TOM AKERLEY

His Adventures in the Tall Timber and at Gaspard's Clearings on the Indian River

By Captain Theodore Goodridge Roberts

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AND AT GASPARD'S CLEARINGS

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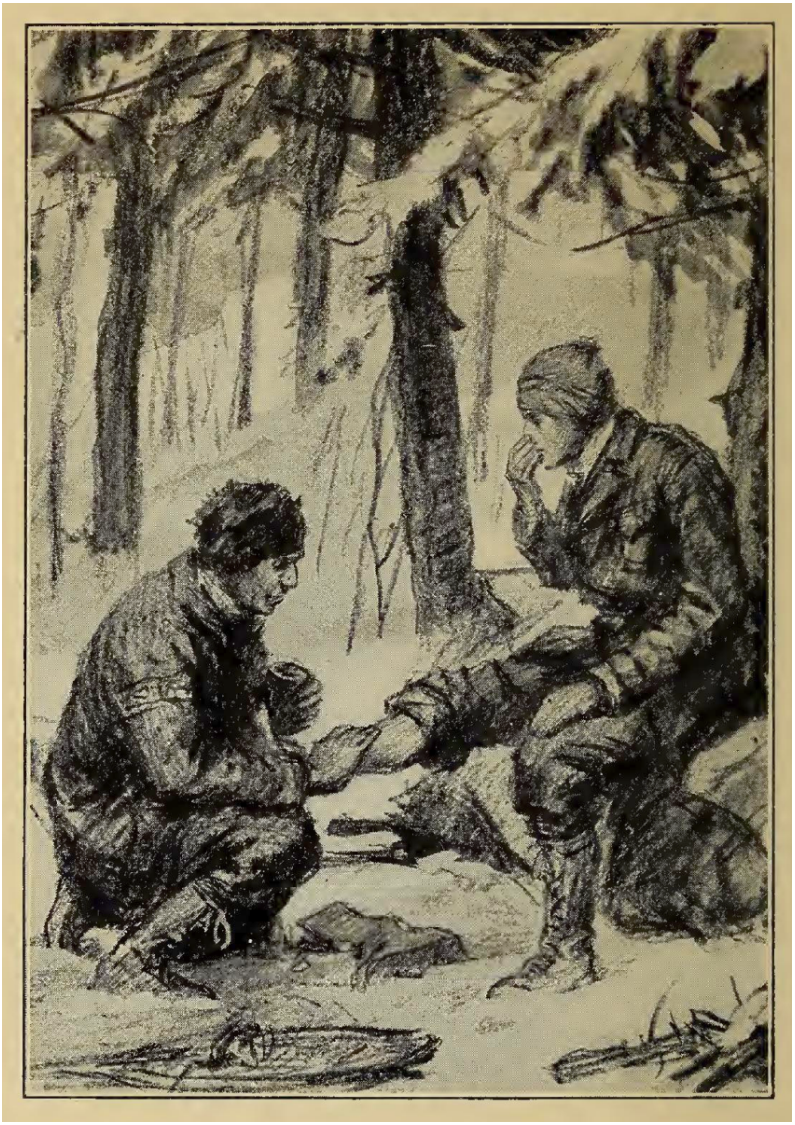

"THE BEAR'S GREASE PROVED TO BE AS POTENT AS IT SMELT." (See page 178)

TOM AKERLEY

His Adventures in the Tall Timber and at Gaspard's Clearing on the Indian River

RELATED BY

Captain Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "The Fighting Starkleys," "Comrades of the Trails," "Red Feathers," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

Ernest Fuhr

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TOM AKERLEY

CHAPTER I

THE FLIGHT

THE night was hot and hazy. The aerodrome was in darkness save for a moving light in the black maw of one of the hangars and a shine from the open window of the office on the other side of the ground. All the machines were down and in.

Two men were in the small hut which served as field-headquarters and office for this particular unit of the Dominion Air Force. They sat at opposite sides of a large table, one leaning back in his chair with a cigar in his mouth, the other stooped forward over a map which he studied intently. Clerks, orderlies, pilots, observers and mechanics all were gone, with the exceptions of these two and the man with the lantern across at the hangars.

"Ottawa seems determined to decorate every one who ever flew, be he alive or dead," remarked the elder of the two, without removing the cigar from his mouth and still gazing upward at the low ceiling. "We seem to have more Military Crosses and such things than we know what to do with."

"Yes, sir?" returned the younger officer inquiringly, looking up from the map.

"It seems so to me," continued Colonel Nasher. "You knew a fellow named Angus Bruce, I believe."

"Yes, I knew Angus Bruce."

"Ottawa suggests a posthumous Military Cross for him."

The younger officer said nothing to that, although the expression of his face suggested that he wanted to say a great deal. Instead of speaking he fell to studying his map again. The line of his mouth was tense. Even the set of his broad, lean shoulders looked tense. A keen observer would have noticed a general air of tenseness about him—tenseness of self-control practiced under difficulties.

"But I think my letter to Ottawa will fix that," added the colonel, still speaking around his cigar.

The other looked across the table again.

“Fix it?” he queried.

His voice was low but slightly tremulous.

“Kill it,” replied the colonel.

“I don’t understand you, sir,” said the junior, still speaking quietly. “Bruce earned it several times, to my personal knowledge.”

“I don’t agree with you. I knew the fellow for years. We used to live in the same town. There’s a yellow streak in the breed. You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.”

“He had no yellow streak. He proved his courage a dozen times—scores of times—his courage and his worth.”

“So you say, major.”

At that the major pushed his chair back and stood up.

“Yes, that’s what I say!” he cried.

Colonel Nasher sat up straight, plucked his cigar from his mouth and stared at his second-in-command.

“And I mean what I say,” continued the major, in a loud and shaken voice. “And I know what I am talking about.”

“But you forget to whom you are talking!” roared the colonel.

“No I don’t,” retorted the younger man, wildly. “I am talking to you—and there is some true talk coming to you. You’ve been asking for it ever since I joined this outfit. I know what your game is. You want to get me out—to make people believe that my nerve is gone and I’m no longer fit for the service. I’m fit enough—fit for anything but to sit and listen to you lie about a friend of mine—about the memory of a friend who was killed over the Boche lines. You’re not fit to name a man like Angus Bruce. You never saw him fight. You never saw anybody fight. A yellow streak? I have seen him go up alone after four of them! You’ll swallow that lie, Colonel Nasher, here and now!”

The colonel got to his feet, glaring. He was a large man with a large face. The only small things about him were his heart and mind. His eyes looked like polished gray stones in his red face.

“Your dead friend won’t get his cross and you’ll lose yours!” he cried, pointing a thick finger at the ribbons on the major’s breast. “I’ll break you for this, you upstart! Consider yourself under arrest. I’ll teach you that you’re not in France now!”

The major stepped swiftly and with smooth violence around the end of the table; and then, quick as a flash, his right fist came in contact with the

colonel's red chin. Down went the colonel with a crash.

The major stood above his prostrate C. O. for a few seconds, staring down at the motionless bulk and shaking as if with fever chills.

"What's the use!" he exclaimed hysterically, turning away. "I'm as helpless as if I were under French mud with Angus Bruce."

He took his leather cap and leather coat from a hook on the door, opened the door and stepped into the dark warm night. He saw the lantern beyond the level field and hastened across to it.

"I want the old bus out again, Dever," he said.

"Very good, sir," replied Dever.

They wheeled the 'plane from the open hangar. The major put on his leather coat and cap and climbed in. He started the engines and switched on the internal lights. Then he leaned over and said, "You remember Major Angus Bruce, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I remember him well," replied the man on the ground. "We don't forget that kind, sir, do we—nor ever will."

"A good soldier, Angus Bruce."

"One of the smartest and bravest in the Old Force, sir. He crashed his sixth just a day after you crashed your seventh, sir."

"Yes, I remember it. Now get me off, Dever, and then go over to the office and see if the colonel wants anything. If he needs a stimulant I think you'll find something of the sort in the right-hand drawer on his side of the table."

"Very good, sir. When'll you be back?"

"Not before sunrise. Don't wait up for me."

Dever gave a downward heave on a propeller-blade. Then the wide, white 'plane slid, roaring, into the darkness.

Akerley was flying low; and when he saw the little smudge of yellow light on the black expanse beneath him he went down to it like a wing-weary duck to the sheen of water. The numbness of indifference and confusion that had possessed him for an hour or more passed swiftly from his brain and spirit. His nerves snapped back to duty and his vision cleared. The light expanded to his gaze as he neared it and by its form and position he judged it to come from an open doorway of modest dimensions. It streamed out upon a green level; and he reasoned hopefully that the level ground would,

very likely, be of considerable extent in front of the building. So he shut off his flagging engines, swooped around, dipped and flattened.

The machine ran, swaying and lurching, through old Gaspard's half-grown oats; and just as Akerley was about to congratulate himself on the soundness of his reasoning, the right plane came in violent contact with an ancient and immovable stump of pine.

Akerley recovered consciousness in the dew-wet grain, in the gray dawn. He lay on his left side, with his left shoulder dug into the soft soil. The sappy stems of the young oats had saved his face and head from serious injury; but there was blood on his cheek. He felt a stab of pain through his shoulder as he sat up and looked dizzily around; and his first thought was that a bullet had gone through him. Then he remembered his changed situation and altered circumstances.

He saw the machine on its nose beside the sturdy old stump. One wing was ripped off and twisted hopelessly. That sight did not distress him, for he had finished with the machine anyway. It had served his purpose.

He sat in a field of half-grown oats, ten or twelve acres in extent, rimmed all around by dense forest. A large log house and two barns stood in a group near the farther edge of the clearing.

Akerley got slowly and painfully to his feet and moved toward the house, the door of which stood open. He had been so badly shaken by his throw from the machine that he had to sink to his knees and right hand several times on the way. He reached the door-step at last and sat down on it. So far, he had not caught a glimpse of anything human and alive. A few hens scratched about a stable door and a small black dog eyed him inquiringly from a distance.

The door stood open upon the main apartment of the house, which was very evidently kitchen and living-room in one. It contained a long, high-backed settle against one wall, a deal table against another and a dresser of unstained pine against a third. Plates, platters and bowls, yellow, blue-and-white and a few adorned with flowery designs in gorgeous hues, and a big brown tea-pot, stood on the shelves of the dresser. There was a wide chimney with a fireplace containing fire-dogs and a crane with dangling pot-hooks; and to one side of the chimney, with an elbow of pipe leading into the rough masonry, stood a small stove. Both hearth and stove were cold. A few rag mats, and two deer skins worn bald in patches, lay on the floor of squared timbers. The log walls were sheathed with thin strips of cedar, the partitions and ceiling were of wide pine boards. Rough hewn rafters ran across the ceiling. There was no sign of plaster anywhere in that wide room.

There were closed doors in the partitions to the right and left, and one in the log wall beside the chimney, opposite the open door. A wide ladder went steeply up from a corner to an open trap in the ceiling.

Akerley got stiffly to his feet and crossed the threshold. He knocked sharply on the open door; he crossed to the stove and hit the top of the oven with the poker; he shouted, “Wake up!”, “Good morning,” and “Is any one at home?” Knocks and shouts alike failed to produce a response of any sort except from the little black dog. The dog looked in at him across the threshold with an expression of sharp but good-humored curiosity on his black face; and when the intruder addressed him familiarly by the name of “Pup” and asked him where the devil every one was gone to, he wriggled with delight but continued to keep his distance.

Akerley opened the back door and looked out, under the roof of a narrow porch and across a wood-yard, at the high edge of the forest. Sunshine was flooding over the clearing by this time like a bright, level tide. The porch ran the length of the house; and in its shelter stood an upright churn, a couple of tubs, and two benches supporting empty pails and pans and “creamers” which shone like silver in the sun. Also, there were two old splint-bottom rocking-chairs on the porch; and on the seat of one of these lay an open book on its face.

Akerley stepped out onto the rough hewn flooring of the porch and stared about him inquiringly. Here was a comfortable and well-kept home; here were the material things of peaceful industry and leisure; but where had the people gone to? He knew that they had been at home last night, for the light from their open door had guided him to his landing. He sat down in one of the chairs, for he was still weak from the shaking and the pain in his shoulder, and lifted the book from the other.

“My hat!” he exclaimed. “Where am I?”

The book was the elder Dumas’ “Three Musketeers,” printed in the original language of that great and industrious romancer.

He replaced the book and reëntered the house. The dog, who had advanced as far as the middle of the room, immediately beat a wriggling retreat to his old position beyond the threshold. Akerley ascended the ladder and searched through the loft, which was divided into three chambers—a bedroom, a storeroom and a lumber-room. Nobody was hidden there. He descended and opened the closed doors off the main room. Behind them he found a pantry and storeroom combined, a long apartment containing a carpenter’s table and several large grain bins, and a bedroom. They were all as empty of humanity as the kitchen and upper floor.

It was now fifteen minutes past six by the clock on the chimney-shelf; and the intruder felt keen stirrings of hunger. He had not eaten since an early hour of the previous day. He made a fire in the stove with kindlings and dry wood which lay ready to hand, and then looked about for water. There was none in the house. He took an empty pail from the porch and followed a path that ran from the chip-yard into the green gloom of the forest. He found the spring within ten paces of the edge of the clearing, roofed over and fenced about with poles. The clear water brimmed the oblong basin that had been dug for it; and in the lower end of the basin stood two tin "creamers" held down by a stone-weighted board across their tops.

"Last night's milk, I suppose," said Akerley, as he filled his pail. "What about this morning's milking? Are they leaving that to me, I wonder?"

He returned to the house and cooked and ate a very good breakfast. He found everything he wanted—bread, tea, sugar, butter, bacon and jam. Then he lit a cigarette.

"I won't wash dishes, anyway," he said, "I draw the line at that. I'll dirty every cup and plate in the house first. But I suppose I'll have to go and look for those blasted cows."

His shoulder felt better, but still very stiff. He placed a dish of bread and milk on the floor and pointed it out to the little dog, then hung two tin pails on his arm and went out to look for the dairy herd. On his way, he searched the barns. The stables were empty, save for a few dozens of scratching fowls. He found a pig-house of two pens and open runs behind one of the barns. One suite was occupied by a large sow and the other by five promising pink youngsters. They all greeted the sight of him enthusiastically.

"Pigs!" he exclaimed. "I suppose they think I'll attend to their confounded pigs."

He entered the pig-house and found there a small iron stove and large iron pot. The pot, which had a capacity of about two flour barrels, was half-full of a stiff sort of porridge. Beside it stood a spade with a short handle. He set the pails on the floor and spaded a quantity of this mess into the troughs to right and left. The exertion sent stabs of pain through his injured shoulder. He glared at the big sow on his right and the small pigs on his left, who had dashed in from their yards at the sounds of his spading and were now sunk to the eyes and knees in their untidy breakfast.

"They'd better come home before that pot is empty," he said. "If they think I'm going to cook for a bunch of pigs while they go fishing they're everlastingly mistaken."

The big field of oats spread completely around the barns, but from the barn-yard a fenced road led through the crop to a second clearing behind a screen of trees. This clearing, which was rough pasture, was fenced and occupied by three horses and a foal; and in a small, square yard at the near edge of it stood five cows in expectant attitudes. One cow had a bell at her neck, which she ding-donged restlessly.

Akerley had learned to milk when he was a small boy and used to visit a brother of his mother's housekeeper in the country. The knack of it is not easily lost, though the muscles of hands and wrists may suffer from neglect of the exercise. He milked the five cows, grumbling at the necessity; and he was glad that two of them proved to be remarkably light producers. He then let them into the pasture with the horses; and upon seeing them hasten toward a green clump of alders in a far corner, he knew that he would not have to carry water for them. Owing to the painful condition of his shoulder, he was forced to make two trips with the milk. He found the house still unoccupied, save by the little black dog.

One thing led naturally to another; and Akerley found no time that morning to consider the graver problems of his situation. He was conscientious to an extraordinary degree and knew just enough about farm life to feel the responsibilities of his peculiar position. Milking led to the care of milk and the washing of creamers. He carried the skimmed milk to the pigs, cooked and ate his dinner, then fell asleep in one of the chairs on the porch.

Akerley slept heavily and senselessly for several hours; but at last his head slipped along the back of the chair into so uncomfortable a position that his brain shook off its torpor and busied itself with the spinning of dreams. They were startling and distressing dreams. They were of flying in fogs and over strange cities and through resounding barrages, of fighting against fearful odds, and of falling—falling—falling. Crash!—and he awoke just in time to save himself from tumbling sideways off the chair.

He opened his eyes wide and straightened himself with a gasp. His heart was going at a terrific rate, his nerves were all twanging, and for a second or two he felt numb with fear. Then he saw the afternoon sunlight along the edge of the forest and remembered. He laughed with relief.

"This is better," he said to the black dog, who sat on the edge of the porch and faced him with an expression of undiminished interest and expectancy. "Yes, a great deal better, you black pup. Better for the nerves and better for everything—and you can take a flight-commander's word for it, Pup."

So great was his relief at awakening from his nightmares to those peaceful and rustic surroundings that, for several minutes, his mood and manner of whimsical complaint were forgotten. He surveyed the yard, with its cord wood, chips and saw-horse; and the path leading into the brown and green shades of the forest; and the dog wagging its tail in front of him, with the keenest satisfaction. His appreciative glance lowered to the floor between his feet and the dog.

"What's this!" he exclaimed, staring. "Where'd it come from?"

He stooped forward and picked up a piece of folded white paper. It was written on with pencil, in a round hand, as follows:—

> "*Sir*; My Grandfather refuses to return for he will not believe that you are not a devil. He is not an educated man, and has not been more than forty miles from here in the last thirty years. He has always believed in the Devil, but never in aeroplanes or anything of that kind, although I have shown him pictures of them. I am glad you were not killed and sorry you broke your aëroplane. You did not find the calves, which are in a pen at the far end of the cow-stable. I fed them a few minutes ago. The cows do not pasture with the horses, as Jess kicks cows—so I let them out. The bars in the brush-fence are just beyond the brook among the alders. I shall bring my grandfather back to the house as soon as he recovers from his foolish fright; but how soon that will be I cannot state definitely, for he is a very stubborn old man. I have left him asleep in the woods. He made me promise not to speak to you.
>
> Yours very truly,
> CATHERINE MACKIM"

Akerley read with astonished haste, studied the signature, then re-read the letter slowly from the beginning. This done, he raised his head and gazed searchingly around him.

He entered the house and looked at the clock on the chimney-piece. It pointed to four; and he corrected the watch on his wrist by it. Again he read the note before putting it carefully away in his pocket-book. He stood for some time in the center of the room, deep in thought, fingering his stubbly chin. Then he entered the bedroom.

This was evidently Grandfather's sleeping-place and nothing else. Its walls of natural wood were bare save for a few earthy and unshapely garments of coarse material hanging from nails. A pair of mud-caked boots

with high legs stood crookedly in a corner. On the window-sill lay a black clay pipe, the heel of a plug of black tobacco and a shabby spectacle-case. The only articles of furniture were a large chest and a bed. The chest was not locked; and Akerley rummaged through it in search of a razor. He found an ancient suit of black broadcloth, a leather wallet fat with ten and twenty-dollar bank notes, flannel shirts, rifle cartridges rolled up in a woolen sock, a packet of papers, cakes of tobacco, suits of winter underclothes so aggressively wooly that his back itched as he beheld them, a Bible, a cardboard box full of trinkets—and, last of all, a razor in a stained red case.

He had to go up to the bedroom in the loft to find a mirror; but he did not shave there, feeling that he would be taking an unwarrantable liberty in doing so. With the mirror and a purloined cake of pink soap he returned to the kitchen. Nothing like a shaving-brush was to be found, high or low, so he did without. The pink soap proved to be a poor producer of lather, and the ancient razor seemed to prefer either sliding or digging to cutting; and so it was twenty minutes to five before Akerley considered himself shaved. He returned the mirror and soap to their places and went out to his crippled machine.

Akerley had no further use for the plane. He felt that it had fulfilled its mission, quite apart from the fact that it was damaged beyond immediate repair with the tools and materials at hand. He judged by the atmosphere and appearance of his surroundings and the fact that the old man of the place had mistaken him for a devil, that he had gone far enough. And the nearest supply of petrol was sure to be many weary miles away. So much the better —for petrol stood for the very things he was most anxious to avoid at this particular stage of his career. Now he was anxious to put the machine out of sight in the shortest possible time, and for a few minutes he seriously contemplated breaking it to pieces and burning and burying the fragments. But he decided against this violent course. He hadn't the dull toughness of heart for the task; for this plane had served him well, as many others had served him well and truly in the past. So he set briskly to work at dismantling it.

It was after seven o'clock when Akerley went for the cows. He found them waiting outside the bars in the brush-fence among the alders, yarded them and milked them. He then fed the calves and pigs, prepared and ate his own supper, and returned to his work on the machine. Later, he found and lit a lantern. It was close upon midnight when his task was completed to his satisfaction. Then he threw himself, boots and all, on the old man's bed, and sank into dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL AND THE MAN

THE twilight of dawn was brightening over the clearing when Akerley was suddenly awakened by the grip of fingers on his injured shoulder. He could not have leapt back to consciousness more swiftly and violently if a knife had been driven into him. He sat up with a jerk and opened his eyes in the same instant of time; and fear shone visibly in his eyes for a fraction of a second. The look of fear gave place to one of relief, and that changed in a wink to an expression of polite and embarrassed surprise.

A girl stood beside the bed, staring at him wide-eyed. Her lips were parted and she breathed hurriedly.

"Get up," she whispered. "You must hide in the woods. Grandfather is coming. Climb out the window and run."

He swung his feet to the floor and stood up before her.

"But why should I run and hide?" he asked.

She placed her hands on his breast and pushed him backward until he brought up against the wall beside the open window.

"He will kill you," she replied. "He has his rifle. Get out, quick, and hide in the woods. Please go! And watch the house. And I'll tell you later. Crawl away. Don't let him see you."

"But why does he want to shoot me?"

"Go! Go! I don't want you to be killed!"

"I am not afraid of any old man with a rifle!"

The girl's eyes blazed and the color faded out of her cheeks. She raised her right hand as if she would strike him in the face. Daunted and bewildered, Akerley turned quickly and slipped out of the window into the dew-wet grass. He moved toward the edge of the woods by the shortest line, on his hands and knees, without pausing once to look back. Upon reaching the shelter of bushes and round spruces along the front of the forest, he lay flat and turned and surveyed the house and clearing. His shoulder hurt him, and he felt angry and hungry and generally abused; but his mind was soon

diverted from himself by the sudden appearance of a tall old man within fifteen or twenty paces of where he lay.

