

*Mike Mullins of
Boston Crick*

O. T. G. Williamson

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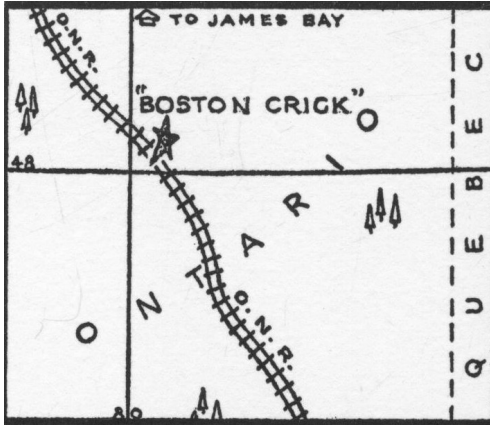
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O. T. G. WILLIAMSON

Mike Mullins of Boston Crick



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TO
MARJORIE

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Foreword

The most notable production of Northern Ontario has not been its silver or its gold, its sawlogs, pulp and paper or its fertile farms. Great as all these have been and much as they have added to the wealth and stability of Canada, they are out-classed as distinctive achievements by the people of the country. These are truly a product of the North Country. It took them as they came, a heterogeneous crew, and, rejecting the unfit through lack of spirit and lack of hardihood, moulded them to its heart's desire. It was a stern school which demanded courage, dogged fortitude and a strong measure of gaiety from all its pupils. There were hardships, discouragements and many forms of death to face and overcome. Good men died in its holocausts. Lonely graves are marked with a twelve-inch blaze at the foot of its rapids. The lakes took their toll and so did falling timber and premature explosions. But, through it all, they persisted and, millionaire or railway navy, they finally received the accolade that dubbed them as true Northerners. They are a special race of men, these Northerners and the hall mark of their guild is still plainly to be seen.

In the beginning, they were a heterogeneous crew. They hailed from the four corners of the earth and from all its seven seas. Settlers came, by boat up the long stretch of Lake Temiskaming, from abandoned southern farms and straight from England. Railway construction crews came from wherever jobs were scarce and many stayed as section-men along the line. With the Cobalt rush, came miners from the hard-rock counties of Eastern Ontario, from the Yukon, British Columbia and Nova Scotia. They came from Butte, Nevada and New Mexico, from Kalgoorie, the Rand, South China and the Malay States. There were Cousin Jacks, Scots and Englishmen, with Irish from the North and South. There were French, Finns and Scandinavians; navvies, mule skimmers, muckers, miners, axemen, river drivers, sawyers, blacksmiths and men whose only stock-in-trade were strong backs and optimism. Very notably, they came from Renfrew, Pembroke and Calabogie.

The Northland took them all and taught them its own code of ethics. It was simple and it was adequate. A man learned to stand on his own feet and he learned to help his fellow in distress. The latter was imperative regardless of danger, self-interest or inconvenience. For all that there was claim-jumping on occasion, a man's personal property was inviolable in the bush. Food, canoes and snowshoes, on which life might depend, could be cached with the full assurance that they would be found intact when wanted. Yet a well-stocked cache of food could be drawn on in dire necessity but such loans were always scrupulously repaid. They were all good fellows or they

did not last. The land that could not break them taught them to love it with a deep passion which seldom found expression.

For all that the Northland minted them with its own stamp, they remained rugged individualists. Jack Munro, Mayor of Elk Lake and heavy-weight contender, wore no man's strait-jacket. Bob Potter, with fifty-four years of the North behind him, is still the Northerner *par excellence*. Kindly, humorous and straight, he has the same optimism which led him as a boy to Lake Temiskaming in '98. Smith Ballantyne, whose prodigious packing feats are legendary, still works, after fifty years of work, for the land he loves. There is Ken Ross, of Varsity football fame, who ranged the country far and wide from the turn of the century, surveying, prospecting and building transmission lines. He too was moulded by its code. Their name is legion. Humble men with honoured names and human frailties; Hollinger, Gillies, Wilson, Preston, McIntyre and Horne. Then there were characters like Father Paradis, who drained Frederick House Lake with a shot or two of dynamite. This act caused more than raised eyebrows in official circles and Father Paradis' attempt to colonize the arid silt exposed did nothing to avert their censure. Frederick House Lake today reflects the blue skies for miles on the way to Timmins but Father Paradis is forever part of the Northland's story.

The rush to the Northland of Ontario began in earnest fifty years ago. Though much remains, the memories of those days are dying fast. Since folk-lore, the most ephemeral of essences, supplies the high-lights which make history a vital story, it was felt that some at least of the feeling of those days should be preserved. An attempt has been made in these stories to record something of the gaiety of those fading times. They are not tales of heroism or of high emprise. The Northerner was a hard-working man who could not have worn a hero's bays with any degree of comfort. Rather they attempt to recall the flavour of the times. If some of the incidents are true, it is hoped that they are none the worse for that. Those that are invention pure and simple conform in general pattern with incidents which did take place.

If it is asked whether Mullins is a real person, it may assist to recall that an old timer at Kirkland Lake said that he could not remember his being at Boston Creek. Since the old timer was notoriously forgetful, this might be taken as proof positive. I can only say that I have lived with him during the past seven years and he is as real as I can make him. You will find him today, under half-a-dozen names, at lonely stations along the line, in little country stores, in cookhouses at lumber camps and at mine bunk-houses in the bush. Annie, a bit shrewder than Mike, is the Northern woman, all

honour to her, who shared adversity and disaster with her man and won through to a placid life, looking back without regret. O'Rourke may do a bit of bootlegging on the side but he is a good fellow for all that. And so are they all who observe the Northland's code.

If Mullins serves the purpose of giving some amusement, he will ask no better. For my part, if he has succeeded in recording something of the life of Northern Ontario in those old formative days, I am content.

—O.T.G.W.

North Bay, September 24, 1952

Introducing Mike, Doyle, O'Rourke and Annie

This is *le mot juste*, since what follows is purely introductory. Candour forces me to say that I did not meet Mullins at Cobalt in 1907 although, on his own admission, he was at the Kerr Lake Mine that year. My first knowledge of him came from Old John, when he related the pig shipment episode. Old John, otherwise John Doyle, is a T. & N.O. Agent who has been in retirement for the past ten years. A close friend of Mullins, he outranks him on the Seniority List by about two minutes, which, together with his masterful attitude, has permitted him to dominate the situation whenever they are together. My first actual contact with Mike came when, still indignant because of the notoriety thrust upon him by the publication of his Big Moment, he told me about the measles epidemic up at MacDougall Chutes. Since these constituted my introduction, they must serve as well to introduce the reader to Mike Mullins.

For those who are not content to paint their own mental pictures, it may be said that Mullins is a plain man of medium height and breadth of shoulder. He would pass unnoticed in a crowd but even a casual glance might be arrested by his eyes. They are eyes which smile even when his lips are set; eyes which, while they may be no asset in a poker game, are peep holes to the inner man. Mike sticks his chest out occasionally when he feels that he has pulled off something good, which distinguishes him from Old John whose chest is always distended. A masterful man is Old John with plenty of self-assurance but with a heart of gold.

O'Rourke? There's a man. Fifty years ago in Southern Ontario, his blood-brothers might have been seen in half a hundred pleasant, well-kept bars, sliding beer mugs half their length and accepting cigars for many a proffered drink. His moustache is of the proper weight and curl and he would be a museum piece except for the subtle variations forty years of Northern Ontario have imposed. The ruddiness and pleasing plumpness of the authentic type has been replaced by a weather-beaten tan and a certain muscular stringiness but he still radiates hospitality and is a good fellow according to his lights.

Annie is a sweet woman, one of the best. You may picture her with eyes of the deepest blue and a kind and understanding smile. If her face is now lined, the lines are an honourable accumulation of good marks conferred for forty years of backing up her man and smiling through the vicissitudes of pioneering. She lets Mike talk, when a word from her might puncture one of his rosier dreams. She is a motherly woman and Mike thrives on it.

For the others, if you come to Northern Ontario, you will find them all the way from North Bay to Moosonee. Not at all heroic, still they are part of the warp and woof of the pattern and fabric of Northern life.

Mike Mullins of Boston Crick

CHAPTER ONE

Mike Mullins' Big Moment

It all happened long ago at a little bush station south of Matheson. Much of it came to me second hand and what I had from Mike himself was so larded with talk about organization and organizing ability—his presumably—that it only tended to confuse the issue. Anyway, from one source or another, the incident worked out as near as may be like this.

Mike Mullins was in a quandary. His big moment had come and he feared that it might be too big for him to cope with single-handed. “There’s glory in it for sure,” thought Mike, “but more kicks than kisses if I don’t pull it off.” A voice over the telephone had informed him that in three days there would be a shipment of a thousand pigs to handle. Mike was alone. The Agent, for two days, had been fighting the thousand devils that torture a man in a severe bout of ’flu. No help could come from that quarter. It was sink or swim and Mike decided to take the plunge. Never before had pigs been shipped from that point and Mike was determined to share none of the glory of such a shipment with the Chief Despatcher.

The little bush station had a twenty-car siding. A two mile spur stabbed off into the bush to serve a now long-forgotten mill. Trains stopped for flags and devil a bit else. It was a peaceful spot. Rather too peaceful for the amount of business now in sight.

“Pigs is it,” thought Mike, “and one thousand of them. Where they’re coming from ’tis hard to say but shipped they’ll be and nothing short of murder’s going to stop me. One thousand pigs and how big would a pig be now?” It seemed to Mike that they came in assorted sizes and big pigs would take more cars than little pigs. “How big was a big pig?” That was the question. Memories of fat pigs from his youth made them appear enormous. “Not a black-fly’s eyebrow less than six feet long they be, for certain, and two feet across the beam at the very least. One thousand of the creatures! Sure, ’tis big business I’m engaged in and one of those days it will be Mr. Mullins, General Freight Agent, no less.”

This bright vision faded abruptly when Mike realized that the thousand had to be reduced to terms of stock cars. Arithmetic in its simplest form was higher mathematics to Mr. Mullins. Sums that required no more than his ten fingers for their solution were well within his compass but calculations involving lead pencils and furrowed brows were quite another matter. However, he went to it.

“One thousand pigs is it and each of the creatures two feet across the back of him.” He plunged deep into the problem. Slightly blown, some minutes later, he came up with the answer. “If you stand them side by side along the track, they’ll make a procession sideways two thousand feet no less and that’ll bring more than half of them out on the main line. Anyway standing them up like a lot of soldiers will never do. ’Tis into stock cars, bad cess to them, I’ll have to pack them.” With grim determination, Mike went at it again with pencil and maledictions against every pig that wasn’t already reduced to bacon.

Fifty stock cars was the answer. Try as he would, there was no other and the siding would take twenty. “The saints be with me but they may be little pigs but, big or little, ’tis twenty cars they’ll get. Worry enough I’ve had already to be giving thought to the comfort of a pig. Crowd in, you devils, and lucky you are to be riding at all, at all.” Twenty cars and Mike looked along a siding as empty as the main line streaking away into the bush.

A man can only stand so much and Mike needed rest. It is doubtful if he got it. Years later Mike asked if counting sheep would make one sleep. When assured it would, all he said was, “Counting pigs won’t work. I’ve tried it.” However each day brings its problems and, tired as he was, Mike was up with the crack of dawn. There on the siding, blank the day before, as if in answer to prayer, were ten stock cars. “’Tis leprechauns I’ll be seeing next. Sure, and I must be living right.” Half his problem was solved because a way-freight in the night had dropped them to make a passing farther up the line. All day they stood there and no one made a pass at them. Ten cars and he needed twenty. In the morning the pigs would arrive and big or little they must be shipped. It was a worrying day for Mike and the temptation to call in the Chief Despatcher was strong but resisted. This was Mike’s show and he would see it through alone.

Night was falling and there were still only ten cars. The barometer of Mike’s feelings was falling fast and pointed strongly to foul weather when a toot from the sawmill switch engine made it jump a point or two. The dinkey rumbled out of the bush with a string of a dozen boxcars ahead of it. Spotting these on the spur near the main line switch, it uncoupled and

chugged its way back to the mill. “Tempting a decent man, is it? ’Tis piracy on the high seas or pigs rampaging in the ticket office and I has no choice. I’ll do it and may the saints protect me.”

A car mover was his only tool and it’s far less handy than a 300-class locomotive. Fortunately the spur was on just the suspicion of a grade. Setting all brakes, Mike cut loose the first car and started pumping. It was a night of toil and backache, pumping the mover, throwing switches and hopping up to brake wheels. At last it was done in the first streaks of early dawn and Mike, exhausted, croaked, “Bring on yer pigs.”

He had not long to wait. Around a curve in the road, the first wagon appeared and a car, passing it at high speed, drew up to the station. A burly man hopped out, glanced at the siding and almost raced up to Mike. “Man, man,” he cried, “I’m lucky. I’ll need the lot and a hundred more.”

“The lot of what?” said Mike.

“The cars, man, the cars,” he roared. “Here’s the boom at the pulp mill gone and all the logs hightailing it to James Bay. The chippers are eating into the stock pile like twenty beavers at a poplar. We’ll save the situation. There’s twenty thousand cords of pulpwood waiting for your cars and you’d better be ordering more at once.”

“The cars is bespoke,” said Mike, grandly, and turned to greet the man on the first wagon.

“You’re the pig man, I take it,” said Mike, “and when will the pigs be coming?”

“Sure they’re here,” said the man. “Can’t you see them on the wagon?”

“What’s here?” said Mike.

“The sow and pigs,” said the man, “and perhaps you’ll help the crate on to the platform.”

Mike stared, but it was too much for his jaded nerves. “One sow and pigs! One thousand pig! And ten thousand ring-tailed devils.” He caught the pulp man as he was stepping into his car. “The cars is yours,” he said, “Sure and I couldn’t see you stuck. I’ve rearranged my shipments and you can start loading at once. It’s all along of my organizing ability.”

CHAPTER TWO

A Tough Christmas

Pigs is it and Old John indeed. Him that hasn't wore out his first set of store teeth yet! There's plenty the same man could learn from pigs if he had the mind to do it. But no, it's blacken a man's character he's after doing until every grinning engine-driver grunts to me as he drills by. Or it's, "Mr. Mullins, have you any stock cars on the siding? There might be a bit of pulpwood to be loading in the morning." 'Tis me that could be telling how he come to be drove out of Galway, no less, if I had a drop of his black blood coursing in my veins. Sure, I'm not one to be telling tales on him but

It was the winter of '34 and times was hard all over. MacDougall Chutes was hit hard like all the rest. Of course people was eating, for none ever starve in the North Country, but it was slim pickings at the best. There was little ready money and not much of anything in the store. All through November, the wood piles took an awful beating and every house was banked with snow right up to the sills. Come December and there was mornings when you couldn't tell the time of day on any thermometer in the village. It was cold and no mistake and the snow kept coming.

The school was open and Nora, the school mistress, as pretty a girl as ever you'll see outside of Ireland and always with a smile for me and John, was hard put to it to gather any sort of a class about her. The village children made the grade, except the littlest of them, but them that came in from the country stayed at home. We'd see them ploughing through the drifts, wrapped up like Eskimos and their little noses red when they wasn't white with frost bite. I'm thinking that Nora was undressing them and thawing of them out and getting them ready to go home the most of the time.

One day we're watching the children bucking through the drifts, when John says, "Mike, what day is it?"

"Sure," I says, "it's the eleventh of December."

"And what will it be two weeks from now?" he says.

"It will be the twenty-fifth," I says, for I'm quick at figures.

"And what day is that?" he keeps on like I'm one of Nora's pupils.

“Bedad,” I says, “I was near forgetting. It’s my woman’s birthday and I’ll have to be after getting her a present.”

“You’re no better than a heathen,” says John, “not to be knowing that ’tis Christmas Day.”

“Sure, it’s no matter,” I says, “and me without chick nor child.”

“Take shame to you,” says John. “You see them kids. What kind of Christmas will they be having, with their dad’s not working and most of them living under the black shame of relief?”

By the powers, when he put it that way, it looked pretty slim and hopeless but, at the moment, we both cocked an ear at the schoolhouse right across the way. Bedad, if Nora and the kids wasn’t singing as if their little hearts would burst. “Good King Wenceslaus,” it was and they followed up with “O Little Town of Bethlehem” and “Silent Night.” I’m damned if John, the old fool, wasn’t crying, not that I could see the tears of him for there was a kind of a mist about.

“Well,” says John, when the singing stopped, “What are we going to do about it?”

For the life of me, I didn’t know and I waited for John to give the lead.

“I’ll tell you what we’re going to do about it,” he says. “We’re going to be Sandy Claus to those kids and give them a Christmas like they never seen before. There’ll be a tree in the schoolhouse, with candles on it and fixings like an Orangeman on parade, bad cess to all of them. There’ll be ice-cream and candy canes and animals and hot drinks and cakes and pies. And there’ll be a present for every blessed one of them and a big one for Miss Nora.”

“Where’ll it all come from?” I says. “Devil a bit of it is there in MacDougall Chutes, except the Christmas tree and it might be cakes and pies.”

“You’ll get them,” says John, “and I’ll tell you how.”

I knew it would be so, for he is a masterful man when it comes to giving orders to the likes of me.

“You’ll go this day and collect the money,” he says. “Here’s what I have on me for a starter.”

“Sure,” I says, “I’m working steady myself and I matches you dollar for dollar.”

“’Tis a start,” says John. “Now go to it.” And I did.

Before night, I had a roll would fill a boxcar. The lads at the mill come through handsome. The section gang wasn't a bit behind. The store and the hotel kicked in with what they could. If it wasn't much, it was worth more for the way they gave it. 'Twas done secret. No kid was to know anything about it. Him at the big house, that had known hard times hisself, just asked what we had and doubled it. I was scared, we had so much.

John had been working himself. Every good cook in the village, with an extra bit of flour in the barrel, was pledged to be mum and give a thumping contribution to the feast. John and me worked late that night. There was fifty kids and Nora to look after. An order went out to the big city for the lot of them. Something warm for everyone and something foolish. Drums and horns and games, dolls and sleighs and hockey sticks. I disremember all of it but it was sure enough and there was a red coat and white whiskers for John to play Sandy Claus.

School was out two days before Christmas. The bales and boxes was in the freight shed and as pretty a tree as you ever see was set up in the schoolhouse that very night. John's woman and mine and a dozen others was all over it. You never see its equal. There was red and blue and white running every which way and, bedad, sparkly stuff like icicles hanging down all over. There was candy canes and animals, like John said, and stars and shiny balls. I just stood back and stared and I'm damned if my old woman didn't kiss me in a corner. 'Twas all ready by midnight and not a kid the wiser. All the people in the country had been told and everything was set for the big day.

And what a day it was. An even zero with every flake of snow a diamond and it crunching and squeaking underfoot. Never was so many sleighbells in MacDougall Chutes when the teams started coming in. At seven o'clock the doors was opened. Every kid in town was there, except little Dinny Dixon and him down with measles right forninst the school. There was singing and Nora led such carols as you never heard. Old Rafferty was there with his fiddle and Pete Coture danced jigs and hornpipes like his legs was rubber. That slick young feller from the mill did tricks with cards and, easy as spitting, he'd take things out of the air I never would have thought was there. He took Bob Potter's watch and smashed it with a hammer and there it was next minute safe in Mr. Potter's pocket. You can bet, I kept my hand tight on my own. Then there was eating and it was good to see those kids dig in.

Long around ten o'clock, the big time came. John ducks out to dress hisself over at the station. When next I see him, what with the magic tricks

and dancing and the carols still ringing in my ears, I didn't know him. For me, he was just Sandy Claus, with his red coat and whiskers, a great bulging pack and a twinkle in his eye. I met him at the back door near the tree.

“ ’Tis fine,” I says, “but I can't help thinking about little Dinny Dixon.”

“Give him never a thought,” says John. “When I come across, there he was, with his ma and pa, and their noses like putty on the window pane. So in I goes and Dinny thinking that I'm straight from the North Pole. He's got his skates and his sweater and he's as happy as a kitten with two tails.”

“ ’Tis well,” I says. “The fun can now go on.”

And fun it was as every little gaffer and his sister comes up and gives a bob and gets their presents. Sure, they believed in Sandy Claus that night. Nora comes last. For her, we had a deerskin parka, lined with rabbit skins and trimmed with wolf fur. She put it on and the pretty face of her, framed in the grey softness of it, was prettier than anything I ever hope to see. She made a little speech. At least, she started one and then she cried and kissed the only bit of John's face that wasn't whiskers. All in all it was a grand night. As they straggled home, they was all singing. It was “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” and, bedad, I'm not so sure that some of the angels wasn't singing with them.

That's the end of it—almost. But just to show you what a lunkheaded, ornery derail Old John really is, within a week every house in the town that had a kid was placarded with a red measles sign and old Doc. Macintosh was like to have a nervous breakdown. Pigs is it. Let him talk to me of pigs.

CHAPTER THREE

Patron of the Arts

It was last week that one of the old timers dropped in and at once we were swapping yarns about the early days. He had travelled the line when Cobalt was a pup and stumps were still standing on Third Avenue in Timmins. Varied and vivid were the tales he told and there was more than one about Mike Mullins. Harry McGee knew everyone and there was little about the railway that had escaped his notice.

It was therefore in a mood for reminiscence that I greeted Mike when he breezed in close on Harry's departing heels.

"The best of everything to you, sir," said Mike, "and a grand job you did with my yarn about Old John and him spreading the measles bugs all over MacDougall Chutes. The ribbing he's been getting from the lads has clear put the pigs out of their silly heads. 'Tis sorry I'd be for him if I could forget the tales the same John has told about myself."

"Forget and forgive, Mike," I said, "It's all good fun and not a bit of venom in the lot of it. Spring's here and that's a time for forward thinking."

"Right you are, sir, but I can remember a spring when looking ahead didn't seem to do much good. 'Twas the year after the big fire. That would be in '17 and the whole country burnt out right from Cochrane to New Liskeard." Mike paused and looked me in the eye. Reassured by a bit of green in it, he went on. "Devil a bit of anything was left. I mind the beaver was using cakes of ice to build their dams, a thing never seen before nor since. However, as you say, spring is here and pretty it looked as I come along. The crick's nudging and eating into its banks and singing a tune that puts heart into a man. All the little birds is chirping as if there wasn't three feet of snow into the bush."

"I can see you have quite a love for music, Mike," I said. "Wasn't it the carols that time got you and John to playing Santa Claus?"

"'Twas that and more fun I never had. Yes, music of all kinds is good and the Irish pipes is best of all. Piannys is good too when the pipes is lacking."

