ignorance of what is going on. They know that all of us are attached to the Mounted Police reserve and it would be fatal to their plans to have us there at the post. Wolf Brennan and his pal are out here to watch us, to see that we do not return. I—”

The young Scotchman interrupted him.

“Hold on there a moment, Dick. I don’t know as I’d care to go that far. I gather from what you’ve just said that you mean they’ve been commissioned by Frazer to put us out of the way.”

Dick smiled. “No, I didn’t quite mean that, Sandy. I don’t think we’ll be murdered. Not that. As long as we stay on this island, or remain here in this vicinity, we’ll be safe

enough. We might stay here all summer, and we'd never see them again, never be bothered, but—"

"Yes, yes," said Sandy impatiently, "go on, Dick."

"But," continued Dick, "let us leave this island or this vicinity and then trouble aplenty."

"You mean they'll attempt to stop us if we start back for Half Way House?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean," said Dick. "They'll harass us at every turn. I'm convinced of it. I won't say they'll resort to open violence if underhanded methods will avail."

"Oh come, Dick, surely not."

"As I live, I sincerely believe it. I wouldn't put these thoughts in your mind, if I didn't. But I can easily prove my point."

"How?"

"By starting back."

"What—you mean right now?"

"No better time than now. If my suspicions are correct, we'll run into some snag within the next day or two."

"Is that why you were starting to pack that luggage?"

"Yes."

Sandy tongued his cheek and in the bright light of that perfect morning he squinted at his chum. In that brief interval he did some quick thinking.

"Wait a minute, Dick," he finally broke forth. "Let's not be too hasty."

"But I'm not hasty. No use staying here any longer that I can see. We've all agreed that it's out of the question to bother with the dinosaur. There's absolutely nothing we can do here unless it is to put in a few weeks fishing and hunting, and somehow," Dick stroked back the hair from his forehead, "I'm in no mood for that. Let's start back and see what happens."

"No, I think I have a better plan. Let's postpone that return trip until we've had a chance to interview Messrs. Brennan and McCallum."

"Just what do you propose to do?"

"Well," began Sandy, "I doubt if they are aware that we've seen them. We can jump into our canoe, slip down along the east side of the lake and come upon them in such a way that they'll think our meeting is quite accidental. We'll profess great surprise at seeing them. We'll ask them point-blank what they are doing out here."

Dick laughed. "Yes, and not learn a thing. They'll have a very plausible story, don't worry about that. And why go to all that trouble anyway? If you want to talk to them, Sandy, let's jump in the canoe and overtake them at once."

"All right. Just as you say. I'm ready."

"What do you think about it?" Dick turned upon the young Indian.

Toma deliberated for nearly a minute. His eyes flecked and his gaze dropped.

"No harm we go see them. Take jus' a few minutes an' we find out what they say. Come on."



They dragged their canoe down to the water and Sandy pushed off. The light craft bobbed and swayed for twenty feet through the blue, almost unruffled surface near shore, then headed straight out toward the gradually disappearing speck retreating in the distance. For fully ten minutes no one spoke. The little vessel leaped and darted through the blue, sparkling element. In another ten minutes the other canoe had grown appreciably larger. Between strokes, Dick puffed:

“Remember, Sandy, this is your suggestion. You’re the spokesman.”

“Leave it to me,” the other retorted. “I know just what I’m going to say.”

“Whatever you do,” Dick warned him, “don’t let them guess that we’re suspicious of them.”

“I won’t,” growled Sandy.

Thus it happened that when they pulled abreast of the smaller craft, it was Sandy who hailed them. The two men raised their paddles and permitted their canoe to be overhauled. There ensued an exchange of greetings.

“Why didn’t you stop?” asked Sandy.

“Stop?” Wolf Brennan rubbed his unshaven chin and stared questioningly. “Stop where?”

“Why, at the island, of course.”

Brennan continued to stare blankly, almost foolishly. He was a good actor.

“There’s a hull lot of islands in this here lake. What island do you mean?”

“The dinosaur’s island, of course. You saw us, didn’t you?”

“Nope, we didn’t see yuh. Knew yuh was up here, o’ course, getting them bones of that thar dinosaur, but we didn’t know just where—which island, I mean.”

“You weren’t very far behind us on the trail.”

“Nope, ’bout a day I guess. Seen your campfire along the trail. One was still smoking when we got to it.”

“We sort o’ half suspected we’d run across yuh somewheres,” McCallum interjected. “So this yere is the lake of the dinosaur? ’Magine yuh fellows will be pretty busy durin’ the next few weeks gettin’ them bones chipped out o’ the rock ready for shippin’.”

“No,” Sandy informed them, “we’re not going to bother with it. The thing’s too big for us to handle.”

“Yuh can build a big raft,” McCallum suggested.

“What about the portages?” There was a faint note of anger in Sandy’s voice.

“Yuh’ll have to pack it, o’ course,” McCallum said. “But it’s almost as easy to build a big raft as a small one.”

“The dinosaur’s skeleton is too big and too heavy to pack,” declared Sandy haughtily.

“Yuh don’t say.”

“It certainly is.”

“What yuh gonna do then?”

“We’re given it up,” Sandy spoke harshly. “We’re starting back to Half Way House this afternoon.”

Wolf Brennan spat in the water and glanced inquiringly at the three occupants in the other canoe.

“If yuh fellows was right smart now, yuh wouldn’t give up so easily. There’s a lot o’ money to be made if yuh can manage to get that big lizard back where it can be took to one o’ the company’s steamers. If I was making a contract now,” Wolf Brennan spat in the water again, “I’m thinkin’ I’d move Heaven an’ earth afore I’d give up.”

Sandy glanced back at him.

“I’m not saying we’ll never get the dinosaur out. But if we do, it won’t be this summer and it won’t be on a raft one is required to pole up a river that has thirteen portages.

“How else could yuh get it out?”

“I don’t know. We haven’t thought about that—yet. Perhaps this winter we may come to some definite conclusion.”

“So yuh’re goin’ back to Half Way House?”

“You bet we are.”

“Too bad.”

“And where are you going?” Sandy inquired innocently.

Wolf Brennan glanced at McCallum for a brief interval and between them passed a significant and knowing look.

“Sort o’ figured we’d go prospectin’ for a time.”

“Where?”

Brennan seemed to be hazy on this point. He coughed embarrassedly and looked again at his partner.

“’Tother side o’ the lake there’s some hills an’ we kind o’ thought we’d put in a week or two jus’ sort o’ looking’ around.”

“What side of the lake?” persisted Sandy.

“On the north side,” Brennan answered. “If yuh’re startin’ back for the post this afternoon, we may see yuh again.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. Because we *are* starting for the post this afternoon.”

Brennan blinked and again he looked at McCallum. Evidently this was McCallum’s cue for he spoke up.

“Mebbe if yuh’d stick around for a while,” he suggested, “the four of us could figure out some way to get out that dinosaur.”

“Five of us,” corrected Dick, speaking for the first time. “You’ve overlooked Toma.”

“Breeds don’t count.”

“This one here,” stated Dick furiously, stooping over and patting Toma on the shoulder, “is as good as any dirty, bewhiskered white man that ever came over the trail from Half Way House. You can take that statement in any way you see fit, McCallum.”

“Regular spit-fire, aint yuh?”

“I’m not accustomed to have my friends insulted.”

McCallum removed his hat and bowed gravely.

“I shore beg your pardon. I didn’t mean no offense. Along toward evening, me an’ Wolf will drop over to your little island and pay yuh our respects.”

“Suit yourself,” said Sandy, “but we won’t be there. As I’ve already told you, we’re starting back to Half Way House this afternoon.”

What Sandy read in McCallum’s eyes was a challenge, but it was Wolf Brennan who spoke.

“Mebbe,” he said.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FIRST ENCOUNTER.

THE first night on their return trip to Half Way House the boys camped twenty miles south of the lake. Here they received their first set-back. In the morning they awoke to find their canoe was gone. Rage in their hearts, they gathered in a little group and stared at the place where it had been. They guessed immediately what had happened. After the first shock, Dick scowled and looked at his two chums.

“Well, we know where we stand now,” he declared grimly.

“Three against two,” blurted Sandy. “They can’t stop us.”

Dick mopped his moist forehead and dug the tip of one moccasin into the loose sand.

“That may be true. We have the advantage in numbers. But I’d also like to point out to you that even though that is so the odds are in their favor, nevertheless. We never know when to look for them. They’ll strike when we least expect it and always from under cover. They’ve already won the first round. Poling up the river in a raft is a tedious and disheartening undertaking. It will take us three times as long to reach our destination. I don’t know as I’m in favor of going on in that way.”

“Why not?”

“Too much danger.”

“Not any more danger than there was in the canoe,” objected Sandy.

“Probably not. But until this moment we haven’t been sure in our own minds that Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum have taken the offensive. Now we know. There’s absolutely no question about it. They’ve struck once and they’ll strike again too. The next time it may be a stray shot that will get one of us.”

“What do you mean by a stray shot?” demanded Sandy.

“If one of us gets killed it might as well be a stray shot, mightn’t it? I mean, it will be a difficult thing to prove that we were deliberately fired on and that those two miscreants did the firing.”

“You propose then to walk back?”

“Yes, I think it will be safer.”

“But they can shoot us just as well while we are going through the woods as they can if we were aboard a raft.”

“I don’t agree with you there. There’s no better mark that I can think of than three standing figures on a raft, no obstructions of any kind to check the progress of a bullet, the best sort of cover along the shore in which they can hide.”

“Well, I don’t mind walking,” said Sandy. “But what about our luggage here? We can’t carry all of that. I’m mighty glad now we left those tools back there at the island of the dinosaur.”

“I’d suggest that we make a cache, right here, of what we can not carry. If we are to travel swiftly, we ought not to pack more than fifty pounds each. Isn’t that right, Toma?”

The Indian nodded. “Not more than fifty pounds. That way we travel quick. Think much better like you say not to pole up river in raft. Next time Wolf Brennan him not be so easy on us.”

Sandy suddenly clapped his hands. His face brightened and he laughed gleefully.

“Cracky! I’ve just had an inspiration. We’ll beat them at their own game. We won’t set our course along the river. We’ll go a more roundabout way and put them off our trail entirely.”

“But how?” questioned Dick, greatly interested.

“I just happened to remember,” explained Sandy, “that sixty miles southwest of here is the Clear Spring River. It’s a large stream, fairly navigable. On this river, near what is called the Great Heart Portage, is an old trading post, now deserted, once the headquarters for an independent fur company. If I remember correctly, Uncle Walter said that this independent company has been out of business for something like eight years. But their stores and warehouses are still there. These have been made over into dwelling houses and are occupied by half-breeds and Indians during the winter months. If we proceed in a straight line toward this old trading post, we ought to reach it in two days. When we arrive there, the chances are, we may find Indians in the vicinity and may be able to purchase another canoe. If we do, we’ll proceed up the Clear Spring River to Halstead’s Island, which will bring us about fifteen miles west of Half Way House.” Sandy paused and regarded Dick and Toma questioningly. “What do you think of that for a plan?”

“Good,” declared Toma.

“I like it very much,” smiled Dick. “It ought to throw Brennan and McCallum completely off our trail. They’ll be waiting for us somewhere a short distance up the river and, when we fail to put in an appearance either by raft or on foot, they won’t know what has become of us. I doubt if they’ll ever tumble to the fact that we’ve gone over to the Clear Spring River. When they do come back here to investigate and stumble upon our trail, we’ll be so far away they won’t be able to overtake us.”

While Dick had been talking, Toma paced restlessly back and forth near the campfire. For some unexplainable reason, he felt uneasy. For several minutes now, he had been watching closely a thicket of elders as a cat might watch a mouse. On two different occasions the leaves and branches of the elders had stirred gently. A light breeze flowed down along the river valley, yet it was so vagrant and listless that it scarcely could be felt fanning one’s cheek. Yet he had distinctly seen the elders moving. His quick eye had noted this and his first thought had been that possibly a squirrel was playing there. Catching up his rifle, he strode straight over to the clustered thicket and parted the branches. As he peered within, for one fleeting moment he was under the impression that he had caught sight of something brown. Then he heard a stealthy movement, followed, by the unmistakable crackling of dry branches.

Pushing his way within the thicket, he paused to listen. He could hear no further sound. Yet something told him that that fleeting glimpse of something brown had not

been of an animal but of a man—Wolf Brennan or McCallum!

He took a few steps forward, critically examining the ground. A barely audible sound escaped his lips. He stooped quickly over the faint imprint of a moccasined foot. Satisfied, his suspicions confirmed, he dashed on through the thicket, emerging at its farther side, just as two figures topped a low hill not thirty feet ahead. Toma raised his rifle to his shoulder in a lightning motion, then came a blinding explosion and the two men ducked their heads as a bullet whistled between them.

The skulkers did not hesitate for even a fraction of a second. They dashed down the hill toward the thicker growth just below. Just as they entered this welcome barrier, a second bullet clipped the leaves above their heads.

In the wild scramble that followed, Wolf Brennan lost his hat. Cursing, he started back for it when still another lead pellet whizzed past, so close to his face that he thought better of it, turned and plunged on after his companion.

Soon afterward, Toma strode back into camp as calmly as if nothing happened. His expression was reserved and dignified. Except for a faint sparkle in his eyes, one could never have guessed that only a short time before he had been so busy.

“What were you shooting at?” Dick and Sandy demanded.

The young Indian smiled faintly.

“A wolf,” he answered.

“Where did you see it? Pshaw, you’re joking,” accused Sandy. “A wolf! One seldom sees a wolf during the summer.”

“I see ’em wolf,” declared Toma, “an’ I shoot at him one, two, three times.”

“Yes, we heard you,” said Dick. “Hit him?”

“I not try very hard. I have lots fun scare that wolf. Wolf no good to eat unless one pretty near starve. Why for I kill him?”

“I’d kill a wolf any time I had a chance,” declared Dick. “I hate them.”

Sandy started to say something, then suddenly paused. Of a sudden his eyes had grown very round and he stared at Toma as if fascinated. He was looking straight at the young Indian’s hip-pocket. From it a bulky object protruded. The object was brown and it was a little difficult to tell just what it was, nevertheless, Sandy had his suspicions. He strode forward quickly and yanked it from his chum’s pocket. He smoothed it and held it out for better inspection.

“Where did you get it?” he demanded.

At the sharp question, Dick turned and he, too, stood goggling.

“I no tell you a lie,” Toma explained. “That fellow him wolf all right—Wolf Brennan.”

Dick turned pale. “Did you kill him?” he cried in horror. “Tell the truth, Toma, you didn’t hit him, surely? You wouldn’t do that.”

“I just tell you I like make ’em run. Wolf Brennan, Toby McCallum do very fast run back there in the trees,” Toma pointed away in the direction he had just come. “Mebbe next time them fellows think twice before they try spy on our camp.”



For a brief interval, Dick and Sandy grinned over the mental picture of those two racing figures, but their mirth was short-lived. The same thought came to each at the same time.

“I’ll bet they heard what we were talking about,” gasped Sandy.

“Sure they did,” said Dick.

“In that case, no use going to Clear Spring River. Might as well go on the way we planned in the first place”—dolefully.

“Might as well.”

Toma, who had been gazing up and down along the shore, suddenly broke forth:

“What you think them fellows do with our canoe?”

“Set it adrift, of course,” grunted Sandy. “It’s probably miles away by this time. Might even have reached the Lake of Many Islands.”

Toma rubbed his forehead with a grimy hand.

“Mebbe not. Mebbe current take it close in to shore an’ that canoe not very far away this minute.”

“Possible, I’ll admit,” agreed Dick, “but not very probable. More likely they took it out here in mid-stream and sunk it.”

“If you fellow stay here,” suggested Toma, “I very willing to walk back to see if mebbe I find it.”

“No,” said Dick, “I wouldn’t want you to do that. I mean it isn’t fair that you should take all the risks and do all the work, Toma. Let’s toss a coin to see who goes.”

It was agreed. They tossed the coin and Dick lost. A few minutes later, carrying his rifle and a few emergency rations, he waved good-bye to his two chums and started out.

## CHAPTER V.

### DICK FINDS A CANOE.

DICK had no definite plan in mind other than to proceed down the river in search of their missing canoe. As Toma had suggested, there was a possible chance that the unscrupulous Wolf Brennan and his partner had set the craft adrift, believing that it would be carried by the current into the Lake of Many Islands—out of sight and out of reach of their three young opponents. If this was the plan that Wolf had actually put into effect, there was still a frail chance for its recovery. It might have floated out of the main current and subsequently been washed ashore. If Dick were lucky, he might come upon it. It was a somewhat hopeless quest yet, under the circumstances, it might be well worth the effort.

“I won’t waste more than a few hours,” Dick decided, as he picked his way along the rock-strewn shore. “If I don’t find it within five miles from camp, I’ll give up.”

At the end of an hour, his patience was rewarded. Turning a bend in the stream, his heart gave a quick leap. Two hundred yards ahead was what looked to be very much like the thing he sought. It was a canoe—that much he knew. It was close to shore, drifting idly, round and round a circular pool on his own side of the river. He emitted a fervid sigh of satisfaction and relief and bounded forward. Fifty feet from his objective he stopped short, his breath catching.

It was not their canoe at all. It was the one in which only the day before, he had seen Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum pass by the island of the dinosaur. The realization had come so unexpectedly that, for a time, Dick was almost too dazed and bewildered to collect his scattered wits.

So Brennan and his partner had lost their canoe, too? How had that happened? Had they left it partly in the water and partly on shore, and had the current succeeded in tugging it away? It seemed probable. The river played no favorites.

And then Dick saw something that caused his pulses to leap with excitement. In the white sand, twenty feet from where the craft was bobbing idly, were the marks made by the canoe when it had been beached, and around these marks were the unmistakable imprints of moccasined feet.

Dick could not suppress a grin of appreciation. Well-trained canoe that! A very obliging current! Caught in a net-work of inshore eddies, moving round and round in a circle, the canoe was nearly as safe as if it had been dragged clear of the water and deposited in the white sand along the beach.

Coincident with this discovery, there came the realization that he was treading on dangerous ground. Having left their canoe here, very naturally the partners would return. Perhaps they already had. For all Dick knew to the contrary, right at this moment from behind some leafy ambuscade they might be watching his approach. The thought frightened him. He paused dead in his tracks, undecided what to do. After the reception Wolf had received back there at the boys’ camp, it was only reasonable to

suppose that neither of the partners would hesitate about using their own weapons. On the other hand, if they were still lingering in the vicinity of the other camp or had paused to rest somewhere, he would be missing a golden opportunity if caution or the fear of a bullet kept him from making a closer approach.

Come to think of it, he was in as much danger here, a mere fifty yards from his goal, as he would be if he were actually at the side of the canoe. Already he was within rifle range. But they hadn't fired. Were they waiting for him to come just a wee mite closer, or was it really true that they hadn't yet arrived upon the scene?

For a full minute Dick stood there, unable to decide. His heart pounded like a trip-hammer. Three times he took a step forward and thrice he stopped short, in panic at the thought of what might happen to him if he could command the courage to go on.

And then, almost beside himself from the inactivity and suspense, he gathered together the fluttering, loose ends of a waning decision, gritted his teeth, and darted forward. Bounding along at top speed, in a few seconds he came abreast of the canoe, checked himself, then splashed out waist-deep into the water and clambered aboard.

He dropped his rifle, frantically seized one of the paddles and was half way out into the river before he was sufficiently recovered from his fright to realize that he had actually made good his escape. Yet he continued to paddle furiously. Never before had he bucked a current with such fierce and desperate ardor. He swept round the bend in the river, perspiration pouring from every pore, working with a dogged, automatic, machine-like regularity. Seemingly he could not, dare not ease up for even as much as a split-second.

On and on he raced. A thin, white line of foam trailed off in his wake. Now and again in his eager haste, his paddle scooped the water in the air behind him, where the freshening breeze caught it and whirled it away.

He was limp as a rag and utterly spent when he reached camp. Toma and Sandy, who stood watching him as he glided up to shore, blinked in amazement.

He had not the breath to answer their eager questions. He lay back in the stern, puffing, gasping, while the blood throbbed in his head with such insistence that for a time he actually believed that his temples would burst. His vision was somewhat obscured, too. Through a sort of haze he could perceive Sandy dancing wildly like a jungle savage.

"Dick, you lucky beggar!" shrieked the suddenly daft and madly plunging young maniac. "What's the meaning of this? O boy! Cracky! If you haven't turned the tables after all. What a comeback! I'll bet if either one of 'em had gold teeth you'd have stolen them, too. Where'd you get it?"

Not yet able to speak intelligently, Dick pointed down the river.

"You did, eh?"

Dick nodded.

"Fight 'em?" Sandy persisted.

Dick shook his head.

"Well, that's too bad. I was hoping that you had left them back there to nurse a couple of broken heads. Serve 'em right after what they did to our canoe."

Dick sat up, his breathing now less violent.

“Ju—just what do you mean, Sandy? Have you found it?”

“You bet we have. Toma and I found it in your absence. It’s not down the river at all. It’s over there in the brush, just where they carried it after smashing it up with rocks. We must have slept like logs not to have heard them.”

Dick thrust his two arms into the water over the side of the canoe and commenced to bathe his hot, sweat-streaked face.

“Well, it doesn’t matter now. We have this.”

“Yes, thanks to you. What do you say we leave this accursed place before something else happens? Toma and I can bring over the luggage while you sit there and rest a bit. You need it. When we saw you first, I’m only exaggerating a little when I say you were travelling at the rate of twenty knots an hour.”

“I’ll admit I was frightened.”

“You must have been. Next time we want to get a little speed in a pinch, I’m going to frighten you myself.”

“Cut out the talking, Sandy, and let’s start. I’m afraid to linger here much longer. Don’t forget that we’ve stirred up a hornets’ nest by taking a flying shot at Messrs. Brennan and McCallum, and now have added insult to injury by appropriating their canoe.”

“Serves ’em right.”

“Please——”

Dick did not finish the sentence. A warning shout from Toma was followed instantly by a sinister crack of a rifle and the whine of a bullet. The young Indian came running, carrying part of the luggage. Dazed by the suddenness of the attack, they could not determine at first from whence the murderous leaden messenger had come. A second puff of smoke revealed the place the two outlaws were hiding. Sitting in the canoe, Dick returned their fire, while Sandy, strangely calm for him, sprang up the bank to fetch what remained of their provisions.

When they were ready to embark, the firing had ceased. But it was only a lull before the storm. Changing their position, this time creeping down closer to the shore, Wolf Brennan and his companion blazed away at the speeding, bobbing mark out there in the water. In order to save themselves, the three boys dropped their paddles and sprawled at full length in the bottom of the canoe.

“Whatever you do—keep down!” panted Dick.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Wood splintered around them. Running wild in the current now, their craft started down stream. Suddenly, water commenced pouring in through one side. They were sinking—and drifting as they sank. Calm though he was, Dick had a feeling that they were irretrievably lost. The water was like ice, chilling one to the marrow. The opposite shore was still a long distance away.

“Be ready!” Dick called sharply. “Swim! Keep under as much as possible!”

Like a man dying, the canoe gurgled and went down. A bullet spat in the water where it had been. A yell of triumph sounded from the shore.

“Dive!” shivered Dick. “We’ll make it!”

## CHAPTER VI.

### A BLEAK PROSPECT.

DRENCHED and exhausted, they waded ashore. They wrung the water out of their dripping garments, eyeing each other soberly. His mouth grim, Toma turned and waved defiance at their two enemies, who stood watching them from the opposite side.

Dick was too overcome, too utterly sick at heart even for speech. His mind dwelt upon their awful plight. No catastrophe, except death itself, could have been more terrible. Canoe, supplies, guns—everything they possessed—had gone to the bottom of the river. In one stroke, fate had delivered a fearful blow. They were face to face with starvation, that grimmest of all spectres of the wild. They were two hundred miles from the nearest trading post—and food. The country through which they must pass was unsettled, except for roving bands of Indians, and here and there, probably, a white hunter or prospector. Without rifles, it would be very difficult to obtain game. They had not even matches with which to light a fire.

Standing there, shivering and despondent, Sandy addressed his chums:

“We’re alive, and that’s about all. An hour ago the odds were in our favor. Not now. The tables have been turned. The advantage is theirs. At least, they have rifles and matches.”

Despondently, they turned out their pockets. Each of the boys had a hunting knife. Dick had three fish hooks and a line. Sandy produced a watch, compass, and an emergency kit containing bandages and medicine. Toma pulled out an odd assortment of articles, including three wire nails, a mouth-organ, a bottle of perfume, a mirror, and a package of dried dates. That was all, not counting a small amount of money which each one carried.

“The prospect doesn’t look very bright,” sighed Dick. “Fish will have to keep us alive until we get back to the post. Toma,” he turned eagerly upon the young Indian, “do you know how to start a fire without matches?”

“Yes,” Toma nodded.

“Well, that will help some. We haven’t any salt to eat with our fish, but in this sort of emergency I guess we can’t complain. One thing that pleases me, that makes all this endurable, is that Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum are not apt to bother us any more. We’re on opposite sides of the river, and by the time they can build a raft, we’ll be a good many miles ahead of them. If you fellows are willing, I’d just as soon walk all night.”

“But we can’t walk without food,” Sandy reminded him. “We must stop, catch a few fish, and make a fire. In time the sun will dry out our clothing, so we don’t need to worry about that.”

Toma led the way as they pushed on. It was late when they stopped. Dick immediately repaired to the river, where he caught four trout. In the meantime, Sandy

watched Toma making a fire. It was a slow process. The young Indian walked up through the woods, and from the stem of a number of weeds he gathered a handful of pith. Next he procured dry moss, and, from the shore of the river, a hard rock about the size of a man's hand. Proceeding with these materials to a place sheltered from the wind and handy to fuel, he squatted down, holding the rock in one hand and his knife in the other. With the ball of pith on the ground in front of him, working with incredible speed, he struck knife and rock together, sending a shower of red sparks upon the inflammable substance below.

Presently, it began to smoulder. Lying prone, he blew upon it gently. Delicate, fine pencils of smoke arose, then a tiny flame, no larger than that made by a match, flamed up from the pith. With a quick motion, still continuing to blow, Toma sprinkled over his embryo fire a quantity of dry moss. The little flame rose higher. He added a few tiny twigs and the outer husks of the weeds, from which he had taken the pith. Within five minutes their campfire was blazing brightly, and when Dick returned with the trout, he stood there staring in wonderment.

“Did you do that, Toma?”

“Yes, I do 'em.”

“What with?” Dick inquired curiously.

“The steel of his hunting knife and an ordinary rock,” explained Sandy. “Struck them together and made sparks. The sparks ignited a little ball of fluff he gathered from some weeds in the woods.”

“That not ordinary rock,” Toma pointed out. “That what Indian call fire-rock. Make spark easy. Not always you find rock like that. If I use different kind of rock, it take much longer.”

When they had eaten their supper, consisting of the four trout, baked over the fire, they all felt much more cheerful. Dick and Sandy spent an interesting half-hour receiving instructions in the art of fire making. Both soon discovered that it was not as easy as it looked. Each made several futile attempts before he finally succeeded. When they left camp, setting out upon their lonely night's journey, much to the young Indian's amusement, Dick took the fire-rock with him.

“We find plenty more rock like that along the river,” Toma told him. “Why you carry that extra load?”

“It's not heavy,” Dick grinned. “Besides it fits nicely into my left hip-pocket. I don't intend to take any chances about finding another rock as good as this. I know I can make a fire with this one and I might not be so fortunate with some other kind.”

Toma laughed again as they made their way through the enveloping spring twilight. The air was exhilarating and the quiet earth was touched with a solemn beauty. Not a breath of air stirred through the fir and balsam along the slope. A fragrant earth smell uprose from the rich soil. They passed shrubs that flamed with white and crimson flowers. Dick became so impressed with the loveliness of it all that for a time he quite forgot about their dilemma. Later, when he did remember it, it didn't seem so terrible after all.