The old man stared at the house from beneath the brim of a wide and weather-stained felt hat. Abundant white whiskers showed with startling distinctness against the breast of his dark shirt. He held a rifle in his right hand, at the short trail. After standing motionless for half a minute, he stooped almost double and advanced toward the house with long strides. He reached the porch and vanished from view through the back door.

"She was right," soliloquized Akerley. "The old bird is out for blood and no mistake. He certainly has his nerve with him—if he still thinks I'm a devil."

He lay still, watching the house. The minutes dragged past; and his hunger and the soreness of his shoulder again attracted his attention. Presently the girl appeared in the doorway, paused there for a moment and then stepped out onto the porch with her grandfather close at her heels. The old man was in the act of passing her when she turned swiftly and halted him, and stayed him with a grip of both hands on the front of his shirt. Akerley, watching intently, again forgot his discomfort and hunger. He knew something of the strength of those small hands.

"I hope she'll pull out his blasted whiskers," he muttered.

The two were evidently of different opinions on some matter of importance. The old man seemed to be all for leaving the porch immediately, and the girl for having him remain there. He waved his left hand violently. He waved his right hand, in which the steel of the rifle-barrel shone blue. She continued to cling to the front of his shirt. It was plain to be seen that they argued the point hotly. He side-stepped toward the edge of the porch and she pulled him back sharply to his former ground. He struggled to get away and she struggled to retain her hold on him. He broke away suddenly and fell backwards off the edge of the raised floor. It was a drop of about two feet. The rifle flew from his grasp as he struck the ground. He lay on his back for a few seconds, then turned over and raised himself to his hands and knees. From that position he got slowly to his feet. He stood facing Akerley's hiding-place for a moment, swaying uncertainly, then staggered forward a few paces, reeled suddenly, fell heavily on his face and lay still. The girl sprang down from the porch and knelt beside him.

Akerley saw the girl make several attempts to get the old man to his feet. He left his cover after the third unsuccessful attempt and approached the yard. He was half-way to the porch when the girl raised her head and saw him. She signalled him to make haste; and he immediately broke into a run.

“He is hurt!” she exclaimed, breathlessly. “He is unconscious. He has not opened his eyes since he fell. There’s no doctor this side of Boiling Pot. What am I to do?”

“He is stunned, that’s all,” replied Akerley. “He breathes right enough, and his heart is working away like a good one. Very likely he knocked the back of his head on a stone or something when he crashed. We had better carry him in-doors, I think, and pour some water over him.”

Akerley lifted him by the shoulders, the girl gathered him up by the knees, and so they carried him into the house and laid him on his own bed. Akerley asked if there were any brandy or whiskey on the premises.

“Not for him!” she cried. And then, in a lower tone, “There is some brandy, but I have hidden it from him,” she continued. “It is the worst thing in the world for him, for it inflames his temper; and I think it is his temper that is the matter with him, mostly. He has been like that twice before, and both times he was in a terrible rage.”

“Pleasant company, I don’t think,” remarked Akerley. “But the trouble isn’t entirely bad temper this time, Miss MacKim. Here’s the bump where he assaulted something hard with the back of his skull. It doesn’t seem serious —but he is very old, I suppose.”

The girl investigated the bump with her fingers.

“I’ll bathe that,” she said. “See, he looks better already. It was foolish of me to be afraid. Please get out of sight before he opens his eyes. Get your breakfast now, please, and make as little noise about it as possible; and I’ll keep him here until you have finished, even if he recovers consciousness in the meantime.”

“Does he still think I am a devil?” he asked.

“Yes—and that it is his sacred duty to kill you,” she replied. “He was terrified at first; but he is not at all afraid of you now. The very thought of you, and of the way you frightened him when you rushed down from the sky, fills him with fury.”

“But am I to hide from him always?”

“Always? Did you come here to settle for life?”

“My machine is smashed and I have dismantled it; and I need a rest.”

“You will not get much rest with Grandfather hunting you all the time; and there are other and more usual ways of leaving here than by aëroplane. But go now—quick!”

Akerley left the room and closed the door behind him. He lit a fire in the stove stealthily, boiled water and made tea. He did not fry bacon, for fear that the smell of it might start the old man into action again; so he breakfasted on bread and butter and jam. He was about to light a cigarette—the last one in his case—when the girl appeared from the old man's bedroom. She came very close to him, with a finger on her lip for warning.

"He has come around, but he is very weak and shaken," she whispered. "He seems quite dazed, just as he did the other times; but he will soon recover his wits and energy, you may be sure. He may be like this all day, or perhaps only for a few hours; and then he'll be out with the rifle again, looking for you. What have you done with your aëroplane?"

Akerley eyed her steadily and thoughtfully before replying.

"I have hidden the parts here and there," he said. "I'll show you, any time you say. One plane is badly smashed, but not hopelessly. I may mend it some day; but just now the important thing for me is to have all the parts out of sight."

"So that Grandfather can't find them and destroy them?" she queried.

"That is one reason," he replied. "The fact is, I should not like any one from outside to find any trace of the old bus around here. It might prove very awkward for me. The less known about me and the machine the better for me, Miss MacKim. If I tell you why I'll put myself at your mercy—which I shall do sometime when we can talk in more security. Now I think I had better milk and do the chores."

"Are you in danger?" she whispered.

"I shall be glad to explain my position to you, as far as possible, at the first opportunity," he answered, smiling. "But there are other things to do now that need to be done quick—the milking, for one—and if I could get hold of your grandfather's ammunition I'd extract the charge from every cartridge. Then I'd feel less uneasy. My nerves are not in the best shape, as it is."

She went to the front door with him and instructed him to keep out of line of the old man's window, not to bring the milk to the house but to leave it on the floor of the larger barn, and to remain in the barn until he saw her again.

"And I'll bring you every rifle-cartridge I can find," she concluded.

He thanked her and started off to attend to the cows; but before he had gone a dozen paces he turned and came back to where she still stood on the threshold.

“I had forgotten the milk-pails,” he explained.

After milking and turning the cows out, he fed the pigs. He could not feed the calves, for he had not brought their breakfast of hay-tea and skimmed milk from the house. He retired to the barn then and gave his mind to very serious and painful thought.

“What’s the use?” he exclaimed, at last. “Thinking won’t undo what’s already done. The past is out of my hands—and I hope to heaven it is buried! I can only help myself in the future.”

The girl found him a few minutes later. She carried a small basket containing sixty cartridges.

“These are all I could find,” she said. “I took them from the box in his room, and from behind the clock, and from the rifle and even from his pockets. He is feeling much stronger already.”

She took up the pails of milk and was about to go when Akerley begged her to wait a minute. He produced a knife of parts from a pocket and with one of its numerous attachments pried the bullet out of a cartridge and extracted the explosive charge. Then he refixed the bullet in the empty shell and handed it to the girl.

“Please put that in his rifle,” he said. “Nothing will go off but the cap when he pulls the trigger on that. I’ll have the rest of them fool-proof in a couple of hours.”

She complimented him on his cleverness, told him not to budge from the barn until her return, and went away with the milk and the harmless cartridge. He was very busy throughout the next two hours. He counted the seconds of the third hour, paced the dusty floor and looked out every minute.

"THEY SAT SIDE BY SIDE ON A SMALL HEAP OF STRAW."

She came at last, with his dinner in a basket covered with a linen napkin. Everything looked as right as could be to him then—and he did not know why. He thought it was because he felt hungry. His pleasure lit his eyes upon beholding her and sounded in his voice when he welcomed her; and these things did not escape her notice and at once pleased and puzzled her. They

sat side by side on a small heap of straw in a corner of the threshing-floor, and she set out the dinner at their feet—sliced cold chicken, bread and butter, pickles, two large wedges of Washington pie and a pitcher of hot coffee.

"I left Grandfather eating his in bed, so I'll have mine with you," she said.

She told him that the old man had recovered sufficiently to demand his rifle, and that she had placed the chargeless cartridge in the breech before giving it to him.

"He still thinks it was a devil who lit in the oats," she ran on, "so if you intend to stay here for some time we must think of a way of leading him to believe that you are not the person who came down from the sky. You must get some other clothes, and a pack, and walk into the clearing as if you had come in all the way from Boiling Pot on foot. I may be able to fix over some of his things so that he won't recognize them. Haven't you a hat? And is that your only coat? You must have been very cold up in the air."

"I have a cap and a wool-lined leather coat," he replied. "They are both hidden away with the engine of the poor old bus; and if I am wise I will hide this one, too."

She looked at him curiously, and he returned her gaze gravely.

"This is a military coat, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, a khaki service jacket."

"You are a soldier, then."

"An officer of the Royal Air Force."

"I knew you were a soldier when I saw you asleep in the chair yesterday. I knew by that ribbon."

She placed the tip of a finger on the left breast of his jacket, and he kinked his neck and looked down at it.

"The Legion of Honor. So you have seen that ribbon before."

"I have it—the cross and ribbon. It belonged to my Grandfather MacKim. He won it in the Crimean War."

"That old boy?"

"No, not that one. His name is Javet, Gaspard Javet—and he was never a soldier. What are the other ribbons?"

"One is the Military Cross and the others are service medals. But tell me about your Grandfather MacKim, please."

“Not now. I am the questioner to-day. You came here without being invited, so I have a right to ask you questions. It is my duty to do so.”

“Of course it is. It is one of your duties as a hostess. Ask away, and I’ll tell you the truth or nothing.”

“Very well. Are you in great danger?”

“I don’t know. If people from the outside don’t find me or learn that I am here I shall be safe enough for the present—except from your grandfather; and I am not seriously afraid of him.”

“But you ran away from something or someone! You flew away! What were you afraid of, to make you fly away? You are not a coward. What are you afraid of?”

“Of disgrace for one thing.”

“Have you done a disgraceful deed?”

“No—but you wouldn’t understand. My nerves are not quite right—and I lost my temper. I struck a senior officer.”

“And you are a soldier! And the king has decorated you!”

“Any soldier would have done it. You would have done it yourself, under the same circumstances. It was about a friend of mine who is dead. Those swankers who have never seen the whites of the enemies eyes don’t understand. He lied about him! I got out and up, and flew and lost myself, and when my petrol was done I made a landing to your light—and here I am.”

“Did you kill him?”

“I don’t know. I hope not. I didn’t wait to see. My nerves aren’t right yet. I hit him with my fist. Any man in my place with an ounce of blood in him would have done what I did. But I’m afraid that won’t help me much if they find me, even if he was only knocked out for the count.”

“Listen! It is Grandfather shouting for me. I must go, or he may get out of bed to look for me. You stay here.”

“For how long?”

“Until I come back—which will be as soon as I can get away. I’ll take these cartridges. Climb into a mow, and if you hear anyone coming hide under the hay.”

“I am in your hands. You believe what I have told you?”

“Yes, everything.”

“Even that you would have done it yourself?”

“Yes, I believe that. There!—he is shouting again!”

“Will you bring me something to smoke? I haven’t a cigarette left.”

“Yes, yes,” she cried, and ran from the barn.

CHAPTER III

CATHERINE'S PLAN

OLD GASPARD JAVET did not return to the war-path with the celerity feared by Catherine. He kept to his bed all that afternoon and all the next day, his rifle on the patchwork quilt beside him, without showing any sign of his usual energy beyond the power of his voice and an occasional flash of the eyes. The tumble had given his dry joints and stiff muscles a painful wrenching; and his mind had also suffered from the sudden shock of the fall and the emotional explosion that had led to it. Now and then, for brief periods, his memory of the immediate past served him faithfully and he thought clearly and violently on the subject of the unwelcome intruder; and at other times, for hours together, he lay in a state of peace and mild bewilderment.

To understand this old man, one must know that he was more Scottish than French, (despite his name), and that a dark old strain of Iroquois blood ran in his veins. He had lived rough and wild most of the years of his life, and neither the ministers of the Kirk nor the priests of the Church of Rome had enjoyed a fair opportunity of shaping him to any authorized form of religious thought and practice. He had been a scoffer and unbeliever until past middle-life; but for years now he had been deeply, and sometimes violently, religious according to his own lights and to laws of his own conception. Born in the wilderness far north of the city of Quebec eighty years ago, of a father of two strains of blood and a mother of three, he had been bred early to self-reliance, privation, loneliness, and physical dexterity and endurance. He spoke French and English fluently but incorrectly, several Indian languages with as much fluency as their vocabularies permitted, and he read English with difficulty. All his reading was done in Holy Writ; and, considering the laborious process of that reading, the ease and freedom of his interpretations were astonishing.

While the old man was confined to his bed, Akerley was permitted almost unlimited freedom of action; but he was not allowed to enter the house or intrude on the field of vision of Gaspard's bedroom window. He milked the cows, fed the calves and pigs, and hoed in a secluded field of turnips and corn. For two nights he made his bed in the hay of the big barn, with blankets brought to him by the girl. She also supplied him with a clay

pipe and tobacco belonging to her grandfather; and though he had smoked cigarettes for years and the first pipeful made his head spin, he soon learned to take his tobacco hot and heavy according to the custom obtaining in those woods. He saw and talked to the girl frequently during that time. She frankly seized every opportunity of leaving her grandfather and her household tasks to be with him. She did not question him further, just then, concerning his deed of violence, nor did her manner toward him suggest either fear or repugnance after he had made his confession. And yet her manner was not entirely as it had been before his frank answers to her questions had placed him at her mercy. It was changed for the better. It was more considerate of his feelings. In short, it was the manner of a sympathetic and trusting friend; and yet she knew nothing more of him, good or bad, than the bad he had told of himself. He was wise enough, understanding enough, not to doubt her full recognition of the fact that he had placed his freedom, his honor and perhaps his life, in her hands. He believed that her manner of sympathy was sincere. He credited her with a heart of utter kindness and an unshaken faith in her own instincts concerning the hearts of others; and he was deeply moved by admiration and gratitude.

She brought him his supper at seven o'clock in the evening of the second day of his residence in the barn, and went back to the house immediately. He made short work of the food, then took up a position behind the barn-yard fence, from which he had a clear view of the house, and awaited her reappearance. When eight o'clock came with no sight of her he felt a sudden restlessness and began to pace back and forth. By half-past eight he was in a fine fume of impatience and anxiety; and then he suddenly realized the silliness of it and made bitter fun of himself. She was safe, there in her own home not two hundred yards away—so why worry about her? And who was he to worry about her? She had never heard of him, nor he of her, four days ago. Why should he expect her to come hurrying back to talk to him? Wouldn't it be the natural thing for her to prefer her grandfather's company to his?

He asked himself all these questions and answered them all with disinterested logic; and yet he felt no less anxious and no less impatient. He climbed the fence and stared accusingly at the house. He was joined by the little black dog, with whom he was now on familiar terms. Together they strolled to the far side of the barns, where Blackie started a chipmunk along the pasture fence; but Akerley could not wait to watch the excitement. He left the chase in full cry and hastened back to a point from which he could see the house as if he had been absent a year. It had been out of his sight for exactly five minutes; and still she was not on her way. He wondered if he

had said anything that could possibly have offended her, anything that she could possibly have misunderstood, and wracked his memory for every word that they had exchanged since morning. He could not recall anything of the kind or anything in her manner to suggest anything of the kind. Again he took himself to task for his foolishness.

"Your nerves are crossed, Tom Akerley," he said. "Your wind is up in vertical gusts. Your brains are addled. You are so devilish lonely that you've gone dotty. You expect a girl who doesn't know you from Adam to sit around and entertain you all the time and neglect her poor old grandfather; and it isn't because you are used to it, old son, for no other woman ever neglected so much as a dog to entertain you. Buck up! Pull yourself together! Forget it!"

He filled and lit the clay pipe and sat on the top rail of the fence and smoked. Twilight deepened to dusk, the stars appeared, bats flickered and fire-flies blinked their sailing sparks; and lamp-light glowed softly from the windows of the house.

It was long past ten o'clock when Catherine made her appearance, carrying a lighted lantern in her left hand and a large bundle under her right arm. She found Akerley on the top rail of the fence. He slid to his feet the moment the swinging circle of light discovered him, and strode forward to meet her.

"I was afraid you were never coming," he said. "I began to fear that the old man had mistaken you for the devil. What have you there?"

"I thought I'd find you asleep," she replied. "I didn't say I was coming back to-night, you know. But I had to. Grandfather is feeling much better and will be up and out bright and early in the morning, so I have had to get these clothes ready for you to-night. And here are an old quilt and things—a frying-pan and old kettle—to make a pack of. You must leave here before sunrise and come back about breakfast-time. I'll show you the road to come in by now—the road from Boiling Pot."

Akerley took the bundle from her.

"You have been working all evening for me; and I am not accustomed to this sort of thing," he said. "You are a very wonderful person, Catherine MacKim."

"What do you mean by wonderful?" she asked curiously.

"You are wonderfully kind. I don't believe there are many girls in the world who would take the trouble to fit me out like this. I may be wrong, for I don't know many girls or women."

“Didn’t a woman have anything to do with—with what you did?”

“A woman! Bless you, no! What made you think that?”

“I don’t know. Please put these things in the barn, and then I’ll show you the road.”

He obeyed and returned to her. She extinguished the lantern.

“He may be awake,” she explained. “He is very restless to-night; and there is no saying what he might do if he saw a lantern wandering about the edge of the woods.”

It was a still, vague night of blurred shadows and warm gloom. The dim stars did no more than mark out the close sky. The girl found a path through the oats and led the way along it until they came to the edge of the forest and the opening of the rough track that wound away from old Gaspard Javet’s clearings to the nearest settlement.

“There has never been a wheel on this end of it,” she said. “We do our hauling in winter; and we don’t pay road-taxes. Grandfather doesn’t seem to mind how far out of the world he lives.”

“Thank Heaven for that!” replied Akerley.

They walked for a short distance along this track, feeling the way with cautious feet and frequently brushing against the dense undergrowth to right and left. She halted suddenly, so close to him that her shoulder touched his arm for a moment.

“Do you think you will be able to find it in the morning?” she asked.

“Easily,” he assured her. “It is due south from the house.”

“Yes, just to the right of the two big pines. But that will not be all. You must invent a story about how you came in, and why, and all sorts of things. He is slightly mad about devils from the sky, you know. He has been expecting one. So, to save your life, you had better say that you lost your canoe and outfit—everything but the quilt and frying-pan—in the rapids below Boiling Pot.”

“But what is this boiling pot?”

“It is the pool below the falls, and it is also a little settlement, about fifteen miles from here. We are on the height-o’-land, you know, and you can’t get to within six miles of us from any direction by water, even in a canoe. The spring where we cool our creamers and the one in the pasture are the beginnings of Indian River. But what will you say about yourself?—who you are and what you are looking for? And what kind of person will you pretend to be?”

“I’ll think of something to-night—but I wish your grandfather was more modern and rational. I know a good deal about the woods, though this part of the country is new to me; and I can use an ax, and manage a canoe in white water. So don’t worry. I’ll think up something pretty safe. But have you told him that the devil has cleared out?”

“Yes, I told him so yesterday; and he thinks I am mistaken. Are you sure that the aëroplane is hidden where he won’t find it? I don’t see how it can be.”

“I took it to pieces, and the pieces are carefully hidden. I meant to tell you before what I had done with them. The engines are packed and stowed away in the little loft over the pig-house. The planes are under the hay in the small barn, where they should be safe until I can think of a better place for them. The old machine is scattered as if a shell had made a direct hit on her. I even took the liberty of putting a few small but very valuable parts in your room.”

“I found them. They are safe there.”

“So you see, Catherine, I have not only put my own fate in your hands, but that of the old bus as well. I have not practiced half-measures.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just that—my liberty and honor. Suppose you were to let people know that I am here—that a stranger had come here by air? What would become of me? I might run into the woods and hide—and starve. The game would be played out and ended, whatever I did.”

“But you have never thought that there was any danger of such a thing!”

“Never. Not for a moment. But what right had I to treat you like this—to tell you the truth about myself and then throw myself on your mercy? You must think me a poor thing.”

“You have not asked for mercy from me; and you have told me that any man of spirit would have done what you did.”

“Any man of spirit and jangled nerves.”

They returned to the barn-yard in silence. There they lit the lantern.

“Don’t forget to put on the old clothes,” she said. “And please give me that coat now. I will take good care of it, ribbons and all; and I will give it back to you when you want to fly away from here.”

“I have neither the petrol nor the desire for flight,” he returned. “There are letters in the pockets, so please hide it securely.”

He took off the jacket, folded it and laid it over her arm.

“Good night,” she said, and hurried away.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEAVIEST HITTER

AKERLEY lay awake for hours on a blanket spread on a mattress of innumerable springs—a ton or more of last year's timothy, bluejoint and clover. He had air enough, though it was still and warm; for one of the wide doors stood open and the fingers could be thrust anywhere between the horizontal poles of which the sides and ends of the barn were constructed. Only the roof was weather-tight.

His thoughts kept him awake; and yet he let them deal only with the immediate past and the immediate to-morrow. He did not think backward or forward beyond this forest-farm. What was the use of brooding over the past or dreaming of the future? After much reflection, he decided on the character in which he was to emerge from the woods into the clearing and encounter that formidable old Gaspard Javet. He would come as a backwoodsman from the upper waters of the main river, two hundred miles or more away to the west and south, looking for new land and seclusion. He had known that country well, years ago. This was a part that he could act with a degree of interest and realism; and he would explain it to the old man—sooner or later, as circumstances determined—that the game-wardens of his old stamping-grounds wanted him in connection with a little matter of spearing salmon at night by the light of a torch. The confession of a crime against the Game Laws was not likely to prejudice the old woodsman against him; and this was a particularly mild offense. He knew enough of back-countrymen to believe that his story would excite Gaspard's sympathy—if Gaspard were true to type.

He worked out his part carefully, giving all his thought to it until he considered it to be as nearly perfect as was possible to bring it before the actual performance. He saw that certain details of character and action would have to be left until the illumination of the psychological moment. As the thing had to be done, it must be well done—with all his brain, all his will and all his skill. If not, then it was not worth attempting. This was the spirit in which he had set his hand and mind to every task, congenial or otherwise, in the lost past. Success had been won by him again and again in this spirit; and though the task before him was but a play, a game, the stakes for which

he was to play were serious enough to give it the dignity of a great adventure. The stakes were honor and freedom.

Still he did not sleep. Invention seemed to have agitated his mind. He continued to keep his thoughts within the former limits of time, but he could not soothe them to rest. They made pictures for him of every one of his waking hours since his first awaking among the young oats in the gray dawn. He heard mice rustling in the hay and scampering on the rafters. At last he slept. He awoke sharply at the first hint of dawn. He continued to lie still for a little while, recalling the details of his plan of action for the new day. Then he donned the ancient and rustic garments which Catherine had brought him and hid his own shirt and breeches. His high, moccasin-toed boots were in part with his new character. He hid his wrist-watch and identification disc, then took up his bundle and left the barn. He made his way swiftly and cautiously to the nearest point of woods and, behind a screen of saplings, to the road. He followed this road toward Boiling Pot for several miles through the awakening forest. Here and there, in swampy hollows, he encountered mud-holes and intentionally stepped into them. By the time he sat down on an old stump and lit his pipe he looked as if he had come a long and rough journey.

