# TORTUOUS TRAILS

## Hulbert Footner

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## *Detection by the Mounties*

POLICE work in the vast spaces of Canada's North-West has a fascination of its own. There is a glamour about the Mounties which never grows dim, and for that reason alone Mr. Footner's new book should be welcome. The four stories included in this book are ingenious and exciting tales of the adventures of Sergeant Brinklow and Trooper MacNab, two typical specimens of this famous corps.

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THE KIDNAPPING OF MADAME STOREY
RING OF EYES
MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY
THE ALMOST PERFECT MURDER
DANGEROUS CARGO
THE NEW MADE GRAVE

# TORTUOUS TRAILS

by

HULBERT FOOTNER

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# THE CASE OF SHEM PACKER

## 1

CONSTABLE DAN MCNAB, R.C.M.P., in the bow of the dugout canoe was not glorying in his career. He and Sergeant Brinklow, circling Caribou Lake on the first patrol of the season, were bucking a head wind and a big sea which came sloshing over the bows every few seconds. The long slender dugout was not designed for heavy weather; but the big Peterboro' in which they usually made the journey had been requisitioned for an emergency patrol up to Opawaha Lake where the Indians had measles. McNab's slicker kept the upper part of his body dry, but he was kneeling in three inches of icy water, and it filled his boots. Moreover, the slicker hampered the free use of the paddle and chafed him under his arms. In short, his discomfort was perfect.

He resented the privileges of rank which permitted his sergeant to sit high and dry in the stern, unhindered by any slicker. Brinklow was whistling cheerfully and unmelodiously between his teeth. The younger man suspected that he was letting him do the lion's share of the work. The wind was like a giant hand pressing them back. McNab gloomily calculated that they were making about a mile an hour against it. They had been fighting it for all of two hours, yet their starting place was still in sight behind them. He was sore against the whole world, and particularly against the man behind him who was making him work like a galley slave.

Yet Brinklow presently spoke up in his rich, slow voice. "We'll go ashore at Cut-Across Point yonder, and let this blow itself out. There's an abandoned shack there where we can build a fire. We'll bake bread, and you can dry out your hindquarters, lad."

A swift, warm reaction took place in McNab. "Good old Brinklow! What a decent head he was! Always thinking of his men!"

Thereafter the young man kept his eyes fixed full of anticipation on the low, spruce-clad point that ran out ahead. It got its name from the fact that here you cut straight across the lake for the intake of the river. The sky was grey and the face of the lake grey, daubed with white; the tall spruces along shore looked almost black in their winter suits. It was late May and there was a sense of spring in the air; the grass bordering the distant inlets was madly green; but all along the main shores at the foot of the spruces, great

cakes of ice were still fantastically piled where they had been shoved up when the face of the lake moved. This made landing difficult; however, Brinklow knew that a little stream came in on the other side of the point which had melted the ice there.

Caribou Lake was a hundred miles long, and shaped something like a pair of saddle-bags pinched in the middle. Apart from the little settlement at the head which included police headquarters for the district, nobody lived upon it except a few miserable fish-eaters who shifted up and down the shores. This patrol was maintained for the benefit of the new settlers who would try to come this way at the wrong season. In the winter there was a good road over the ice, and in the summer they could come by boat without too much difficulty; but with the wrongheadedness of tenderfeet they insisted on driving in in the summer, and there was no road around the lake. It was possible to drive around the beach, but not for tenderfeet; the services of the police were continually required to get them out of trouble.

The policemen rounded the point at last and ran into the mouth of a little stream between walls of ice. The tall, thickly springing spruce-trees hid all sign of the shack of which Brinklow had spoken. Alongside the stream rose a clump of canoe birches, and the sergeant immediately pointed out to his young companion where several patches of bark had lately been cut from their trunks.

“The fish-eaters mended canoes here yesterday,” he said.

There was a regular landing-place in a pool inside the line of ice, and from it a well-beaten trail led away through the spruce-trees. As he disembarked Brinklow’s keen eyes became busy upon it.

“Ha! There’s been a reg’lar crowd here. Both moccasins and hobnails.”

It was about a hundred and fifty yards to the little clearing where the log shack stood with its attendant stable. These buildings had been put up by a new settler who designed to open a stopping-house for freighters in the winter, but the enterprise had not prospered. As soon as the trees opened up, McNab who was in advance saw a wagon.

“There are white men here now,” he said in surprise.

“No smoke in the chimney,” said Brinklow.

They had to pass the stable first, and looked in the door. No horses there, but a settler’s outfit stowed neatly in one corner; boxes, bags, trunks, farming implements and so forth.

“Another greenhorn,” said Brinklow dryly. “Mark the iron cookstove and the boxes of canned vegetables, ninety per cent. water. They will do it!”

There was no one about as far as they could see. Absolute silence brooded on the little clearing, save for the wind in the tops of the spruce-trees. Passing around the stable Brinklow called McNab's attention to a smashed window in the end of the house.

"A hell of a smash. See how the sash is splintered. From the inside."

A strong disquiet seized upon the younger man.

Drawing near to the door of the shack, Brinklow stopped; his eyes searched the ground all about, and he scowled. It had rained heavily on the day before and the earth was soft. McNab saw everywhere the tracks of dogs as he thought.

"Coyotes," said Brinklow; "nosing right up to the door. I never knew them to do that before. I don't like it!" He laid his hand on the old-fashioned latch, and pushing the door in a few inches raised his head and sniffed like an old hound. "There is something wrong here!" he said gravely. "Stand back, lad."

McNab felt as if an icy hand had been laid on his breast.

Brinklow kicked the door all the way open, and looked over the threshold. He caught his breath in horror, and made a step backward. "Oh, my God!"

McNab looked over Brinklow's shoulder. Lying on his back on the floor of the shack with his feet pointing towards them, he saw a dead man. His eyes were staring open and his jaw fallen down. In his forehead there was a round hole, and a great pool of blood had spread over the floor under his head. A burly man in his forties, with a thick, dark beard. Even in death his vigour was impressive.

There was no furniture in the shack except a rough home-made table and a pair of chairs. One of the chairs lay smashed on the floor under the broken window. At the other end of the room bedding for several men had been spread on piles of hay brought from the nearby stable. Four men had slept there. Various rough garments hung from nails driven into the log walls. A few soiled cooking utensils stood about on the hearth; the ashes were cold.

McNab was young enough and new enough to the force to feel nauseated and helpless. It was his first experience of death by violence. "What shall we do?" he murmured.

To Brinklow, the old sleuth, the sight acted as a spur. He instantly recovered from his start of horror; his eyes glistened with a kind of zest. "Do!" he cried in a strong voice. "I'll tell you what you've got to do, my lad. Sit ye down on that bench outside the door, and stay there till I give ye leave

to move. I don't want anybody else messin' up these tracks until I can study them. If anybody heaves in sight, grab hold of him, that's all."

## 2

McNab sat down at the door of the shack as he was bidden, and lit his pipe to steady himself. Brinklow disappeared within, where he could be heard stirring about with quick, assured movements. By and by he came out, and without speaking to the other, commenced to search the tracks around the house, all his senses on the alert; always heedful where he placed his own feet so as not to blot out anything. Frequently he squatted on his heels to see better. McNab, watching him, thought: Brink is a natural born detective. He's been wasted up here where all his cases are simple and obvious. Maybe this will give him his big chance. Outside, he would have been famous long ago.

Sometimes Brinklow's investigations carried him out of the clearing, now to the left, now to the right. So quiet was he that the moment he was out of sight McNab lost him. A perfect stillness brooded over the scene; the sun partly breaking through the clouds cast a watery shine on the clearing. Green was springing up everywhere. In spite of the chill, there was a feeling of life and growth in the air hard to reconcile with the thought of the dead clay in the cabin.

In perhaps an hour Brinklow reappeared, and dropping on the bench beside the young man, allowed himself to relax. He carried a fine new automatic pistol which he put down between them. McNab surveyed it with an uneasy respect. Drops of water clung to it. So this ugly bit of machinery had been the means of setting a soul free of its tenement. Brinklow lit his pipe, and studied for a while, chewing on the stem. Finally he began to speak.

"This is how the matter stands so far as I can dope it put. This poor stiff in here was one of a party of four incoming settlers. There are no papers on his body nor amongst his dunnage to tell me what his name was, nor the names of his companions, but as I take it, that ain't essential. The murder was provoked and accomplished right here, and it won't be necessary to dig far into his past. He and his mates were comin' in with a loaded wagon and team and six spare horses. Town-bred horses with shoes on. Up to this point they had fairly easy goin', but here they were held up by the ice along the beach. Been here a week.

"He was shot while he was running down the path towards the landing-place. We walked over the spot on the way up. He was shot in the back of the head. That hole you saw in his forehead was the point of egress of the bullet. The gun must have been held close to his head, but not directly against it, because his hair is not singed. The first shot must have laid him out cold, but the murderer continued to shoot, and a curious thing is that, although the man must have been lying directly at his feet, he didn't hit him again. I found three other bullets imbedded in the ground. Either the murderer was crazy with passion, or totally unaccustomed to handling a pistol—or maybe both.

"He then threw the gun away. I found it about five yards off. It was lying in a puddle of rain water, which is unfortunate, because the water would wash out the fingerprints, always supposin' that I was smart enough to decipher them. I wish to God I had a magnifier. The gun is the latest type automatic, the first that was ever brought into this country. Thirty-eight calibre. It has been kept carefully cleaned and oiled. This don't jibe with the clumsy way it was used, so I have it in mind that maybe the deed was done by some one other than the owner of the gun. The holster from which the gun was drawn is hanging up on the wall of the shack, just inside the door.

"Immediately after the murder the body was dragged to the shack and dropped where you see it now. He lost most of his blood inside here as you can see. Whether it was the murderer who brought him in I can't say. At any rate he was in a hell of a hurry, for most any man would have done the dead the decency of coverin' him up. The body is stiff, yet the blood is not all congealed, so that fixes the moment of the deed at about twelve hours back. Say ten o'clock last night. At that hour it is dusky but not totally dark."

"Sergeant, you're a wonder!" said the young man admiringly.

Brinklow waved it aside. "Well, that is what happened accordin' to what my eyes tell me. As to what led up to it, I am all at sea. The smashed window suggests there was a hell of a time here previous to the shootin'. Why anybody should want to smash the window for, I can't figger. 'Tain't big enough to let a man out of. There's a greasy deck of cards on the table from which you might suppose there was a quarrel over the game. But that won't hold, because the dead man has got over five hundred dollars cash in his pocket. If they were so keen about money they wouldn't go away without that. Five hundred in cash, and a draft on the company for a thousand, made out to bearer. Even though robbery had no part in the motive I can't understand how they went away without securing that.

"Neither does a gamblin' quarrel or robbery as a motive account for the Indians bein' here. Where they come in I can't tell you. The tracks of

moccasins are everywhere. Four or five different individuals. God knows these fish-eaters are pretty near the lowest of mankind, but they haven't got nerve enough to hunt game. That's why they're fish-eaters. I can't conceive of the fish-eaters attacking even one white man, let alone a party of four. And can you picture three able-bodied white men running away from those miserable savages when one of their number was shot? It *couldn't* have been the fish-eaters, because nothing around the place is touched.

"One set of moccasin tracks seems to favour the right foot. This suggests the man was lame. The only lame man that I can recall among the fish-eaters is Sharley Watusk who generally pitches at the mouth of Atimsepi across the lake. Has the name of bein' a bad egg, but cowardly as a coyote. If it was robbery, I could well believe it of him. But never the murder of a white man. Sharley has a daughter called Nanesis, a remarkable beauty. Once in a while you find them in the tepees.

"There's another relic of the visit of the fish-eaters here. About fifty yards up the little stream from where we landed is a smashed birch bark canoe, a fish-eater canoe. It was not broke by accident, but somebody has turned it over and stamped on it until it was completely smashed to pieces. Now what do you make of that? Some hellish passions have been let loose here."

McNab could only shake his head.

"Here's something else that bears on the killing," Brinklow went on, "but I can't as yet fit it into its place. There's a second little window in the westerly wall of this shack. It is not smashed. Outside it the ground is soft from the rain, and bears the imprint of two knees there. Somebody knelt there last night, peeping over the sill into the shack. It wasn't the murdered man, because the knees are smaller than his. First off I reckoned they couldn't see much at that time of night, because I couldn't find that they had any way of lighting the shack except from the fire. Yet at that they couldn't have played cards on the table by firelight. Afterwards I found a candle in the fireplace. Fire must have been near out when it was thrown there, because it had rolled to one side and only melted a little. Now candles are worth something up here. I wish somebody would tell me why they threw a good candle on the fire."

Another shake of the head from McNab.

"The first thing I've got to do is to find where the other three white men have gone to," resumed Brinklow. "One might almost suppose that the fish-eaters had carried them off in their canoes, but that idea seems a little fantastic. They turned out their horses in a little natural meadow of blue

grass alongside the stream a hundred yards or so back from the lake shore. Four of the horses are still grazing there; sorry plugs. This suggests that the men took the other four and rode off somewhere, but I haven't tracked them yet. They did not ride back east the way they come, nor can I find any horse tracks to the west of us. They went in an awful hurry, without fetching their saddles from the stable or taking any grub. Whatever it was drove them away, they're bound to return. In this country a man cannot abandon his grub. Soon's I finish my pipe I'll take another look."

However, Sergeant Brinklow's pipe was not destined to be finished. As he sat chewing the stem and studying, the two of them were electrified by the sound of a distant shot from the southward.

"Ha! Still at it!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Now I know where they've gone! Rode up the bed of the stream! Come on, lad! Bring your carbine!"

## 3

THE horses in the little meadow were hobbled, and for further convenience in catching them each wore a rope bridle with a short length hanging from it. The policemen threw off the hobbles from two horses, and clambered on their backs. The docile and broken-spirited beasts answered willingly enough to the tugging of the rope, but, bred to the pavements, they were very unsure of foot, and stumbled continually in the rough ground.

"We'd make as good time on our own legs," grumbled Brinklow.

Urging their mounts into the stream, they turned their heads against the current. The sergeant rode in advance. Where the stream ran through the meadow the water was almost breast-high, but striking into another dense growth of pines and spruces, it shallowed, and ran brawlingly over small stones. Here the going was fairly easy, though they had occasionally to dismount and lead their horses around a tree which had fallen into the stream. McNab observed with surprise that Brinklow kept his attention upon the footing of his horse, and never looked at the banks on either side.

"Mightn't they have turned off somewhere?" he suggested.

"Not here," said Brinklow. "You couldn't put a horse through virgin timber like that."