"Do you mean to tell me that you play one?" I said, for by this time I was prepared for anything.

“Devil a bit,” said Mike, “but any of them things sort of strums the heart strings of me and puts a tingle in my feet. No, I don’t play none but once I sort of acted as an impresario, I think you calls them.

“ ’Twas this way. In them days, I was the Agent up at Boston Crick. There was some claims about that was being worked though they has played out since. We was busy enough with mine hoists and boilers, pumps and drill steel. Lots of outfits got their chuck then through the Crick and men was coming and going all the time. The little town was pretty active too. All in all times was good right there. Then one day what should come in but a pianny, one of them high kind in a crate like six coffins stuck together. Well we rustled it into the shed and I see by the billing that it’s going to a claim ten miles back in the bush. They had been having trouble holding their men and I guess they thought a little music might liven up the camp.

“Anyway there it was just at the tail end of winter and the road, which was no more than a snow track through the bush, was breaking fast. A week before and taking it in would have been as easy as spitting over a log. Now it was impossible. That pianny was good for a month or two right where it lay. So we shoved it into a corner and that was that.

“Well, about this time there was talk of doings in the village. ’Twas in wartime, you mind, and all the lads of fighting age and some that wasn’t was overseas. They was Engineers and Highlanders mostly for the McKloskeys and the Murphys and the Indians all took a liking for the kilts. These fighting men was boys and ’twas well known that they’d fight the easier if they knew their home folks was backing of them up. So parcels was being sent as often as they could be got together and the letters from the lads was common property. Everybody worked together and the ways of raising money stopped at nothing short of blowing safes. This time ’twas to be a concert and I’m busy with my freight and passengers so I have no part in the arrangements.

“First I know, they was sticking printed posters on the station. Never had the Crick done anything so grand. There was to be singers and comic fellers, a fiddler and a magician, musical glasses and two pianny players. One of them was little Katie Doherty and the other was Ole Swenson, shift boss at the Whatahope. Nothing as big had ever been done north of the Bay. I’m reading the first of them and, I’ll not deny it, sticking my chest out because we could do so well, when who should come along but Father Walsh and the Consolidated minister.

“ ‘Good day to you, your Reverence and Mr. Jones,’ I says, ‘ ’Tis a fine doings for the lads we do be having.’

“ ‘ ’Tis that, Mike,’ says his Reverence, ‘but I’m thinking that we’ll have to cancel the whole affair.’

“ ‘Sure, there’s never been a fire in the schoolhouse,’ I says.

“ ‘Not the least taste of it, Mike,’ says Father Walsh, ‘and every artist is raring to go. The joke, if you can call it that, is sure on us. Mr. Jones and me, we arrange the whole thing and get the posters printed and then, bedad, we remember that in all the Crick there’s nary a pianny.’

“I’m just getting ready to tell him that ’tis sorrow I’m feeling for them when I looks hard at Father Walsh. Then I feels sorry for myself. Everybody knows, including Father Walsh, that I have a pianny in the shed.

“ ‘You’d never do it to me now,’ I says, ‘You know they’d chop me into little pieces and I’d lose my job besides if it was ever to come out.’

“ ‘Mike, Mike,’ says his Reverence, ‘I’m ashamed. Don’t you ever give a thought to the lads in the mud of the trenches? I mind, when Tim Conlan goes away, you said there was nothing you wouldn’t do for him.’

“ ‘And,’ says Mr. Jones, ‘do you know about the Thirty-nine Articles and Runnymede and St. Bartholomew’s Eve?’

“Of course I didn’t and I see that I was licked.

“ ‘Gentlemen,’ I says, ‘Mike Mullins is your man and may all the shamrocks wither at Killarney if I don’t see it through. You’ll handle it like your baby sister and you’ll have it back in its box in the morning. I have my methods,’ I says, plucking up a bit of courage, ‘and, at least, ’tisin’t as bad as a burying I once went through.’

“So that afternoon the pianny went to the schoolhouse and I took steps to consolidate my position as the soldier boys would say. First I hopped into the pianny box with a hammer and a fistful of nails. I spiked it down as solid as the floor itself. Then I closed the box all neat and comfortable. Having taken my precautions, I went to the concert that night with my conscience as easy as any uncaught burglar. Everybody there patted me on the back and I sure felt good. If it hadn’t been for Michael Mullins there would have been no concert and well they knew it. Father Walsh opened the proceedings and when he thanked me for my public spirit was when he called me a *impersario*. Bedad, I was even sitting on the platform beside the instrument.

“The concert started with a comic song and Mrs. Jones, as light-fingered a lady as I ever want to see, was playing the accomp’niments. When the applause was nicely going, I looks at the door and there was Harry McGee, the Travelling Auditor. For all his crinkly smiles, he was the auditor, and me sitting on the platform right forninst the pianny I had pinched. I’m telling you, I suffered and it kept getting worse. The musical glasses comes next and a song was after. Then little Katie Doherty comes up to do her piece. I see right away by the hands of her that she’d been eating candy bars. The chocolate was sticking to her fingers. So up I gets pretending to fix the stool for her and gave them a wipe on my handkercher. It did some good because, when I wiped the sweat off my forehead, there was brown streaks across it.

“How I lived through the rest of it, I’ll never know. It seemed to go on for hours. Big Ole Swenson played ‘The Battle of the Baltic’ and the pianny took an awful beating. Mr. McGee sat through it all. Finally it came to an end with Mr. Jones announcing a collection of three hundred dollars and, praise the saints, there was no more praise for Mr. Mullins. Down I goes to Mr. McGee, for I figures them’s the tactics that’ll see me through and, sure enough Mrs. Jones comes rushing up.

“‘We owe it all to you, Mr. Mullins,’ she says, ‘Without—’

“‘Think nothing of it,’ I says, breaking in. ‘Sure, we all did our best for the fine collection,’ and I got Harry out of the school. We talk a bit about this and that, the fine crowd, the songs and the pianny playing and then he says,

“‘Been riding all day on Number 9 and I’ll turn in for I’m tired but I’ll have a word with you in the morning and we’ll check things up.’

“Well, there I was. No chance of moving the pianny before daylight and everything in the shed would be checked. I dreamed that night with battles and chocolate bars all mixed up together but, bright and early, I was at the station. About eight o’clock, Harry McGee comes down.

“‘Well, Mike, let’s go to it,’ he says, ‘for I’m taking the speeder north when I get the low down on your stuff.’

“I didn’t like the way he said it, me not being easy in my mind but I took the bills and we started in. There wasn’t much in the shed. We checked a bit of drill steel and a few oil drums. There was some odds and ends of furniture and then we come to the pianny.

“‘Mike,’ says he, ‘I think this’d be better at the other end. Let’s give it a shove.’

“‘Sure, you’re right, Harry,’ I says, ‘but think of the heft of it. I wouldn’t have you straining yourself. I’ll just get a few of the boys in here when we are done.’

“‘Why I could move it myself,’ he says.

“‘Of course you could with them big strong arms of yours but it wouldn’t be dignified for you to do it and I’ve a bit of a sore back myself. Would you be looking at this barrow now and it with a broken handle. ’Twas the way it come to us,’ and I got him to thinking of other things. By and by, he goes away on the speeder and Mike Mullins had scored again.”

When I next saw Harry, I grinned at him. “Mike Mullins certainly put one over you in the piano business up at Boston Creek. I thought you always got your man.”

“He sure did,” said Harry, “with me facing a foot-square shipping tag tacked to the back of it through the whole of the performance.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Completed Angler

“Fishing is it,” said Mike apropos a remark about a thirty-pounder caught in Lake Temagami. “I don’t hold with it. Not that I won’t eat the creatures on a fast day but, by the powers, I won’t play games with them.”

“Why the bitterness, Mike?” I said, surprised at his vehemence. “Fishing, of all sports, is designed for the contemplative soul attuned to Nature in her happiest mood.”

“Is it now,” said Mike darkly. “That ain’t the way it looked to me the only time I tried it.”

“Here’s my pouch. Fill your pipe and let’s have the story.”

With his briar drawing nicely, Mike looked thoughtful for a moment before he spoke.

“This was the way of it. ’Twas in 1908 it happened, the time I’m going to Gowganda to make my fortune. Them days I’m a young feller just out from the Old Country and full of ambition to see what makes the world go round. Well, I drifted up to Toronto doing this and that and I’m working on a track gang with the old Grand Trunk. One day the lads is talking about a place called Cobalt and one of the right sort named Murphy says he’s turning in his check and trying his luck up there come pay day.

“‘What’s there,’ I says, ‘and where is Cobalt at?’

“‘Sure, ’tis away up north,’ says Murphy, ‘and ’tis where the silver comes from. They has it in chunks as big as boxcars and anyone that finds it can have it. There’s so much they even makes sidewalks of it.’

“Well, I thinks to myself, I’d admire to see a sidewalk made of silver, so I tells Murphy that I goes along with him. ’Tisn’t more than a week later Murph and me steps off the train at Cobalt and starts looking round. Devil a bit of silver could we see. The sidewalks, what there was of them, is wood perched up on posts to keep them out of the mud but ’twas a bustling place with half the town always on the move. Getting a job was easy and I’m lugging mine timbers on the surface out at the Kerr Lake. The lad was right about the silver sidewalk and many a time I’ve scraped the heel of my foot

across it to help the shine of it. The silver was there all right but of course the whole country's staked and devil a bit of it was there for Mullins.

“Come spring, I hear them talking about Gowganda which is a country with silver sticking out of the rocks like promises at an election rally. So what do I do but chuck up my job and go along, for I'm bound to have a silver mine. Down to Latchford I goes and up the Montreal on the Booth boats and me knowing no more about prospecting than I does about astronomy. 'Tis the tail end of the evening when we arrives at Elk Lake and the rapids and the river and the bush is giving me thoughts about the bunk-house at the Kerr Lake. Well, I has a bit of money, for I'm never one for the blind pigs and such, and I gets bunked down at the King Edward right up from the landing stage. Next morning, I'm mooching round and I run into a feller and him looking for a partner. Right away, we hooks up and I'm an Orangeman if it don't turn out to be Old John that was to be in the hair of me for forty years.

“Little did I know, as the lad says in the dunce's cap, what was to come of it. However, there we was partners and us sitting on the edge of the Post Office verandah talking things over. Not that there was much to talk about for John was as green as me. For all that, we're getting acquainted, with John talking pretty big about how he has handled boats ever since he was a little lad, him having been reared on a bit of the coast in the Old Country. To hold my end up, I'm telling him what a swimmer I am and how I swam the Shannon at its widest, though I never saw the stream and did my bit of swimming in the Liffey.

“By and by, two sports come along and plumps theirselves down beside us. You could tell they was sports by the clothes of them and the fishing taykle. Well, these gents was talking loud and we could hear that they was making bets. They'd bet on anything. Whether anyone would go in the Post Office before anyone would come out and how many people was going which way on the bridge or any other thing that took their fancy. Soon a crowd was gathered round listening to the fun and some of them starts making bets theirselves. Then one of the gents looks at me and John and he says:

“ ‘These gentlemen has the look of dead game sports. I'm thinking, if they're agreeable, we could fix them up with fishing taykle and stage a fishing Derby on the bridge. To start the thing, I puts twenty dollars on the big one.’

“‘I covers your twenty,’ says his friend, ‘and I has twenty more if any of the gents in the crowd would like to try their luck.’

“Soon the bets is flying thick and fast and near the whole town is milling round placing their money. John and me can’t spoil sport like that so we says we is agreeable and I even bets ten dollars at two to one on myself.

“Well, you must know the bridge in them days was nothing more than a plank walk riding on barrels with a bit of a railing on both sides. About four feet wide it was, for there was devil a horse or cart in the country. The Montreal’s wide and deep with a nice easy current. So the crowd ropes off a bit of the bridge near the middle for me and John, and the gent gets out two poles joined together that they says is casting rods. They has little windlasses on them for to roll the line up and there’s a ugly little critter on the end of the line full of hooks that they calls a plug. The idea, they says, is that we throws the plug out and, when a fish takes hold, we works him in with the little windlass. ’Tis agreed by all that once we starts there’s to be no interfering. So out we goes to the middle of the bridge and someone fires a gun and we’re off.

“It don’t go so good because John hooks me and I hook John the first time we tries to throw the plugs. When we gets untangled, we moves a bit and things goes better. We gets so we can throw the plugs about twenty feet or so, John upstream and me the other way. We throws them out and we winds them in and nothing happens but the crowd is still making bets and the odds change every time a plug hits the water. Then I hear a roar from the crowd and, out of the corner of my eye, I see that John has got a fish with his windlass singing like it’s mad. But, bedad, I pays no more attention to him with my ten dollars to protect and all my backers howling at me from the bank. I cast again and gets a good one and I’m just winding in when something hits my plug and away it goes with me trying to grab a hold on my windlass. Just then, about fifty feet away, up comes the biggest fish I ever hope to see. It jumps clear into the air and I’m damned if it doesn’t seem to have two lines on it. ‘Lunge’ yells someone from the bank but I don’t know what it means and anyway I’m too busy for such trifles, with me winding hard for the fish is coming right for me but deep in the water. I hear John winding too. Then this devil of a fish dives under the bridge and my line runs out again and saws against a barrel.

“I hears John yell, ‘The creature’s my side of the bridge. D’you want to ruin the good fishing taykle? For the love of Heaven, under the bridge you go and we’ll get him on this side.’

“Well, I don’t like the idea so much but just then the fish jumps again and there’s a roar from the crowd so in I goes. ’Tis a hard swim with my clothes and all and the fish tugging at the line but I makes it with my breath near gone. When I comes up with my pole in my hand, John’s winding hard again and the crowd’s cheering and laughing fit to kill. I’m just starting to climb out, when John yells, ‘Back you goes. He’s making for your side.’

“‘Go yourself,’ I yells, ‘He’s as much yours as mine.’

“‘If I could only swim,’ says John, sorry like. ‘In you go,’ he says. ‘Do you want to be losing the biggest fish ever seen in Elk Lake?’

“So I takes a big breath and down I goes with the current fine to help me. I’m half way through, like as not, when something hits me on the shoulder. ’Tis the fish, for I opens my eyes as he streaks by, and I’m scared for he’s a wicked looking devil. So I swims hard but I makes no headway with something tugging at my shoulder. I’m near done but there’s nothing for it but turning back. ’Tis easier going then and, when I’m like to bust, up I pops clear of the barrels. I grabs hold, breathing hard, and there’s John laughing so he can hardly stand with his pole almost in my face and his plug hooked tight in my collar. There’s no sign of the fish and anyway I’ve lost all interest. There was a good deal of arguing but finally all bets is called off when I offers to fight any two of them if they decides what John caught was fish. As I says, since that time I don’t mind eating the creatures but devil a game will I play with them.”

“And what happened to the partnership?” I said. “Did you go to Gowganda and stake a claim?”

“Sure, I never got past Elk Lake, nor John neither. Me and John got jobs with the T. & N.O. up around North Cobalt and we’ve been with the road ever since.”

“Too bad John never learned to swim,” I said. “It was a one-sided show he made you put on.”

“Swim, you says. The cunning devil. That same summer he wins a hundred dollars for swimming across Lake Temiskaming from Ville Marie to Haileybury. Bedad, he was more like to catch that fish with his bare hands than with any pole and windlass.”

CHAPTER FIVE

A Friendly Encounter

Mike Mullins came into the office and flopped down in his accustomed chair. His lack of greeting made me glance up from what I was doing to see the grandfather of all black eyes assuming new tints of maroon and purple.

“For the love of Heaven,” I said, “have you been in a collision?”

Mike grinned with a sort of modest pride.

“Sure, ’twas a big Swede down by the shops and him, you might say, almost out of reach barring a step ladder. But I asked for it.”

“A wise man stays in his own class,” I said, “but what was it all about?”

“Well, this Oleson,” said Mike, “a quiet hunk of a man in general but forty wildcats when roused, was giving Old John the rough side of his tongue and John not there. So I stepped into him and later, when I come to, Oleson is gone and the lads is pouring water on my head.”

“But surely,” I said, “Old John has ridden you enough for you to enjoy someone putting the spurs into him.”

“ ’Tis easy to see, sir, you’re new in these parts. All the lads knows that one word against John and they has to fight Mullins. If there’s any blaggarding to do, I can do it myself.” And I knew that Mike meant it.

“It’s all a riddle to me,” I said. “I’ve heard about the pigs and the fishing at Elk Lake and I can see nothing in either to make you take a black eye for John. What’s the story behind it all.”

“It’s like this. Me and John is friends for forty years and all the shiners in the world will never pay for what I owes him. I never told you, sir, about the lad I lost. Me and Annie, that’s my woman, had five years of dreaming and thirty years of sorrow for him and Old John has shared the lot. Perhaps you don’t know the black hours in the night when you wake up thinking you’ll see him and, when you remember, the cold grips your heart. No matter. ’Twas long ago and the memory of the little lad is sweet when the sun is shining.

“We was all, John and me and his woman and Annie, up the line together from New Liskeard. ’Twas a little station with John the Agent and me about everything else. There wasn’t so many trains them days and we

had time on our hands. Little Micky, as soon as he could toddle, was in and out most of the time. John called him the General Manager and 'twas fine to see him riding John's shoulder with the sun in the gold hair of him. All the train crews knew him and he knew the lot of them. Sure, if they could have spoiled the lad, they would have done it, for hardly a train went through without something from the crew for Micky. There was lead soldiers, I mind, and we has some of them yet and him lining them up for battles on the floor behind John's chair. Good as gold, he was and never in the way, with a cheery word for everyone.

"So it went for five years and him coupled to the hearts of us like the tug of fifty box cars down at Jocko. Saving our money, we was, against the time he goes to college and John and his woman saving too for they never has a child and Micky was as much theirs as ours. We'd talk about whether Micky would be a engineer, a doctor or a lawyer and we'd settled on a engineer when the black diptheriar struck. 'Twas all over in two days. The railway doctor hightailed it through on an engine from the Bay, but 'twas too late and we buried little Micky and the hearts of us under some white birch trees in the graveyard.

"You've wondered why I never went to the war and it's been a shame to me for all the life of me. 'Twas early in '15 it happened and, with the black rage in me, to stop a bullet was all I asked for. I see the lads joining up, with the light in their faces, but I couldn't go with them. 'Twould have been too much for Annie and her arranging and dusting Micky's toys and smiling over them.

"'Mike,' she says to me once, 'you're dying for to fight. You can go if you must.'

"'Why should I fight?' I says. 'Remember Cromwell, woman.' And me with my own father dead with the Dublins in South Africa.

"However, the morning after the burial, I'm late and dragging my feet to the station. John sees me coming and he's at the door when I arrives.

"'You're late, Mullins,' he says, 'and you'll work this day to pay for it.'"

"'Sure,' I says and I got no further.

"'You're late,' he says again savage like, 'and I'll take no excuses. Into the shed with you and straighten of it up. 'Tis worse than a Connemara pig pen.'

"'All right, my bucko,' I says to myself, 'if that's the way you want it,' and I went on into the shed. 'Twas as neat as a colleen's ankle, the way we

always kept it. There was a raft of package stuff lined up in rows to be got at easy, with some heavy stuff at one end and ten tons of salt at the other. John follows me in.

“‘You’ll shift the salt to this end,’ he says, ‘and the machinery to the other,’” and out he goes with never another word.

“I’m mad for I sees no sense in it but I says nothing and I goes to work. ’Twas a big job with the shed nigh full and everything needing shifting to work it out. The machines, pumps and the like, was on skids or they would have stayed put for all of me. However, I juggled them the length of the shed with a bar and lugged the salt, two hundred pound bags it were, to make room. Them days I’m in my prime and mad clean through to help me. By the tail of the afternoon, and me with my knees buckling, I’m so tired, the job is done and I’m just taking a breather when John comes in again.

“‘You’ve finished, have you,’ he says, ‘and long enough you took. Now you’ll holystone the floor except the salt end. ’Tis a disgrace to the railway.’

“With that, out he stomps and I goes to work once more with black hate shoving at my elbow. By quitting time I’m done and, wreck that I am, I goes to the office to tell Old John a bit of what’s on my mind. I shoves open the door and there he is with his head on the arms of him and him sprawled out on the ticket counter. His back is heaving and sobs is wracking his very heart out. I closes the door and goes away on my toes. I never looked back but, if he saw me through the window, he could see me with my head up but he’d never hear the little song that was playing on my heart strings.”

It was not a time for words but Mike got up and started for the door.

“Sure, you’re not going so soon, Mike,” I said.

“I’m that,” said Mike, “for I have to find that Swede and he can black my other eye and welcome.”

CHAPTER SIX

Crime Wave at the Crick

“No, I can’t call to mind any such goings on in the early days. Of course there was blind pigs, or where would the lads have got their licker, and mebbe a bit of moonshine made by a gentleman with a place in the country. The banks was mostly tents in them days but I never heard tell of anyone blasting their way into them with dynamite. Sure, you could hang your watch on a tree and it was safe as churches from an Indian or a white man mebbe.”

All this was apropos a comment on the frequency and boldness of bank robberies as Mike lolled in his accustomed chair.

“I mind the strike at Cobalt. That would be ought seven. A tame affair entirely. I’ve seen more excitement at a Sunday School picnic for all the milling round in Cobalt Square. ’Twas a peaceful country them days, except perhaps for the time I’m held up when I am Agent up at Boston Crick.”

“You don’t mean a gunman stood you up, Mike,” I said.

“I do that. He was a tough customer and had a gun in the ribs of me before I knew what’s happening. If you have the time, I’ll tell you about it. ’Twas along in January, when the Crick was a busy little place thinking it was going to be another Cobalt. I’m on my way to the station after having my dinner, when I sees a feller coming towards me. I notice him because he don’t look quite right somehow. His parka and boots is new and they looks like something you might see in a moving picture. They looked too much like a parka and boots, if you understand me. Anyway, ‘Tenderfoot,’ says I to myself and thinks no more about it. Just as we passes, a couple of kids on the way to school comes up and I hear one of them say, ‘Mr. Mullins, has the money’ and t’other says, ‘Yes, and I betcha it’s a million dollars.’ I recalls this afterwards but it makes little impression at the time.

“Well, I goes on into the station and there’s the money the kids is talking about right in the open on my desk. I’d clean forgot to put it in the safe. ‘Bad luck to you, Mullins,’ I says to myself, ‘you never think of anything.’ So I opens the safe, that has about a thousand dollars of the company money into it, and gets out the sealing wax, for I wants the parcel shipshape before I puts it away. I’m putting big blobs of wax on the parcel and whistling to pass the time when I feels something jabbing me in the ribs.