“We'll fool them yet,” he announced cheerily. “If we can manage to get food as we go along, there's no reason why we can't arrive at Half Way House in time to upset



Frazer's plans."

"We must do it," replied Sandy soberly.

"It won't be easy," warned Dick.

"I know that. It makes me all the more anxious to succeed. I'm not very apt to forget this experience for a long time. If the factor really is up to some underhanded work—and the actions of Brennan and McCallum have indicated that pretty plainly—I, for one, intend to get to the bottom of it."

"That's the spirit," applauded Dick. "We'll show him. We'll go till we drop. If anything happens to one of us, the other two must carry on."

They paused at that and shook hands all around. Then they went on more grimly and doggedly. All night they tramped. When the early morning sun blazed a new trail across the blue field of the sky, they made a second camp, started another fire with flint and steel and devoured hungrily, almost ravenously, the six trout which Dick had the good fortune to catch in a deep, quiet pool near the shore of the river.

In catching the trout, Dick had used clams for bait. Watching him, the operation had given Sandy an idea. He set out along the shore, returning at the end of an hour with thirty large clams, which he placed in a hole he had scooped out in the sand.

"When we've had a few hours sleep," he told Dick and Toma proudly, "I'll roast these fellows in the hot ashes and we'll have a change of diet."

"Not a bad idea," Dick rejoined. "I'm almost hungry enough to eat them right now."

They slept longer than they had intended. It was late afternoon when they awoke. The warm sun, beating down upon their tired bodies, had kept them as warm and comfortable as if they had been wrapped in blankets. So refreshed were they when they had clambered up from their couches of white sand that Toma was moved to remark:

"Not bad idea to sleep daytime an' travel night. At night fellow sleep by campfire with no blankets get cold. No rest good."

"True," agreed Dick. "We'll do most of our travelling at night. Wish I knew what time it was. Too bad the water spoiled Sandy's watch. By the look of that sun, I'd say it was about three o'clock in the afternoon."

Toma squinted up at it and shook his head.

"Five o'clock," he corrected. "Soon as we get something to eat, better tramp some more. Dick, you give 'em me fishhook and line an' mebbe by time you an' Sandy get fire ready an' bake clams, I catch some more fish."

Toma had better luck even than Dick. A few minutes before the clams were baked, he appeared upon the scene with eight speckled beauties, none of which weighed less than two pounds. They cleaned and baked them all, wrapped up five in Dick's moosehide coat, made a pack of it, and started out upon their journey.

They went jubilantly. It was many hours before the sun swung down toward the northwestern horizon. Just as the twilight waned and the half-night of the Arctic dropped its mantle over the earth, Toma, who was twenty yards in the lead, suddenly stopped short and threw up his hands, shouting for his two companions to hurry. When they reached his side, he pointed down at the loose sand at his feet.

"Go—ood Heavens!" stammered Dick.

In the sand, plainly distinguishable, were the imprints of naked human feet.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BREEDS DON'T COUNT.

WHO made those naked footprints in the sand? For hours afterward the boys puzzled over it, but could come to no satisfactory conclusion. Indians, as they well knew, seldom went barefoot. If, on the other hand, the tracks had been made by a white man, who was he and from whence had he come? Though they searched long and diligently for the remains of a campfire or other evidences of the stranger's presence, none was to be found. The tracks could be followed for a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile along the shore, after which they turned away from the river and became lost in the thick moss that carpeted the woods.

Nor could they pick up the tracks again. Toma, whom nature and training had specially fitted for this kind of work, was forced to admit, finally, that even he was baffled. Given a little more time, he believed that he could find other imprints, but inasmuch as Sandy and Dick chafed at the delay already caused by the mysterious, barefoot stranger, he decided to concur with popular sentiment and try to think no more about it.

But it was not thus to be dismissed so lightly. The passing of time seemed only to add fresh interest to the puzzle. During the next two days it was the popular topic of discussion. New theories were advanced by one or other of the boys, argued over sometimes for hours, then relegated to the limbo of dead and forgotten things.

On the morning of the third day, however, while travelling over a rough section of country near the winding, interminable river, Dick was reminded again of the tracks. His own toes had worn through his moccasins. There was a hole about the size of a silver dollar in each one of his heels. In another day or so, he, too, would be walking barefoot, much as he dreaded to think of it, making those peculiar and tragic marks in the sand.

He glanced over at Sandy's moccasins and noted with a sinking of the heart that his were even in worse condition than his own. Toma's were in better shape, but also very badly worn. Soon they must all endure the torture of going unshod, or else cut up their moosehide coats and make new footwear.

None of the three wanted to part with his coat. The nights were often chilly and it would be a positive hardship to do without them.

"I'd almost as soon go barefoot," declared Sandy.

"Yes, I know," Dick's face clouded, "but do you think we can endure these forced marches if our feet are cut and bruised? Mine are beginning to cause me untold suffering now. You, Sandy, are limping. No! Don't try to deny it. I've been watching you. A few more bruises, a few more scratches and cuts, and we won't be able to walk five miles a day. You may not have noticed it, but already we have begun to slacken down. I don't believe we made more than eighteen miles yesterday. We put in the hours

but we don't seem to get the results. I'll admit that it's tough going through here, but we won't find anything better until we reach the seventh portage."

"I know it," sighed the other. "Yet I hate to part with my coat. Say—where in the dickens has Toma gone?"

"I saw him around here only a few minutes ago," Dick answered absent-mindedly, still absorbed with the pressing problem of footgear.

"No, you didn't," his chum flatly contradicted. "He's been away a long time now—over an hour, I'm sure. I'm beginning to worry about him."

"Probably away somewhere getting fish for breakfast," Dick decided.

"He's done that already."

"You couldn't lose that restless scamp if you tried, so stop worrying."

"I can't help it," grumbled Sandy.

Dick suddenly sat up straight, the perplexed lines vanishing from his forehead.

"Say, I'll bet I know. He's gone off to snare rabbits. He's been complaining a lot lately about our fish diet. I recall now that when we were walking along together early this morning he informed me that at our next stop he intended to set out some snares."

"Don't blame him one bit. I'm tired of this fish diet myself. Every time I wake up, I examine my body to see if I haven't started to grow scales."

Dick laughed. "Fish are called brain-food, Sandy. Don't forget that. By the time we reach Half Way House, we'll all be very learned and wise."

"I much prefer to wallow along in ignorance," Sandy retorted. "I hate fish. When we get home I never want to see another. Lately, about all I can think about is flapjacks and coffee and thick slices of white bread with a top covering of butter. Last night, or to be more exact, yesterday afternoon while I slept, I dreamed that Uncle Walter had just received one of those big plum puddings from England and that he made me a present of the whole of it."

Sandy paused to moisten his lips.

"I never had such a vivid dream," he went on. "At one sitting I ate the whole of it. It had dates and raisins in it, and currants and nuts, and there was a rich sauce that I kept pouring over it and—yum, yum—"

"Stop! Stop!" Dick shouted, vainly trying to shut out the appetizing picture. "You can tell the rest of that some other time when I'm in a better condition to appreciate it."

"Well, if you won't listen to me," Sandy said aggrievedly, "I'm going to curl up here in the sun and go to sleep. Maybe I'll dream about another plum pudding."

"Think I'll roll in too," said Dick, smiling at the idiom.

*Sans* blankets or covering of any kind, even a coat, there was, of course, nothing to roll into. One simply stretched out in the sunshine, covered one's face with a handkerchief to keep away the flies and fell away into deep slumber. He felt particularly tired today and decided that, as soon as Toma returned, he'd follow Sandy's example. He lay back, his arms pillowed under his head, watching a few widely scattered fleecy clouds floating lazily along under the deep blue field of the sky.

He did not hear the young Indian steal quietly into camp more than two hours later, having fallen asleep in spite of himself. But when he did recover consciousness, Toma was the first person his eyes lighted upon. The Indian was standing less than twenty feet away, his back toward him, and he was busily absorbed in feeding a freshly-kindled fire. Something unusual about the native boy's appearance immediately attracted Dick's attention. He saw what it was. Toma, apparently, had rolled up his moosehide trousers and had gone wading for clams. From his ankles to his knees his legs were bare.

"Did you get any clams, Toma?" Dick inquired sleepily. "How long have you been back? Why didn't you wake me, Toma?"

The young Indian answered none of Dick's questions. However, he smiled somewhat sheepishly as he turned around and faced his chum. Then Dick gave utterance to a prolonged exclamation of genuine astonishment. His eyes widened perceptibly. He sat up very quickly, contemplating Toma as one might contemplate a man from Mars.

"What in blue blazes have you done with the bottom of your pants?" gasped Dick.

"I cut 'em off," answered Toma, flushing.

"Yes, I see you have—but why?"

By way of explanation, and not without a touch of the Indian's native dignity, he strode over to a pile of driftwood and fished out of it two new moccasins. Excellent work, Dick could see at a glance; moccasins of which anyone might have been proud.

"Sew 'em all same like squaw," said Toma.

"But you had no needle."

"Make 'em needle out of stick," came the prompt reply.

"But what about the sinew, Toma? You had no thread. How could you sew without thread?"

Toma hung his head. He hated to make this admission, but the truth must come out. Toma was always truthful.

"I use part of fish-line," he explained.

"Part of the fish-line?" gurgled Dick.

"Yes, I use 'em part of the fish-line."

"Well, I must admit that you made *good* use of it. There is really more than we require anyway. I'm glad for your sake, Toma. Who, beside yourself, would ever have thought of a stunt like that? They'll come in mighty handy for you, of course, but won't you feel cold, Toma? When the winds are chilly I'm afraid you'll suffer."

Toma shook his head, bit his lips and stared very hard at some imaginary object across the river. It was plain that he was keenly embarrassed and quite at a loss to know what to say. Finally, he found the words that he had been vainly striving for and quickly blurted them out:

"Dick, I no can stand it any longer to see Sandy all time limp. Mebbe two, three more days Sandy sit down and feet swollen so bad not walk any farther."

He gulped, averted his eyes, then tossed the result of his handiwork over at the sleeper's side. Dick took in the little tableau, feeling suddenly very sick and mean and

miserable and selfish. He did not try to hide the tears that came into his eyes. Through a sort of mist he saw Sandy's blurred form stretched out there on the sand. Then he glanced at Toma, who looked very ludicrous and silly standing there in his abbreviated trousers, the cool night wind blowing over his bare legs.

At that instant there popped into his mind the sarcastic utterance of one Toby McCallum:

“Breeds don't count!”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A HUMAN GORILLA.

NEITHER that day nor the following did the boys succeed in getting a single trout. It was an unforeseen calamity and they were wholly unprepared for it. At first, they could not understand it. They knew that the river teemed with fish. Up to this time, they had had no trouble in catching all they had required. That blazing hot noon when Sandy returned to camp empty-handed and reported that not one member of the countless schools of trout and white-fish, that literally darkened the stream, would rise to his bait, Dick could not believe his ears.

“You couldn’t have tried very hard, Sandy,” he chided him. “Here, give me that line. You never were much of a fisherman, that is the trouble with you. You haven’t the patience, Sandy.”

The young Scotchman relinquished the line, his eyes stormy.

“I’ll admit I’m no fisherman,” he blurted, “but please don’t tell me that I didn’t try, because I did, or that I haven’t the patience because I have. I’ve caught nearly as many trout on this trip as you have. But they aren’t biting today at all. I think the river must be bewitched.”

Dick smiled knowingly and confidently, unsheathed his hunting knife and cut a long alder pole. Then, winking at Toma, he hurried over to the river, sure in his belief that he’d show Sandy a thing or two about the gentle art of fishing.

He baited his hook and cast his line. Repeatedly he whipped the swift water, grinning. In a moment he’d feel that sharp tug, experience that old familiar thrill. Poor Sandy! At best, he was only a half-hearted fisherman, had never learned to love the sport, had never entered into it with the enthusiasm and spirit that made for proficiency. The minutes passed, but he was not discouraged. Back and forth his line flipped over the water. The smile left his face. He scowled, swung in his line, walked fifty or sixty yards upstream and tried again.

An hour—two hours—he was very grim now, but he just couldn’t give up. There were fish here. He must get fish. They had no other food except clams and it was not possible to get many of them. Good Lord, what would happen if their one heretofore unfailing source of sustenance were cut off? Following their long tramp that previous night, they were all weak from hunger. He was so famished right now that he could even relish eating a dead crow. Despondently, he sat down on a rock, still whipping the water. A shadow appeared from behind him and he heard a voice:

“What’s the matter, Dick? No catch ’em one yet?”

Dick turned his head. He looked up into Toma’s serious face and gulped down a lump in his throat.

“I don’t understand it. I don’t understand it!” he wailed.

The young Indian regarded the river with a sober, thoughtful face.

“Long time I been ’fraid about this,” he sighed. “All the time I hope mebbe I’m wrong. River too swift here to get many fish. No pools along here. Trout keep in central current an’ hurry on to better feeding place down the river.”

“So that’s the reason. But, Toma, what are we going to do? We must eat, somehow, and for nearly thirty miles the river is just like this. Is it starvation? Has it come to that?”

“Mebbe not starve, but get mighty hungry.”

“Perhaps we could kill a few birds with stones,” Dick suggested hopefully.

“I know better plan than that. We do like Indians before white men come. I make ’em bows an’ arrows. Only trouble is we no shoot straight at first.”

“But what about the strings for our bows?”

“We use fish-line.”

Dick slid off the rock, his expression more hopeful.

“All right, let’s set to work. I’ll help you, Toma. We’ll eat birds for dinner, squirrels—anything! Perhaps we might even be lucky enough to get a rabbit. If we don’t find something to eat pretty soon we’ll——”

The words died in his throat. On that instant back at camp, Sandy let out a scream—a ringing, pulsating, vibrant, piercing scream of terror. Looking back, they perceived Sandy tearing along toward them, arms and legs swinging, hat gone and the loose sides of his unbuttoned jacket billowing up in the wind.

While Dick stood there, wondering what it was all about, Toma stooped swiftly then straightened up, a rock in either hand, his cheeks the color of yellow parchment. At that moment, Dick caught sight of the apparition himself. His eyes popped and unconsciously he made a queer, choking noise in his throat. A thing that looked like a beast and yet, somewhat resembled a man, was making its way slowly down the steep bank toward their campfire. The horrible creature’s face was covered with a long black beard and the hair of his head straggled down over his eyes and fluffed out in a sinuous black wave around his shoulders.

It was a man undoubtedly—but what a man! A skin of some sort had been wrapped and tied around his torso, but both his arms and legs were quite naked. In every sense—a wild man. His huge frame supported bulging muscles. His chest expanded like a barrel. He walked with a gliding motion. His head rotated from side to side and, during the breathless silence that followed Sandy’s arrival, they could hear him clucking and grunting to himself.

The three boys waited there, rigid with terror. Never before had they seen a wild man. His awful appearance, his constant gibbering, his bobbing head and fearful eyes reminded Dick of gorillas and huge hairy apes, whose pictures he had often studied in his natural history book at school. When the hideous creature had turned from a momentary inspection of their campfire and commenced gliding toward them, with one accord they shrieked and fled.

They had no thought of their sore feet now, neither were they aware of the incessant, gnawing pains of hunger. In a great crisis of this sort, the mind has a peculiar



tendency to become wholly subjective to the feelings of instinct. Instinct inherited from a thousand generations of jungle-prowling ancestors, told them to flee—and they fled.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BOWS AND ARROWS.

SOON they headed away from the shore into the thickets of willow and jack-pine and began to climb the ascent that led away from the river, up and up, until right ahead they could see the somber, interminable green of the forest. It was cool here, a welcome coolness after the stiff climb. They were all panting for breath, fearful lest the wild man be still in pursuit of them. None of the boys wanted to meet him, cared about engaging in a hand to hand fight with that gorilla-like monster. So, plunging in the forest, they continued on, leaving the river far behind. At the end of a half-hour, they swung south, guided by the sun, and continued their difficult journey in the direction of Half Way House.

When Dick felt perfectly sure that they were no longer being followed, he called a halt and brought up the subject closest to all of them.

“What about something to eat?” he inquired. “This will never do. We must eat. Toma, let’s put your plan into execution.”

“You mean ’em bows and arrows? All right, you get ’em fish-line.”

Dick handed it to him. With his hunting knife the young Indian set to work, cutting and fashioning the bows, while Dick and Sandy sharpened some straight sticks for arrows. Under Toma’s instructions, they tufted one end of each arrow with some tough, fibrous bark the young Indian found for them. In a little less than twenty minutes they were ready. Walking at a distance of about one hundred yards apart and, still moving south, they commenced to hunt.

Dick was not very hopeful. The first bird he saw, a bird that resembled a king-fisher, he shot at and missed. Five minutes later, his heart landed up in his throat as a rabbit scurried into his path and, for the second time he bent his bow and again he missed. He missed a squirrel that ran up a tree in front of him. Recovering his arrows each time, he took five shots at the squirrel and in the end lost sight of it. Every minute he was becoming more discouraged and more hungry. The arrows never went just where he expected. Usually, he was a foot or two wide of his mark, whether that mark was moving or stationary. After what seemed like an hour, he pressed over more to his right to discover if either of the others had had any better luck. There he found Sandy.

“How are you getting on?” he inquired eagerly.

Sandy turned his head. No need to ask him how he had fared. The discouraged lines in his face told the story. His words confirmed it.

“Dick, I’ve seen two rabbits and three grouse and I failed to get any of them. Think I’m too excited and eager. What did you get?”

“Nothing!” Dick’s eyes were tragic.

The young Scotchman averted his face.

“Cripes!” he choked.

When he turned toward Dick again the latter experienced a momentary feeling of utter discouragement and despair. Slow starvation—had it come to that? He noticed how gaunt and drawn his chum's face was.

"Every minute that we have to spare, we must practice with these bows and arrows, Sandy," Dick told him. "It's our only salvation. In time we'll grow expert in their use. I had a chance once to take up archery and now I wish I had."

They heard a shout near at hand. The bushes parted and Toma plunged forward to join them. Toma was carrying something. What was it? Staring, Sandy suddenly let out a whoop and bounded forward to meet him.

"A porcupine!" he shouted. "Dick, Dick, come here! A porcupine and two rabbits! Thank God for that."

Dick merely stood there, gasping—doubting the evidence of his own senses. A queer feeling swept through him. It was not merely joy at the successful outcome of their hunt, but a feeling of relief, of tension relaxed. The future did not look quite so dark now. With food they could make it. Good old Toma! Faithful ever, a wonderful help in time of stress or emergency.

All the boys contended that they had never tasted anything so good as that porcupine, which they roasted, Indian fashion, over the fire. When they had eaten they were actually happy. For nearly an hour Toma instructed them in the use of their bows and arrows. Then they sat down to decide what to do next.

"I don't know what would be the best plan," puzzled Dick, "keep on as we're doing or retrace our steps to the river. What would you boys suggest?"

"Go back to the river," answered Toma unhesitatingly.

"But why?" asked Dick.

"Follow the river," explained Toma, "an' then no chance we get lost. Bad to get lost now without grub, blankets. Pretty soon all our clothes wear out. What we do then?"

"Yes, that's true," agreed Dick. "There's no danger of getting lost if we follow the river. The only thing I was thinking of, will we find as much game in the river valley as we will up here?"

"Not much difference," returned Toma. "Hunting pretty much the same everywhere. It's like what you call 'em—luck. If we lucky we see many things to shoot. If not see 'em, no luck. 'Nother thing, by an' by, fishing get good again."

Seeing the wisdom in all that Toma had said, they returned to the river valley without discussing the matter further. After partaking of the porcupine they had become more optimistic and were determined now to push on to their destination more hurriedly. It was agreed that not only would they walk all that night, but part of the next day before they made camp. They had still some of the roasted porcupine and rabbit, so it would not be necessary to stop long for lunch.

An hour later, breaking through a willow thicket, they perceived the slope leading to the river, descended it and continued along the shore. Occasionally, while they were marching, Dick and Sandy would test their marksmanship by firing at some object ahead, picking up the arrow again when they reached it. The interminable twilight of

the Arctic made this possible and it was not long before each of the boys began to note a decided improvement in his marksmanship.

The feet of the three adventurers grew more sore and swollen through the passing of the hours. Yet they pushed doggedly on. They had walked so much that the action had become mechanical. Sometimes they plodded ahead with eyes half-closed, nearly asleep. The twilight faded and the day sprang forth. The gray morning mist lifted from the river. A hot sun threw its slanting rays across the strip of white sand along which the boys were proceeding.

Suddenly, Toma who was in the lead, stopped quickly, called sharply to his two chums and pointed ahead.

“Look!” he shouted.

On their side of the river, less than a quarter of a mile away, gently eddying among the tops of the spruce and balsam, were thin spirals of smoke.

“A campfire!” shrieked Sandy in wonder. “Oh boy, we’re in luck! Maybe we can get help—a canoe or a gun.”

Unmindful of his great weariness and tortured feet, he had started out on a dead run, when Dick called to him sharply.

“Just a minute, Sandy. Not so fast. It may be Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum.”

Sandy stopped dead in his tracks.

“What’s that? Are you mad? If they had come up the river, we’d have seen them.”

“I’m not so sure. They might have passed us while we slept, or yesterday when we were in the woods after that experience with the wild man. One can never be too sure, Sandy. Our best plan is not to rush that camp, to make sure who they are before we let ourselves be seen.”

“That is right, Dick,” agreed Toma. “Brennan an’ McCallum very bad; also very clever fellow. No tell just where they may be now.”

Sandy, quick to see the wisdom propounded by his two friends, nodded in agreement while he waited for them to come up. They left the flat, sandy shore, where they could easily be seen, and proceeded thereafter through the jack-pine and willows farther up along the slope. Inside of twenty minutes they had approached to within a short distance of the place where the smoke was ascending.

At first they could see no one. They waited in a breathless inactivity. The brush was very thick and, from where they crouched, the boys could see only the light streamers of smoke drifting up from among a heavy copse of willow. Indeed, to determine who might be sitting around the campfire, the boys soon saw that it would be necessary to creep even closer. This they did not care to do for fear that the sound of their light movement might be detected. If only one of the campers would rise up behind that brush. For ten long minutes they waited, undecided whether to take the chance or not, For ten long minutes they watched the smoke rising, curling and eddying up through the trees. Putting his hands to his lips, Dick rose stealthily and tip-toed forward another twenty feet, this time more to the right. Then through a narrow opening in the thicket he caught sight of a kneeling form which he recognized instantly. It was McCallum! And as McCallum put up a hand and leaned to one side to evade a momentary puff of

smoke from the fire, he saw Wolf Brennan and another man. The third person sat in such a position that Dick caught only his profile and so did not immediately recognize him.

Even when this third person did present a better view, Dick pondered over his identity. There was something vaguely familiar about him. Where had he seen him? A repulsive looking man, heavily bearded with deep-set, staring eyes. His flannel shirt, open at the neck, revealed a hairy, bear-like chest. The man was huge and muscular. One more look, then Dick sat down, gasping. A slow flush mounted his cheeks. He knew now. It was the wild man!

## CHAPTER X.

### TOMA'S DARING PLAN.

"CAN'T be!" gasped Sandy.

"I tell you it is! The wild man. With McCallum and Brennan."

The young Scotchman sank down to a sitting position, staring across at Dick. Just then he had no words to voice his astonishment. But not so Toma.

"What's that you tell 'em Sandy an' me? This fellow look like crazy man now wear clothes? Sit there an' talk McCallum an' Brennan like he got some sense after all?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I've been trying to tell you."

"No believe."

"Slip over there then and see for yourself. It's true, Toma. He looks different now, but it's the same person undoubtedly."

The young Indian still shook his head in unbelief as he crawled forward to the place Dick had recently vacated. For several minutes he crouched there, his eyes on the three men, then cautiously returned.

"Am I right?" demanded Dick.

"You say right. It is that fellow. He no more crazy than you an' me. He look like wild man, that's all. I think mebbe Wolf Brennan tell him come over dress like that to make us big scare."

"That's what I think."

Sandy caught at Dick's arm.

"Well," he said nervously, "let's get away from here before we're discovered."

Dick did not reply. His face was serious, absorbed. He was thinking deeply.

"Let's get out of here," Sandy insisted. "Remember, Dick, they're armed and we aren't."

"Just a moment, Sandy. It's just occurred to me that these men must have a canoe or craft of some kind. I've been wondering if it wouldn't be possible to get it away from them a little later when they fall asleep. If we can successfully put such a plan into effect, it won't take us long to get to Half Way House."

Toma emphatically nodded his head.

"Yes, if they got canoe, we try get it."

Sandy brightened visibly.

"I'm willing to take the chance," he said. "This constant walking has begun to tell upon us all. We have still a long way to go. Yes, I'm willing to take the chance," he repeated eagerly.

It was hot where the three boys sat. The sun, now directly overhead, beat down upon them with fierce, penetrating insistence. Not a breath of wind stirred along the

river valley. Dick wiped away the beads of moisture that stood out upon his face and commenced fanning himself with his broad-rimmed hat.

“First of all we must find out for certain whether they have a canoe,” he pointed out. “If they have, it’s probably hid in the brush near the river. We must try to find out exactly where it is.”

Sandy nodded his head.

“Do you suppose there is any chance that the three of them will take a nap?” he inquired.

“Extremely likely,” rejoined Dick. “From what I can make out, they’re preparing their mid-day meal now. After they have eaten, they’ll do either one of two things, embark on their journey again immediately or sit around and rest for an hour or two. I’m very much inclined to the latter view. Unlike ourselves, they’re in no hurry to return to Half Way House. They’ve been sent out here to watch us. No doubt, they think that after the scare we received yesterday, we’re still up in the woods.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” Sandy half grinned.

“You think we better try get gun as well as canoe?” Toma asked.

“That depends a good deal upon circumstances. I mean, we’ll get one if we can do it without taking too much of a chance.”

“You suggest waiting here then until we find out what they’re going to do?”

Dick nodded. “We’re as safe here as anywhere.”

“Let’s creep a little closer,” suggested Toma.

“No, we’d better stay here. In these bushes they can’t see us. If we’re quiet, they can’t hear us either.”

During the interval of deep silence that followed, they could hear quite distinctly the voices of the three men. Occasionally, too, there came to their ears the rattle of a kettle or the clatter of a spoon. The ascending streamers of smoke thinned gradually and finally disappeared. Now and again, Wolf Brennan’s harsh laugh fell across the quiet air.

The minutes slipped by. Dick began to wonder if they would never cease talking. The drone of their voices continued on unintermittingly, for an hour or more, before the sequestered camp became quiet. Not until then did Dick turn and motion to his companions.

“Now’s our chance,” he whispered. “Toma, you and Sandy follow me down along the shore of the river and we’ll try to find that canoe. We must take our time. In case they hear us we’ll make a break for the trees and climb the slope.”

Moving slowly, cautiously, Dick led the way down to the river. They were glad when they reached the belt of white sand. Their footsteps could not be heard here. They proceeded about fifty yards, to a point just below the place where the three men were camped. Though they looked up along the bank eagerly, they had seen no trace of the outlaw’s craft. But presently, Toma moved closer to Dick, nudging him in the elbow.

“I see it,” he breathed.

“Where?”

The young Indian pointed. “Right there,” he said.

Dick's heart nearly stood still. The canoe was farther up the bank than he had expected. The three men had carried it within thirty feet of the place where they had built their fire. Its graceful lines standing out sharply against the background of green brush—never had the boys looked upon anything they wanted so much and yet which seemed so unattainable. Even if Wolf Brennan and his two unprepossessing companions were sleeping soundly, how could they ever contrive to creep up there unheard, pick up the canoe and make their way back to the river?

It would be a terrible risk. Careful though they might be, it would be almost impossible to secure the prize without arousing the sleepers. Disheartened, the boys crouched down close to the bank.

"Guess we'll have to give it up," murmured Sandy, "We'll lose our lives in the attempt."