The stream ran as through a winding tunnel between the gigantic trunks. The curious monotony of the way made it seem longer than it was. At the bases of the trees a species of raspberry spread gigantic pale leaves in the dim light, a nightmare plant. The size and the endlessness of the trees

oppressed the spirits; one felt that they reached to the confines of the earth. While they were still among them, the sound of another shot, somewhat muffled, reached their ears, followed by a hoarse yell and presently two more shots. It had an uncanny effect there in the shadows, and Dan McNab's heart contracted.

"Hope those shots didn't find human targets," said Brinklow gravely. "One murder is aplenty."

They got through the dark forest at last, issuing suddenly into a parklike country set out with clumps of willow and poplar. Sun and sky made a different world, and a fresh resolution inspired McNab the recruit. He urged his dejected mount ahead.

Brinklow's keen little eyes were now searching the banks on either hand, and presently with an exclamation, he put his horse to the right-hand bank. McNab followed him. Even he could see where other horses had clambered up before them. Up on top they found themselves in rolling grass starred with crocuses. But they could not see far ahead owing to the unevennesses of the ground and the frequent bluffs of trees. Brinklow, his eyes fixed on the tracks in the grass, rode in a bee-line south-westward.

"Looks as if we were following somebody who knew the country," he said. "This is a natural route around the big timber, and back to the lake at the narrows."

The ground must have been imperceptibly rising, for presently, looking back, they could see over the black sea of the forest to the blue waters of the lake.

Rounding a clump of black poplars, both horses shied violently. McNab lost his seat, but managed to cling to the rope fastened to his mount's head. That which had frightened them proved to be a wounded horse lying in the grass. One of his hind legs had been broken by a shot. There was no other living object visible in all the green landscape. The poor beast looked at them with soft, agonised eyes, and Brinklow fingered the butt of his carbine. However, he slung it over his shoulder again.

"A shot would give warning of our coming," he said. "I mustn't do it."

They rode on.

In another mile or so both horses pricked up their ears and whickered softly. Brinklow pulled up and dismounted.

"We're near other horses," he said. "Lead your horse slowly ahead, and hold his nose until we find out what we're up against."

A wide and seemingly impenetrable thicket of poplar saplings lay athwart their course; in the parlance of the country a poplar bluff. The little

trees all of a uniform height of ten or twelve feet seemed to grow as thickly as hair out of the prairie, their branches misted with a tender green. Drawing closer they saw that the bluff though wide was not thick through; they could see to the other side. Presently they could make out the shadowy forms of two horses tethered within the shelter of the little trees, and coming closer yet distinguished two men beyond the horses with their backs turned. The horses had perceived their fellows, and were moving restlessly and pulling at their halters; but so intent were the men on what lay in front of them they never looked around.

Seeing this, Brinklow turned off at a tangent, softly walking away through the grass until an inequality of the ground put both men and horses out of sight. He then led the way to the edge of the bluff, where they tied their horses and made their way back on foot.

They approached the two men from the side. The little trees did not grow so thickly as appeared from a distance, and a man could make his way through the bluff without difficulty. Brinklow followed by McNab approached to within half a dozen paces of the men and stopped, surveying them grimly. Both policemen had their carbines in their hands. The two men likewise were holding rifles ready. They crouched down, peering out into the sunlight in front. Occasionally they brought their heads together and whispered. Brinklow watched them for a moment or two, then said coolly:

"Well, gentlemen?"

The two whirled around with a gasping breath. One lost his balance and toppled over backwards, dropping his gun. "Oh, Christ!" he gasped. In spite of himself a start of laughter escaped from McNab. The man on the ground was red faced and red haired; the other black haired and pale; both heavy men, rough customers in their late thirties. The red faced man continued to gibber and mow out of sheer nervousness; the other turned wary and ugly.

Notwithstanding his shaken nerves the red-haired man was the first to find his voice. "Thank God, the police," he said, picking himself up. "That lets us out!"

But his voice rang false and his eyes bolted as he said it. The other man said nothing, but only scowled.

"What is going on here?" demanded Brinklow. "Who shot your partner last night?"

"The cook," they answered simultaneously. "We were tryin' to take him for you," the red-haired man added.

"Much obliged," said Brinklow dryly. "Where is he?"

"Yonder," answered the other, pointing. "Takin' cover behind the dead horse. Him and the girl with him."

"Oh, there's a girl in it," said Brinklow. "I might have know as much. Who is she?"

"A redskin girl. I can't say her name rightly. Nan something or other."

"I know her," said Brinklow.

Looking out beyond the little trees, the two policemen saw a wide stretch of sunny green without any trees within a furlong's distance. In the centre of the picture, a couple of hundred yards away, lay a dead horse in the grass. Over his ribs stuck the barrel of a rifle, and behind the rifle the top of a sleek black head.

"Hand over your guns to the constable," said Brinklow crisply; and when the two men reluctantly obeyed: "Now follow me, and we'll look into this."

Brinklow stepped out into the sun, raising his hand in token of amity. The two men followed him sullenly, and McNab brought up the rear carrying the three guns over his arm. The black head raised itself up, and proved to belong to a woman. As they came closer, she stood up, and McNab's eyes widened in astonishment; an extraordinarily beautiful girl. Her companion was not visible until they reached the horse. A young man was then seen to be lying unconscious in the grass, one of his shirt sleeves soaked with blood.

"Well, Nanesis, what is this?" asked Brinklow.

The gun slipped out of her arms. "Oh, Brinklow, I so ver' glad you come!" she faltered. "I so glad——"

She swayed, and seemed about to fall, just like one of her white sisters. Brinklow flung an arm around her.

However, she did not swoon. "I all right," she whispered. "Tak' care of *him*. He is shot."

She dropped down in the grass, and hid her head between her arms while she struggled with her weakness. Brinklow knelt beside the wounded man. McNab out of the corners of his eyes surveyed the girl with growing amazement. A red girl they all called her, but he had never seen another like this. Her skin was no darker than a brunette of his own race; it had the texture of creamy flower petals. Her big dark eyes were limpid with intelligence and feeling. Red or white, savage or civilised, she would have been a beauty anywhere.

From her he looked towards the young man with a spice of jealousy, because her voice had been so warm with solicitude and tenderness. He saw a tawny-headed lad of his own age, smaller and lighter than himself, but nevertheless well-knit. Even in unconsciousness his face had a resolute, tight-lipped look. A good head, was McNab's inward verdict. His sympathies went out strongly to these two.

## 4

BRINKLOW cut away the sleeve of the young man's shirt. There was a bullet hole through the fleshy part of his arm.

"Never touched the bone," said the sergeant cheerfully. "He's just fainted from the loss of blood. We'll bring him round directly. What have you got for a bandage, Nanesis?"

His words acted like a tonic on the girl. She got up immediately, and turning her back on them, tore the hem off her petticoat. "Don' let that touch the hurt," she said; "it is not 'nough clean. I get med'cine."

Searching in the herbage until she found a small plant with fleshy leaves, she rolled the leaves between her palms to crush them, and applied them to the wound as a plaster. While Brinklow held the arm up, she bound the place with her strip of coloured cotton as neatly as a trained nurse.

"Either of you fellows got a drop of liquor?" asked Brinklow.

The two men, perceiving that the sympathies of the police had gone to the other side, watched the scene with a growing sullenness. The black-haired one answered with a sneer, "Not for him, the murderer!"

A peculiar hard sparkle appeared in Brinklow's blue eyes. He stood up. "You hand over what you got," he said with a dangerous mildness that was characteristic of him, "and I'll decide who's to get it."

The man's angry black eyes quailed, and without another word he handed over a flask with a little liquor in the bottom of it.

Brinklow poured a few drops between the wounded man's lips, and the effect was almost instantaneous. He opened a pair of startled grey eyes on them, and springing to a sitting position, looked around for his gun.

"Easy! Easy, pardner!" said Brinklow, pressing him back.

From the other side the girl murmured, "It's all right, Phil. The police 'ave come. We are safe!"

He fell back with a sigh of relief. She took his head in her lap. "Tak' ease," she softly whispered, stroking his hair. "All is well now."

Envy struck through McNab. Gosh! he thought, if there was only a girl like that for me!

The wounded man presently appeared to fall into a natural sleep. It would have been inhumane to attempt to move him at such a moment, and the whole party therefore sat down in the grass within arm's length of the dead horse. Young McNab was struck by the strangeness of the scene; a sort of magistrate's court sitting in the sunny prairie.

"Well, what are the rights of this matter?" asked Brinklow.

"There's your prisoner," said the red-haired man violently. "He shot our partner."

The girl jerked up her brooding head, and her soft eyes flashed. "He lyin'!" she said. "Phil not near the man w'en he shot."

"Aah, she's cracked about the kid," retorted the other bitterly. "You can see it for yourself. She'd say anything to save him!"

"One of them two, him or him," said the girl dramatically pointing, "*he* kill!"

"She lies!" cried both the men together. "Why should we kill our partner?" added the red-haired one.

"I don't know," said Brinklow coolly. "What reason had they for killing their partner?" he asked the girl.

She hung her head and blushed like a white girl. "I tell you," she said low. "All the men is wantin' me. So they play for me wit' the cards. An' him, the dead one, Blackbeard, he win. So the ot'er men are sore."

McNab's youthful idealism was hurt by this disclosure. Her words propounded a dozen new questions for the one they answered. How had she fallen in with these men? How came this common Indian girl to have the looks and the feelings of a white woman?

"She ain't got that right," spoke up Red-head. "Our partner hadn't won her yet. He had only won the right to court her first, to have the first say. . . . We meant fair by the girl," he added with a virtuous air; "any one of us was willin' to marry her."

Brinklow looked from the men to the girl, and said dryly, "That certainly was square of you!"

His sarcasm was wasted. "We hadn't no cause to croak our partner," put in the black-haired one. "He hadn't won the girl."

"All right," said Brinklow. "Why should your young partner have done it then?"

“He wasn’t no partner of ours,” was Red-head’s contemptuous answer. “He was just a grub-rider, kind of. We let him cook for us for his keep. He hadn’t no share in the outfit. He hadn’t nothin’ but the clo’es he stood in and his gun.”

“Darn good gun,” remarked Brinklow glancing at the weapon. “A Harley express rifle.”

“He wasn’t allowed no show with the girl, and he was sore. That’s why he croaked our pardner.”

“It’s a lie!” cried the girl. “W’at I care for the cards? I choose Phil. I tell him I choose him. What for he want kill Blackbeard?”

“Liar yourself!” retorted the man. “Didn’t you bust out of the shack, and call for Phil to come to you?”

“I call him to go way wit’ me in my canoe,” she said.

“Yeah,” he said contemptuously, “but he shot the man first.”

“It’s a lie! He is in front and Blackbeard shot be’in’.”

“Aah, tell that to the marines!”

Brinklow wagged his hand for silence. “This is gettin’ nowhere,” he said. “One at a time! You,” he commanded, singling out the red-headed man, “you have a ready tongue. Tell your story from the start. What’s your name and what brought you up here?”

The man paused and took a chew of tobacco before beginning his story; looked around to make sure he had the attention of all. “Me, I’m Russ Carpy,” he said with a swagger. “I been a prize-fighter, and a darn good one. Not so long ago on’y three men stood between me and the light heavyweight champeenship. Sojer Carpy was my professional name. Guess you’ve heard it.”

“Can’t say as I have,” said Brinklow dryly.

“Oh, well, you wouldn’t, up in this neck of the woods. Havin’ retired from the fightin’ game I aimed to take up land som’eres. I heard there was good free land in Northern Athabasca, so I headed this way. I met up with the other two fellows in the city of Prince George at the end of the railway; Bill Downey here, and Shem Packer, that’s the dead guy. Bill, he raised cattle down in Southern Athabasca, but the dry farmers run him out. Shem, I don’t know what his line was before. He never told us. Shem, he had a wagon and eight horses he brought up from Vancouver, and me and Bill we each had a stake in money, so all chipped in together, bein’ as all had the same idea, which was to take up land along the line of some new railroad and sit down and raise cattle until it come through.”

“Where was you aimin’ to get the cattle to start with?” asked Brinklow dryly.

“Oh, from the Indians,” said Carpy.

“Moose or Caribou?” asked Brinklow, with a wink in McNab’s direction.

Carpy stared at him.

“Go on,” said the sergeant.

Carpy nodded towards the wounded man. “We picked up this kid bummin’ around Prince George, half starved. Phil Shepley is the name he give. He was aimin’ to go north so, as I tell you, we let him be our cook. We never had much truck with him, bein’ as he was a sullen crab. Thought himself too good for his company.”

Brinklow glanced at McNab again. Showed his good taste! his expression said.

“This was in the winter,” resumed Carpy. “We put our wagon body on runners, and started in over the snow and ice. Got as far as the joinin’ of the rivers two hundred miles from town, when the snow melted and the ice begun to soften. Had to go into camp until the land road was fit for travel. Then we put the wheels to the wagon, and come up alongside the little river to the lake, and so to the place where you found our outfit. We was stopped there by the ice on the beach. Lucky we found the empty cabin and stable. Been there a week yesterday. It was a tiresome time. Hadn’t nothin’ to amuse ourselves with but a greasy deck of cards.”

Carpy paused, and looked at the girl sullenly. “At dinner time yesterday,” he went on in a lowered voice, “this girl come to our shack. She come in a canoe, but we didn’t know that then. She hid the canoe, and it was like as if she dropped from the sky. Ev’ything about her was myster’ous. We couldn’t make her out noways. She let on she couldn’t speak English nor understand it, so we had to talk to her by signs. . . . I leave it to you if she ain’t a deep one,” he said with resentful bitterness, “takin’ us in all the time, and never givin’ nothin’ away herself!”

Brinklow looked down his nose, and made no comment. Young McNab leaned forward to hear better.

“We couldn’t figger out what she come for at all,” said Carpy. “Like a tigress if a man laid hands on her. Yet she seemed friendly, too. Cooked us up a darn sight better meal than our own cookee was good for, and showed herself real handy sewin’ and fixin’ things up and all.

“Well, bein’ as she was such a good looker and all,” he went on, “ev’y one of us begun to think it would be nice to have her round for keeps.

Though she come like an Indian, and made out to be red, what with her white skin and the colour in her cheeks, we made sure she had white blood. A settler in a new country needs a good wife above all, to help him make a go of it, and she was like one sent a purpose. But only one, whereas we were three.

"So there begun to be trouble right away, ev'y man snarlin' at his pardners, and ready to fight at the drop of the hat. The girl never let nothin' on, but just stayed around mendin' our clo'es as if for to advertise herself as a good wife. Tell me she wasn't a deep one! It got worse and worse all afternoon. The on'y thing that kep' us from fightin' was, if any fellow picked a quarrel he always had the other two to fight. None of us could get the girl alone for a minute, because we had to watch each other.