“‘It’s a stick-up, Buddy,’ I hears and who’s behind the gun but me bucko in the parka and boots.

“‘Sure,’ I says, ‘You don’t mean you’d rob me.’

“‘Enough talking,’ he snarls at me, ‘and hand it over.’

“I know I’m beat and I does it. Anyway, for all his toughness, I see he’s nervous and nervous people and guns is a bad combination. He grabs the parcel and he says, ‘You can keep the change but don’t you make a move for half a hour if you values your life.’ With that, out he ducks and I see from the window that he’s taking a trail away from the village. There’s no one in sight and I’m agin’ tackling a man with a gun in the open.

“However, I’m thinking fast. I figgers this laddie is heading for Tim Conlin’s shack that’s been empty for six months. He’ll hide out there for a hour or two and grab the way-freight where it hits the top of the grade. Of course there’s no roads them days except bush roads to the camps.

“I’ve got to get that money back and I don’t aim to get hurt in doing it. So I gets into my coat and, as soon as he’s out of sight, I hops on the jigger which is standing convenient on the track. ’Tis a long chance. The trail me desperado’s took is hard beat and the going’s good but it ain’t the shortest road to a spot I knows about. It circles round a little valley to miss the hills and comes near as spitting to the track about three miles down. He’ll be doing four to make it that far. I’ll mebbe have half a hour or twenty minutes to do my business, whatever that may be.

“I’m all for action in a emergency, as you might call it, but devil a idea did I have at the start. ’Twas not ’til I’m pumping the jigger for dear life that it comes to me. For there, hanging to the side of it, is a bear trap complete with as fine a set of ugly teeth as you would care to see. One of the section lads was going to take it into the bush that very afternoon. It gave me wings, as the feller says when the bull caught up with him. The record I set for them three miles ain’t been beat unless them people at Salt Lake I read about has done it.

“When I reaches the spot I’m making for, I grabs the bear trap and the padlock off of the jigger and barges into the bush. The trail’s not more than a hundred yards away and it don’t take me fifteen minutes to bury that trap in the right o’ way and padlock it to a convenient tree. I smooths up the snow as natural as paint and takes cover behind some rocks. It’s a long wait of ten minutes, with me anxious and all, and I’m thinking that I haven’t got the right of it when I hears him coming. All he’s thinking about is making speed

and bear traps, if he ever heard of them, isn't in his mind at all, at all. Down he comes, hitting the trail fast and hard, and I hears the bear trap snap and he tumbles on the face of him. I never hears the remarks of a bear in the first moments of his surprise but me bucko had all the appropriate words and music. 'Twas a wonder the spruce trees didn't shrivel up. 'Twas hurting, you could tell that, and I lets him rave. After a while he starts to work on the trap but they's harder to get off than any shoepac. When he sees that it's no use and settles down to cursing a bit more, and I'll say for the lad that he never repeats hisself, I yells, 'It's a stick-up, Buddy, and you'd better make up your mind to like it.'

“‘Come into the open,’ he says, ‘where I can see you.’

“‘Not likely,’ I says, ‘You’ll first throw your gun this way and then the money.’

“You could see he’s thinking hard and they was tough thoughts with little good in them for Mullins. After a while, he gave up and did it, first the gun and then the money. I watched him close, for them guns might have been travelling in pairs. Then I come out and got the gun and the money.

“‘Now me bucko,’ I says, ‘you’ll just stay where you are until I can send some big, strong men to relieve you,’ and with that I goes back to the jigger but I don’t set no records getting back to the Crick.”

“Did he get a stiff sentence?” I said. “Robbery under arms is a pretty serious offence.”

“That’s the queer thing about it,” said Mike. “When we went back to bring him in, he was gone. The trap was a hundred yards down the trail and it looked as if he had walked or crawled with the trap still on his leg. He must have had a pal that helped him out of it. He got that far himself, you see, because I clean forgot the key was tied with a bit of string to the padlock.”

“I suppose the railway made it right with you for your courage in recovering the money,” I said with a new respect for Mike.

“Sure, they never heard anything about it and ain’t to this day. If you was to tell the story now,” said Mike anxiously, “you wouldn’t think that Archie would reach back that far to get me, would you now? You see the stick-up man never had any of the railway’s money. He says, you mind, ‘You can keep the change,’ and it was the change, over one thousand dollars, that was my real worry. The parcel of bills would have done him little good. You see, it was in the war days and we was always doing things at the Crick

for the lads that was overseas. This time it was to be a Millionaires' Night and the parcel was the phoney money.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mullins to the Rescue

Old John dropped in to wish me the compliments of the season and stayed to chat. As I hadn't seen Mike for a week or more, I asked for news of him.

"Sure, Mullins is in bed with a mustard plaster on his chest," said John. "It was all along of him being helpful. You see, the ice was on Chippewa Crick and Mike's down along the tracks when he sees some of the lads trying out their skates. It don't look too safe to Mullins and so he gallops over to tell the kids. They ain't impressed and Mullins undertakes to show them. He goes out to the middle and gives a bit of a jump. He's right about it not being safe and the next thing he knows he's up to the arm pits yelling bloody murder with the cold. The kids gets him out and it's been mustard plasters for him ever since."

"Mike's got a heart of gold," I said, "but perhaps he's a little short on judgment."

"Impulsive, you might say," said John. "Why I've seen Mullins go right through a fight and, at the heel of the hunt, find he's been fighting the wrong man. I've wore myself out with the man and that's a fact. Take the time at Boston Crick. He blunders into that with his eyes shut and I don't suppose he knows the rights of the matter to this day.

"It wasn't my shift at all, at all but I was there to relieve Mullins, who was Agent them days. He's going on holidays and it's then that he's courting Annie Lavery. Before he gets back he's married to her and has been for nearly forty years, the poor woman. Anyway, I hops off the van of the up-freight with my bag in my hand and Mike's going up the trail away from the station. He waves his hand and keeps on going and that's the last I sees of him for that time. What's been happening, I learns subsequent, as you might say.

"It seems a few days before I arrives, Mike's out in the bush aways picking raspberries, in an old burn like as not. Coming home, he's mooching along the trail when he sees a letter lying in the grass. He picks it up but it's rained the day before and the writing on it's run so he can't read the address. Now Mike ain't one for reading other people's letters but something comes over him that makes him bound to look at it. Mike says later it's instinct or

second sight or mebbe the blessed saints that makes him do it. Be that as it may, he opens it and takes a quick squint at it. Right at the top in gold letters is Rita Cholmondeley and a address. It's been sent to 'Dearest Ricky' and it's signed 'Rita.' He sees that much and it tells him nothing. So he takes another gander and right in the middle of it he sees 'jump Niagara Falls.' That was all he saw and it was enough for Mike. Impulsive was what he was and always will be. 'Tis the saints for sure has led him to it to save the girl from her rash act. Before he closes the letter, he takes another look at the gold lettering. It's Rita Cholmondeley right enough and a street and number in Toronto. Mike says he'll remember that address to his dying day and well he does for by the time he hot foots it to the station, the letter's nowhere to be found.

"No matter. On the way in he makes up his mind what to do. It ain't two minutes before a wire is on its way. 'Don't make jump Niagara Falls. Ricky desperate. Mullins.' is what he says. Then he sits back to think. Devil a bit does he know what to do next. He don't know who Ricky is nor where he's at. 'Tis on a Tuesday all this happens and he spent the next couple of days investigating. Of course, being Mullins, he don't tell anyone about it or ask advice. It's all Mullins, Special Investigator and blood hound on the trail. Of course, it's a hard trail to follow and it's not 'til the shank of the evening on the Thursday that he runs into a character that can tell him Ricky goes to some open ground about ten miles east of the Crick. This Ricky is a young feller called Richard Wilson. He's a tenderfoot with a partner as green as himself but they're husky lads and packed in a good load of chuck intending to stay put until they makes a strike.

"It's Mike's idea he has to get this Ricky out to the telegraph before the girl has made the fatal jump. So he's on his way when I hops off of the van. As I says, I don't see him any more at that time and, consequent, I knows nothing about what took place. However, I'm busy picking up the loose ends around the office and, except for the thought that Mike's starting his holidays in a queer way with Annie down at North Cobalt, I thinks no more about it.

"Number 9's due about 1.30 and I'm out on the platform when she pulls in. There's a raft of express and I'm busy right up to the second toot. When I has time to look about me, the platform's empty except for one gal who's standing helpless like and looking kind of lost. I goes up to her and asks if there's anything I can do for her.

"'I'm looking for Mr. Wilson,' she says, and I see her lips is quivering. She's a slip of a gal, with a pretty face and a voice that gets right in among

you.

“ ‘I’m a stranger here myself, Miss,’ I says. ‘It’s my first morning in the place and I don’t know Mr. Wilson but we’ll see what we can do to find him for you.’

“ ‘Perhaps you know Mr. Mullins then,’ she says.

“ ‘Mullins, is it,’ I says, and I know I’m for it. ‘Of course I knows him. He’s the Agent here when he’s for working.’

“ ‘If I could see him, he would explain,’ she says, ‘for I have a telegram from him.’

“With that I ask her to come into the office and she brings out the telegram. ‘Don’t make jump Niagara Falls. Ricky desperate,’ is what it says. It’s signed Mullins right enough but it don’t make sense to me. So we gets our heads together, in a manner of speaking, and the story comes out something like this.

“The gal’s Rita Cholmondeley all right and she’s a kind of a actress. At least I gathers she dusts the furniture and opens the door and all like that. It appears she learns it in college and keeps right on with a regular company of actors. Ricky, that’s what she calls Wilson, is in college too and he’s just got out. They’re in love, you can see that, but they’re as poor as Hogan’s pig and Ricky’s proud and wants the best for the little woman. So they agrees that Ricky comes north to seek his fortune and Rita takes the job with the actors. When Mullins’ telegram comes, she can’t make it out but she figgers they can get someone else to dust the furniture and she takes the first train north. It’s enough for her that Ricky’s desperate even if she don’t understand the part about jumping Niagara Falls.

“ ‘You wasn’t going to jump over them?’ I says.

“ ‘Heavens, no,’ she says with a kind of squeak. ‘We were going to give the show there.’

“Then I sees that Mullins has been impulsive again but we still don’t know about the letter nor where he gets the information. Anyway we gets a bite to eat and I brings the gal back to the station while we figgers out the next move. It’s along in the middle of the afternoon and we’ve got nowhere when I sees a young feller hot footing it down the trail to the station. He barges in and looks through the ticket window. Then they both lets out a yell and the young feller scrambles through the door into the office. They goes into a clinch and it’s ‘Ricky’ and ‘Rita’ and ‘dearest’ and such so that I sees there’s no place for me in the office. After a while they quiets down and I

goes on back in. They're sitting hand-in-hand just looking at each other kind of dreamy and I sees there's an organizing job for me. The telegram's brought out and Rick knows no more about it than the rest of us. However, it appears that Rick and his partner has staked a couple of claims the second day they're in and Rick has a bag of samples. Free gold, he says, and some rocks he says is good. He comes out to record it down at Haileybury while his partner stands pat because of claim jumpers which has been known in them parts. The long and the short of it is they're rich to hear Rick tell it and Rita's there, so what are they waiting for.

"All this takes time, of course, what with one thing and another, and it's mebbe seven o'clock when I looks out the window and sees Mike straggling down the trail. He's coming slow with a sag to his shoulders and he's not happy, you can easy tell that. I tell the lovebirds who he is and they're ready for him. As he comes in, with the blood of the blackfly bites dried on his face, Rita jumps up and grabs him round the neck and kisses him.

"'You wonderful man,' she says, 'You did it all for us, and everything's all right and we're going to be married.'

"Mike looks kind of funny for a minute but Rick is pumping his hand and Rita's hanging on to him. I see Mike kind of straighten up and the devil puts a spark of light into his eyes.

"'Think nothing of it,' says Mike. 'I was bound to save you and I did. Sure, I'd do it again, blackflies and all, bad cess to them, for a colleen as pretty as yourself.'

"As for me, I says nothing then nor since and Rick and Rita plays the cards as they was dealt.

"Next day the Consolidated minister ties them up as tight as ham and eggs and Mike gives the bride away with every blackfly bite standing out on him like candles on a Christmas tree. Every year since on the seventeenth of June me and Mike hears from them. They're doing fine and Michael Wilson is a big hunk of a man hisself and married years ago."

It was the day before Christmas when Mike came in to see me. He was muffled up in an overcoat and two sweaters but his cold was practically gone. I asked him about Rick and Rita and he said:

"You know I was all wrong that time. The gal's name wasn't Chol-mon-del-ey at all. It was Chumley all the time and t'other was just her stage name. I never knew until I stand up with her before the Minister."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Circumnavigation

The exploits of our past, seen through the mist of years, glow with increasing lustre. All our yesterdays are bright with valorous achievements. The faint arthritic twinge, the slowing reflex are of little moment when the tenuous arms of memory probe the glamour of the fragrant years. Some such nostalgic influences stirred Mike to reminiscence.

“The spring always puts the itch in the feet of me. ’Tis when I’d like to be out looking for new things. If there was mountains to be climbed now or new seas to sail on, it would be a fine thing. ’Tis in a manner of speaking, you understand, for I’ve climbed no mountains but ’tis a grand thing to be young and to know your own strength. ’Tis a great country we have with the good air of it blowing up your lungs like bellows. Boy and man, I’ve knowed it for forty years. ’Twas bush mostly when I come, with the grand logs plunging down the rivers in the springtime. Cobalt was a roaring town and the boxcars of silver going south with every train. One man was as good as another and they was all good men.

“There was bush fires that wiped the country clean and took the poor people with them. Then there was ploughing of the good earth and the fine farms and the herds of cattle. I’ve seen it all grow up and the gold towns round the mines and the paper mills with the fine towns and gardens. ’Tis a grand thing to be a part of. Me and John went through it all together and it’s a young man I’d like to be this day to see what another fifty years will do to it.

“ ’Twas ought seven, I come to see the sidewalks made of silver up at Cobalt. Green I was them days but I’ve learned since and there’s not much of the country I haven’t known along the old T.N.O. I’ve even been to Moosonee and I’ll tell you about that.

“ ’Twas in ’37. August it was and John and me gets our holidays together. We’d been talking about this Jameses Bay and how the Eskimos and polar bears floats round there on chunks of ice. Well, one thing leads to another and we makes up our minds to go and see it. Our women is agreeable. Annie says, ‘ ’Twill do you good, Mike, to see them pigging it round in their snow houses. You’ll value your own when you get back.’

“Well, we starts to get organized. We plans to take a camping outfit and get a canoe at Moosonee. Young Harve Fisher, that’s always mucking about in the bush, lends us a tent and Rod McLeod, the devil, gets us two fur parkas against the cold. We collects pots and pans and dishes, blankets and axes and everything a man could need. And food, we sure wasn’t going to starve. A slab of bacon, beans and rice, flour and tea and coffee and a raft of stuff the women folks puts in. We must have lugged two hundred and fifty pounds up to the station when we boarded 49. ’Twas the middle of August and a hot night but we was a grand sight. If you was to look up the Nugget of them days, you’ld see our picture as we boards the train. We wore our socks like lumberjacks over our pants and we had the parkas on because there was no room for them in our packs. Hot we was and no mistake but swaggering a bit because of the adventure of it.

“Well, we gets to Cochrane in the morning and by this time we’re stripped down to our undershirts. We boards the *Polar Bear* and keeps a sharp lookout for the first ice and snow. We never sees none right to Moosonee but there’s lots else. The grand rivers we cross on the high bridges, the white water in Sextant Rapids and the Moose River, a mile wide at the Crossing. There was Indians at every stop, mostly Scotch Indians if the tartans meant anything, with Indian babies in their baskets.

“Anyway, about dark we pulls into Moosonee and we sticks our tent up and beds down for the night. Next morning, before anyone is stirring, we packs our stuff the half-mile to the river. Here we find a Indian and dickers with him for a canoe. What we wants is to get away fast for we’ve had enough of photographs. We knows where we’re going and we don’t need no advice.

“Everything settled with the Indian, we piles our stuff into the canoe and heads downstream. The current’s running nice and fast and we aims to make short work of it to a likely place for breakfast, for we hadn’t ate at Moosonee. We paddles a bit but mostly lets her run with the current, which we judge is four miles a hour.

“It ain’t what we expects. Devil a bit of ice can we see. There’s not a cloud in the sky and the sun’s beating down hot and strong but prettier country you never see. The river looks to be two miles wide with islands all along the way. The fine trees are growing on them and the water’s clear so that you can see the gravel on the bottom. The air has a tang to it that gets us thinking about breakfast. So we pulls into a gravelly island and beaches the canoe well up the shore. Then we makes our fire and has our breakfast. Like two kids we was with the freedom of it and all. We gets things cleaned up

and has a swim and comes ashore and snoozes for an hour or two. We has ten days and so there's no hurry to see the Bay. 'Take it easy,' says John, 'snow and ice is all right but this sun suits me fine,' and I agrees.

"When we goes to the canoe, there it is with its stern in the water. 'Sure, we carried it a length inshore,' I says. 'What's happening?'"

"'Must have been rain upstream,' says John. 'The river's rising.'"

"'Could be,' I says and we thinks no more about it.

"'Shove her in the water,' says John. 'I feels like fishing.'"

"John, you'll remember, is a fisherman, though I don't hold with it myself as I tells you before. My dislike of the sport don't cover eating them so I says I'm agreeable. Right forninst the place where we has lunch is a crick and I paddles over to it. There's a little bar at the mouth but we slides right over and as nice a crick as you would want to see opens up before us. It's mebbe seventy feet wide and, by the time John has his pole fixed, we're right into it. He hasn't made more than three or four casts when he gets a strike.

"'Trout as sure as you're a foot high,' says John and, after a fight with the creature, he brings it into the canoe. A two pound speckled trout with the red spots grand to see. Going along nice and easy, he catches a couple more and then two or three he puts back, for John is no fish-hog, you'll understand. We has enough for that time so we paddles up, it may be half a mile or so, to where a rapids breaks fast around an Island. We has a general good time exploring like a couple of kids. 'Twas as good as playing hookey.

"By this time, it's mebbe four o'clock and we heads back to our island to make camp. 'Tis a strange thing but the bar's sticking out of the water down by the mouth. 'Sure, the stream's falling fast,' says John as we eases through a shallow spot. Anyway, we carries the canoe well ashore, for we're not trusting them quick floods too much. We gets the tent up with a bed of spruce and balsam boughs and makes our fire down on a rock by the shore.

"'Tis hungry, I am,' says John, 'with nothing to eat since breakfast.'"

"'We'll have the trout and bacon,' I says, 'and I'll cook you a pot of rice and raisins,' for I elects myself cook, for I figgers that's easier than rustling firewood. So I hangs a pail with about a pound of rice into it to boil and gets the trout frizzling in the bacon fat. Oh, the grand smell of it with the wood smoke in the nose of you.

“Did you ever cook any rice, sir? ’Tis the most amazing stuff. The fish has just come to a nice brown, when I hears something plopping in the fire. The rice is coming up like a fountain. I takes it off of the fire with a stick and yells for John to bring a bucket. We catches near a pailful before it stops erupting. So much rice, I never see. Every time I puts it on the fire, up she comes a-whooping. Anyway, it makes grand eating with raisins and brown sugar. ’Tis near dark when we finishes and turns into our blankets. I mind we talks a bit about what we’ll see next day down at the Bay and we watches the Northern Lights a-dancing in the sky. Green and pink and silver they was, swooping and cavorting around. They was still at it when we falls asleep.

“Next morning, we’re up with the sun to make a day of it and gets our breakfast. There was rice, I minds. The river’s running hard as ever when we launches the canoe. ‘They let’s it out of the dam at Fraserdale,’ says John. ‘That’s the reason for it.’ Anyway, we paddles hard with the current fine to help us, for we knows we has only ten or twelve miles to go. The river’s changing all the time. There’s narrow channels with the current rippling and tugging at the canoe. Then comes stretches that look like lakes, all wide and lazy like. We goes along for two hours mebbe, making good time, when what does we see but a great river tumbling into the Moose over a rapids. Devil a sight of the Bay is there anywhere about.

“‘Tis all one,’ says John. ‘The Bay’s beyant somewheres and we’ll get there in good time. For me,’ he says, ‘I’m going fishing.’ Of course, there’s no arguing with him so he has his way. Sure enough, it’s a good place for fishing. He puts one of them plugs on like we uses that time at Elk Lake and with the first cast he gets a fish. Pickerel, they is and big ones. John has the time of his life. He keeps one big one and the rest he puts back careful like. As I says before, John is no fish-hog. Then John says mebbe we’d better camp somewhere and I know he’s thinking of the fishing. So we paddles back upstream and lands on the first island. There was nothing but a big Indian village at the rapids and we don’t want no neighbours. By the time we’ve ate, ’tis afternoon. When we looks for a camping place, there’s none to our liking. So back in the canoe we gets and paddles with the current. ‘May as well keep heading for the Bay,’ says John, and I agrees. You mind, we was all among the islands and there was lots of them.

“We runs for about an hour and finds a likely spot. Grass it was in a bit of a clearing. We spends a pleasant night and lazes around in the morning, swimming a bit and sleeping between swims. It was a grand place and hard to leave it, so it’s along in the afternoon when we takes off once more for the

Bay. We don't go far, mebbe five or six miles, when we decides to camp. Right ahead we sees another of them big lakes. The wind was blowing right against us and kicking up more sea than a sixteen-foot canoe will take.

“‘We're near the Bay,’ says John, ‘and no use in bucking into no wind like that.’ I likes my paddling dry myself, so we makes camp.

“Next day, that would be our fourth, we gets off after breakfast. Right away, we're in the lake and, away off to the left, we sees a settlement.

“‘What's that?’ says John. ‘Sure, there's nothing down stream from Moosonee.’

“‘’Tis Moosonee itself,’ I says. ‘You can see the water tank.’

“‘What day is it?’ says John.

“‘Saturday,’ I says.

“‘I'll not believe it,’ says John. ‘We left there Wednesday and we has been going ever since.’

“‘I don't believe it either,’ I says, ‘but there she is.’

“‘Would you believe it yourself, sir? There we was paddling with the current for three days and here we are right back at the i-dential spot we started from. Anyway we says nothing about it but, by common consent, as you might say, we gives up looking for the Bay. We paddles around, camping on the islands and goes to Moose Factory, a grand place and old. As for the river, we never did understand it. Some times it would be running one way and sometimes the other and times it would stand still. I never see the like of it and it's not a thing to talk about too much.’”

A few days later John came in to see me and I brought the talk around to Moosonee.