Dick groaned. "And when they wake up, they'll start up the river again and we'll probably never have another chance."

As he spoke, he looked at Toma and noticed a sudden sparkle of determination in the young Indian's eyes. Toma had become excited, restless. His hands moved along the edge of the bank nervously.

"Tell you what we do," he proposed. "I have plan. Listen, Dick. You two fellows stay here. Keep down close to bank so they no see you. While you do that I circle round through the trees an' come down on them from above, making loud noise. Pretty soon I wake 'em up. I try keep hid. By an' by, them fellows think mebbe it's a bear an' come up an' try find it. Soon they do that, you, Sandy run up quick, get canoe."

"And leave you in the lurch," protested Sandy. "I guess not. You'll get a bullet for your pains." Toma shook his head. "No 'fraid of that. I keep plenty hid all time. Pretty soon them fellows give up an' go back to camp."

"But what will you do?" inquired Dick.

"I keep right on till I come to bend in river. You an' Sandy be watch, look for me all a time an' soon I come down to shore you paddle in an' pick me up."

Dick's face grew instantly grave.

"The plan might or might not work," he decided. "Supposing, Toma, that only one or two of them leave camp. How do you know they'll all follow you?"

"I not know that," the young Indian admitted. "But pretty good chance they all come when I make noise."

"But if only two should follow you, what will we do?" persisted Dick.

"Mebbe you get chance to get canoe anyway. If one fellow stay at camp, he very much like to know what other two fellow do, what you call 'em, he be excite. He keep look up that way. Then mebbe you an' Sandy creep up close behind him with club an' knock him down."

Dick's breath caught. He and Sandy were staring questioningly and a little wildly into each other's eyes.

Toma persisted. "What you say 'bout that?"

"I couldn't do it, Dick," Sandy exploded. "There's something sneaky and cowardly about creeping up and knocking a man down with a club. I just can't do it. I can't!"



“He try same by you,” the young Indian scowled. “What for you not do it to him?”

“If we had a rope,” said Dick, “we might grab him and tie him up.”

Toma’s face fell. “Why we talk ’bout that now? Mebbe all three follow me. It’s only chance I see to get canoe.”

“All right,” Dick suddenly came to a decision. “We’ll risk it. We’ve delayed long enough now. Get busy, Toma, and carry out your plan just as you’ve told it to us.”

The Indian’s sober features lighted into a broad smile. Swinging about without further preliminary, he broke into a dog-trot, then, twenty yards further down the shore, turned and began making his way up the steep embankment. The boys watched him for a while, whereupon they turned and looked at each other, their cheeks flushed with excitement. Dick reached over quickly and laid his right hand on Sandy’s shaking shoulder.

“We’re in for it now,” he said.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A CANOE AT LAST.

THE first intimation Dick and Sandy had that Toma had arrived opposite the outlaw's camp was when they saw Wolf Brennan spring to his feet, rifle in hand, and call sharply to his two friends. Immediately after that, a crackling in the brush, made by Toma, came to their ears.

"A moose!" shouted Wolf Brennan, pointing.

The other two, disturbed from their slumbers, scrambled to a place beside Brennan, their attitudes that of tense watching.

Breathless with excitement, Dick wondered if Toma's ruse would work. The three men stood there immobile as three statues. The crackling noise up along the slope continued. Finally, when the boys had begun to believe that the outlaws were too clever for them, Wolf Brennan turned upon his two compatriots, growling:

"Toby, yuh stay here while me and Willison take a run up there tuh see what's up. All ready, Willison, grab your gun."

Willison obeyed implicitly, following Wolf Brennan up along the slope to the first ridge on the ascent. Toby McCallum, one hand against a tree, stood and watched them depart. Dick nudged Sandy.

"Now!" he whispered tersely. "You drag down the canoe while I attend to McCallum."

They clambered up the low embankment, moving swiftly and quietly. Reaching the canoe, Sandy paused while Dick gathering momentum, leaped straight over a low barricade of scraggy brush and hurled himself straight at his adversary.

Turning in time to see Dick leaping for him, McCallum instinctively raised one arm to ward off the attack. However, this defensive action came too late. With all his weight behind it, Dick struck McCallum in a flying tackle just above the knees. The outlaw crashed down like a sack of wheat. He was somewhat stunned by the impact of the fall, but, even then, tried to reach out for his rifle, lying on the ground barely two feet away.

In the meantime, perceiving both Dick and McCallum struggling on the ground, locked in each other's arms, Sandy dropped the bow of the canoe and hurried to the rescue. Just as Dick succeeded in pinioning McCallum's arms under him, Sandy caught up the outlaw's gun.

"Quick, Dick!" he shouted. "I've got it."

Dick released his hold and staggered to his feet.

"Glad you came, Sandy," he panted. "McCallum, lay right there," he ordered savagely, "if you know what's good for you."

While Sandy covered their prisoner, Dick stooped and unbuckled the cartridge belt from around McCallum's waist, placed it about his own, then took the rifle from Sandy's trembling hands.

“Hurry, Sandy!” he blurted. “Go over and pull down that canoe. I’ll watch McCallum here until you’re ready.”

The prospector’s face was livid with rage and humiliation as Sandy departed. Suddenly, to Dick’s surprise, he opened his mouth and shouted at the top of his voice. It was a warning, clarion call that echoed and re-echoed through that quiet forest place.

Dick’s cheeks blanched. “Yell all you like,” he told McCallum. “We’ll get away just the same.”

From his position there on the ground, the outlaw glared up, his face crimson with fury, and broke into a torrent of abusive oaths.

“Yuh’ll pay for this,” he snarled. “Yuh ain’t got safe back tuh Half Way House yet. It’ll take a hull lot more than one canoe and one rifle tuh get yuh there. Remember that.”

“Yes, I’ll remember it,” said Dick tensely, “and I’ll be on the lookout for you too.”

“Yuh better,” growled the other.

Dick did not reply. Out of the corner of one eye he was watching Sandy’s progress toward the shore. The moment the canoe slid across the belt of yellow sand, he addressed himself to McCallum.

“If you get off the ground before I reach the river, I’ll take a pot-shot at you,” he threatened. “We’re desperate—and I mean business. Just try it if you like.”

Evidently McCallum took Dick at his word, for he did not so much as move a muscle as Dick sped down to the shore where Sandy awaited him. He jumped into the canoe and Sandy pushed off. Putting down his rifle, he seized one of the oars and began paddling frantically. The canoe rocked and swayed as it darted over the water. Spray dashed up around them. They swept into the central channel, desperately bucking the swift current. It was a race against death. Any moment now Wolf Brennan would return and commence firing from shore. In the glare of the sun, the river roared about them. They paddled as they had never paddled before. The shoreline gradually receded. On and on they swept. Perspiration poured out upon their foreheads and trickled into their eyes. Their breath struggled in their throats.

Zip! A bullet whistled between them and spat viciously into the water. Crack! A puff of smoke from shore, and Dick’s paddle leaped out of his hands, punctured by a speeding pellet of destruction.

With a quick, conclusive movement of his arm, Dick retrieved his paddle and as he did so he caught a glimpse of three figures running along the shore.

“Make for the opposite side!” he screeched to Sandy. “We must get out of rifle range.”

“But Toma—” faltered Sandy.

“He’ll look after himself. Quick, Sandy!” His own paddle clove the water again just as a third bullet whistled above their heads.

In a few minutes more their danger perceptibly decreased. The fire from the two on shore was now going more wide of its mark. Soon it ceased altogether. They were close to the opposite shore now, still paddling desperately.

“Dick, I can’t stand this pace much longer,” Sandy gasped.

“All right, ease up. We’ll run ashore for a minute or two.”

When Sandy had grunted his approval, Dick turned the bow of the canoe sharply and the light, graceful craft grated upon the white sand and came to a full stop.

“Good gracious, Dick,” Sandy gurgled, springing out, “that was a close call. I’m afraid they’re going to capture Toma.”

Dick shook his head. “Not that boy. He’s too clever for them,” he replied, still breathing heavily.

“But how will we ever manage to pick him up again?” blurted the young Scotchman.

“Have to await our chance. Toma will keep an eye on us. He’ll make his way along the opposite shore. When he thinks the time is propitious, he’ll give us a signal.”

“I hope so,” said Sandy prayerfully. “If it wasn’t for him, we wouldn’t be where we are now.”

“True. But don’t worry about him. He’s clever, as you ought to know by now. I haven’t the least fear that Brennan will ever succeed in capturing him.”

“What do you propose to do now?” asked Sandy.

Dick pursed his lips. “When we are rested, we’ll paddle along this side of the river slowly so that Toma will have plenty of time to keep up with us. We’ll go up the river a mile or two and then stop for the night. We’ll build a fire close to the shore so that Toma will know just where we are, what we are doing. We’ll have to take turns sleeping tonight. I don’t think there is any danger that Brennan’s party will build a raft and come over, yet it will be wise to be on our guard. Now that they know we have a rifle, they’ll think twice before they try a stunt like that.”

The remainder of the afternoon passed uneventfully. They saw no more of Brennan and his friends, neither did they catch a glimpse of Toma. Just before dusk they disembarked in a sheltered spot and by means of the fire stone soon had a blazing campfire near the shore. While Dick watched it and gathered more driftwood and dry branches, Sandy took the rifle and went up along the slope in search of game. Within twenty minutes he came back carrying a rabbit.

“Wish Toma was here to enjoy it with us,” he stated a little sorrowfully. “Dick, I’m terribly afraid that something has happened to him. I try to make myself believe that he’s safe, but the feeling still persists.”

Dick laughed away Sandy’s fears while he prepared supper and later as they gathered brush for a high bon-fire. The fire would keep them warm that night, Dick explained. Also it would be a beacon to let Toma know just where they were.

“We’ll keep it burning brightly until morning,” he told Sandy. “What part of the night would you like to keep watch?” he inquired.

“From now until a little after midnight,” replied Sandy.

So it was decided. A pale dusk covered the earth when Dick stretched out by the fire and went to sleep, but it was much darker than usual when he was awakened by his weary chum and notified that it was his turn to stand guard.

“Keep the fire going good, Dick,” Sandy instructed sleepily. “It’s chilly and I’d like to have an unbroken sleep.”

The young Scotchman was slumbering deeply, curled up alongside the comforting blaze, by the time Dick had returned with his first arm-load of wood. The older boy smiled as he looked down at him. What an eventful day it had been, he mused. No wonder Sandy was so tired. The difficulties and hardships of the past week had tested strength, endurance and nerve to the utmost. They couldn't go on indefinitely like this. The hard pace had begun to tell. By the look of him, Sandy couldn't stand much more of it. His cheeks were sunken and there were deep hollows under his eyes.

The young leader sighed and sat down with his back to the fire, his gaze wandering. Up overhead the clouds seemed to be gathering for rain. Through a narrow rift shone a handful of brilliant stars and a white half-circle of moon. Down below, glinting mysteriously, was the wide path of the river. Tonight its song was as mournful as the weird music of an Indian lullabye.

Dick continued to sit there half musing, half dreaming, until suddenly down near the shore he heard a loud splash. He bolted to his feet and ran for his rifle. Wolf Brennan—was his first thought. Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum! They had made a raft and come over after all!

He caught the rifle to him, when a muffled figure staggered up over the bank, shaking himself like a dog that had been thrown into a mill-pond—shaking and blowing and shivering, and beating his arms to quicken the circulation in his body.

Dick gave one short, sharp cry, dropped his rifle and darted forward, arms outstretched.

“Toma! Toma!” he called.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE MEETING ON THE RIVER.

WHEN SANDY awoke on the following morning, his joy was unbounded. Taking one look at Toma, he gasped and daubed frantically at his sleep-stained eyes. Both the young Indian and Dick laughed at the young Scotchman's astonishment.

"How did you get here?" asked Sandy, finding his voice.

"I swim across the river," grinned Toma.

"What's that! Across the river!" Sandy's eyes grew wide.

"Yes, that's what I do. River cold and swift, but me, I think pretty sure I make it."

"He arrived here in the middle of the night," explained Dick. "It was about an hour after you woke me up to relieve you for guard duty."

Sandy looked out at the river that swirled and rolled along northward. At the point where Toma had crossed, it was over half a mile wide. Its waters were swift and as cold as ice. A remarkable feat even for an expert.

All the boys were happy and in high spirits when they embarked in the canoe an hour later and resumed their journey upstream. Though it was hard work to paddle incessantly against the strong current, it was nevertheless a welcome relief after the days they had spent in travelling on foot. All day they sweated at their task. They were miles away from Wolf Brennan and his party by the time that night fell. They were turning in towards shore to make camp, when Toma, who was sitting in the bow, suddenly sang out:

"Canoe! Canoe! I see 'em canoe!"

Instantly Dick and Sandy straightened up, their eyes almost staring from their heads.

"Where?" they demanded in one voice.

"Oh, I see it now!" Sandy shouted. "Hold into mid-stream Toma, so we'll meet him. Small canoe. Just one man. Wonder who it is?"

The canoe and its lone occupant drifted toward them. Closer and closer it came. The man, industriously plying his paddle, took form. Dick's heart leaped and he suddenly went weak all over. He recognized the garb of that lonely traveller. No mistaking that broad-brimmed hat and scarlet coat. A mounted policeman! All of the boys had become so breathlessly interested in trying to determine the identity of the occupant of the canoe that he was within two hundred yards of them before any of them spoke again. Then, suddenly Dick raised his paddle and waved a frantic, hilarious greeting.

"Corporal Rand!" he shrieked.

The policeman had never received a more spontaneous and noisy welcome. The three chums howled and shrieked. They rent the air with their huzzas. In the stern,

Sandy laughingly reached out, caught the prow of Rand's canoe and both crafts floated down stream nearly fifty yards while they exchanged greetings. Then, as if moved by a common impulse they swerved to the left and presently disembarked at the edge of a sandbar projecting out from shore.

"I never expected to meet any of you here," stated the corporal, pulling up his canoe. "Thought you were all over at Fort Good Faith. In fact, I sent a letter over there less than a week ago, asking you to meet me at Half Way House."

"You did?" gasped Dick and Sandy.

"Yes, and I was disappointed when you didn't show up."

Dick's expression was one of amazement.

"Didn't Factor Frazer tell you where we had gone?" he demanded.

"Why no. Did he know?"

"Certainly he knew." There was an angry quaver in Dick's voice. "He was the one that sent us up here."

"Did you let him know that you expected us from Fort Good Faith?" inquired Sandy.

The corporal nodded.

"And he said nothing?"

"Not a word."

In jerky, angry sentences, Dick told Corporal Rand of the dinosaur and of the incidents leading up to their journey to the island of the granite shaft. Out of breath at last, he paused and Sandy took up the narrative where he left off, relating in the minutest detail everything that had happened subsequent to their departure from the island. Rand listened without once asking a question or making a comment. Even after Sandy had finished, he sat silent and thoughtful, the toe of one boot tracing patterns in the sand.

"Why don't you laugh?" asked Sandy.

Corporal Rand straightened up. "Laugh? What for?"

"Why, at the beautiful joke Factor Frazer played upon us."

Corporal Rand's brows knit and his mouth tightened.

"It doesn't impress me as being particularly amusing."

"What do you make of it all?"

The policeman raised his eyes toward the young Scotchman and half smiled.

"I'll be perfectly frank. I haven't the least idea."

"Can you imagine what we have done to incur their enmity—Factor Frazer's, Wolf Brennan's and Toby McCallum's?"

"No."

"When I first saw you, do you know what I thought?" inquired the young leader of the trio.

"No. What did you think, Dick?"

“I thought perhaps you had guessed that we were in trouble and had come to our rescue.”

Corporal Rand shook his head. “No, I am on patrol duty.”

“But why did you wish to meet us at Half Way House?” persisted Dick.

“That’s a different story. The police have another little job for you.”

“What is it?” the boys inquired in unison.

“Wanted you to go over to Caribou Lake to investigate a rumor.”

The three boys gathered more closely around the policeman.

“What rumor?” asked Dick.

Corporal Rand rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“It concerns a certain Conroy Miller, a prospector who has been working up in that section. Miller has not been heard from since last fall. He sent word down to Ford Laird by an Indian that he proposed to trap all winter in the vicinity of Caribou Lake, where he had staked out a few mining claims, and asked Factor Goodwin to send out a quantity of supplies. On the first of December last year the Indian, who had brought in the message, and several companions with dog teams, took the supplies out to Miller and afterward returned, reporting that Miller had received them and wished to thank the factor for his kindly co-operation.

“Well, a few weeks ago a trapper, a German named Lutz, reported to the Fort McKenzie detachment that he had passed through the Caribou Lake region and had stopped at Miller’s cabin. He reported that the cabin was well stocked with provisions but that no one was there. In fact, there was every evidence that the cabin had not been tenanted for months. Dishes were on the table just as Miller had left them. In one corner of the room was a quantity of green fur and a pile of traps. Dust had settled everywhere, proving conclusively that Miller had not been at home for a long time.”

Corporal Rand paused for a moment, then resumed.

“Lutz, who is an honorable fellow in every way, became frightened, jumped to the conclusion that Miller had met with an accident and searched the vicinity in an attempt to find the prospector’s body. Unsuccessful in this, he proceeded straight to McKenzie Barracks and reported the matter to us.”

“Are you on your way there now?” Dick cut in.

“Yes. I wanted you boys to go along to help search for the body. When you failed to meet me at Half Way House, I started on alone.”

“You hold to the Lutz theory then, that he met with an accident while trapping?” interrogated Sandy.

“We have come to no definite conclusions yet. We may find his body there and we may not. If we don’t, I propose to follow up another lead, that he has met with foul play.”

“Foul play?” cried Dick.

“Yes, it is possible. There are many rumors floating around about him. Nothing tangible yet. However, there is one thing we have made a note of. On April third, an Indian named Henri Karek claims he met Miller on the trail between Thunder River



and Lynx Lake. He stated further that Miller was in the best of health and carried a good grub supply. His destination, he told the Indian, was Fort Laird.”

“Wonder if the Indian really met him,” mused Dick.

“He met someone by the name of Miller,” replied the corporal, “but whether it was our man or not is a debatable question. Since then other stories have been circulated, most of them, I fear, without foundation. If it was really Conroy Miller that Karek met on the trail, he never reached his destination. That much I have found out by making inquiries at Fort Laird.”

The corporal paused abruptly, regarding the boys through half-closed lids. Dick wondered what he was thinking about.

“How long since you left the dinosaur’s island?” the policeman suddenly inquired.

“Just two weeks ago today,” Sandy replied.

“You’ve had an unusual experience. Went hungry, didn’t you? Looks as if you’d been living on a diet of fish and no mistake. Honestly, Dick, I believe you’ve lost ten pounds.”

“I think I have,” came the unconcerned rejoinder.

“Wolf and McCallum will have to answer for this some day, but I don’t want to do anything now. We’ll give them plenty of rope and see if they won’t eventually hang themselves. Now about that pseudo-wildman you spoke of, I can’t seem to place him—unless it’s old Bill Willison, an eccentric trapper who used to live in the vicinity of Fort Laird.”

“That’s who it is!” Dick exclaimed. “I remember now. They called him Willison.”

“Too bad he’s fallen into their net. He’s not a vicious character and would harm no one if left alone. The old man is as rugged as the hills and they say as old as Methuselah. If he has joined Brennan’s party, it was under compulsion. Of that I feel sure. No doubt, the canoe you have belongs to him.”

“Does the old man wander around sometimes just dressed in furs and without any shoes or moccasins?”

Rand laughed. “Yes. The other clothes you saw him in, he wears only when he goes to a trading post for supplies. In his own natural habitat, old Willison is almost as wild as he looks.”

“Then Brennan and McCallum sent him to frighten us?” asked Sandy.

“Undoubtedly.”

Toma edged closer, waiting for a chance to break into the conversation. Corporal Rand noted his look.

“Yes, Toma, what is it?” he asked kindly.

The young Indian put his hand to his stomach and grinned.

“If you got some tea, corporal,” he hinted, “I like ’em get your kettle and put some water over the fire. No taste tea for over two weeks.”

“Just fish and rabbits,” grunted Sandy.

“And don’t forget the clams and porcupine,” appended Dick.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### HALF WAY HOUSE.

COOL air rose from the river, driving before it long, grey streamers of mist. Up through the trees it spread, close to the ground, dense as smoke. Across the sandbar, well up on the bank above, in the deep shadow of the balsam, a bright fire etched in bold relief the faces of Corporal Rand and the three boys. They made a complete circle around the fire and were conversing eagerly. Just now it was Sandy who held the center of interest.

“Something underhanded going on at Half Way House,” he explained to the corporal. “I think that Uncle Walter is suspicious of Factor Frazer. I don’t know exactly what the trouble is, but I think it has something to do with the way Mr. Frazer has been keeping his accounts. You see, Uncle Walter is Chief Factor for this district and audits the books of all the trading posts. He acted very mysterious when he asked us to go over to Half Way House. Didn’t he, Dick?”

“Yes, he did,” Dick corroborated his chum.

“It looks to me,” Sandy went on, “as if Mr. Frazer suspected that we were spies sent by my uncle and took the method he did to get rid of us.”

“Seems very likely,” smiled the policeman.

“Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum were at the post when we left,” continued Sandy. “After what has happened, we can draw only one conclusion, that these two men are paid emissaries of Frazer’s. I suspect he wants to keep us out here until he has had time to cover up some sort of deviltry.”

Corporal Rand rose and gazed down into the fire.

“It would seem so, Sandy. Something deeply mysterious afoot there. Probably another case for the police to solve. I’ve never known it to fail. No sooner do we hear of an important case and start working upon it, than something else crops up. We’ve done nothing but patrol duty until this Miller case came to our attention. I start out upon this case when I learn of this business at Half Way House. Probably before I get back from Caribou Lake, there will be a murder or two added to the growing list of crimes.”

“Do you plan to have us accompany you to Caribou Lake?” Dick asked.

“When I met you out here this afternoon, that was my intention. But now that I’ve talked with you and heard your story I’ve changed my mind. It’s more important that you should go on to Half Way House. By travelling as fast as you can, you should make it in four more days.”

“What will we do when we get there?” asked Dick.

“That’s up to you,” Corporal Rand spoke grimly. “You handled the Dewberry case very nicely. I’m really in no position to advise you or help you in any way because I don’t know what’s wrong there. If I were you though, the minute I arrived I’d confront

Frazer and demand an explanation. I'd mention Wolf Brennan and McCallum too. Make it plain that you intend to take up the matter with the police."

"Do you believe there is a chance that he may confess?" asked Sandy incredulously.

"No, I don't. But there is a chance that your accusations may sweep him off his guard, that he will blurt out something that will give you a clue to the mystery."

"I never thought of that," said Dick.

"I'll divide my grubstake with you," Rand went on. "I haven't much, but you're welcome to half of it. I can give you tea, rice, a little sugar, part of a slab of bacon and about ten pounds of flour."

"You may run yourself short," Dick hesitated.

"No," smiled Rand. "I can look after myself."

"Now that we've met you, I hate to separate so soon."

"It can't be helped," smiled the policeman. "And that reminds me that it's getting late. We must hurry to bed if we expect to make an early start tomorrow."

Following a good breakfast the next morning, the boys loaded their canoe, shook hands with the corporal and, just at six o'clock by Rand's watch, the two canoes floated out into the river, separated and began speeding on their respective ways. All day the boys worked like Trojans. In spite of a delay of over an hour at one portage, they managed to travel over forty miles before they stopped at dusk to make camp.

The second day was more or less a repetition of the first and, on the afternoon of the third day since their meeting with Corporal Rand, they drew up at the boat landing at Half Way House, tired but exultant.

They walked up along the well-beaten path toward the trading post, the cynosure of curious eyes. And indeed, this was not to be wondered at. Their appearance resembled scarecrows more than human beings. They were ragged from head to foot. Their faces were burned a deep brown from the exposure to sun and wind. As they made their way past a row of cabins, the company's warehouse and finally to the store itself, Toma's abbreviated trousers caused a good deal of merriment among lounging groups of Indians and half-breeds.

Though they were exultant, they were also grim. Dick's eyes were hard as he led his two companions through those tittering groups. His hands were clenched tightly at his sides and, reaching the entrance he flung open the door and strode defiantly in. Toma and Sandy followed, their manner belligerent.

Behind the counter, busily occupied in rearranging merchandise on the shelves, the factor, Mr. Donald Frazer had not noticed their entrance. When he did look around, his face paled.

"Y—y—you!" he trembled.

Three pairs of glaring, unfriendly eyes bored into the wavering optics of the man behind the counter. As yet, not one of the boys had spoken. A deep and ominous silence settled over the room.

"We're back!" Dick cleared his throat.

"So I perceive," the factor attempted to make light of the matter, but his effort at jocularly proved a dismal failure.

“We’re back,” Dick repeated, his voice harsh and cold, “and we demand an accounting. You’re a miserable snake, Frazer, and you have a lot to answer for. Before we report this matter to the police, perhaps you’d like to do a little explaining on your own account.”

The factor’s right hand reached out and he grasped the counter for support. He tried to speak, but in his fear and great agitation, the words would not come. A queer rumbling in his throat, his jaw muscles twitching, his face white, he stood there helplessly staring at the three determined figures confronting him.

“Didn’t expect us back, did you?” almost snarled Dick. “Had an idea that we’d starve out there, didn’t you? Thought that your friends, Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum, would settle our hash for good and all, didn’t you? Well, we’re back. What do you propose to do about it?”

Frazer’s face distorted queerly and he protested angrily.

“What sort of a plot are you trying to lay at my door?” he wheezed. “Brennan and McCallum—I don’t understand you. What have they to do with me? If you had trouble with them, it was not of my making.”

“Don’t try to deny that you didn’t send them. You did.”

At this juncture Sandy completely lost his temper. In a flash, he had bounded over the counter, seizing Frazer by the throat.

“You wretch!” he shouted, shaking the factor as a cat might shake a mouse. “You wretch! Don’t lie to us! You sent us out there to the island of the dinosaur for no other reason than to get rid of us. And then,” Sandy shrieked, “you instructed those two miserable rats to follow us to make sure we didn’t get back.”

The factor was a powerful man and Sandy’s advantage was only temporary. Frazer flung him off, stepped back and his fist crashed into Sandy’s face sending him reeling back, where he toppled and fell over a packing case. The resounding impact of his fall was sufficiently heavy to shake the room. Dick and Toma cried out angrily and they, too, leaped over the barrier. Retreating before them, Frazer sped down along the space behind the counter, reached up in one of the shelves and whipped out a revolver, just as Dick made a lurch for him.

“Stand back!” he cried, breathing hard.

An inner door flew open. There came the sound of running footsteps. Dick turned in time to see, to his unutterable astonishment, the commanding figure of Sandy’s uncle, Mr. Walter MacClaren.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CHARGES AND COUNTER-CHARGES.

“MR. FRAZER,” ordered Factor MacClaren, “put down that gun. Dick, what’s the meaning of this?”

Before Dick had time to reply, Sandy’s head arose behind the counter, twisted around and presented a blood-stained face to his uncle. At sight of it, Mr. MacClaren started back in dismay.

“Good Heavens, Sandy—you too! What have you boys been up to?” He whirled toward Frazer again. “Put down that gun, I told you. Put it down! Mr. Frazer, Dick, Sandy, I demand an explanation. Are you all mad?”

“If you want the truth, they attacked me first.” Frazer had grown more calm now. “Your own nephew grabbed me by the throat and I knocked him down. These other two miscreants were coming toward me just as you ran in. I picked up the revolver as a last resort. I have a right to defend myself.”

Mr. Walter MacClaren sat down in a chair, produced a handkerchief and feverishly mopped his brow. Sandy clambered over the counter and advanced toward him. Dick was still trembling and fighting mad. Toma’s lips were drawn tightly across his teeth. There was still an atmosphere of tension in the room. Sandy’s voice broke the quiet.