"Towards supper time Shem proposed that we leave it to the cards. 'Boys,' he says, 'we can't go on this way. We all want this girl, and if we don't settle it somehow, we'll be blowin' the tops of each others' heads off before mornin'.' None of us wanted to stake his chance on the turn of a card, but there wasn't no way of escapin' from Shem's logic; we had to agree. So it was fixed as soon as supper was over we'd play for who should have the first chance to court the girl. The winner was to have the shack that evenin', and if he made good with her, all right. If he was turned down, the second man was to have the shack the second evenin'; and if he was unsuccessful, the third man followin' him."

McNab felt somewhat relieved in mind. It was evident from the speaker's reluctant tribute that the girl was neither light nor common.

"Meanwhile the girl and cookee was gettin' supper together," Carpy resumed with increased bitterness. "Must a been somewheres about that time they come to an understandin' with each other. It didn't occur to none of us that she might take a shine to that measley little feller. Why, any of us would most have made two of him! We never seen them whisperin' together; we never suspected she had any English. Shows what a sneakin' onderhand pair they was, the two of them!" he burst out.

"That's right!" put in Downey with a black look.

"Well, it's all in the point of view," remarked Brinklow.

"After we eat there was another wrangle how to settle it with the cards," Carpy resumed. "Some wanted to cut for it, and some to deal. In the end we did both. We cut for deal, and Shem won it. It was agreed he was to deal out the cards face up, and whoever got the ace of spades was eliminated. Both me and Bill shuffled the cards, and then Shem dole them out. I had no luck;

I got the ace of spades the first round. Bill got it on the second, leavin' Shem the winner. It made me sore. . . ."

Downey broke in bitterly, "Yeah, why don't you tell the sergeant you was a bum sport and wouldn't stand by the decision of the cards?"

"Be quiet," said Brinklow. "You'll have your say directly."

"Well, it looked funny to me," grumbled Carpy, "bein' as Shem was the dealer and all. . . . Cookee, he fired up. He said it was a shame and all, and he was thrown out of the shack. I don't know where he went. The girl took it all perfectly quiet. Then me and Bill left the shack accordin' to agreement. . . ."

"You mean you was thrown out too," put in Downey.

"Shut up!" said Brinklow.

". . . And the two of us went down to the lake shore and built a fire there," Carpy continued; "but we was sore. And pretty soon Bill went away. I was suspicious what he would be up to, so I went back to the shack and looked around. It was pretty dark, but you could see a little. I seen Bill akneelin' on the ground, spyin' on 'em through the window."

"It's a lie!" cried Downey. "I went to the shack, and I seen Sojer spyin' through the window. He's tryin' to put off on me what he done hisself!"

"Never mind it now," said Brinklow. "Get on with the story."

"I went back to my fire," said Carpy. "I was good and sore. I doubted if Shem would play fair with the girl, and I was darn sure Bill wouldn't. . . ."

Downey snarled at him.

". . . So it looked as I didn't stand no chance at all. . . . While I was by the lake I hear a crash of glass and breakin' wood, and right after that the door of the shack banged open, and I heard the girl callin', 'Phil! Phil! Phil!' Just as good as I could say it myself. That was a staggerer. Then I hear Shem cussin' her, and the sound of runnin' feet. I run myself. Seemed like they was makin' for the landin' place, and I followed. Before I got there I hear a shot and a fall on the ground, and four more shots fired as fast as you could pull the trigger. Then silence."

## 5

SOJER CARPY had lost his conceited air. His eyes were haunted by the recollection of that scene in the dark, and the ready tongue stumbled. It was impossible for McNab to judge how far he might be telling the truth. As for Sergeant Brinklow, he looked down his nose, and kept quiet.

“The sound of them shots scairt me,” said Carpy, “and I come to a stop. Not another sound reached me. I went on slow, and pretty soon I all but stumbled over the body of Shem lyin’ in the path. Bill Downey was standin’ on the other side of him.”

“You lie!” interrupted Downey. “When I got there you was already there.”

“You lie!” snarled Carpy.

“Oh, get on, get on!” said Brinklow with a bored air.

“I left him there,” said Carpy. “I thrashed around through the timber lookin’ for the girl. But it was useless in the dark. When I stopped to listen all I could hear was Bill bulling around just like me. Bime-bye we met by the corpse again. God! I judged from his actions he was goin’ to shoot me next.”

“You raised your gun at me,” snarled Downey.

“Well, anyhow, we seen we couldn’t go on that way,” said Carpy, “and so we made a deal to hunt for the girl together.”

“And kill the cook?” put in Brinklow softly.

Carpy ignored it. “And when we found her, then we could decide which was to have her.”

McNab looked at the girl. What passions her beauty had set loose in the dark! At the moment all her attention was given to the sleeping man whose head lay in her lap.

“By that time,” Carpy went on, “we figured she must have come by canoe, though we hadn’t seen the canoe. The on’y place you could land from the lake or push off was the mouth of the little river, so Bill went down there to watch, while I dragged Shem’s body to the shack to keep him from the coyotes. Ev’y night the coyotes come around camp after we went in. I dropped Shem in the shack and shut the door on him, and then I went back to the river, and watched there with Bill, him on one side and me on the other.

“Well, after a long time we heard ’em comin’ real soft. About a hundred feet in from the lake there’s a shallow place where the stream runs over stones, and that’s where we was watchin’. They had to get out there and float their canoe down. Bill and me, we rushed ’em, and they left the canoe and run for it.”

The girl spoke up unexpectedly. “They fire’ at us.”

“It was Bill fired at them,” said Carpy quickly.

“You lie! It was yourself!” cried Bill.

"We smashed the canoe good," Carpy went on unabashed, "so they couldn't escape any more by that means. And then as it was useless to look for them in the dark, we set down to wait for daylight. Before three it begins to get light again up here. Seems there's scarcely no night at all at this season. Soon as we could see a little, it occurred to us they would steal horses next, so we crep' up to the little prairie where we had our horses turned out. We wasn't quite soon enough. We saw them ride a couple of horses into the water, and disappear upstream. They didn't see us.

"So we got two more horses and took after them. They rode slow up the stream, not knowin' we was behind, and it wasn't long before we come in sight of them. They saw us too, and they went behind a big fallen tree which made a natural barricade across the river. From behind it they held us off all mornin'. We'd a been there yet, on'y we discovered they'd left a couple of sticks pointin' at us like guns, and had ridden clear away behind the tree. So we took after them again. We seen where they left the stream, and took to the prairie. Bill was experienced in trackin' horses through the grass. We caught 'em in range as they rode around a clump of poplars."

"Yeah, and who fired at them then?" sneered Bill Downey.

"I did," said Carpy defiantly. "And I had a good right to. Wasn't he tryin' to escape from justice?"

"So?" drawled Brinklow. "When did that notion first strike you?"

"Me and Bill talked it over good durin' the night, and we decided that cookee had shot our partner."

"I see," said the sergeant. "Go ahead."

"I brought down one of the horses. But cookee who was ridin' it, he jump up behind the girl, and I was afraid to fire again for fear of hittin' her. They rode into cover amongst some trees. We caught 'em fair as they loped across this open space, and both of us fired."

"I fired at the horse," said Downey.

"So *you* say," sneered his partner. "However that was, between us we killed the second horse and winged the man. When the horse fell they dropped behind it, and then they had us at a stall, for bein' in the open out here, we couldn't approach them without exposin' ourselves. We didn't want to shoot the girl, and the man was hidden from us. Well, that was how matters stood when you come. I cert'n'y was glad to see the red coats of the police!"

"I reckon!" said Brinklow.

Carpy pulled out his pipe and started to fill it with an air of bravado. His hand shook slightly. To McNab he had the look of a liar. Certainly his last

sentence was transparent hypocrisy. Brinklow was studying him through narrowed eyes. Finally the sergeant turned to Bill Downey.

"Well, what have you got to say?" he asked. "Do you corroborate his story? Have you got anything to add to it?"

This man was of an entirely different character; black and saturnine. Ordinarily a silent man, when he was forced to speak his sentences were clipped and laconic. He said:

"It's true in the main. But coloured to suit hisself. You was right in givin' him a ready tongue. Too damn ready. Nobody can't believe Sojer Carpy. I learned that long ago. Me and him made it up to stick together, and look how he was gettin' at me all through. Well, two can play at that."

"Aah, shut up you fool!" snarled Carpy.

Brinklow silenced him. "So you made it up to stick together," he said. "Go ahead."

"What he didn't tell," Downey went on, "was the dirty part he played all through. It was him made all the trouble when the girl come yesterday. Fancied hisself as a ladies' man. Tried to shoot Shem and me he did, on'y when he run to the corner where the guns was kept, they wasn't there."

"Where were they?"

"Sojer, he accused me of havin' hid 'em for my own purpose," said Downey. "He set Shem against me, and the two of them was beatin' me up when cookee says *he* hid the guns. Didn't want to be concerned in no wholesale murders he said."

"What a happy little family!" murmured Brinklow.

"Cookee says they was shoved under the eaves of the stable, if we was bent on blowing each others' heads off," said Downey. "But Shem stopped us gettin' them. It was then we made up to settle it with the cards. Sojer wouldn't stand by that neither. Me and Shem had to throw him out of the shack. He run and got his gun then. And I got mine just to watch him. We went down to the lake shore together. Sojer proposed that him and me bump off Shem together. . . ."

Carpy broke out into furious denials. Brinklow silenced him.

". . . But I wouldn't," Downey went on coolly, "because I knew if I did Sojer would lay for me afterwards. He made me sick with his grousin' and cryin' and I went by myself. Bime-bye I hear somethin' and I went back to the shack, and I seen Sojer kneelin' on the ground peepin' through the window."

"It was you!" cried Carpy.

“I ain’t no peeper,” said Downey. “It’s a woman’s trick.”

“Will you go on the stand and lay your hand on the Book and swear that you seen me kneelin’ at the window?” demanded Carpy.

“Sure, I will,” answered Downey with the utmost coolness. “And if anybody’s got a Bible, I’ll swear it now.”

“It’s a lie!” yelled Carpy. “And your soul will be damned to hell for sayin’ it!”

“Well, leave it lay for the present,” said Brinklow. “Let him go on with his story.”

“It disgusted me like, to see him peepin’,” Downey went on, “and I went away from there. I was down by the waterhole when I heard the glass busted.”

“The waterhole?” queried Brinklow.

“That’s the landing-place in the little river. We fetched our water from there. I heard the girl run out and call for the cookee. I heard Shem cussin’ her. Then I heard the shots; five shots. I run up the path and I come on Shem’s body lyin’ there, and Sojer kneelin’ down beside it.”

“You lie!” cried Carpy. “You was there before me!”

“After that,” Downey went on unconcernedly, “ev’ything happened just like he said. On’y it was him fired at cookee and the girl when they was tryin’ to escape in the canoe. If the fool hadn’t fired his gun they would a walked right into our arms in the dark, and we’d a had ’em both. That’s all I got to say.”

McNab having heard both stories, thought: It lies between these two all right. I believe Downey’s side of it. He’s just as big a scoundrel as the other, but he hasn’t got enough imagination to lie.

Sergeant Brinklow betrayed no sign of what his opinion might be. He gave the situation a new twist by turning to the girl and asking:

“Nanesis, what was your father and his friends doing at Cut-Across Point yesterday?”

“Sharley Watusk, him not my fat’er,” she said quickly and proudly. “Him jus’ my mot’er’s ’osban’. My fat’er him white man. Name’ Dick Folsom.”

“Sure,” said Brinklow. “I had forgotten. Well, what was your mother’s husband doing at Cut-Across Point?”

“I not know what ’e do there,” she said with a contemptuous air. “Ask them.”

Brinklow turned to Carpy. “You had some other visitors at your camp yesterday,” he said.

“A parcel of redskins,” was the indifferent answer. “What they call fish-eaters. They come before the girl.”

“What did they come for?”

“Nothin’ so far as we could make out. Just curiosity. When we got up in the mornin’ they was already there. Jus’ squattin’ on their heels lookin’ at us. Four little men. Couldn’t get no sense out of ’em.”

“But Sharley Watusk speaks good English,” said Brinklow. “That was the lame man.”

“I suspected as much,” said Carpy. “But we couldn’t get nothin’ out of him but grunts and signs.” He looked resentfully at the girl. “Seems to be the custom hereabouts to make out to be dumb. . . . They begged for ev’ything they saw. Made out to be starvin’, but we found they had plenty nice fish in their canoe, so we wouldn’t give ’em nothin’. Got our goat bime-bye to see them squattin’ on their heels, starin’, starin’, starin’! Never lettin’ nothin’ on. So we told them to get the hell out o’ there. They jus’ went off a little way and squat down again. Finally the three of us we got good and sore, and booted them down to the stream and into their canoe. They paddled across the lake. That was about half an hour before the girl come.”

Brinklow studied this, rubbing his chin. Finally he turned to the girl again. “Nanesis, what were they after?” he asked.

“They lookin’ for me,” she answered in the contemptuous tone she always used towards her own people. “But I not show myself till they gone back. I done wit’ fish-eaters. I white girl now.”

## 6

IN the haste of escape and pursuit nobody had brought any food. It was now past midday. The wounded man, awakening, said that he felt able to ride the three miles or so back to camp; so his arm was bound in a sling, he was helped on a horse, and the slow walk back began. Brinklow, McNab and Nanesis mounted the other three horses, while Bill and the Sojer were required to foot it. They grumbled loudly.

“Well, you shot the other two horses,” said the sergeant.

The two set off ahead at a fast walk that would soon have carried them out of sight of the rest of the party. Brinklow, mindful of the dugout in the mouth of the stream, ordered them to heel.

“Aah, what’s the matter?” snarled Carpy. “Are we under arrest?”

“Don’t say arrest,” said Brinklow ironically. “Say detained as material witnesses.”

Young Shepley, with his wound and his horse having no saddle, was hard put to it to keep his seat. He suffered much pain, and was obviously incapable of telling a connected story. Brinklow tried to get the girl to talk, but she could only give him half her attention. “Wen I mak’ him comfortable, I tell all,” she said. And Brinklow let her be. Passing the wounded horse, the sergeant ended his sufferings with a bullet.

In an hour they were back at the shack where all was found as they had left it. Blankets were spread on a bed of hay out of doors for the wounded man, while Nanesis made haste to prepare a meal. McNab’s job was to watch Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey. All ate in silence, watching each other.

Afterwards, leaving Nanesis to nurse her man, Brinklow and McNab took Sojer and Bill into the shack, where the sergeant bade them pick up the dead man and carry him outside, preparatory to burying him. He watched them keenly, hoping, as McNab supposed, that the guilty man might betray himself in the presence of his victim. But both Bill and the Sojer regarded the corpse with the greatest coolness. The latter said:

“Gee, a feller ain’t pretty when he’s dead!”

“You won’t look no better,” retorted Bill.

“I didn’t know a man held so much blood,” said Sojer.

“Aah, Shem would a died of apoplexy if he’d lived,” said Bill.