“‘’Tis a strange place,” John said. “I've been there. Mike and me paddled all round the place and we knows it like a book. ’Tis a grand river, the Moose, but devil a bit does it know its own mind. I tells Rod McLeod about it one time and he says it's the tide. Who ever heard of a tide in Northern Ontario? Rod says the moon draws the water up and makes it run anyway it likes. That's just his nonsense. You know Rod. He will have his joke. There's nothing to it. I tried it out down by the dock with a tape line in the full of the moon. It's one of them things that can't be explained and I've given up worrying about it. All the same, Mike and me has the time of our lives up at Moosonee.’”

CHAPTER NINE

Without Benefit of Clergy

It was one night a few years ago that I dropped in to see Mike and Annie. There is always a warm welcome from both and in no time I was ensconced in my special chair with my pipe drawing free and easy, the way a pipe should draw with a long evening of good talk ahead.

Almost at once Mike said, "I'll be leaving you for a minute while I go to my cellar." Not the cellar, mark you but, very grandly, "my cellar." While waiting to see what the unwonted formality might portend, I complimented Annie, not for the first time, on the beauty of her living room. It is indeed a room to live in with its solid furniture in perfect harmony and all subservient to the gem of a mirror hanging over the crackling fireplace. It seems to glow with an inner light and Annie, seeing my gaze drawn irresistibly to it, said, "Sure, it was give to us by Ricky and Rita Wilson, the time we're married forty years ago. You mind, Mike, the poor deluded creature, thinks he saved her from jumping over Niagara Falls. No harm in that for it makes him happy. They've never forgot us and I had a letter from Rita, it's only last week."

By this time Mike was back with a potbellied bottle which he was polishing vigorously with a cloth.

"Will you look at that now," said Mike, displaying a label whose motto, being translated, means "Nothing better," and bearing the legend "Bottled in 1910."

All I could say was, "There's no such animal. Do I wake or sleep?" Mike, busy with a corkscrew, paid scant attention to my plea for explanations.

"Just wrap your tongue around three fingers of it first," he said, "and I'll tell you all about it later."

Annie said, "Mike, you know I'll have no part of it but you might pour me a glass of the port wine." The speech had such an air of elegant primness about it that I was determined the ensuing conversation should not divert me from hearing the whole truth of the matter.

Some mention of a paltry theft in the neighbourhood started us reviewing the whole gamut of ways of separating the unwary public from its

money. The conversation ranged from bank robberies through various forms of petty larceny to penny sales and tag days. Beaver poaching and all the tricks of the trade came under review. It was a live topic in the Bay, because of the seizure of a shipment of illicit furs just a few days before.

“There was a hundred thousand dollars of the critters,” said Mike, “and a hundred and two of the pelts had nary a tag on them. Consigned to Montreal they was and going through as bold as brass. The game warden knows a thing or two about the racket and he takes the whole lot off at the Bay and lays a charge could break the shipper into little pieces. He’s a bold man who would try to run a cargo of the likes of that. You wouldn’t be knowing all the tricks they use. They say that a plenty of the tags has been used before and there’s no way of telling where some of them come from. Like as not, they picks them up for a dollar or two from trappers that hasn’t got their quota. That shipment meant dams blown out and houses raided to the last kitten. ’Tis a foul business that should be wiped out to let the decent trapper make his living. Sure, ’tis a bad world in spots and you’d be surprised at the tricks is played to make a dirty dollar.

“I mind one time, it was in 1911. I’m still pretty green and I has a little station up the line aways from the Bay. ’Twas the last spot the old Temiskaming Road hits the railway. Well, one day all is peaceful and a feller drives up to the platform in a light wagon. He’s a big feller with a two-weeks’ growth of whisker and I see that he has a great band of black crepe on his arm. He comes slow along the platform towards me and you can see he’s down.

“‘It’s my old partner,’ he says, ‘and him after drilling into a dud hole back on a prospect in the bush. He’s been my best friend for forty years,’ he says, ‘and I wants to bury him decent on a claim we has up in the Porcupine.’

“I see then that there’s a long white box on the wagon with a tag on it. ’Tis addressed all right and proper to South Porcupine.

“‘Handle him careful,’ he says, ‘because I has to go to the Bay to do some business and pick up the sky pilot what has ministered to him ever since he was a little lad. We’ll be going up by the night train and we’ll be there when he arrives.’

“I’m green, as I says, and I’m sorry for him all along of losing his old partner, so I says for him to give it never a thought. ‘He’ll ride on velvet,’ I says, ‘and I’ll even pick some wildflowers to put on his coffin.’ Then he gives me twenty dollars for the freight charges.

“ ’Twill be enough,’ he says, ‘and, if there’s any change, keep it or tack it to the coffin. It’s all one with me,’ he says. ‘Money’s no object to me now that old Pete is gone.’ With that he shakes my hand and almost blubbers over it and then he drives off towards the Bay.

“Well, I gets some of the lads from the village to help me with the coffin decent like, into the freight shed. Pete, for all he’s been blown up, is plenty heavy and we sweats a bit in moving him from where he’s been shoved out on the platform. Then I gets out my tariffs, for of course I has to have it right for I’m not going to keep the change. As I says, I’m green them days and I never ships no bodies before. What does I find but the tariff’s one first-class fare and the body must be accompanied. You see the fix I’m in. The twenty dollars is enough to move the body but the shipper ain’t there to accompany him. Rules is rules and there it is in black and white. I’m stumped, I tell you that. There’s no use wiring Bob Daly at South Porcupine because, with his grief and all, I forgets to get the shipper’s name. All I can do is to wait it out and hope something will be turning up. Which I does for two days. Then I knows I has to take some action.

“For forty years, I’ve broke no rules of the road to know about it and I wasn’t starting then. I couldn’t ship the body legal, so I says to myself, ‘There’s nothing for it but to bury it.’ With my mind made up, I’m all for action. So I gets three of the section lads that I can trust with their picks and shovels and we finds a nice soft spot back in the bush. It ain’t long before we has him all snug and comfortable under five feet of earth. We smooths it up and plants a wild rose or two and calls it a day. As long as I’m there, I tends that grave like it was my own.

“A year or so later, I’m moved back to the Crick and, for all of me, he can rest in peace for I never heard a word from anyone and I never goes back to the place in almost thirty years. But I often wonders what become of Pete’s partner.

“ ’Tis a dry tale, sir,” said Mike, “and another three fingers of the critter might make all the difference and we could drink to the dear deceased, as they calls them in the papers.”

“Mike,” said Annie, “I’ll have none of your sacrilege nor your ill-gotten whisky but another drop of the port wine would do me no harm.”

“What about the whisky, Mike?” I said. “It’s nectar for the gods and I must know all about it.”

“All in good time, sir, but let me finish my story about the burial. Well, as I says, I don’t go back there for thirty years and then last week I thinks I’ll look the old place over. There’s not much change. Dead and alive it always was and always will be but I goes over to look at my grave. The mound was there, sunk a bit, but I finds the place and nothing more desolate you ever see. A fire has gone through and the trees is down and it looks like no graveyard ever should look. I feels bad and no mistake. That corpse has been on my conscience more than I knows. So I makes up my mind to get him into a decent spot. With that I rounds up my section lads, old men retired now but living in the settlement, and we goes to work. ’Tis slow for there’s not much spring in the backs of them. However down we goes, with a breather every now and then. After about five feet one of the picks hits into something that ain’t a rock.

“ ‘Careful,’ I says, ‘do you want to drive the pick between the eyes of him?’

“ ‘Careful it is,’ says the lad, ‘but ’tis a glass eye he has for sure,’ and with that he comes up with a bottle in his hand. Soon the two of them that’s in the hole is coming up with bottles. You never see the like. Well, right there the obsequies, as you might call them, ceases. ’Tis buried treasure no less and we splits it four ways square and even. Would you be having just one finger straight for a nightcap, sir?’”

CHAPTER TEN

Mullins Is Touched

Annie was highly critical of modern furniture as Mike and I toasted our toes before a crackling fire.

“I see it myself,” she said, “with the veneer so thin you could see the deals at the back of it. Our own few sticks may be old fashioned, I’m not saying they’re not, but it’s handmade and stays in one piece at least.”

Knowing the old walnut, with a patina which comes from much elbow grease, was her chief joy, I agreed that no trumpery modern stuff could equal it.

“Yes,” said Mike, “it should be good, for it all come from a gold mine I once owned. It was when I was up at the Crick, the time I’m saving Rita Wilson from jumping over Niagara Falls. It might be mebbe three, four months before.”

Annie’s quiet smile had far more of affection than derision in it.

“I’m doing paper work in the office about two o’clock or so when I sees a feller coming up the trail. He’s got a three months’ beard on him and his clothes ain’t what you’d call neat. I see he has a packsack bogged down with something heavy and then he comes into the office.

“We passes the time of day and then he says, ‘When’s the next down train?’ You could tell he was Irish—County Cork like as not—and it subsequent turns out his name’s O’Grady.

“‘Number Ten’s due in about two hours,’ I says, ‘if she’s on time.’

“‘Praise be,’ he says, ‘for I has to get south this night. I’m bound for Ireland, me bucko,’ he says, ‘to see my old mother,’ he says, ‘who is not for this world much longer.’

“‘Is it poorly, she is,’ I says, ‘the poor woman?’

“‘Poorly!’ he says. ‘She’s like to die at any minute and me four thousand perishing miles from Cork. ’Tis broke I am or near it and how I’ll make the grade barring a cattle ship it’s none of me knows.’

“‘’Tis a terrible long ways,’ I says, ‘and two hundred dollars you’ll have to have to see the length of it.’

“‘True for you,’ he says, mournful like, ‘and I has the short end of fifty. ’Tisn’t broke I’d be when I gets home and her needing comforts at the end of it. There’s only one thing to do. I’ll have to let my prope’ty go.’

“‘Prope’ty,’ I says, ‘has you got prope’ty?’

“‘For sure,’ he says, ‘I’ve got a gold mine but you’re a poor man by the looks of you.’

“‘With that, I gets mad, the scarecrow, and me with over five hundred dollars in the bank at Haileybury against the time I’m marrying Annie here.

“‘Not so poor as you might think,’ I says, ‘Sure I’ve got an interest in the railway,’ I says, and it was no lie at that, seeing as how it’s a Government road.

“‘Has you now?’ he says, ‘Then it might interest you to look at the samples I has with me.’

“‘With that he opens his packsack and takes out a bag and dumps it on the table. It’s full of hunks of ore.

“‘They’re from my mine,’ he says, ‘what was going to make me rich,’ he says, ‘and now I’ll have to leave it go for the tag end of a song, as you might say. Sticking right out of the ground they was and I knocks them off with my bit of a hammer. All staked and recorded down at Haileybury and the assessment work done right and proper. Wirra, wirra, to think that I has to let you have the whole thing for two thousand dollars. ’Twill be a small matter to the likes of you what owns the railroad and it’s handy for you to work in your spare time. Just like digging your garden it’ll be and it only ten miles back in the bush. Like as not, you’ll run a spur line in to it.’

“‘O’Grady’s talking pretty fast but I has my eye on the samples and I can see that they is good. There’s yellow gold sticking out all over them and I’m thinking that it will be a fine thing for me and Annie to be owners of a gold mine.

“‘Two thousand dollars,’ I says, ‘is more cash than I has and my chunk of the railway won’t get you to Ireland at all, at all. Now, if you was to be thinking about five hundred dollars,’ I says, ‘and the deal is regular, we might do business.’

“‘With that he was near to having a fit.

“‘Five hundred dollars for my gold mine with all the gold in it,’ he says when he can speak. ‘ ’Tis robbery,’ he says, ‘and me with the papers to prove it.’

“He’s red in the face when he digs into the packsack and comes up with the papers. He’s the owner, all fair and square, of a forty-acre claim back in the bush east of the Crick.

“‘You can telephone to Haileybury,’ he says, ‘to see that it’s all clear. I insists on it,’ he says, ‘and I’ll pay for the call.’

“To save him from having a fit in the office, we telephones and, sure enough, it’s as he says.

“‘Five hundred dollars,’ he says, ‘and a month from now you’ll have dug out five thousand with your own two hands.’

“The long and the short of it was, I give him my cheque for the money and he signs over the paper. Number Ten’s just whistling for the Crick when we winds up.

“‘I’ll just take the samples for a bit of a present for my old mother,’ he says and he sweeps them into the bag. With that the train is in and he wishes me luck and away he goes.

“I’m telling you I’m feeling good and me with a gold mine for five hundred dollars and it with only a chip or two off of the surface. When I gets back to the office, I finds one little sample that he misses. It’s as big as the end of your thumb and the half of it is gold.

“Well, it’s mebbe two or three days on my off day, I goes to look at my mine. ’Tis easy to find and it not half a mile off the trail to the Whatahope. ’Tis easy to find but not as easy to believe. The ground falls away from the trail and I brings up at a stake on the edge of a pond. My mine is under it. The only gold I sees is waterlilies swimming all over it. I’m feeling sick for I knows I has been took. I walks all round the forty acres and devil a bit can I get on my mine without wetting my feet. I ain’t walking on air, as you might say, walking back to the Crick. My five hundred’s gone what was to set me and Annie up and I didn’t have the heart to tell her.”

“’Twould have been all right,” said Annie softly.

“And well I knows it, mavourneen,” Mike said. “You’d have stood by me as you always have.”

“Anyway, I tries to forget the whole thing, except that I looks at my sample when I’m thinking of indulging myself with a plug of smoking. I has nothing but dry smokes for the next three months and good for the pride of me it was. Then one day, when Number Nine comes in, what does I see but O’Grady hopping to the platform. My first thought is to tear him limb from

limb but I'm that busy with the express I postpones the pleasure. As I cools down, I does some thinking and O'Rourke, what runs the King Edward, is there waiting for a case of eggs. This O'Rourke's my friend and he's the only one at the Crick what knows about my mine. I tips him off to Mr. O'Grady.

"It's mebbe one hour later, when I'm at my paper work, when O'Grady blows in. I treats him like he was Sandy Claus and him just after filling of my stocking but first I slips the gold sample, which is plain to see, into my cash drawer.

"'It's glad I am to see you, Mr. O'Grady,' I says, 'and you along of setting me up for life. When I first sees that claim,' I says, 'I'd like to have your heart out but 'tis me that knows little about mines, not being a mining man like yourself. And how's your old mother when you left her?'

"'Never mind my old mother,' he says. 'You caught me with my grief and all and it's robbed me you has no less. I've talked with O'Rourke up at the hotel and you can't get away with it. I'll have the law on you,' he says, 'taking my prope'ty with your smooth talk. What was you putting in the cash drawer? 'Twas gold and don't you deny it.'

"'Well, you knows what it was,' I says, 'and it come from the same place you got your samples but the mine is mine,' I says, 'and I has your writing to prove it.'

"Then he sees I'm not to be browbeat and he comes over all soft like. There's tears in his eyes almost.

"'You're a hard man,' he says, 'and me losing it all along of my old mother,' he says, 'and her not resting quiet yet in the cold clay, God rest the soul of her,' he says. 'I has one thousand dollars from selling of the shebeen and her few poor sticks and it's yours if you will leave me have my mine back.'

"'One thousand dollars is it for the fine mine what's mine by legal purchase,' I says, 'and it's yourself has said I can dig the gold out of it with my own two hands. Not likely,' I says, 'and it like digging in my garden.'

"I'm feeling in the bones of me that he's never been to Ireland and, like as not, he got the money selling waterlilies. Anyway, we haggles back and forth, him getting sadder all the time and me softening up gradual like. After a while, he pulls out his money and counts out one thousand dollars and I signs back the papers to him legal. When the deal is closed, we're both happy men and he goes out whistling with his head cocked in the air.

“The O’Gradys has their pride and I never sees him again. O’Rourke just winks at me when I asks him what he tells him. Anyway Annie gets the chair you’re sitting in and the whole shebang from the only gold mine I ever owns.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“ ’Tis Kicks, not Kisses, Makes Men
of Heroes”

We had been talking about the old times in the bush with Annie’s needles clicking a soothing undertone. It was thirty below outside with everything tense and on the point of cracking. The warm glow from the fire, with just a suggestion of pine knots in the air, had put Mike in a mood for reminiscence.

“Yes,” he said, “they was good men in them days. One fly season would make or break them and only the good ones stayed. ’Twas a fine school, the bush, and it sheltering you or threatening you as it had a mind. Times it was dry as tinder and ready to go raging across six townships if you was careless with a camp fire. An’ the fine smell of it with the wind playing little tunes in the tree tops. ’Twas then it would sorta make you a part of it, like you belonged same as the loons crying from lake to lake and the moose and beaver going about their business. For all I’m working on the railway steady, I gets to know it and, if you understand me, love it.

“You see men come out with nothing but raw meat on the necks of them and they’d curse the flies and the bush and their own selves for the fools they was to stick it but give them a day or two to relax in the *effete* pleasures of Boston Crick and rustle up some chuck and off they goes again as chipper as you please. As the poetry book says, ‘You hates it like hell for a season and then you are worse than the worst of thim.’ I’ve seen it many a time and you never can tell by the looks of a man.

“I remember, it would be 1912 mebbe, when things was hot around Kirkland, a broncho comes into the Crick. He’s a young feller with a pair of shoulders to him but innocent as a little woolly lamb. He don’t know a tumpline from a shoepac. Well, we’re sitting around O’Rourke’s hotel one night swapping lies with as hairy a bunch of bushwhackers as you ever see when he blows in and asks for a room.

“ ‘With or without?’ says O’Rourke.

“ ‘Sure, I’d like a barth,’ says he in his English voice and the gang roars for the only bedroom in the place is the whole second floor with twelve bunks in it. When the situation is explained to the lad, he takes it good natured and dumps his pack in a corner and sets down with the rest of us. Them sourdoughs knows there’s no closed season on his kind and their talk

is all for his benefit. Such lies you never heard and all backed up with Bible oaths. The lad is drinking it all in with his eyes popping out. To hear them tell it, all you has to do is to barge into the bush anywheres and stake a claim with the gold sticking out of it like raisins in a pudding. After one outrageous story, swore to by the whole crowd, I says, ‘That would be the year of the blue snow’ to tip the lad off for I’m feeling sorry for him. Sure, blue snow means nothing to him at all, at all, and he takes it in his stride.

“Then they gets to talking and arguing about what a man needs in the bush, and him intent on doing a spot of prospecting. The outfits they thinks up would take ten men to pack but when the young broncho starts to ask questions, they modifies their views and I has a feeling that there’s something cooking. However, it’s getting near my bedtime and I pulls my freight. All next day I’m busy with my own affairs and it ain’t ’til evening that I sees O’Rourke.

“‘The lad’s gone,’ he says, ‘and I never had a chance to give him a word. That Big Bill Kolensky and Mike Ryan sings him a song and gets him outfitted with ten days chuck and off he goes, with an axe and mattock over his shoulder to seek his fortune. The flies is perishing bad and devil a bit does the lad know about travelling the bush. We’ll see him back tonight,’ he says, ‘or tomorrow at the latest.’

“‘Sure, I wouldn’t blame him,’ I says, ‘but them that’s ignorant will go where a better man would think twice about it. ’Tis myself don’t like the look of it.’

“However, the lad has ten days’ chuck and he won’t starve for a while. Anyway the country’s staked for ten mile round and he can always work his way back following of the tie lines which is blazed for any man to read. Being busy, I’m thinking little of it for the next week or so. Then I’m at O’Rourke’s one night, it might be ten days after the lad sets out and the gang, which is laying over the worst of the flies, is setting round as usual. They’re talking about the lad as I comes in and there ain’t a laugh in any one of them. Serious they is, the lot of them, and damning greenhorns what get themselves lost or mebbe break a leg where there’s no one to help them. They thinks up so many things could happen to the lad that you could tell they’re getting scared and they damns him from Cork to Donegal, before they decides to give him one more day. Then the ten of them is going to search the bush for twenty miles around.

“It’s next day, just after Number Ten’s gone south, that I’m looking up the track when I sees the lad stepping along the ties. He breaks off on the

trail to the village and I shuts up the station and follows along. He's stepping out handsome like with his axe and mattock on his shoulder and his pack sagged down like it is near empty. His clothes is tore bad and he's dirty enough to need a 'barth' but he ain't beat by many a mile.

"We reaches O'Rourke's together and I shakes his hand and says, 'Good lad' and in we goes. The gang looks kind of shamefaced and tries to act like they'd been expecting him. The lad goes over and shakes hands all round and then he says, speaking English like you understand, 'Gentlemen, I wants to thank you one and all. I comes here a stranger and you takes me in. You helps me get an outfit and sets me on the road to fortune. 'Tis glad I am to see you waiting here for me to get back. I'll never forget you,' he says, 'and I hopes that you will always remember me.'

"With that they crowds around asking him questions about his trip and all talking at once to sorta relieve their minds which was none too easy. The lad's as openfaced as a eight-day clock but it seems to me that he's picking his words careful. The gang gathers from what he says that he heads due east and for ten miles he finds the country staked. Then he gets into a swamp where he spends three days floundering around looking for high ground. The flies is bad and you can see that his neck's no better than raw beef. The mosquitoes likes him too, and he don't get much sleep. Of course, he don't know where he's been but, except for one day when he lays up, he's travelling steady. Anyway, at the end of it, he opens his pack and takes out three samples. Two of them is quartz with free gold showing and the other's a bit of grey rock what he brings along because of the heft of it.

"You never see a bunch of men rocked back on their heels like that set of beauties. They can't get nothing more out of the lad for of course he don't know where he's been. The gold is there but where it comes from none of them can tell and that goes for the lad as well. Big Bill Kolensky remembers that he has to see a man about a canoe and off he goes. Then Mike Ryan and all the others has business to attend to. It ain't two hours later before every last one of them has disappeared from the village in pairs or by themselves. They're all carrying packs to make their knees buckle for every man of them is bound to stake the kid's discovery. He says nothing, you mind, about staking anything.

"It's ten days before the first of them is back and for three weeks they keeps coming in. A sorry looking lot of scarecrows they was what with the flies and the swamp and brûlée they travels through.

“As for the lad, he don’t stay more than three days and most of the time he puts in with me in the office. We gets friendly like and I takes to him. There’s never a whimper out of him. He was lost complete from the time he’s half a mile into the bush but he just keeps pushing ahead. He never sees a sign of gold but he meets up with a geology shark, one of them rock doctors, after eight days of it and he goes out with him to Kirkland Lake which is just starting to be a camp. He rests up one day. Then he walks out to Swastika and hops off of the train a mile or so up the track from the Crick. He says, if he don’t come back, he fears his friends at the Crick might be worrying. He’s got a job with the geology shark and anyway he has to return the samples which is only borrowed.”