He had not been seated more than ten minutes when his reveries were disturbed by the appearance of a large young man with an axe on his shoulder and a pack on his back. The stranger came into view suddenly and close at hand, around a bend in the track from the direction of Boiling Pot. He halted abruptly at sight of Akerley.

“Good day,” said Akerley, coolly.

“Where’d you come from?” exclaimed the other.

“I’m a stranger in these parts,” returned Akerley; “and what I want to know is, where’ve I got to?”

“Into the woods, that’s where. But you know where you come from, don’t you? You ain’t just been born right here, I reckon.”

“Maybe I was.”

“Say, you know where you’re headin’ for, don’t you?”

“Sure thing. I’m heading for somewhere north of here on this track.”

“Well, it’s got a name, ain’t it?”

“I don’t know.”

“T’ell you say! Where do you cal’late to fetch up at?”

“Somewhere quite a way north of this—if I don’t have to spend all day answering questions.”

“Looka here, friend, you don’t want to git too cussed sassy.”

“Friend nothing! I choose my friends.”

“Say, d’you reckon you’re talkin’ to me?”

“That’s what I am dead sure of. It’s you I am talking to; and unless you change your line of conversation for the better pretty quick I’ll quit talking.”

The big young man in the road flung down his axe and pack, uttered a string of blistering language and spat on the palms of his hands.

“What’s the idea?” queried Akerley, still smoking his pipe, still hunched forward with his elbows on his knees.

The other raised and flipped his feet about as if in the opening steps of a popular rustic dance, and at the same time began to chant in sing-song tones of a marked nasal quality.

“Stan’ up an’ take yer medicine, ye pore skunk,” he chanted. “Git up onto yer hind legs so’s I kin knock ye off’n ’em again, ye slab-sided mistake. Git onto yer splayed feet, or I’ll sure lam ye in the lantern right where ye set.”

“I don’t know if you want to dance or fight,” said Akerley, calmly but clearly, “but I’ll tell you this—I don’t feel like dancing. And I warn you not to start anything else, for I am a smart man with my hands.”

“Git up,” sang the other, continuing to jink about on his booted feet without shifting his ground. “Git up so’s I kin swing onto ye. Stan’ up on yer feet, dad blast ye, or git down onto yer prayer-handles an’ say ye’re bested already—for I’m Ned Tone, the heaviest hitter in Injun River.”

“So be it—but never say that I didn’t warn you,” replied Akerley, laying aside his pipe.

Then he complied with Ned Tone’s reiterated request with speed and violence suggestive of the releasing of tempered springs within him. His feet touched the ground in the same instant of time that his right fist touched the cheek of the heaviest hitter on Injun River. That was a glancing blow. Ned Tone turned completely around in his tracks, but he did not fall. He staggered and lurched. He recovered his balance quickly and plunged at his antagonist. He spat blood as he plunged, for his cheek had been cut against his teeth. He flailed a murderous blow—but it returned harmlessly to him through the non-resistant air. He jumped again, quick as thought, with a jab and a hook.

Akerley employed all his skill of defense, for he realized in a moment that the big bushwhacker was a practical fighter and that he possessed agility as well as weight. In height and reach there was little to choose between them—but that little was in favor of the woodsman. Akerley's left shoulder was still tender; and when he caught a swing on it like the kick of a mule he gasped with pain and realized that now was the time for him to do all that he knew how for all that he was worth. His left was useless for offense, but he managed to keep it up so that it looked dangerous. After a little more clever foot-work, which seemed to bewilder and madden the heaviest hitter on Indian River, he stepped close in and did his very best at the very top of his speed.

Akerley was glad to sit down and press his hands to his head. He felt dizzy and slightly sick with the pain in his shoulder and neck. The dizziness and nausea passed almost instantly; but he continued to sit limp and gaze contemplatively at the sprawled bulk of the heavy hitter.

Ned Tone lay flat on the moss of that woodland road. For a few minutes he lay face-down; then he turned slowly over onto his broad back, with grunts of pain. He opened one eye slowly, only to close it immediately.

"Feeling bad?" asked Akerley, drily.

"Kinder that way," replied Tone, thickly.

"As if you'd had enough, perhaps?"

"Too durned much."

"You'll be right as you ever were in a little while, so cheer up. I didn't hit you hard."

"Ye hit me hard enough, I guess—but I ain't complainin'."

"You remember that I warned you."

"Sure thing. I ain't complainin' none. Leave me be, can't ye?"

"I'm talking for your good, just as it was for your own good that I hammered your ugly mug."

"Sure. I feel real good."

Akerley laughed, then took his frying-pan in hand and went along to a green, alder-grown dip in the road. There he found water, and after drinking deep and bathing his face, neck and wrists, he filled the pan and returned to the heavy hitter. Tone drank what he could of that panful and asked that the rest be poured over his damaged face. Akerley humored him in this; after which Tone sat up groggily.

"Ready to start?" asked Akerley.

“Start nothin’!” retorted Tone, in a voice of bitter disgust. “I ain’t goin’ back nor forrards till my grub gives out or my face mends. I’m makin’ camp right here. I ain’t fit to show myself at Javet’s place nor yet back home.”

“Javet’s place? Who’s Javet?”

“Gaspard Javet. He’s an old codger got a farm back here in the woods.”

“Is it far from here?”

“Ol’ Gaspard’s farm? Seven or eight mile to the west of this. Ye turn off jist round that bend. Ye can’t miss the track.”

“Thanks. And where does this road go to?”

“Straight north to nowhere. Maybe ye’d find an old camp if ye went far enough.”

“Javet’s place for me,” said Akerley, turning and moving away.

“Watch out on yer left,” Ned Tone called after him. “The road to Gaspard’s clearin’s turns off jist past the next bend.”

The unexpected encounter with the heavy hitter had delayed the intruder’s plan by nearly an hour, so now he stepped forward briskly. But he did not feel very brisk. The mill with the big woodsman had been a more strenuous before-breakfast job than he liked or was accustomed to; and now his shoulder and neck felt even worse than when he had first opened his eyes in the young oats in the gray dawn. He decided to blame the imaginary accident in the rapids below Boiling Pot for the crippled condition of his left shoulder.

When he issued from the green shade of the forest into the wide light of Gaspard’s clearings he saw that the front door of the house stood open and smoke trailed straight up into the sunshine from the gray chimney. He moved slowly but unfalteringly toward the house.

He had not gone far before Catherine appeared in the doorway, only to vanish instantly. Then old Gaspard Javet appeared, with the rifle in the crook of his right arm. The devil-hunter stepped across the threshold and stood with a hand raised to shade his eyes.

Akerley thought of the extracted cordite and smiled. He was more than half-way to the house before the old man broke his dramatic attitude in front of the door and moved forward with the obtrusive rifle at the port.

“What are you doing with that gun?” cried Akerley, halting. “Do you take me for a moose? What’s the matter with you, anyhow?”

Old Gaspard Javet continued to advance with long and even strides. He came to a standstill within three paces of the intruder and regarded him

searchingly for several seconds. The young man returned the gaze steadily.

"I'm out gunnin' for a devil," said Gaspard. "At fust glimp I kinder hoped you was him, but now I reckon ye ain't. Ye're in luck. Hev ye seen him by any chance?"

"Seen who?"

"The devil."

"I don't know him by sight."

"He's somewheres 'round in these woods."

"I met a fellow back along that track a few miles who may be a devil. His temper was bad enough; but he said his name was Ned Tone. I haven't seen anyone else."

"Ned Tone, hey? No, that ain't the one I'm lookin' fer."

"I don't know what you're looking for or what you're talking about—but if you asked me if I had a mouth I'd make a guess at what you meant."

"Come along to the house an' hev some breakfast. Ye look all played out, that's a fact."

"Now you're talking English."

Gaspard turned and led the way to the house. Akerley followed him into the wide living-room. Breakfast was on the table; and between the stove and the table stood Catherine, with a glow of conflicting excitements and emotions in her eyes and on her cheeks.

"This here's a young feller jist in time for a bite of breakfast," said Gaspard. "He ain't a devil, nor he ain't seen the devil. Don't know his name nor his business."

"My name is Anderson," said Akerley, with an apologetic smile at Catherine.

"Good morning," she replied, none too steadily.

They sat down at the table, and the old man made a long arm and speared half a dozen pancakes from a central platter with his fork. Catherine poured coffee.

"The young feller here says as how he see Ned Tone a ways back along the road," said Gaspard, spanking butter on the hot cakes.

The girl started and shot a quick glance of anxious inquiry at her guest. Guessing the reason for her alarm, he smiled reassuringly at her. They had not considered or guarded against that ghost of a chance of his meeting anyone on the road.

“Is Ned Tone coming here?” she asked.

“I think not,” answered Akerley. “Not for a few days, anyway.”

“Why ain’t he comin’ here?” said Gaspard. “Not that he’s wanted—but he’s comin’ all the same! Where else would he be on his way to but here?”

“He told me he wasn’t,” replied Akerley, pouring molasses on his cakes. “He said he would stay where he was—where I met him—as long as his grub hung out.”

His hearers did not make the slightest effort to hide their astonishment.

“Ye’re crazy!” exclaimed the old man. “What’s the matter with him, that he ain’t comin’ here? He’s been here often enough before, durn his pesky hide!”

Akerley looked fairly into the girl’s eyes for a moment, then turned his glance back to her grandfather.

“He doesn’t consider himself fit to be seen either here or back where he came from,” he said. “He has a black eye, a cut cheek, a swollen ear, a split lip and a skinned nose.”

“He run agin the devil, that’s sure!”

“You’re wrong. He started roughing it with me, when I was sitting as quiet and polite as you please, smoking my pipe. He asked for it. But for my hurt shoulder I’d have given him more than he asked for.”

“What’s that ye say? Walloped Ned Tone! Bested the heaviest hitter on Injun River an’ split his lip! Stranger, I wisht it was true—but it ain’t. It couldn’t be done by no one man as ever I see—leastwise not since my own j’ints begun to stiffen. Young man, ye’re a liar.”

“Grandfather!” exclaimed Catherine.

“That’s as may be—but it is no lie when I tell you I pounded the pep out of Ned Tone,” replied Akerley. “You can go and see for yourself. You’ll find him at the edge of the road, about two miles from here.”

“That so? Reckon I’ll go take a look after I’ve et my breakfast. But it’s that devil out o’ the sky I wanter see! I got what he needs an’ don’t want, young man—bullets nigh an inch long, in nickel jackets!”

The old man had a fine appetite; and he could do several things at the same time. He could not only talk with his mouth full but he could quaff coffee from his saucer in the same breath. He asked many questions. He heard that his guest’s name was Tom Anderson, that Tom had come from somewhere about the upper waters of the main river and lost his canoe and

outfit, and injured his left shoulder, on Indian River. But Akerley did not tell his story gracefully, though it was to save his life.

"Whereabouts on Injun River?" asked Gaspard.

"In white water, below a big pool and a fair-sized fall."

"B'ilin' Pot. An' how'd ye git here?"

"I took a track 'round the pool and the falls and struck a road that led me into the crease in the woods that brought me here."

"Didn't ye see no clearin' nigh the Pot?"

" 'HE WAS FIGGERIN' TO LOSE YE IN THE WOODS.' "

"Maybe I did. What does it matter what I saw? I was heading for the tall timber; and when Ned Tone overhauled me this morning I wasn't more than two miles from here. After our fight—after Tone woke up—he told me to take the first turn off to the west and follow that track seven or eight miles and I'd strike Gaspard Javet's farm—but I guessed he was lying by the look in his available eye, so I didn't turn off to the west."

"Did he tell you that?" cried the girl. "To go to the west—seven or eight miles! And he saw that you hadn't a rifle, or any food! And he didn't know that you knew better than to go to the west!"

“Knowed better!” exclaimed the old man, testily. “It wasn’t what he knowed brought him here—it was the hand of Providence. That thar Ned Tone’s a pore skunk! He was layin’ to lose ye in the woods; for ther ain’t a house due west o’ this here within sixty mile, an’ all ye’d find at the end o’ that loggin’ road is an empty shack that was built by Mick Otter the Injun an’ me one year we cut out a bunch o’ pine timber. He was figgerin’ to lose ye in the woods, the mean critter!”

“The coward!” exclaimed Catherine, pale with scorn.

Old Gaspard eyed her contemplatively for a moment. Akerley felt a pleasant warmth at his heart.

“I’ll step along an’ take a look,” said Gaspard. “Ye kin stop right here, young man, an’ rest up. I ain’t heared all about ye I wanter know yet. Maybe ye’re a liar, fer all I know.”

“Liar or not, you’ll find me right here when you get back,” replied Akerley.

CHAPTER V

THE PLAN SUCCEEDS

OLD GASPARD JAVET was no more than out of the house before Akerley commenced a detailed account of the morning's adventure; and when that was finished—and it was brief as it was vivid—the girl expressed her delight at Ned Tone's defeat. But she confessed her satisfaction was somewhat chilled by apprehension of trouble of the bully's making. Akerley made light of her fears on that score.

"I am glad it happened just as it did," he said. "He picked the fight. I'm not worrying about him, so long as you are glad I did the beating. And I don't think he will talk about it, even after his lip heals."

"The less he talks the more he will think," she said. "He is stupid and ignorant; and now we know he is bad—a murderer at heart. What brains he has are inclined to craftiness and cunning. Hatred will stimulate them—and he is sure to hate you for that thrashing."

"I believe you. He has hopes of my starving in the woods. But hatred is not the only sentiment I inspire in him. He is afraid of me."

"Of course he is afraid of you. He will never stand up to you again in a fair fight, if he can avoid it."

"That is not all. Fear of my fists is not his greatest fear of me. He would rather know me to be dead in the woods, by his lies, than know me to be here. This came to me when your grandfather was talking. Now I am beginning to understand things that I used to half see and half-heartedly wonder at; and of course I have read about them in books, as you have, too, I suppose. This has been an illuminating morning to me."

She looked at him inquiringly; and there was a shadow of embarrassment in her eyes. She smiled and lowered her glance.

"When you talk like this I am certainly reminded of things I have read in books," she said. "But that is not enough intelligent conversation, is it? What things do you mean?"

Akerley took pipe and tobacco from his pocket and regarded them fixedly in the palm of his hand.

“I mean jealousy—and things like that,” he said, in a somewhat stuffy voice. “Jealousy of one man for another—about a woman—and that sort of ro—er—thing.”

“Oh, that sort of thing! Are you really ignorant of things like that?—you, who have lived in the big world of men and women?”

Akerley glanced at her, then back at his pipe and tobacco. He produced a knife and fell to slicing a pipeful.

“It is a fact,” he said. “Ever since I was a small boy I have had to drive all my brains and energy at other things. I have been only an onlooker at games of that sort, big and little; and as I didn’t know the rules, and couldn’t guess them by looking, I wasn’t an interested onlooker. But I have learned a great deal since I landed in this clearing; and this very morning Ned Tone tried to lose me in the woods simply to keep me away from here. Nothing like that ever happened to me before.”

Catherine colored slightly.

“I wonder if you know anything of the horrors of loneliness,” she said in a low voice.

“I have been lonely in cities and on crowded roads,” he replied; “and I have been lonely in the air, sometimes with the old earth like a colored map below me and flying blind in the fog, and with sunlit clouds under me like fields and drifts of solid snow.”

“But you had your work,” she said; “and you were not always alone; and in crowds you were always elbowed by strangers. I have never seen a crowd of people. You have not known such loneliness as this—of endless woods, and empty clearings, and winds lost in everlasting tree-tops, and empty skies with only a speck of a hawk circling high up. You worked and fought—but I had nothing to do. But for books I’d have gone mad, I believe.”

“I can imagine it—but I wish you would tell me all about it.”

At that moment the expression of her eyes changed and she got quickly up from the table.

“What if Grandfather tells Ned Tone about your arrival!” she exclaimed. “About the devil he is looking for? Ned is from the settlements. He often goes out to the towns on the main river. He would know it was an aëroplane, and he would suspect the truth about you.”

“He may not mention it,” said Akerley; “so why go to meet trouble?”

Then he did a thing that astonished himself more than it seemed to surprise Catherine. He stood up, stepped around the table and took her

passive right hand awkwardly in his.

"We have both read of this in books, and I have often seen it done on the stage," he said, in a wooden tone of voice; and he raised her hand, bowed his head and touched his lips to the backs of her fingers. Releasing her hand swiftly he turned, went out by the back door, took two pails from the bench against the wall and started for the cow-yard.

The young woman ran after him and called from the porch that she and her grandfather had already attended to the milking. He returned and replaced the milk-pails.

"It is just as well," he said. "I could only use one hand, anyway, for that big rube caught me one smasher on my lame shoulder."

She advised him to bathe the shoulder and put arnica on it. She gave him the arnica along with the advice; and he accepted both. After that he helped her with the work about the house; and then they sat on the porch and she told him a great deal about her parentage and herself while they awaited the reappearance of Gaspard Javet.

Catherine MacKim had been born twenty-one years ago, in this very house in this clearing. She could not remember anything of her mother, Gaspard's daughter, for she had been left motherless at two years of age; but her father, a son of the Crimean veteran, had often talked to her about Catherine Javet, whom he had met and married, cherished and buried in this wilderness. Hugh MacKim had been utterly lacking in worldly ambition; and though not a weakling in mind or body, he had possessed none of that particular blunt yet narrow variety of strength by which thousands of men force themselves successfully through life. He had been born in a big house in a prosperous farming district in Ontario. His father, Major Ian MacKim, who had been awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor for his services before Sevastopol when an ensign in an infantry regiment of the line, had moved to Canada soon after his retirement from the active list of the army. Whatever the major may have been when operating against the enemies of his King and Country, he had proved himself an extraordinarily violent, stupid and difficult person in civil life. As a farmer he had made himself an object of terror and dislike to his neighbors and of fear and distress to his family. The fact that he had contracted the causes of that bitter and unreasoning temper while serving his country at the risk of his life excused it to those of his connections and acquaintances who were so fortunate as never to come into contact with it; but the truth is that rheumatism from Russia and a liver whose action had been dulled and deranged in India had made that valiant old soldier a terror to his own children.

Under the circumstances young Hugh MacKim, (who was later Catherine's father), had been glad to leave the farm and go to school in Montreal; and when his school years had come to an end and he had been ordered to return to the farm, he had taken to the woods instead. That life had suited him. He had given up, without regret, most of the things to which he had been born and bred; and of all that collection of inherited and acquired tastes and habits, only his mild affection for books, his good manners and his sense of fair play had survived. From one point and another of the northern fringe of settlement he had written occasionally to his mother.

After the major's death the widow had sent the Cross of the Legion of Honor to her strayed son Hugh, hoping that it might act as a spur to hereditary pride and ambitions. It had pleased him mildly, that was all. So the widow had turned to her younger son for an acknowledgment of family and class responsibilities. Then Hugh had come into the Indian River country, "cruising timber" for a big firm of Quebec operators; and here he had discovered Gaspard Javet and his secluded clearings and his beautiful daughter. Hugh had not gone farther. He had even neglected to retrace his steps to Quebec and submit his report on the timber of the lands which he had gone forth to explore. He had simply fallen in love with Catherine Javet and thrown in his lot with her father.

Hugh MacKim had known happiness and contentment in his height-of-land for seven years—until his wife's death; and after that—after time had dulled the cutting edge of his loneliness for her—he had known contentment for the remaining years of his life. His appetite for the woods, and for those dexterities of hand and eye which life in the wilderness called for, had never failed him. He had been a poet in his appreciation of nature. His eye for the weather had never been as knowing as Gaspard's, but always more loving. He had always seen more in dawns and sunsets than promises of rain or wind or frost. And his had been the knowledge and skill, but never the ruthlessness, of a first-rate trapper and hunter. He had delighted in the companionship of his father-in-law from the first; and admiration and affection had been mutual in the friendship of those two. His love for his daughter had been tender and unfaltering. He had taught her the delight of books and of the life around her. He had taught her to read two languages from printed pages and the hundred tongues and signs of wood, water and sky. He had died two winters ago.

"I should like to have known your father," said Akerley. "I believe he was right about himself, his own life—but didn't he ever look ahead? Did he picture you here in the woods always?"

“There was no place in the big world for him,” she replied. “We belonged to these woods, he and I; and, of course, he did not know that he was to die so soon. His health was good. He was ill only a few days.”

“Part of his brain must have been asleep,” said Akerley. “He thought of you always as a child, I suppose. All this would be well enough if you never grew up; but you are grown up already. And your grandfather cannot live for ever. He is queer, anyway—with this crazy idea in his head about devils.”

“Here he is,” said Catherine.

Gaspard Javet stepped out onto the back-porch and stood his rifle against the wall. He sat down and reflectively combed his beard with long fingers crooked with the toil of the woods. Then he looked at Akerley with a new interest, new curiosity and a distinct light of kindliness in his gray eyes.

“I found Ned Tone,” he said. “He tol’ me how he’d had a fight with a b’ar—an’ he looked it. I didn’t gainsay him.”

“Did you tell him anything, Grandad?” asked Catherine.

“Yes, I told ’im how I’d like fine to see the b’ar.”

“Nothin’ about the devil, Grandad?”

“Not me—to be laughed at fer an old fool by them fat-heads down round B’ilin’ Pot.”

“Did you ask him why he told this gentleman to go to the westward to find these clearings?”

“I didn’t tell ’im nothin’ about what doesn’t consarn ’im. If he wants to know what’s happened to this young feller he kin take the old road to the west an’ try to find out.”

“I think you are very clever and wise, Grandad,” said the girl; and she glanced at Akerley with relief in her eyes.

Akerley felt relief, too. The heavy hitter was off his trail for the moment, at least. But something else worried him.

“About that devil,” he said, turning to Gaspard. “What makes you think it was a devil?”

“I heared it miles an’ miles away,” replied the old man. “It was a devilish sound, hummin’ all ’round in the dark. It was foretold to me long ago in a dream—how I’d be beset by a devil, an’ how I’d best ’im if I kep’ my eyes skinned an’ my gun handy. I ain’t afeared of ’im—but I was at first. I hid in the woods; but pretty soon that old dream come back to me about how a devil would beset me one day fer the cussin’, unbelievin’ ways o’ my youth, but how I’d surely git ’im in time if I kep’ after ’im.”

“What would you do if you found him?” asked Akerley.

The old man twitched a thumb toward the rifle against the wall.

“But if he’s a devil you couldn’t hurt him with a bullet.”