“By the way,” said Brinklow carelessly, “whose was the automatic in the leather holster hanging by the door?”

The two men looked at each other warily, then at Brinklow. Finally Sojer said, “I don’t rec’lect no holster hangin’ by the door.” And Bill echoed him, “Me neither. Where is it now?”

“I have it,” said Brinklow. “That was the gun this man was shot with.”

“No!” they both said, with such a transparent affectation of surprise, that Brinklow laughed in their faces. “Do you mean to tell me,” he said, “that you don’t know the difference between the report of a pistol and a rifle?”

“Well, I suppose I do,” said Sojer. “But I was so excited I never noticed.”

“Same here,” said Bill. “I was too excited.”

Brinklow singled out the Sojer. “Answer me, you. Are you tryin’ to tell me you didn’t know there was such a weapon in the outfit?”

Sojer hesitated in a painful indecision. Evidently he reflected that such a fact could not be hidden, for he said sullenly, “Sure, I knew we had it. But I ain’t seen it lately.”

“Whose was it?”

“Shem’s.”

“So! The man was shot with his own gun! Was there any other pistol in the outfit?”

“No. We knew it was against the law to carry short guns up in this country, but Shem already had it and didn’t want to sacrifice it. So he put it in the bottom of his dunnage bag when we come in.”

“Well, why did you try to make a mystery of it,” said Brinklow, “unless you used it last night.”

“I swear to God I never had my hands on it!” cried Sojer in a panic. “I was outside! I was outside! How could I get it? Why, I wouldn’t know how to shoot with a pistol anyway.”

“Neither did the murderer,” said Brinklow dryly.

Sojer stared at him in terror, then hastily corrected himself. “Well, of course, I *have* shot with a pistol. I was pretty good at it once. But I ain’t tried it lately.”

Brinklow turned away. “Fetch the body outside,” he said.

Bill Downey was not ill-pleased at his partner’s discomfiture.

A spot was chosen for the grave at the edge of the clearing behind the shack. Spades and picks were fetched from the stable, and a piece of canvas to wrap the body in. The two partners were set to work digging under McNab’s watchful eye, and Brinklow went off to search the ground anew in the light of what he had learned.

McNab stood a few paces off from the men he was guarding, wishing to encourage them to talk to each other. They did talk in whispers, while he watched them narrowly. Sometimes they cursed each other bitterly, then appeared to make it up with an effort. Simple men they seemed, and McNab thought that he could pretty well read what had happened. Sojer had done the deed, and Bill knew it; perhaps Bill had helped him. They had then agreed together to put the crime off on the young lad. But so deep was their distrust of each other, they were continually blocking their own game by quarrelling. Sojer feared that Bill meant to denounce him, while Bill suspected that Sojer might try to lay the murder at his door.

When Brinklow came back, Sojer hailed him with a wheedling grin. “Sarge,” he said, “me and Bill here’s been talkin’ things over. . . .”

"What, again?" said Brinklow.

"We both seen where we made mistakes in what we said. That's nacherl ain't it, in all the excitement? Bill ain't sure now that it was me he seen kneelin' at the window. No more ain't I sure it was Bill I seen there. Seems like it was a smaller man then Bill. And as to our findin' the body, I recollect now that we both arrived there runnin' the same moment simultaneously."

"That's right, sergeant," added Bill.

"Well, maybe you turned around and ran back again," said Brinklow slyly.

The Sojer pulled up short, stared at Brinklow with a falling jaw.

"Climb out of the grave," said Brinklow briskly. "Let's practice a little shooting."

They obeyed with wary, suspicious glances. Brinklow produced the automatic. "This is the gat that silenced *him*," he said with a nod towards the corpse. "I've reloaded it. Bill, see that spruce-tree yonder with the blaze. Fifty feet, an easy shot. Let me see you hit the blaze."

Bill took the gun in an unconcerned way, threw it into position with the assurance of old experience, and pulled the trigger. A black spot appeared in the centre of the blaze.

"Good!" said Brinklow, taking the gun. He handed it to Sojer Carpy. "Let's see what you can do."

Sojer's red face looked bluish in his agitation. He raised the gun, but his hand shook so that he could not take aim. He endeavoured to support it on his left hand. He fired, and the bullet went wide. He fired again, but no second mark appeared on the blaze of the tree. Sojer flung the gun on the ground.

"I'm too nervous!" he cried with tears in his voice. " 'Tain't fair to make me shoot when I'm so nervous. I can shoot all right when I ain't nervous."

Brinklow possessed himself of the gun. "The grave is deep enough," he said curtly. "Lay the body in it and cover it."

The two policemen stood off a little way watching them at their task. The younger man wondered at the indifference with which the two men threw the earth upon the human clay. A man they had slept and eaten with for months past! He said to Brinklow in a low tone:

"It must have been Sojer who did it."

Brinklow grinned at him indulgently, and slowly shook his head.

"But," objected McNab, "according to his own story he ran down the path after Shem. Shem was shot from behind. If Bill Downey came from the

other side it couldn't have been him."

"It wasn't either of them," said Brinklow.

McNab stared. "Then who was it?"

"I don't know," said Brinklow.

The two diggers paused in their work, and it could be seen that they were quarrelling again.

"It wasn't me!" said Sojer.

"It was you!" said Bill.

Sojer flung down his spade with an oath. "I'll prove it to you!" he said, starting away from the grave.

McNab made a move to stop him, but Brinklow laid a hand on his shoulder. "Let them go," he whispered. "The truth may come out."

The two returned to the shack, the policemen following. Sojer was heading for the westerly end, the wall which contained the unbroken window. Rounding the corner he said, pointing:

"That's where I seen him kneeling; under the window there . . . Look!" he added excitedly; "you can still see the marks of his knees!"

The two rounded depressions were clearly visible in the soft earth under the window.

Sojer went up near to the two marks, and plumped down on his knees. Springing up again, he cried challengingly: "Compare them! Compare them! Is them my knees?"

Bill approached on the other side, and likewise pressed his knees into the earth. "Well, they're not mine neither," he said. "Look for yourself!"

To the policemen it was clear without the necessity of taking measurements that the one who had knelt under the window was a smaller man than either Sojer or Bill. McNab's heart sunk.

The blood rushed back to Sojer's face; his eyes glittered with exultation. All of a sudden he and Bill were like blood brothers. Sojer pumped his arm up and down crying:

"It wasn't me and it wasn't you! I ask your pardon for suspicioning you, Bill!" He whirled around on Brinklow. "Are you satisfied of that, sergeant?"

"Perfectly," said Brinklow.

"It was a smaller man than either him or me," Sojer went on examining the marks afresh. "It was that damned cook! I see it all now! Lookin' into the shack from here he could see the gun hangin' by the door. When the girl

and Shem bust out of the shack he run round to the door and took the gun, and went after him and shot him! We got him where we want him now!"

It sounded only too convincing.

"Come on and finish the grave," said Brinklow.

## 7

STONES from the lake shore were piled upon the grave to keep the coyotes from digging. McNab shaped a cross out of two pieces of plank, and lettered the dead man's name and the date of his death upon it. Further particulars were lacking. Meanwhile, as the afternoon wore on, the chill increased, and it became necessary to make the cabin fit for occupancy. The floor was washed and a fire built to sweeten the air. The wounded man was helped to a bed inside, and Nanesis cooked another meal.

Afterwards they sat in front of the fire; Brinklow and Nanesis on the two chairs; McNab sitting on the little table swinging his long legs; Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey squatting on the floor. Even while the sky was full of light outside, the thick-walled cabin was dark, and the fire filled its corners with dancing shadows. The wounded man lay on his bed back in the shadows.

"Well, Nanesis," said Brinklow, "tell us your story. First of all, what brought you here?"

The girl looked at him with a proud, calm air.

"I lookin' for white 'osban'," she said.

Sojer and Bill broke into loud guffaws. McNab scowled at them. He saw nothing comic in it.

Nanesis was disconcerted by their laughter. "Why they laugh?" she asked Brinklow.

"Well, my dear," he said, "amongst white people the men are always supposed to do the hunting. It is not so really, but our girls never admit that they go looking for husbands."

"I not on'erstan' that," said Nanesis with her proud air. "I spik w'at is in my mind."

There was renewed laughter from the two partners.

"Quite right, too," said Brinklow. "And if our friends don't mend their manners they can go outside."

The laughter ceased.

"Always I t'ink I half white," Nanesis resumed in her soft voice. "I know my fat'er call' Dick Folsom. Many tam my mot'er tell me 'bout him.

She say he ver' pretty yong man wit' curly black hair and red face. Mak' moch fun wit' laugh and sing. He ver' kind man. That is w'at I lak, me. Fish-eater treat his woman mean. Dick Folsom is die w'en I a baby, and my mot'er marry Sharley Watusk. Mak' big mistake. Sharley Watusk no good. He mean man. So all tam I live wit' fish-eaters. I not lak those people. They not lak me. Say I t'ink too moch myself. Fish-eater women are slaves. I no slave, me. So there is trouble. Mos'ly wit' Sharley Watusk I got trouble. W'en I little he all tam beat me. W'en I big I tak' the stick and beat him." Nanesis paused. "Always I t'ink I half white," she repeated in a low thrilling voice. "Now I know better."

"What," said Brinklow surprised. "Do you mean you have no white blood?"

"I am all white," she said proudly. "My fat'er white, my mot'er white."

The sergeant looked incredulous.

"Mary Watusk is dead two weeks," Nanesis went on. "Her I call my mot'er. Before she die she tell me she not my mot'er. She tell me when Dick Folsom come in he bring white wife. He goin' Willow Prairie take up land, but his wife is sick. He got to stop beside river, build her shack. I born there. My mot'er die. Dick Folsom go to Fish-eaters village get woman tak' care his little baby. Get Mary Watusk. She tak' care so good he marry her to mak' mot'er his baby. They go to Willow Prairie. In the Spring one year Dick Folsom is freightin' on the lake. Br'ak through wit' his team. Never come up. So my mot'er go back to the Fish-eaters. Got no ot'er place to go. Marry Sharley Watusk. Long tam pass. All forget I not Fish-eater too."

Nanesis sitting straight in her chair with her hands in her lap and her eyes fixed on the fire, told her story in a quiet voice that asked no pity of her hearers. It made young McNab grind his teeth to think of such a woman being condemned to live among the mean Fish-eaters. Of course they hated her. He glanced jealously over at the wounded man. Why did Shepley have to meet her first?

Nanesis resumed. "Wen Mary Watusk die I got moch trouble. All say a girl can't live alone. Many yong men want marry me. I don' know why. I treat them bad. I say go 'way from me you Fish-eaters. But all tam they come around. Then Sharley Watusk he say he goin' marry me. Mak' me mad. Him ogly an' mean an' lame. I say I marry no man I beat wit' a stick. But he speak to head men. Give presents. All say I got marry Sharley Watusk. So I want leave the Fish-eaters. But got no place to go. I am white but don' know how to live lak white people.

“Men fishin’ in the lake see smoke at Cut-Across Point. Paddle over to look. Say four white men is camp there. Comin’ in to tak’ up land. Got wait there till beach ice melt. So I t’ink I go see those white men. There is four to choose. If I lak one maybe I marry him. A farmer needs a wife bad. I am a good worker. I can cook and sew and fish and dress skins for him. Maybe he tak’ me wit’out I know white man’s ways. I am not afraid. I am t’inkin’ all white men is good to their women like my fat’er. I know they are bad to red girls, but I am white!

“So I go at night in my canoe. It is rough, and I am slow crossin’. W’en the light come I am still crossin’ and Sharley Watusk see me, and come after in big canoe wit’ three men. So I paddle into little river and hide my canoe. Hide my canoe so good Sharley not find. Not find me. All tam I am watchin’. When Sharley go back I come to white men. I am a little scare’ then. They so big. I mak’ I can’ spik no Anglays. I want find out ’bout them before give myself away. There is three; Blackbeard, Redface and Yellowface. They smile at me, mak’ moch friend. Jomp aroun’, make’ fool jus’ lak Fish-eaters. I see I can have any one I want, but I not want none. They not true men lak my fat’er. They bad men. Got bad eyes. I sorry I come.

“Bam-bye I see ot’er man, little man, cook. Then I glad I come. When I see him I know he true man to woman lak my fat’er. My heart tell me that. Right away I want him. He not lak those ot’er men, but he not scare of them neit’er, though he is little. He got proud strong eye. They let him alone. I want him, but he not want me at all. Jus’ look at me cool, and go on workin’. Never look again. Mak’ me mad and sorry too. Not know what make wit’ a man lak that. I feel bad. I mak’ out not look at him no more. But my heart is sore.

“Bam-bye I see him lookin’ sideways and I feel glad. He think I not lookin’ and he look hard. I see his heart in his eyes. It is sore lak my heart, and I am glad. I see he is jus’ makin’ out not lak me. I see he want me bad. So I look at him lak I not care, jus’ to mak’ him want me more. I think I mak all right w’en I spik wit’ him. But how can I spik wit’ him? I scare ot’er men kill him w’en they see I choose him.

“They tell you how they curse and fight all afternoon over who shall talk to me. Mak’ me sick. I see white men no better than Fish-eaters. Only bigger. I not care if they kill each ot’er if they leave the cook alone. Soon as it is dark I think I tak’ him away in my canoe. They have no boat to follow. They tell you how they deal the cards for me. Blackbeard win me. Mak’ me laugh inside me. Not much good the cards do him with me, I t’ink. I heard them say the cook’s name; Phil. A little name; easy to say.

“He help me mak’ the supper. The others are cursin’. I watch them close. I say to the cook, not movin’ my lips: ‘I spik Anglays, Phil. He is scare’.’ Bam-bye he say: ‘For God’s sake w’at you doin’ here? Don’ you know your danger?’ I not answer that. Can’t spik right along. Got watch my chance. Bam-bye I say: ‘I white girl, Phil. White fat’er. White mot’er.’ He nod his head. Bam-bye I say: ‘You lak me, Phil?’ He say not’in’. Look at me hard. Squeeze my hand till it mos’ break. I am glad. W’en I get not’er chance I say: ‘I got canoe here.’ He say: ‘Get away while you can.’ I say: ‘I wait till dark. Come wit’ me, Phil.’ He say: ‘You mak’ mistake. I on’y cook here. Got not’in’ my own.’ I say: ‘No matter. We paddle to the settlement. You work for wages. Men are wanted there.’ He say: ‘You sure you not makin’ mistake?’ I say: ‘I know w’at I want w’en I see it!’ He laugh, and fire shoot out his eyes. ‘All right,’ he say. ‘So do I! At dark we’ll beat it!’ ”

Brinklow chuckled. “Swiftest courtship on record!” he said.

“W’at is courtship?” asked Nanesis.

“Never mind now. Go on with your story.”