“Yes,” said Mike, “you never can tell just by looking at them.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Spell of the Northland

Mike and I were riding the van on a freight up from the Bay one day last summer. It was as pretty a June day as even the Northland can boast. Charlie Spence's coffee was freighting the air with all the fragrance of Araby and steaming cups were at our elbows.

"You know, sir," said Mike, "spelling is a strange game. I never learns it what you might call proper. Many's the rap over the knuckles I took when I was a gaffer at the Board School just because the words was spelled different from what they sounds. Last night me and Annie is over at the spelling bee at St. Mary's and little Ambrosio Cassidy, what ain't more than four feet high, takes the prize against the whole school. Nothing stumps him. Words I never hear before comes to him as easy as if he was making of them up as he goes along. I never hopes to see the beat of him.

"It all brought back something that happened to myself all along of sticking to the easy words in school and letting the hard ones take care of themselves. 'Twas years ago, when I hadn't been Agent long and I'm at Widdifield and like to get bushed for it's a lonesome spot. Most of the time I'm by myself with the operator within easy call pottering around in his garden.

"One day, when I'm like to be talking to myself it's that lonesome, a stranger comes in. I see by the face of him that he's one of them foreign lads, Finn mebbe or Rooshian, but a big handsome hunk of a man. There's nothing due either way for two hours or more, so he's as welcome to me as a Jack of spades in the middle of a straight flush. I'm thinking if I can hold him talking for a bit 'twill be a blessed relief for me and what he comes for can wait a while.

"So I says, 'Good day to you and come into the office where we can talk comfortable.'

"When we're sitting down, 'I wants a ticket to Tar-mi-gan,' says my Finn or Rooshian, as the case may be. He talks English thick like but so a man can understand him. 'Tis glad I am to hear it but, if he talks Chinees, it would have sounded good that day."

For all Mike's attempts to reproduce the dialect, Finn or Rooshian, as the case may be, it still would have done credit to Mike's accent at its fruitiest.

“‘Tar-mi-gan,’ I says, ‘and where might that be at?’

“‘Sure, it's in Saskatchewan,’ says Matti, for that's his name it develops subsequent.

“‘It's a pleasure for to sell you a ticket,’ I says, ‘and I'll just be looking it up in my big book,’ I says, ‘which has all the stations into it.’ So I gets down my *Official Guide* and my tariffs and goes to work. And work it was. Devil a bit could I find any Tar-mi-gan and I searched the whole country west of Winnipeg until I was getting my feet wet in the Pacific Ocean no less.

“‘Tar-mi-gan,’ I says, ‘what like place is it,’ I says, ‘that you wants to go there so bad?’”

“‘I wants a ticket for Tar-mi-gan,’ says the lad. ‘My brother's wife's brother's there and he tells me to come.’

“‘Likely it's a small place,’ I says, ‘and has no station on the railway. Could I sell you a ticket to Tantallon, or Tatagwa or Tugaske?’ I says, ‘I hear them all well spoke of. Saskatchewan is none so big but you could walk over to Tar-mi-gan of an evening.’

“‘I wants a ticket for Tar-mi-gan,’ says Matti.

“So I goes back to my books and near wears them out trying to find the place. It just was nowheres in the book and I can't sell no ticket to nowheres not in the book. So I decides to try it another way.

“‘Has you ever been to Saskatchewan?’ I says, ‘and does you know the length of it?’

“‘No,’ he says, ‘I've never been there. I comes from old country by a great ship and then they brings me here. I'm working in the bush,’ he says, ‘with my axe and I wants a ticket for Tar-mi-gan where my brother's wife's brother's at.’

“‘Then you would know nothing about the Injuns what's in Saskatchewan,’ I says, ‘and them murdering and scalping the poor people. 'Twould go against my conscience,’ I says, ‘to sell you a ticket and have you scalped at the end of it.’

“‘I see some Injuns,’ says Matti, a bit doubtful like, ‘and they ain't scalped me none.’

“‘You see some tame Injuns,’ I says, ‘if you see the Injuns round here. These here Injuns is Sunday School Injuns. They never scalps no one. Them wild Injuns in Saskatchewan, they’re different. They has feathers,’ I says, ‘and paint on their faces and they scalps you with their tommyhawks. They drinks your blood,’ I says slow and solemn.

“‘I ain’t heard from my brother’s wife’s brother for a long time, not since I come to this country,’ says Matti kind of thoughtful. ‘Would you think . . .?’

“‘Sure, he may have run away,’ I says, ‘when they burns the settlement. That would be why it ain’t in the book no more. They takes it out of the book. That would be the way of it.’

“‘Seems like you’re right,’ he says, ‘and you with the book to prove it.’

“‘Could be,’ I says, ‘and glad I am that you comes to me in your trouble. You can use an axe, you says, and sure there’s no trees in Saskatchewan. Listen to me now,’ I says, ‘They’re looking for likely lads like yourself, it’s only forty miles up the line for the fine chopping and hauling of the logs. ’Twill be like this. You gets a ticket for Red Water and I gives you a writing for the walking boss. You’ll get a job from Jimmy Whalen, what’s my friend,’ I says, ‘and it won’t be no time before you makes your fortune.’

“So that’s the way we fixes it. He gets his ticket and the mixed comes along and he hops on board. I hears no more about Tar-mi-gan at that time nor for years after. Be that as it may, if little Ambrosio Cassidy was Agent at Widdifield them days, instead of Mike Mullins, there’d be no fine house and mill we’re whistling for this minute.”

Sure enough, George Haskins at the front end was giving one long for a station and the brakes went on smooth and easy as if the “Northland” were coming to a stop at Temagami. As the van cleared the last of the bush, Saari’s mill, with its trim piles of inch and dimension stuff, came into view. Logs were sliding up the jack ladder and the buzzing saws were filling the sunbaked air with the tangy perfume of good spruce. High on the knoll, Saari’s house, rambling, broad-eaved and tight as expert Finnish axework could make it, was a bit of the homeland enhanced by the inevitable sauna down at the shore.

“‘Would you look at that now?’” said Mike. “Saari has only his axe when I see him first. Then he gets a bit of a portable and goes to sawing lumber on his own. One thing leads to another, for the lad has a head on his shoulders.

Then ten years ago, he builds the house and mill. A grand man and a good friend, as myself well knows. 'Tis a strange world, sir, to think that I makes Matti Saari, in a manner of speaking, all along of my not knowing that the P in Ptarmigan is as silent as a henpecked husband in a family squabble."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Just Good, Clean Sport

The ice in our glasses gave a companionable tinkle as we sat one warmish evening in Mike's garden. Annie, despite the heat, contented herself with a ladylike glass of port wine.

"Men has no conscience," said Annie, "for well you know that liquor come from the coffin of a man that was buried for twinty years and more."

By a strange process of logic, Annie will have it that some weird method of transubstantiation accounts for the elixir with which Mike occasionally regales his special friends.

"Sure, I tells you," said Mike, "that he never was in his coffin. I thinks I buries him right enough but 'twas only a bootlegger, may his shadow never grow less, that tries to make an honest dollar at his trade."

"I thinks what I thinks," said Annie with a toss of her head, "and I'll have no part of it."

Mike took an unregenerate draught and, anxious to shift to less controversial ground, said, "They tells me there's plenty of deer in the bush come hunting season. Any time you drive by night down from Temagami, you sees them in your headlights. For all the shooting of them, they never seems to get less. 'Tis myself has shot my share of them but, while I hunts them regular, I ain't shot one in ten years. The lads has even stopped ribbing me about it. Annie's against it and that's good enough for me."

"And why not," said Annie, "with their great soft eyes and the graceful ways of them. I'd take shame to eat them though I'll not say no to a nice roast of moosemeat or a beaver when it's caught fair and legal."

"So now I just hunts them," said Mike, "and, by the powers, it's far more fun and harder. My best one was a big buck at ten yards last year. I works up to them against the wind and it takes some doing. Every man has his own way of hunting and that reminds me of something that happened years ago.

"I'm here at the Bay them days and you don't have to go far to get a deer. Some of the lads is going out and I goes along. One of them is a Italian who hasn't done too bad with the bananas and oranges and he decides to take up hunting. He's green of course, this being his first trip. There's no

dogs to speak of then and some of the lads circles round a likely bit of country and drives them in. To make it real like, they barks like dogs and such a mixed pack you never hears. The I-talian's posted in a good spot about half a mile from me. It's three hours mebbe when I gets my deer and then I works over to see how the I-talian gets along.

“‘You shoota da buck, Tony,’ I says speaking I-talian. ‘Has you shot your deer?’

“‘You says, has I shoota da buck, has I shoota da deer. Sapristi. No, no,’ he says. ‘I bark lika da houn’ dog. I bark lika, what you call, da Great Dane. I bark lika da poodle dogs, all kinda dogs and I never sees da deer.’

“Of course the man was green and he took a lot of ribbing. But, by the powers, I’ll say this for him, he took it. Anyway Tony and me is friendly like and does a lot of hunting together. He learns fast and he gets his deer like everyone else. A better man you wouldn’t ask for in the bush after a year or two and he sure knew the answers with a frying pan or a reflector. Good natured too. Nothing ever fazed him much. I remember once I pulled his leg good and proper and never a hard word from him at the end of it. I’ll tell you about that, for it just shows that even a good man can get hisself tied up if he don’t watch all the angles.

“It’s mebbe two years after Tony starts to hunt when we decides one day to get some rabbits. You know what Annie here can do with a jugged rabbit. Well, Tony gets a horse and buggy and we starts out the old Temiskaming Road. It ain’t paved like now but the going’s not too bad and we jogs along enjoying the ride. We mebbe go ten miles when we come to one of these here bush farms that looks a likely place for rabbits. I’m not one for shooting over no man’s land without the asking so I goes up to the house and leaves Tony with the buggy.

“The farmer’s chopping a bit of wood by the house when I comes up. He looks kinda low and discouraged and ain’t got no welcome for me. I passes the time of day with him and then I says, ‘Would you be letting me shoot some of the rabbits, me and my friend?’

“‘Why would I let you shoot the rabbits on my land?’ he says. ‘I can shoot them myself,’ he says.

“Well, we talks a bit and I discovers that I knows his brother. With that he gets more friendly like and allows mebbe we could do some shooting.

“‘You’ll have to pay for it though,’ he says. ‘There’s a job to be done and I haven’t the heart for it. You can shoot and shoot,’ he says, ‘if you’ll do

it for me.’

“ ‘Anything in reason,’ I says. ‘What’s the job you’d have me doing?’

“ ‘It’s like this,’ he says. ‘I’ve got a old horse that’s mebbe thirty years old,’ he say, ‘and poorly. It ain’t happy,’ he says, ‘and would be better out of the way. I can’t bring myself to shoot him because he looks at me, if you understand me. So you got to do it for me.’

“I says I will and he shows me where it’s at in a bit of a field at the far side of the clearing. Then I goes back to Tony and tells him we can shoot. Right then I’m thinking that I keeps the horse as a surprise for Tony. We gets the harness off our horse and waters him and puts his nosebag on. He’s comfortable for a good long spell.

“It’s mebbe ten o’clock in the morning when we start to hunt. We hunts the rest of the morning and then we has our lunch. Then we hunts all of the afternoon and the whole time we never sees a rabbit. It’s as likely a place as you could find but, with the country full of them, there’s none anywhere we goes. We’re tired, hungry and disgusted when we starts back for the buggy.

“I’m telling Tony what I thinks about it when we hits the field where the old horse is standing.

“ ‘We ain’t shot a thing,’ I says. ‘Never fired our blessed guns off. We traipse over twenty miles of country and here we are, with our tongues hanging out, and we never even see a chipmunk. It’s myself is going to shoot the old horse there. I’ll not hunt all day without no shooting. Here goes,’ says I, and I starts for the horse.

“ ‘No shoota da horse,’ says Tony. ‘We getta arres’,’ he says, ‘and tree mont in da jail. For the love of Mike,’ he says, ‘no shoota da horse.’

“When he sees I’m for it, he takes to his heels and is off down the hill like a scared jackrabbit. I goes over to the old horse which is standing with its head between its knees. I see he’s not long for this world for all of me. It’s a kindness I does him when I gives him both barrels between the ears. He never knows what happens and I leaves him lay. Then I starts back to have my joke with Tony.

“The whole thing don’t take twenty minutes but, bedad, when I comes in sight of the road there’s no Tony and no horse. The fire lads couldn’t have harnessed up and got away faster than Tony did that day. I can tell you walking back the ten miles to the Bay, I’m glad we shoot no rabbits.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Mullins with Whiskers

“Christmas! ’Tis a fine season of the year,” said Mike, “with all the little gaffers whooping it up on the hockey rinks and everyone getting a lift out of it. Men that never cracks a smile the rest of the time has a ‘Merry Christmas’ for you. It does you good just to walk along Main Street and see the lights and colours in the windows and the shine on the people’s faces.”

“ ’Tis a blessed time,” said Annie, “if you don’t think back too far.”

“What’s on your mind I knows,” said Mike. “It’s myself remembers he’d be a strapping man this minute if things had turned out different. Perhaps it’s why you and me likes to see the little gaffers happy. You’ll have noticed, sir, that the years has a way of rubbing the sharp edges off of memories.”

I nodded, for one does not willingly obtrude on echoes from the past.

“ ’Tis a grand time, for sure,” said Mike, “but there’s them as wouldn’t say so. You remember Casey, Annie? It’s five years ago this week. Just wait ’til I puts a stick of that Widdifield maple on the fire and I’ll tell you about it.

“When did it start, Annie?”

“ ’Twas one week before Christmas,” said Annie, “and well I remembers it, with Mrs. Casey in that very chair crying her eyes out.”

“You’re right,” said Mike. “I meets Casey on the street by the Post Office. This Casey, sir, is working steady in the shops. A good man at his job and straight and square. He’s my neighbour and I knows him well. Casey’s as low as a 100-class loco trying to lug eighty loads up Jocko Hill.

“I passes the time of day with him and I says, ‘Merry Christmas to you Casey.’

“ ‘The hell you says,’ says Casey. ‘What’s merry about it?’

“I see he’s down and I asks him what’s the trouble.

“ ‘I’m low,’ he says, ‘and that’s a fact. I’m running on the ties with no water in my glass. You knows how it’s been,’ he says. ‘My woman’s mother has been poorly for a year and then she up and dies last Tuesday. It’s been a grind for us and it takes everything we has in the sock and the most of my

last pay cheque for to square the funeral. 'Tis Christmas in one week and there's the kids to think about. Can you say "Merry Christmas" to that one?'

"'Sure,' I says, 'it's bad. Now if it was a bit of a loan you'd be needing to see you through,' I says, 'Annie and me won't see you stuck.'

"'Is it the heel of my hand in your face you're wanting?'" he says.

"'Tis not, me proud man,' I says, and I went on my way.

"For the next week I can't get Casey out of my head, not with Annie here telling me all the news. She and Mrs. Casey is friends for years and you know how Annie is when any one's in trouble. I hears a bit of the story every time I come into the house. The kids, Dinny and Honorah, are talking Christmas and Sandy Claus all of the time fit to break Mrs. Casey's heart. They goes to a kid's party at the church and there's a feller that takes things out of a hat. Rabbits, umbrellas and all like that. Mrs. Casey hears little Dinny, that's only six, telling one of the lads his dad can do it better. 'My dad can do anything,' says Dinny.

"'They'll eat on Christmas,' says Mrs. Casey, 'if it's the last thing they does, but devil a bit of money is there for no presents.' Sandy Claus is going to look pretty cheap to them kids come Christmas with nothing but a couple of sleighs Casey makes for them hisself. The kids is getting the idea that Sandy Claus may miss them altogether that year. Mothers has ways of smoothing the bumps that might hurt their kids.

"I don't see Casey again 'til Christmas Eve. Annie sends me over to the house to fetch Mrs. Casey for a minute and I goes in. Casey shows me the kids fast asleep in their little beds as pretty as a pitcher and I'm damned if there ain't a battered up plug hat on the floor beside of Dinny. Casey give it one look and it hurt to see his face.

"'When we comes out, 'It's myself has to do an errand up town,' I says, 'and will you come with me, Casey? I'd be glad of your company.'

"'Fine company you'll find me,' he says, 'but I might as well come along.' And he does.

"'When we gets outside, I says, 'I'm a bit short myself, what with one thing and another,' I says, 'and I'm going to do a bit of business as may square me up. You knows this I-talian, Tony, I shoots with. Well he makes a bet now and then and I thinks that I can beat him. Today I gets a tip on a horse as is bound to win and I puts two dollars on the nose of him. He's called Old Irish and he can't lose with a name like that.'

“‘You’re crazy, Mullins,’ says Casey. ‘Who ever heard of horses running on Christmas Eve in the night time?’

“‘Crazy, is it,’ says I. ‘Hasn’t you heard of the lads playing football under the lights and baseball too, for you’ve listened to the games. Why wouldn’t the horses run under the lights in Mexico where it’s summer all of the time, Christmas Eve or not? You tell me that.’

“I sees Casey is stumped and, as we goes along, I tells him about Old Irish and how he’s thirty to one but Tony won’t pay more than fifteen if he wins. And I talks and talks until we gets to Tony’s place. Casey, decent man that he is, never puts a nickel on a horse in his life but he goes in with me. Tony’s there and I tells him what I wants.

“‘You placa da bet on Olda Irish? Two dollars to winna da race? Also your friend trya da luck? Dey goes to the pos’ in twenty minutes and I burna da wires to placa da bets.’

“My talk has impressed poor Casey and he pulls two dollars out of his pocket and I knows it’s all he has.

“‘Tis devil a bit of use to me,’ says Casey, ‘so put it on.’

“Tony goes into a back room and we hears him talking into a telephone. He don’t come out for half a hour and then, from the long face of him, I knows that we wins our bets. He shells out thirty dollars to Casey and then to me and you’d think they’d been printed with his heart’s blood.

“When we gets outside, Casey grabs my hand and near breaks the bone of it. ‘Merry Christmas to you,’ he says. ‘It’s a lucky thing I goes for a walk with you instead of ordering you from my house. ’Twill mean the world and all to the woman and the kids.’

“The long and the short of it is that we lands back at Casey’s with our arms full of presents and all because Old Irish runs a good race way down in Mexico.”

I saw a happy smile on Annie’s face that was full of warm affection for Mike. It seemed to me that there was more to the story than had been told.

“On your Bible oath, Annie,” I said, “what part did you play in it?”

“Sure, all I do was sell Mrs. Casey a raffle ticket for a quarter, and it was like getting blood out of a stone, as you might say. She won a nice gold chain for Casey’s watch that he always had on an old silver one. Mike does all the rest.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Heads I Win, Tails You Lose

The talk had been desultory under the relaxing influence of a cheery fire on the hearth. In haphazard fashion it had touched on slide trombones, the price of butter, Black Jack and the art of finger printing.

“You say that every man’s thumbs is different?” said Mike.

I said that it had yet to be disproved.

“For all that, men are all alike,” said Annie with unwonted cynicism as she eyed two rather untidy ash trays.

“It could be,” said Mike, “and I remember two that was. It was in the old days and I’m up at the Crick. There’s not much doing that morning. I has my bit of express on the truck and I’m waiting for Number Ten, when a fellow, with a black moustache, comes in to get a ticket. He’s dressed in a red mackinaw and a coonskin cap.

“‘I wants a ticket to Englehart,’ he says. ‘Good and bad.’

“‘Good and bad,’ I says, ‘and what might that be?’

“‘Going and coming,’ says he, and I gave him a return ticket.

“Well, Number Ten comes in. I gets my express aboard and I stands there watching her pull out. My man with the red coat and cap is standing on the rear platform as she goes round the bend. I thinks no more of it and I’m back in the office, it’s mebbe two minutes after, when what does I see but my man in the red coat galloping down to the station from the settlement.

“‘I’ve missed my train,’ he says, when he can talk for puffing.

“‘You have not,’ I says. ‘I see you going round the bend on her not two minutes ago,’ I says, ‘and you’re getting near to Rosegrove by now.’

“‘Then how come I miss her,’ he says, ‘and here’s my ticket to prove it.’

“‘I’d have swore I saw you on the train,’ I says.

“‘You’re not by any chance a drinking man?’ he says. ‘That would explain it.’

“With that I gets mad for I knows my Rule G as well as any man. He’s grinning, which saves him, big as he is and we gets friendly. I gives him a

refund and he tells me his name is J. J. Jordan and he's just come to town.

“Next morning, I'm waiting for Number Nine and who steps off of her but J. J. Jordan.

“‘It can't be,’ I says to him when he comes up.

“‘What can't be,’ he says.

“‘You can't get off of the train,’ I says, ‘for you never went to Englehart.’

“‘Never went to Englehart, is it, when you sells me a ticket and watches me go?’

“‘I sells you a ticket, right enough,’ I says, ‘but you misses the train and I gives you a refund and well you knows it.’

“‘Is it glasses you're needing?’ he says. ‘We'll ask the conductor.’

“McManus, what's on Number Nine them days, comes up and ‘Sure he's on the train the whole ways,’ he says.

“‘What's your name?’ I says, ‘if it ain't a secret.’”

“‘My name,’ he says, ‘is J. J. Jordan and my friends call me Jake.’

“I tell you I'm stumped and thinks of nothing else the next two days. Then I'm up at O'Rourke's hotel one night and, as I comes in, there's J. J. Jordan sitting in a chair.

“‘Good evening to you, Jake,’ I says as I'm going through for I has business with the cook.

“‘My name is Jack,’ he says, ‘and good evening to you.’

“‘You tells me Jake,’ I says, feeling a bit hostile.

“‘I tells you nothing,’ he says, ‘but my name is Jack.’

“‘Tis all one,’ I says. ‘Jack or Jake,’ and I starts for the kitchen through the dining-room.

“When I'm half way to the kitchen door, I hears someone say, ‘Hi-ya, Mullins’ and there's J. J. Jordan eating of his supper. I don't say nothing. I just looks at him. Then I goes back to the front room and takes a look. I does it twice and, sure as you're a foot high, there's two of them. Identical twins they calls them and there ain't a bit of difference between them barring their names and mebbe their thumbprints as you says.

“No one ever sorts them out and I’m thinking they don’t know themselves for they must have been shuffled and dealt half-a-dozen times before they is tagged with names. When someone asks them what the second J is for, they both says Jones and there we was with only Jake and Jack to go on. They wears the same clothes or else, being of a size, they wears each others. They talks alike and when someone gets Jake to cut off his moustache, we don’t see no one but Jake for a week until we finds out that both of them has cut them off.