“Uncle Walter, that man is no better than a murderer. He sent us up Half Way River on a fool’s errand, then hired a couple of his confederates to track us down and try to kill us.”

Mr. MacClaren stared at his nephew incredulously. It was his Scottish caution that moved him to exclaim.

“Careful, Sandy. Careful, Sandy, my boy. Those are hard words. A murderer, you say. Are you prepared to back up your statements?”

“I am,” spat Sandy.

“Mr. MacClaren, he lies.” It was Frazer’s voice. “There is no truth in what he says. The boys are laboring under a delusion. If they’ve been attacked while away on their trip, it was not through any of my conniving. I have nothing whatever to do with Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum. Those men are not in my employ, as these three young men seem to believe.”

“They have been in your employ, haven’t they?” MacClaren asked drily.

“Indeed, they have not,” protested Frazer.

“If that is true, how do you account for the three entries in your own ledger under the date of March third, seventh and fifteenth? According to your own books, you paid McCallum and Brennan for work done here at the post.”

“Yes, I’ll admit that but—” Frazer paused slightly confused.

“They have been in your employ then?” Mr. MacClaren persisted.

“Little tasks about the post here,” the other retorted. “Does it necessarily follow that they are in my employ regularly?”

“No, it doesn’t. But it does give us a line on the type of men you do employ.”

“You’re prejudiced,” flamed Frazer.

“Not at all. If these boys are wrong, I shall insist that they apologize. But it hasn’t been proved that they are wrong yet. Sandy, go on with your story.”

During its recital, Mr. MacClaren’s eyes narrowed. He turned again upon the factor.

“You must have known, Mr. Frazer, that the boys could never bring back the bones of that dinosaur. Isn’t that true?”

“No, it isn’t. I never saw the dinosaur. I had no idea that it was so large.”

“Look here,” protested Dick, “I can bring witnesses here to prove that you visited the dinosaur’s island two years ago.”

Sandy’s uncle ignored the sally. He asked the post manager another question.

“You promised the boys six hundred dollars if they would bring the bones of the dinosaur back here to Half Way House. Is that correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“As I understand it, the bones of the dinosaur were to be sold to a famous London Museum. Is that also correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You have a letter from that museum making a certain offer.”

“Yes. Mr. MacClaren, I have.”

“May I see it?”

“You could see it if I had any desire to show it to you, but I haven’t. I consider it none of your business.”

Mr. MacClaren smiled grimly at this affront.

“Very well. That may not be my business, but what you do here as a factor of a Hudson’s Bay Company’s post is my business. Does your contract permit you to engage in any enterprise not connected with that of the company?”

“On my own time, yes.”

“You’d better re-read your contract.”

“I’ve already done that,” sneered the other.

“When I came over here today,” Mr. MacClaren’s voice was deathly calm, “an audit of your books showed that you had robbed the company of over two thousand dollars. I suppose you had a perfect right to do that under the terms of your contract?”

“I object to that word ‘robbed,’” rasped Frazer. “I’ll admit to a shortage but I’ve covered it.”

“Yes, when I drew your attention to it.”

“I paid back every cent of it in gold.”

“Where did you get the gold?” sneered Mr. MacClaren. “How did you come in possession of it? There’s another point that may need a little explaining.”

“You know as well as I do that we take gold over the counter in exchange for goods.”

“Correct. But whenever we do we keep a record of the transaction. In auditing your books, I found no such record.”

“The more you talk the farther you get away from the subject under discussion. You asked me what was wrong here and I told you. Your own nephew assaulted me without cause. Not only that, but he made a very serious charge against me, a charge without any foundation whatsoever.”

“Whose word can I take for that?” inquired Mr. MacClaren sarcastically and angrily.

“Mine.”

“But I do not consider that your word is sufficient. You’ve lied to me repeatedly. You lied to me this afternoon. Your conduct generally is so deceitful and dishonest that I think I was perfectly justified in asking for your resignation.”

“By doing that you haven’t hurt my feelings in the least. For some time past, I have been seriously thinking of quitting the service anyway. In fact, not long ago I completed arrangements to take charge of an independent trading post shortly to be established at Caribou Lake.”

At the mention of the name, Caribou Lake, Dick pricked up his ears. That was the name of the place Corporal Rand was proceeding to.

“It is your privilege to go anywhere you like,” Dick heard Mr. MacClaren say.

Sandy looked across at Frazer, a peculiar gleam in his eyes. At that moment he presented a most unusual appearance. His bruised lips had swollen to twice their normal size. His cheeks were smeared with blood.

“If you’ll permit me to say so,” he blurted forth, “I’d like to prophesy that you’ll not take charge at Caribou Lake either. I propose to swear out a warrant for your arrest.”

Frazer’s face grew a shade whiter, but he recovered himself quickly.

“Two can play at the same game,” he reminded Sandy.

“My charge is a more serious one.”

“What is your charge?”

“Attempted murder.”

The man behind the counter laughed a mirthless laugh and made an ugly grimace.

“You may have a lot of trouble proving that.”

“I expect to,” said Sandy calmly, “but we’ll get you in the end. Please don’t forget that. This matter isn’t settled by a long way.”

Mr. MacClaren rose hastily to his feet.

“Enough,” he said. “Argument will get us nowhere. Mr. Frazer will be leaving us tonight and after his departure we’ll have plenty of time to discuss your case.”

The factor darted from behind the counter and strode over to where Mr. MacClaren stood.

“I didn’t say I was going tonight,” he snarled, his face close to that of his superior.

“No, but I’m saying it. In fact, I insist upon it.”

“You’re exceeding your authority. You have no right to compel me to go.”

“Nevertheless, that is my intention.”

“I refuse to go.”

Coming from a mysterious place, a revolver leaped into MacClaren’s hands. Dick was astounded. He had never suspected that Sandy’s uncle could draw a gun so quickly. Its cold nozzle sprang forward pressing against the front of Frazer’s coat.

“We won’t argue the matter,” he declared pleasantly. “I’ll accompany you to your room while you pack your things. After that I’ll arrange for a transport. Much as we may dislike to part with your company, Mr. Frazer, I think it is for the good of all concerned. Turn and march to your room.”

Frazer complied hurriedly, his features swollen with rage. The two figures passed through the inner doorway, their footsteps echoed down the long corridor and, presently, in the trading room a deep silence reigned.

Mopping the blood from his face with a handkerchief which Dick moistened, Sandy was soon more presentable.

“That was a mighty wallop he gave me,” half grinned the injured one. “Still, I suppose that it was coming to me. Shouldn’t have lost my temper.”

“It’s probably just as well that things have turned out as they have,” Dick reassured him.



## CHAPTER XV.

### A THREATENING LETTER.

THE next morning, after the departure of Donald Frazer, Harold Scott, Frazer's assistant, was placed in charge of the company's post at Half Way House. Having made the appointment, Sandy's uncle issued final instructions and then prepared for an immediate departure for Fort Good Faith.

"I'd just as soon you'd stay here for a week or two," he told the boys. "There is a bare possibility that Frazer may return to cause trouble. Mr. Scott may require your help."

This request on the part of Mr. MacClaren met with general approval, for none of them believed that Frazer's real perfidy had yet been uncovered. Something deeper and more mysterious was afoot. Frazer's attempt to rob the company was not, they reasoned, his only crime. He was mixed up in other and more sinister affairs. Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum were, undoubtedly, part of the gang who were operating under Frazer's directions.

"Where do you suppose Frazer will go?" Sandy inquired of Dick soon after Mr. MacClaren's leave-taking. "Do you think that he is really establishing a new trading post at Caribou Lake?"

"No, I don't," Dick replied. "I think that was a fabrication, pure and simple. There wouldn't be enough money in it for him. That is a very sparsely inhabited district. Few Indians trap there during the winter and I doubt very much whether the fur trade would warrant the establishment of a post."

"That's what I've always heard. The country is rugged and hilly, better adapted to mining and prospecting than to trapping."

"Exactly. Frazer has no intention of engaging in trade there. You could tell when he said it, that it was a lie. He has other projects in mind."

"All I know is," put in Sandy, "that anyone that would associate with characters like Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum can't be very honest himself."

"Where do you suppose he got the gold to cover his shortage?" Dick mused.

"Probably stole it. That's Uncle Walter's belief too. It's another case of robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Dick and Sandy were sitting on a bench outside the trading room while this discussion was going on. It was a lovely morning and after the rigorous activities of their experience down river, it seemed good merely to sit there basking in the sun. Some distance away, Toma sauntered about among the idling groups of Indians and half-breeds who came here to trade. Presently, he came strolling up with that shrewd gleam in his eyes that denoted some new discovery. Dick looked up and smiled as he approached.

"What's on your mind now, Toma?"

Without preamble, the young Indian plunged into his subject.

“You remember them two fellow, Indian boys, I tell you ’bout I see in that room one night with Toby McCallum, Wolf Brennan an’ Mr. Frazer?”

Dick scratched his head. “Let me see. You mean that time when you saw the light burning in Frazer’s room at two o’clock in the morning?”

“Yes. Them two fellow here.”

“Here at the post?” inquired Sandy, straightening up in his seat.

“Yes.”

“What are they doing?”

“They just hang ’round. Do nothing like us. I find out they have tepee down near the river.”

“Well, what about it?” demanded Dick. “They have a right to stay there if they want to, haven’t they?”

Toma grinned. “That just the trouble. Why they want to stay here now that their friend, Mr. Frazer, go ’way? They very good friend Mr. Frazer, you think they like go ’long too.”

“Perhaps they’ll follow later,” surmised Sandy.

“Mebbe so. But I think I know why they stay here.”

“Why?” asked Dick.

“ ’Cause Mr. Frazer tell ’em to. Mr. Frazer talk with them two fellow just before he go. I see him do that. I see they very careful nobody hear what they say too.”

Dick felt a momentary quickening of his pulses.

“Good boy! No one could ever accuse you of being slow-witted. I know what’s on your mind now. You believe that these two Indians have been left behind purposely—that they’ll be up to some mischief before long.”

“Yes, Dick, them very bad fellow. Other Indians say that. Like drink alla time an’ get in trouble.”

Toma scowled and took a seat on the bench beside Sandy. For one full moment no one spoke.

“There are two reasons why Frazer instructed those two Indians to remain here. Either they intend to cause Scott all the trouble they can or they are waiting for the arrival of Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum,” said Dick.

“We’ll keep an eye on them,” stated Sandy darkly. “We might possibly learn something to our advantage.”

Toma turned his head. “There they are now,” he said.

Two Indians came down the path toward the trading room, walking one behind the other. Both were sinister looking men, Dick thought. He wondered if they were intending to enter the store to make some purchase or whether the object of their visit was to appraise himself and his two chums. He bent his head toward Sandy and whispered in a low voice.

“Slip into the trading room and see what they do.”

The young Scotchman rose, stretched himself languidly, imitated a yawn and lounged through the open door. The two Indians followed him in. Dick winked at Toma, produced his hunting knife and began whittling on a stick. For five minutes they waited. At the end of that time the Indians came out, one of them carrying a package under his arm. Just outside the door, looking about them for a moment idly, they took a seat on the bench near Dick and Toma.

The action was wholly unexpected and Dick was taken unawares. Were the two Indians giving them a secret appraisal? Was there an ulterior motive behind this seemingly trivial act? To add to his surprise, one of the two men addressed him.

“You come up the river yesterday?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Dick.

“River more high than last year,” said the Indian conversationally.

“I believe it is,” Dick nodded.

“You come back prospecting trip, eh?”

Dick shook his head. “No, we weren’t prospecting.”

“How you like ’em new factor?” came the next question.

“Mr. Scott is a very nice fellow,” replied Dick, half smiling to himself.

“Mr. Frazer fine fellow too.”

Dick looked startled. “I’m—I’m glad you like him,” he stammered.

“You no like him?” persisted the Indian.

“Why do you ask me that question?” Dick wanted to know.

The Indian did not answer.

“You call ’em your name Dick Kent?”

“Yes.”

The Indian rolled a cigarette and lighted it, inhaling the smoke deeply, puffing with satisfaction. Sandy came out and, perceiving his seat occupied, stood leaning lazily against the door frame. An interval of silence, then Dick’s questioner fumbled in his pocket and drew forth a slip of white paper which he handed over with a slight bow.

“What’s this?” Dick asked.

“That am letter for you. By an’ by you read.”

The Indian rose to his feet beckoning to his companion.

“By an’ by you read,” he repeated.

“Who is this letter from?”

“I not know that.” A slight frown settled between the native’s eyes.

“But who gave it to you?” persisted Dick.

“Fellow come up river this morning gave it to me. Tell ’em me give it to you. Tell ’em me you read it by an’ by.”

“But don’t you know this man’s name?”

“Fellow name—” the Indian hesitated, “fellow say his name John Clark. By an’ by you read letter.”

The speaker smiled a sort of twisted smile, took his companion by the arm and hurriedly made his departure.

Puzzled, Dick looked down at the letter in his hands. Then he glanced up at Sandy. He gulped. Who was John Clark? He had never heard of him.

“For goodness sake, don’t keep me in suspense!” It was Sandy’s voice. “Open the letter.”

Dick complied hurriedly. Sandy left his position by the door and slumped in the seat beside him. A bit of a white paper fluttered in Dick’s hands. He read in a choked voice:

“Mr. Dick Kent:

“If everything goes well, I’ll be seein’ you a few days after you receive this letter. Mebbe you can guess why. Mebbe it won’t be very good for your health if you stop very long at Half Way House.”

“Yours,  
“WOLF.”

“So that’s it!” Sandy exclaimed excitedly.

“A threat,” said Dick.

“Wolf come an’ shoot you, Dick,” grinned Toma. “That fellow mad all over. While you got chance, you better run away.”

Dick laughed. Yet, in spite of his laughter, he did not feel very happy at that moment. Wolf Brennan was a desperate character. The Wolf felt that he had a grievance and would try to settle his score.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A MIDNIGHT RAID.

DICK did not sleep well that night. Though he was not willing to admit it even to himself, Wolf Brennan's threatening letter had upset him. He lay for a long time on his bed in the loft over the trading room, his mind active and restless. Close at hand, he could hear the even breathing of Sandy and Toma and, through the open window, there was borne to him the sighing of the wind in the pines. It was a clear June night of half darkness and only partially stilled woodland noises. Birds still peeped sleepily in the trees, the little denizens of the forest spaces still moved about as they had during the brighter hours of day.

Lying there, Dick was aware of a myriad night sounds. The staunch old log building, built nearly eighty years before by members of the Honorable, the Hudson's Bay Company, creaked and groaned in the brisk night wind. Something was flapping up there on the roof. Was that a bird that made that peculiar pecking noise just under the eaves? Trying desperately to sleep, Dick succeeded only in becoming more and more awake with each passing moment.

In despair, finally, he swung his legs over his bunk, reached for his clothes and commenced to dress.

"I'll go outside," he thought, "and walk around for a while. The exercise may make me sleepy."

He slipped quietly down the stairway and thence outside. Walking briskly, he turned his steps toward the river and, upon reaching the boat landing, sat down with his back against one of the pilings, watching the water eddying along under him.

Along the shore for nearly a quarter of a mile, both up and down stream, were the brown, skin tepees of the post population. About them the stillness of night had descended. From the inverted, cone-like top of one of them, smoke issued. Dick sat and watched it speculatively. The members of that household were up early. Probably someone sick. Through the translucent walls he could see the faint reflection of a fire within.

Must be someone sick, he mused. An Indian child perhaps. A papoose suffering an attack of colic. Once he thought he heard a child's plaintive whimper.

The flap was drawn aside and a figure emerged. Behind the first figure came a second. Dick drew in his breath sharply, slid along the rough planking and concealed himself behind a flat-bottomed boat which had been drawn up on the pier for caulking. Lying flat on his stomach, he raised his head and peeped over the top.

The Indians, who had brought the letter from Wolf Brennan, were making their way along the shore. They walked after the manner of men who knew where they were going. Reaching a point just opposite the boat landing, they swung sharply to the left, taking the path that led up along the warehouse to the trading post.

Dick's heart thumped excitedly as he rose soon afterward and commenced following them. He went leisurely. He endeavored to keep himself concealed as much as possible by walking, not along the path, but through the bushes that grew on either side of it. For two hundred yards he stalked his quarry, finally bringing up in a clump of willows not sixty feet from the trading room. Lying concealed, his eyes were glued upon the forms of the two prowlers, who had strolled boldly up to the building itself.

Dick's mind raced. What was the intention of those two midnight raiders? What were they up to? Had they designs upon the life of Mr. Scott, the new incumbent? Was this to be the first in a long series of reprisals aimed at Mr. MacClaren and the Hudson's Bay Company by a disgruntled former factor and his insidious crew?

Now that it was too late, Dick regretted his folly in coming out of doors without first taking the precaution to arm himself. In case the two men broke into the trading room—and that seemed to be their intention—what could he do to prevent further depredations? Two against one, and they were armed. He was no match for either one of them physically. To make matters still worse, he recalled that he had left the door, leading to the loft, unlocked. If the Indians succeeded in forcing the door of the trading room, they would have easy access to Factor Scott's room, which adjoined the hall at the top of the stairs just across from the space that the boys occupied.

Almost desperate because of his helplessness, it suddenly occurred to Dick that probably the best way to prevent the Indians' entrance would be to call out sharply, attracting attention to himself. Such a move might cost him his life, but on the other hand, it might arouse the sleeping occupants of the post. In the very act of inflating his lungs another plan popped into his head.

Why not, he asked himself, follow the two Indians inside? In a flash, there had come to him a mental picture of the revolver Donald Frazer had returned to the shelf behind the counter yesterday afternoon. If the Indians went up the stairway, he would rush in, seize the weapon and could probably reach the factor's room in time.

His body bent forward almost at right angles, he slipped out from behind his place of concealment and very cautiously commenced working his way forward. He was within thirty paces of the trading room door by the time the two Indians had forced the lock and had gained admittance. When the door closed behind them, he sprinted lightly across, not to the door but to the window. The interior space was dark and shadowy, yet he could make out the two forms hesitating near the counter. To their left was the door leading to the loft. Twenty feet to their right was another door leading to the cellar. To Dick's great astonishment, instead of making their way to the stairway, they turned in the opposite direction, tip-toed across the floor, flung open the door and descended below.

No unexpected move on their part could have surprised him more. What did they expect to find in the basement? Dick had been there often and knew what it contained—packing cases, boxes, rolls of wrapping paper, yes, and—suddenly Dick grinned. He thought he knew now. All his panic over nothing. Petty thievery, not murder, was the motive behind the Indians' forced entrance. Liquor was what they had come for. The Indians' love of fire-water had led them here.

Realizing this, his tension relaxed. He decided not to go in to get the revolver after all. He'd wait until they reappeared—that would be safer. He'd keep hid. If he opened the door and stepped upon the trading room floor, no matter how quiet his footsteps, they would be sure to be heard. The loss of the liquor would be little compared to the risk he took. He'd have the goods on them anyway. Tomorrow the factor could swear out a warrant and place them under arrest.

"No," decided Dick, "I'll wait and bide my time."

He had not long to wait. The cellar door opened and the two prowlers appeared, carrying two burlap sacks, bulging with what looked like bottles, and so heavy that the two stalwart natives bent under their load.

Dick slipped around the corner of the trading room, flattened himself against the side of the building and waited tensely. He heard the outer door creak lightly. He heard light footsteps pattering across the ground outside, gradually growing less distinct as they paced off the distance to the warehouse. As Dick peeped out around his corner, they passed the warehouse and disappeared from view.

Dick hurried inside, bounded up the stairway and knocked loudly at the factor's door.

"Who's there?" inquired a sleepy voice.

"It is I—Dick Kent, Mr. Scott. I'd like to see you."

The creaking of a bed, the sound of footsteps moving across the floor, and the door swung open.

"Hello, Dick. Come on in. What's the trouble?"

"Mr. Scott," announced Dick breathlessly, following the other inside, "I've just been a witness to a bit of thieving. Two Indians broke into the trading room and made their way to the cellar where they stole something. I think it was liquor. They came out carrying burlap sacks full of what looked like bottles."

"Do you think you could identify the two thieves?" asked Mr. Scott, motioning Dick to a chair.

"Yes, I can. I can even take you to their tepee. Rough looking characters. No doubt, you know them well."

"Pierri and Henri Mekewai," guessed the factor. "They're about the roughest looking pair that hang around the post."

"I don't know their names," replied Dick, "but as I told you, I can identify them. I saw them come out of the tepee and followed them up here."

The new factor's eyes widened and he regarded Dick in some surprise.

"You saw them come out of their tepee?" he blurted. "What were you doing outside at this time of the night?"

"Oh, I assure you, I wasn't up to any mischief," smiled Dick. "Restless and couldn't sleep. Thought that if I went out and walked around a while I could come back and get a little rest."

The factor proceeded to dress.

"If you'll wait just a minute," he instructed, "we'll go down and investigate. I shouldn't wonder but what you are right about the liquor. That's an Indian's old trick.

It's a frequent occurrence. Don't know why we keep the stuff. It's only a temptation to many a poor devil who seems powerless to resist it."

Mr. Scott continued to chat amiably while he pulled on his clothes. A few minutes later, he led the way to the basement. Reaching the bottom of the flight of stairs, he struck a match and lighted a candle that stood on a shelf. Dick following close behind him, he walked straight over to a pile of cases in the far corner, stooped down and began examining them carefully.

"I happen to know just how much there is here, so it won't take long to determine the extent of our loss," Mr. Scott pointed out.

Dick held the candle while the factor took inventory. At the end of five minutes he straightened up, looked at Dick searchingly, then bent down and made a second examination.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick.

"Can't understand it. It seems to be all here."

"What! All of it?"

"Yes, all of it. Every case and every bottle. Nothing missing."

Dick whistled in surprise.

"If that's true, they've taken something else."

"But there's nothing else down here in this cellar that anyone could possibly want. I mean, nothing of value."

"Are you sure?" gasped Dick.

"Absolutely."

"But I tell you, they came up the cellarway carrying two burlap sacks—sacks full of something. I saw them with my own eyes, Mr. Scott. I wasn't dreaming. I tell you they took something."

The factor scratched his head, continuing to stare at Dick, an expression of wonderment in his eyes.

"That beats me. Don't know what to make of it."

Wondering and still perplexed, they ascended to the upper floor.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### A HIDDEN PIT.

FACTOR SCOTT decided that he would not prefer charges against the two Indians until he had definitely discovered what they had stolen. But in the days that passed, to his increasing astonishment, he could find nothing missing. What had the two prowlers taken from the cellar? It was a question that was threshed over, pro and con, for many an hour. In Sandy's opinion, the solution to the mystery was to be found in only one way: namely, that Factor Scott had taken a hurried inventory a few days previous to the robbery and that there were more cases of liquor in the cellar than he had on record.

"He can say what he likes," insisted Sandy. "There is the real solution. Those two Indians wanted fire-water and they broke in and got it."

However, when Dick reported this theory to the factor, Mr. Scott had a good laugh over it.

"It wasn't liquor," he smiled, "you can tell Sandy for me. Even if I did make a mistake in my reckoning, I insist that it wasn't bottles of rum that the Indians stole."

"How do you know that?" asked Dick.

"It's all very simple. If the Indians had stolen liquor they would have proceeded to get gloriously drunk. They wouldn't have been able to resist the temptation. I know Indian nature well enough for that."

"You're quite right," laughed Dick. "We'll eliminate such an hypothesis. Now what I'd like to know is, what did they steal out of that cellar?"

The factor bit his lips. "I confess that I don't know. Every day for the past three weeks I've gone to the cellar and, if there was anything there beside those empty packing boxes, the cases of liquor and wrapping paper, I'd have seen it. If it wasn't for the evidence of the broken lock on the trading room door, I'd be very much inclined to believe that you have been the victim of a nightmare or an hallucination."

"And I wouldn't blame you in the least," stated Dick smiling. "However, as you say, that broken lock is pretty conclusive evidence of a forced entrance. Of course, you have only my word as to the rest of the story."

"I wouldn't doubt you, Dick," the factor patted his shoulder. "I know you're sincere and truthful about this. I really believe that you saw the two Indians come up from the cellar carrying those two loaded burlap sacks. By the way, Dick, if those had contained bottles you'd have heard the rattle."

"That's true. No sound came from the sacks." Dick paused and stroked his chin reflectively. "Pshaw! We don't seem to be getting anywhere. Mr. Scott, will you give me permission to go down into that cellar and examine it carefully? I just want to satisfy myself that we haven't overlooked anything."

"Certainly. I'd be glad to have you. I've been down there myself a number of times since the robbery. I've gone over every foot of space and found nothing at all

suspicious; found nothing that might give me a clue to what the Mekewai brothers stole. But though I searched carefully, I might have overlooked something. Two pairs of eyes are better than one. Go down and look for yourself.”

Dick went down. He lighted the candle that was always to be found on the shelf near the bottom of the stairway, and explored every inch of space in that dark interior. The floor of the cellar was constructed of heavy planks nailed to logs which had been sunk into the earth. In a country where cement was almost unknown, it was as good a flooring for a basement as could be found anywhere. Starting at one end of the cellar, Dick examined every plank in the floor. The planks had been in the cellar for a long time and they made a clattering noise as he walked over them. This suggested an idea. He wondered if any of the planks were loose. He went up to the trading room, procured a heavy chisel and returned and tried to pry up the planks.

The eighth plank over from the bottom of the stairway, to his great glee, he discovered was loose. It came up when he exerted a slight pressure upon it. Grasping the plank next to it, he found that that also was loose. Pulling up this second board he received a rude shock. The edge of a gaping hole, freshly dug in the earth, was visible there under the planking. Removing another section of the floor, he completely uncovered it. Reaching out for the candle, he explored the shallow pit below.

The hole was about three feet wide, six feet long and three feet deep. The dirt taken from it had been thrown under the planking between the logs used as support for the floor. The pit was absolutely empty.

Dick's first impulse was to return to the trading room and report his discovery to Mr. Scott. But on second thought he decided not to do this. He would work on the case alone, not even saying anything to Sandy and Toma. He would find out what the Indians had taken out of that pit. When he did, something told him that he would have a clear case against Frazer.

He replaced the flooring hurriedly, scraped dust over the loose planks and ascended to the room above. Busy waiting on a number of customers, the factor did not accost him. Dick proceeded straight outside and sat down on the long bench to think it over.

In a few minutes he came to a decision. He got quickly to his feet, re-entered the trading room and made his way upstairs to the loft. From among his personal belongings he picked up a small black automatic, thrust it in his hip-pocket and again made his way outside. The first person he saw was Toma.

“Where you go, Dick, in so big hurry?” the young Indian asked.

Previously, when he had made his plans, Dick had decided to play a lone hand, but now it would be a little awkward getting rid of Toma. Well it would do no harm in taking him along. Toma was close-mouthed and dependable. He might prove to be of valuable assistance in an emergency.

“I'm going down to see those two Indians,” Dick informed him. “Care to come along?”

“Yes,” grunted his chum.

Dick took him by the arm. “Come along then,” he said.

Together they hurried along the foot trail in the direction of the river. Passing the warehouse, a voice called out lustily.

“Hey there!”

It was Sandy. Dick and Toma paused while the third member of the trio shambled up.

“Where are you fellows going?” Sandy inquired suspiciously.

Dick gave up. He could see how impossible it was now to keep anything from two friends like these. Then and there he confessed.

Both Sandy and Toma were astonished at the outcome of Dick’s investigations.

“A hole under the floor of the cellar!” Sandy exclaimed. “Good Heavens, what do you suppose Factor Frazer has been concealing there?”

“I don’t know but I have a hunch,” Dick answered, proud of the impression he had made.

“Tell us,” pleaded Sandy.

“I haven’t time just now. I’m anxious to get over to the Mekewai brothers’ tepee to have a look around. There’s a remote chance that we’ll find those two sacks of loot.”

Sandy balked. “If we’re going over there,” he said, “I want a gun.”