“Got no more chance to spik,” she said. “They begin watch us. Never fixed what to do or where to meet at dark. They made me sit to eat with them. Phil he eat alone. When they want Phil go out, he mad. He curse them. He fight all three. I try tell him wit’ my eyes all is right, I will get out. But he not see. They throw him out. I not know where he go then. After that Redface mak’ a fight, and they got throw him out. Then Blackbeard and me is alone in the shack. He been drinkin’ some. I not moch scare. I know w’at to do.”

Young McNab listened to this story with stretched ears. What the girl’s brief bare sentences omitted his imagination could supply. He pictured the scene in the low dark cabin lighted by a single candle on the table, the fire having almost burned out. The supper dishes had been left on the hearth unwashed. He could see the gross bearded face of Shem Packer leering at the girl and he could see the grave, wary girl who was keeping her wits about her.

“Blackbeard, he spik me ver’ friendly,” she went on. “Say he goin’ marry me. Say he goin’ leave his pardners when he get to Settlement and we set up for ourselves. Tell me all he got; wagon and many horses; moch money. Say we rich for that country. Long tam he talk. I say not’in’, me. Jus’ listen. Always I am watchin’ the window for dark to come. Blackbeard tell me what good man he is. Say he ver’ kind man to women. I t’ink he lie. His eye is not true. But I friendly too. Not want any trouble till dark come. He want hold my hand. I let him. But no more.

"Bam-bye he want me say somet'in'. He say w'at you say marry me, Nanesis. I say got t'ink it over. That mak' him little mad. Talk moch and curse. Say I never get such good chance as him. Want me to say why I not marry him. Always I say got to t'ink it over. He say how long you want t'ink it over. I say I tell him to-morrow mornin'. He get more mad. Talk bad to me. It is gettin' pretty dark now, so I say got to go now. He say where you goin' to-night? I say I camp by myself. He curse and say: 'No you don't! You don't leave this shack till you promise marry me!' I say again got t'ink it over.

"He run bar the door. He try catch me. I blow out candle and t'row in fire where he can't get it again. Then I pick up chair, br'ak window. He t'ink I goin' out that way, so he run there. I run soft back to the door and unbar it. I run out. I call: 'Phil! Phil! Phil!' He is not there. I run for the little river. Blackbeard run after. He is close be'in' me. There is a shot. He fall. More shots."

Nanesis lowered her head.

Brinklow gave her time to recover herself.

"Go on," he said kindly.

"I hear somebody runnin' to me from the river," said Nanesis. "I not know if it is Phil, so I hide be'in' tree. It is Yellowface run by me. I not know where find Phil. I scare' to call him again. Feel moch bad. Walk among trees. Not know where I goin'. Then I see a man standin' so quiet like a shadow in the dark. Wah! I am lak wood. I t'ink I weh-ti-go—w'at you say, go crazy. But it is Phil. Oh! I so glad. I weak lak a rabbit. I am fallin' down, but he hold me."

Nanesis sighed deeply and went on: "You know what happen after that. My canoe is hide in deep grass of little prairie. We go there ver' soft. We put it in the river and go down. In the shallow place Redface and Yellowface jomp out. Redface fire his gun. We got run away and leave canoe. We hear them smashin' it. We go back. Hide in tall grass till the light begin to come. Catch horses and ride up little river. I goin' to the Fish-eaters at the Narrows. Trade horses for canoe and grub, and paddle to Settlement. But Redface and Yellowface was be'in' us. Shoot one horse. Shoot ot'er horse. Shoot Phil. Then you come."

The silence that followed was broken by Sojer Carpy. "What'd I tell you?" he cried. "Cookee was right on the spot! It was him that shot Shem Packer!"

All the evidence pointed that way. I wouldn't have been sorry to shoot him myself, thought McNab.

"Phil not shoot Blackbeard," said Nanesis with quiet confidence.

"How do you know that?" demanded Sojer.

"He tell me," she said proudly.

Sojer and Bill looked at each other and burst into a guffaw. McNab felt his neck swell under the collar of his tunic, but it was not his place to speak in the presence of his superior. As it proved, Nanesis could speak for herself.

She stood up, quivering with indignation.

"Liars!" she said, not loud. "They t'ink all ot'er men liars too!"

Sojer and Bill laughed louder than before, but there was little heart in it. She had penetrated their thick hides.

Brinklow rose. "Time to turn in," he said. "We'll go into this in the morning."

## 8

THE wounded man was lying at one end of the shack, and Nanesis made up her bed near, where she could tend him during the night. The rest lay at the other end of the room. Brinklow sat up to watch by the fire. A store of wood had been fetched in, sufficient to keep it going.

At two o'clock Brinklow awoke McNab to stand watch. "Keep the fire up," he said, "so they can't turn a trick on you in the dark. Remember the dugout is lying on the shore. If they got that we'd be up against it."

He lay down to sleep, while McNab sat himself in front of the fire, and lit his pipe. Sojer and Bill were making loud music on the nasal trumpet. McNab did not feel sleepy. He had plenty to think about. A whole page of life had been unrolled for him.

Later when he put fresh wood on the fire, the mounting flames lighted up Nanesis's face. She lay with her hands pressed together under her head for a pillow. Her curled black lashes lay on her pale cheeks like a child's.

After a while the wounded man stirred and groaned. She was up and kneeling beside his bed without having made a sound. He asked for water. From the pail which stood outside the door she fetched it in a tin cup, and partly raised him while she put it to his lips. When she put him down again she kissed his forehead. They murmured together. McNab wondered uncomfortably if, as a good policeman he ought to insist on hearing what they were saying. The wounded man fell asleep again, holding her hand between his. For a long time Nanesis remained kneeling on the hard floor gazing at him with the look that no woman had as yet given to McNab.

Bye and bye she gently detached her hand and stood up. As she returned towards her own bed, she looked at McNab in the proud and guarded fashion that was habitual with her. McNab grinned at her and she instantly smiled back. It was like the sun breaking through.

"I am your friend," said McNab.

"I glad," she said simply. "Got no friend, me, but Phil."

"Brinklow is your friend," he said.

She shook her head, smiling slightly. "Brinklow ver' good man," she said. "But he all for police. Not friend wit' anybody."

This was unanswerable.

Nanesis seemed to think better of her intention of returning to bed. To McNab's delight she sat down on the floor with her back against the arch of the fireplace, her knees folded under her. Thus she was facing him. She studied the young man's face like a grave child. This open steady look gave him pleasure and at the same time made him uneasy.

"Why you friends wit' me?" she asked.

It was on his tongue's tip to say: Because you are so beautiful! But he thought she would not like it, and said instead: "Because you've had a hard time."

She shrugged slightly. "Always I 'ave hard tam," she said. "Not know not'in' else. I use to it."

"Maybe there's a better time coming now," said McNab with more assurance than he felt.

A look of sadness came into her face. "Maybe," she said softly. "I glad if it come. But I not expect good tam come to me."

She knows in her heart that Phil did it, thought McNab; though she would never admit it. It gave him a wrench. He said: "Well, life is hard."

"Life?" she said. "I not on'erstan'."

"I mean everybody has a hard time," he said, "if they've got feelings."

"Yes," said Nanesis, with her hands in her lap.

After a moment's silence she said wistfully: "Please tell me 'bout white people, McNab. Always I want know 'bout white people. How they live and all."

"Well, that's a pretty big order," he said.

"I want know 'bout white girls," she added lower. "How they mak' nice."

“Huh!” he said in his enthusiasm. “I never knew one outside that could touch you! You’ve got nothing to learn from them.”

“I got everyt’in’ to learn,” she said sadly.

“Well, what do girls learn outside?” he asked. “How to talk about nothing at all; how to rig themselves up like painted savages; how to fool men!”

“Not all girls,” she said with a shocked air.

“Oh, not all I suppose,” he said, “but that’s the general impression you get.”

“I t’ink some girl treat you mean, McNab,” she said.

He laughed. “No. None ever took any notice of me.”

She glanced over at the sleeping Phil. “I want learn all nice ways,” she murmured.

“A good heart is more important than good manners,” said McNab.

“Oh, sure!” she said, “but if you goin’ live wit’ a man you got to please him wit’ the nice ways he has known.”

“You have them already,” said McNab. “You’ve got as good manners by nature as any woman I’ve ever seen. With your voice and bearing, your look of being able to keep things to yourself when need be—a duchess couldn’t get away with it any better.”

She wagged her hand to signify that this was mere foolishness. “I ignorant girl,” she said. “I not want shame my ’osban’.”

If it was me, thought McNab, I’d be proud of her. “Can you read?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “I go to school at mission two year. I read ver’ good. But in a tepee is no books.”

“I’ll get books in for you,” McNab said eagerly “. . . I mean Phil and all of us will,” he amended with a glance at the sleeping man. “You can read as much as you want.”

“That will be nice,” she said. “I wish I got nice white woman talk to me.”

“Well, at the Settlement there’s Mrs. Braithwaite the inspector’s wife,” he said. “She’s a lady, and a good sport too. Treats us fellows fine! We call her the Old Woman, and she don’t mind.”

“I t’ink Mis’ Brait’waite not lak me ver’ moch,” said Nanesis. “When I go to Settlement she look cross at me.”

"I expect she thought you were too pretty to be honest," said McNab. "However, I'll put that right. I'll tell her about you."

Nanesis smiled at him like a true daughter of Eve. "You McNab!" she said, "woman never goin' b'lieve what man say 'bout 'not'er woman."

You darling! he thought. If you were only mine, I would know how to appreciate you. He glanced at the sleeping man. I hope to God he's got sense enough to.

Nanesis got up sedately. "Good-night, McNab," she said in the soft voice that played on his heartstrings. "We mak' good talk."

He jumped up offering her his hand. Nanesis, searching his eyes saw that she could trust him, and laid her hand confidingly in his. He pressed it; she turned away and lay down on her hay bed, turning her back to him. McNab refilled his pipe.

## 9

IN the morning the wounded man was much better. He was a wilful patient, and insisted on getting up to breakfast with the rest. After eating, they gathered outside the door of the shack in the sunshine, and the informal investigation was picked up at the point where it had been dropped the day before. Phil Shepley with his arm in a sling, sat on the bench, with Nanesis beside him. Sergeant Brinklow sat on an upended chopping block in front of them; Constable McNab leaned against the wall of the shack with folded arms, Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey squatted on their heels on the ground, taking everything in.

"Phil, do you feel strong enough to talk?" asked Brinklow.

"Certainly," was the curt reply. Pain made him look more tight-lipped than ever.

McNab looking at his pale, drawn face was forced to admit that he was a handsome and resolute lad. He doubtless knew they all believed him to have killed Shem Packer, and it was that which made him defiant.

"Well, wait a minute," said Brinklow, "I want to ask Nanesis a question." Sitting on his log, he paused, and looked around on the ground for a stick to whittle. This was to put the witnesses at their ease—and likewise off their guard. "Nanesis," he resumed, "when you were in the shack with Shem night before last you seem to have taken notice of everything. Did you see the pistol holster hangin' on the wall beside the door?"

"Yes I see it."

"Was the gun in it?"

"Yes."

"Can you swear that the gun was in it when you ran out of the shack?"

"Yes. Nobody tak' it out."

"Good!" said Brinklow. "That narrows it down. If the gun was there when you and Shem ran out, it must have been snatched up the next instant. It is therefore certain that Shem was shot by the man who was kneeling outside the shack, looking in the window."

Brinklow, as he said this, allowed his eyes to stray as if by accident to Phil Shepley's face; that, however, bore a look of perfect indifference. Sojer and Bill made no secret of their pleasure at this turn.

Brinklow resumed his whittling. "Phil," he asked coolly, "did you shoot Shem Packer?"

"No," was the equally cool reply.

Exclamations of disbelief were heard from the two men on the ground. Phil flashed a fiery look at them. "If I had, I wouldn't hesitate to own it. I'd consider it a deed well done."

"Easy," said Brinklow. "Let me warn you as a friend not to take that line. You must consider that the girl came here of her own free will, and practically offered herself as a wife to these white men. It does not appear that Shem harmed her in any way, and merely because his wooing was a little rough would be no reason for killing the man."

Phil shut his mouth tightly.

"By the way," said Brinklow carelessly, "Phil Shepley is not your right name, is it?"

"No," was the scowling reply. "How the devil did you know that?"

"Well, the initials on the stock of your gun are P.H.," said the sergeant. "What *is* your name?"

"I won't tell you," said Phil.

Nanesis with a face full of trouble, leaned and whispered in Phil's ear.

"Cut that out," said Brinklow. "You must not speak to him, or you cannot sit there."

Nanesis' eyes filled with tears. "I jus' tell him please not spik so sharp to you," she faltered. "Please not mak' you mad."

Brinklow cleared his throat. "Hem . . . Your real name is nothing to me," he went on. "You changed it of course before this happened. But if there is an official investigation it will have to come out."

Phil softened his defiant air. McNab, looking down on them, could see that Nanesis' and Phil's hands were tightly clasped between them on the bench. Phil said:

"I'd like to tell you why I changed my name so you can see there was nothing crooked in it."

"Go ahead," said Brinklow.

"It was for family reasons," said Phil. "My father and mother are dead. I have three brothers all prosperous business men, all older than me. In fact they have sons as old as me. Well, my brothers were all right to me, but their wives were down on me. Looked on me as standing in the light of their own sons. I was the queer dick of the bunch. I hated business. I wanted to live a natural man's life and they wouldn't let me. Looked on it as something disgraceful. I couldn't help the way I was. I was passed on from one family to another and put in my brothers' different businesses without making good anywhere, and at last I quit. I sold all my little personal truck except my gun and raised enough to pay my fare West. And that's why I changed my name. I'll never go back to the old one. I stand or fall by Phil Shepley now."

Brinklow's eyes gleamed more kindly on the young man. He said; "Well, go right ahead now you're started. Tell how you met these men, and all."

"Not much to tell," said Phil. "I was broke by the time I got to Prince George. I found you couldn't get into this country without an expensive outfit. Prince George was full of bums like me and you couldn't get a job there. I was desperate when these fellows picked me up. I didn't like them, but I took the job of cooking for them. Thought I could make out on my own once I got into the country.

"As to what happened day before yesterday," he went on, "I understand that Nanesis has told you. When she turned up here I was a blind fool. She was good-looking enough to drive any man crazy. But I suspected her of being crooked. My life in civilisation had taught me to suspect everybody. What's the use of my going on if you've already heard the story. . . . Better ask me what you want to know."

"You and Nanesis came to a sort of understanding?" suggested Brinklow.

"Yes."

"Well, if you had an understanding why did you put up a fight when they told you to leave the cabin?"

"I couldn't help myself," said Phil quickly. "I couldn't go out and leave her alone with that brute, Shem Packer. Flesh and blood couldn't stand for it . . . Besides, I thought when I was putting up a fight, it would give her a

chance to run out. But she wouldn't go. That made me so sore I couldn't see straight. I gave her up then."