“It’s a lucky thing for them and for all of us that they’re not the murdering kind because both of them would have been hanged to get the guilty man. But they’re both good fellows and causes a lot of innocent amusement around Boston Crick that summer. More than one man swears off the licker because of them. Of course they’re not with us all the time, and it’s just as well for they drives you crazy even when you knows them. They has a claim east of the Crick that they works during the summer.

“Comes November and the deer-hunting season. The lads has been shooting kind of promiscuous, as you might say, the year before and they runs in a game warden on us. He’s a fellow named Duquette, as we finds out subsequent. Well, one evening in comes J. J. Jordan, don’t ask me which, with a deer over the back of him. He gives it to the lads at O’Rourke’s, keeping a hind quarter for hissself. This Duquette shows his badge and asks to see the hunting licence. J. J. shows it made out all right and proper to J. J. Jordan.

“Next night in comes J. J. Jordan again with a deer over his shoulder for the lads. Duquette is there and near hits the ceiling. He shows his badge again and takes the licence made out to J. J. Jordan.

“‘You’re a bold man,’ he says, ‘and you flouting the law under my very nose,’ he says. ‘You kills two deer when you knows you can kill only one. You’re under arrest and I takes you to jail at Swastika this night.’

“‘What for does I go to jail?’ says J. J. ‘I kills only one deer and you can’t prove different.’

“‘You can tell it to the judge,’ says Duquette, ‘in the court tomorrow,’ he says, ‘but this night you spends in jail and that’s only a starter.’

“Before they goes, J. J. asks me to be a witness and I goes up on Number Nine next morning. When I gets there the court is ready to begin. The judge is a J.P. and a jailer and a finer from away back. He bangs the table with a

mallet and calls the case. There's only one. J. J. Jordan is sitting in the prisoners' chair and the judge tells him to stand up.

“‘What is your name?’ says the judge.

“‘My name is John Jones Jordan,’ says the lad, ‘and my friends call me Jack.’

“‘You'll find no friends here,’ says the judge, ‘with your killing of the deer in flagrant violation of the law. Does you plead guilty?’ he says.

“‘I do not,’ says Jack, ‘for devil a law has I broke.’

“‘We'll see about that,’ says the judge, ‘and it will go hard with you taking up the time of this court.’

“Then Duquette is swore and he tells about J. J. Jordan bringing in two deer and showing his licence bold as brass. The judge is all for sentencing him there and then but the lad has a lawyer and he says he has witnesses to call. The judge is near to busting a blood vessel but he allows it. The first one called is a fellow from Kirkland Lake. He swears that J. J. Jordan is with him at 6 o'clock in Kirkland Lake on November third in the evening. Duquette has swore he was at the Crick at the very same hour. The judge bangs on the table and shouts but Wilson, that's the witness, sticks to his story and says there is six others to prove it.

“‘And where might they be,’ asks the judge.

“‘Sure, in Kirkland Lake,’ says Wilson.

“So the judge makes a great point of that and won't accept the evidence.

“Then I'm called and swore and the judge says, ‘Does you know the prisoner?’

“‘I do, your Honour,’ I says very polite.

“‘Was he or was he not at O'Rourke's hotel in Boston Crick on the evening of November third at six o'clock?’ says the judge.

“‘I couldn't say, your Honour,’ I says.

“‘Was you there?’ the judge says pretty loud.

“‘I was, your Honour, and I saw the deer brought in,’ I says.

“‘Then you saw this man, this skulking law breaker bring it in. Answer me that,’ says the judge.

“‘I see a man bring it in,’ I says, ‘but I could not swear it was this man,’ I says.

“‘You’ve swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth,’ says the judge, ‘and, by the powers, if you don’t give me a straight answer, I’ll hold you in contempt of court,’ he says.

“‘Your Honour,’ I says, ‘ ’tis sorrow and pity I feels, not contempt for the court. You’re in a bad spot and my heart bleeds for you.’

“With that, the judge turns purple and, the way he goes for me, hanging’s the least I can expect. He’s just going to have me arrested, when there’s a stay in the proceedings. J. J.’s lawyer has been writing at the table and, when he looks up, there’s J. J. coming into the courtroom.

“‘Get into the dock,’ he says to J. J. ‘Do you want to be in contempt at the end of it?’”

“‘What for do I get in the dock?’ he says. ‘I’m only a spectator,’ he says.

“‘A spectator, is it you are?’ says the lawyer. ‘You’re being tried for killing of the deer.’

“‘Sure, that’s my brother,’ says J. J. ‘I only come for the fun.’

“With that the lawyer turns round and there’s J. J. in the dock with a grin on his face. The judge calls J. J. up and he stands beside of J. J. Then they mills around a bit and devil a person in the court knows which from t’other. The judge gives Duquette a terrible going over to save the face of him and they calls the whole thing off. At the end of it, no one knows if Jake kills two deer or Jack kills two deer and nobody cares. It’s too bad no one takes their thumbprints but it’s myself thinks they would be identical.”

Mike smoked in thoughtful silence for a minute or two before he said, “However that may be, it had a happy ending. Next summer, it’s settled for good and all. The two of them is out on their claim doing some hand-drilling and shooting when they gets a bit of quick fuse and one of them is dead when the smoke clears away. We buries him at the Crick with all the honours and you can see the stone to this day. It says, ‘Here lies the remains of J. J. Jordan, R.I.P.’ And from that day to this, we calls the other Jake or Jack which ever comes to mind.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A Pilgrim at the Crick

We sat together one evening in the spring, Annie with a basket of darning in her lap and Mike and I had our pipes going nicely. The smell of the good earth bursting into life drifted in at the open windows. Mike's talk ranged over forty years of Northland memories. At one point, Mike said, "I meets a man today that licked Jack Munro in at Elk Lake when he was Mayor. You know, sir, I never met a man that was in Elk Lake them days—except a few and them poor spirited creatures that couldn't tell a lie—that hadn't beat Jack Munro one time or another and him a contender for the world champeen belt. Everyone gets a bit bushed them days along of seeing their forty acres of rock and muskeg as producing mines. They don't know no figure smaller than a million and all their ideas is more than life size. The only honest fighter I ever sees is a minister and his bit of a brawl is a kind of lie from beginning to end.

"It was at the Crick when I goes there first and before they takes the bark off of the settlement. Barring the station and a bit of a store in a tent and a shack or two, there's not much that calls for any display of civic pride. The bush is kind of crowding the settlement those days and even the clearing ain't grubbed out to no extent. There's mebbe twenty people in the place and prospectors in and out and milling around for a day or two. About then, we acquires a Chink to do the washing and a pool table and starts to hold our heads up but what you might call the spiritual aspect of the community is pretty low and mostly missing.

"However, along about June one day, a young feller in a black coat blows in and allows he's a minister. He sets up a good size wall tent, makes some benches and fixings and pins a sign on it reading, 'Church of All People. Welcome.' Then he passes the word around that, come Sunday, he's ready for business. Sunday comes and he waits and waits but nobody goes in the church. Does it faze the lad? Not a bit of it. Next we knows, he's standing in his black coat among the stumps and singing.

"Now singing in the bush has more pull to it than a dog fight down on Main Street. It's like the steam cal-i-ope in the circus parade that sets all the lads to running. The grand singing of the minister soon has every man Jack of us standing round. Them songs has a lift to them that warms you up inside. When he's done three of them with the boys standing round with

their mouths open, he starts to talk. It wasn't preaching somehow. More like telling of a story. It's all about a young feller called Christian—I never do hear his other name—and he's going on a trip through rough country. He's carrying a pack, seems like on his shoulder, for there's no mention of a tumpline. It's heavy going, what with the rock and muskeg but the lad stays with it. Along the trail, he meets up with fellers, mostly no account Indians by the sound of them. Names like Fearful and Faintheart they has and one brave called Faithful is being burned at the stake. 'Twas long ago, you mind. Nothing like that ever happens round the Crick.

“Well, the going's tough and the lad caches his pack and it's some better and begins to look as if he makes it to where he's bound for. Then he pairs up with an Indian that calls hisself Greatheart. Seems like he's painted up for the war path and he needs to be, for what does they meet up with but a giant and him hostile. This Greatheart ain't so big but he has a sword and you can bet he ain't no Cree or Ojibway, for I never sees none of them with swords. The giant, which would make three of him, comes at him with a club.

“The minister's telling the story well and I'm real interested and so's the rest of them. Well, them two fights and fights and finally the little man has the giant a-puffing and a-blowing and he cuts off his head. I never does hear the end of it for just then a big bushwacker pushes out from the crowd and he says, ‘I'll not believe it. A good big man can beat a good little man anytime. Besides which, I don't like you. This community don't need no hell-dodger and I'm for running you out of town.’

“Now this feller's Harold Hawken, only he gets fretful if anyone calls him Harold and he goes by the name of Bill. He's only been infesting the Crick for a day or two and he's been throwing his weight around more than something.

“‘Why does I get out of town?’ says the minister. ‘'Tis the Lord's work I'm doing and I stays.’

“‘You stays is it,’ says Bill. ‘Then you beats me first and runs me out for there's no room for the two of us. And that's impossible no matter how good you are, my little man.’

“‘If you will have it so, I'll beat you but it goes against my conscience to be shedding of your blood,’ says the minister and he takes off his coat. Hawken strips to the buff of him and the hair on his chest would make as prime a beaver pelt as you ever see.

“Then Hawken says, ‘If any of you gents wants to make some easy money, I gives you thirty to ten I beats the hell-dodger in two minutes.’ Two minutes ain’t so long and the lad looks healthy so two of the crowd takes him up. Then he says to the minister with a nasty kind of snarl, ‘Does you want some of the same bet?’

“‘I’ll bet you,’ says the minister, ‘but on my own terms.’

“‘Dollars or doughnuts,’ says Hawken. ‘I’ll take any bet you name.’

“‘Will you now?’ says the lad. ‘Then if I wins this fight, you comes to my church every Sunday. If I loses, I leaves the town this day or as soon as I can walk.’

“‘I takes you,’ says Hawken, ‘but I never sees the inside of your church.’

“Just to put heart into the lad, every man in the crowd makes the same bet.

“While all this is going on, some of us gets our heads together. It looks like murder and we wants to figure out some way to save the lad. Some is for ganging up on Hawken but, after all, a fight’s a fight and there ain’t much excitement at the Crick. Anyway the lad looks willing and he don’t look scared. We figures perhaps he lasts three minutes and then we calls it off. So O’Rourke, that’s just come to the Crick to build his hotel, speaks for the crowd.

“‘This fight’s going to be regular,’ he says. ‘I referees it and I’ll be in there with this bit of a shillelah in my hand. The man that kicks or rassles gets it on the head. The rounds will be three minutes with Mullins here holding the watch. You will retire to your respective corners,’ he says, ‘when time is called and, if you’re able, you will come out fighting after one minute. You will now shake hands and you will back away until I gives the word.’

“They does it and the fight begins. There ain’t a blow struck in the first round but such footwork by the minister I never see. Hawken is rushing and punching and swinging for the whole three minutes but the minister just dodges and weaves and rolls away from the punches. For all he sticks his chin out for Hawken to smack it, never once does he stop a blow of any kind. At the end of the round, Hawken goes back to his corner puffing and mad clear through. It don’t make him feel any better to see the stakeholder hand over his sixty dollars.

“The next three rounds is the same. Nary a blow struck but Hawken’s sweating and blowing like he’s been working hard. Once the minister goes down, tripped by a root, but O’Rourke’s between them with his shillelah until he’s on his feet again. The fifth round is different. The minister begins dancing in and out with short blows that don’t seem to travel half a foot but, sir, there was something on the end of them. You’ve seen them pile drivers at work. Well, Hawken was one of them drophammers with forty foot leads and he advertises every blow. The minister has a steam hammer in both the fists of him. Every now and then, he’d let go a right or left to the face and they’d travel past taking the bark off. Hawken bleeds free and copious, as you might say. His rushes is getting more like blind staggers and he’s breathing hard. Then in the sixth round the lad gives him one amidships with his left and brings one up from the ground with his right. Hawken’s head snaps back and the next thing we knows he’s lying nice and peaceful on the ground.

“We carries him to the church and he don’t come to until we has him comfortable on two benches with a coat under his head. The minister is daubing him with iodine from his First Aid kit and the sting of it brings Hawken wide awake.

“ ‘Parson,’ he says, ‘you wins but you never learns all that in no Sunday School.’

“The lad never has to fight again and there’s people standing in the church every Sunday morning until the minister pulls out. No one ever welshes on them bets and strangers come in too or they’d have a fight with Hawken. That minister was people just like me and you and, while I don’t say as the Crick was exactly pious, there was law and order while the minister was around.”

Mike smoked in silence for a minute or two after finishing his tale. Then he said, “You know, come to think about it, there was a lot of fighters in the bush them days. Seems like they thought a gold or silver mine was better than anything they could make in the ring. There was Jack Munro in at Elk Lake and Kid Welch and Spider something at Gowganda and I do hear about one called Battling Billy Boyle that got religion and set up as a missionary. It do make you wonder, don’t it, sir?”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Big Business

Annie, Mike and I were sitting in our accustomed chairs one evening. Mike and I had some of the Widdifield elixir at our elbows and Annie a ladylike glass of port wine. It was evident that Mike had some momentous news but he had no intention of divulging it until the stage was set properly. Finally he said, "I has a letter from the Gov'ner-General today."

He let the statement hang in air to savour the full impact of my surprise.

"A letter from the Governor-General!" and my face showed a gratifying bewilderment. "These are troublous times. Was he asking your advice?"

"Devil a bit of it," said Mike. "'Tis thanking me for the advice I gives him. In general, I'm not the worrying kind. I finds, if you takes things easy, they most generally rights themselves. There's times though when a man does some heavy thinking and that's what happens to me. I see by the papers that there's talk of barter trading, which is the same as swapping, and I knows that ain't no good. Them Roosians are cunning devils and they comes out on top for sure in any game like that. So I ups and tells him about a experience of my own and, good man that he is, there'll be no swapping of our wheat for icons, whatever they might be, of which I hears they has a surplus of."

"Good for you, Mike," I said, "and what did you tell the Governor-General?"

"Sure, I tells him the whole story. 'Twas in the early days but not as early as some of the stories I tells you. Annie and me is married, it's mebbe ten years. We're mostly places where there's plenty of water and we're in my canoe the most of my spare time. I tell how I takes to a canoe right from the first days. Then we gets moved up to Pamour, which ain't canoeing country. I gets sick of seeing my canoe around and me wanting to be dipping of a paddle. Annie sees I'm getting restless and one day she says, 'Mike, what for do we keep the canoe? You can't use it and it's only cluttering up the back kitchen and gives me no room for my tubs.'

"Water or no water, I'm not for giving up my canoe but I knows she's right and me fretting every time I looks at it. 'Twas a good canoe, one of them Peterboroughs with nary a rib in it and weighing forty-five pounds for

the whole sixteen foot of it. There was 'Annie' painted on the bows of her in green paint. 'Twas my pride and joy, as you might say.

"Be that as it may, the next time I'm in Timmins, I starts looking round for to sell her and finally I runs into a feller that wants a canoe. He says he has no money but he'll do a deal with me. Seems this Jackson has a motor car and he don't want no motor car and him going prospecting. So he says, seeing he can't use the car prospecting, he lets me have it for the canoe and one hundred dollars. Them days I never thinks about owning no motor car and here's one that looks like falling into my lap. I can see me and Annie running into town with it of an evening and driving all of the back roads and seeing the country.

"For all I wants the car, I'm not jumping into the trade with my eyes shut. We goes up and looks it over. Of course, all I can see is the paint on it, which is nice and shiny.

"'Will it run?' I says, trying to look as if motor cars is old stuff with me.

"'Will it run? you says,' says Jackson. 'Ain't I drove it for sixty thousand miles,' he says, 'and over some of the worst roads in the country?'

"That sounds good to me and we gets in and he drives me to Pamour and it gives one cough and stops right at my doorstep. So I pays over the one hundred dollars and Jackson takes the canoe back on the train with him to Timmins.

"Annie comes out for to admire it and then we gives it a good washing which it don't really need. 'Tis then I remembers that devil a bit can I drive my new car. I'm all for trying but Annie won't hear of it and we gets Kelly, my neighbour, over for to teach me. Kelly steps in, grand as you please and turns the key and pulls out the plugs on the dashboard and stamps on the pedals on the floor but devil a buzz does he get out of it. Then he gets under the hood and twiddles with the wires and takes out what he calls the sparkplugs and still she don't go. Fact is, she never does go and a dozen of the lads has a go at her. She just gives up like Paul Bunyan's blue ox when they asks her to thread a needle.

"For two weeks, it stands in front of my door and it's worse than having my canoe in the back kitchen. Then comes word that I'm to go back to the Crick. That puts the lid on it, as you might say, for there's nary a road at the Crick, but the luck of the Irish is with me. I sees in the Press where some misguided individual wants to swap one of them portable saw rigs for a

motor car. I hot-foots it into town and I meets this McLeod that wants to make the trade.

“‘I has a motor car, what won’t run,’ I says, ‘and I swaps it, sight unseen, for your saw rig.’

“‘What kind of motor car is it?’ he says.

“‘Devil a bit of me knows,’ I says, ‘but I gets it right here in Timmins from Jackson,’ I says. ‘It’s two weeks ago and there’s not been a kick out of it since.’

“‘I knows the car,’ he says, ‘and it’s a deal.’

“So we loads up the saw rig and ships it to the Crick and we goes back to Pamour on the train. McLeod has a five-gallon can with him and he pours it in the motor car and puts a bit under the hood. With that, he twiddles a bit with the dashboard and steps on one of the pedals and away he goes in a cloud of dust and me standing in the road with my mouth open. Kelly and them experts never thinks to look was there any gas into her.

“We gets to the Crick and there’s my saw rig in the freight shed with a set of saws and a nice, shiny motor. We moves right into our old house and sets up the rig in the shed back of it.

“‘It will be saving of the back of you,’ says Annie. ‘No more bucking of the wood on a sawhorse.’

“‘Right you are, me girl,’ says I. ‘We just turns on the juice,’ I says, ‘and the stove lengths comes out like peas from a pod when you’re shucking.’

“‘What juice,’ says Annie.

“I never give it a thought but, sure, there’s no ’lectricity at the Crick at all at all, and I bucks wood same as usual all that winter.

“Comes spring, I gets a chance to swap the saw rig for a lighting plant with a gas engine. That worked fine. We wires the house and the station and a Christmas tree or two in between for good measure, and I don’t mind saying that I’m feeling a lot better about the whole thing, when what does they do but run in a Hydro line on us and everyone has lights. That lighting plant’s no more good to me than a busted flush in a Jacks or better game.

“I’m about ready to take her into the bush and bust her when, one day, I see a feller coming out of the bush with a canoe over his head and it’s

Jackson and 'Annie.' Seems like he's staked some claims and he has no use for the canoe, so he ships it to Timmins.

"I tells him the whole story and he laughs like he's going to have a fit. Finally, he says, when he can get his breath, 'I tells you what I does. I swaps the canoe and fifty dollars for the lighting plant which I can use back on my claims.'" And that's what we does.

"So there we are, after all my swapping and shipping and work, buying my own canoe back for fifty dollars. I tells the whole story to the Gov'ner-General and, bedad, we'll be swapping nothing with the Rooshians barring punches mebbe."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Noblesse Oblige

Mike dropped into the office a week or so ago and the talk drifted to the war in Korea. As we were in complete agreement on that subject, the conversation wandered and finally Mike said, "As you knows, sir, I has no use for Joe Stalin or any of his gang and that goes double for the people in this country that follow his lead. Same time, I'm not the one to be calling every man a Red that don't think the same as me. That way, we'd soon all be voting the same ticket and I wants to be agin the Government if I'm so disposed. T'other night, when I drops in for a pint of beer, I hears half-a-dozen of the young lads going after little Paddy Casey. To hear them tell it, he's as Red as my winter underwear. Young Paddy is a good lad and what he says is over the heads of them featherbrains and they don't understand him. I calms them down with a demonstration of force, as you might say, and they gets to talking about the Black Hawks and that's the end of it. Most generally, people up here minds their own business and them that does usually has a full time job of it. You can be badly mistook, there's times, if you thinks you knows what's in the other feller's head.

"It reminds me of one time up at the Crick. That would be in '17 when things was going bad overseas. The Crick's a busy little place them days with a wagon road right through it, though I don't call to mind that it goes anywhere particular. We has O'Rourke's hotel, the two churches, a Chink restaurant and we even has a bank. There's the manager and one lad to run it. Well, this young feller, that's been there a year or so, gets old enough to enlist, which he does. We gives him a send-off, same as usual, and they sends in a new man to take his place.

"This new feller looks about twenty-three. He stands six feet and he has a pair of shoulders. All round, a pretty likely looking man for the Army. I'm not saying anything, not being in it myself, and you know why that is. Some of the others don't take it too kindly. The lad's a Englishman which don't make it any better. Them that has sons overseas don't like to see anyone coming this way. However, no one says anything to the lad hisself but some of the women, and Annie weren't one of them, sends him a white feather. All in all, he knows the village is hostile and he keeps to hisself and just does his work. I figures he knows his business best and I treats him the same as I would any other man.

“One day, O’Rourke’s in the bank cashing of a cheque. The lad is counting out the money and O’Rourke sees a ring on his finger. It’s a plain gold ring with some carving on it. A deer’s head like on a roll of carpet.

“ ‘What for is the ring?’ says O’Rourke, who likes to know everything.

“ ‘It’s my family crest,’ says the lad short like.

“And O’Rourke says, ‘Oh’ and that’s the end of it. But from that day on he gets nothing but ‘The Dook’ and there ain’t no loving kindness back of it.

“Things goes along that way through the winter and, comes February, someone goes down with the ’flu. Soon there’s a dozen cases in the village and it gets worse all of the time. We’re sending out a coffin with a one-way ticket every other day or so. Men comes in from the bush and drops in their tracks. You can’t send them anywheres for the hospitals is full. We makes the best of it by taking over O’Rourke’s hotel which has twelve beds into it. There’s no doctor, nor no nurses. We gets instructions from outside what to do. Keep ’em warm and feed ’em whisky. Fortunately the hotel has a dispensary, as you might say, strictly unofficial, and it’s well stocked up.

“The women is either sick or nursing round the houses. They has their hands full. The twelve beds has men in them and sick men they was. Everyone that can turns in and helps. There’s fires to stoke, day and night, for the winter’s perishing cold. There’s meals such as they is and nursing. I’m taking a twelve-hour shift stoking and The Dook comes along and volunteers for the night shift nursing. Seeing as how he’s been cold-shouldered by everyone, it makes some of them do some thinking.