“I have one,” Dick patted his hip-pocket. “Anyway I don’t think they’ll have the courage to attack us in broad daylight. Hurry if you’re coming.”

They followed Dick down the path to the river, then along the shore to the Mekewai tepee. His two chums crowding close behind him, Dick knocked gently against the closed flap.

“Hello! Hello!” he called.

They heard subdued voices within. The flap was drawn aside and the Mekewai boys stooped down and peered at them through the entrance.

“What you want?” one of them asked gruffly.

“Came over to see if you could lend us a canoe so that we can go fishing,” lied Dick. “Our own is damaged and we are having it repaired.”

“No have canoe,” growled one of the Mekewai boys.

But Dick was not put off so easily.

“Do you know anyone that has?”

“Come in,” one of the Indians invited, “an’ I try think where mebbe you find one.”

Dick pressed a coin in the hand of each of the two brothers.

“Wish you could,” he said, stepping inside.

One glance told Dick what he wanted to know. There were no sacks here. Nothing at all of an incriminating nature. Dick was tremendously disappointed and he could not resist turning his head and looking at Sandy.

Sandy was amused. There was a twinkle in his eyes and the beginning of a smile puckering the corners of his mouth.

“I think mebbe I know fellow that has canoe,” one of the Indians spoke up. “How much you like pay?”

“We didn’t want to buy one,” stated Sandy, helping Dick out. “We wanted to borrow one.”

“Don’t know anybody like ’em borrow you canoe.”

“Thank you,” said Dick, backing toward the door. “In that case we’ll have to wait until our own is repaired.”

The three boys went out, Dick scowling, Sandy and Toma amused over the interview.

“Never mind, old chap,” consoled Sandy, “you may have better luck next time. By the way, what do you think they’ve done with the stuff?”

“Don’t worry, they’ve either hidden it somewhere or have sent it over to Frazer. I hardly expected to find it there. There was about one chance in a thousand.”

“Now that we’re on the subject,” coaxed Sandy, “Perhaps you’ll be willing to tell me what your hunch is. What did those two Indians bring up out of that pit?”

“Gold,” came the answer unhesitatingly.

Sandy looked dubious. “What makes you think it was gold?”

“I’ll tell you why. If you recall the conversation between your Uncle Walter and Frazer the day we had the trouble in the trading room, you will remember that Frazer said that he had paid the shortage in gold. That’s the only reason I have for suspecting that it was gold that the Indians took out of the cellar. If Frazer had two thousand dollars worth of gold, sufficient to cover his shortage, it is not unlikely that he had more of it stored away somewhere. Frazer did not explain satisfactorily to your uncle how he had obtained that gold. The inference is that he stole it.”

“Seems reasonable,” said Sandy, “and I wonder from whom.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### TAKE THE OFFENSIVE.

THE next morning, Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum arrived at Half Way House. Sandy, who was walking along the river at the time, witnessed their approach, a grim and dour pair aboard a light raft, which they poled and shoved against the tugging current.

Sandy did not wait for them to put in at the boat landing. Suddenly fearful, he hastened up to the post to spread the alarm. Dick and Toma received the news calmly. The former went immediately to his room, buckled on his revolver and returned to the trading room to announce to his two chums that he proposed to go down to the river forthwith to meet the new arrivals.

“Dick,” exploded Sandy, “you’re crazy! Have you forgotten the letter you received?”

Dick shook his head. “No, I haven’t. That’s the very reason I’m going down there. If they think they can intimidate me, they’re badly mistaken. If I show the white feather they’ll make life miserable for me—not only for me but for all of us. The best thing to do is put on a bold front and go down there and show them that I’m not afraid.”

“Cracky!” admired Sandy. “I wouldn’t have the nerve to do that. They may pull a gun and shoot you.”

“You show ’em pretty good sense, Dick,” declared Toma, indicating by his expression how proud he was of his chum. “When them fellow see you down at the boat landing they won’t know what to think.”

“Come on,” said Dick, “let’s hurry.”

They ran all the way down to the river. They arrived there just as the two outlaws drove their raft up to the landing and made fast. Pushing his way through the crowd, Dick was one of the first to welcome them.

“Hello, Wolf. Hello, Toby. I see you’ve got back. I received your letter, Brennan.”

The outlaws were nonplused, taken aback by the unexpectedness of Dick’s greeting. Both were seething with fury. In the very act of reaching for his gun, Wolf paused and bethought himself of the mounted police. For all he knew, this might be a trap for them to fall into.

“Yes, we got back,” growled Wolf, his face red with humiliation. “We got back an’ we’re going to stay here fer awhile. We got a lot of business to attend to here at Half Way House,” he hinted darkly. “Just as soon as we’ve seen Factor Frazer, we got a little matter we want to talk over with yuh.”

Looking around and perceiving no mounted policemen in the crowd, Wolf raised his voice.

“A little matter we want to discuss with yuh an’ your friends.”

“Factor Frazer isn’t here any more,” Dick told them.

Both the men gave a quick start, staring at him incredulously.

“You’re lyin’,” croaked McCallum.

“Go and see for yourself,” Dick spoke calmly. “Mr. Scott is in charge here now.”

The news had a very unusual effect upon the two newcomers. McCallum went suddenly pale and the frown upon Wolf Brennan’s forehead blackened like a thunder cloud. Yet it was apparent that they only half believed Dick’s statement. Seizing his rifle and a small bag of luggage, Wolf motioned to his companion and they lumbered up the path toward the trading post. The boys followed them all the way, slipping through the door just as Brennan demanded:

“Where’s Donald Frazer?”

Scott turned quickly at the sound of the gruff voice.

“Mr. Frazer isn’t here any more.”

“Where is he?”

“That’s a question, Mr. Brennan, that I can’t answer. I do not happen to be in Mr. Frazer’s confidence. The former factor went away very suddenly and left no forwarding address. Otherwise I might suggest that you could write to him.”

The sarcasm was lost upon Brennan.

“I believe yuh know an’ don’t want to tell us,” McCallum growled.

Wolf Brennan marched to the counter and made a few purchases. When this had been done, he turned, held a whispered consultation with his partner, then again approached the factor.

“Got any liquor?” he snarled.

“A little,” answered Scott, not wishing to sell it to him.

Brennan’s ugly face lighted up and he started for the cellar door.

“I know where yuh keep it,” he said, “an’ I’ll go down an’ fetch a couple of bottles. That’s the way I always done when Frazer was here.”

Factor Scott came around the corner of the counter, his cheeks flushed with anger.

“Mr. Frazer isn’t here now,” he informed Brennan hotly. “If you want two bottles of liquor, I’ll get it myself. And while we’re on the subject, I’ll tell you this much: I don’t care about selling the stuff to people like you and McCallum. Also I want to warn you, if you get drunk and cause any trouble around the post, I’ll put you on the list and you’ll never get another drop from me as long as I remain in charge here.”

The two partners exchanged significant glances and Wolf’s face fell. Observing this, Scott believed that it was his threat that caused their sudden dejection. But not Dick. He could see through the wily plan of the big prospector. Brennan wanted to go down to the cellar alone to fetch his two bottles because, by doing so, he would have an opportunity to look into the pit and see if the gold was still there.

When Scott returned with the bottles, McCallum paid for them and the two partners stalked out. Watching their exit, the factor turned grimly to Dick.

“When did they get here?” he asked.

“Just a short time ago. We met them at the boat landing when they arrived.”

Factor Scott scowled. "I hope they decide to leave again before they commence to drink that rum. They're vicious. Frazer seemed to get along with them well enough but it was because he let them have their own way. All winter they've been a regular pest around here, have instigated more fights and have caused more trouble than any other twenty men in this entire region. But now that I'm in charge," Factor Scott's lips tightened, "they don't want to try their bullying methods with me."

Soon afterward the boys went outside and sat down on the bench to discuss the new development.

"Brennan didn't fool me when he suggested going to the cellar," Sandy stated.

"You're thinking about the pit, aren't you?" smiled Dick. "The same thought came into my mind. Wolf wanted to find out whether or not Frazer had taken the gold."

"What do you suppose they'll do next?" mused Sandy.

Toma rose nervously and paced back and forth in front of the store building. Abruptly he stopped in front of Dick, frowning.

"Them fellow go to find Pierre and Henri Mekewai," he said. "Why not we go 'long too? Mebbe we find out where they hide the gold."

"Why not?" Sandy bounced to his feet. "Listen, Dick. I have an inspiration. Let's cut straight through the woods over to the river and hide in the brush behind the Mekewai tepee. If you recall, their tepee is set at the bottom of a slope just below a heavy thicket of alders. The alder bushes are only about twenty feet from the tepee. If they commence drinking, they'll talk loud enough so that we'll be able to catch a good deal of what they say."

Dick was so pleased with this plan that he clapped Sandy on the back, suggesting that they start at once. Less than a quarter of an hour later, they crawled on hands and knees into the thicket at the place designated. It was very quiet in the tepee. The only sound they heard was the murmur of the river.

"They haven't arrived here yet," Dick whispered. "But I'm pretty sure they'll be along in a few minutes. Just now, I imagine, they're making inquiries down at the boat landing. You see, they don't know yet whether the Mekewai boys are here or whether they have gone with Frazer."

Toma parted the bushes and looked out.

"I see somebody come," he announced excitedly.

Dick and Sandy rose to their knees and they, too, peered down along the shore.

"Brennan and McCallum all right," Sandy whispered breathlessly.

Dick nudged his chum, "Careful!" he warned. "Let's all sit down and be very quiet."

Soon afterward they could hear voices in the tepee, the loud domineering voice of Wolf Brennan, the rasping snarl of Toby McCallum and the broken, guttural tones of one of the Mekewai boys. Only occasionally, however, did they catch a word they could understand.

But true to Sandy's prediction, the voices grew more noisy. They had probably opened one of the bottles. Heavy oaths punctured the talk now. An argument of some sort seemed to be in progress.

“It’s a lie!” suddenly screamed McCallum.

Then the boys heard quite distinctly Wolf thunder out: “Where’s Henri?”

Sandy leaned close to Dick whispering in his ear: “Hear that? Only one of the Mekewai boys is inside there. Wonder where the other is?”

At that moment Dick felt a thrill of excitement go through him. Brennan was speaking and he had heard another sentence.

“If yuh didn’t bury it in a safe place, yuh’ll have to answer for it.”

“Plenty safe,” they heard Pierre Mekewai answer.

A roar of ribald laughter was followed by splintering glass. Evidently, they had already finished one bottle and had broken it. The voices subsided a little hereafter and the three boys were straining their ears in an effort to make out what was being said, when a soft, cat-like tread sounded behind them.

Dick whirled, his hand darting to the revolver at his side. Sandy gave a low exclamation of dismay. Toma grunted. Approaching them was the other Mekewai brother. He carried a rifle. His pock-scarred face was twisted in a hideous leer.

“What you fellow do here?” he demanded.

“Haven’t we a right to sit here if we want to?” trembled Dick.

“You go ’way pretty quick,” threatened the Indian.

The boys rose to their feet, feeling like culprits caught in the act of committing some petty offense.

“You go quick,” snarled the Indian. “If you come back again, next time I shoot.”



## CHAPTER XIX.

### TROUBLES COME FAST.

RETIRING to his room that night, Dick sat down in a chair near the open window and stooped to unlace his moccasins. The loft was smothering. Sunshine still streamed into the room. All day a furnace glare had lain over the river valley. Outside the grass was dry and the leaves of the white poplar curled from the intense heat. One of the longest days in the year, it would be three hours yet before the crimson ball of the sun, rolling through the northwestern sky, would sink to the line of the horizon. Ten feet away, sitting on the edge of his bunk, Sandy puffed and wiped his perspiring brow.

“Whew! Let’s postpone going to sleep for a while and slip down to the river and have a dip. It will be the third time we’ve been in today, but we have to try to keep cool somehow. Cracky! But isn’t this loft hot.”

In the act of pulling off one moccasin, Dick paused, considering Sandy’s suggestion. He rose from the chair and stood looking out of the window.

“I’ll bet that’s where Toma is now,” he guessed.

Just then he saw a movement in the brush, caught the bright gleam of sun upon steel, and stepped back just as the screen on the window shivered from the lightning stroke of a bullet. Something that felt like a breath of hot wind scorched his side. Two holes appeared as if by magic in his bulging flannel shirt. A vicious thud behind him and another hole showed in a pine log on the opposite wall.

“Cracky!” exclaimed Sandy again. “Dick are you hurt?”

“Almost got me that time.” Trembling, Dick walked over and exhibited the tell-tale holes.

“Didn’t it even nick you?” gurgled Sandy.

“Not a bit. That was lucky. I caught a glimpse of the man that fired the shot.”

“Who was it?”

“Pierre Mekewai.”

“Wolf put him up to it.”

“No question about that. Now that he’s got a little liquor into him, he’s commencing measures of retaliation.”

The door opened below and someone came bounding up the stairs. White-faced, Factor Scott bounded into the room.

“Did someone fire through the window just now?”

“Yes,” answered Dick.

“The devil!” exploded the factor. “As soon as I heard the report outside, I ran out to see if I could see anyone. Wonder what practical joker did that?”

“It wasn’t a practical joker,” stormed Sandy. “It was an assassin. He—he tried to kill Dick. Dick was standing in front of the window. The bullet went right through his

shirt. Come here, Mr. Scott, and look at it.”

The factor, amazement written in his face, crossed the room as he was bidden. His eyes grew very wide and his lips compressed tightly.

“Heavens! What a close call, Dick. You’re lucky you’re alive.”

“Don’t I know it,” trembled Dick.

“That settles it,” the factor’s breath caught and he plunked down in a chair. “Tomorrow I’m going to send word to the police.”

“No, I wish you wouldn’t.”

Mr. Scott started in surprise.

“Wish I wouldn’t! Why not? When murder is attempted I think it’s about time something was done about it. When the police come, they’ll find out who fired that bullet.”

“I already know who fired the bullet.”

“Who?” the factor’s voice snapped.

“Pierre Mekewai.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. I saw him.”

“Very well then, I’ll put him under arrest. But what—Good Heavens, what grudge has he against you?”

“It’s not his grudge. It’s Brennan’s and McCallum’s. We had some trouble down river. They’re trying to even the score, that’s all.”

“In that case we’ll have them all placed under arrest.”

“No, not yet, Mr. Scott. For certain reasons of my own I do not wish anything done about this for the time being, anyway. And as for the police, until we find we can’t cope with the situation ourselves, we won’t call them.”

“Dick, I think you’re mad.”

“No, not mad,” Dick smiled. “I’m merely carrying out, or I should say Sandy, Toma and I are carrying out certain investigations.”

“For whom?”

“The mounted police.”

Factor breathed an expansive sigh.

“Well all I hope is that everything will come out all right. I’d hate to have any of you boys get hurt.”

“For our own sakes, I hope so too,” grinned Sandy.

“But what’s at the bottom of this?” the factor commenced all over again. “You can’t make me believe that men will attempt murder because of some trivial grudge.”

“I’m not trying to,” retorted Dick. “We’re not sure what it’s all about ourselves. But we propose to find out.”

“Good for you!” applauded the factor.

Next morning, when Dick and Sandy awoke, there was another surprise in store for them. Bounding from his bed, the former was the first to make the discovery. He stood,

staring in dismay. Across the room, Toma's bunk had not been disturbed. Where was he? Overcome with sudden fear, he stepped forward, gasping.

"Sandy!" he shrieked, pointing. "Sandy!"

The young Scotchman became so weak at the thought of what might have happened, that he gave utterance to a little cry of dismay and sat down.

"It's all our fault," he moaned. "We shouldn't have gone to bed until we had found out where he had gone. Something terrible has occurred or he'd have been back long before this."

"I'm afraid so," Dick was forced to admit.

"He knows we'd worry about him if he stayed out all night. He wouldn't do it either unless he was hurt—or—or——" Sandy's voice broke.

The boys commenced feverishly to tear into their clothes, and, in less than two minutes, they were bounding down the stairs into the trading room. Factor Scott looked up in surprise at their precipitous entrance.

"What's wrong now?"

"Mr. Scott, have you seen Toma?"

The factor rubbed his chin. "Why, no, I haven't. Didn't he come in last night?"

The boys did not answer. Bolting to the door, they ran outside. They began searching everywhere. They made inquiries of every person they met. Organizing a search party, they scoured the woods in the vicinity of the post. That afternoon at three o'clock, beaten and discouraged, they returned to the trading room to see if by any chance Toma had returned during their absence. Factor Scott met them at the door.

Dick's and Sandy's dejected appearance told the story. The factor knew without asking that they had been unsuccessful. He endeavored to comfort them.

"We mustn't worry," he said, placing a kindly arm about the shoulders of the disconsolate pair. "I feel sure that Toma is safe. I really can't make myself believe there has been foul play."

"Wish I could think that," Sandy's eyes were tragic.

"Mr. Scott," requested Dick, "may we see you alone for a few moments?"

"Why, yes. Certainly."

Dick turned and dismissed the search party and he and Sandy followed the factor inside. They went directly to the little room at the back. Scott closed and locked the door.

"What is it, Dick?" he asked.

"Sandy and I have come to a decision. We're going to have it out with Brennan, McCallum and the two Mekewai brothers. We're convinced that those four men know where Toma is—wh—what has happened to him. They're going to tell us or we'll know the reason why."

Aghast, the factor stood and stared at the two boys.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You'd go there? Why, they'll kill you. You're no match for them. Just pause to consider, Dick. Don't be rash. There must be a better way than that."

“If there is,” Dick’s tones struck coldly upon the ears of the older man, “I wish you’d tell me. If they haven’t already killed him, there’s a chance that Toma may be over at the Mekewai tepee.”

“You mean held prisoner?”

“Yes, there’s a faint chance. I haven’t much hope that we’ll find him. I believe that they murdered him, just as they tried to murder me last night.”

“If you’re determined to go,” suggested the factor, “can’t I send a few men along with you?”

“No, we’ll go alone. We don’t know whom we can absolutely trust. Thank you for your willingness to help. Come on, Sandy.”

As they walked back into the trading room, the younger boy, who was in the lead, stopped unexpectedly and gave vent to an ear-splitting screech:

“Toma!”

In the doorway swayed the young Indian. A livid scar streaked his forehead. His hat was gone and his hair was crusted with blood. He stood there, smiling feebly. In a moment two strong pairs of arms encircled him and bore him triumphantly and joyously into the room. Sandy was sobbing like a child. Dick laughed half hysterically, his eyes filled with tears.

“I’ll bring some bandages,” shouted the factor.

## CHAPTER XX.

### TOMA BRINGS NEWS.

THOUGH SANDY and Dick were anxious to find out what had happened to Toma, they did not ask him a question until his head had been bandaged, food had been given him, and he had been made comfortable in a bed upstairs.

“Now tell us all about it if you feel strong enough, Toma,” said Dick, as he, Sandy and the factor bent over him.

“I tell you pretty quick,” the young Indian smiled up at them weakly. “Not very much I remember what happen. Last night I take ’em my rifle an’ walk away through the woods. Think mebbe I shoot partridge or two. By an’ by, I come to old mission trail, ’bout two miles from here. It very hot in the woods an’ I sit down on a log to rest. I sit there mebbe ten, mebbe twenty minutes. All at once I hear ’em sound like partridge make try fly through the brush. I look ’round when something hit me on the head, knock me off the log. Everything turn black. Not remember nothing after that. Stay there all night just like a dead man. When I wake up, sun shining. Feel sick, dizzy, when I try sit up. Want drink of water very bad. Tongue all swell so big that it hurt me if I close my mouth.”

“Ugh!” shuddered the factor. “Imagine that sort of agony out there all alone.”

“And he isn’t telling half of it.” As he spoke Sandy bent forward and brushed back a wisp of black hair that had fallen over the patient’s bandaged head.

“Then what did you do?” asked Dick.

“Well,” continued Toma, “I want water very much. I think ’em me ’bout little creek I cross night before. Long way off that creek. Part time I walk hold on trees, other time I crawl. I get tired an’ think no use. Too weak to get there. But after I lay still little while, I feel better. Then I go on some more. After very long time I come to creek. I very glad then. I crawl right over an’ lay down in water. I drink not too much at first, then after while some more. I began feel better. I stay mebbe one hour at the little creek then I come on here.”

“And that’s all you can tell?” gasped the factor.

“Yes, I say everything I know.”

“Did you see the man that struck you on the head?”

“No see ’em,” answered the young Indian.

“Where did you leave your gun?”

“Somebody take gun. Take money too. Everything gone when I wake up.”

“This isn’t a bullet wound on your head,” Dick told him. “It was made by some sharp instrument.”

“Knife,” guessed Toma. “Place where I thought I hear partridge only little way behind me—not more than fifteen feet. What I think happen, man creep up that far an’

throw 'em knife.”

“You’re probably right,” said Dick. “An Indian, not a white man attacked you. As a general thing a white man doesn’t know much about knife throwing. No doubt, it was one of the Mekewai brothers.”

Toma nodded his head slightly, lying there on the pillow.

“I think mebbe Mekewai too.”

“What induced you to go hunting at that hour?” inquired Sandy reproachfully. “Was that your real reason for going off alone?”

The Indian flushed. “That only one reason,” he admitted.

“What were some of the others?” Dick smiled.

Toma hesitated, looking at the factor. Mr. Scott interpreted that look.

“If you like, I’ll withdraw,” he announced cheerily.

“No, Mr. Scott, stay right where you are. You might as well hear the rest of the story. Toma, you can trust Mr. Scott implicitly. Now what was another reason?”

“I know,” interrupted Sandy eagerly. “He was out trying to find the place where the Mekewai brothers hid those sacks. Come now, confess. Isn’t that what you were doing?”

To the surprise of everyone, Toma shook his head.

“No,” he said emphatically; “I not go look that time. One other time I go look everywhere an’ try find. But last night I have something else make me go. I think mebbe I find the factor.”

“Who, me?” almost shrieked Scott.

“No, Mr. Frazer, the factor Sandy’s uncle send away.”

Scott laughed uproariously. “Good gracious, my boy! What a queer fancy. Frazer! Why he’s miles away.”

There was one thing Toma did not like and that was to be ridiculed. His eyes darkened angrily. A slow flush mounted to his cheeks. He appealed to his two friends.

“Dick, Sandy—I tell you that not so crazy like you think. Factor Frazer come here two nights ago.”

“I can’t believe it——” began Dick.

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” cried Sandy excitedly. “Toma wouldn’t make that statement if he didn’t have a good reason for doing so. Hold on there, you two fellows! Not so fast! Give him time to explain. Toma, if they won’t believe you, I will. What makes you so sure Donald Frazer was here two nights ago?”

“Old Indian he tell ’em me he see Frazer go past his tepee with Wolf Brennan an’ Toby McCallum. Him very good Indian an’ I don’t think he tell lie. Him Indian fellow that live next to last tepee south of the boat landing. I talk with him yesterday when he tell me that. He say nearly everybody know now Frazer stay in little cabin not far away in the woods—some place near mission trail. That’s why I go that way.”

“Donald Frazer’s presence here can mean only one thing,” decided the factor. “He is planning revenge for being dismissed from the service. By nature a revengful man, he’ll retaliate in every way that he can. We must be ready for him.”

“What do you think he’ll do? Personally, I can’t see that he can accomplish much—one man against as powerful a company as the Hudson’s Bay.” As Sandy spoke, he reached for a chair, which he pulled toward the factor. “Sit down, Mr. Scott. And please tell us what you think Frazer will do. Seems to me he’s wasting time.”

The factor thanked Sandy and slipped into the chair. For a moment the room was quiet, put out his hand weakly and tugged at the blankets that had been tucked in around him. It was still uncomfortably warm upstairs, almost as hot as it had been on the day before when Dick had been fired upon.

Mr. Scott cleared his throat. “Every factor has his following,” he commenced. “Frazer has been here eight years and has made many friends, of course. These friends will sympathize with him now that he has lost his position and will be ready to believe that he has been treated unjustly. It will divert trade to independent companies. He may be able to influence many of our best customers against us. Not only that, if he has no scruples about employing more criminal methods—and I don’t think he has—he can tamper with incoming shipments of merchandise and outgoing shipments of fur. He can do incalculable damage in so many different ways that I can’t begin to enumerate or even think of all of them.”

“We must be on our guard incessantly,” Dick advised.

“Even if we are, I doubt if we’ll be able to stop him. The only sure way would be to have the police come over and take him into custody. When Corporal Rand gets back from his patrol, I’ll lay the matter before him.”

“I’m afraid it will be weeks before Corporal Rand returns,” said Dick, shaking his head.

“That’s unfortunate.”

“Yes, it is,” agreed the young man. “Sandy and I will do all we can, but I guess we’ll have more than our hands full fighting that crowd.”

“And they won’t fight fair,” lamented Sandy. “Cowardly tactics, unscrupulous methods—snakes in the grass all of them. Yesterday they almost killed Dick, and now they have wounded Toma. They won’t stop at anything. With all deference to your opinion, Mr. Scott, I do not believe that revenge is Frazer’s only motive. There is some other reason; something less devious, more deep and mysterious. Dick, we might as well tell Mr. Scott about that pit in the cellar.”

“What’s that!” the factor bounded from his chair.

Dick’s face changed color. He had not expected that Sandy would blurt out about that discovery.

“I should have told you,” he apologized. “I——”

“A pit in the cellar!” Scott gasped. “I don’t understand.”

“Under the floor,” explained Dick. “The planking is loose. A hole—quite a large hole there. Frazer evidently knew about it; probably had it dug. Those burlap sacks the Mekewai brothers brought up that night must have come from that hole; been hidden there.”

The factor mumbled incoherently, staring at the two young men opposite. He sank into his chair again, brought out a handkerchief and mopped his perspiring face.

“A pit, you say? Under the floor! Well, good gracious! How——”

“That isn’t all. You might as well hear the rest of it,” Dick interrupted, glaring at Sandy. “We have pretty good reasons to suspect that Frazer hired the Mekewai brothers to get those sacks. Frazer’s loot, we believe. Probably gold. Two other persons know all about the sacks, too—Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum.”

“A conspiracy!” exploded the factor. “What else have you found out?”

“Nothing, except that we know the Mekewai brothers buried the loot somewhere.”

In great agitation, the factor filled and lit his pipe. He puffed for a moment in silence.

“I can begin to see where I’ve been duped, too,” he told them. “What you’ve just divulged helps to throw light on some of Frazer’s former actions. For one thing, it was never quite clear to me why he kept sending me away on such trivial errands. Twice during the month preceding his discharge, I was despatched to outlying districts ostensibly to drum up trade among the Indians. It seemed foolish to me at the time, but I had no choice in the matter. It didn’t make a bit of difference how busy we were, he’d always find some pretext to send me away.”

“Exactly! He worked the same scheme on us,” Sandy cut in. “Say! What’s the matter with you, Toma?”

The injured boy raised his hand, commanding silence.

“Listen,” he said. “I think I hear somebody come up the stairs.”



## CHAPTER XXI.

### FRAZER'S RUSE.

DICK ran to the door and opened it. In the hallway outside was the young half-breed boy, whom Mr. Scott employed in various capacities.

"Yes, yes, Meschel, what is it?"

The boy's eyes were round and staring.

"Mr. Scott here?" he cried. "Tell Mr. Scott to come quick. Fellow downstairs very drunk, try to break in through the window."

"Who was he?" demanded the factor, who now stood immediately behind Dick. "But never mind, Meschel, I'll be right down."

He followed the half-breed below. Dick and Sandy joined him.

"Mr. Scott," said Dick, "I think Meschel must be dreaming. Who would break in at this time of day? They don't need to. All they have to do is to walk in through the front door."

"So it would seem," smiled the factor, "but after the many surprises we've received in the last few days, I'm prepared for anything. What window did they try to break in, Meschel?"

"Window at the back where you have your office," the half-breed replied promptly. "Two women come in an' buy some cloth an' right after I hear some noise that seem like it come from your office. Just as soon as I open the door, a man standing in front of the window outside, put down the screen an' run away. Screen lying on ground now. You see that for yourself."