“Ye’re wrong. In my dream I shot ’im dead as pork. And now that I’ve told you all about that devil, young man, I’d like to hear more about yerself.”

“Have you ever heard of men flying in the air?”

“What’s that?” exclaimed Gaspard, with a swift change of voice and a queer, dangerous gleam in his gray eyes. “Men flyin’? No, I ain’t! Nor I don’t want to. Devils may go disguised, in lonely places as well as in towns, fer to dig pit-falls fer the feet of men. But men can’t fly!”

Catherine gave the intruder a warning glance.

Akerley sighed and told a story of his past—a very patchy one—along the lines which he had planned while lying awake in the barn the night before. But his heart was not in it. He felt that the old woodsman was doing him an injustice and an injury in believing in flying devils and at the same time refusing to believe in flying men. He felt that, but for this crazy kink in Gaspard’s brain, he could safely be as frank with him as he had been with Catherine—for he saw the qualities of kindness and understanding in the old man. But he had to invent a silly story as he valued his life.

He was from the big river, he said: but he had lived in towns sometimes and even gone to school. He had made his living in the woods of late years in lumber-camps and on the “drives” and that sort of thing. He had trapped for one winter, without much success; and he had taken city sportsmen up-country several times, for fishing in summer and to hunt moose and deer in the fall. He was not a registered guide, and he had not kept to any one part of the country for long at a time.

“What started ye fer Injun River?” asked Gaspard.

“I had to start for somewhere, and quick at that,” replied Akerley.

“Had to, hey? Chased out?”

“I didn’t wait to see if I was chased. I had plenty of gas, as it happened, and—”

“Hey?”

“Grub. I shifted my ground quick and stepped light so’s not to leave any tracks in the mud. My canoe was ready.”

“I reckon ye mean that the Law’s on yer tracks,” said Gaspard, eyeing him keenly. “Ye don’t look like a law-breaker to me—onless maybe it was a

game-law ye busted.”

“Anything you prefer.”

“Well, some game-laws have hoss-sense an’ reason to ’em and others ain’t.”

“He wouldn’t kill deer or moose or caribou out of season,” said Catherine, looking intently at the intruder. “But I wouldn’t think the worse of anyone who took a salmon out of a rented pool, as Mick Otter did on Indian River.”

There was something in her glance that caused Akerley to sit up and use his brains quick.

“I am glad you feel that way,” he said, quite briskly.

He remembered an actual incident of a trip he had made into the wilds years ago.

“I dipped into a pool with a spear that was given me by an old Indian,” he continued. “I got a fine fish—twenty-four pounds. You should have seen him come up like a ghost through the black water to the light of the birch-bark torch. Great sport—but it isn’t inside the law now-a-days.”

“Ye’re right!” exclaimed old Gaspard Javet. “I ain’t speared a salmon in thirty years—but I reckon I’ve done worse.”

“So here I am—with a frying-pan and an old quilt,” said Akerley.

“Thar’s grub enough fer ye here, an’ work too,” said Gaspard. “Grub an’ work, an’ blankets to sleep in—which is enough fer any sensible man. Ye’re welcome to all three fer as long as it suits ye, fer I like yer looks.”

CHAPTER VI

MICK OTTER, INJUN

THE newspapers had a great deal to say about the extraordinary behavior and mysterious disappearance of Major T. V. Akerley, M. C., of the Royal Air Force. Why had he hit Lieutenant-Colonel E. F. Nasher on the point of the chin? That was the question; and no one seemed to be so ignorant of the answer as Colonel Nasher himself. Many young men who possessed pens of ready writers (more or less) and little else dealt lengthily with the problem.

The Press soon came to the conclusion that the major had hit the colonel out of pure cussedness—that a young and distinguished officer had committed assault and battery; insubordination with violence; behavior unbecoming an officer and a gentleman; and desertion coupled with theft of Government property, all in an outburst of causeless and unreasoning temper.

Then military men, demobilized and otherwise, of various arms of the Service and various ranks, began dipping unaccustomed pens on the vanished Akerley's behalf. One wrote, "I was Major Akerley's groom when he was a cavalry lieutenant. He was the quietest officer I ever knew. Some of our officers. . . ; but that Mr. Akerley didn't even get mad, so's you'd notice when his batman burnt his boots he'd paid seven guineas for in London. I guess Major Akerley had a reason for doing what he did."

Many other warriors wrote in the same vein, among them a retired major-general. Much was written of Akerley's reserve of manner, devotion to duty, skill as an airman and cool courage as a fighter. All these champions had known Akerley in France, of course; and all denied any personal knowledge of Colonel Nasher, whose military activities had not carried him beyond Ottawa.

The result of all this literary effort on the part of the veterans was a very general sympathy, strong and wide-spread, for the run-away Ace—but as neither newspapers nor the faintest echoes of public opinion reach Gaspard's clearings, Akerley knew nothing of it. The civil and military police continued to scratch their heads, and run finger-tips (not entirely free from splinters) across and around maps of the world, and submit reports to their

respective headquarters through the proper channels, with a view to the disciplining and undoing of Major Akerley and the recovery of the aëroplane.

Tom Akerley, known to old Gaspard as Tom Anderson, lived his new life from day to day and tried not to worry. His shoulder mended rapidly, and he worked about the farm with a will. He spent much of his time in Gaspard's company, working in the crops, mending fences and clearing stones from the fields; and the fact that the old man's rifle always lay or stood near at hand at once amused and irritated him.

Gaspard continued to cling to his belief that he had been visited by a devil, a fiend of darkness out of the night, and that the visitor was still somewhere in the vicinity; and sometimes Tom joined him on these fruitless hunts for the intruder through the surrounding forests. On these occasions, Tom was armed with a muzzle-loading, double-barrelled gun, the left barrel rammed with a bullet and the right with duck-shot.

"Would you know him if you saw him?" asked Tom during one of these expeditions, as they rested after a stumbling struggle through an alder swamp.

"He'd be discovered to me quick as the flash of an eye," replied the old man. "Fer years have I bin expectin' him, in punishment for the reckless ways o' my youth; an' I'll know 'im when I set eyes on 'im, ye kin lay to that!"

"And then what will you do?" asked Tom.

"Pump it to 'im! Pump it into 'im!" exclaimed the old man, heartily; and he illustrated his pleasant intention by crooking and wiggling the trigger-finger of his right hand.

Even the knowledge of the fact that the cartridges in the rifle were harmless failed to put Tom entirely at his ease.

Tom enjoyed the evenings and rainy days. Then he read or played chess with Catherine or listened to Gaspard's stories of the past. The old man told some stirring tales of his physical prowess; and always at the conclusion of such narratives he would say, in a fallen voice, "Vanity, vanity, all sich things is vanity."

The grass ripened for the scythe; and Tom drew Gaspard's attention to the fact.

"Mick would feel reel put out if we started hayin' before he got here," said Gaspard. "He ain't missed a hayin' in twenty year, Mick Otter ain't."

"Where does he live?" asked Tom.

“Everywheres,” replied the old man. “Mostly crost the height-o’-land, I reckon. He can’t keep still fer long, that Injun. Soon as the ice busts up he’s off, runnin’ the woods till the grass is ripe. He lights out agin after harvest, an’ lives on the gun till the snow lays a foot deep over these clearin’s. He’ll be here inside the week, to mow the first swath—onless somethin’s happened to ’im.”

They took down the scythes next morning, and Tom turned the grind-stone while Gaspard ground the long blades. They were intent on their task in the sunshine when a shadow fell suddenly upon the stone. Tom glanced up and saw a squat figure standing within a few feet of him. He ceased to turn the stone and straightened his back. Old Gaspard poured water from a rusty tin along the edge of the blade, tested its keenness with a thumb and said, “How do, Mick.”

“How do,” replied the old Maliseet. “You start hayin’, what?”

“Reckoned ye’d be along in time to cut the first swath,” returned Gaspard.

Mick Otter nodded his head and looked at Tom. His eyes were round and dark and very bright. He stared unwinking for several seconds, then turned again to Gaspard.

“You got young man for Catherine, what?” he said.

Gaspard smiled.

“That’s as may be,” he replied. “Ask Catherine herself, if ye wanter know. Howsumever, this here’s Tom Anderson, from ’way over on the upper St. John. He speared a salmon an’ the wardens chased ’im out.”

“That so?” said Mick Otter. “Chase ’im quite a ways, what?”

Tom laughed goodnaturedly.

The three went into the house, where Catherine welcomed Mick Otter cordially and produced a second breakfast. The Maliseet ate swiftly, heartily and in silence, nodding or shaking his head now and then in answer to a question. Then the three men returned to the scythes and the grind-stone. Fifteen minutes later they were mowing in the oldest and ripest meadow. Mick Otter led along the edge of the field; old Gaspard followed and Tom brought up the rear. Tom had learned to swing a scythe when a small boy. Like swimming and milking, it is a knack not easily forgotten. Catherine came out and sat on the fence. Mick Otter left his place and walked over to her, wiped his long blade with a handful of grass and then played on it with his ringing scythe-stone. Returning the stone to his hip-pocket, he said, “How that young feller come here, anyhow?”

“Why, how would he come?” returned the girl, “not in a canoe, that’s certain; and he didn’t bring a horse.”

“Maybe he walk here, hey?”

“That seems reasonable, Mick.”

“An’ maybe he don’t walk, what?”

Catherine glanced over to assure herself that her grandfather was out of ear-shot, then descended from her perch on the top rail and stepped close to the old Maliseet.

“What do you mean, Mick Otter?” she asked in a whisper.

“That young feller no guide nor lumberman,” said Mick. “Big man, him. See his picter in the paper, all dress up like soldier.”

While he spoke his round, bright eyes searched her eyes.

“Keep quiet,” she whispered. “Grandad doesn’t know—nobody knows. I’ll tell you first chance I get. You are my friend, Mick. You’ll keep quiet, won’t you? Grandad thinks it was a devil—and he is always hunting around with his rifle.”

“That a’ right,” said the Indian; and he returned to his work.

Catherine soon found an opportunity for speech with Akerley. She told him of her conversation with Mick Otter.

“I am not afraid of him,” she continued. “He is kind and sane: He will keep your secret, if we are perfectly frank with him. I am afraid of the newspapers. A mail comes in once a fortnight to Millbrow, and that is only ten miles below Boiling Pot; and perhaps Ned Tone has already seen a paper with your photograph and story in it.”

Tom’s face paled for an instant.

“Please don’t think that I am afraid of Ned Tone,” he said. “I am only afraid of being driven away from here. But perhaps there is no real danger of it. That fellow’s eyes may not be as sharp as Mick Otter’s. If the old Indian is to be trusted I’ll just carry on and let Ned Tone make the next move; but I think he would have been nosing around before this, if he had recognized my phiz in a newspaper.”

“But he does not know you are here,” said the girl. “He has every reason to believe that you are lost in the woods, wandering about eating wild berries—or dead.”

When old Mick Otter heard Tom Akerley’s story from Catherine, he permitted himself the faintest flicker of a smile. The thing that tickled his sense of humor was the position of his old friend Gaspard Javet.

“Gaspar’ he hate devil darn bad an’ like Tom darn well, what?” he remarked. “We bes’ fix them catridges again before Gaspar’ shoot at deer or bobcat, or maybe he smell somethin’, hey?”

“But what shall we do if Ned Tone sees a newspaper and suspects the truth about Tom?” asked Catherine.

“How you know that until he come, hey? He don’t git no newspaper, maybe, down to B’ilin’ Pot. We watch out sharp, anyhow; an’ if Ned Tone make the move, me an’ Tom take to the big woods; an’ nobody find ’im then, you bet. Ned Tone got nothin’ in his skull ’cept some muscle off his neck.”

With this the girl had to be satisfied, but she believed that both Tom and the old Maliseet under-rated Ned Tone’s cunning and the possible danger which he represented.

The weather held fine and the hay-making went briskly on day by day; and in odd half-hours, usually late at night, Mick and Tom worked at replacing the explosive charges in Gaspard’s cartridges. Catherine helped in this, by carrying and returning, as she had helped Tom in the work of withdrawing the same charges of cordite. She and Tom felt no fear now of the old man’s recognizing Tom as the being that had swooped down from the sky; and Tom felt so sure now of Gaspard’s friendship and sanity that, but for the girl, he would have confessed the facts of the case to him. She would not hear of this, however.

“You don’t know him as well as I do,” she argued. “He is a dear, kind old man—but he is quite mad on that one subject of a visit from a devil. But, of course, if you want to be shot dead, if you are tired of life in this dull place, tell Grandad.”

“Then I’ll not tell him—for I was never more interested in life than I am now,” said Tom, gravely.

Soon all the grass was cut, cured and housed, except that in the “new clearin’.” This piece of land was actually four, five and six years old as a clearing. Though not more than four acres in extent it represented three seasons’ brushing and burning. Old Gaspard Javet had cleared every rod of it single-handed. Each spring, as soon as the ground was dry, he had set to work, cutting out the brush and smaller growth at the roots but leaving waist-high stumps in the felling of the larger timber. Then, having trimmed and twitched out the stuff for fence-rails and firewood, he had piled the brush and branches and set fire to them, piled them again and burned them again, then scattered his oats and grass-seed and harrowed them into the ashes among the scorched stumps. Thus he had taken a crop of grain, or a

crop of fodder if the frosts fell early, from each patch of new land in the first year, and harvests of hay in the following years. Now the whole clearing stood thick with long spears of timothy grass that topped the gray and black stumps.

The new clearing lay north of the older fields and was separated from them by a belt of woods several hundred yards wide.

Tom cut into the ripe timothy early one morning, while Gaspard Javet and Mick Otter were still engaged in an argument concerning the relative merits of several methods of trapping mink. He cut along the northern edge of the field—a wavering swath, owing to obtrusive stumps. He was about to return to the starting-point when the excited barking of Blackie, the little dog of obscure antecedents, attracted his attention. There was a serious, threatening note in Blackie's outcry that was new to it—a tone that Tom had never heard when chipmunks, or even porcupines, were the cause of the excitement.

"He has found something interesting," said Tom, and he immediately balanced the scythe on the top of a stump, vaulted the brush-fence and made for the sound through the thick undergrowth of young spruces. The dog continued to bark; and suddenly Tom realized that he was moving to the right in full cry. So he quickened his own pace and shouted to the dog as he ran. Then he heard the crashing of a heavy body through the thickets, receding swiftly; and Blackie's angry yelps, also receding, took on a breathless note. He ran at top speed for several hundred yards, avoiding the trunks of trees but setting his feet down blindly, until a sprawled root tripped him and laid him flat on the moss. He sat up as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"It didn't sound like a deer," he reflected. "It wasn't jumping. The pup doesn't pay any attention to deer. It may have been a bear or a moose—though I can't quite imagine either of them running away from that pup."

He got to his feet and spent a few minutes in searching around for tracks in the moss. Though rain had fallen during the night, he failed to discover any marks of hoof or claw. So he returned to the clearing; and there he found Gaspard and Mick.

"What you bin chasin', hey?" asked the Maliseet.

Tom told them. Mick immediately discarded his scythe and scrambled through the fence. Old Gaspard Javet grinned and stroked his white whiskers.

“There goes that durned Injun, fer a run in the woods,” he said, with an expression of face and voice as if he were speaking of a beloved infant. “He’s the everlastin’est wild-goose chaser I ever see. He’d foller a shadder, Mick would—aye, foller its tracks, an’ overhaul it, too—an’ maybe try to skin it. But he’s more for the chase nor the kill, Mick is—more for the hunt nor the skin. He’s what Cathie’s pa uster call a good sportsman, I reckon—that gad-about old Injun.”

Then he swung his scythe with a dry swish through the stems of tall timothy and a thousand purple-powdered heads bowed down before him.

Gaspard and Tom moved steadily among the stumps for about half an hour; and then Mick Otter scrambled back through the fence with the little dog panting at his heels.

“That b’ar got boots on, anyhow,” said Mick.

“Boots, d’ye say?” exclaimed Gaspard. “Boots!—an’ spyin’ ’round like a wild critter instead of walkin’ up to the house an’ namin’ his business like a Christian. I reckon I best take a look at him an’ his boots.”

He laid aside the scythe and took up his ever-handy rifle.

“You think him devil, what?” said Mick.

“Ye can’t never tell,” returned Gaspard, climbing the barrier of brush that shut the forest from the clearing.

Mick Otter and the little dog followed. Tom checked his own impulse to go rambling in the cool woods, filled and lit his pipe and returned to the mowing. He had not gone half the length of the field before Catherine came running to him, straight through the standing crop.

“Ned Tone is at the house,” she said, breathlessly; and then, “Where are the others?” she asked.

Tom told her of the morning’s excitement.

“That was Ned Tone,” she said. “He had been running, I know. You didn’t see him; and I am sure he didn’t see you, by the questions he asked. But he wouldn’t have come spying like that if he didn’t think there was a chance of your being here.”

“Do you suppose he has seen a paper and suspects something?” asked Tom.

“I don’t know. I couldn’t see anything in his manner to suggest it. He was just as he always is—except that he asked if I had seen anything of a stranger recently.”

“Where is he now?”

“Sitting on the porch. I told him to wait there—that I would soon be back.”

“And he didn’t wait!” exclaimed Tom. “He came sneaking after you.”

He stepped past the girl and ran forward through the tall grass.

“I see you,” he shouted as he ran. “What are you prying ’round here for? Stand up and show yourself.”

Ned Tone advanced reluctantly from the belt of forest that separated the old clearings from the new, with an air of embarrassment and anger. Tom walked aggressively up to him, halting within a yard of him. They were in plain sight of Catherine.

“So it’s you!” exclaimed Tom. “Were you looking for me?”

“Nope, I wasn’t,” said Tone. “Who be ye, anyhow?”

“I’m the man who didn’t take the track to the left, as you know very well,” replied Tom, smiling dangerously. “Your face looks better than it did when I last saw you. Your lip has healed quite nicely.”

“ ’S that so! Mind yer own business, will ye? Have I got to ask yer leave to come to Gaspard Javet’s clearin’s?”

“Certainly not—but I thought you didn’t know the way. You told me that Gaspard’s place lay to the west. What were you spying ’round here for, half an hour ago?”

Tom jerked a thumb toward the northern edge of the field.

“What of it?” retorted the other. “I go where I choose. I was here afore ye ever come an’ I’ll be here still, after ye’re gone. I don’t step outer my tracks fer every tramp an’ thief that runs the woods. Don’t think ye own this country jist because the game-wardens chased ye away from where ye belong.”

“What do you know about the game-wardens?” asked Tom, in surprise, wondering where the fellow had heard the yarn which he had been forced to tell to old Gaspard Javet.

“I ain’t a fool,” returned Ned Tone, with a knowing leer. “What else would ye’ve come into this country for? But if ye don’t clear out, I’ll put old Gaspard wise to ye; an’ he’ll run ye outer these woods.”

Tom laughed cheerfully; and Catherine heard it and caught the note of relief in it.

“Gaspard is hunting you with his rifle this very minute,” he said. “He and Mick Otter are on your tracks.”

“Huntin’ me!” exclaimed Tone. “Me an’ this family is old friends.”

Catherine MacKim joined them at that moment.

“You are not a friend of ours, Ned Tone,” she said, looking him straight in the eyes. “Grandad and I don’t have cowards and liars for friends.”

CHAPTER VII

TAKING TO THE TRAIL

NED TONE flinched and reddened at the insult.

"That ain't no way to talk to me!" he cried. "You wouldn't dare say it if ye was a man."

"Yes, I would. You showed yourself in your true colors when you misdirected this stranger. That was the lowest, meanest trick ever played in these woods by white man or Indian."

" 'S that so. Maybe *he's* the liar. Who is he, anyhow, an' what's he hidin' 'round here for? Where'd he come from? He's a slick talker; an' I reckon that's all ye know about him, Catherine MacKim."

"We'll just step back into the woods, you and I, out of the lady's sight and hearing, if she'll excuse us for a few minutes," said Tom, in a quiet voice.

"Not me," replied the big woodsman. "I got nothin' to say to ye in private. If ye're lookin' fer a fight ye're lookin' up the wrong tree, I wouldn't dirty my hands on ye."

"Again, you mean."

"So ye've bin braggin' about that, have ye?"

"Well, it was something to brag about, don't you think so?—to beat up the heaviest hitter on Indian River? Gaspard Javet wouldn't believe it possible until he saw you—and you told him you'd had a scrap with a bear."

"It ain't true," snarled Tone. "It's all lies. My word's as good as yourn—an' better. I won't fight, anyhow."

"In that case, please go away from here immediately!" exclaimed Catherine.

Her voice shook and her face was pale with anger and scorn.

"D'ye mean that?" cried Tone. "Order me off like a dog, without bite or sup, because I won't fight with this here tramp? An' me a neighbor from B'ilin' Pot! Treat me worse'n ye'd treat a drunk Injun! That ain't the way we do things in this country, Catherine MacKim. We don't turn agin our neighbors jist to please slick-spoken hoboes a-sneakin' 'round tryin' to

shake the game-wardens. Like enough there's more nor game-wardens after this smart Alec—the police theirselves, like as not."

"I wonder why you stand there talking when no one wants to listen to you," said the girl.

Tone received those quiet words as if he had been struck in the face. He had been amazed and angered before—but the amazement and anger which he now felt were beyond anything of the sort he had ever known or even imagined. His eyes darkened with the dangerous shadows of outraged vanity and goaded fury. So he stared at her for a few seconds; and then, quick as a flash, he turned and flung himself upon Tom Akerley.

Tom, who had not seen the change in the other's eyes, was not ready for the onslaught. Over he went, flat on his back in the long grass, with the big bushwhacker on top of him; and so he lay—for a fraction of a second.

Ned Tone's fingers were on Tom's windpipe, and one of his knees was on the chest and the other in the pit of the stomach of the prostrate one, when Tom suddenly turned over on his face and humped himself like a camel. Tone felt a grip as of iron on both wrists, a cracking strain on the muscles of his arms and shoulders, and then a sense of general upheaval. His feet described an arc in the air and he struck the ground full-length with jarring force.

Tone got up slowly and saw Tom standing beside Catherine.

"You don't know any more about wrestling than you do about boxing," said Tom, pleasantly. "But even if you were trained you wouldn't be much good, for all your weight and muscle—because you haven't any spirit, any grit."

Tone turned without a word and started slowly for the road that cut through the belt of forest and connected the new clearing with the older fields. The others followed him, Tom smiling and the girl still pale with indignation and scorn. Tone did not look around. As he passed close to the house, on his way to the road that led afar through the wilderness to Boiling Pot, Tom overtook him and suggested that he should rest awhile and have something to eat. Tone's reply to the offer of hospitality would scorch the paper if written down. So Tom let him go. Tone turned at the edge of the woods and shook his fist.