“Nursing’s the hard chore and few of them sticks it through, going sick themselves mostly. But The Dook goes the whole way and finally has the night shift all by hisself. Twelve sick men keeps the lad on the go all of his time. He’s up and down the ladder a dozen times a night, fetching them drinks and slugs of whisky. Not one of them ever dies. The lad won’t let them. If one of them is for cashing in his chips, The Dook, like as not calls him a white-livered hound and shames him into living. He gets more cursing than thanks from them bushwhackers but they knows, all right, they knows. He’s nothing but The Dook to the whole village but they says it like the name of God hisself.

“Well, the weeks goes by and finally the ’flu lets up. Every one of the twelve is on his feet and takes their licker standing for a change. The whole village is tuckered out and there’s many a empty chair round the tables. However, we gets by as well as most.”

“I suppose,” I said, “after that everything was all right for The Duke?”

“Yes,” said Mike, “you could put it that way. Right at the heel of the hunt, he takes the ’flu and he’s dead in three days. It’s when O’Rourke’s helping the manager to lay him out, that we finds he has a store foot, his own having been took off by a bit of shrapnel up near Wipers. Him being so far from home, we buries him right along of J. J. Jordan, that I tells you about. The whole village buys him a tombstone with his name carved into it with ‘The Dook’ and a deer’s head underneath. As I says, if a man in this country minds his own business, he most usually has a full time job.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Confusion of Tongues

The news had been more than usually depressing and Mike clicked off the radio at the end of it.

“ ’Tis a bad world we’re living in for sure. A pack of wolves and them hungry don’t sound no worse than them lads in that Security Council. They barks and snarls in Rooshian, Chinee, United States and English. It never makes me feel what you’d call secure to hear them. I’ve seen fights start on street corners for less than the likes of that. Of course, they’re all of them clever men and they has to uphold the dignity of the common people, which, when you comes right down to it, ain’t got enough dignity to want to fight about it. Every last one of them Security lads is for peace, and, bedad, they’re willing to cut each others’ hearts out if they can’t have it and have it just the way they wants. Me, I’m not mad at anyone but, one of those days, someone will start shooting and I’ll be just as mad as them lads is now.

“It all comes, I’m thinking, because none of them understands any of the others. Suppose you has someone spitting and snarling at you in Rooshian. It makes you mad and perhaps all he’s saying is passing the time of day and telling you the vodka crop’s a failure. Take them Chinees. We sees them doing the washing and figures they has no more pride than Paddy’s pig. I’ve read where they has aunts’ sisters wearing silk when we was going round in skins with a club. You can’t slap four hundred million of them in the face just because they don’t vote the Democratic ticket.

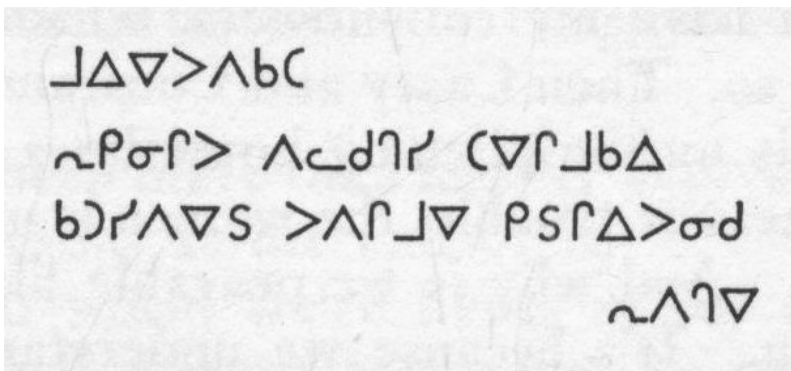
“Take the Rooshians. By their story, they’re democrats. ‘Like hell,’ we says, ‘We’re the democrats.’ So there you are. They don’t understand our language and they makes us mad. If we all speaks the same, there’d be no argument. Take this here neighbourhood. There’s never a fight from one year’s end to the other. Mrs. Kasonoffsky’s for ever swapping gossip with Annie over the back fence and showing off her latest baby. Mueller gives me his Irish cobblers and I lets him have my collyflowers, which is better than his, if I do say so. Then Casey and Constantino, that works at the Shops, is mebbe pitching horseshoes and so it goes. If there’s sickness or trouble, the women is up half the night until it’s fixed. And why is we peacable like? I asks you and I tells you. It’s because we understands each other. There’s Poles in the next street, decent people, and you couldn’t heave a brick

without hitting of a Frenchman but we gets along fine together all because we speaks one language.

“I has language trouble myself one time up at the Crick. It might be 1912 and me new to the country. As I tell you, I come to Cobalt first in ought seven. The Crick’s more or less put together at the time I’m speaking about. Me and O’Rourke and Kolensky and Mike Ryan is beginning to feel like old timers, having been there for a year or more. O’Rourke’s hotel is the general meeting place and she’s generally full about freeze-up and break-up time, when a man can’t move in the bush. They was good times with the skylarking you get when men has nothing on their minds. Of course there’s no harm in it. Just good nature and high spirits with no more kick than Gowganda beer.

“Well, this time I’m telling you about is right in the break-up and I runs the railway, far as the Crick is concerned, by myself. The station’s locked except when the trains is due. One day, I steps down to open her up before Number Ten comes in and, under the door, I finds that someone has slipped a envelope. When I has my parka and snowboots off, I opens it. There’s a five dollar bill and a letter and a telegraph into it. The letter says to send the telegram, which is urgent, and if there’s anything over from the five to keep the change. Five dollars sends a telegram a long way and back again, so that’s all right and, as for the change, I gives it back the next time I sees the feller. Then I looks at the telegraph and it has me stumped. I has it here in my pocketbook where it’s been all of them years. Take a look at that, sir.”

I took the bit of paper, dry with age, and this is what I saw



“You sees my difficulty. I can send English fast enough but how could I send a foreign language when it ain’t writ so that I knows the letters? I sends French even if I don’t speak it, not to say speak it. I sends code even when it

makes no sense. But this here, I can't send. My key ain't made for it. And urgent too. 'Tain't often I'm stumped and I don't mean to be this time. Soon as Number Ten pulls out, I goes to work. Most generally I figures things out for myself and I starts with that idea. After two hours of puzzling, I'm no wiser than when I starts. It don't mean nothing to me. I sees it's broke up into words and that's about as far as I gets. I knows it ain't Chinee, for I sees Hi Lung right at the Crick writing his tickets with a brush. What foreign language it is has me beat.

"Then I thinks I writes it down in English and sends it and lets them at the other end sort it out. So I starts in and works at it for a hour or more. At the end of it, I has something like this. L writ backwards, triangle standing up right and proper, triangle balanced on one point, a broadarrow pointing east, one pointing north, a b like any other b, and a big C. Then a thing like a sickle resting on its handle with the blade pointing down and a P, then something the devil himself couldn't put a name to. When I gets this far I sees it won't do. They'd think down at the Bay that Mullins has gone crazy. I just can't send her that way and I allows I'm beat.

"There's nothing for it but to try all the foreigners in the Crick. First I tackles a big Swede but he can't make nothing of it. He does tell me that his aunts' sisters carves something like it on rocks but apparently that was before his time. Then I tries a Finn and a Rooshian but they can't read or write their own language so they don't know. Next I tackles Phil Dufour.

"'Phil,' I says, 'I knows it ain't French. What is it?'

"'Her,' says Phil. 'She's de Cr---ipes,' and he laughs 'til I'm like to take the back of me hand to him. 'I knows,' he says. 'She's de mathematique. La plus grande mathematique. Magnifique!' and he starts throwing kisses in the air.

"'For the love of Heaven what does it mean?' I says, for I'm getting desperate.

"Phil just shrugs his shoulders. 'Me, I adds two and two, gets you four and I divides two into four, gets you two,' he says, 'but la plus grande mathematique, non, non. Dey don't teach me dat on the school.'

"The next night I'm up at O'Rourke's hotel. All the gang is there, same as usual. When I comes in and digs my telegram, out, they all starts to laugh and I knows Dufour has told them all about me being stumped. However, duty comes first with me and, one way or another, I has to send that urgent telegram. So I tells them all about my difficulty and asks if there's one man

in the crowd that's man enough to help me out. With that they're all for helping and they looks it over.

“‘It could be Greek,’ says Mike Ryan. ‘Whyn’t you ask Brandynose Jack? They says he’s been to college.’

“Now this Brandynose Jack is a character what’s mostly whiskers and he’s been infesting the Crick for it might be six months or more. Right then he knows more about blind pigs than colleges but I gives him a try.

“‘Greek, my uncultured friend,’ he says. ‘You insults mankind’s Golden Age,’ he says, and he starts spouting with the great deep voice of him, which has a whisky rasp to it. Such outlandish talk I never hears but it rolls and thunders like a organ.

“‘That’s Greek,’ he says. ‘It’s a immortal oration by Soph O. Clees,’ he says. ‘It’s music and the high point of human eloquence. Your poor hen scratches ain’t Greek, whatever they may be. Will you join me in a drink. ’Tis little better than the hemlock drunk by Sock Raytees but ’twill serve.’

“I declines with thanks and I goes back to the gang.

“They tries to help, every blasted one of them. One young feller says it’s jometry and another says he bets it goes to King Faro of the Agyptians. Finally they takes a vote and decides it’s a secret code what takes a special kind of telegraft that ain’t been invented yet and that’s all the help I gets.

“I tell you, it’s on my conscience. I can’t send the telegram and I has the money and it don’t help none to have the gang inquiring about it every time I step into O’Rourke’s for the next month or two. Then, after a while, they forgets about it and the money and the telegram lays in the safe at the office.

“Comes the end of July and me and old John has our holidays together. You mind, I tells you me and John meets up together at Elk Lake in 1908. With one thing and another, we never sees Gowganda that trip, so we decides to go in by canoe, which me and John has done a lot of during the last four years. We takes me sixteen-footer and a bit of a tent and travels light. We starts at Latchford and up the Montreal we goes past Elk Lake to Indian Chute. Then over the portage, which is a sand hill with three-quarters of a mile down grade to Sydney Crick. It’s easy up the lakes with just a lift round the chutes and over the Golden Stairs back into the Montreal. We makes it to Gowganda in two days steady slugging. It’s a nice situated place and we lays round a day or two enjoying the effete pleasures of civilization. John does a bit of fishing, for the pickerel’s just asking to be caught. Then we decides to push on west, having plenty of time to spare.

“We goes up Gowganda Lake and through Hangingstone to Elkhorn Lake, as nice paddling country as you wants to see. I’m packing the canoe and when I flips it off my shoulders at the portage end, I sees a Indian blazing of a tree. Being curious for why he blazes the tree, I goes up to him and he’s writing on the blaze with a pencil stub. I stands there with my mouth open as he writes triangles and pot hooks and sickles neat as any kid in school. It’s my telegram writing and a uncultured savage puts it down.

“‘My friend,’ I says, ‘what for is the writing?’

“‘It’s for brother,’ he says. ‘Go Fort Mattagami. Leave pork on Wapus. No get whisky.’

“‘You says all that,’ I says, ‘with them triangles? What kind of writing is it?’

“‘Cree writing,’ he says and that’s how I come to know that my five dollars and my telegram comes from a noble redskin.

“John’s all for going on but I says duty comes first and we backtracks to Latchford where I takes Number Nine up to the Crick. To make a long story short, I says nothing to the gang but the first time the Bishop comes through, I gets him in my office and shows him my telegram. He looks at it one minute. Then when he can stop laughing, he says, ‘Mullins you’ve been took for a ride. This here address don’t mean nothing nor the signature neither. The message, putting it short like, means something like this, “No matter how long your leg is, it can still be pulled.”’

“About two days later, I goes to O’Rourke’s with two bottles of good rye. The gang is all there.

“‘Gentlemen,’ I says, ‘There’s your five dollars in currency you can understand. If there was only one language,’ I says, ‘I’d be ten years younger this day.’

“For all of that, sir, I’m not for having no Rooshian kicking of me round.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

Things Get a Bit Mixed

Despite the fact that Mullins was a railwayman for forty years and “strictly business” while he was on duty, his first love, “barring Annie” as he would have said, is the bush. A handy man with paddle, axe and tumpline, he had travelled it far and wide in his spare time and is a friend of every prospector and trapper in the area. Even the Indians know and respect him. Mike had learned the hard way but there is little he does not know about the wild creatures and their ways of life. Never a killer for the sake of killing, he has shot his moose and bear and many a pelt he has skinned and stretched for his trapper pals. It is always a joy to have him talk about his experiences, because, running through his tale like a minor theme, is an awareness of all the intangible sounds and scents which make the bush a thing apart.

One night, not long ago, we were sitting in Mike’s garden with our pipes going and something cool tinkling in our glasses. Annie’s knitting lay idle in her lap, for the light was fading and the pervasive odour of nicotine, overriding our cut plug, invited relaxation. The talk had been desultory and finally touched on postage stamps.

“I seen blankets would cover Paul Bunyan’s chest,” said Mike, “but never did I see pelts like they has stretched on them new ten-centers. Sure they’re buffalo robes or the Indians is midgets. The beaver was never whelped could wear all of that skin. ’Tis a lot of money they asks for a bit of paper and they makes them pelts big to ease their conscience, like as not.”

“Of course them artist lads can’t know everything and I’d say the teepee is pretty drawed even if the poles is on the outside. There’s times when even a man that should know better makes mistakes and I would be the last one to deny it. Reminds me of the time I gets crossed up myself. As you know, I knows my way around and wild animals means no more to me than as if they was in cages in the zoo. I never sees a wolf that won’t scamper into the next township when he hears you and every bear I ever sees gets off the trail as polite as you please whenever you comes in sight. A moose now is different and him with his horns rubbed smooth. He will not be pushed around and you without no gun. Then, if you’re wise, it’s ‘So long. It’s been nice to meet you,’ as the song says.

“Anyway, we’re up at a camp this side Temagami, Annie and me, for a bit of a holiday. We figures on loafing around in the canoe and having a lazy two weeks of it. The afternoon we arrives, Annie is fixing up the cabin, the way women does and I sets out for a bit of a stroll through the bush. ’Tis a nice afternoon with the sun shining down through some furry white clouds that lifts out of the bays in the morning.

“I’m on a trail that’s new to me, for I’ve never been in that bit of country before. I’m going along as a man will when’s he’s got nowhere special to go. The blueberries is ripe and I eats a handful now and then. I sees the wintergreen with its berries turning red and I chews a leaf for the fresh taste of it. A whisky jack is keeping me company, the way they does and the little birds is flying and chirping to make a man feel good. Times, I steps off the trail to kick through a patch of Labrador tea just to see the brown dust of it turn gold when the sun hits it through a break in the trees. Once, a porkypine waddles across the path with no more mind to me than as if I’m a jackrabbit and I watches some beaver kits playing around above their dam. Taking it all in all, I’m enjoying myself.

“Perhaps I’m two miles from camp when I runs into a nice patch of blueberries and I thinks I picks a hatful for me and Annie’s supper. I’m working along the trail, picking of the big ones, when what do I see but a bear wading into them not fifty feet ahead. I stop picking to see what he’s going to do and the bear stops too. We stands there staring at each other.

“‘You’re a strange kind of bear,’ I thinks, ‘to be standing there instead of getting into the bush.’ I waves a stick at him, for I’m not one to be yelling in the bush. With that, he starts walking to me.

“‘By the powers,’ I says to myself, ‘that bear ain’t been brought up proper for a bear,’ I says, ‘and I ain’t tangling with no ignorant bear. He can have the blueberries for all of me. I’m for the camp,’ and I lights out. I’m running, I tells you, and I hears the bear pounding along behind. Fast as I runs that bear runs faster and I feel something tug at my shirttail and a bit of it goes. I’m scared, for that bear weighs four hundred pound and he’s right out of my class if it comes to rassling. I’m running faster than I ever runs before and my wind’s near gone but Mr. Bear runs faster. He passes me and, call me a Rooshian, if he don’t flop on the trail right under my feet. Down I goes and the bear and me is all of a heap rolling around together.

“I’m thinking, ‘Annie don’t get no blueberries for supper this day and ’tis lucky she’ll be if they finds more than my skeleton.’ By and by, the bear gets up and, I’m so winded, I just lies there playing dead. I couldn’t run no

more and the bear comes up and licks my face. ‘You black heathen,’ I says to myself, ‘to be tasting of me before you begins your supper.’ All this time, you see, there’s never been a snarl out of him. He’s the strangest bear I ever meets and, I’m damned, if he don’t seem kind of friendly. With that thought in my mind, I gets up and he stands on his hind legs and hugs me. ‘The black-hearted creature,’ I thinks, ‘feeling of me is it you are for a good place to start the eating.’ With that, I breaks away and am going down the trail again. By this time the camp’s in sight and I makes it with the bear hanging on my shirrtail.

“ ‘Get a gun,’ I yells. ‘I’m being eat alive by the creature.’

“With that out comes Mike Kelly that runs the camp and, when he sees me, he laughs ’til he can hardly stand. There I am with my shirrtail tore to ribbons and the mud and sweat on my face and he laughs.

“ ‘It’s a disgrace to Ireland, you are,’ I says, ‘and me being eat by the savage beast,’ I says. ‘Will you shoot the creature before he chews my leg off?’

“ ‘Sure,’ says Kelly, ‘Fido won’t eat you none. He likes you. You can see that yourself.’”

“ ‘Likes me, is it? ’Tis what I’m thinking myself and the stupid creature don’t make up his mind what piece he likes the best.’

“As it turns out, that bear is the family pet with no more harm in him than four aces in a poker hand. He’s been bottle-raised from a cub and we gets along fine when he learns that my shirt tail’s not for chewing. Many’s the stroll we has together round the camp. Then one day, it’s mebbe a week or so after, I sees Fido stomping along the trail before me. I whistles to him but he keeps on going and breaks into a run.

“ ‘You’d give me the cold shoulder, would you,’ I says and I takes after him. He don’t go far when he takes to the bush and I plows through the alders on his trail. When I comes up to him, he’s backed up to a bit of a cliff he can’t climb.

“ ‘I’ve got you,’ I says, ‘and you comes back to camp with me.’ I’m thinking to take him by the ear and drag him out, when he snarls and shows a great set of teeth to me but them teeth never belongs to Fido. It’s a strange bear I never sees before and I’m just two jumps ahead of him as I scrambles up a tree. ’Tis a good tree, too small for him to climb but big enough for all of that. He gives it a shake or two but I’m tight in a crotch. Then he sets down to wait it out, snarling a curse at me every once in a while.

“It’s mebbe half a hour, when I hears something coming through the alders off the trail. It’s Fido, following of my scent like as not and I gives a shout and yells, ‘Sick ’im, Fido.’ That hostile bear is on his feet when Fido hits him like a eleven hundred plowing into a string of empties. He rolls the fight right out of him and the last I sees of him he’s hightailing it into the bush and me and Fido goes back to camp.

“I gets crossed up on my bears for sure that time, and no mistake, but I’m not the first man that don’t know his friends.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Feast or Famine

“Will you be having a bit more of the white meat?” said Mike. “Sure, two helpings ain’t nothing and it Christmas Day itself. I just cuts a couple of slivers off of the breast and the second joint of the wing is good picking.”

After all, it was Christmas Day and Annie’s cooking is hard to resist. My half-hearted protests were overruled but I could not but feel that there was some unexplained urgency behind Mike’s insistence.

There was one of Annie’s mince pies to follow, food for the gods on high Olympus, and finally we were sitting, pleasantly relaxed, before the open fire with black coffee at our elbows.

“You’ll be making samwidges of the rest of the bird, I’m hoping,” said Mike.

“I will that,” said Annie, “and I’ll send them over to the social at the church.”

“ ’Tis that way always,” said Mike. “We eats what we can at one sitting and we never sees the creature again. As they says, ‘Christmas comes but once a year’ and a good thing too. We never streels it over two, three days. Come December twenty-sixth and it’s over far as we’re concerned.

“Not that it ain’t a great day, mind you. With everyone feeling friendly and the good food and a kid or two, you couldn’t ask for better. This night, we has Dinny and Honorah, them’s the Casey kids, you’ll mind. Them kids, with their eyes like stars, comes over with Casey and his woman and they’ll be showing of the things they gets from Sandy Claus. Sure, one of them on my knee and t’other on Annie’s lap, and both talking at once and you knows that Christmas is a blessed time. ’Tis lucky people we is when all is said and done.

“I minds one Christmas when it looks as if there’s neither food nor friendship nor even a kid to enjoy it. ’Twas up at the Crick, the first year Annie is there and just after O’Grady sells me my gold mine, as I tells you. Annie’s the only woman in the place them days but we’s as snug as you please in the company’s house. O’Rourke’s just built his hotel a while before and there’s a bit of a store and mebbe ten shacks and most of them empty in the winter. The place is quiet and that’s a fact, every one that can having

gone south. However, it's our first Christmas together and we figures on making it a good one. Annie stocks up with groceries and we sends down to the Bay for a turkey. We orders it in for Tuesday, Christmas being Wednesday that year. Like two kids we is with the room all decorated up and a Christmas tree standing in the corner. We trims it all over and it has little candles on to it, for there's no 'lectricity at the Crick them days.

“O'Rourke's my friend, as I tells you, and he's fixing for a Christmas dinner too. He has no woman but he's expecting six or eight out of the bush for a turkey feed. He orders his in, same as us, for the Tuesday, for he has no icehouse yet and we can't take no chances on the weather being soft. Well, O'Rourke's men turns up, six of them, and they eats bacon and beans and salt pork like the rest of us. I sees them, a hungry looking lot, and no turkey stands a chance against them.

“Well, I'm right down at the express car when Number Nine comes in on the Tuesday and nothing is put off. I has them search the car and I looks myself but there's neither hide nor hair of any turkey. O'Rourke's there too and a sorry looking pair we is.

“‘It's a hell of a railway that can't deliver of a turkey,’ says O'Rourke.

“Of course, I wasn't taking that from O'Rourke, not agin my own railway.

“I says, ‘This here railway delivers turkeys when it gets them to deliver,’ I says. ‘It don't breed them none and it ain't supposed to. But,’ I says, ‘if I had that butcher in the Bay what sends me a turkey and him not sending it, I'd break his neck, I would, and happy to hear it crack.’

“With that O'Rourke cools off and we goes to the office and both of us sends wires to the Bay for turkeys. They can get them on Number Nine and for all the difference it makes, we just has our dinner late on Christmas Day.

“Long about four o'clock, O'Rourke is back.