It was just as Meschel had told them. Making their way into the little office, the factor, Dick and Sandy stood looking at the evidence of the marauder's recent visit.

The factor turned to Meschel. "You must have seen who it was."

"Not sure because I was very much scare."

"Come now, Meschel, you know better than that. If he stood just in front of the window facing you, you could easily identify him. You've already told me that he was drunk. If you had that much eye for detail, surely you can give me a description of him."

The half-breed blinked and a slow flush of embarrassment mounted his swarthy face.

"Yes, Mr. Scott, I know who it was. But I'm 'fraid tell you because you go make that fellow trouble an' afterward sometime he come kill me."

A slight frown of perplexity appeared upon the factor's thoughtful brow.

"What's that, Meschel? You know who it is and won't tell me? You're afraid of the consequences?"

"I tell you," whimpered Meschel, "but I am very much 'fraid. Pierre Mekewai—that's the fellow I see."

Mr. Scott swallowed heavily, commenced pacing back and forth. His face was touched with pallor. He stopped before Dick and Sandy.

"Frazer's work! Now what do you suppose he was up to?"

The disclosure acted upon Dick like a cold shower. He stood with lips pressed, staring at the screen outside. Near him, Sandy clenched his fists convulsively.

"Mr. Scott," asked Dick at length, "have you any way to bar the windows? It may be Frazer's intention to burn down the post."

"Not in broad daylight, surely. No, I think that more likely what they were after were the company's books. Another thing, as Frazer knows, we often keep money in this room, valuable papers and accounts. It would be a serious loss to this post if we should lose them. All the records dealing with transactions with our fur customers are here. However, your suggestion to bar the windows is a good one. I'll send for the blacksmith at once."

"From now on," said Dick, "we'd better keep close watch day and night."

The factor nodded. "Two night watchmen armed with rifles. You and Sandy can help me during the day."

It was well that these precautions were taken. That same night, two Indians, hired for the positions for night watchmen, repulsed three efforts on the part of Frazer's men to gain admittance. So persistent were these attempts to enter the post, that Dick began to believe that something even of more value than the company's records were at stake. At ten o'clock on the following morning, he and Mr. Scott were discussing this phase of it, when a young half-breed bolted through the open door of the trading room, shouting wildly.

"Fire, Meester Scott! The warehouse eet ees burn! Come queek!"

The factor tore around the end of the counter, his eyes blazing like two lamps.

"My God!" he cried. "The fur! Thousands of dollars worth waiting for shipment." He raced to the door. "Come on!" he shouted.

The boys followed closely behind the racing form of the factor. They could see the fire now. Dense volumes of smoke curled up from the eaves of the building. As yet, no flame was discernible but the smoke was thick. They had almost reached the burning building, when suddenly Dick stopped. Through his mind there had flashed an appalling thought. The trading post was unguarded. Everyone had rushed to the fire. Hadn't the warehouse been purposely set on fire with this end in view? For a moment, he watched Sandy and the factor racing on, then turned quickly and sprinted back to the trading room.

Purposely leaving the door open behind him, revolver in hand, he concealed himself behind the counter and waited. Through the door and open windows there came to him the frenzied shouts of the fire fighters. Even in the trading room he could detect the rancid smell of smoke. He wondered if he had been foolish in coming here when his assistance was so urgently required back there at the warehouse. He crouched low, his thought a conflicting whirl. Once he half started to his feet, deciding that his suspicions

were groundless and that he must hurry to the aid of his comrades. But again he thought better of it and stooped still lower, breathlessly waiting.

A step sounded outside. Whispering voices, then the stealthy movement of feet across the floor. He gripped his revolver convulsively. He dare not look up for fear that he might be discovered. He did not wish to confront them yet. What were they here for? Why had they made those repeated attempts to break in?

The door of the factor's office opened and closed. He could hear muffled voices in there, the faint shuffling of feet, the creaking of what sounded like a drawer. Stealthy as a cat, he rose to an upright position, tip-toed around the counter and, with desperate caution, made his way over to the door of the factor's office. His hand stole tremblingly to the knob. Just before he closed over it, he heard a husky voice.

"Quick! Someone may come back any moment. It's here! You take one and I'll take the other."

Steeling himself for the ordeal, Dick turned the knob and kicked the door open. A wicked, pock-marked face, with wolfish fangs bared, confronted him. Behind Henri Mekewai stood the figure of Donald Frazer.

"Make one move," said Dick in a voice of deathly calm, "and I'll blow your brains out."

The renegade Indian snarled like a cornered beast. Frazer's first spasm of fear was followed by a low cry of rage. His unsteady, sinister eyes squinted into Dick's, then with a lightning motion his hand flashed toward his belt.

The room roared with the explosion. Frazer's revolver clattered to the floor. He held up a bleeding hand, like one scarcely crediting the evidence of his senses.

"Next time," Dick growled, "I won't be so easy on you. Move back to the wall, Mekewai, if you make another move like that, I'll shoot you where you stand. Stand back!"

Wincing with pain, the former factor hurriedly obeyed. The Indian followed him. As they did so, Dick's gaze flashed to the open roll-top desk and on that instant his eyes popped.

There on the flat surface in front of him were two large leather pokes—prospector's pokes, bulging with gold. At sight of them, his heart leaped. He was so startled and astonished at seeing them there, that for a period he was off guard. Perceiving the momentary laxing of vigilance, the Indian dove headlong, straight toward Dick, who, recovering his presence of mind, tried to slip to one side and fire at the same time. The revolver exploded harmlessly, the bullet crashing into the wall opposite. Hurling back through the door, Dick landed in a heap just inside the trading room, Mekewai on top of him. But even then, Dick had not lost the instinct of self-preservation. His opponent's head was just above him and he struck out boldly with his clubbed weapon. Mekewai groaned, went limp and slipped to one side. Dick scrambled to his knees just in time to dive furiously for the speeding form of Frazer, who had bounded through the open office door.

It was a glancing tackle, yet it was almost sufficient to knock Frazer from the perpendicular. Crashing up against the wall, the fleeing man inadvertently dropped one of the pokes and was trying to reach it when Dick made a second lunge for him.

Almost cornered, Frazer leaped frantically straight over Dick's head and darted for the door. A bullet whistled after him, missing him by a scant two inches.

Dick groped to his feet, stepped over the prostrate heap on the floor and stumbled back into the little office, where he picked up Frazer's revolver. Then returning quickly, he got the poke Frazer had dropped, slipped both revolver and gold under the counter in the trading room and was just stooping down to examine the unconscious prisoner, when the door of the loft opened and Toma, his face flushed with excitement, staggered toward him.

"Dick," he trembled, "What happen? You shoot this man—you——"

"Toma, get back to bed," Dick interrupted whirling about, confronting his chum. "Don't worry—everything all right—now. Frazer and Mekewai—I—I tried to capture both of them and—and Frazer got away. My fault too. I was careless."

"Why they come?" the young Indian demanded, steadying himself by holding on to the counter.

"Gold! In the office, Toma. Frazer had it concealed there."

Dick's chum stood and stared incredulously.

"They get 'em?" he croaked.

"Part of it."

Then, without explaining further, Dick strode over, procured a rope from the company's stock and commenced binding up his unconscious prisoner.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### TENSION TIGHTENS.

TOMA walked nervously to the door and peered out.

"No go back to bed," he stated. "I stay up. Dick, you run get Sandy an' try follow Frazer. Tell 'em factor I am here all alone to watch Mekewai an' gold. Soon as factor get back here, then I go to bed."

There was less smoke drifting in through the door now, an indication that the fire at the warehouse might be under control. But it would be some time before Scott, Meschel and Sandy returned. No doubt, they and others had taken a good deal of the fur from the warehouse to a safe distance outside. Dick was very anxious to know how the fight with the fire was progressing. Yet, he feared to leave the trading room, even for a moment, while the wounded Indian and gold were still there. Indeed, Dick half expected that Frazer would return with the second Mekewai brother and probably Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum. In such an event, Toma would be no match for them. By the same token, it was doubtful whether the combined efforts of himself and Toma would be sufficient to repulse them.

"You better go quick," insisted Toma.

Dick turned beseeching eyes toward his valiant comrade.

"Toma, I can't do it. I'm afraid. The minute I go through that door, they'll be down upon you like a pack of wolves. Four against one—what chance would you have?"

Toma had started to protest, when Dick caught sight of an ominous glint of metal less than a hundred yards away. Without further adieu, he sprang forward and slammed the door, bolted and locked it. Then from the front window, he and Toma looked out toward the place where the former had seen the stealthy movement.

"Over behind that brush! Look!"

The young Indian drew in his breath sharply.

"I see 'em three men, Wolf, McCallum an' Frazer."

Alert, Dick stepped back. "Look out, Toma," he jerked. "They may fire. What do you say we route them out of there? They don't know yet that we've seen them. If you'll stand guard here, I'll run up to the loft and fetch our rifles."

When Dick returned, Toma was still standing there.

"Have they gone yet?" he inquired.

"No."

The boys fired three rounds at the screen of willows and presently the skulkers broke and fled precipitously. To Dick's amazement, Toma continued to discharge his rifle.

"What's the idea?" he snapped. "You can't hit them now. Isn't one chance in a thousand that a stray bullet will get to them."

“That not why I shoot,” Toma informed him coolly. “Factor, Sandy, they hear noise. They come back.”

Dick grinned. “Yes, that is a good way to summon them. If the factor hears that, he’ll go frantic.”

And in truth the boys did not have long to wait. They heard voices outside, then, before they had time to open it, loud pounding on the door.

“Good gracious, Dick, what is going on here?” the factor shouted as he came into the room, quickly followed by Sandy and Meschel.

“Cracky!” Sandy’s eyes popped. “What’s that?” He stood staring at the now groaning form of Henri Mekewai.

“Frazer was here in your absence. So was that scum you see lying on the floor. There’s a secret compartment in the wall of your office and two pokes of gold were concealed there. I walked in upon them just as they were taking it from its hiding place. I was so surprised at seeing the gold that, even though I had them covered, I was off guard for a moment and the Indian leaped upon me.”

“And you shot him!” gasped Sandy.

“No, I struck him over the head when we tumbled to the floor. Previously, I had wounded Frazer in the hand when he tried to reach for his gun. During my struggle with Henri, Frazer seized the two pokes and started to rush by me. I grabbed for him and nearly upset him. He dropped one of the pokes, but in spite of all I could do, he escaped with the other.”

“But who were you shooting at just before we came?”

“Frazer and the two prospectors. They were returning to get the other poke. Did you succeed in saving most of the fur?”

“Some of it was badly scorched and ruined,” the factor informed him. “However, the fire is out now. I have placed Langley, the blacksmith, and two half-breeds in charge. The fire is of very mysterious origin. It broke out among the bales of fur in the back of the building. I believe now it was the work of an incendiary. No doubt, Frazer started it. When Sandy’s uncle drove him away from the post, he probably took one of the keys of the warehouse with him. Today when no one was looking, either he or one of his accomplices boldly entered, started the fire, then came out and locked the door.”

“There’s no question but what Frazer set the fire,” said Dick grimly. “I suspected it from the first. I followed you and Sandy almost to the warehouse, when it suddenly occurred to me that we had left the door to the trading room open and the place unprotected.” He paused and looked earnestly up into the factor’s face. “Can’t you see,” he went on, “that it was all of a prearranged plan? Unsuccessful in his efforts to get into your office, Frazer hit upon the very clever idea of firing the warehouse, knowing that all of us would rush out to the scene of the fire, leaving this place wholly unguarded.”

Mr. Scott thumped his two hands together and looked at Dick admiringly.

“You’re right. If it hadn’t been for you, they’d have succeeded.”

“You mean, they almost succeeded in spite of me. Don’t forget they got one of those pokes.”

The factor moved forward. "Show me the place where the gold was hid. You spoke of a secret compartment. I want to see it."

Dick led the way into the little office and pointed at the gaping hole in the wall. When closed, the door of the compartment fitted so nicely into its place that, standing three feet away, it was almost impossible to tell where it was. To complete the deception, a calendar had been hung down over it from a nail in the wall.

"And you didn't know a thing about that cabinet?" Surprised, Dick turned upon the factor.

"No, it's a revelation to me."

"I wonder from whom he stole the gold."

Mr. Scott shook his head. "I can't imagine. It's all a mystery to me. In spite of the fact that I've been working here for nearly three years, I must confess to a complete ignorance of Frazer's nefarious schemes. I always suspected, however, that he was dishonest and I had almost proved to my satisfaction that he was stealing from the company. It was no surprise to me, therefore, when Mr. MacClaren came over from Fort Good Faith to audit the books."

Sandy had grown restless and impatient.

"Where's the gold?" he demanded.

"Come on," said Dick, leading the way, "and I'll show you that too."

Returning to the trading room, he stepped behind the counter, stooped and lifted up for their inspection both poke and gun.

"Do you suppose they'll come back for it?" the factor inquired nervously.

"Of course they will. They won't be satisfied with half of it. Just before you came over from the warehouse, they were preparing to rush the post."

"What will be their next ruse?" puzzled Sandy.

"I don't know but you may depend on it, they'll think of some scheme. Frazer is a dangerous opponent. There is only one way that I can see to put a stop to this."

"How?" Sandy and Scott inquired in one breath.

"Just this," Dick gestured emphatically. "Assume the offensive ourselves. Instead of waiting for him to carry the fight into our territory, let's go down and make it interesting for him."

"Now I think you talk sense," Toma's eyes snapped.

"We'll do it," Sandy exclaimed excitedly.

"Right now," Toma appended.

"You bet!" Sandy began dancing up and down. "I have an idea. We'll recruit a little party and start out. There's Langley, the blacksmith, and those two half-breeds down at the warehouse, Toma, Dick and myself. That makes six in all. Six against four."

"Seven," corrected a vibrant, musical voice.

Startled, every person in the room turned sharply and looked in the direction from which the voice had come. Dick gasped and reached out toward the counter for support.

There in the doorway stood Corporal Rand!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE POLICE TAKE CHARGE.

CORPORAL RAND immediately took charge.

“Now,” he said, “tell me all about it.”

He listened gravely to the story the boys told, while he sat there near the open doorway, through which there poured the hot sun of early afternoon. Bronzed and weather-beaten was the corporal, but hard as nails, a steel spring in action.

“Making merry in my absence, eh?” His eyes glinted as he spoke. “Where can I find these men?”

“You might find a few of them over at the Mekewai tepee,” replied Dick. “I do not know whether Frazer will be there or not. Toma says that the former factor occupies a cabin somewhere near the Old Mission road.”

“I’ll slip over to the tepee,” announced the policeman as calmly as if he spoke of entering the adjoining room. “If Wolf Brennan and McCallum are away with Frazer, I may be able to pick up the other Mekewai boy.”

“May I go with you?” asked Dick eagerly.

To Dick’s great disappointment, the corporal shook his head.

“No, I’ll go alone,” he smiled. “You can stay here and rest on your oars. I think you’ve done enough for one day, Dick, old chap. I may call upon you later. Now if you’ll tell me where I can find this Mekewai tepee, I’ll be ever so much obliged to you.”

“Turn down the bank to your right when you get to the boat landing,” instructed Dick. “It’s the fourth tepee.”

Corporal Rand rose, yawned and walked over to where Henry Mekewai lay trussed up on the floor. To Dick’s surprise, he spoke to him.

“Where’s your brother?” he demanded.

The Indian’s ugly, repulsive face twisted into a snarl at the sound of the voice. He did not know it was the policeman that spoke to him. His eyes, averted, gazed at the wall beside him.

“Where’s your brother?” persisted the quiet voice.

Henri Mekewai turned his head surlily and looked up. He started visibly. In common with other natives of that vast northern territory, he possessed an almost superstitious dread of anyone wearing that flaming red coat. Sudden terror leaped into his eyes.

“Where’s your brother?” the corporal asked for the third and last time.

“My brother he——” the Indian paused and moistened his dry lips.

“Yes, go on.”

“My brother in our tepee, I think. I not sure.”



“Where are Brennan and McCallum?”

“Find ’em in tepee,” answered the Indian like a parrot.

“Do they stay with you?”

“Yes.”

“And where does Frazer stay?”

“He stay in cabin two mile from Half Way House. Pretty close to Old Mission trail.”

Corporal Rand turned away.

“You’d better lock him up in a room somewhere,” he instructed Dick. “Take off these bonds. I may talk to him again later when I come back.”

Without further word, the policeman spun on his heel and clanked out, spurs rattling, his body very straight and trim and pleasing to the eye. He was absent just twenty minutes, by Dick’s watch. When he returned, two figures preceded him—Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum, a somewhat worried looking pair. They came shamefacedly into the room, slinking like two whipped curs. Gone was their blustering courage and cocksureness. Rand motioned them over to one side of the room a little disdainfully.

“Don’t try to move,” he ordered, “if you know what’s good for you. Mr. Scott, is the other prisoner locked up?”

“Yes, Corporal.”

“Do you think you can find a place for these two men?”

“In the office. The windows are barred.”

The policeman beckoned to the two prisoners, then strode forward and opened the door.

“Get in there,” he commanded.

Wolf Brennan and his partner lost no time in doing as they were told. The door was locked behind them.

“Now, Dick.”

“Yes, Corporal Rand,” Dick stepped forward.

“I’ll want you and Sandy to accompany me. We’ll get an early supper and leave here around seven o’clock. I think I know where Frazer’s cabin is. I propose to swing completely around it and come in from the opposite side. That will mean about six miles of steady tramping.”

“Why not go straight there?” asked Sandy.

“Because they may be on the lookout for us. They may be watching the road leading from the post. I want to surprise them.”

The corporal sat down in a chair while the three boys crowded around him.

“We’re all mighty glad you got back,” Sandy broke forth eagerly. “You certainly came at an opportune time. How did you manage to get here so quickly?”

“Because I didn’t go as far as I expected to,” Rand smiled. “It’s rather a long story, Sandy, and I don’t intend to burden you with it now. My destination, as you may remember, was Caribou Lake. However, I got no further than the lower waters of the

Half Way River. I was drifting along one day, half asleep, when I saw a canoe approaching. The occupant of the little craft proved to be Jim Maynard, an old friend of mine. Jim is a trapper and prospector and has been working all winter up in the region of Caribou Lake. When I told him I was going up to Miller's cabin, he seemed surprised. 'You won't find him there,' he told me. He explained to me that he had visited at Miller's cabin just two days before the latter left by dog team for the south. I asked if Miller had told him his destination. He replied that he had, Miller, it appeared, was going out to Fort Laird."

"But he never got there," Sandy interrupted.

"No, he never got there. Something happened to him en route. He might have lost his way in a storm and both he and his dogs perished."

"So the mystery is still a mystery."

The policeman nodded. "Time probably will solve it. Some day, I expect, a lone traveller wandering through the vast wilderness space south of Caribou Lake will run across his bleached skeleton. The north has many secrets," he went on, half to himself, "many of which will never be solved."

"I wish we could solve this mystery that surrounds Frazer," put in Dick. "He had a good deal of gold hidden here, corporal. First we discover the place where he had it concealed in the basement, now we find the secret compartment in the little room. Of course, it is stolen gold. But from whom did he steal it?"

"Gold in the basement!" the policeman stared at Dick. "You didn't mention that. So he had it there too?"

Dick nodded. "Very cleverly concealed just like it was in the office. Only in the cellar, instead of having a secret niche in the wall, he took up a portion of the plank flooring, dug a pit and hid it in there in burlap sacks."

"Burlap sacks!" Rand looked incredulous. "That is very unusual. How do you know he had it in burlap sacks?"

"Because I saw them," and Dick narrated the incidents of the night the Mekewai brothers broke into the trading room and descended to the cellar.

"You are really sure that they carried this gold in burlap sacks?"

"Yes, Corporal."

"And you say the sacks were nearly full?"

"Why, yes," Dick looked puzzled, wondering what the policeman was driving at.

"But how do you know it was gold they carried in those burlap sacks?"

"We didn't, of course. We merely surmised that. It was something very valuable or they wouldn't have been so anxious to get it."

"I grant you that. But did you ever stop to consider how much a sack of gold, one of the heaviest metals, would weigh? And didn't it ever occur to you that if a man had gold enough to fill a burlap sack, he'd be wealthy enough to afford a container a little more durable and dependable than burlap?"

"Why, I never thought of that," Dick scratched his head.

"The inference is, that it wasn't gold. Only a fool would put so precious a metal in burlap sacks."

“Yes, that seems reasonable,” Dick smiled sheepishly. “But if it wasn’t gold, what was it?”

Corporal Rand laughed heartily.

“Now, my boy, you’re asking me a very difficult question. If we can find what they did with those sacks, I might be able to tell you.”

“I know what they did with those sacks,” Dick informed him.

“Very well, please tell me.”

“They buried them.”

“Why are you so sure?”

“We overheard one of the Mekewai boys tell Wolf Brennan and Toby McCallum that they had buried the sacks in a safe place.”

“In a safe place,” mused the policeman aloud.

“Yes,” Sandy corroborated his chum, “those were the very words he used.”

Corporal Rand sat for a moment immersed in thought. Then suddenly he started to his feet.

“I think I’ll go in and have a talk with Henri Mekewai,” he said.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### NEAR FRAZER'S CABIN.

WHEN CORPORAL RAND came out of the room in which Henri Mekewai was imprisoned, the boys met him in the hall outside.

"What luck?" asked Sandy.

"Not a word out of him," Rand growled a little testily. "Couldn't get him to admit that he had even taken the sacks out of the cellar. Claims that he knows nothing about it. I tried to frighten him, but it's no use. The only way to get to the bottom of this is to find Frazer himself and force a confession."

"It will soon be time now to start after him," Sandy looked at his watch. "Ten minutes to six now. Supper is waiting for us in the dining room."

"When we go, shall we take our rifles?" asked Dick.

"No, just our revolvers."

On the way to the supper table, Toma swung in behind Corporal Rand, his face utterly disconsolate. Looking at him, one might have thought that he had just lost his nearest and dearest friend. His lower lip quivered. Unshed tears stood in his eyes. In the dining room, when Rand drew out his chair to sit down, Toma stood near him gulping.

"Corporal Rand."

"Yes, Toma,"—kindly.

"Corporal Rand, I feel 'em much better now."

The policeman turned his head and surveyed the drawn, haggard face.

"You certainly don't look it. You ought to be in bed."

"Tomorrow," smiled the young Indian, "I take 'em off bandages."

"I'm glad to hear that, Toma."

A deep sigh. "Corporal Rand, I feel plenty strong go along you, Dick an' Sandy."

The policeman shook his head as he reached over and patted the young man's arm.

"Like to have you, Toma. If you hadn't been wounded. I'd say yes. You're really in no condition to go."

To the surprise of everyone, Toma swung on his heel and walked out of the room. Sandy's face clouded.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed. "That upset him so much he won't even eat his supper."

"It is hard on him," sympathized Dick, looking down at his plate. "The minute you brought up the matter, Toma set his heart on accompanying us. It is a terrible blow to him. He loves action and wants to be in at the finish."

"I appreciate all that, but you must remember that if he overtaxes himself, a thing which he is very apt to do, it is liable to cause complications. He still has a slight fever."

Tell that by looking at him. Eyes heavy, cheeks flushed. No, boys, for his own sake, I can't permit him to go."

Not long afterward, Corporal Rand and the two boys left the trading post, hurrying away through the woods. They had slipped off so quietly and unobtrusively that few persons were aware of their going. Rand set the pace, walking with long, easy strides. Through dense thickets of alders, through the shadowed coolness of fir and balsam, across rippling green meadows of luxuriant grass, they made their way. Except now and then for a low order respecting their route, the policeman did not talk. Only the noises of the forest and the steady beat of their footsteps could be heard. Sandy was nervous and continually consulted his watch.

"Eight o'clock," he finally announced to Dick. "Ought to be getting there pretty soon."

On and on they tramped. Rand never hesitated. He seemed to be sure of his route. Dick knew they were swinging around in a wide arc, yet he marvelled at the policeman's sense of location. When they plunged through the trees out to the Old Mission road, for the first time since their departure, he raised his hand commanding them to stop.

"We're very close to their cabin now," he explained in a low voice. "Straight north," he pointed, "about three hundred yards. We will separate here and attempt to make our approach from three directions. Dick and I will start out, Dick to the right and I to the left and come upon them, if possible, coincident with your approach from the north, Sandy. You have the shortest distance to go, therefore you must proceed slowly. I hope to corner them in the cabin."

The corporal paused. "Now is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

The boys shook their heads.

"Very well then, we'll start. Don't shoot unless it is absolutely necessary. Good luck!"

They separated in silence. Down the road Dick hurried, watchful as a lynx. The sunlight streamed aslant, a glare in his eyes, bright gold where it touched the leaves of the poplar. Swerving abruptly to his right when he had gone a distance of about two hundred yards, he darted in among the trees, zig-zagging to avoid clumps of underbrush, his right hand resting lightly on his hip close to the butt of his revolver. He made little sound as he advanced, and was actually preparing for a final sprint up to the cabin when, less than thirty feet straight ahead, he caught a flashing glimpse of a human figure.

Breathless, he stopped short, swung in behind a large tree and stood there trembling. To his ears there came the faint trampling of feet. A voice cracked across the stillness.

Suddenly, his heart almost stopped beating. They had halted just within the clump of bushes ahead, as though they had sensed his presence. Had they seen him? Fearful now, he yanked out his revolver, crouched closer to the tree and waited. Frazer's harsh tones broke forth anew.

"I don't care what you say, Pierre, it isn't safe here. Sooner or later, someone may happen upon it."

“I dig ’em down deep,” the Indian reassured him.

“Can’t help it. Too close to the post. Hundred places you might have chosen better than this. I tell you, someone is apt to stumble upon it.”

“You ’fraid,” accused the Indian.

Frazer’s voice rose angrily. “Yes, I am afraid, you black cut-throat, and you ought to be afraid too. Tonight we’ll dig it up and——”

“Ssh!” cautioned the Indian. “I think I hear something.”

Dick had heard something too—a slight crackling in the brush behind him and a little off to his right. A shiver of apprehension coursed down along his spine. Dizzy with weakness, he shrank still closer to the tree. Just then Pierre Mekewai plunged forward, his quick Indian eyes catching sight of Dick’s protruding arm. Firing from his hip, he darted back to cover. The bullet sliced the bark of the balsam. Dick heard the sound of running footsteps. A full half-minute passed.

“Stop!” commanded a voice some distance away, followed by the crack of a gun.

His heart pumping, Dick bounded from behind the tree, into the underbrush, believing that both Frazer and the Indian had fled. Too late he discovered his mistake. A blinding flash almost in his face, a sharp pain in his left arm, the distorted picture of the white fear-struck face of Frazer!

Carried forward by his own momentum, he collided with his opponent, striking up the arm that still held the smoking weapon. Grappling, they went down. The struggle was short and spirited.

“I’ve got you!” rumbled Dick, his hands fastened like leeches upon the other’s wrists. “Drop that gun!”

He was still holding Frazer when the policeman came running up. The corporal purloined the revolvers of both vanquished and victor. He assisted Dick to his feet.

“Good boy!” he breathed. “Hurt badly?”

Before Dick had time to answer, Sandy joined them.

“You’re wounded!” shouted the newcomer. “Can’t you see, you’re wounded.”

“Just a scratch,” Dick smiled feebly. “A mere flesh wound, Sandy. Corporal Rand, will you twist on a tourniquet? I’m sorry that Mekewai got away. It was my fault. I think I was too hasty.”

“You’re good,” grinned Rand. “I’ll take a little of the responsibility of Mekewai’s escape myself. When he went past me, I called to him to stop.”

“Then you shot at him,” guessed Dick. “That was your revolver I heard.”

“Yes, he’s wounded.”

The policeman stepped forward and prodded Frazer with his foot.

“Get up!” he ordered savagely.