Nanesis put in beseechingly: "It was still day outside. They three against him. I know they kill him."

"Oh, well, I know now that I was a fool," muttered Phil.

"What did you do when you went out?" prompted Brinklow.

"I got my gun out of the stable where I had hid it."

"I must warn you," said Brinklow, "that anything you say can be used against you."

"I've got nothing to hide," said Phil.

"Then what did you do?"

"I went down the path to the little river. Nanesis had told me she had a canoe, and I thought if she was on the square, that was where she'd come."

"You returned to the shack?"

"I did not. I never returned to the shack, once I left it."

"But you have admitted you were crazy about the girl. Do you mean to tell me you never gave any more thought to what was happening to her? That you did not try to see what was happening?"

"I did not. I gave her up. I thought she didn't mean what she said about going with me. I thought she was staying with Shem of her own free choice."

"Hm," said Brinklow. Bill and Sojer hooted, but he quickly shut them up. "Well, go on," he said to Phil.

"After I had been by the waterside for a little while I heard somebody coming down the path. It was a heavy step so I knew it wasn't Nanesis. I got out of the way a little. It was Bill Downey. I took care not to let him see me. I couldn't rest anywhere. I started back along the path. I was still sore against Nanesis, but I couldn't help myself."

"So you did return to the shack?"

"I did not. I was only half-way there when I heard the window crash out. I heard Nanesis run out calling for me, and I heard Shem after her. Well she was running straight towards me, so I just stepped back between two trees; I unslung my gun and went down on one knee ready to get him when he ran by me . . ." Phil paused.

"Well?" said Brinklow.

"He was shot before he got to me," said Phil.

Sojer Carpy laughed loudly. “Huh! that’s an old stall! Makin’ out you was ready to shoot him, but somebody saved you the trouble.”

“The magazine of my gun is still full,” cried Phil. “I can account for every time I fired it since we left Prince George.”

“It’s admitted he wasn’t shot with your gun,” said Brinklow.

“Well, I had no other weapon.”

“You might have picked one up.”

Phil stared at him, taken aback.

“Go on,” said Brinklow.

“That’s about all,” said Phil, pulling himself together. “Nanesis had disappeared. I heard Bill Downey coming along the path behind me, and another, Sojer I suppose, running from the other direction . . .”

“There you have it,” interrupted Sojer. “He admits that neither Bill nor me was on the spot. Well, if it wasn’t us it must have been him.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” drawled Brinklow. “You might have sneaked away soft, then run back again.”

Sojer subsided.

“Go on,” said Brinklow to Phil.

“I was looking for Nanesis,” said the young man. “I knew she was right close at hand, but I didn’t dare speak her name. Then I ran into her.” He sighed with remembered relief. “You know what happened after that.”

“Put him to the test!” cried Sojer Carpy. “Take the print of his knees like you done to me and Bill yesterday.”

Brinklow stood up. His face was grim. “All right,” he said. “Come ahead.”

All followed him around the corner of the shack, Phil’s face showing a wary scowl. There were the prints of the three pairs of knees at the base of the wall. They lined up looking at them. The ground was now too hard to take an imprint, and Brinklow sent Bill back for a pail of water. It was splashed on the ground. Close to the house there was a little depression which held the water from running away. While they were waiting for it to soak in, Brinklow said suddenly to Phil:

“You ain’t worn a hat since I first saw you. Where’s your hat?”

“I lost that weeks ago,” was the answer. “Blew into an airhole in the big river and was carried under the ice. Since then I have done without one. I got plenty of hair.”

Brinklow turned to Sojer Carpy. “What made you say so positive that it was Bill Downey you saw kneeling here night before last.”

“Well, I just had words with Bill,” said Sojer. “I was suspicious he was up to somethin’. He was on my mind like.”

Sojer when he said this puffed out his cheeks a little, and looked injured and honest. Picture of a liar if I ever saw one, thought McNab. But I suppose even a liar’s got to tell the truth occasionally.

“The man you saw kneelin’ here had a hat on,” suggested Brinklow carelessly.

“He didn’t neither,” said Sojer loudly. “His head was bare.”

“Then why didn’t you think of Phil right away?”

“Bill was on my mind I tell you,” said Sojer. “I thought he’d taken off his hat so it wouldn’t show through the glass.”

“Did you see his hat in his hand, or on the ground.”

“No. Couldn’t see much of anythin’ with him kneelin’ in the dark against the wall.”

Brinklow shrugged. “Kneel down in the soft spot,” he said to Phil.

The young man with a glance of defiance all around, obeyed.

“Get up,” said Brinklow.

When he obeyed, five heads eagerly thrust forward to look. Phil himself paid no attention to his own prints. To the unaided eye those prints certainly looked the same as the pair immediately under the window.

“It’s him!” cried Sojer gleefully.

“Shut up!” said Brinklow.

Sojer slunk behind his partner. Brinklow cut a straight wand, and peeled it, while the others looked on in strained suspense. He squatted down and took careful measurements of the prints, marking his wand with a pencil. He then compared his measurements with the original prints under the window. Finally he got up.

“The measurements are the same,” he said grimly.

Nanesis flung a quick arm around Phil, and her agonised eyes searched his face, Phil made his face wooden. Sojer and Bill shouted and clapped each other on the back.

“What did I tell you,” cried Sojer.

THE whole party returned to the front of the shack. Brinklow dropped on his block, and picking up another stick, started to whittle it. At this moment the policeman was submerged in the man; there was no mask on the kindly face. He was deeply troubled. The others watched him. Phil and Nanesis were pressed close together. However defiant he looked, it was clear that Phil was frightened. But he thought of Nanesis; patted her shoulder; whispered reassuringly in her ear. The conflict of feelings in his face made him look a mere boy. A pair of kids! thought McNab, watching them.

Finally Nanesis could stand the suspense no longer. "Brinklow, w'at you goin' do?" she asked, clasping her hands together.

The sergeant frowned at his stick. "Sorry, Nanesis. Got no choice. Got to take him up to the Settlement under arrest."

"Arres'! Arres'!" She could not speak above a husky whisper. "No, Brinklow, no! You mak' big mistake. He didn't do it, Brinklow. No! No! . . . I lie to you before, Brinklow. *I* done it!" She beat her clenched hands against her breast. "I! I! I!"

Brinklow looked up at her keenly.

"I! I! I!" Nanesis continued to cry.

Phil flung an arm round Nanesis. "She's lying," he cried with a strange exultation in his voice. "Any fool could see she was lying to save me!"

Nanesis clapped a hand over his mouth. "No, Phil! Be quiet. Let me tell all!"

"Lying," cried Phil from behind her hand.

"Let her tell her story," commanded Brinklow. "I'll be the judge of that."

Phil let her speak, holding her within his arm and looking down at her with joy, pride, and a kind of helpless anger all showing in his face.

Nanesis hesitated before she began to speak, and seemed to weigh every word. "I not tell you all what happen in shack. Blackbeard is ac' ver' bad to me. T'row me on the floor. I t'ink he goin' kill me. So I try get out. While I am talkin' wit' Blackbeard I see that gun hangin' by door. I remember that. An' w'en I run out I snatch it up. I run for river. I stop be'in' tree. When Blackbeard run by I shoot him. Wah! he fall down. I shoot, shoot, shoot, shoot! Not know w'at I doin' then!"

The girl's story had a convincing ring. Brinklow and McNab scowled as they listened. To put Nanesis under arrest was a job no man would relish. Phil, when he saw that her story was gaining credence dropped his arm from around her, and glowered at her with a real anger.

"It's all *lies*!" he said furiously.

“Be quiet,” said Brinklow. “Nanesis,” he said to the girl, “why didn’t you tell me before that Shem hurt you?”

“I not want tell that,” she said. It was the only answer she would give.

Brinklow tried another approach. “Did you shoot him from behind the tree?”

Nanesis considered before she answered. “No, I come out in path be’in’ him and shoot.”

“What did you do with the pistol?”

“Throw away.”

“Where?”

Again Nanesis took thought before she answered. “I stan’ in path,” she said slowly. “I face to little river. Pis’ol in right han’. Throw away so.” She illustrated.

Brinklow grunted disgustedly. She had given the right answer. “Then what did you do?” he asked.

“Hear somebody comin’,” she said; “this way, that way. Hide be’in’ tree. Watch for Phil. But it is Yellowface come, and Redface. So I go way ver’ sof’. Meet Phil.”

Brinklow took her over the scene again and again, seeking to trip her, but she was ready for him at every turn. Finally he produced the pistol. “Is that the gun you did it with?” he asked.

“Look lak’,” said Nanesis.

“Had you ever seen such a gun before?”

“No.”

“Then how did you know how to use it?”

“Not’in’ to know,” said Nanesis. “Point; pull trigger; bang. Ev’y tam pull trigger, bang. It is easy gun to shoot.”

At Brinklow’s command she acted out the scene. The girl who had been so agitated when Phil’s safety was in question, showed not a tremor now. She showed them how she had stepped out from the tree and shot Shem in the back of the head, the gun almost touching him; how he had dropped, and she had shot wildly in every direction looking for his body in the dark.

Brinklow flung up his hands. McNab judged from his exasperated look that he did not believe the girl’s story, but he was unable to find a hole in it.

Nanesis was now in a strange, quiet state of satisfaction. Phil kept saying helplessly:

“She’s lying! She’s lying!”

Nanesis said eagerly: “Brinklow, get pen and paper. Write all down. I sign it.”

“A confession!” cried Phil. “No, by God! I won’t stand for that! She didn’t do this thing!”

“How do you know?” asked Brinklow mildly.

“Because I did it myself.”

“Ha! that’s more like it,” said Brinklow.

Nanesis flew to Phil. “No! No! Phil,” she cried. Over her shoulder she said to Brinklow: “He jus’ lyin’ to save me!” To Phil she went on in a desperate voice. “Let be! Let be! Blackbeard hurt me. I t’ink he goin’ kill me. I got right kill him. Police not do not’in’ to me!”

“You should thought of that in the beginning, my girl,” said Brinklow.

Phil roughly freed himself from her embrace. “She is lying,” he said. “I killed him. Sure I went back to the shack. What man wouldn’t? I watched through the window. I spotted the gun hanging by the door. When they ran out, I ran around and got it, and followed. I overtook Shem. He was no runner. I shot him from behind.”

Nanesis’ face was distorted with anguish. “What!” she sneered. “You tell these men you smell ’roun’ shack lak a coyote! You listen and peek lak a woman! They not believe you!”

Phil’s face flushed. “It’s the truth.”

She turned to Brinklow. “You not believe that?”

The sergeant said nothing.

“I shoot Blackbeard!” cried Nanesis. “Always I will say that. I will write it. I sign my name. You can’t punish him then.”

Brinklow scratched his head. Her woman’s wit had led her straight to the weak point of his case. If two people insisted on confessing to this crime, it would be impossible to convict either of them. He tried to quiet her. “Wait a minute. Wait a minute! Let me get to the bottom of this.”

Phil broke in. “She is lying! Anybody could see it! She never thought of all this until now. Why we talked about the killing all night long. It was a mystery to her then.”

“And you! And you!” cried Nanesis whirling on him. “You talk to me all night. You not know who did it.”

“Oh, I lied to you,” said Phil. “A man has to learn to lie young.”

With a great effort Nanesis controlled herself. “Listen, Brinklow. I be quiet now. I prove to you I not lyin’. Listen. W’en Yellowface and Redface come to the dead man I sneak away sof’ be’in’ the trees. I turn to river, go

that way. Soon I meet Phil comin'. Well if Phil in front of dead man he can't shoot him be'in'."

The faces of all the men fell. Brinklow rubbed his chin. Nanesis turned a hard, triumphant face on Phil.

"Now, who's lyin'?"

To McNab it was like a bad dream; the lovers turning hard faces on each other, each trying to make the other out a liar—for love's sake.

Phil, stumped for a moment, scowled at Nanesis. Then his face lighted up wickedly. "You're lying," he said. "If it was you shot Shem Packer, what about the man who knelt outside the window, looking in?"

Nanesis was not to be caught napping. "Wasn't no man," she said. "Was me kneel down there."

"You? When?" demanded Brinklow.

"Long before that," she answered. "At noon spell w'en I come here. I kneel down, peek through window. Want see those white men before show myself."

"Sojer and Bill saw a man kneeling there."

"They liars. Say this thing, say that thing."

The men were silenced. They scowled at the girl. Finally Phil said disgustedly:

"She's lying still. The measurements fit *my* knees. I'm bigger than she is."

"Women got bigger knees than men," retorted Nanesis. "Ev'body know that. Come on. I kneel down. Measure me, too."

Nobody cared to take up the challenge. She had established her point. Phil turned to her in a fury.

"You fool!" he cried. "This does no good. The truth is bound to come out!"

"This is the truth!" she cried, outshouting him. "I say it till I die!"

Brinklow wagged his hands. "Cut it out!" he commanded. "This is too much for me. I'm goin' to take you both to headquarters. You can thrash it out before the inspector. Go fetch your beds and we'll start."

Terror struck through both the man and the girl on hearing this threat, but it did not cool their anger. They went into the shack bearing themselves towards each other like enemies.

Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey sat on the ground puzzled by this unexpected outcome. They glanced at each other stupidly, not knowing what

to say. To them Brinklow said:

"You fellows will be wanted as witnesses of course, but my dugout will only carry four. I'll send back for you."

Inside the shack Phil and Nanesis could be heard furiously quarrelling.

"Come out!" cried Brinklow. "We'll be startin' now!"

## 11

A FEW minutes later the whole party was gathered at the landing-place on the shore of the little river. Brinklow and McNab having run the long, slender dugout into the water, were busy stowing bedding and grub amidships, while the other four sat on top of the low bank watching them. Nanesis and Phil kept as far as possible from each other.

It was a pretty spot. The stream of clear, brown water rippled down over a stony bed to the right, and fell into a deep round pool which made a natural embarking place. On the hither side the dark spruces frowned over the water, but across the pool there was a break with a little glade of vivid grass and a clump of graceful birches with tiny green spangles on their twigs.

The beach of the lake was piled to a height of ten or twelve feet with great broken cakes of ice now half rotted by the spring sun. The stream found its way out through a little canyon in the ice, which had a bend in the middle. Consequently the people on shore had no warning of a coming visitor until a graceful little bark canoe poked its nose around the ice. It contained a single paddler. At sight of the redcoats, with a backhand drive of his paddle, he sent his light craft back out of sight again. But too late.

"Hey!" cried Brinklow. "Come back, you, whoever you are."