Tom turned to Catherine, who had come up and halted beside him, and said, "He is so futile that I feel sorry for him."

"He would be dangerous if he knew—but it is quite evident that he doesn't know," she said. "But he'll do you some injury if he possibly can. I

think he hates you. I am afraid I would not have let him off so easily if I had been in your place to-day, after that treacherous attack."

"He doesn't seem to like me, that's a fact," returned Tom, with a quiet smile. "I suppose it is natural that he should feel that way about me, for several reasons; and I am not sorry."

Catherine glanced at him quickly, and the color was back in her cheeks.

"You are wonderfully good-natured," she said, "and you seem to have a marvelous control of your temper. I can't understand your striking that colonel."

"My nerves are better than they were then," he replied. "But even now—well, when it comes to a fellow like that saying that your dead friend was a coward!—but he was fat and out of condition, and I shouldn't have hit him on the chin."

"I am not finding fault with you for that," she said. "Far from it."

She entered the house, and Tom returned to his mowing in the new clearing. As he took up his scythe he muttered, "I wonder what's going to happen to me here—and when?"

Gaspard and Mick Otter were late for dinner, but they found Catherine and Tom waiting at the table for them. After hearing all about Ned Tone's visit, Gaspard used threatening language. Mick Otter plied his knife with a preoccupied air.

"You don't like him, hey?" he queried, looking at Gaspard.

"No, or never did, durn his hide!" exclaimed the other.

"Guess he feels sore," said the Maliseet, looking reflectively at Catherine. "You like 'im one time maybe, hey Cathie?"

"Never!" cried the girl. "I never liked him!"

Mick wagged his head and glanced at Tom.

"You best watch out or maybe he shoot you from b'ind a tree one day," he said.

The hay was all cut and gathered in; the oats and buckwheat were harvested; the potatoes were dug and stored; and still old Mick Otter stuck to the clearings and the hard work, and in all that time nothing more was seen or heard of Ned Tone from Boiling Pot. Gaspard Javet continued to keep his rifle handy, but whether in readiness for a snap at the fiendish visitor or at the heaviest hitter on Indian River the others were not sure.

Mid-September came, with nights of white frost, mornings of gold and silver magic, and noons of sunshine faintly fragrant with scents of balsamy

purple cones and frost-nipped berries and withering ferns. Red and yellow leaves fell circling in windless coverts; and cock partridges, with trailing wings and out-fanned tails, mounted on prostrate trunks of old gray pines, filled the afternoons with their hollow drumming. Then a change came over Mick Otter. His interest in agricultural pursuits suddenly expired. Fat pigs, well-fed cattle, full barns and his comfortable bed suddenly lost all meaning for him. He sniffed the air; and his eyes were always lifting from his work to the hazy edges of the forest. Even the virtues of Catherine's cooking suddenly seemed a small and unimportant matter to him.

One evening at supper he said, "Set little line o' traps 'round Pappoose Lake maybe. Plenty musquash, some fox, some mink, maybe. You don't trap that country long time now, hey?"

"Ain't trapped it these five years," replied Gaspard. "I'd help ye set the line but I be afeared o' rheumatics—an' I gotter watch out 'round these here clearin's."

"You come, hey?" queried Mick, turning to Tom. "Git plenty fur, plenty money, plenty sport."

"Where is it?" asked Tom, without enthusiasm.

"Five-six mile," replied Mick. "You come back when you like to see Gaspar', what?"

Tom reflected that money might be useful in the future, although he had lived through these last three months without a cent. He could see no likelihood of ever being able to touch the few hundreds of dollars to his credit in the bank, in the distant world from which he had fled. Yes, he might need money some day; and furs of almost every variety brought a high price now, he had heard. So why not join Mick Otter in this venture? If their activities took them no farther afield than Pappoose Lake he would be able to visit the clearing twice or thrice a week—and oftener, with luck. He glanced covertly at Catherine.

Catherine had been watching him; and the moment their eyes met, she nodded slightly and smiled.

"That a' right!" exclaimed Mick Otter, whose sharp eyes and active wits had missed nothing.

"Yes, I'll go with you," said Tom, with an embarrassed grin. "But I warn you that I don't know anything about trapping fur."

"That a' right," returned the Maliseet. "Mick Otter got the brain for the both of us, you got the arm an' the leg for the hard work. Take plenty fur, you bet."

They set out for Pappoose Lake, six miles to the northward, two days later. They carried blankets, axes, Mick Otter's rifle, a small bag of flour, tea, bacon, a kettle, a frying-pan and half a dozen traps. It took them three hours to get to the lake, for the way was rough and not straight and their loads were heavy. There Tom rested for half an hour; and Mick cruised around for a likely site for their camp. Then Tom returned to the clearings, dined with Gaspard and Catherine, loaded up with more provisions, four more traps and a tarpaulin, and headed northward again for Pappoose Lake.

Catherine followed him from the house, and called to him just as he was climbing the brush-fence at the northern edge of the new clearing. He turned very willingly and lowered his pack to the ground.

"I have just thought of something," she said. "Ned Tone is still dangerous, and we should be ready for him if he comes back. The danger of his seeing something, or hearing something, to cause him to suspect your identity, isn't passed, you know."

"I know it," said Tom. "I realize that I am still in danger of discovery. That is the only thing that worries me now."

"And if you are found, it will be through Ned Tone," she said. "You must be careful. Whenever you come back, take a look at the house before you show yourself. If there is danger I'll show something white in my window."

"And at night?"

"A candle on my window-sill. But that is not all. If the danger seems acute, if there is a chance of people searching the woods for you, I'll come and warn you."

"But do you know the way?"

"Yes, I have been to Pappoose Lake."

Tom thanked her somewhat awkwardly for her thoughtfulness, hoisted his lumpy pack to his shoulders again and scrambled slowly across the brush-fence. He turned on the other side.

"Perhaps I'll be able to tell you—to show you, some day—to prove to you—what I think of your kindness—and you," he said.

Then he turned and vanished in the underbrush; and the girl turned and went back to the house, thoughtful but happy.

Mick Otter and Tom made two camps, one on the western end of Pappoose Lake and the other seven miles away to the northwest, on Racquet Pond. The first was nothing more than a lean-to, walled with woven brush

and roofed with the tarpaulin. The second was built of poles chinked with moss—four walls broken by a doorway and a tiny window-hole. In the middle of the mossy floor lay a circular hearth of stones; and directly above the hearth, in the sloping roof of poles and sods, gaped a square hole.

Mick Otter was proud of the Racquet Pond camp—but Tom didn't think very highly of it. Having completed the camps to the old Maliseet's entire satisfaction, they set the lines of traps—five traps in the vicinity of Pappoose Lake and five around Racquet Pond. For three weeks they made the lean-to their headquarters; and in that time Tom made half a dozen visits to Gaspard Javet's farm; finding that everything was right there and that nothing more had been seen or heard of Ned Tone.

The last week of October was one of miserable weather. A heavy frost had frozen the swamps and driven the woodcock south; and this was followed by days of chilly rain—rain so exceedingly chilly that it sometimes fell in the form of hail. It was in this time of discomfort that Mick Otter suggested the removal of headquarters to Racquet Pond. He said, very truthfully, that the farther camp was warmer and drier than the lean-to and that the farther line of traps had already beaten the Pappoose line by three mink and a fox.

"Do pretty good with ten traps on Racquet," he said.

"Take the traps, if you want to," replied Tom, "but I stay right here until something happens."

So Mick moved alone, taking his blankets, the kettle and frying-pan, some of the grub and two traps along with him. Bad as the weather was, Tom immediately set out for the clearings, to borrow another pan and another kettle. He spent a very pleasant evening with Catherine and her grandfather.

Tom was to recall that happy and comfortable evening often before spring. Catherine was as frankly friendly as ever—but the old man's attitude toward him was not quite as usual. It was as friendly as ever, but different. Tom caught the old man gazing at him several times with an expression of new interest, curiosity and wonder in his searching eyes.

"You aren't saying much to-night," remarked Tom, after his host had sat silent for nearly an hour and two games of chess had been played.

"An' thinkin' all the more, lad," replied Gaspard, pleasantly.

"But what about, Grandad?" asked Catherine.

"One thing an' another, one thing an' another—but mostly about human vanity an' ignorance an' the hand o' Providence," answered Gaspard.

The young people let it go at that. They smiled at each other across the corner of the table and set up the chessmen again. The subjects of human vanity and ignorance did not touch their imaginations, and they were well content with the workings of the hand of Providence.

Tom left the house after breakfast, with a light pack on his shoulder. His heart was light, too, though the sky was gray and a cold and gusty wind blew smothers of icy rain across the clearings. Upon reaching camp he immediately built up the fire, which lay full-length across the front of the lean-to, dried himself thoroughly and smoked a pipe. The heat and cheery light beat into the shelter, thrown forward by mighty back-logs. Hail-stones rattled in the trees, hopped on the frozen moss and hissed in the hot caverns of the fire. A big, smoke-blue moose bird or "whiskey jack" fluttered about the camp, harsh of voice, confiding, and possessed of curiosity in that extreme degree that is said to have killed a cat.

Tom felt happy in the present moment and situation. He even felt that his happiness might well be established here for a lifetime, if only the great world, from which he had parted so violently and suddenly, would continue to leave him in peace. He was glad that he had not followed Mick Otter and the lure of peltries seven miles farther afield. He felt that the distance of six miles was quite far enough for any sane person to be separated from Gaspard Javet's clearings.

He dined at mid-day on tea and bacon and Catherine's bread and Catherine's home-made strawberry jam. He fed the attentive moose bird with rinds of bacon and bits of bread soaked succulently in hot fat. The rain and hail ceased early in the afternoon. He left the shelter and worked his ax for an hour, felling and trimming selected trees for fuel. The moose bird kept him company, flitting about him and attending upon every stroke of the ax as if expecting it to produce bacon rinds, instead of chips. Then he inspected the three traps that Mick had left with him. They were empty—but their condition did not chill his sense of contentment in the least.

Soon after supper he heaped the long fire high with green logs and rolled himself in his blankets. The night was frosty, but the gusty wind had gone down with the sun; and the fire-lit shelter seemed an exceedingly comfortable and secure retreat to him. To fully appreciate comfort, one must be within arm's-length of discomfort or but recently emerged from it. Thousands of persons in steam-heated places with electric bells and janitors do not know what they are enjoying—or what they are missing.

Tom was fully conscious of his comfort. He lay for some time with his eyes half open, gazing up at the flicker of firelight on the poles and tarpaulin

overhead; thinking drowsily of Catherine MacKim, and of Gaspard with his good heart and extraordinary beliefs; and of Mick Otter. He liked Gaspard better than any other elderly person of his acquaintance, despite the old woodman's embarrassing ambition to deal with the supposed devilish powers of the air with a rifle. And he liked Mick Otter, too. In short, he liked every one he had met in Gaspard's clearings except Ned Tone. It was really wonderful how full his heart was of affection and how entirely he seemed to have finished with worldly ambition. He would make an early start on the morrow for Racquet Pond, to see how that amusing old Indian was getting along; and he would visit the clearings again on the day after that, for a game of chess. A fine game, chess—an old and romantic game—an ancient pastime of kings and queens. He fell asleep and dreamed of kings and queens in romantic costumes playing chess with ivory pieces—and all the queens looked like Catherine MacKim.

Tom was awakened by the clutch of a hand on his shoulder. He didn't believe it at first. He tried to sink back, to submerge again, to that delicious depth of sleep from which the hand had partially raised him. But the grip of fingers tightened on his shoulders and he became conscious of an insistent voice in his ear. He opened his eyes and saw dimly that some one crouched over him. There was no more than a ghost of light to see by—a pale filter of faint starshine; and there was no glow from the fire across the open front of the lean-to, for it had fallen to a bank of ash-filmed embers against the charred back-log.

"What's the matter, Mick?" he asked, sleepily.

The dim figure drew back and stood upright.

"It isn't Mick," said Catherine, in an excited and distressed whisper. "Ned Tone and another man are at the house—a policeman of some sort—a detective. They came this afternoon—looking for you, Tom. I got away as soon as they were asleep, to warn you."

Tom was sitting up before she got this far with her statement, you may be sure. He threw aside his blankets, stepped out from the shelter of the tarpaulin and kicked a little pile of dry spruce branches onto the coals. Tongues of flame licked up through the brush, crackling sharply; and in the flickering light he turned to the girl and took her mittened hands in his bare hands.

"You came alone!" he exclaimed. "Six miles through these woods in the dark, alone! Cathie, you're a wonder."

"That's nothing," she said. "I knew the way and I'm not afraid of the dark. The thing was to get here quickly. You must pack up immediately and

move over to Racquet Pond; and Mick Otter will know where to go from there. You are lucky to have Mick for a friend."

"I am lucky in my friends, sure enough," he replied.

He persuaded her to enter the shelter and rest. He placed more wood on the fire.

"How did it happen?" he asked. "What did Tone and the other fellow say? Have they the right dope?—or is Tone just trying to start something on his own?"

"They know you are Major Akerley—at least, Ned Tone feels sure that you are. He saw an old newspaper in Millbrow, with your story and photograph in it—a copy of the same paper that Mick Otter saw, I suppose. Then he got hold of this detective and brought him in. They reached the clearings about supper-time. They haven't told Grandad what they want you for, so of course he thinks the stranger is a game-warden from the St. John River. Ned Tone showed me the paper and sneered about my new friend who is wanted by the police—but I laughed at him. His idea is that you came down somewhere in the woods and that I didn't know who you were until he told me—that you had lied to me and fooled me."

Tom put on his boots and outer coat. He looked at his watch and saw that it was one o'clock in the morning.

"We had better start," he said. "You won't get much sleep, as it is."

"We?" she queried. "You have to pack and go to Racquet Pond and warn Mick."

"I'll see you safely home first."

"But there is no time for that, Tom! You are in danger. You must get away with Mick Otter as soon as possible."

"I need ammunition for Mick's rifle, and my leather coat. You must let me go with you—or I'd worry all the time until I saw you again. We really do need cartridges, Cathie—and I don't think a couple of hours will make any difference. They won't make a bee-line for Pappoose Lake in the morning."

So he saw her home; and on the way they decided on the following plan of campaign. Tom was to keep far away from Gaspard's clearings, in such hidden recesses of the wilderness as seemed best to Mick Otter, for six full weeks. If he and Mick were still at liberty and unmolested at the end of that time, Mick was to pay a cautious visit to the camp on Racquet Pond. There he would find either a blank sheet of writing paper or a sheet of paper marked with a black cross; and the blank paper would mean that they might

safely return to the clearings, to the best of Catherine's belief; and the black cross would mean that the danger was still imminent. Should Mick find the cross, he and Tom would take to the trackless wilds again without loss of time and refrain from visiting Racquet Pond in search of further information until after the middle of January.

CHAPTER VIII

BLACK FORESTS AND GRAY SWAMPS

THE house in the clearing was dark and quiet as the grave when Catherine and Tom reached it. Blackie did not bark at them, for he was with them, shivering cheerfully at Tom's heels from the combination of loyal enthusiasm and chilliness. Catherine entered the house, as silent as a shadow of the night. Tom went to one of the barns and unearthed his wool-lined leather coat and with it on replaced the patched mackinaw of Gaspard's which he had been wearing. He returned to the house just as Catherine reappeared with twenty-five of her grandfather's cartridges, half a dozen cakes of his tobacco and a small bag of flour.

Tom received these things from her hands with mumbled words of thanks. He behaved so awkwardly that he dropped the tobacco and had to get down on his hands and knees to recover it.

"Snowshoes and moccasins," she whispered. "I almost forgot them; and I'm sure it will snow before morning."

Again she slipped into the sleeping house; and again she returned, this time with a pair of cowhide moccasins, an assortment of woolen socks and two pairs of snowshoes. They retired to a safe distance from the house and there made everything into a pack of sorts. She helped him lift the pack to his shoulders and adjust it.

"Now you must go, you must hurry," she said.

He extended his mittened hands and rested them lightly on her shoulders.

"I'll go—and I'll hurry, of course," he replied, in husky and hurried tones. "But if it wasn't for you I wouldn't move an inch—I'd let them catch me and court-martial me and break me. Hunted by those fellows! A fugitive! But they'll forget it some day—and that's the day I am praying for—the day when I can tell you what I think of you, Cathie MacKim!"

Next moment she was gone from beneath his extended hands—gone, and vanished in the gloom toward the blacker gloom of the silent house.

He stood motionless for fully a minute, scarcely breathing, with his hands still extended. Then his arms sank slowly to his sides and his breath

escaped in a gasping sigh of suggestive astonishment and even greater emotion. He hitched his pack higher, turned abruptly and headed northward through the cold and dark. But cold as it was and dark as it was he felt as warm as toast and stepped out as assuredly as if the sun were shining.

"By thunder, she kissed me!" he whispered. "Quick as winking—but that is what it was! They can't catch me now, the poor Rubes—not in fifty years!"

He would probably have continued in this high strain for several minutes had he not strode squarely into the raking barrier of a brush-fence. After that, he walked with more circumspection; but in spite of a scratched face and a barked skin he felt at the top of his form.

The snow which Catherine had predicted began to circle down just as Tom reached his camp on Pappoose Lake. He placed his pack in the lean-to, fed the fire, and then went out and brought in his three traps. One had a mink. Returning to the camp he made all his possessions—including the tarpaulin and the dead mink—into two formidable packs. He shouldered one of these and started for Racquet Pond.

It was close upon seven o'clock in the morning, and snow was still falling, when Tom reached the camp on Racquet Pond. He found Mick Otter up and breakfasting by the light of the fire in the middle of his floor. He explained the situation without loss of time, in the fewest possible words.

"Got you," said the old Maliseet, gulping the last of his mug of tea as he rose to his feet. "I go. You eat breakfas', then fetch in two trap by brook, then pack. Git other five trap sometime maybe. Don't matter now."

Tom breakfasted and lit his pipe. He brought in the two nearest traps, which were empty. The snow continued to circle down through the windless air. The morning came on grayly, without a gleam of sunshine. He made another pack of everything that he could find about the camp—pelts dried and fresh, provisions and blankets and the two traps—and wondered what was to be done with all this luggage.

It was ten o'clock when Mick Otter appeared, staggering. He dropped his load, shook and beat the clinging snow from his head and shoulders and sat down with a grunt in the doorway of the shack.

"You make darn bad pack," he said.

He pulled the mitten from his right hand, produced a short clay pipe from somewhere about his person and passed it over his shoulder, without turning his head.

"You fill a pipe," he said. "You got dry 'baccy, what?"

He was a generous man, but he always made a point of cadging tobacco.

Tom, who stood behind him, took the pipe, filled it and returned it, then lit a splinter of wood at the fire and held the flame to the bowl. Mick puffed strongly.

“That a’ right,” he said. “Chuck fire out now. Smoke smell long ways.”

Tom obeyed, tossing the fire out into the new snow brand by brand.

“Good,” said Mick. “This snow darn good too, you bet. Don’t let up one-day, maybe. We make toboggan now an’ git out, what.”

“Whatever you say,” replied Tom. “You are in command, so long as we stay on the ground. But what shall we make the toboggan of, and how long will the job take us? We are supposed to be in a hurry, I believe.”

Mick got to his feet, ax in hand, and walked to a big spruce that towered nearby, all of it but the brown base and lower branches lost to view in the twirling white veils of snow. He hoisted himself to the lowest branch and lopped it off. Thus he cut six tough, wide branches. With these, and strips cut from a blanket, he quickly fashioned what he was pleased to call a toboggan. Upon it he laid all the packs and fastened them down with the tarpaulin. He rigged strong traces of blanket to the forward end of the thing.

“Now we pull him,” he said. “Guess he slide pretty good; an’ the snow fill up his track darn quick.”

They rounded the western end of the pond, dragging their possessions at their heels. They headed north then, pulling like horses, each with a rope of blanket over a shoulder and gripped in both hands. The toboggan, so called, stuck frequently and had to be yanked this way and that and lifted by the stern. It was hard work and slow progress—but they kept at it without rest until three o’clock in the afternoon; and the snow continued to fall thickly and windlessly all that time.

"IT WAS HARD WORK AND SLOW PROGRESS."

They pulled into a close thicket of young spruces, made a small fire and boiled snow for tea. After eating a few slices of bread and drinking a kettleful of tea, they lit their pipes and continued their journey. The visionless day darkened to black night; and still they toiled forward. The light, new snow took them to the knees. It was rough going all the way, with never more than a few yards of level ground at a time—over blow-downs and hidden hummocks of moss and hidden rocks, and through tangles of every variety of underbrush. Mick Otter missed his footing and fell twice and Tom did the same thing four times. Twice one of the packs worked loose and fell off; and at last the sledge itself fell apart from sheer wear and tear.

"Guess we go far 'nough to-night," said the old Maliseet.

They cleared themselves a space in the heart of a clump of cedars and rigged the tarpaulin for a roof. As the snow was still falling thickly they permitted themselves a good fire. They took to their blankets and fell asleep before the bowls of their after-dinner pipes were cold.

When the fugitives awoke just before the first pale shimmer of dawn the snow had ceased to fall—but it lay all around them almost hip-deep and clung to the bowed tops and branches of the forest in great masses. They fried bacon and boiled the kettle at a mere pinch of fire. They constructed a new and stronger drag for their baggage, changed their boots for moccasins, donned their snowshoes and pulled out. The east showed silver, then red,

then gold through the snow-burdened towers of the forest. Presently the sun lifted above the world's edge, and with it arose a vigorous wind. Before that wind the light snow went up in clouds, even in the sheltered woods; and it fell from the shaken trees in showers and masses.

"Good," said Mick Otter. "Snow hide our track yesterday, wind hide him to-day."

"We seem to be playing in luck," replied Tom; and then, "Are you heading for anywhere in particular?" he asked.

"Git to one darn good camp by sundown, maybe," answered Mick. "Have buckwheat flap-jacks an' molas' for supper, maybe."

"A camp!" exclaimed Tom. "Do you mean a lumber-camp? That would be a crazy thing to do!"

"Nope, don't mean lumber-camp. Camp I make long time back. Live in him three-four week las' winter."

An hour later, while crossing a corner of open barren, they were almost smothered by the drifting snow. And the cold was piercing. Also, the lightness of the snow made the "going" exceedingly difficult—but this condition improved as the wind drove it into white headlands and packed it tight.

Before noon, the backs of Tom's legs were attacked by snowshoer's cramp. It was exactly noon when he relinquished the painful struggle and sat down with a yelp of pain. Mick Otter saw what the trouble was at a glance. He made a fire and dragged Tom close to it. Then he produced a pot of bear's grease from the luggage, melted a quantity of it and rubbed it vigorously into the cramped muscles of Tom's legs. Tom held his nose.