When the former factor had groped to an upright position, Corporal Rand turned upon Sandy.

“Watch him,” he instructed, “while I look after Dick’s arm.”

The policeman worked hurriedly and in a manner that left no doubt in the minds of his onlookers that he knew his business. He had just stepped back to relieve Sandy

when, through the screen of trees ahead, two figures hove into view. Perceiving them, Dick exclaimed softly under his breath.

“Bless, me, if he didn’t come along after all,” gasped Corporal Rand. “The rascal!”

Hands clawing the air, Pierre Mekewai, savage and vindictive-looking even in defeat, marched toward them. Ten paces behind, equally savage and vindictive-looking, came the Indian’s captor—a young man with a bandage wound around his head!

“By cripes!” Sandy broke the stillness. “By Golly, it’s the first time that Toma ever disobeyed an order.”

Corporal Rand tried to look severe, bit his lips, then presently threw back his head and laughed.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### GATHERING UP THE THREADS.

IN the cabin, recently occupied by Donald Frazer, they found the poke. It was the mate to the one Dick had picked up off the floor of the trading room at Half Way House earlier in the day. Frazer's face fell when Corporal Rand pulled it out of the pack lying in the corner.

"Gold—sure enough!" the policeman's eyes sparkled. "You made a big haul from somewhere, didn't you, Frazer?"

The prisoner ignored the thrust.

"I came by it honestly."

"Glad to hear that."

"It's mine and I'm going to have it. You can turn over that other poke too. Walter MacClaren's fault I didn't take it all with me in the first place. He had no right to drive me away from Half Way House at the point of a gun. There isn't a court in the land that wouldn't exonerate me of the charges you'll bring against me."

Corporal Rand laughed sarcastically.

"You talk like a fool."

"We'll see," growled Frazer. "I've a right to fight for my own. No man can keep from me by force what rightfully belongs to me."

"Are you referring now to the gold?"

"Yes."

"You really have the nerve to stand there and make an assertion like that?" snapped the corporal. "It was stolen and you know it."

"You can't prove it."

"Oh yes, I can. Not very difficult either. The proof is less than a hundred yards away."

Donald Frazer went deathly pale.

"What's that—hundred yards—you, you—do you know what you're talking about?"

"Yes," grimly smiled the policeman. "I do. If you don't believe me, we'll go there together and dig it up."

Frazer staggered back as if from a blow. Every vestige of color drained from his cheeks. In terror his hands went up clutching his throat.

"You—you know!" The sound that issued from his lips was a low breath of agony.

"Yes, I know. A horrible crime! You, Brennan, McCallum and the two Indians will have to answer for it, Frazer. Bit by bit, these boys here have unearthed the evidence that will hang you as assuredly as I'm standing here. Miller's murder will not go unavenged."



Frazer crumpled like a leaf and would have fallen had not Sandy caught him. Dick whirled upon the mounted policeman at the mention of the missing prospector's name, for a full minute not able to speak. He, too, was trembling violently over the very unexpectedness of the revelation.

"Miller!" he cried, when he had found his voice. "The man from Caribou Lake! How do you know that?"

"By putting two and two together, Dick," Corporal Rand answered unhesitatingly. "To you boys belong most of the credit. The evidence I had was inconsequential until it was added to what you had unearthed yourselves."

"I don't think I quite understand," puzzled Dick.

"Very well then, let's review the case. Let's start with Miller, the prospector. At Caribou Lake last fall, Miller made a very rich strike. Before the freeze-up, he had taken out over thirty thousand dollars worth of gold. He remained at his claim all winter, rigging up windlasses, trapping in his spare time, preparing for the active resumption of work in the spring. Late in March, he suddenly decided that he needed more equipment and tools. When Jim Langley visited Miller at Caribou Lake on March twenty-third, the latter explained to his friend that he was setting out for Fort Laird on the twenty-fifth, just two days later. Miller showed Langley two pokes filled with gold—the gold he had mined the previous fall—and told Langley that he was taking it with him.

"From that point, we almost lose trace of Miller. Setting out by dog team from Caribou Lake, he failed to arrive at his destination. The last seen of him was on April third, between Thunder River and Lynx Lake, by an Indian named Henri Karek. The prospector was in good health and had plenty of grub, the Indian claimed.

"I do not know whether you remember or not, but between April third and April tenth we had one of the warmest chinooks we have ever experienced so early in the year. The trails were running water and most of the snow in the open melted. From Lynx Lake to Fort Laird, a distance of eighty-five miles, there is a lot of open country and two small rivers, which flood badly during the wet season. Now on the other hand, between Lynx Lake and Half Way House, a distance of a hundred and twenty miles, there are no rivers at all and the trail threads its way through heavy forests that protect the snow."

Corporal Rand paused. "Do you follow me?" he asked.

Dick and Sandy nodded eagerly.

"Yes, yes, Corporal. Please go on."

"That chinook will explain why Miller didn't continue on his way to Fort Laird. Swollen rivers to cross, poor trail. Remember he had a sledge and dog team."

"So he changed his mind and came on to Half Way House," Sandy interrupted.

"Naturally he would," the policeman replied. "Put yourself in his place. Wouldn't you have done the same?"

"Yes."

"And don't forget he had two large pokes of gold. Deducing that he came on to Half Way House, what happened? Well, for one thing, he was robbed. It is something more

than mere coincidence that Frazer has, or I should say, had two pokes of gold in his possession. The gold was hidden in a secret place. Isn't that true?" Corporal Rand addressed Dick.

"Yes, it's quite true."

"Now we've come to your discovery of the pit in the cellar. What was in this pit? More gold? No. Furs? Possibly, but not very likely. One need not keep fur so carefully hid. Mr. Frazer, with perfect impunity and no fear of detection, could have kept stolen fur in the company's warehouse. So, by elimination and deduction, we arrive gradually at a startling conclusion, namely that the contents of that pit—something that was kept in two burlap sacks—was even of more importance to Mr. Frazer than the gold."

"How did you make that out?" Sandy again interrupted.

"I'll prove it to you. When Mr. MacClaren discharged Frazer and drove him away from the post at the point of a gun, there were two things that the latter was unable to take away with him: the gold hid in the office and the sacks concealed in the pit. If the gold had been of more value to Frazer than the contents of the pit, he'd have tried to get the gold first, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, he would," agreed Sandy.

"But instead of trying to get the gold first, he sent the Mekewai brothers to procure the two sacks. Why?"

"Yes, yes, why?" blurted Sandy.

"Because he was terribly afraid that in his absence someone would stumble upon what he had hidden in the cellar."

"I can't make it out," Sandy scratched his head. "Can you, Dick?"

"Yes," Dick whispered through white lips. "I understand now. God help the man that did it. Don't ask, Sandy—don't ask. It's too unutterably horrible. For your own peace of mind, it is better that you should never know."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FRAZER'S CONFESSION.

DONALD FRAZER'S confession, made on the day following his capture, corroborated the statements which had been made by Corporal Rand. The actual murder, according to Frazer, had been committed by Pierre and Henri Mekewai in the trading room at Half Way House on the night of April 18th, just ten days after the prospector had been seen at Lynx Lake by the Indian, Henri Karek, and within two hours after his, Miller's, arrival at the post.

"He drove in at ten o'clock or very shortly after," Frazer told them. "Since morning it had snowed heavily and the wind had risen almost to a gale. There were five of us in the trading room at the time, Wolf Brennan, Toby McCallum, the two Mekewai brothers and myself. We had all been drinking for several hours. The first intimation we had of Miller's arrival was when we heard the sound of a sledge outside, then a voice calling through the door. Brennan and McCallum went out and assisted Miller to unharness and feed his team and later helped him carry in his grub-box, blankets and the two pokes containing gold. Miller was chilled to the bone and had not eaten for twelve hours. He asked me if I could get supper for him. He especially wanted a hot cup of tea. He was very tired, he said, and wished to get to bed as quickly as possible.

"I went to the door of the loft to summon my native boy, Meschel, who, like Mr. Scott, had already retired, when Wolf Brennan called me to one side, suggesting in an undertone that he would do the work himself. Immediately afterward Wolf started for the kitchen, winking at me covertly as he went past. On some pretext or other, I followed him a few minutes later, and there in the kitchen, while Wolf brewed the tea and prepared the lunch, he told me about the two pokes.

"'They're worth thousands', he informed me. 'Gold enough there to buy our way into Kingdom Come'."

"At first I was appalled at the thought.

"'You mean to murder him?'" I asked.

"Wolf told me that that was exactly what he meant. For a few hundred dollars and a bottle of rum, he said, the Mekewai boys would be willing to slip up behind Miller while he ate and knife him in the back.

"I told him flatly that I wouldn't be party to such a crime. I was horrified. The mere thought of it sent cold shivers running down my back. But after we had two or three more drinks from a bottle, I looked at it differently. For days I had been desperate, wondering where I could get enough money to repay what I had borrowed from company funds—in all about two thousand dollars."

"Why had you borrowed that amount?" interrupted Corporal Rand.

"Money I had lost at cards. I had to cover my shortage before the books were audited or else suffer disgrace and probably imprisonment. I lived in constant fear of

Mr. MacClaren's coming. Here was a chance to get myself out of a very bad hole. I took it."

Frazer lowered his eyes and a deep silence crept over the little room.

"Within thirty minutes of the time I came to a decision," he resumed, "the crime had been committed. Miller's death was almost instantaneous. At my suggestion, we dug the pit under the floor in the cellar. The Mekewai boys concealed the body there, were paid their blood-money and bottle of rum and went home singing."

"Singing!" gasped Dick.

"Yes, they went home singing," repeated the former factor. "Just as soon as they had gone, Brennan, McCallum and I held a short conference and it was decided that I should keep the gold in my possession until it could be sold to advantage. The money received for it would be divided equally among the three of us. Before entering the service of the Hudson's Bay Company I was a cabinetmaker by trade and that night I told them that I could easily construct a wall-cabinet in my office, where we could hide the gold.

"The next morning the Mekewai brothers came over before daybreak—as it had been previously planned—to get the dead man's effects. The dogs were sold to an Indian, who resides at Fort Chipewyan, and all the others things were weighted with rocks and sunk through a hole in the ice in Half Way River.

"Miller's body was the only thing we had to worry about. As the days passed, I began to see that I would never know one moment's peace as long as the corpse remained in the cellar. My waking hours were filled with grim spectres of fear and horror, with a constant dread of discovery. The thing preyed upon my mind so much that finally I summoned Wolf and Toby and explained to them that we must find a safer burial place. The body, I told them, had to be moved. I simply couldn't stand the worry and suspense any longer. I was rapidly becoming a physical and mental wreck. I jumped at my own shadow.

"Brennan and McCallum endeavored to laugh away my fears, but I was abdurate. Wolf pointed out that moving the body again presented unusual difficulties. Even at night there was a chance that someone might see us. The days were getting longer, he said. Neither he nor his partner, he made it quite plain, wished to have anything to do with such a perilous and unnecessary undertaking.

"Thus the matter rested for several days, and then I had an inspiration. As soon as I could send Mr. Scott away, I hired the Mekewai brothers to come over late at night and dismember the body. They put it in sacks and agreed to come back on the following night and take the sacks away and bury them."

Frazer paused, wiping his perspiring face.

"We could not carry out this plan because on the very next morning these three boys appeared. I can not begin to tell you, Corporal Rand, how their coming startled me. I was afraid that the mounted police had in some mysterious way got wind of the murder and had sent them here to spy upon me. I recalled that during the previous summer the boys had assisted you in solving the Dewberry case. By the end of the week, frantic, desperate, I began to plan how I could get them to leave the post without arousing their suspicions."

Again Frazer paused and again he daubed at his flushed sweat-streaked face.

“I need not tell you how I eventually succeeded. You all know what subsequently occurred. But I was afraid even when the boys departed for the island of the dinosaur that they could see into my little game and would return as soon as they were out of sight of the post. In order to make sure on this point, I sent Brennan and McCallum to watch them closely and prevent them from coming back again.

“Strange as it may seem, I had no opportunity during the next few weeks to remove Miller’s body from the cellar. People dropped in at the post unexpectedly. Mr. Stearns, an old friend of mine, came up from Fort Vermilion and remained with me for several days. No sooner had he left than a party of prospectors arrived on the scene and camped in the trees just outside the trading room for a full week. Then you put in an appearance, Corporal, and *within two hours of your departure Mr. MacClaren walked in upon me.*”

Startled by these disclosures, Sandy leaned over and whispered in Dick’s ear:

“Divine interference! And some people doubt the existence of God!”

“Please continue with your confession,” the policeman instructed Frazer.

“I have nothing more to tell.”

Corporal Rand turned his head thoughtfully and looked out of the window. Another deep silence pervaded the room.

“Does old Bill Willison know anything about the murder of Miller?” he asked finally.

Frazer shook his head. “No, not a thing. He’s as innocent as a babe. He doesn’t enter into this case at all except in a small way. He lives in a cabin now along the lower stretches of Half Way River. When Wolf and Toby lost their canoe, they walked back in the wood’s to Willison’s place and hired him to take them up river in pursuit of these boys. On the way, they conceived the plan of dressing Willison like a wild man and frightening the boys so badly that they would leave the course of the river and strike off toward Fort Good Faith.”

“It didn’t work, did it?” glared Sandy.

“No comments, please!” came the corporal’s sharp reprimand.

“You set fire to the warehouse.” The policeman turned again to Frazer.

“Yes, it was a ruse to get Scott and these boys out of the post.”

“Did you instruct Pierre Mekewai to shoot at Dick that night Dick stood near the window of the loft?”

“No, Corporal, I did not. Those instructions were issued by Wolf Brennan who bore this young man a grudge.”

“Who threw the knife that wounded young John Toma?”

“Henri Mekewai.”

“By your orders?”

“No, sir. I knew nothing about it until afterwards.”

Corporal Rand gathered up the sheets of foolscap on the desk in front of him.

“I have your confession here, Mr. Frazer, word for word, just as you have told it to us. Are there any other statements you wish to make apropos of this case?”

Frazer raised his head and for the first time that afternoon he looked straight into the eyes of his questioner.

“With your permission, Corporal,” he stated in a hollow, choking voice, “I’d like to say that heinous as my crime is and black as my character may seem to you, I am ready and willing to pay the penalty. I want you all to know that I hold no brief for myself, expect no sympathy or mercy. On the other hand, I’d like to have you understand, to believe somehow, that here at the last I am a changed man, an altogether different person than he who was one of the slayers of Conroy Miller. Before God, now that it is too late, I am deeply and sincerely sorry. Crime is a terrible thing, Corporal, and if I had my life to live again I swear to you——”

In the middle of a sentence, Frazer stopped short, sank back in his chair and covered his face with his hands. In the deep silence that followed Dick looked searchingly at Sandy and together they rose and tip-toed out of the room. They did not pause until they had reached the path, leading to the river.

“How sweet and cool the air is outside,” remarked Sandy.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### TOMA'S SCAR.

CORPORAL RAND met the three boys just outside the trading room. He, too, breathed deeply of the cool, sweet air, his eyes shining with relief.

"Well," he announced smiling, "the worst is over. Five prisoners in safe custody and everyone of them has confessed. The Mekewai brothers were more reticent than the other three, but I have enough evidence to hang them all. Another case has gone down in the police records."

"Perhaps if we had known," grinned Sandy, "we might not have come at all. What about it, Toma?"

The young Indian moved over and sat down on the bench, his thoughtful, dark eyes turned toward the fringe of poplar and balsam that ran in a zig-zag line around the natural clearing that harbored the white, log building of the great fur company. For a moment he did not speak.

"I think I come anyway," he answered finally. "I like alla time plenty move around. Plenty excitement, too, once in a while."

"Well you got the excitement," grunted Sandy. "Enough to do for a long time. You can be thankful that this job is finished."

"Mebbe not so thankful like you think," Toma retorted evasively.

Corporal Rand looked up in surprise.

"You must like fighting better than I do," he smiled. "In my line of duty I'm forced into it sometimes, but just between you and me, I'd prefer staying out. Now tell us, Toma, why you're not glad that our troubles are all over."

"I am glad," the young Indian objected. "Pretty hard for me I try to make you understand. Mebbe you no feel like I feel. What you say if bad fellow come up, sneaking like coyote, an' make 'em scar on your head that stay there till you die? How you like it stay all night in woods alla same dead man? Make me more mad than ever I feel before. I like do to that Mekewai fellow just what he do to me. No chance now. No chance I ever fight that man again. Tomorrow, next day mebbe, all these bad fellows you take away to Mackenzie Barracks an' I no see 'em any more."

It was a long speech for Toma. Dick and Sandy looked at him in astonishment while Corporal Rand moved over, sat down beside him and in a friendly way, threw one arm over his heaving shoulders.

"I understand what you mean," he said kindly. "But you mustn't forget that this Henri Mekewai will be punished for all his misdeeds. He has many crimes to answer for. You mustn't feel that way about it. You helped to capture him, Toma, and that is surely revenge enough."

"But he no carry scar on his head," the young Indian pointed out.

“True enough. But he carries other scars that one can’t see. His heart and soul are scarred with wickedness and, no doubt, he will be compelled to pay the life penalty.”

Knowing something of the Indian’s point of view, in his own mind, Dick did not blame Toma for the stand he took. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It had been bred in Toma, was the product of generations of savage, relentless ancestors—part of the Indian’s code.

“I didn’t know you were so blood-thirsty, Toma,” Sandy poked fun at him. “You mustn’t think of such things.”

Toma averted his eyes, flushing under the criticism.

“I think all the time about that scar,” he said.

The policeman drummed thoughtfully on the bench for a moment, then again he addressed the young man beside him.

“Yes, Toma, you must forget. If you’ll promise me to overlook this slight, I’ll give you and Sandy a chance to earn a little extra police pay during the next two weeks. Tomorrow I will be compelled to take my five prisoners back to the Mackenzie River Barracks. You and Sandy can render me valuable aid by accompanying my party. I hate to take any chance of losing them now. One can’t be too careful. They are dangerous criminals, desperate men all, and would take the first chance offered them for a break for liberty.”

The young Indian’s eyes brightened.

“Thank you, Corporal, I like that very much.”

“Two weeks at full police pay. I’m giving you and Sandy this chance because on the last occasion it was Dick who helped me.”

“That’s splendid of you, Corporal,” Sandy’s face was beaming. “I’d like to hear what Inspector Cameron says when we bring them in. Aren’t you jealous, Dick?”

Dick laughed. “No, Sandy, the arrangements suits me perfectly. The experiences of the past few days have been so vigorous that I am ready to take a short vacation. I shall wait here till you return.”

The mounted policeman rose preparatory to entering the trading post.

“Very well, then, that is the understanding. You, Toma, and Sandy are to accompany me. We’ll leave here at six o’clock, journeying up the river in two canoes as far as Painter’s Ferry, where we will disembark and proceed eastward overland to the Mackenzie River Trail. When we reach Moose Lake, I think I can arrange for horses to take us the remainder of the way. I left my own mount at Painter’s Ferry.”

“How long do you think it will take us to make the trip?” Sandy asked eagerly.

“About seven days. I’ve made it in five on a hurried patrol, but with the prisoners, of course, we’ll not be able to travel quite so fast.”

“I can expect Sandy and Toma back here then in about twelve or fourteen days?” Dick asked anxiously.

“Yes, it will take about that long. I suppose, Dick, that you will put in your time fishing.”

When Dick shook his head, Sandy broke out into a roar of merriment.



“Dick’s had all the fishing he wants in one summer,” he explained to the corporal. “When we were down river, just after leaving the island of the dinosaur, we lost all our grub and had to fish or go hungry.”

Corporal Rand smiled. “I had almost forgotten. Well, anyway, I’m not worrying about Dick being utterly bored anywhere. He’ll find plenty to keep him busy.”

Bright and early on the following morning, Corporal Rand led out the five prisoners in preparation for their departure. All arrangements had been completed. At the river, drawn up alongside the landing wharf, were two large canoes, packed with grub for the journey to Painter’s Ferry. It had been arranged that four men would go in each canoe, Donald Frazer, Wolf Brennan, Pierre Mekewai and Corporal Rand in one, Henri Mekewai, Toby McCallum, Sandy and Toma in the other. The prisoners were to furnish the motive power for the two crafts. Not only would this keep them out of mischief, but it would give their guards a better opportunity to watch for any attempt at treachery. As a further precaution, no rifles were to be taken. Sandy and Toma carried revolvers in holsters strapped under their left armpits with coats worn over them.

An inquisitive, jabbering crowd followed them to the boat landing. Upon their arrival there, Corporal Rand ordered the prisoners to their respective canoes, and while this command was being carried out, a most unusual thing happened. Instead of stepping into the canoe, Henri Mekewai, the last one to move forward to take his place, suddenly lurched forward and leaped straight into the river.

The action was totally unexpected. By the time Dick and the Corporal had sprung to the end of the wharf, the Indian was thirty feet away, his long arms cutting the water with quick powerful strokes. A sudden splash, and he had negotiated the swift inshore current, where he half-raised from the water, took a deep breath and dove out of sight. While Dick stood dazed by the quickness of it all, he heard a quick pattering of feet behind him and turned his head just in time to see Toma executing a graceful, running leap that carried him flying through the air and into the river a full twenty feet from the wharf.

His next vivid impression was of Corporal Rand. Revolver in hand, the policeman stepped into the nearest canoe, calling out as he did so:

“Sandy, Dick—watch the other boat while I go out and fetch Mekewai!” Then to the three prisoners: “Your paddles, men, and hurry! I’ll shoot the first one who doesn’t do his duty. Now—!”

The craft shot forward. One eye on the prisoner, Dick watched the progress, excitement tugging at his heart. He was sure now that Henri Mekewai had made his escape. On various occasions, he had witnessed remarkable feats of endurance and prowess of Indian swimmers. He feared that Toma had no chance to overtake his enemy. Out there in the current, he could see two bobbing heads about forty feet apart. Two bobbing heads sweeping quickly down the stream.

“Look, Dick!” Sandy shouted. “Toma is gaining! He’ll catch him yet before the canoe gets there. Look, look, Dick!”

A cold shiver suddenly struck its icy fingers through Dick’s chest. For a moment he doubted the evidence of his senses. For the first time, he noticed something that

previously had escaped his attention. As Toma raised one arm in a desperate forward stroke, in the bright sun he caught the glint of steel.

He could see more easily now. Toma was swimming with a knife grasped firmly in his right hand. Like a flash, there came to Dick a horrible realization. The young Indian was planning his revenge! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The memory of that insidious attack in the woods near the Mission Trail apparently burned in his mind with undimmed fury. An insult and injury never to be forgotten!

Sick at heart, the two silent watchers on the wharf, half turned and gazed solemnly into each other's tense, set faces.

"Once an Indian, always an Indian," blurted Sandy. "I'm afraid Toma is going to break *his* promise to Corporal Rand."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### LEAVE-TAKING.

TOMA overtook Henri Mekewai in mid-stream and, with arm upraised brandishing the knife, checked the other's flight until Corporal Rand and the canoe arrived. Not until the two swimmers were pulled aboard did Dick's tension relax. He was glad that it was all over, relieved beyond measure that Toma had not committed his rash act. He stepped back from the edge of the wharf, breathing a sigh of relief. He knew now that not in vain had the young Indian given his promise to Corporal Rand.

"I was afraid for a minute," he heard Sandy's voice. "Terribly afraid, Dick. I thought that in the excitement of the moment, Toma might forget himself. I can see now that he didn't pull out that knife to attack Henri Mekewai. Merely wanted to defend himself. And I don't blame him either. I'd hate to be in a similar position without some means of protection."

"So would I," Dick agreed. "He showed good judgment, that is all, and quick thinking in a time of emergency. Just the same, for a moment it looked as if he really intended to use that knife."

Sandy laughed relievedly. "Neither one of us would have thought a thing about it if we hadn't remembered what Toma had said about carrying that scar. But we should have known him better than to believe that he really would break his promise to Corporal Rand."

The canoe was returning now. It sped back toward the landing and, a short time later breasting the current, shot inshore, coming to a full stop next to the other craft. Rand's voice rang out sharply:

"Toma, we'll wait here while you run up to the post to get a change of clothes. While you're up there, you'd better procure another revolver from Mr. Scott and a box of ammunition. It's poor policy to take a chance with wet cartridges."

Toma grinned as he stepped ashore. "All right, Corporal, I go hurry."

In a moment more he had sped away through the crowd, the object of admiration and respect on the part of the half score of Indians and half-breeds that thronged the landing wharf.

"Pretty close call," Rand looked over at Dick. "Took me wholly unawares. Keep my eyes open next time."

"Weren't you afraid for a time?" Dick asked.

"Afraid of what?"

"That Toma would use that knife," Dick answered.

"No, not in the least. He'd given me his promise. I was sure he wouldn't attack Mekewai unless it was to prevent him from escaping. As a matter of fact, he held the prisoner for nearly twenty seconds there in mid-stream until we arrived. If it hadn't

been for him, I fully believe that Mekewai would have contrived to reach the opposite shore. A splendid swimmer.”

“But not as good as Toma,” Sandy pointed out.

“That was proved beyond a shadow of a doubt. All right, Sandy, slip into the other canoe and we’ll be on our way as soon as Toma returns. Pierre, you get in beside Sandy.”

For a moment the policeman grew grim. “For the benefit of the rest of you prisoners,” he glared around him, “I’d like to say that if another person attempts to escape, I’ll show no mercy. I’ll shoot the next man who tries it.”

Wolf Brennan raised his shaggy head and looked straight over at the stern guardian of the law.

“I won’t answer fer the rest of them, Corporal, but yuh can bank on me.”

“Good for you, Wolf.”

“An’ me too,” said Toby McCallum.

“Thank you, Toby.”

“If it ain’t out of order,” Brennan spoke again, “I’m kind o’ curious tuh know just where you’re takin’ us.”

“Mackenzie Barracks,” snapped the officer.

For a period of nearly ten minutes, conversation waned. Sandy had taken his place in the canoe and kept glancing back toward the trading post, looking for Toma.

“Don’t be so impatient, Sandy,” Dick advised him. “He’ll be along presently. When you get there, give my respects to Inspector Cameron.”

“Righto!”

A well-known figure made his way along the path from the warehouse. Not long afterward, the young Indian, attired in dry clothing and grinning broadly, took his place in the canoe beside Sandy. The order was given to start. Paddles dipped in the water.

“Good-bye, Dick, good-bye!” shrieked Sandy and Toma.

“Good-bye,” Dick answered, feeling suddenly very lonely and out of it.

Corporal Rand turned, smiled and waved his hand.

“Keep out of mischief, Dick,” he advised him.

“I’ll try to,” responded Dick.

To the surprise of everyone, Wolf Brennan swung half way around and leered back toward shore.

“Don’t go diggin’ up no more dinosaur’s bones,” he called out mockingly, while Toby McCallum bent forward and gave vent to a cackling, jarring laugh.

On that instant, Dick’s face shadowed and he bit his lips. The threat had gone home. So they had thrown that up to him? His hands clenched as he turned about facing the tittering crowd.

Dinosaur’s bones! Like a ghost of the past, it had come up to haunt him. The memory was not a very pleasant one. The picture burned in his mind—three credulous young men starting out on a fool’s errand. How easily they had all been taken in. A

mere child, he reasoned bitterly, would have known better. Eyes straight to the fore, he strode angrily across the landing and up the familiar, well-beaten, path.

“I’ll show them yet,” he blurted angrily to himself. “I’ll make it my business to wipe out that disgrace if it’s the last thing I do.”

In the trading room, Mr. Scott awaited him.

“Well, have they gone?” he inquired eagerly.

“Yes,” answered Dick, forcing a smile, “they’re on their way now.”

“Their start wasn’t very propitious, was it?” The factor moved back to the counter.

“No,”—glumly.

“Why Dick,” accused the factor, “you look as if you hadn’t a hope in the world. I wouldn’t worry if I were you. Your friends will return safely. Two weeks isn’t very long, Dick, when you stop to consider.”