Finding that he had been seen, the red man paddled into sight again, his face wearing the walled, sullen look characteristic of his race in the presence of white men. He was an ugly specimen, with a mean, unwholesome face and close-set eyes. Though the day was warm for that season, he still wore his dingy blanket capote. He wore the broad brimmed hat of the country and under it the stringy black hair hanging to his shoulders, was bound by a soiled red fillet. His age might have been anything between thirty-five and fifty-five.

Brinklow knew him. "How are you, Sharley Watusk," he said coolly. "Come ashore."

Nanesis' stepfather! McNab could scarcely credit it. He glanced at the girl. She looked at the newcomer with cold scorn, and turned away her head

again. Sharley Watusk did not immediately obey the sergeant's invitation, but rested on his paddle in the pool, with the bow of his canoe touching the mud. The featherweight craft was as graceful and shapely as a natural object. The paddler's shallow eyes travelled from face to face.

"Feel bad," Sharley Watusk said to Brinklow. "Stomach bad," he added laying his hand there.

Brinklow paid no attention to this. "Come ashore," he repeated.

Sharley Watusk drove his canoe farther into the mud, and stepping out, pulled it up. He then went from one to another of the party, holding out his hand and saying, "How," gravely, according to the custom of the country. Nanesis ignored the extended hand, and he passed on to Phil. Phil took his hand with an angry stare.

Sharley Watusk squatted down under the bank. Brinklow, having finished loading the dugout stepped ashore, and drawing it up alongside the bark canoe, sat on the prow and pulled out his pipe. McNab squatted on his heels alongside Brinklow. The other four were ranged along the edge of the low bank above them.

"You well?" asked Sharley Watusk politely.

"Fine!" said Brinklow. "How's the folks across the lake?"

"All well. Ice gone there. Fishin' good."

"Glad to hear it," said Brinklow.

A silence followed. McNab knew that Brinklow's first maxim in dealing with the natives, was to make the red man speak first. Well, that was the red man's maxim too, and there was a kind of silent duel between the two. Brinklow scored, for Sharley Watusk gave way first. McNab saw the glitter of curiosity in his eyes.

"What you doin' here?" he asked.

"Just makin' my regular patrol. This is McNab the new policeman."

Another silence followed. Brinklow smoked unconcernedly. The Indian looked like a bundle of dirty clothes on the shore, only his shallow, bright eyes alive. Again Brinklow scored.

"Where is ot'er white man?" asked Sharley Watusk.

"The other white man?" echoed Brinklow, to draw him out.

"When I come here two sleeps ago," said Sharley Watusk, "wit' Mukasis, Tom Mistatim and Benoosis, there is four white men here. Where is big man wit' beard?"

"Gone away," said Brinklow, regarding the bowl of his pipe.

"Where gone?"

“Gone West,” said Brinklow grimly. The red man could not know the meaning of this.

Another silence; Brinklow busy with his pipe, and Sharley Watusk looking at nothing at all; they contended against each other with their indifference. The others, aware of the hidden forces, looked on in silent attention. This time Brinklow spoke.

“What you come over here for, Sharley Watusk?”

“Come get my girl,” said the red man, with a jerk of his head towards Nanesis.

“Oh, your girl,” said Brinklow.

“Nanesis my girl,” said Sharley Watusk. “I raise her. Now I goin’ marry her.”

McNab, glancing at Phil, saw his face flush, but he kept his mouth shut. McNab sympathised with him entirely.

“She says she’s white,” remarked Brinklow in that mild way of his which was so deceptive.

“She lyin’,” said Sharley Watusk coolly. “On’y half white, her. Her mot’er is Mary Watusk my wife. Mary Watusk dead now. I marry Nanesis.”

“Well, her parentage can easily be proved one way or t’other,” said Brinklow. “What does she say about this marriage?”

“Got not’in’ to say. I raise her. She got marry me now. Head men say she got marry me. All is fix’ for marry.”

Brinklow said nothing.

After a long silence Sharley Watusk without moving, said with his bright inhuman eyes fixed on the sergeant’s face. “I tak’ her now.”

Brinklow slowly shook his head.

“What for no?” asked the Indian.

“Sorry she’s got a date with me up at the Settlement.”

“What you mean?”

Brinklow said: “She’s wanted for killing the blackbearded one.”

Sharley Watusk neither moved, nor did any muscle on his face change. McNab wondered at such self control. It is the red man’s last virtue. “Wah!” he said calmly. “Got any proof?”

“She has confessed it.”

Sharley Watusk half turned, looked at Nanesis, said nothing.

Brinklow, to provoke some response from him, added: “The young fellow yonder, he says he did it. So I don’t know what to think.”

Sharley Watusk said not a word. Perhaps there was only confusion behind his red mask. A lone Indian there in a crowd of powerful white men, he was at a terrible disadvantage. McNab felt a kind of pity for him. The beggar is game, he thought.

"So I'm takin' them both up to the Settlement," Brinklow went on.

"I go too," said Sharley Watusk calmly.

Brinklow, blowing smoke, allowed this proposal to pass without comment. Not so Nanesis. The girl slipped down from the bank with burning eyes.

"Go!" she cried, pointing. "Go back to the tepee! What you got do wit' white people, Fish-eater? Go get Fish-eater wife! I white girl. Not for you. I go wit' white people. Maybe the police hang me. All right. I sooner hang than be Fish-eater's wife!"

The red man's imperturbability broke up at last. Under her scorn he cringed and slunk towards his canoe without a word. Brinklow who had been studying hard for some minutes past, stood up and stopped him with a gesture.

"Pull up your canoe," he said. "Turn it over."

"What for that?" snarled the Indian.

"Pull it up!" rasped Brinklow in his parade ground voice.

Sharley Watusk obeyed, and removing his meagre outfit, turned the canoe over. Brinklow studied the bottom of it, and then glanced across the pool at the trunks of the birch trees. The others, sensible that a new crisis had arisen, watched attentively.

"Nanesis," said the sergeant carelessly, "when you came over here you broke your canoe?"

Nanesis considered warily. Finally she said; "Yes. How you know that?"

Brinklow pointed to the birch trees where all could see that two patches of bark had lately been cut from the trunks.

"I break canoe on ice," said Nanesis. "I men' it after Sharley Watusk go back."

"How many pieces of bark did you cut?"

"One piece."

"Which of those two pieces did you cut?"

Nanesis pointed to the tree which was farther up stream.

"You are sure of that?"

"I sure. Ot'er piece not cut then."

“Good!” said Brinklow. He turned to the Indian. “So you come back that night alone,” he said.

Sharley Watusk became suddenly voluble. “What for you say t’at?” he asked with much play of his hands. “N’moya. N’moya. Not come back! On’y been here once before wit’ Mukasis, Tom Mistatim, Benoosis . . .”

“Oh, cut them out,” said Brinklow wagging his hand. “Look!” He pointed to a new patch on the bottom of the canoe and then to the lower tree across the pool. All eyes followed the direction of his finger. “That patch came from that tree. My eye tells me that, but if you want further proof we’ll go across and measure it.”

The Indian shrugged without replying.

“Furthermore,” Brinklow went on, “that cut place is lighter in colour than the patch Nanesis cut. It has been exposed to the air for a shorter time. That’s how I know you came back that night . . . What have you got to say about it?”

Sharley Watusk considered, scowling. Brinklow gave him his time. The sergeant’s pipe had gone out, and he relighted it. Finally the Indian said with a stoical air:

“All right. It is true. I come back alone. Want get my girl.”

“Good!” said Brinklow. “Now we’re making progress. Why did you lie to me?”

Again the Indian debated with himself before answering. His face was perfectly wooden. The onlookers slipped down from the bank, and came closer to hear. Sharley Watusk looked from face to face. At last he said:

“I tell you why I lie. I see murder done. I scare’. Poor red man not want trouble wit’ police.”

The listeners caught their breath.

“Who did the murder?” asked Brinklow.

Sharley Watusk’s accusatory finger shot out towards Phil. “Him!” he said. “The cook!”

A mutter of satisfaction broke from Sojer and from Bill. Phil received the charge with a hard smile. Nanesis cried out:

“No! No! He lyin’. He lyin’ for try to get me!”

“Be quiet!” said Brinklow. “Let him tell his story.”

BRINKLOW waved the others back. “Give him room!” he said. He resumed his seat on the end of the dugout. McNab squatted beside him. The young man’s breast was tight with suspense. It seemed to him notwithstanding the Indian’s wooden air, that he rather enjoyed his importance. A strange race! Sharley Watusk began to tell his story.

“First tam come not fin’ Nanesis. But I t’ink she here. So come back. It is sundown w’en I come. I afraid show myself. I o’ny one, they four. I men’ my canoe and hide her be’in’ ice where can get quick. I hide myself. See nobody. When mos’ dark I go ver’ sof to shack. Not go on trail. Go through trees. Not want meet anybody.”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Brinklow. “What was your idea? Did you think you could take Nanesis away from the four white men?”

The Indian shook his head. “N’moya! Nanesis t’ink white men all good men,” he went on with a sneer. “I give her a day. Come night I t’ink maybe she fin’ out they not so good. I t’ink maybe she willin’ come home then.”

“That sounds reasonable,” said Brinklow. “Go on.”

“I come to little clearin’,” said Sharley Watusk. “All is quiet. See nobody, hear not’in’. See little light in window of shack, and creep ver’ sof’ to look in. Wah. I see somebody is there already lookin’ in. No place for hide, me. Lie down flat on groun’. Watch him. It is the cook.”

“How did you know that?”

“See top curly head wit’ light be’in’. When he get up I see he smaller man. Got no hat. So I know it is the cook.”

“Go on.”

“Bam-bye light go out inside. Wah! I hear ot’er window smash. I hear them run out of shack. I hear Nanesis call. I hear Blackbeard curse. Cook, him jomp up, run after. I run after him. He stop by door of shack, get gun, run after Blackbeard. I run too. In trail between trees cook come up to Blackbeard. Shoot him. I see the fire of gun in dark. Blackbeard fall down. Cook shoot four tam more. I moch scare’. Run through trees. Get canoe. Paddle home. That is all.”

When he came to an end, several voices cried out in confusion. For a moment or two Brinklow made no effort to stop the racket, but watched them all, smoking. Nanesis, wringing her hands, was crying:

“He lyin’. He lyin’. He lyin’!”

“Lyin’ nothin’!” bellowed Sojer Carpy. “It happened just as he said. All have said so. Well, Sharley’s just come. He didn’t hear what the rest of us said. He must have seen it himself!”

Phil laughed out loud, and the others silenced, turned and stared at him. They saw that it was real laughter; the young man's sullen face had cleared. "He's lying all right," he cried. "For I was never near the shack after I left it. Thank God! I can tell the truth now. I'll tell you how he knows so much about it. *He* did it! He has convicted himself!"

The noise redoubled. Sharley Watusk, scared by the voices, slunk nearer to Brinklow. The sergeant sat smoking, listening unmoved to charge and countercharge.

Nanesis ran to Phil, and flung her arms around his neck. "Oh, Phil, I so glad! I so glad!" she cried. She turned her face towards Brinklow, the tears running down her soft cheeks. "I can tell the truth too," she said. "I not shoot Blackbeard. On'y say that when I think you goin' arres' Phil!"

"Nobody ever believed you did, my girl," said Brinklow.

Sojer Carpy was heard shouting above all: "Nothin' is proved! Nothin' is proved! The Indian's word is as good as cookee's any day!"

Brinklow stood up and waved his arms. "Be quiet, all of you! Sojer is right. There's no fresh proof here. It's a question of veracity." He addressed the Indian. "Sit down, Sharley Watusk, and let's go over this again."

The Indian huddled inside his dirty coat, shot a sharp, furtive glance sideways into the sergeant's face. "Red man got no chance 'gainst white," he muttered.

"Don't you believe it, old man. The police don't play no favourites. You tell me the truth and you can bank on me . . . Now! When you were lyin' on the ground as you say, watchin' cookee at the window, when you heard the other window smashed, didn't you go look?"

"Got no cover," said Sharley Watusk. "If I get up cookee see me. Got wait till he get up."

"When he got up what did you do?"

"Run to corner of shack, peek 'round."

"What did you see?"

"See cookee stop by door, get gun, run after Blackbeard."

"Wait a minute," said Brinklow with a poker face. "Where did the other two white men run to?"

Sojer Carpy opened his mouth. "We . . ."

"Silence!" roared Brinklow. Sojer shut his mouth.

"Ot'er two men not in shack," said the Indian.

Brinklow pounced on him. "How you know that?"

“Not know till all run out. On’y hear two, Nanesis callin’, Blackbeard cursin’.”

“Well, come to that, how did you know it was Blackbeard?” demanded Brinklow. “It was dark.”

“Not know then,” said Sharley Watusk cunningly. “On’y know it was white man. You tell me when I come here Blackbeard is dead.”

“Show me just what cookee did at the door,” said Brinklow.

The Indian illustrated a man standing on the doorsill, reaching an arm inside, and groping.

“How could he get a gun that way?”

“White man’s short gun hangin’ beside door.”

Brinklow pounced again. “How do you know that?”

Sharley Watusk hesitated, pulled the collar of his dirty blanket coat away from his neck. McNab, watching him, perceived that a red man was liable to sweat under cross-examination, just the same as a white.

“When I come before,” he said at last, “I see that gun hangin’ there.”

“The first time he came was he inside the shack?” asked Brinklow of the listeners at large.

“Yes,” said Sojer Carpy.

“No,” said Phil.

Brinklow with a shrug, returned to the Indian. “After cookee got the gun he ran after Blackbeard you said, and you ran after cookee. What did you do that for?”

“Want to see where Nanesis go.”

“You must have been pretty close to see everything that happened in the dark.”

“I pretty close.”

“How could you keep up to cookee, lame as you are?”

“I lame since little boy. Learn run wit’ it ver’ good.”

“Oh, he can run ver’ good,” put in Nanesis bitterly.

“Strange that cookee didn’t hear you behind him,” suggested Brinklow.

“I not mak’ no noise. Got moccasin.”

“Well, *I* can’t run without making a noise,” burst out Phil. “I had these boots on. Is it likely Shem would let me run up behind him without looking around?”

“He may have thought it was Sojer or Bill,” suggested Brinklow.

“He knew I was outside there,” insisted Phil. “And I had warned him I’d shoot him at sight.”

“Hah!” cried Sharley Watusk, starting up, “he say he goin’ kill Blackbeard, hey?”

“Well, never mind what he said he was goin’ to do,” said Brinklow. “You stick to what you saw. You say you saw the flashes of the gun. Describe to me how cookee shot.”

Sharley Watusk illustrated. “Shoot high; bang! Shoot low; bang! bang! bang! bang!”

This was exactly as all had described the shots. Brinklow made him repeat it several times, but he never varied.

“But,” said the sergeant with the mild air that always betokened danger, “if he shot so quick, he wouldn’t have time to cock the hammer between.”

“White man’s short gun got no hammer,” said Sharley Watusk. “On’y trigger. Ev’y tam pull trigger, bang!”