"If the detective gets a whiff of that he will track us around the world," he said, at the conclusion of the operation.

"We don't go 'round the world, so that a' right," replied the Maliseet.

The bear's grease proved to be as potent as it smelt; and by the time dinner had been cooked and eaten, Tom's muscles were free from pain and comparatively limber. But it was not until a full hour after sunset that Mick Otter halted and said they had arrived. He let fall his trace and vanished in a wall of spruces. Tom backed up and reclined on the loaded drag; and presently he saw the glow of firelight through the heavy branches and crowded stems of the thicket.

"Come in," called Mick. "Plenty time unload after supper."

The camp was one to be proud of. It was at least thirty feet long. In width it dwindled from about fifteen feet to as many inches, and its height permitted Tom to stand upright. Its front wall was built of logs and a part of the roof of poles and brush. The sides and the greater part of the roof were of rock and earth. It pierced the rugged hill at a gentle slant. It had been a brush-filled little gully backed by a little cave inhabited by a large bear, when Mick Otter first found it, many years ago.

When Tom scrambled through the small doorway, his snowshoes still on his feet, he found the place full of smoke from the newly lighted fire. The fire burned in a chimney of mud-plastered stones that went crookedly upward against one rocky wall and vanished through the roof of poles. Tom remarked on Mick's evident appetite for smoke, remembering the camp on Racquet Pond.

"A' right pretty soon, you bet," said Mick. "Coons make nest in the chimley, maybe, or maybe snow stuff him up. One darn good chimley, anyhow. He suck up smoke fine most times."

Snow was the trouble; and at that moment a bushel of it slid down and extinguished the fire, leaving the owner and his guest in absolute darkness.

"That a' right," said Mick. "Now he suck up smoke fine."

He quickly cleared the snow and wet faggots from the hearth and laid and touched a match to dry bark and dry wood. He was right—the smoke went straight up the chimney in the most knowing manner. He was pleased.

"You don't find no better chimley nor him in Fredericton nor Noo York nor Muntreehall," he said.

Then, working by the increasing illumination from the hearth, he raised a square of poles from the floor—a thing that looked more like a miniature raft than a door—and propped it across the low entrance of the cave.

"He have two good hinges made of ol' boot las' winter, but some darn b'ar come along an' bust him in, I guess," he explained.

"Don't apologize," said Tom, kicking off his snowshoes and throwing aside his fur cap and leather coat. "If I had been the bear I would have stayed right here till spring, once I had forced the door."

He sat down on a heap of dry brush close to the fire. Mick went to the far end of the cave, to investigate the condition of the stores which he had left there the winter before.

"That b'ar stop plenty long enough!" he exclaimed. "He eat all the prune an' all the backum, darn his long snout!"

“Is that so!” cried Tom, now keenly interested. “And what about the molasses?”

“He don’t git that molas’, no,” replied Mick. “He don’t have no corkscrew ’long with him that trip, I guess.”

“And the buckwheat meal? How about that?”

“Buckwheat a’ right, too.”

“I’ll fetch the pan and the kettle and the baking powder.”

The supper was a success. The flap-jacks, fried in a pan greased with a rind of bacon and flooded with molasses at the very moment of consumption, were delicious. Even the two that missed the pan in the act of turning and flapped into the fire lost nothing in flavor.

After supper they brought in the outfit and spread their blankets to warm. There was enough dry fuel inside to last for several days. Outside, the wind continued to blow and the snow to drift before it.

In the morning they found the hingeless door banked high with snow; and upon pushing their way out they found the trail of their approach drifted full up to the edge of the dense wood which screened the front of their retreat. A land of small, heavily wooded hills lay around them. The sky was clear, a thin wind was still blowing and the air was bitterly cold. They made their way over the roof of their dwelling and up the rough slope behind, plunging and squirming through tangles of brush and snow hip-deep; and, upon reaching the crown of the hill, Tom climbed into the spire of a tall spruce. From that high perch he could look abroad for miles in every direction. He looked back over the country through which they had made the laborious journey, and saw nothing but black forests and gray swamps; with here and there the pale trunks of birch trees, and here and there a ridge of high gray maples and beeches, and patches and strips of gleaming snow everywhere. Nothing moved but the wind, and thin, sudden clouds of snow that puffed up and ran and sank before it. No least haze of smoke, no sign of human habitation or trafficking, tinged the clear air above the forests or marred the white of the open spaces. He turned his head and searched the bright horizon all around the world and every square yard of the landscape within his range of vision. There was no smoke or ghost of smoke anywhere, nor any break in the timber that looked as if it had been cut by the hand of man, nor any sign of movement on the patches and lanes of snow. He descended and reported to Mick Otter.

“That a’ right,” said Mick. “Guess we stop here an’ see what happen, hey? Don’t make no tracks in front an’ lay low, what?”

“Sounds good to me—but what about our smoke?” asked Tom.

Mick pointed down the southern slope of the hill, where the underbrush between the boles of the wide-limbed spruces and firs grew thick and interlaced.

“Darn little smoke git through that,” he said. “Burn dry hard-wood all day, anyhow—an’ mighty little of him.”

“It seems to me that we might stay here until Tone and the detective chuck it. If we keep a sharp look-out they won’t catch us in daylight; and they’ll never find that cave at night. It suits me. I don’t want to go any farther away than I have to.”

“Maybe—but we stop here only two-three day, to rest up an’ look out. Go north an’ west then, to place I know where we buy grub—an’ find little camp of mine pretty near the hull way. Maybe they don’t know nothin’ ’bout you over to Timbertown—so we trap an’ make some money, what?”

“Buy grub? We have enough to last us weeks—and I haven’t a dollar.”

The Maliseet smiled and tapped his chest with a mittened finger.

“Got plenty dollar an’ plenty fur, me, Mick Otter,” he said.

They worked all that day and the next at the construction of a real toboggan, leaving their work only to eat, and to climb into the top of their look-out tree once in every couple of hours of daylight. They failed to discover any sign of pursuit.

This toboggan was made of thin strips of seasoned ash which Mick had prepared for this very purpose two years ago. These were held in place, edge to edge, by numerous cross-pieces of the same tough wood; and as they lacked both nails and screws they had to tie the cross-pieces down with thongs of leather. They were without a gimlet; they hadn’t even a small bit of wire to heat and burn holes with; so the numerous holes through which the thongs of leather were passed had to be bored and cut with knives—Mick Otter’s sheath-knife and Tom’s pen-knife. The strips of ash of which the floor of the toboggan was formed were an inch thick. They bored and they gouged. They raised blisters in unexpected places on their hard fingers. Tom broke the tips off both blades of his knife. But they stuck to it and made a good job of it.

They buried half of their wheat flour and a little of their bacon in the cave, along with the half-full jug of molasses and the tin can of buckwheat meal, and banked the low door with logs and brush. Then they dragged their new toboggan up and over the hill and down its northern slope. The newly-

risen sun showed a hazy face above the black hills, and the light wind that fanned along out of the east had no slash or sting in it.

“That snow work for us agin, maybe,” said Mick Otter.

CHAPTER IX

GASPARD UNDERSTANDS

BACK in Gaspard's clearings the days had not passed so pleasantly nor so uneventfully. You may remember Catherine's parting with Tom in the dark, outside the big log house, and the effect of her parting action on Tom. In that case I need only say that she had been almost as keenly and deeply affected as Tom by her action. Her astonishment had been almost as great as his—but not quite, of course. She had slipped into the house again and safely up to her room without disturbing any one of the three sleepers, and had lain wide awake for hours. At five o'clock she had heard sounds in the house—the voices of Ned Tone and the detective, then the voice of her grandfather; then the rattling and banging of the lids and door of the stove. But she had continued to lie still, denying her hospitable instincts. She had heard the front door open and shut half an hour later; and then she had left her bed, gone to her open window and thrust her hand out between the woolen curtains. She had smiled happily at the touch of the big snow-flakes on her hand. Then she had dressed and gone downstairs and found her grandfather seated alone at the lamp-lit table, feeding scraps of scorched bacon to Blackie.

"I didn't cook fer 'em nor eat with 'em," he had said.

Gaspard had worked about the barns all that morning. Ned Tone and the detective had returned to the house at noon. They had immediately asked questions: Had the man who called himself Tom Anderson gone away alone? Did he know these woods? When had they seen him last? Was he alone then? Had he provisions and a rifle?

Catherine had smiled at these questions and Gaspard had scowled at them. Neither had made the least pretence of answering them. Then Ned Tone had blustered and spoken in a large, loose manner of the might of the law; and old Gaspard Javet had confronted him with bristling eye-brows, flashing eyes and quivering whiskers and threatened to throw him out of the house. Then the stranger, the detective, had said, "Don't lose your temper and do anything rash, old man. I represent the Law here."

"Prove it!" Gaspard had retorted.

The other had opened his inner coat and displayed a metal badge. Gaspard had sneered at that, and had said, “I warn the two of ye right here an’ now to git out o’ my house an’ off my land. I reckon ye don’t know who I am, stranger. If I fight my own battles agin the likes of Ned Tone an’ yerself, it ain’t because I hev to; an’ if I was to do a mite o’ shootin’ meself it wouldn’t be because I had to. This here Law ye talk about wasn’t made jist so’s ignorant, no-count lumps like yerself an’ Ned Tone can clutter up an honest man’s kitchen. Clear out, or there’ll be some shootin’ now—an’ maybe some law later.”

The man-hunters had gone reluctantly out into the storm and built themselves a camp half a mile away. They had brought in with them blankets, and enough provisions to last them ten days, from Boiling Pot.

“Do you think that was wise, Grandad?” Catherine had asked.

“It was right, anyhow,” the old woodsman had replied. “We ain’t hidin’ Tom. He went off with Mick Otter to trap fur, didn’t he; an’ if they don’t know Mick’s along with him that’s thar own look-out. If any harm ever comes to Tom, it won’t be my fault—nor yers either, I reckon.”

For two days after the expulsion of Ned Tone and the detective from the kitchen, Catherine and Gaspard saw nothing of those unwelcome invaders; and during that time the old man talked a great deal in a very truculent manner of what he would do if they crossed his threshold again; and how he would have handled Ned Tone in his prime; and what would happen to them if they did catch Tom and Mick Otter; and what in thunder the world was coming to, anyhow. It was loose and careless talk for so stiff and elderly a person—but it warmed Catherine’s heart to hear.

On the third day Gaspard left the house immediately after breakfast, rifle in hand as usual, and did not return until close upon one o’clock. He stood the rifle in a corner and sat down to his dinner without a word. He ate in silence, looking at the girl frequently with an expression of accusing inquiry in his deep-set eyes.

“What is the matter?” she cried, at last. “Why do you look at me like that, Grandad?”

The old man was evidently embarrassed by the questions. He pushed back his chair from the table and hooked his pipe from his pocket before attempting an answer; and even then his answer was a counter-question.

“I wanter know if ye figger as how I be crazy?” he asked.

“Crazy?” said the girl, in her turn embarrassed.

“Yes, crazy,” he replied. “Not ravin’, but queer.”

He tapped his forehead with a long finger, in an explanatory manner, looking at her keenly but kindly.

“Queer about that thar devil,” he continued. “Kinder cracked about the devil. That’s how ye figgered it out, I reckon.”

“Yes,” replied Catherine. “You acted very queerly about that, Grandad, raving around with your rifle.”

Gaspard nodded his head and sighed. Catherine left her seat and went over and stood beside him, with a hand on his shoulder. She shook him gently until he looked up at her.

“Do you remember that Tom once tried to tell you that man can fly, and what you said and how you looked?” she asked.

“I remember,” he said. “I was queer.”

“It was Tom himself who flew down from the sky that night,” she said, speaking quickly. “You would have shot him if you had found him before I did. But as soon as he knew you, he wanted to tell you—but I wouldn’t let him, I honestly thought you would kill him even then, Grandad.”

“Not after I knowed ’im, Cathie. I was queer—but knowin’ that lad, an’ workin’ longside ’im an’ talkin’ to ’im made me feel happier an’ put the thoughts o’ that devil outer my head. An’ now the police are huntin’ that lad—not the game-wardens, but the police!”

“You knew, before I told you, Grandad. You found out about Tom to-day. Where have you been?”

“I’ve bin studyin’ on it fer quite a spell now; an’ when I was forkin’ over some hay in the north barn this mornin’ I come on a queer contraption that kinder put me wise. So I went over to Ned Tone’s camp; an’ the both of ’em was still settin’ thar eatin’ breakfast. So I sez, ‘All ye lads ’ill ever catch in these woods is a cold’; an’ after a little chat about the law I sez, ‘Ye seem almighty wrought up about a salmon. That’ll be an all-fired costly fish by the time ye catch Tom Anderson, I reckon.’ Then they up an’ told me how Tom’s name is Akerley an’ how he’s wanted by the police an’ the military for worse things nor spearin’ a salmon.”

“I’ll tell you all about that, Grandad,” said the girl; and she told him.

“And it was all my fault that he told you that story about losing his canoe below Boiling Pot and about spearing salmon—because I told him that you would shoot him for a devil if he didn’t make up a story—and so you would have,” she concluded.

“Ye’re right,” said Gaspard, deeply moved. “I was ignorant—but I’ve larned a lot since Tom come to these clearin’s. How was I to know that men can fly in the air, like birds—onless Old Nick himself had his finger in it? But it seems they can; an’ if Tom done it then I ain’t got nothin’ to say agin it—but it do seem like temptin’ Providence. An’ soldierin’ in the air! That do seem to me a mite presumptuous—a flyin’ ’round an’ fightin’ in the sky, like the angels o’ the Lord!”

Catherine went up to her room, and returned in a minute with Tom’s service jacket. She explained the rank badges and the decoration and medal ribbons to the old man. He recognized the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor; and he had frequently heard from his son-in-law the story of how Major MacKim had won that white and gold cross in the Crimea. Then Catherine told him about the Military Cross, and what the war medals signified—the ’14-’15 Star, the General Service and the Victory.

“Tom fought on the ground before he fought in the air,” she said —“before he knew how to fly, even. He was a lieutenant in a cavalry regiment that went over without its horses with the First Canadian Division and fought in the trenches as infantry—a regiment of Seely’s brigade. When our cavalry was sent out of the line to get its horses—that was after Currie had taken command of the division—Tom joined the Flying Corps, because he thought that the mounted troops wouldn’t get much fighting. That was in the winter of Nineteen-Fifteen; and since then he flew and fought all the time, except when he was in hospital, until the end of the war.”

“An’ now this here detective, an’ this here bully from B’ilin’ Pot, figger on catchin’ him an’ havin’ the law on him—fer hittin’ a fat feller who named his dead friend, who died fightin’ in France, a coward!” exclaimed Gaspard, in tones of rage and disgust. “Whar’s the sense or the jedgment or the decency in that, I’d like to know? An’ him still jumpy when he done it from flyin’ round an’ round ’way up in the sky a-shootin’ at them Germans an’ them a-shootin’ at him! Law? Show me law that ain’t got reason nor decency nor jedgment in it an’ I’m dead agin it! What does Ned Tone know about shootin’?—’cept shootin’ off his mouth an’ pluggin’ bullets into moose an’ sich that can’t shoot back? I don’t know Seely nor Currie, nor never heared of ’em before, but I know that lad Tom; an’ ye kin tell me all ye want to about that war, Cathie. I’d be glad to larn about it, for I reckon I be kinder ignorant an’ behind the times.”

Catherine told him what she knew of those momentous years and events, which wasn’t very much. During the war she had seen an occasional newspaper and magazine, and recently Tom had told her a good deal of what

he had seen. At the conclusion of the talk her grandfather was deeply moved and torn with regret that he had not trimmed his whiskers and shouldered his rifle and gone to war; and of two things he was sure—that the Emperor of Germany had started a terrible thing in a cowardly and dishonorable way and that Tom Akerley had jumped into it and stopped it.

"An' Ned Tone, the heaviest hitter on Injun River, reckoned as how he could do what that thar Kaiser couldn't!" he sneered.

When Gaspard went to the camping-place of Tone and the detective next day, he found the shelter deserted and a trail heading toward Boiling Pot. Two days later he found a new trail of snowshoes and a toboggan running northward to the west of his clearings. He returned to the house and informed Catherine of this: and together they followed it to Pappoose Lake, where they found Ned Tone and the detective encamped, with a tent and a fine supply of grub. They went back to the house without having disclosed themselves to the sleuths. Gaspard set out before sunrise the next day and found that the man-hunters had again broken camp and moved on. He followed their tracks five or six miles beyond the lake before turning back. He was late when he reached the house, and his ancient muscles were very stiff and sore. But there was great stuff in Gaspard Javet; so, after a day's rest and a brief but violent course of bear's grease, Minard's liniment and elbow grease, he set out again on the trail of the trailers, this time carrying food and blankets and an ax as well as his rifle. The snow was thoroughly wind-packed by this time: None had fallen since that first heavy and prolonged outpouring. He took a straight line to the point at which he had turned back two days before; and from there he followed a difficult trail. The erasing wind had been busy. There was no faintest sign of that trail except where it pierced the heaviest growths of spruce and fir; and even in such sheltered spots it was drifted to nothing but occasional white dimples. He lost it entirely before sundown; but he knew that it passed far beyond, and well to the westward of Racquet Pond. He struck out for home next morning and accomplished the journey without accident.

Two weeks passed without sight or sound of Ned Tone and the detective or any news of the fugitives; and then one gray noon, when snow was spilling down with blinding profusion, a knock sounded on Gaspard's door and Catherine opened to a fur-muffled and snow-draped Ned Tone.

"Stop whar ye be!" cried Gaspard from his seat at the dinner-table. "If ye cross that threshold I'll do fer ye. I run ye outer this house once, an' that was for keeps."

Catherine stood aside, leaving the door open.

“Ye’re a hard old man,” said Tone, without moving. “What have I ever done to ye that ye treat me like this—worse nor a dog? If it wasn’t that we uster be friends, Gaspard Javet, I’d have the Law on ye for interferin’ with the course o’ justice.”

“Go ahead,” replied the old man, drily. “It’ll make a grand story to tell the magistrates down on the main river.”

Tone shuffled his feet uneasily.

“What I come here now for is to tell ye an’ Cathie as how I’ve quit huntin’ that feller who was here,” he said. “I’ve told the police, that detective ye seen with me, that I was mistook about that feller.”

“Ye must be reel popular with him,” remarked Gaspard.

“All I want is decent treatment from old friends,” continued the big young woodsman. “That tramp’s nothin’ to me, whatever he done to git the police after him—but he ain’t fit company for a girl like Cathie. I’ve scart him away, an’ I’m ready an’ willin’ to let it rest at that.”

“Whar’s yer friend?” asked Gaspard.

“He’s went on out. I told him I’d made a mistake. He was sore at me, an’ I had to pay him for his time—but let bygones be bygones, sez I.”

“Ned Tone,” said the old man, slowly and clearly, “ye’re lyin’ quicker’n a horse can trot right thar whar ye stand. I’d know it even if I didn’t know yerself, fer it’s in yer eyes. Ye’re lookin’ fer money from the Gover’ment, an ye’re lookin’ fer vengeance agin a young man whose got more vartue in his little toe nor ye’ll ever have in yer hull carcass. Ye fit him fair once, an’ he trimmed ye; then ye tried yer durndest to send him astray in the woods, without a rifle an’ without grub; an’ then ye fit him dirty an’ got trimmed agin; an’ now yer huntin’ him with the help o’ the police. An’ ye know as how he be a better man nor yerself—a man who sarved his country whilst ye hid under the bed; an ye know that the thing he done that the law’s huntin’ him for, wouldn’t have been nothin’ if it wasn’t that he’d sarved his country as a soldier an’ still wore the uniform. An’ still yer so all-fired scart o’ Tom Akerley that ye’d jump a foot into the air if ye knowed he was standin’ behind ye this very minute.”

Ned Tone jumped and turned in a flash. But there was nothing behind him except the twirling curtains of snow.

“Confound ye!” he cried.

“That’s all I got to say to ye, Ned Tone,” said Gaspard. “Shut the door, Cathie.”

Cathie shut the door; and Ned Tone went slowly away and rejoined the detective at the edge of the woods.

“I told them we was gettin’ out,” said Ned.

“Has Akerley been back?” asked the other.

“Guess not. They didn’t say.”

“Well, I got something better to do than spend the winter cruisin’ these woods for a man you say is Major Akerley. A gent like that one would head for a big town, as I’ve told you before. If you don’t show me him or his machine inside the nex’ two weeks I’ll get out in earnest.”

“Keep yer shirt on! It was yer idee chasin’ him, wasn’t it? All we got to do is hang ’round here, out o’ sight o’ the old man and the girl, until he comes snoopin’ back.”

“Then he’d better come snoopin’ pretty darned quick or he won’t have the honor of bein’ arrested by me.”

They moved to a secluded and sheltered spot five miles to the eastward of the clearings and there went into camp. The snow filled in the tracks of their snowshoes and toboggan.

In the meantime, Mick Otter and Tom Akerley held on their way undisturbed, traveling in fair weather and remaining in camp in foul. Day after day they moved through a wilderness that showed neither smoke nor track of human occupation, nor any sign of man’s use save occasional primitive shelters, and small caches of provisions and mixed possessions, for which Mick Otter was responsible. This was Mick’s own stamping-ground, his country, the field of his more serious activities and (apart from what food he ate at Gaspard’s place) the source of his livelihood. Sometimes a whim drew him to the east or the west or the south, but this was the area of wilderness that knew him every year and had paid toll to him in good pelts for many years. He was familiar with every rise and dip and pond and brook of it; and when on the move he looked forward from each knoll and hill-top, as he gained it, with the clear picture already in his mind’s eye of what he was about to see; as a scholar foretastes familiar pleasures when turning the leaves of a beloved book.

Of late years, however, Mick’s trapping operations in this wilderness region of his own had been of a sketchy and indolent nature—had been just sufficient, in fact, to let other Maliseet trappers know that he was still in occupation.

He told this to Tom Akerley.

“But why?” asked Tom. “Aren’t furs worth more now then they ever were?”

“You bet,” replied Mick. “Worth four-six time more nor ever before. Sell red fox two dollar long time ago—fifty year ago, maybe. But I got plenty money now an’ plenty pelt too. You want some money, hey?”

“I’ll very likely want some, and want it badly, one of these days—if those fellows don’t catch me,” replied Tom.

“Never catch you on this country long’s Mick Otter don’t die; an’ when you want money, a’ right.”

“You are very good, Mick.”

“Sure. Good Injun, me.”

They were now far over the height-of-land; far out of the Indian River country; far down a water-shed that supplied other and greater streams. Even Mick’s trapping country was left far behind—but still he knew the ground like a book.