“I wasn’t thinking of that. I—I mean I know they will. It isn’t that.”

“For goodness sake, then, what is the matter?”

Dick slumped into a chair, removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Mr. Scott,” he began, “we’ve been pretty good friends and I’m going to take you into my confidence. Something is troubling me. Perhaps you can help. Perhaps——” he paused, regarding the other perplexedly.

“You can depend on me,” the other did not hesitate. “What is it?”

“It concerns the dinosaur.”

“Dinosaur!” gasped the factor.

“Yes. I’ve decided that I’m going to do something about it. Have you ever seen it, Mr. Scott?”

The factor shook his head. “No, never,” he answered. “I’ve heard of it though. I was here two years ago when Donald Frazer went up to look at it. Quite a curiosity, I believe.”

“You’re right. It is. It must be a very valuable fossil. I believe that Frazer was right when he told us, Sandy, Toma and me, that it was very valuable. No doubt, some museum somewhere would be glad to pay real money for it.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. But what are you driving at, Dick? You’re the most restless scamp I ever saw. Exactly what is on your mind now?”

“I’d like to make a contract with someone to take that dinosaur outside—to sell it.”

“Is it because you are short of money? If you are, I——”

“No,” Dick interrupted, “that isn’t it at all. I want to take out that dinosaur for reasons of my own, Mr. Scott.”

“You’re really serious about this?”

“Never more serious in my life.”

“Well what do you want me to do to help you?”

“First of all, I want your advice. Just for the sake of argument—supposing that it were humanly possible to remove the skeleton from that island—where could one be likely to sell it?”

Mr. Scott pursed his lips and gazed at Dick thoughtfully.

“Well I must confess that that’s a big order. Guess I’ll have to think it over. Have a sleep on it. No, wait a minute! Tell you, Dick, what I’d do if I were in your shoes and really wanted to sell that dinosaur. I’d write to the Canadian Geographical Society at Toronto and get their advice. They know all about such things. Just the sort of project they’d be interested in.”

“Thank you,” said Dick, his eyes shining. “I appreciate your suggestion. Now we come to the really difficult part. Supposing that the society really is interested, how in the name of all that’s worth while am I going to solve the problem of transporting—conveying it outside? Remember the thing must weigh tons.”

“As large as that?”

“Yes.”

The factor wrinkled his nose in perplexity. “That lets out a raft or canoe. Why not build a scow?”

For a moment, Dick’s heart leaped. Then suddenly he became serious again.

“No, that wouldn’t do either. Even a scow would be battered hopelessly about in the rapids. The dinosaur, unless very carefully taken apart and crated—and I wouldn’t know how to do that—could not be carried over the portages. And even if it could be, you couldn’t portage a scow. If you let it go through the rapids, it would be broken up. Remember, too, that you are bucking an upstream current. What motive power would you use for the scow?”

Mr. Scott threw up his hands in a gesture of mock despair.

“Enough! Enough!” he cried. “I can see now that a scow is out of the question.”

“At the same time,” puzzled Dick, “it wasn’t a bad suggestion. As you know, the skeleton of the dinosaur is on an island in the center of a lake. We could build a scow to take it to shore. But what to do with it after we got it there, is more than I can tell you. I’ve racked my brains trying to figure it all out. From the lake of the dinosaur to Big Rock River, a tributary of the Peace, is over five hundred miles. There are no trails. Even if we had plenty of horses and wagons, it would be absolutely impossible to take the dinosaur out that way.”

“I give up,” sighed the factor. “From what you have told me, that dinosaur seems to be pretty safe from molestation. It’s a hard problem, and just now I can’t think of any solution. Why bother with it, Dick? The game isn’t worth the candle.”

Dick shook his head stubbornly. “There must be some way. Nothing is impossible. I won’t give up yet. I won’t!”

Mr. Scott was surprised at the other’s vehemence. He stared at Dick wonderingly, then turned and strode over to the door. Just then a customer came in and the subject was dropped. His brows puckered, Dick lounged to the door and looked outside.

“Hang the luck!” he whispered to himself. “The farther I get into this thing, the more difficult it appears.”

With an impatient, angry gesture, he yanked his hat down over his eyes and strode outside.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE RIVER PILOT.

ON the next day, the routine and monotony of life at the post was broken by the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer from Painter's Ferry. It carried a cargo of merchandise and the bi-monthly mail for persons residing at the post and vicinity. Dick was on hand when it hove to and tied up at the landing. Factor Scott was also there and waved his hand at the pilot, Captain Morrison, who stood near the rail while the gangplank was lowered. A moment later, a crowd of passengers trooped down to the shore. Dick followed the factor who went aboard to speak to the captain.

"You're a day ahead of your schedule," he smiled as they shook hands.

Captain Morrison was a grizzled veteran of twenty years' continuous service with the great fur company. Few men knew the North better than he. On the Athabasca, the Peace and the Mackenzie Rivers and Great Slave Lake he had passed a long and eventful career. Scarcely a white person in the North that he had not met at some time or other. He smiled when he saw Dick, stepped forward and extended a brawny hand.

"Perhaps you don't remember me, my boy. You're Dick Kent, aren't you? I was at Peace River Crossing two years ago when you made that flight from near Fort Good Faith to the Crossing in that airplane with that fire ranger."

"At the time of the small-pox epidemic," Dick recalled. "I remember you now."

"I had the *Northern Queen* then. My run was from Fort Vermilion to Hudson's Hope. Got transferred up here this spring."

Morrison turned for a moment to call out instructions to the first mate, then resumed:

"Still assisting the police?"

"Occasionally," answered Dick.

"That's what I thought. We passed Corporal Rand, Mr. Frazer and a number of others in two canoes. Where are they bound for?"

"Mackenzie Barracks," answered Mr. Scott.

"Frazer accompanying the policeman?"

"Yes."

"Had some trouble here?" persisted the captain.

It was a little difficult for Mr. Scott to explain the circumstances. He hesitated, looking at Dick.

"You have guessed correctly, Captain Morrison. Donald Frazer, the former factor here, has been arrested for complicity in the murder of Conroy Miller, a prospector. The motive was robbery. With the exception of the two young men you might have noticed in one of the canoes, all the others in the party were implicated."

Captain Morrison stalked to the rail and looked down at the scene of activity below. His mouth twitched and he wiped his perspiring face with a shaky hand.

“Good Heavens! I never would have suspected—it is hard to believe—Frazer! The last person on earth I’d associate with such a crime.”

“That’s true,” Mr. Scott admitted. “He’s changed a lot in the last two or three years. Gambling and drinking led up to it. He was pressed for money, had appropriated funds belonging to the company.”

“Weren’t two of those prisoners Toby McCallum and Wolf Brennan? Seems to me I recognized them.”

“That’s who they were. The others were Henri and Pierre Mekewai, two Indians.”

“Never heard of the Indians, but Toby McCallum and Wolf Brennan I know well. Very unscrupulous, both of them. At one time, about ten years ago, they worked under me. I was on the Athabasca then. My run was from Guard to Athabasca Landing. Lazy, impertinent, light fingered. I had the devil’s own time with them. Finally forced to dismiss them from my employ.”

“How far do you run up the river?” Dick asked, hoping to change the subject.

“I go as far as Big Rock Lake. During high water, occasionally I go down Big Rock River which flows into the Peace.”

Dick started. “You mean to say, Captain, that in high water you can run your steamer clear from here to Peace River Crossing?”

“Quite right, my boy. A month ago I could have done it quite easily. But not now. Under the present arrangement, all the supplies for these northern posts in this immediate territory, are freighted across country from Peace to Big Rock Lake. Costs the company a pile of money, too. If the cost wasn’t so prohibitive, we would deepen the channel in Big Rock River.”

At this juncture, Morrison was called away to supervise the work of unloading cargo stored in the hold. Dick and Mr. Scott watched the proceedings for a time, then turned and retraced their steps to the post.

“You don’t know how hard it was to tell Captain Morrison about Frazer,” confided the latter. “He and Frazer were pretty close friends at one time, I believe. I’ve often heard the former factor speak of him in rather laudatory terms.”

“It was quite a shock to him. You could see that. By the way, when does Captain Morrison make the return trip to Big Rock Lake?”

“Early tomorrow morning. He always ties up here for the night. All afternoon they’ll be loading cordwood which, as you know, they use for fuel. Also, I have nearly two hundred bales of fur ready for shipment.”

So, as was his usual custom, the grizzled pilot of the North’s great waterways remained at Half Way House for the night. Dick spent the afternoon in a futile wandering about, still pondering over the problem of the dinosaur. The captain’s statement, that in the spring, when water was high, his steamer could proceed as far south as Peace River Crossing, filled him with unbounded joy. If only he could think of some way—some plan by which he could bring the fossil from the Lake of Many Islands to Half Way House, his perplexity would be at an end.



“It can’t be impossible,” he kept repeating to himself over and over in a monotonous, mournful undertone. “I simply must think of some way before the boys return.”

But how? Almost within his reach, that remaining barrier of three hundred miles of wilderness held him from his goal. The thought was maddening. Restless as a sprite, he paced back and forth between the post and the river at least twenty times. Again he considered Mr. Scott’s suggestion regarding a scow. Wasn’t there some way of pushing or hauling such an unwieldy craft through the rapids opposite the portages? For a time, he seriously considered the advisability of a gasoline motor in the scow.

Of all the plans that had come into his mind, the last seemed most feasible. Yet, it had its drawbacks too. In the first place, he didn’t have a motor or the gasoline with which to run it. It would cost a lot of money and a good deal of time would elapse before he could even hope to try out his plan. In case that it should prove to be impracticable, he would be out a good sum of money and no nearer a workable solution.

After supper, he sat in the dining room, still pondering the question. He could hear Captain Morrison and Mr. Scott conversing in low tones at the opposite side of the room. Now and again, a word or phrase came to him. Tonight Captain Morrison was in a reminiscent mood and he regaled his host with many tales of a long lifetime spent in the northern Canadian wilderness. His voice droned on and on happily. Occasionally he lapsed into thoughtful silences, industriously sucking his pipe. The room was pleasantly warm and Dick felt tired and sleepy.

He rose lazily to his feet and went to a window and looked out. He was standing close to Captain Morrison now and could hear every word that was being said. In spite of himself, he became interested.

“In 1904, I think it was,” Morrison paused for a moment, puffing at his pipe. “Yes, 1904. I was running on this river same as I am now. A different steamer though, the *Lady Marian*. Trim little vessel she was and, at that time, the fastest boat that ever headed into these northern waters. She was new and spick as a pin. I was proud of her. I wasn’t a bit ashamed when that distinguished party of Hudson’s Bay officials, I was telling you about, came out here from London, England on their round of inspection.

“There were a couple of Lords and an Earl or two in that party. I picked them up at Big Rock Lake and steamed up here for Half Way House in one of the worst storms I have ever seen. It had rained steady for six days. River flowing like a torrent. Drift bumping up against us every few minutes. So nasty outside that not one of the party could come out on deck. Thermometer dropping every hour. That was in April, too—the tail end of the month. My second trip since the ice went out. Near Painter’s Ferry I was standing in the bow, watching the drift, when I heard someone come up behind me and felt a hand on my arm. I turned, and so help me Bob, if it wasn’t the commissioner himself.

“ ‘When do we arrive at Half Way House?’ he asked me.

“ ‘In about six more hours,’ I told him.

“He nodded to me, pinched my arm in a friendly way and went below. I kept watching the drift until the dark came. All the time the storm was increasing. The rain

turned into a wet, blinding snow. It kept getting colder every minute. I was afraid of the drift and slowed down until I was barely drifting with the current.

“With the engines quiet and the darkness growing more and more intense, I began to see that I could never make Half Way House in six hours. So I went below and explained my difficulties. The commissioner was a very grave man and a little impatient at the delay.

“‘Why don’t you put on a little more steam?’ he asked me.

“‘I’m afraid of crashing into the drift,’ I told him.

“He hesitated, twirled the ends of his waxed mustache and turned to the rest of the party.

“‘Are you gentlemen willing to take the risk?’ he inquired. ‘If you are, I’ll give the captain here instructions to go ahead more quickly.’

“There wasn’t a dissenting voice. They were all anxious, it seemed, to get on to their destination. I went down and gave the engineer his orders.

“‘Full steam ahead,’ I said a little angrily. ‘Give her all you’ve got. The commissioner and his party are in a hurry to get to Half Way House.’

“Soon after, when I went to the deck, the *Lady Marian* was thundering under my feet like a huge locomotive. We drove straight into a head wind, a furious storm of sleet and snow. It kept me busy trying to figure out where I was. Every little while, I was compelled to take soundings. The minutes and the hours slipped on. The night was black as a crow’s wing. Snow piling up in drifts along the deck—slippery as ice. Still no sight of Half Way House. I couldn’t see a light twinkling. I was certain that we must be close upon it by that time and finally I rang orders to the engineer to slow down and, a few minutes later, to stop altogether.

“Nearly frozen, I stood there like a lost child gazing out through the storm. One thing that worried me was the rate of speed we were drifting. I had never seen the current so swift here before. It literally boiled around us. When the steamer went forward again, the velocity of the current increased. Then two miles farther on, it became steadier, less precipitous.

“For a long time I stood out there on the deck, shivering, weary, disgusted, unable to account for the phenomenon. I knew the river like you gentlemen know a book. I had never run into anything like that before. Between Painter’s Ferry and Half Way House, such a current simply did not exist. Then suddenly, like a clap out of a blue sky, it struck me all at once. I got so blamed mad that I felt like jumping overboard. For the first time in all my life, I had committed an unpardonable error.”

“What was it?” asked Dick, unable to contain himself any longer.

With maddening deliberateness, the old river man silently filled and relighted his pipe. He turned toward his young questioner and grinned broadly.

“In the terrific storm and darkness,” he explained, “I had run completely past Half Way House and down an unchartered stretch of river six miles past the first portage. All things considered, I was mighty fortunate. If it had been a few weeks later, I would have run slap-dash into the rocks there at the portage.”

“Did you go back to Half Way House that same night?”

Captain Morrison laughed and shook his head.

“No, that’s the best part of it. It hurt like blazes to go below and tell that distinguished party what a fool I had made of myself. But instead of becoming angry, as I had supposed they would, they had a good laugh over it and instructed me to pull in a little closer to shore where we wouldn’t drag anchor, and stop for the night.

“The next morning was beautiful. The wind had changed into the west and one could feel the faint stirrings of a regular chinook. I was getting ready to turn back, when the commissioner came on deck, all rosy and smiling, and asked me how I had spent the night.

“‘Fine,’ I told him.

“‘Have you got a good head of steam?’

“‘Yes, sir,’ I answered. ‘I can take you back to the trading post in a little over an hour and a quarter.’

“I had stepped forward to give my orders to my engineer, when he called me back.

“‘Have you ever been this far down the river before?’ he asked me.

“I told him that I had not. I explained to him that there were no trading posts further down the river and that navigation was impossible except during high flood.

“‘The lower part of the river has never been charted then?’ he said.

“I shook my head.

“‘Very well then, Captain Morrison, we’ll go on down the river and chart it. We’ll stop at Half Way House on our return.’”

Dick suddenly strode forward and placed an eager, trembling hand on the broad shoulders of the river pilot.

“And did you really chart the river?” he asked in a queer, tense voice.

“Yes, that’s what we did,” the other replied promptly. “We were away two weeks. Went three hundred and fifty miles by actual count.”

Dick suddenly threw his hat in the air.

“Whoopee!” he shouted.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### BACK FROM THE BARRACKS.

“CAPTAIN MORRISON,” said Dick, shaking the pilot’s hand, “I can’t begin to tell you how thankful I am that I remained here tonight and listened to that interesting account of your experiences. It has solved a great problem for me.”

“What problem? I don’t understand. How have I helped you?” Captain Morrison’s questions came like staccato explosions.

“Did you ever hear of the dinosaur in the Lake of Many Islands?” Dick asked.

The river man rubbed his forehead thoughtfully.

“No, I don’t believe that I have. Is there a dinosaur there?”

“On the island of the granite shaft,” explained Dick. “A huge skeleton of a dinosaur, or what has been described as a dinosaur, a big skeleton weighing tons. At Mr. Scott’s suggestion, I’m writing out to the Canadian Geographical Society to see if they will be interested in buying it, or at least, finding a purchaser. My great problem was to discover how to get the thing out of there if I did succeed in selling it. I’ve been studying over it for weeks. Until you came here tonight, I had no idea that it was possible to descend the river in a steamer even in high water.”

“You didn’t!” gasped the captain.

“No, I didn’t. None of us did.”

“I thought that nearly every one knew that the river had been charted,” mused the old pilot. “I have the chart in my possession right now. In the morning, if you will accompany me to the steamer, I’ll show it to you.”

“Splendid,” enthused Dick. “Now comes the next difficulty. Do you think the Hudson’s Bay Company would consider a proposal to transport the skeleton from the Lake of Many Islands to Peace River Crossing?”

“Why not?” the captain looked at Dick in surprise. “We carry thousands of dollars worth of freight every year for private individuals.”

“When would be the best time to go up there for it?” came Dick’s next question.

“That depends a good deal upon the season. Ordinarily, I should say, the latter part of April or the first part of May. Certainly not until the snow has all melted and the first spring rains have come.”

“If I can find a purchaser, can I depend upon yours or some other steamer to do the work for me? The reason I’m asking you this is because I’d hate to enter into any sort of contract and then discover at the last minute that you were too busy to make the trip.”

“That difficulty can be solved easily. Let me know just as soon as you have completed arrangements with the society and I’ll charter a steamer for you.”

“Thank you, Captain Morrison. That’s very good of you. I’ll write a letter tonight and will send it out to the Canadian Geographical Society in the mail that you are taking with you tomorrow. Even allowing for delays, I ought to hear from them within two months. If the answer is favorable, I’ll get in touch with you just as soon as I can.”

“Very well, Dick, I’ll expect to hear from you. Now, if I’m not too inquisitive, do you think that such an undertaking as the one you propose will be a profitable venture on your part?”

“I really don’t know,” came the startling answer. “To be perfectly frank with you, I don’t care if I don’t make a single penny.”

Captain Morrison’s eyes popped.

“What’s that? You don’t care? You—you——”

Factor Scott’s amused laugh broke across the room.

“Look here, Dick,” he expostulated, “in fairness to the captain, you ought to give him your real reason for wanting to fetch out the dinosaur.”

“All right, Mr. Scott, I will.”

Dick pulled forward a chair and sat down.

“If you have just a moment or two more to spare, I’ll tell you. For a long time now it had been a sore point with me. A number of weeks ago, at the instance of Mr. Frazer, I went up there to the island of the dinosaur, accompanied by my two friends, Sandy MacClaren and John Toma—the two young men you saw yesterday with Corporal Rand. Mr. Frazer had promised us quite a large sum of money if we would bring the skeleton back to Half Way House. Not until we arrived at the island and saw how large the dinosaur was, did we learn that the expedition was planned by the factor merely to get us out of the way. It was a fool’s errand. It made us all feel silly. Quite a few people, who have heard about it, had a good laugh at our expense. I can take a joke as well as the next one, but this joke was too raw to suit me, or my chums either. We had paid out quite a large sum of money for tools and grubstake and were forced to endure untold, almost unbelievable hardships.”

Captain Morrison’s eyes shadowed.

“Atrocious!” he pronounced. “I don’t blame you in the least for feeling as you do.”

Soon afterward, Dick bade good-night to Factor Scott and the genial river pilot and retired to his room in the loft to write his letter to the Canadian Geographical Society. On the following morning, he was up bright and early and, after a hurried breakfast, went down to the landing wharf, his epistle in hand.

Captain Morrison greeted him cheerily.

“Good morning, young man, you’re abroad early. Were you afraid I’d pull anchor before you had time to mail that precious letter? Bet you didn’t sleep a wink last night.”

Dick flushed under the steady gaze.

“In strict confidence, I didn’t sleep very much, but I guess it was more than a wink. I feel rested, anyway—and happy, too.”

The captain yanked his blue cap farther down over his eyes and bellowed out an order. A sailor, standing idly near the gangplank, jumped as if he had been shot.

“Got to watch them every minute,” grumbled the captain. “By the way, I told you to come over and see that chart. If you’ll come with me to the cabin, I’ll give you a peep at it. Rather proud of that chart. Made under very unusual circumstances. Has the sanction and approval of the highest officials of the Hudson’s Bay Company.”

For nearly an hour Dick remained aboard with the captain, studying the chart and listening to the account of that memorable journey down the river. When the time came for him to go ashore, he shook hands with his benefactor, thanking him once more.

“I never would have solved the problem if it hadn’t been for you,” he declared earnestly, squeezing the pilot’s rough hand. “You can’t realize how happy it has made me.”

“Even happier than the satisfaction of knowing you helped to bring those crooks to justice?” inquired the other slyly.

Dick smiled modestly. “No, I wouldn’t say that. What I mean is that everything has worked out so nicely. The slate is almost wiped clean. Somehow it seemed that our job wasn’t fully completed until we had settled the fate of that dinosaur.”

Captain Morrison laughed, shook hands again and Dick hurried down the gangplank just as the steamer’s whistle shrieked out its warning. He turned to wave a last good-bye then thoughtfully made his way up to the post.

“Never saw such a change in anyone in my life,” commented the factor as Dick breezed through the open door. “Your smile would warm the heart of a stone.”

“That’s just the way I feel,” chuckled the young man. “All I have to do now is enjoy a well-earned vacation while I’m waiting for Sandy and Toma.”

“I bet you can hardly wait until they come. They’ll be as pleased as punch when you tell them the news.”

However, during the next few days, in which he had plenty of time to think it all over, Dick decided that he would say absolutely nothing about the dinosaur for the present. Instead, he would keep that for a surprise until he had received word from the Canadian Geographical Society. By so doing, if the society’s letter was unfavorable toward the project, no one would be disappointed except himself.

Nevertheless, he counted the days, almost the hours, while he waited for his chums’ return. When the thirteenth day came and passed, little lines of worry and impatience began to etch his smooth, brown forehead. On the fourteenth day, he had grown so restless that he found it utterly impossible to remain in one place more than a few minutes at a time. He walked around the post like a lost soul. What was keeping them? Had the prisoners escaped? Through his mind there flashed in review a hundred scenes of lurid, sanguinary combat, through which he could follow the sinister, gliding form of two Mekewai brothers—triumphant at last. So vividly did his troubled imagination conjure up these fantastic horrors, that he could actually see Sandy, Corporal Rand and Toma lying prone and lifeless in the shadow of the sentinel trees along the gloomy, woodland trail to Fort Mackenzie.

At four o’clock in the afternoon, almost crazed by his obsessions, he wandered back toward the trading room, then suddenly stopped short as if transfixed. Coming out of the woods, less than a hundred yards away, were two well-known figures—two laughing and noisy young men.

A thrill of joy coursed through him.

“Hello, Dick!” they both, shouted as their friend bounded forward to meet them.

By the time he had joined them, Sandy and Toma had slipped off their shoulder-packs, heedlessly letting them fall to the ground.

“Fooled you, didn’t we?” cried the former. “Instead of returning by Painter’s Ferry, we struck straight across country. Had a glorious time. Toma shot a moose.”

“How did the prisoners behave?” Dick demanded.

“Everything went just like clock-work,” replied Sandy. “No trouble at all. The Mekewais were docile as two lambs. We both had the satisfaction of seeing the lot of them thrown into iron cells, where they’ll remain until the day of the trial. When that time comes, we’ll be the Crown’s chief witnesses. Inspector Cameron asked me to tell you that.”

“We’ll all be ready,” smiled Dick.

“Inspector Cameron sent his very kindest regards to you,” continued the young man. “He says that we’re getting better and better all the time. Here’s your check, Dick.”

“Thank you,” said the recipient of the money, glancing at the bit of paper while he flushed with pride and pleasure.

“And that isn’t all,” Sandy hurried on. “I almost forgot to tell you an important bit of news. The story of Miller’s strike at Caribou Lake has precipitated a gold rush. Hundreds of prospectors are on their way there and a few already staked out claims. The police think that there’ll be an important camp established near Miller’s claim before the summer is over. Constable Perry left two days after our arrival, to go up there and keep order. The chances are that he’ll be stationed there permanently.”

“Too bad that Miller isn’t there himself,” said Dick. “If his life hadn’t been cut short, he might have lived to become very, very wealthy.”

“That’s true.” Sandy’s face shadowed a little.

Toma turned radiantly upon Dick.

“What you do alla time we be gone?” he asked curiously. “Sandy an’ me tell each other that you get so lonesome that——”

Interrupting him, Dick put aside the implications with a lordly gesture.

“Not a bit of it. Never had a more interesting time in my life.”

“You didn’t even miss us!” gasped Sandy.

Dick flushed as he stooped to pick up the forgotten shoulder-packs.

“Sandy,” he reproved him, “sometimes I think you talk too much. Come on now, Factor Scott will be waiting for you.”

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### HE WHO LAUGHS LAST.

Two months later at Fort Good Faith, Dick received a letter which caused him to exclaim excitedly and then call out in an eager voice to Sandy, who stood just across the room conversing with a half-breed trapper from Willing River.

“Sandy, come here!”

Dick’s chum swung obediently on his heel and hurried over.

“Yes, Dick. What’s up now?”

“A letter about the dinosaur,” explained Dick. “Arrived here just now from the Canadian Geographical Society.”

Sandy’s expression changed suddenly from eagerness to surprise.

“Our dinosaur up there at the Lake of Many Islands!” he gasped.

Dick nodded. “The very same.”

“You mean to tell me you’ve been corresponding with the Canadian Geographical Society about that mountain of bones?” inquired the other wonderingly.

“Yes, Sandy, that’s what I’ve been doing.”

The next question was a very natural one:

“But why?”

“To prove the old saying that the man who laughs last laughs best,” answered Dick enigmatically.

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean just this: Up until the time we encountered the dinosaur, we never tackled any task we didn’t successfully finish. But that dinosaur stuck us. We didn’t know how we’d get the brute out of the country. We lost a certain amount of prestige when we set out upon that undertaking. It made us look like fools. With the exception of Corporal Rand, everybody had a good laugh over it.”

“But it was our first experience of the kind,” Sandy expostulated. “We knew nothing about fossil hunting. Except in a hazy way, we didn’t even know what a dinosaur was. The mistake was natural. I’ll admit that the joke was on us, but almost anyone else, even an older person, might have been taken in by it.”

“True enough, Sandy.” Dick’s hand rested lightly on his friend’s shoulder. “Still I think you’ll agree with me that if we succeed in getting the dinosaur away from the island, we can feel more like facing the world again.”

“Well, what have you done about it? What does the letter say?”

Dick handed over the sheet of paper.

“Read it,” he said.



Ottawa, Canada,  
August 2nd, 1923.

Mr. Richard Kent,  
Fort Good Faith,  
N. W. T.  
Dear Sir:

In reply to your letter, dated June 27th, I wish to say that our society is very much interested in your proposal and early next spring will undertake the preliminary work of exhuming, crating and shipping the fossil you have described. Our representative, Mr. Claymore, has been instructed to proceed at once to Fort Good Faith, where he will arrive about September 1st to take up with you more fully the project of transporting the dinosaur from Half Way River to the end-of-steel at Peace River Crossing.

Yours very truly,  
(Signed) L. P. GRAHAM,  
Secretary for the Society.

Sandy glanced up when he had finished reading, thoughtfully folded the letter and handed it back to his chum.

“I suppose you know what you’re doing, Dick. Made all your plans?”

Dick nodded emphatically. “Yes, down to the last detail.”

“Taking Toma and me with you?”—a slight frown and an assumed air of great indifference.

“You bet I am,” grinned Dick. “You ought to know that without asking. You and Toma are to furnish the brains for my working party.”

THE END.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A Table of Contents was created for reader convenience.

[The end of *Dick Kent at Half Way House* by Milo Milton Oblinger (as Milton Richards)]