“‘Mullins,’ he says, ‘them bushwackers of mine is eating salt horse and liking it today but I misjudge them if they eats salt horse tomorrow. Two of them, or three of them even, and I gives them salt horse for the rest of the winter but six of them eats turkey or they burns my place down right over my head. I sends a wire to Englehart and I sends a wire to Cochrane, for I can take no chances.’ So he does it. After thinking of Annie here and her first Christmas at the Crick, I does it too. Then there's nothing to do but wait it out.

“The winter’s been what they calls a good, old fashioned winter, except for what some of the train crew’s been calling it. It’s cold with plenty of snow and nary a thaw to settle it. On the Tuesday, it snows and snows hard. Early Christmas morning, the plow gets through from Englehart and, far as we knows, Number Nine’s on time. Then all hell breaks loose and it snows and blows something terrible. Except for a drift or two, the wind keeps it clean at the station but I sees it piling into the rock cut at the north end. Number Nine don’t do bad. She’s in one hour late but that’s as far as she ever gets. You can’t buck no ten-foot drift in no rock cut.

“However, I’m down at the express car when she stops and off comes a great cardboard box that can’t be anything but turkey. The shipping tag is gone but Boston Crick is scrawled on it with blue keel. Right away, I see’s it’s mine for it’s the only one and I gets it fast to the Office. O’Rourke is late, what with the heavy going, and I has time to look it over. That bird weighs twenty-five pounds stripped and stands over four feet in its stocking feet. I just has time to see, tucked in its innards, a great bottle of port wine, that being the custom them days if you wants your licker to get through. I slaps the lid back just as O’Rourke comes in puffing and blowing.

“I’ll take my turkey along with me, Mullins,’ he says, quiet-like but I can tell he talks with the expressman.

“‘Tis too bad,’ I says, ‘for your turkey never come. Like as not, they’re fattening of them up down at the Bay,’ I says.

“‘You has it right there,’ he says. ‘It’s a tremendous great bird just like I ordered,’ he says, ‘and Danny Cooper on the express car says it weren’t sent to you.’

“‘Danny Cooper me eye,’ I says. ‘It wasn’t addressed to you neither,’ I says, ‘and how will you prove it’s yours? I can’t be giving out no shipments,’ I says, ‘except to the right parties. It’s me duty,’ I says, ‘and I does me duty even if I has to keep the turkey.’

“‘I has the law on you,’ he says, ‘for it’s my bird.’

“‘If you knows it’s your bird,’ I says, ‘you tell me what’s into it.’

“‘What’s into it,’ he says. ‘What would be into it but the giblets,’ he says, and then he looks kind of sly.

“‘Come to think of it,’ he says, ‘it could have a bottle of cooking licker into it. That would be the way of it.’

“‘Then it ain’t your bird,’ I says, ‘for there’s devil a bit of cooking licker, which well I knows is your only drink. ’Tis stuffed with a bottle of port wine and who would be sending port wine to the likes of you?’

“He sees he’s beat and he goes away mad and fearsome too for he has to face them six bushwackers and him without no turkey. For me, I steps out of the door. Number Nine stands there picking up a drift or two and the engine crew is banking the fire, for she spends Christmas at the Crick for sure. There’s no passengers but a woman and a kid and him asking, ‘Is it the North Pole, Mummy?’ and ‘Do Sandy Claus live here, Mummy?’

“Well, the long and the short of it is Annie takes the woman and the kid, that thinks to spend Christmas up at MacDougall Chutes. Then there’s nothing for it but my turkey goes up to O’Rourke’s hotel after O’Rourke admits it’s mine. Everyone eats at O’Rourke’s and my turkey gives everything he’s got. ’Twas a fine celebration and we even has a Christmas tree for the kid with presents on it. What he does with hunting knives and pocket flasks, I wouldn’t know but I carries him down to bed and him asleep with his arms full.

“Next day, the plow gets through and Number Nine goes north and on the Friday, O’Rourke’s down at the station looking for some eggs. Number Nine’s on time and O’Rourke gets his eggs and a turkey from the Bay, then another from the Bay and one from Englehart. I gets the same and, when Number Ten comes along, we has two from Cochrane. Eight turkeys we had and, by that time, there ain’t eight people in the place. You sees why Annie makes samwidges of what is left of the bird this day. Where that first turkey comes from, I never knows, unless it was from Sandy Claus.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Cat and Dog Affair

The talk had been desultory, as happens after a good dinner and when a man's pipe is drawing nice and easy. Annie was reading the *Nugget* and giving us pithy comments on the local happenings. She turned a page and read intently for a minute or two.

"I see by the paper," she said casually, "there's a cat down in Ferris is half lynx. Leastwise, it's a kitten for all the twenty pounds of it."

"A link?" said Mike. "Belike they has it in a cage for them links is tough creatures when they're on the loose. I mind two of them kills a cow up at Widdifield nine, ten years ago. No one sees hide or hair of them, except for the great paw marks they leaves in the snow. That wouldn't be what they mean by the missing link I hears about, would it, sir?"

Not to be drawn into the muddied and unfamiliar waters of anthropology, I ignored the question and asked Annie to tell us about the kitten.

"Seems it comes from a lumber camp and not another cat but the mother for sixty miles. 'Twas small when it come to Ferris but now it weighs all of twenty pounds. The dogs leave it alone, for they has no luck with it but it plays round like any other kitten with the little girl that owns it. You can see for yourself," said Annie, "for here's its picture."

A formidable creature it was with a great square head and upward pointing ears.

"'Tis not a kitten I plays with," said Mike. "More link than tabby cat seems to me and a hefty lot of claws it packs in them pads of his."

"Somehow it reminds me of something that happens to me up at the Crick. 'Twas early days it happens, before Annie puts the civilizing touch of a woman's hand on Boston Crick and sort of takes the bark off. One day I'm at my paper work in my office when in comes a feller I knows called Driscoll, Paddy Driscoll.

"'Merry Christmas,' I says to him, it being July and hot.

"I'll Merry Christmas you,' he says, 'and you killing of my dogs. It's damages you'll give me,' he says, 'and heavy damages.'

“‘I never kills no dogs,’ I says. ‘I never even knows you owns none.’

“‘Who says you kills my dogs?’ says Driscoll. ‘ ’Twas your railway kills them. Number Ten gets all four of them at one crack and I buries them yesterday. In one grave I plants them so they’s all together like. I wants damages,’ he says. ‘Twenty-five dollars for each one of them or I has the law on you.’

“Of course, sir, claims for damages has little to do with me but I don’t figure to have no one collecting damages from my railway, leastways not on the bit of it under my jurisdiction, as you might say. Anyway this Driscoll is a bad one to argue with, him being a bit bushed, and I figures I saves them trouble down at the Bay if I can handle it myself. With that in mind, I starts to calm him down and get his story.

“‘Driscoll,’ I says, ‘this here railway does the right thing and, if you has a claim, you gets it settled.’

“‘If I has a claim,’ says Driscoll, ‘and me walking along the track peaceable and my dogs chasing of a rabbit just for devilment. Up the track they goes, gaining fast, and round the bend in the rock cut, when they runs bang into Number Ten and devil a whistle out of it for warning. When I gets up, there they is dead on the shoulder and Number Ten hightailing it through to the Crick.’

“‘You says you’re trespassing on the railway property when all this happens,’ I says, hoping to stop him cold.

“‘Trespassing, me eye,’ says Driscoll. ‘Well you knows your track is the only trail through the country. Would you be having me plowing through the bush instead of walking on the ties? I knows my rights,’ he says. ‘Hasn’t I the law book and I’ve been reading of it up. *Every Man His Own Lawyer* is the book,’ he says, ‘and would you be setting up yourself to be arguing with a law book? If you has a path right across Buckingham Palace,’ he says, ‘and the people walks on it,’ he says, ‘not the King can’t stop them. It’s in the book,’ he says, ‘It’s just a case of im’nant domain t’other way round, according to the book.’

“Well, sir, of course if it’s in the book, I’m beat and I has to try another deal.

“‘What kind of dogs is these dogs of yours that you wants twenty-five dollars for?’ I says. ‘Them’s high prices for dogs, especially dead dogs.’

“‘High prices,’ he says, ‘and one of them a mastiff and one of them a setter, and a Irish setter at that. Where do you get a good hound dog and a

boxer for twenty-five dollars, I'd like to know? That's what them dogs is and thoroughbreds every one of them. I has a heavy-draft sleigh dog and a bird dog when I goes for a partridge, and a dog to run a deer for me and my boxer's a watchdog if a bear or a Provincial comes around. And where is they now? Dead, I tells you and I gets the law on you and your railroad.'

"Driscoll's hostile and no mistake and I sees I has to stall him while I gets the rights of the matter. As he says, I can't argue with no law book.

"'Paddy,' I says, 'you seems to be in the right of it. You goes back to your place and makes your claim according to your law book. Then you brings it in and I sends it to the Bay, for I can't take the bread and butter out of the mouth of the Claims Agent. He has to live, same as you and me,' I says. 'Say you come back one week from today with your claim writ legal and proper and I'll be ready for you.'

"With that, he cools down and says he does it and goes away.

"That night, I'm up at O'Rourke's hotel and I tell O'Rourke about Paddy losing his four dogs.

"'Four dogs,' says O'Rourke. 'I never sees four dogs at Driscoll's. I'm there three, four days ago arranging for Driscoll to get me a case—anyways, I'm up at Paddy's place and all I see is one mongrel dog.'

"I lets it pass for it's no concern of mine where Driscoll gets his licker and all I says is, 'You didn't see four dogs, a mastiff and a setter, a hound dog and what he calls a boxer? Four dogs is what he says was killed by Number Ten.'

"'He never has four dogs. Just this Heinz, as I tell you.' says O'Rourke, 'and it no more account than Driscoll hisself.'

"'Could it be that this here mongrel dog is all four of them in one parcel? What like is it?' I says.

"'It ain't like nothing,' says O'Rourke. 'Just dog. Kind of yellow with spots, big and clumsy, with a kind of a pug nose and feathers like on the tail of it. It ain't worth ten cents as dog or dog feed.'

"I tell you, sir, I'm set back on my heels to think that Paddy Driscoll tries to put that across me with his law book and all.

"Next day, I gets hold of Jones that takes care of dog tags down at Englehart and is a J.P. and all like that. He's new them days. We fixes it that he comes to the Crick on the day that Driscoll's due and he's there an hour or so when Driscoll comes in.

“ ‘Here’s my claim, Mullins,’ says Driscoll, ‘all writ out legal. You sends it to the Bay and I gets my money and no hard feelings.’

“ ‘Right you are,’ I says, ‘and we sends the four dog tags along just to make everything complete.’

“ ‘Tags!’ he says. ‘There ain’t no tags and well you knows it.’

“Then Mr. Jones horns in.

“ ‘You says,’ says Jones, ‘how you has four dogs running at large without no tags. It’s against the law,’ he says, ‘and I has to take you down to Englehart where you will be dealt with according to the law. You will buy a tag for each of them dogs and you pays a fine, which is fifteen dollars,’ he says, ‘and the court costs for taking up my time, which is eight dollars. Them dogs will cost you twenty-five dollars each,’ he says, ‘and cheap at the price,’ he says.

“ ‘Tis what I gets for my damages,’ says Driscoll, jumping up and down. ‘It’s robbery,’ he says. ‘Anyway, there’s only one dog, for them dogs was kind of consolidated, as you might say.’

“ ‘Oh, ho,’ says I, ‘so you’re trying to fraud the railway. Your law book will tell you what that means,’ I says. ‘I lays a charge against you,’ I says, ‘with Mr. Jones here,’ I says. ‘And what would that get him your Honour?’

“ ‘It would be a jailing matter, Mullins, at the least,’ he says. ‘Five or ten years, if he gives me trouble but I has his statement about the four dogs,’ he says, ‘and the hundred dollar fine might be more appropriate,’ he says.

“By this time, Driscoll’s looking pretty sick and the fight’s gone right out of him.

“ ‘I’m a poor man,’ says Driscoll, ‘and I throws myself on the mercy of the court.’

“ ‘Tis irregular, highly irregular,’ says Jones, ‘but, if you says nothing about it, Driscoll, I lets you off for one dog tag and my expenses up from Englehart, if Mullins here don’t press his charges.’

“Me, I’m only out to protect my railway and, Driscoll’s tail being down, I says I’m satisfied and that’s the way it ends. That link down at Ferris brings it all back to me.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Packed Rink

“Take Howard Teskey,” said Mike, as we sat before a crackling fire discussing curling. “There’s a man that plays games hard and it’s the only way to play them. With curling, if you don’t keep your mind on the game, you might as well be playing tiddly-winks for all it gets you. For me, I’m always watching every rock and sizing up the ice my whole time and it pays off.”

I had to agree, for no one throws a better rock than Mike and no one plays a better game on crooked ice.

“Of course, sir, you never sees me at my best. I’m good I tell you when I’m younger and I don’t ride my rock to the hog line like these young fellers. Last year or two, I just puts my name on the spare list and I only curls when I thinks that Rod McLeod or young Harve Fisher needs to be cut down to size. Not that I has anything against them lads, you mind. They’re good lads on the ice or off and I likes them fine. But neither one of them ever beats Mike Mullins at a curling game and don’t let them tell you different. Do they pack their rinks against me makes no differ. They still has to argue with my last rock.

“Speaking of packed rinks reminds me of one time up at the Crick. ’Twas ’37, about a month after Christmas. ’Twas cold. Ten below on top of a January thaw two days before. I’m not there regular, you understand; just relieving. Well, me and O’Rourke is setting in the office, with my work all up to date, and playing boxcar poker on the northbound manifest that’s going through. I picks up six bits on him and has just got a Pennsy gondola with three nines and two deuces, which is loose, when what does we see but four fellers drop off of the van. They looks like city fellers but they’re dressed regular in parkas and rubbers with their socks showing. And they’re all likely looking men.

“O’Rourke and me goes out on the platform, or what would be one if there was one, to see what they wants.

“‘Welcome to Boston Crick,’ I says, when they comes up. ‘And what could I be doing for you?’

“‘It’s a bed for the night, we wants,’ says one of them, ‘for we’re going back in the bush in the morning,’ he says, ‘to the old Whatahope.’

“‘Sure,’ I says, ‘Mr. O’Rourke here can take care of you and him owning the best hotel in Boston Crick.’

“Which it was, sir, being the only one, and not bad at that with running water and a bathtub, well as ’lectric lights in every room.

“‘You’re welcome, gentlemen,’ says O’Rourke, ‘and I shows you the way. You’re in good time for a hot supper.’

“With that, they shoulders their packs and away they goes up the trail past the curling rink. I banks my fires and gets her closed up for the night. Then I goes up to the hotel myself, for I stays there while I’m relieving. Them four is toasting their toes round the stove when I comes in and I gets washed up and joins them.

“‘I’m Mullins,’ I says, ‘T.N.O. Agent,’ I says, ‘relieving.’

“‘My name is Congalton,’ says one of them, ‘and these gentlemen, Mr. Mullins,’ he says, ‘is Watson and Hudson and the little one is Campbell.’

“This little one is six foot four, if he’s an inch.

“‘Seems to me,’ says the one called Watson, ‘that Boston Crick is kind of quiet. Not much excitement,’ he says, ‘from what I sees of it.’

“Of course, I’m not taking that, not against the Crick.

“‘If you’re thinking of murdering and burgling and disturbing of the peace in general, the Crick is quiet,’ I says, ‘but we has our fun all the same,’ I says. ‘Just last week, the Consolidated Church gives a social which, except for one fight, is as nice a shindig as I sees anywhere. Then, two weeks ago, a medicine man comes in and gives a show and sells enough pain killer, guaranteed to cure everything from spavin to broken hearts, as would handle the spring drive. Only O’Rourke has any complaints, for the stuff has enough kick to cut into his trade. I don’t mind telling you fellers, which I see is gentlemen, that there’ll be a slack time in the back room until the medicine’s all gone. Then, of course, there’s the curling.’

“‘Curling!’, says Campbell. ‘Do you mean you have a rink?’

“‘For sure we has a rink,’ I says, ‘a one-sheeter and there ain’t any ice like it in the North Country.’

“Well, they all perks up at this and O’Rourke comes in and we arranges a game with the four of them after supper. We has Jim Kelly, of the

Recorder's office, him being in town for the night, and we sends out for Black Jack McDonald that runs the general store. When Black Jack comes in, it looks like the game's all over before it starts.

“‘Your name is Campbell, is it?’ he says, when the new fellers is introduced. ‘That there is a fighting name in these parts,’ he says. ‘I never sees no good in no Campbell.’

“‘The McDonalds flunked Culloden,’ says Campbell, flaring up, ‘and we beats you whenever we meets you in the old days,’ he says, ‘and we beats you again tonight if you’re not afeared to play.’

“‘Hold me,’ says Black Jack, ‘before I tears him limb from limb. Afeard, is it? We bets you fifty dollars a side,’ he says, ‘and you takes it, or there’s no curling this night.’

“‘With that, we all digs up the money and we puts it in O’Rourke’s tin safe ’til after the eighth end.

“‘Of course, sir, we don’t know what all the trouble is about. I just tells it as I remembers it. It has something to do with the old days when they wears paint and feathers somewhere in the Highlands.

“‘Before we goes to the rink,’ says O’Rourke, ‘I’d just like you gentlemen to sign the register. In general, I don’t bother about it but this is what we might call a historic occasion and I like to have your names in the book.’

“‘With that they steps up and signs and O’Rourke is going to slip it under the counter, when he calls me over.

“‘Mullins,’ he says, ‘do you see these here names? Our fifty dollars ain’t worth a grease spot in hell,’ he says, ‘as you can see for yourself.’

“‘I takes a look and these is the names I sees: Gordon Campbell, Hamilton; Ken Watson, Winnipeg; James Congalton, Winnipeg; and Gordon Hudson, Winnipeg. Of course, I sees right away that we has been took. Every last one of them has won the Brier, as any curler knows. If ever a rink is packed, this one is.

“‘We can’t back out of it,’ I says, ‘but, for the love of Heaven,’ I says, ‘has you flooded the ice this day?’

“‘We has not,’ says O’Rourke. ‘Praise be.’

“‘Then we sees it through,’ I says, ‘and may the best rink win—or the luckiest.’

“So over we goes to the rink, which I knows these fellers sees coming up from the station, and we turns on the lights, for we has a string of them all the way down. To look at, she’s not too bad but the ice takes a bit of knowing. You see, along about February, we gets her built up and level. Right now she’s crooked. Going away, she’s dished at the middle and, coming home, it falls away from the button all round. O’Rourke and me plays it once the day before. It’s got a pebble O’Rourke’s put on that afternoon but, along the edges, it’s as rough as Donnybrook Fair.

“O’Rourke and Hudson flips a coin and we wins.

“‘You takes the pick of the rocks,’ says O’Rourke and Hudson takes the red. We’ve painted them up, you see, and numbered them.

“Campbell’s lead and Watson gives him the broom on centre ice with the out turn to put her on the blue. Down she comes with good weight and stops on the button. Watson looks kind of surprised but I gives McDonald the broom on the rock and takes her out. Then Watson gives the broom on centre ice with the in turn and Campbell lands on the button. We takes it out and so it goes. Devil a place can you put her, if your weight is right, but on the button, and devil a shot can you miss no matter how you plays them. We counts one on the first end.

“Going home, I gives McDonald two feet off centre ice with an out and calls for tee weight. His rock starts to curl at the hog line and then the fall takes hold and he’s on the blue at ten o’clock. Campbell lands on the blue at seven, being a bit overweight.

“‘The devil’s in the ice, Mullins,’ says Watson. ‘I never sees the beat of it.’

“You see, sir, there’s a swell in the rock right under the tee and we won’t work it out ’til the end of February. Outside the blue the ice is rough and, no matter what you do, you’re bound to stay and the worst you get is a bite. The only way you gets on the white is to lay up on a rock and it takes some doing.

“Well the game goes on, with McDonald and Campbell feuding the way there’s like to be a ruckus any minute and Ken Watson near crazy the way the rocks is acting. Each rink makes one with its last rock going away and each makes one or two coming home depending on the luck. Ken Watson makes a point on the seventh to tie her up and give us the last rock. I’m not for having our fifty dollars riding on a lucky break on the last end. O’Rourke and me discovers something and we holds it up for a emergency which is

what we're up against now. The leads and seconds put their rocks down same as usual, on the blue or biting. Hudson lays one in on the right on top a rock and is shot. O'Rourke gets another on the blue. Hudson puts another on top of his first, as pretty a piece of luck as I ever see, and is laying two. Then I gives O'Rourke the nod and he lets one go easy with an in and it slides over the hog and we sweeps it in to four feet off the blue right at two o'clock. Watson's first is light, him being afraid of moving his shot rocks. Then I gets ready to throw my first. O'Rourke and me discovers the day before that there's a kind of gully from two o'clock on the blue right to the button. O'Rourke gives me mebbe three feet of ice for the out turn and I lets her go more than hack weight.

"'You're going through, man,' says Ken, 'and sorry I am to see you lose the game.'

"'It ain't lost yet,' I says. 'Sweep,' I yells. 'Hold her up, for the love of Heaven,' and they sweeps 'til their brooms is smoking. Down she comes taking the curl and the fall and I gets a wick that sends her up the gully and solid on the red. Watson don't know what to do. He's curler enough to know that he can't get at me by my road and he studies the situation every which way. Then he takes the broom on the rock and lets go a drifter. It don't work. The fall's too much for it and he misses by an inch and the rock goes through the house. My last rock is just over the hog line for I takes no chances and we wins the game from four skips that wins the Brier. Mind you, I'm not saying that I beats Ken Watson at the Granite Club at the Bay but I sure beats him on the one-sheeter up at Boston Crick."

It did not seem the time to question the coincidence of four Brier winners being at Boston Creek together, so that my comments were strictly congratulatory. However, the next time I was in Boston Creek, I made a point of laying the whole matter before O'Rourke.

"Them lads. Sure I remembers them," said O'Rourke. "They came out from the Whatahope two weeks later, after Mullins was gone. All I said to them was, 'Gentlemen, I'd like you to register,' which they did. Here's the book and you can see for yourself."

O'Rourke turned back a page or two and right beneath the earlier registration I read the names: C. A. James, James B. McDougall, A. A. Douglas and Arnold Sinclair, Toronto.

"A fine lot of lads they was," said O'Rourke, "and, somehow, I never got round to showing Mullins the book."

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

Page numbers have been removed due to a non-page layout.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Mike Mullins of Boston Crick* by Owen Templeton Garrett (O. T. G.) Williamson]