One day, immediately after breakfast, Mick said, “Go down to Timbertown to-day an’ buy some molas’ an’ pork an’ baccy. Come back to-morrow. You stop here. Maybe they hear about you.”

“Will you trust me for the price of a razor?” asked Tom.

“Sure. But you don’t shave off them fine whisker till that policeman quit huntin’ you. What else you want, hey?”

“What about a book for Cathie? But I don’t suppose they sell books in Timbertown.”

“Good bookstore in that town, you bet. Buy plenty everything there. That one darn good town. You smoke cigar, maybe.”

“Not a cigar, Mick—but I often wonder if cigarettes still taste as good as they used to.”

“You like fat cigarette or little thin feller, hey? Doc Smith smoke the fat feller an’ Doc Willard don’t smoke nothin’ but eat whole lot.”

“Books, cigarettes and two doctors!—it sounds like a city! But still I haven’t any money.”

“That a’ right. You smoke him fat or thin, hey?”

“What about a little package of fat ones, Santa Claus? And I’ll write down the name of a few books.”

Mick went away with his rifle on his shoulder and a few slices of bread and cold pork in his pockets. He arrived home an hour before sundown of

the following day with a pack on his tough old back as big as the hump on a camel.

"Buy all I kin tote," he said, as Tom helped him ease the load to the snow. "Take two-three a'mighty strong feller to tote what I got plenty 'nough money for to buy, you bet."

They examined the pack after supper, by the light of candles which it had contained. Here were cakes of tobacco, a small jug of molasses, bacon, salt pork, a copy of Staunton's "Chess," a copy of Stevenson's "Black Arrow," and a well-thumbed romance by Maurice Hewlett named "Forest Lovers." Also, here were cigarettes, a razor, a shaving-brush, sticks and cakes of soap, rifle ammunition and a green and red necktie of striking design.

"Give him Caspar' for Chrismus," said Mick Otter, holding the tie aloft. "He shine right through Gaspar's whiskers, what?"

"You are right—but tell me about this book. Is there a second-hand book-shop in Timbertown? I didn't put it on the list, either—but it is a good story. Where'd you get it?—this old copy of 'Forest Lovers'?"

"That book? Doc Smith send him for you an' Cathie."

"What does he know about Cathie and me? Have you been talking all over Timbertown about me?"

"Nope. Nobody there know you fly into the woods—but Doc Smith, he know you fine—so I tell him."

"He knows me! And you told him where I am hiding! Have you gone mad, Mick? What's your game?"

"Doc Smith one darn good feller. You trust him like yer own trigger-finger, you bet. Good friend to me, Doc Smith—an' good friend to you, too. He know you at the war, doctor you one time, some place don't know his name, when you have one busted rib."

"Smith? Not the M. O. with the red head; a jolly chap who sang 'The Fiddler's Wedding', who hung out just east of Mont St. Eloi in the spring of 'Seventeen?"

"Sure. He say St. Eloi. He read all about you, but nobody 'round Timbertown hear 'bout how you hide in these woods. He read how that feller you hit go live on farm when all the soldier write to the paper how he ain't no good an' you one a'mighty fine fighter; an' Gover'ment take your money outer bank an' say how you still owe him seven thousand dollar for flyin'-machine."

“Is that so,” remarked Tom, reflectively. “Seven thousand—and took my money?”

He lit a cigarette and smoked it slowly, in a silence so vibrant with deep and keen thought that Mick Otter respected it.

“They’ve got my money,” he said, at last, “and they’ll have the old bus, too, some day—but they’ll never catch me to hold a court on me. They’ll never get my decorations!”

“What you mean, bus?” asked the Maliseet.

“The machine. The ’plane. Do you know where I can get oil and petrol? Are there any gasoline engines in Timbertown?”

“Sure. Doc Smith got one, you bet, for to pump water. He got bath-tub, too; an’ one little Ford what can jump fence like breachy steer.”

“Then he is the man I must see.”

Tom and Mick left the camp together next day, with an empty toboggan at their heels. They timed their progress so as not to reach the town before sunset. They went straight to Doctor Smith’s house and were fortunate enough to find him at home and about to sit down to his evening meal with Mrs. Smith, a lady of whose existence Mick Otter had not informed Tom.

Smith recognized Tom instantly, in spite of the beard, and welcomed him cordially.

“Dickon, this is Major Akerley, of whom I told you last night,” he said to his wife; and at the look of consternation on Tom’s face he laughed reassuringly.

“She is safe, major,” he continued. “She’d never peach on a good soldier. I first met her under bomb-fire; and she wears the Royal Red Cross when she’s dressed up.”

Tom talked freely during dinner; and after dinner he made known to the Smiths his intention of assembling the aëroplane and returning it to the Government in the spring. He said that he should require petrol and oil and certain tools.

“Guess I can fit you out,” said the doctor; “but I advise you not to fly up to the front door of Militia Headquarters and send your card in to the Inspector-General. Even those who don’t know why you hit Nasher think that you did a good thing—but for all that, there’s the old mill waiting to grind you. Keep away from it, major. Don’t force it to do its duty.”

“You are right,” returned Tom. “If I can get the old bus patched up I’ll fly her over here somewhere for you to discover and pass on. And I’ll

continue to lie low, officially lost—unless some fool starts another war."

"But do you mean to continue to hide in the woods until your case is forgotten?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"There are worse places than the woods," replied Tom.

"So Mick Otter tells me," remarked the doctor.

Tom and Mick did not go to bed that night; and long before sunrise they pulled out of Timbertown with a small but hefty load on the toboggan. They reached camp early in the afternoon; and before the next sunrise they commenced their slow and cautious return to Mick's trapping-grounds. Again the wilderness was all around them, trackless and smokeless save for the smoke and tracks of their own making. Days passed without disclosing to them any sight or sign of Ned Tone and the detective. One morning Mick killed a fat young buck deer. In time they reached the cave, the snuggest and least conspicuous of Mick's posts, and found it undisturbed. Here they set out a short line of traps; and then the Maliseet went on alone to Racquet Pond. Mick found the little camp on Racquet Pond just as he had left it, save for snow that had drifted in at the doorway and fallen in through the square hole in the roof. If the pursuers had found it they had left no sign behind them; but in a corner lay a square of white paper marked with a black cross. Mick snorted at sight of the paper, then pocketed it and laid in its place a red woolen tassel from the top of one of his stockings.

CHAPTER X

MICK OTTER, MATCH-MAKER

MICK OTTER scouted cautiously around Racquet Pond and took up the two traps which had been left behind in the haste of the flight across the height-of-land. One of them, set near an air-hole in a brook, had evidently made a catch of a mink—but a fox, or a lynx, or perhaps another mink, had visited the trap ahead of the trapper.

Mick returned to the cave and showed the marked paper to Tom; so the two extended their line of traps and settled down to pass the time until the middle of January as comfortably and profitably as possible. They kept their eyes skinned, as the poet has it. Tom made a practice of climbing the look-out tree four times a day when the weather was clear. They refrained from firing the rifle; and they were careful to burn only the driest and least smoky wood on their subterranean hearth, except at night. Snow fell frequently and thickly. They were fortunate with their traps, taking a number of red foxes and one patch, a few mink, an otter and half a dozen lynx—all fine pelts; and with some very small traps from one of Mick's caches they even managed to catch a few ermine.

In the clearings, Catherine and Gaspard carried on and hoped for the best. Catherine had made the trip to Racquet Pond with the warning to the fugitives in a snow-storm, and so had left no tracks either going or coming. Gaspard spied on the camp of the sleuths now and again; and, finding it always in the same spot, he twigged their game. He wondered how long their patience would last.

One morning the detective came knocking on the door of the big log house. Catherine opened to him; and he entered weakly and sat down heavily on the floor. One of his cheeks was discolored just below the eye and his lower lip was swollen.

"A drink, please," he said, in a voice of distress. "Anything—even cold tea. I feel all tuckered out."

The girl gave him a cup of coffee.

"Ye look kinder like ye'd caught up to Tom Anderson," remarked Gaspard. "An' whar's yer pardner?"

“Him!” exclaimed the detective, his voice shaken with anger. “That big slob! He’s lit out for home—and beyond.”

“But he told us, weeks ago, that you had gone out to the settlements—that both of you had given up looking for Tom Anderson,” said the girl.

The detective swallowed the last drop of coffee, shook his mittens from his hands, pulled off his fur cap and pressed his hands to his head.

“The liar!” he cried. “He’s a fool—and he’s made a fool of me, with his story about that man Anderson bein’ an officer—the great Major Akerley. I must hev been crazy to believe him for a minute. And now the big slob has beat it for the settlements; and he’ll keep right on goin’, for the Law’s after him now—or will be as soon’s I’m fit to travel agin.”

“Maybe yer lyin’, an’ again maybe yer tellin’ the truth,” said Gaspard. “Howsumever, we’re listenin’.”

“I’m talkin’ Gospel,” replied the man on the floor. “Tone lit out last night—but he beat me up before he left. He jumped onto me when I wasn’t lookin’; and I guess he bust me a rib or two. I’m about all in, anyhow.”

So saying, he sagged back against the wall, toppled slowly sideways and lost consciousness.

Gaspard Javet was greatly put out by this accident. He glared at the unconscious man on the floor.

“If I was to lay him out in the snow till he come to, an’ then run him off the place with the toe o’ my boot, it wouldn’t be more’n fair play,” he muttered. “Tom would be in jail now if this sneak had had his way—an’ here he comes an’ lays down on my floor. I’m right glad Ned Tone smashed ’im; an’ I wish he’d smashed Ned Tone too.”

“We must do something for him,” said Catherine. “He may be seriously hurt. The sooner we doctor him the sooner he’ll go away, Grandad.”

Gaspard snorted angrily and lifted the detective from the floor.

“I hope I’ll drop ’im an’ bust all the rest o’ his ribs,” he said; and so he carried him carefully into his own room and put him down gently on his own bed.

When the detective recovered consciousness he found himself very snugly established between the sheets of Gaspard’s bed, and the old man standing near with a steaming bowl in his hand. The bowl contained beef-tea, and the detective drank it eagerly.

“Yer ribs ain’t bust, I reckon,” said Gaspard. “They ain’t stove clear in, anyhow—but they do look kinder beat about,—an’ the color o’ yer eye.

What did Ned Tone hit ye with?"

"He knocked me down with his fist and then he whaled me with a stick of firewood," replied the other.

"I'm goin' out to scout 'round a bit," said Gaspard. "If ye git hungry or thirsty while I'm gone give a holler an' Cathie'll hear ye. I put arnica on yer ribs an' tied 'em up with bandages."

The old man went out and straight to the most recent camping-place of the sleuths. There he found the tent still standing, snugly banked with snow: but Ned Tone was not there, nor were his snowshoes or rifle. The provisions were scattered about, the tea-kettle lay upset in the ashes of the fire, and an air of violence and haste possessed the entire camp. A few bright spatters of blood marked the trampled snow; and Gaspard correctly inferred that one of Ned Tone's blows had landed on the detective's nose. Large, fresh, hasty snowshoe tracks led away from the camp southward into the forest.

"He was sartinly humpin' himself," remarked the old man, setting his own feet in the tracks. "I reckon he's quit an' lit out for home, like the stranger said—but I'll make sure."

He followed the trail of Ned Tone steadily for more than an hour; and every yard of it pointed straight for Boiling Pot.

Gaspard and Catherine nursed and fed the detective as well as if he had been a beloved friend, and so had him up in a chair beside the stove in two days; on his feet in three; and well able to undertake the journey out to the settlements within the week. And he was as eager to go as they were to have him gone—eager to go forth on the trail of Ned Tone and to follow that trail until the treacherous, violent, cowardly bushwhacker was brought to his knees before the might and majesty of the Law. As for the case of Tom Anderson, he no longer felt the least interest in it. It was his firm belief that even Tone had never really suspected Anderson of being Major Akerley, but had invented the case from motives of personal spite and greed. He did not find Ned Tone in Boiling Pot, however; nor did he find him at Millbrow; nor yet in any town on the big river. In short, he never caught up with the ex-heaviest hitter on Injun River; and, for all I know, and for all the detective knows, Ned Tone may still be on the run.

Tom Akerley and Mick Otter returned to the clearings on the evening of January the Seventeenth, in time for supper; and Catherine was ready for them with roast chickens, mince pies and the best coffee they had tasted since their departure from that wide and hospitable room. All four were in

high spirits—but it was Gaspard who made most noise in the expression thereof. He told all that he knew of the adventures of Ned Tone and the detective in the most amusing manner; and when he wasn't talking he chuckled.

"You feel darn good, what?" remarked Mick Otter, eyeing him keenly but kindly. "Maybe you catch that devil an' shoot him flyin', hey?"

"Ye're wrong thar," replied Gaspard. "I found 'im, but he wasn't flyin'. Caught 'im on the ground—but I ain't shot him yet. But I got his wings."

Tom looked at Catherine and was relieved to see her smiling at her grandfather.

"If you catch him on the groun' why you don't shoot him, hey?" asked Mick. "You make a'mighty noise 'bout shootin' him one time."

"An' Mick Otter laughin' all the time at pore old Gaspard Javet for a durn ignorant old fool. Well, I don't blame ye, Mick, I'd hev laughed meself to see me a-devil-huntin' all the time, with my rifle handy an' the devil mowin' grass at my elbow or totin' the old duck-gun 'round helpin' me to hunt himself."

"So you know!" exclaimed Tom, getting quickly to his feet and staring anxiously at the old man.

Gaspard made a long arm across the table.

"Lay it thar, lad," he said. "Thank God I didn't know when the vainglorious madness was on me, when I was that et up with the pride o' my wild youth an' present piety that I reckoned on havin' a reel devil sent to me for to wrastle with—for I like ye, lad."

"Me, too," said Mick Otter. "You pretty big feller on these woods, Tom, you bet. Gaspar' like you too much for to shoot, an' Mick Otter like you; an' maybe Cathie like you, too, one day, now Ned Tone go 'way with policeman chasin' him, what?"

Both old men gazed quizzically at the girl with their bright, kindly eyes. She smiled a little, looked squarely at the swarthy round face of the Maliseet, then at the bewhiskered visage of her grandfather, blushed suddenly and deeply, and then said,

"I like him much more than either of you do—or both of you together; and he knows it."

Then Mick Otter actually chuckled; and as for Gaspard Javet, his delighted laughter filled the room. And Catherine and Tom joined in the old

man's mirth, but with an air of not quite seeing the joke. Gaspard became silent at last and helped himself to a second piece of mince pie.

"She never told me before," said Tom, very red in the face and short of breath. "Not like that. And I—well, you know how it has been with me—and still is, to a lesser degree. I had to keep how I felt under my hat—more or less, I mean to say—as much as I could. She knew all the time, of course. Didn't you? How I felt, I mean—and that sort of thing. But as things were with me—and still are, I suppose—well, I had to lie doggo. What I mean is, I was a fugitive from justice. Only honorable thing to do, you know. But now that you've seemed to notice it, and have mentioned it, I feel myself at liberty to say that when I fell into this clearing I fell for her, for you, I mean for Cathie. First time I saw her, anyhow; and it has got worse—more so, I mean to say—ever since. But I always wished that you knew the truth about me, Gaspard—for I didn't like pretending, and I wanted you to know that I was—that I wasn't just a breaker of game-laws—what I mean to say is, I wanted you to know that I have fought bigger things than Ned Tone. I have been happier ever since I landed to your light than ever before in my life, and—and now that I know—well, I hope that I shall never again be chased out of these clearings."

The old men exchanged glances and approving nods; and Tom got hold of Catherine's hand under the edge of the table.

Life continued to go forward sanely and delightfully in the secluded world of Gaspard Javet's clearings. A spirit of cheer and security possessed the big log house and the brown barns. Gaspard read his Bible with more hopeful eyes than of old. He was in fine form and full of brisk stories of his youth. He had learned to play chess—a game which, until recently, he had eyed somewhat askance as an intricate and laborious example of human vanity. Mick Otter spent much of his time in the woods, but went no farther northward than to Racquet Pond nor remained away from home for longer than four days at a time. He made one trip south to Boiling Pot and found the villagers blissfully ignorant and unsuspicious of the mysterious affair of Tom Anderson and Tom Akerley, the flying major. His cautious inquiries proved them to be equally ignorant of the whereabouts of Ned Tone. It was quite evident that the heaviest hitter had kept his suspicions and the story of his and the detective's activities strictly under his hat.

Catherine and Tom were happy; but after that mutual declaration at supper on the night of Tom's return from the north, they both avoided any further mention of the inspiration of their happiness. They knew that their position was not yet secure from the menace of the outside world. But they

were not afraid, and they understood each other. Their brains cautioned them to keep a sharp look-out beyond the southern edge of the clearings and a firm grip on their dreams; and their hearts told them that their future happiness was as secure as if no fat colonel had ever been hit on the chin; and they heeded both their brains and their hearts and sailed a delightful middle course.

Tom attended to a string of traps near Pappoose Lake, but seldom allowed that business to keep him abroad all night. Also, he worked about the barns with Gaspard and cut out firewood and rails. Catherine often worked with him in the woods. The girl could swing an ax with the force and precision of an expert chopper. She also helped with the threshing of the oats and buckwheat, which was done at odd times; and in handling a flail the extraordinary grace of her swing detracted nothing from the force of her blow.

The necessity of making a journey to Boiling Pot, to obtain a supply of wheat and buckwheat flour, made itself undeniably evident in the last week of March. Mick Otter and Tom were both to go, for it was likely to prove a formidable expedition owing to the fact that the long road through the forests was entirely unbroken; but as Tom had done away with his disguising beard, it was decided that he should not venture all the way to the grist-mill in the village. Preparations were made during the day before the start. A track was broken across the drifted clearing, from the barn-yard to the mouth of the road. A few high drifts had to be cut through with shovels. On the road, itself, the snow was not more than knee-deep, for there had been a great deal of melting weather of late. But there was a stiff crust which would have to be broken for the safety of the horses' legs. A light set of bob-sleds were fitted with a light body and loaded with ten two-bushel bags of buckwheat and rations of hay and oats.

Tom was up at four o'clock next morning, to water and feed the horses. Breakfast was eaten half an hour later, by lamp-light; and the horses were hitched to the sled and a start made well before six. The air was still and cold and the horses lively. For a few miles Tom led the way, breaking the cutting crust ahead of the eager horses, and Mick held the reins. Then, for a few miles, Mick broke the crust and Tom teamed. So they toiled forward until noon; and as Tom was heavier and longer in the leg and stronger than the old Maliseet, he did more breaking than teaming. After a rest of two hours the journey was continued; and before dusk they struck a well-broken road and the impatient horses went forward at a trot. Tom dropped off a mile this side of the settlement, with blankets and provisions, and made camp about fifty yards in from the road.

Mick Otter did not reappear until noon. The return journey proved to be an easy and speedy affair compared to the outward trip, in spite of the heavier load. There was no crust to break, and Tom walked only occasionally, for the exercise. It was not quite seven o'clock when they issued from the forest into the clearing and saw the yellow lights of the big log house gleaming on the snow. Tom was holding the lines at the time and Mick was sitting hunched up beside him; and as the horses swung to the left and pulled for the barns with a sudden burst of enthusiasm, Mick slipped a small package into the pocket of Tom's leather coat that was nearest to him.

A few minutes later, in the kitchen, when Tom was stuffing his mittens into his pockets, he felt the small package and produced it. He stepped toward the lamp on the table, holding the package extended on the palm of his hand.

"What's this?" he said. "Where'd it come from?"

"Ye'd best open it an' look, if ye don't know," suggested Gaspard, crowding against his left elbow.

And so, with Gaspard on one side of him and Catherine and Mick Otter on the other, Tom unwrapped the little package. Within the wrapper he found a cardboard box, and within that a smaller box of a different shape and material. This inner box had a hinged top that was fastened down with a catch; and when Tom undid the catch and turned back the top he gasped with astonishment at the thing he saw. Old Gaspard's white whiskers shook with excitement and Cathie's cheeks and eyes brightened like roses and stars. Mick Otter alone showed no sign of emotion.

"I didn't buy this," said Tom to the girl. "I haven't any money, as you know, and still owe the Government some thousands on account of a stolen aëroplane. If this were mine, and all danger of my being cashiered were past —"

"It was in your pocket," said the girl.

"True; and I'll pay for it when my skins are sold. Show me a finger, please."

She raised her left hand and extended to him a finger of peculiar significance.

"On the understanding that you will transfer it to another finger if I am caught and broken," he said; and then he slid the ring into place.

"Never," she whispered, closing her hand tight; and the little diamond flashed defiant fire from her small brown fist.

“Mick Otter have to larn ’em how to get engage’,” said the old Maliseet, in a voice of pity and mild scorn.

“Vanity! Vanity!” exclaimed old Gaspard, shaking his head slowly. “But I reckon I never see a purtier little ring,” he added.

“What’s for supper?” asked Mick Otter, in sentiment-chilling tones. “Hungry man can’t eat rings, nor vanity neither.”

They were seated at supper, and Gaspard was in the middle of a story of his vainglorious past to which only Mick Otter was paying any attention, when the latch of the front door lifted, the door opened slowly and a figure muffled in blankets stepped noiselessly into the room. Gaspard, who sat facing the door, ceased articulating suddenly and stared with open mouth. Catherine and Tom glanced over their shoulders and Mick Otter got to his feet and hurried to the visitor.

“Got sick pappoose here,” said the muffled figure, closing the door with a heel and leaning weakly against it; and before Mick could get a grip on it, it sagged slowly to the floor.

In his attempt at succor, Mick pulled a fold of the blanket aside, thus disclosing the haggard face of a young squaw. The blanket fell lower and a ragged bundle clutched tight in thin arms came to view; and at that moment a faint, shrill wail of complaint arose from the bundle. This brought Catherine flying and lifted Gaspard and Tom out of their chairs and stunned Mick Otter to immobility. The girl took the bundle swiftly but tenderly from the relaxing arms even as the squaw closed her eyes.

Fifteen minutes later both the mother and pappoose were in Gaspard’s wide and comfortable bed, more or less undressed. A nip of strong coffee, then a nip of brandy, had been successfully administered to the squaw and a little warm milk had been spoon-fed to the baby; and all this, except the carrying, had been accomplished by Catherine. Gaspard and Mick Otter were of no use at all, though Mick was eager to get busy asking questions. Tom warmed milk very well and filled two bottles with hot water which were placed at the foot of the bed.

The pappoose wailed with a thin and plaintive voice for an hour, then took a little more nourishment and fell asleep. The mother drank a bowl of warm milk and slept like a log. It was close upon midnight when Gaspard’s fur robes, and blankets were laid on the floor of the big room, between the robes and blankets of Mick’s and Tom’s humble and mobile pallets.

Mick Otter questioned the young squaw industriously next day, but acquired very little information. Her answers were suspiciously vague. She

did not seem to know how far she had come, or where from, or why. She said again and again, in answer to every question, that the baby was sick and needed a doctor; but the baby, full-fed now, seemed to be in the pink of condition. Hunger and fatigue seemed to be the only thing the matter with either of them. In three days they were both as right as rain, beyond a doubt; and still the young woman would not say where she had come from or why she had left home and seemed to entertain no idea whatever of where she was bound for.

Mick Otter, anxious and thoroughly exasperated, took the case firmly in his own hands at the end of a week. He made a snug apartment in one of the barns, established a rusty old stove in it and, deaf to Cathie's protests, moved the visitors out of Gaspard's room. The weather was mild by this time. The barn-chamber was very comfortable. Mick made a fire in the stove every morning and saw that every spark was dead before bed-time. He carried all the squaw's food and the baby's milk to the barn, forbade the others visiting the strangers and refused the mysterious squaw admittance to the house. He was hard as flint in the matter. One day he lost his temper with Catherine, who threatened to have the mother and baby back in the house in spite of his cruel whims.

"You know her, an' why she come here?" he cried. "Nope, you don't know. You know why she run away?—what she run away from? Nope nor me neither. When we know, then you call Mick Otter one darn fool all you want to,—maybe. What Mick Otter think,—what he see before two-three time—that squaw run away from big sickness maybe with her pappoose. So you keep 'way—an' shut up!"

Tom and Gaspard were far too busy to worry much about Mick Otter's peculiar treatment of the strangers. They had cleared the threshing-floor of the largest barn and turned it into a work-shop; and there, in a week, they had straightened and mended the buckled plane of Tom's old bus.

CHAPTER XI

THE MILITARY CROSS

THE machine was brought together bit by bit, from this hiding-place and that. The little engines were assembled and tested. The car was put together and the engines were fastened in place. Gaspard and Mick, and even Catherine, could scarcely believe their dizzied eyes when the little engines first turned the thin blades of the propeller over, and then over and over until nothing was to be seen of those blades but a gray vortex into which they had dissolved and out of which roared a wind that threatened to blow the barn inside-out. The noise of that wind frightened fur folk great and small miles away and sent crows cawing and flapping out of distant tree-tops. It almost stunned the secretive squaw with terror—for I think her conscience was not quite at ease; and it even distressed Catherine. But Catherine was not feeling up to the mark at this time. She had caught a slight cold, she thought; so she drank a little ginger-tea and said nothing about it.

One evening in the first week in May an Indian came to the house and asked if his squaw and pappoose were here and, if so, how they were getting along. He looked an honest and somewhat dull young man and complacent beyond words.

"You Gabe Peters from Tinder Brook," said Mick Otter.

The visitor nodded. Then Mick took him by an elbow, backed him to the threshold of the open door and talked to him swiftly in the Maliseet tongue. The other replied briefly now and then. Mick became excited. His excitement grew by leaps and bounds; and at last he turned Gabe Peters of Tinder Brook completely around, kicked him from the threshold into the outer dusk and shut the door with a bang.

Gaspard and Tom were stricken voiceless with amazement by Mick Otter's treatment of the visitor. Catherine seemed scarcely to notice it, however. Mick turned from the door and went straight to the girl, where she sat close to the stove.

"You go to bed," he said. "Take plenty medicine an' go to bed darn quick."

She protested, but without much spirit.

“Go to bed!” cried the old Maliseet, violently.

The girl stood up and moved toward the steep stairs. Tom hastened to her, took her hands and looked at her closely.

“What is it, Cathie?” he asked. “Your hands are hot, dear.”

“I have a cold, I suppose,” she replied. “My head aches—and I think Mick is crazy. But I’ll go to bed,—just to keep him quiet. Don’t worry.”

She went up to her room. Mick got Tom and Gaspard each by an elbow.

“Diptherie at Tinder Brook,” he whispered harshly. “That why Gabe Peters’ squaw run ’way with pappoose. He don’t have it but he bring it here, I guess. Cathie gettin’ sick, anyhow. Guess she need doctor pretty darn quick.”

Gaspard Javet groaned. He had been so happy of late—or had his happiness been only a dream? He sat down heavily in the nearest chair. Tom Akerley paled but did not flinch. He looked steadily at the old Maliseet and in a steady voice said,

“It may not be anything more than a cold, Mick. I’ll get a doctor immediately—but you don’t think she is seriously ill, now, do you?”

“Dunno. Take too darn much chance a’ready, anyhow. Where you get a doctor quick, hey? No doctor at B’ilin’ Pot. Go way out to Millbrow an’ find one darn poor doctor maybe. Take a’mighty long time anyhow—an’ maybe we don’t find him.”

Tom opened the door and looked up at the sky. It was a fine night. He aroused Gaspard and sent him up to Catherine to consult her in the matter of treatment for her own cold. Then, with two lanterns, he and Mick Otter went out to the big barn. Tom set to work immediately. Mick visited the mother and baby. He found Gabe Peters there and devoted a few minutes to telling all three what he thought of them. He was particularly severe with the squaw, because of her secretive behavior. Then he returned to the work-shop and assisted Tom for three hours.

Tom was the first of the household to wake next morning. The first thing he did was to go out and look at the weather. There was not a breath of wind. The dawn of a fine spring day was breaking in silver and gold along the wooded east. He woke Gaspard then, lit the fire and dressed. Gaspard went up to Catherine’s room and found her sleeping—but she tossed and moaned in her sleep. Her face was flushed.

Tom opened the doors of his work-shop wide and fell to work by the level morning light. Mick Otter cooked the breakfast. Gaspard looked after Catherine, who drank a little weak tea and complained of a sore throat.

Breakfast was eaten in ten minutes. Mick fed the three unwelcome guests and locked them in their quarters. Then Tom, Mick and Gaspard worked like beavers for two hours; and by the end of that time the ’plane squatted wide-winged before the barn, like a wounded goose of gigantic proportions. The three wheeled it to the top of the oldest and levelest meadow.

Tom donned his leather coat and went to the house. He entered and called up the stairs to Catherine. She answered him and he went up. He found her lying bright-eyed and flushed of face, staring eagerly at the door.

“Oh, I am glad you are real!” she cried. “I was queer last night—and I thought you weren’t real.”

He laughed.

“I am one of the realest things you ever saw, of my own kind,” he said. “I’m no dream, Cathie. And now I’m going to make a little journey, to fetch you a doctor—so when you hear my engines wish me luck, girl—put up a little prayer for me.”

He stooped, touched his lips lightly and quickly to her hot forehead, and left her. He ran to his machine and started the engines. He put on his cap and goggles. He twirled the propeller; and suddenly it hummed.

“Stand clear!” and he scrambled to his seat.

The old bus thrilled, lurched, then moved forward down the field, slowly for a few yards, then less slowly, then fast. Gaspard and Mick stared after it, frozen with awe; and when they suddenly realized that the little wheels were no longer on the mossy sod they felt as if their hearts were stuck in their windpipes. Yes, the little wheels were off the ground! And the wide wings were climbing against the green wall of the forest; now they were swooping around; and now they were against the morning blue; and still the great bird circled as it rose. Now it was high over the house, high above the blue smoke from the chimney. Now it was over the barns, and over the woods beyond, still circling and rising. Four times it circled the clearings, flying wider and higher each time; and then it headed north and flew straight away into the blue.

Then those two aged woodsmen suddenly recovered the use of their lungs and limbs. They shouted triumphantly and waved their arms in the air. They leaped together and embraced.

The frail thing that flew northward with so much of their pride and love dwindled and dwindled and at last vanished from their sight.

“An’ that’s the man Ned Tone fit with,” said Gaspard, in a voice thrilled with pride and shaken with awe.

“An’ you an’ me help him fasten it together,” said Mick Otter, in tones of reverence and satisfaction.

Gaspard returned to the house, and Mick went to the barn in which he had shut the people from Tinder Brook and unlocked the door. The man and the woman were in a tremor of fear. The fierce song of the birdman’s flight, striking down at them through the roof, had chilled them with a nameless dread. Mick gave them provisions, blankets, a kettle and frying-pan, and told them to get out and travel quick. They obeyed with alacrity. He told them that if they ever mentioned the great sound they had heard that morning a terrible fate would overtake them swiftly, no matter how far they traveled or where they hid; and they believed him, for truth gleamed in his eyes.

Gaspard found Catherine sitting straight up in a tumbled bed, staring at the window.

“Has he gone?” she cried. “Was it Tom? Has he flown away?”

“Now don’t ye worry, Cathie,” returned the old man, with an unsuccessful attempt to speak calmly. “Yes, it was Tom. An’ he flew—ay, he surely flew. He’ll fetch in a doctor for ye, girl, if thar be a doctor in the world to fetch. I’ve saw eagles an’ hawks fly in my day, an’ wild geese an’ ducks an’ crows, but nary a bird o’ the lot could fly like Tom. The sight of it shook me to the vitals. If I was a young man only a few years younger, nor what I be, I’d sure git him to larn me how to do it. It was the shiverin’est sight I ever see—shiverin’er nor the swash an’ wollop an’ windy roar o’ fifty gray geese gittin’ up all of a suddent out o’ the mist at yer very feet; an’ ye mind how that sets yer heart a gulpin’, girl.”

Catherine lay back heavily on her pillow.

“Yes, I mind,” she said. “All the great wings beating the air. I wish I had seen Tom fly. Now that my head feels so queer it all seems like a dream to me—all about Tom—how he flew down to us that night, to the light of our open door—and how brave and strong he is. I wonder if it is true. . . . I wish I had a drink, Grandad. My throat is burning—and it aches.”

Gaspard hastened away, pottered about the stove and the dairy, and soon returned with milk hot and cold, cold spring water and hot tea. She drank thirstily of the cold milk and water, talked for a few minutes in a vague and

flighty vein that terrified the old man, and then drifted off into a restless doze.

Tom Akerley flew straight and swift, high up in the spring sunshine, into the clean bright blue of the northern sky. He held his course by compass and sun, and read his progress on the ever unrolling expanse of hill and vale and timbered level beneath him—so far below him that the mightiest pines looked smaller than shrubs in a window-box and forests through which he and Mick Otter had toiled for weary hours were scanned from edge to edge at a glance. He saw the silver shine of lakes and ponds like scattered coins and bits of broken glass; black and purple vasts of pine and spruce and fir; gray dead-lands and brown barrens; and here and there his exploring eyes caught a flush of red-budded maples, a pale green wave of poplars in new leaf, and a smudge of yellow where crowded willows hung out their powdery blooms. A flock of geese flying northward with him at the same altitude, swerved from their course by a few points as they came abreast of him and drew slowly ahead and away. His machine was not the swiftest in the world, by any means, but it slid along those free tracks of air at an unvarying rate of sixty miles an hour; its taut sinews humming against the wind of its flight and its trusty engines singing full and strong and smooth with a voice of loyalty and power.

Doctor Smith and Mrs. Smith, of Timbertown, lunched that day with one of the windows of the dining-room wide open, so bland and bright was the air. They had trout from the mill-pond—the first of the season—and steamed apple-pudding. Their trusty cook, who also waited on table, had the platter of trout bones in one hand and the pudding in the other, and was on the point of removing the first from before the doctor and replacing it with the second, when a shadow fell across a corner of the table. All three looked up and beheld a bare-headed young man in a leather coat at the window.

The cook set the pudding down with a thump that split it from top to bottom; but as the doctor and his wife jumped to their feet without so much as a glance at the wrecked pastry, the cook also ignored it and retired hastily with the platter of bones.

“Hello!” exclaimed the doctor. “Speak of the—we were just talking about you, major. Come in. Glad to see you.”

“I’d better not,” replied Tom. “I’ve come to take you to Gaspard Javet’s clearings. His grand-daughter is ill, and Mick Otter thinks it is diphtheria,—thinks it came with some Indians from Tinder Brook. The bus is about two

miles away,—so if you'll give me a tin of gas and come along, I'll be greatly obliged."

The Smiths looked greatly concerned.

"I'm with you," said the doctor. "A tin of gas? Right-o. Better put on furs, hadn't I? Eat something while I hustle. Feed the major, Dickon."

As Tom persisted in his refusal to enter, from fear that he might have the germs of diphtheria on his person, Mrs. Smith fed him on the window-sill with cold ham and pudding and coffee.

"We were speaking of you just a little while before you appeared," she said. "Last week's Herald arrived this morning, with good news; and we were just wondering how we could get word to you; and here you are—with bad news. But you mustn't worry, major. Jim is a great doctor."

"I know he is," replied Tom. "I've seen him at work. He is a two-handed man. And I haven't wasted any time. Mick Otter threw the scare into me last night and I nailed the old bus together and started this morning."

"I am glad you hurried—but you'll be careful, won't you? Try not to crash with Jim, please."

"I'll do the very best I know how, you may be sure. I promise you that I'll bring him back just as carefully as I take him away. I can't say more than that."

"No, indeed. Now where is that Herald? Here it is."

The lady picked up a newspaper from the floor and began to search its columns for a particular item; but before she had found what she wanted the doctor entered the room. He wore a fur cap and carried a fur coat on his arm; in one hand was a professional bag and in the other a can of gasoline. The lady folded the paper small and stuffed it into one of his pockets.

"Take it with you," she said. "It should bring you luck on the journey."

He set his burdens on the floor and embraced her.

"Don't expect me back till you hear us coming," he said. "And don't worry, Dickon. If I had the pick of the whole Air Force for this trip I'd pick the major."

He took up his burdens and left the room, joining Tom in front of the house. Tom led the way at a sharp pace to where the aëroplane lay in a secluded clearing about two miles from the outskirts of the town. The doctor had picked up a slight knowledge of air-craft during his service in the army, so together they filled the petrol-tank and went thoroughly over the machine.

The result of the inspection was satisfactory. Then Tom stowed the doctor and his bag aboard and donned his cap and goggles.

It was exactly three o'clock when the old bus took wing and flew straight away into the south.

"HE . . . THRUST HIS HEAD AND SHOULDERS OUT OF THE WINDOW."

Mick Otter was the first of the family to catch the song of the homeward flight. He was out in the wood-yard at the time, splitting up an old cedar rail for kindlings. He dropped his ax and cocked his head. He scanned the clear horizon and the blue vault above it, blinking his eyes when he faced the west. At last he spotted it, and it looked no bigger than a mosquito. It grew steadily in his vision and yet did not seem to move; grew to the size of a snipe—continued to grow, hanging there against the sky, until it looked like a lonely duck homing to its feeding-grounds. And the sound of its flight grew too, droning in from all round the horizon. Little Blackie heard it then and crawled apologetically under the back-porch.

Gaspard Javet heard it. He left his chair beside Catherine's bed, crossed the floor on tip-toe and thrust his head and shoulders out of the window. He

saw it, rubbed his eyes and looked again to make sure, then withdrew from the window and turned to the girl in the bed.

"Here he comes," he said.

Catherine moved her head restlessly on the pillow. Her eyes were wide open, but she paid no attention to her grandfather's remark. Instead, she put out a hand gropingly toward a mug of water which stood on a chair beside the bed. Gaspard went to her in one stride, raised her head on his arm and gave her a drink. She swallowed a sip or two with difficulty.

"Hark, Cathie girl," he whispered. "Don't ye hear it now? the hum o' Tom's flyin'-machine?"

"I've heard it for hours," she answered faintly. "It isn't true. It is in my poor head."

"But I see it this very minute dear, when I looked out the winder. Thar it was, plain as a pancake', a-hummin' home like a big June-bug. It's Tom, I tell ye, and if he ain't got a doctor with him then all the doctors has died! Don't ye hear it gittin' louder an' louder?"

"Yes, it is growing louder," she said, slowly, "louder than the noise in my head has ever been—as loud as when Tom flew down out of the dark that night and frightened you into the woods."

Gaspard lowered her head to the pillow and hastened from the room in his socks. He was in such a hurry that he left the door open behind him and took the short, steep stairs at a slide. He got outside in time to see the 'plane sink below the top of the dark wall of forest, flatten out and run on the sod. He raced Mick Otter to it, shouting as he ran.

The doctor went up alone to see Catherine; while Tom, Mick and Gaspard sat on the back-porch and stared at the resting 'plane without a word. Tom still had his great gloves on his hands, his goggles on his eyes and his fur-lined cap on his head.

The doctor returned to them in fifteen minutes; at sight of the expression on his face they all sighed with relief, and Tom pulled off his gloves and head-dress.

"Mick, you were right," said the doctor. "That's what is the matter with her, but it hasn't got much of a hold. And she is strong and I'm here in plenty of time."

Mick Otter nodded his head just as if this good news was no news to him. Gaspard leaned heavily on Tom's shoulder. Tom took off his goggles and fell to polishing them diligently with a handkerchief.

“Bless that old bus,” he said, making a swift and furtive pass with the handkerchief across his eyes.

Doctor Smith pulled a cigarette-case and a folded newspaper from a side-pocket of his coat. He lit a cigarette and then unfolded the paper.

“Ah! here it is,” he said. “Dickon and I were wondering how we could get word to you about it, Tom. Here you are.”

He handed the big sheet to Tom, indicating this official advertisement with a finger.

> “Major Thomas Villers Akerley, M. C. This officer is hereby instructed to apply at his early convenience for transfer to the Reserve of Officers, with his present rank and seniority, and to return to any Officer of the Permanent or Active Militia, with a complete statement attached, all such Government Property for which he is officially responsible. Major Akerley will understand that, in consideration of his distinguished services, fine record and good character and the peculiar circumstances of his case, his compliance with these instructions will cause the cessation of all Official action in the matter.
>
> (Signed) T—— W——
> Deputy Minister of Militia.”

Tom read it three times, very slowly. The full meaning of it struck him suddenly, and he trembled. The wide sheet shook between his hands, fluttered clear and swooped to the floor. Mick Otter picked it up and stared at it like an owl.

“I see the mark of your finger in that,” said Tom to the doctor.

“And of the fingers of every other old soldier in Canada,” returned the doctor.

“When may I show it to Catherine?” asked Tom.

“To-morrow, I think. I am counting on that bit of news to save me a lot of medicine and professional effort.”

Six days later, very early in the morning, Tom Akerley and Dr. Smith flew away from Gaspard’s clearings—but not northward across the height-of-land toward Timbertown. They carried the Winter’s catch of furs with them, which included several exceptionally fine pelts of otter and mink and a few of “patch” fox. Tom wore the same clothes, ribbons and all, in which

he had landed so violently amid the young oats on that June night, now almost a full year ago.

They passed high over Boiling Pot and made a landing in a meadow on the outskirts of a small town. There they attracted a good deal of attention; so they took flight again as soon as the doctor had dispatched a telegram to Timbertown and procured petrol and a map.

Their second and last landing was made in the Agricultural Exhibition Park of a city. Leaving the machine in the charge of a policeman, and taking the package of pelts with them, they went to the nearest hotel. From the hotel Tom rang up Militia Headquarters and the doctor rang up a dependable dealer in furs.

An hour later, Tom gave his name to an orderly. The orderly was back in fifteen seconds.

"The general will see you now, sir," he said. "This way, if you please."

He opened a door and backed inwards with it, keeping his hand on the knob.

"Major T. V. Akerley, M. C.," he announced; and as Tom crossed the threshold three paces, halted with a smack of his right heel against his left and saluted, the door closed behind him.

The Inspector-General, a large man in a large suit of gray tweed, looked up from some papers on his desk and said, "How are you, Akerley? Glad to see you."

"Thank you, sir," returned Tom, standing very stiff.

The general left his desk, advanced and extended his hand. Tom grasped it.

"Glad to hear the machine is all right," said the general. "You have had a long flight. Loosen up, my boy. You are not on the carpet, I'm glad to say."

Tom's back and shoulders relaxed a little.

"I can scarcely believe it, sir," he replied. "May I ask how it happened? Did Colonel Nasher say how the trouble began?"

"Something like that," said the general. "Not of his own free will, of course. It came hard, but we scared it out of him. One of your men, Dever by name, told of your speaking to him of poor Angus Bruce just before you flew away that night. And we had Nasher's letter objecting to Bruce's name on the list of posthumous awards; a letter fairly reeking with cowardly spite. A disgraceful letter. I looked into that matter and learned that Nasher and the father of Angus Bruce were enemies of long standing in their home town. I

was inspired to put one and one together and suspect the result of being two; so I sent for Nasher, to see if the answer really was two. He came; and I saw at a glance that his wind was up already. The Vets were hot on his tracks by that time, you know. Half the old soldiers in Canada had pen in hand, most of them painting you in colors almost too good to be true; and the remainder demanding to know why, when and by whom, a person like Nasher had been given a commission. So, when I asked Nasher, in this very room, what he had said to you about your friend, young Bruce, fear shook enough of the truth out of him to satisfy me that you had done exactly what I should have done in your place."

"You would have knocked his head clean off, sir," said Tom.

The general grinned and walked across the room to an open window. He stood there for half a minute, with his hands behind his back. He turned suddenly, strode back and laid a hand on the airman's shoulder.

"If you feel fit for it, Akerley, I shall be glad to have you carry on," he said. "The past year can be called sick-leave. There was something of the sort due you, anyway."

Tom changed color several times before he found his voice.

"I feel fit for a fight, sir—but not for peace-time duty, I'm afraid," he replied. "I feel that I need to be in the woods, sir, where I've been ever since last June. But if you will put me in the Reserve, sir, so that I may come back if needed—to fight, you know—I'll be very much obliged,—as I am about everything now—more than I can say."

"That shall be done," said the general. And then he added, "So you've been in the woods? What did you do in the woods?"

"Farmed and trapped, sir. It's a great life."

"I believe you. Have you bought land?"

"Not yet, sir; but I hope to do so."

"That reminds me! You must go to the Pay Office. Show them this receipt for the machine you brought back."

Then the general walked Tom to the door, still with a hand on his shoulder, and opened the door. They halted and faced each other on the threshold.

"Did Angus Bruce get his M. C., sir?" asked Tom.

"He did," replied the general. "His mother has it. And that reminds me! You are improperly dressed, Akerley."

“I am sorry, sir,” returned Tom, in confusion. “I hadn’t any other clothes to put on.”

“That’s not what I refer to,” said the general, placing a finger-tip on the ribbon of the Military Cross on Tom’s left breast. “You have been awarded a bar to this. Get it and put it up before you go back to the woods, or there’ll be trouble. Send me your permanent address. Good-by. Good luck.”

It was a long and round-about journey back to Gaspard’s clearings. But Tom Akerley made it with a light and eager heart, thinking fearlessly of the past and dreaming fearlessly of the future.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Tom Akerley--His Adventures in the Tall Timber and at Gaspard's Clearing on the Indian River* by Theodore Goodridge Roberts]