Brinklow pounced. “How do you know that?”

The Indian hesitated. The silence grew until the tension hurt the listeners. McNab watching, saw Sharley Watusk change colour. The coppery skin turned greenish. But no muscle changed. He was as still as an image.

Brinklow asked again: “How you know that? No gun like that was ever brought into this country before.”

No answer from Sharley Watusk.

Brinklow whispered in McNab’s ear, and the constable, leaning over the edge of the dugout, unfastened the neck of the sergeant’s dunnage bag. The Indian’s sharp inhuman eyes followed every move. McNab rummaged in the bag, and brought forth a pair of shining handcuffs, which he handed over to his superior. Brinklow, jingling them, said:

“For the last time I ask you; how you know the white man’s gun got no hammer?”

Sharley Watusk shrugged. From a perfectly expressionless face he said: “I shoot Blackbeard. Guess you know that. He after my girl.” He stuck out his scrawny wrists. “Put ’em on!”

The handcuffs clicked.

Nanesis flung herself into Phil’s arms. The young man seemed to put off ten years care. His face shone like the sun. “Thank God that’s over,” he cried.

Sergeant Brinklow went over and shook his hand. McNab followed suit. Nanesis flung her arms around the grinning sergeant's neck, and kissed him. She was more shy with young McNab. Sojer Carpy and Bill Downey surveyed the scene with disgusted scowls. The handcuffed red man continued to sit huddled on the shore, staring straight ahead. God knows what visions rose in his mind.

"Well, it's almost time to spell again," cried Brinklow. "Nanesis, cook us up a meal, and we'll start up the lake."

Later, the two policemen being left alone together for a moment, McNab shook the hand of his superior. "A nifty piece of work, sergeant."

"Sho, lad," said Brinklow, grinning widely, "if I get any credit out of this, you needn't let on, but I'll tell you I was up against it good and plenty. I never thought the girl did it, and I suspected the lad didn't do it either, though all the evidence pointed his way. I had a hunch the partners were lyin' when they said they saw him at the window. It was a man with a hat on they saw there, the Indian.

"When the lad *said* he shot the man then I was darn sure he didn't. It would have been clear to an infant child the pair of them were tryin' to lie each other down. But what was I to do? Nobody else in sight. Soon as the Indian come back I saw light. I hadn't thought of him, because I never thought he'd dare come back after being booted away by the whites. Let alone come by himself. It was rare courage in a Fish-eater. He must have been crazy about the girl too, in his way."

"Poor devil!" said McNab.

"You're right," said Brinklow, "poor devil!"

After a preliminary hearing at the Settlement, the whole party was sent out to Prince George at the government expense, by york boat and wagon. There was a speedy, brief trial in the provincial capital, and a merciful jury taking into account that a red man was after all a man too, with passions no different than his white brother, found Sharley Watusk guilty of manslaughter, and he was not hanged.

Back in the outside world it proved to be not a difficult matter to prove that Nanesis' parentage was white on both sides. In fact a whole family of aunts and uncles turned up. Nanesis stuck to Phil. They were married in Prince George. Sergeant Brinklow gave the bride away, and Constable McNab was best man. The publicity attendant upon the trial, won the young couple a host of friends, and a shower of wedding presents more or less

suitable to pioneers. The great trading company which is known throughout the north as the French outfit having established a new post at Willow Prairie, and being in need of a teamster to freight goods from the Settlement, gave Phil a team on credit. This supplied a solid foundation to their fortunes. They were both a little dazed by the turn of affairs, each having considered himself the unluckiest of mankind.

"I owe it all to you," said Phil to Nanesis.

"Ah," said Nanesis with a catch in her breath, "where I be if you hadn't been cookin' for those men?"

"I'm just an ordinary fellow," said Phil, "but you . . . you! . . . there is nobody like you!"

"Or'nary! You!" cried Nanesis indignantly. "I back you 'gainst any white man anywhere!"

# THE CASE OF LUKE DARROW

## 1

INSPECTOR CONSIDINE having departed for his three months' leave, Sergeant Brinklow was in command of the post at Caribou Lake Settlement when word came through that Sir Angus Fairburn, the Lieutenant-Governor, was about to pay them a visit. Athabasca had just been created a province, and the appointment of Sir Angus to head it had been a popular one since he was a native son who had served as governor of the former territory. There were a few cynics who pointed out that he and his partner Mr. Luke Darrow controlled the whole of the province's resources in coal and cement, and that the circumstances under which they had secured it were somewhat obscure, but such carping voices were lost in the general acclaim.

Mr. Darrow was to accompany Sir Angus and his daughter on this tour of the remoter parts of the new domain. Whereas Sir Angus was a rich man for Canada, Darrow was rapidly becoming a figure in world finance. He had presented to the new government the luxurious tri-motored plane *Northern Lights* in which the tour was to be made. Mr. Darrow and Miss Agatha Fairburn the governor's only child were engaged to be married. The ceremony was to be performed with great pomp on their return to Prince George the provincial capital.

Such were the preliminary reports that reached the little settlement at the head of Caribou Lake. Sergeant Brinklow grinned upon hearing them. He was the most famous man in the R.C.M.P. and a popular hero owing to his work in the famous Shem Packer case, but as a non-commissioned officer he was not supposed to be experienced in ceremonial receptions, and he cheerfully passed the buck to Maroney of the French outfit, the senior trader at the post. Maroney all but wrung his hands. "What the hell am I gonna do with a Lieutenant-Governor?" he asked the world.

Maroney tried to ring in young Jim Lockran as master of ceremonies. Jim spent a good half of his time outside, and was supposed to be on to the ways of city folks. But he refused to have anything to do with the reception. Darrow and Fairburn were a couple of gilt-edged crooks, he said, and he wasn't going to kow-tow to them just because their swag ran into the millions and one of them had got a handle to his name. Jim was looked upon

as the coming man of the Caribou Lake country. It was freely prophesied that he would end with millions and a handle to his name too.

The Reverend Mr. Pines the English missionary suggested that it was customary to prepare an illuminated address of welcome for such occasions. No doubt the sisters of the Catholic mission could paint it. This should be read to Sir Angus upon landing while the massed school children sang patriotic songs and the mounted police presented arms. Maroney broke into a profuse perspiration at the bare idea. No, he said, Sir Angus and Luke Darrow had both obtained their start in the Caribou Lake country twenty-five years before. Sir Angus had even been married in the country to Cora Greer, daughter of a former Company trader, who had more than a dash of red blood. That made the girl one of them too, said Maroney. What tom-fools they would look trying to put on style with these old-timers. They should have a plain old-timer's welcome with a steer roasted in the open air, and free grub to all comers. And so it had been settled.

Now the great moment had arrived. The giant plane circled gracefully and lit upon the surface of the bay, sending out sheets of spray on either hand as it scooted towards the waiting crowd and came to a standstill. Big Maroney, sweating gently, was wishing now that they had let the little parson have his way. If everything had been settled and rehearsed beforehand a man would not feel this sickening uncertainty. He wondered if his Nibs would wear a pot hat ashore. In the background Sergeant Brinklow, stiff and soldierly in parade uniform, watched Maroney with a twinkle in his sea blue eyes. Jim Lockran was not present in the crowd. He had refused to leave his work.

A door in the side of the plane opened and a short ladder was dropped. Sir Angus and Mr. Darrow descended into the skiff that drew alongside, and handed down the young lady. Maroney breathed more freely upon perceiving that there were no top hats. Sir Angus and his partner were wearing many-pocketed "hunting-suits." Each had a gun slung over his back and a sheath knife at his belt. Sir Angus's was a very elaborate one with a mother-of-pearl handle having a gold cap over the end. Maroney began to lose his awe of them. Old-timers they may have been, but their years in town had softened them. Such an outfit was the sign manual of every greenhorn who appeared north of fifty-five.

The girl was the wonder of all beholders. She resembled the magazine pictures that they had secretly disbelieved in. No ridiculous hunting dress for her; with a truer instinct she displayed the last radio from Paris, a cunning rag of blue silk that in such an environment made her look as rare and exquisite as an orchid. A tall girl, she gave an impression of slenderness that

was illusory. She seemed all legs, but *such* legs, slim, silken, shimmering! Her high colour and fine black eyes bespoke her Indian blood. She was interested in everything. Her frank, bold, smiling glance made willing slaves of them all.

The visitors landed on the beach, and the crowd made a lane for them to walk through. There was an awkward moment then. Sir Angus bowed affably to the right and to the left, but the breeds maintained a stolid silence. It was not hostility; they didn't know any better. The Reverend Mr. Pines leaping into the breach, sent up a thin cheer and all joined in heartily enough. Maroney roared a welcome. The girl smiled at everybody with unaffected pleasure. She was heard to murmur to Mr. Darrow: "These are my people. I feel at home here."

After that there was none of the stiffness that Maroney dreaded. Everybody shook hands. Here and there in the crowd Sir Angus spotted an old-timer or a redskin that he had known long ago, and clapped him on the back with a right good will. And the young lady was just as easy to talk to as a man. Casually producing a cigarette, she asked the astonished Maroney for a light.

"It's darn nice of you," she said, "to cut out the addresses of welcome, the parading firemen and all that. I'm fed up with it, I can tell you."

After that Maroney was hers for life.

Some of the bystanders insisted afterwards that she had said "damn nice" but Maroney denied it. However, her breezy manner suggested that she was perfectly capable of saying it if she felt that way.

The visitors were to be put up in the "kitchen" of the French outfit, a primitive boarding house maintained by Maroney for his employees and for chance travellers. It was hardly suitable for Lieutenant-Governors and world financiers, but there was nothing better in the settlement since the inspector's house was closed up. Sir Angus graciously waved aside Maroney's apologies.

"We didn't expect to find tiled bathrooms," he said.

They gathered around one of the oilcloth-covered tables in the general room to discuss the arrangements for the visit. Sir Angus said:

"Our schedule permits us to remain five days with you. We wish everything to be most informal of course. During the afternoon we will walk around and talk to everybody, and this evening there will be the barbecue that you have so kindly arranged. We will devote to-morrow to visiting the several little settlements in the neighbourhood, and the rest of the time we

would like to spend in taking a trip into the real wilderness. My daughter's heart is set upon it."

Agatha Fairburn spoke up for herself. "I have been studying the map. I see that surveys have been made to the south, to the west, and to the north-east of you, but due north all the lakes and rivers are marked with dotted lines. I want to see a bit of the unexplored."

"If it can be arranged," put in her father politely.

"It *must* be arranged," said Agatha with the delightful smile that took everything for granted.

Maroney for one, was unable to resist it. "Sure, sure," he said. "We call that Jim Lockran's country. Nobody's been up there but him."

"Lockran?" said Sir Angus looking around; "have I met Mr. Lockran?"

"He couldn't get in," said Maroney, embarrassed. "He's got a contract from the government to build a road north."

"Oh, if there's a road up there . . ." said Agatha disappointed.

"He's on'y pushed it three mile into the bush," said Maroney. "Beyond that there is nothing."

"If there's nothing there why is the government building a road?" asked Sir Angus.

"The road is so Jim can tote in his turbines and generators over it," said Maroney. "Jim's got the lease of a waterpower up there almost as good as Niagara."

"How generous of my government," said Sir Angus dryly, "to employ Mr. Lockran to build a road so he can use it."

"Well, that's Jim's way," said Maroney. "If anything is done around here Jim does it."

"A second Luke Darrow," said Sir Angus with a dry smile in the direction of his partner.

"This man sounds interesting," said Agatha. "Do you think he would show me his country?"

"He'd jump at the chance," said Maroney. What he really meant was that Maroney would jump at the chance. Nobody could foretell what Jim Lockran would do in a given situation.

There was a good deal of talk one way and another. The upshot was that Sergeant Brinklow who took no part in the talk but whose quiet efficient presence was always at hand to take action when required, despatched Trooper McNab with a message to Jim Lockran to the effect that Sir Angus would be glad to see him. Young McNab did not particularly relish the

errand. He knew Jim as well as anybody and he was wondering what he would do if Jim refused to come.

Meanwhile in front of the store across the road, the old-timers were discussing the arrivals with a shrewdness and freedom that would have astonished the city folk.

"Angus Fairburn has gone soft," said Smitty of the French outfit. "He's forgotten a man's speech. Talks as if he had a sponge in his mouth. And look at that suit with the pockets! And the gold-handled knife! Gosh Almighty!"

"There was a piece in the paper about that knife," said a voice. "It was presented to him by the Rotary Club of High River."

"It would be," said Smitty, spitting clear of the platform.

"The man is fidgety," said Saunders the company trader. "He may be Sir Knight and have a couple of million salted down, but he's uneasy in his mind. I wouldn't change with him."

"Nothin' oneasy about Luke Darrow," remarked Smitty. "His eye is as steady and cold as a fish's."

"Always was," said old Jos Ackley from Heart River. "Luke Darrow was a bad actor, mean. . . . Angus Fairburn never was much," he went on. "A good-natured, easy-goin' young feller popular with ev'body, he never amounted to a hill o' beans till he joined up with Luke. Luke is the business end of that concern. It's twenty-five years ago since them two joined up, and ev' since Luke has been dressin' the window with Angus while he done business inside. Angus is Luke's decoy duck, that's what he is."

"And now it seems he's goin' to get Angus's girl," said young Dick Mitchell the surveyor. "It's a darn shame! He's older than her father! . . . Gosh! what a queen!"

"Well, she's nobody's fool," said Smitty. "You can see that. If she marries Luke Darrow it's because she has a mind to. They say he owns pret' near all Canada, and he's going across the ocean shortly to buy up England. I suppose she's looking ahead to a grand career. You can't blame the girl."

"Just the same, she'll be sorry if she marries fish-eyes," said Mitchell.

"Meanin' she'd do better to take you, eh, Dick?" put in old Jos slyly.

A couple of hours later Jim Lockran and McNab rode into the settlement together. After all McNab had had no trouble with his man. He had found Jim mightily swinging his axe alone on the job, since all his breeds had

deserted to see the governor arrive. Jim was only human. He would not, as he put it, suck up to his nibs, but he had no objection to accepting a polite invitation. So here they were.

Jim had scarcely opened his mouth during the ride. He was a strange one. McNab admired him, and would have been glad to be his friend, but Jim seemed not to require friendship from anybody. The two were about of an age. McNab without any bitterness recognised in Jim Lockran a bigger man than himself. Most men did. At an age when other fellows were simply on the loose Jim was already a solid man of property, with a brain humming with big plans. He was a handsome fellow too, with a direct glance and a bold aquiline nose. He had a way of compelling other men to do his will. He seemed to despise his own good looks and had never, so far as McNab knew, become entangled with a woman.

In order to see how he would take it, McNab had repeated Sir Angus's saying about him. "Called you a second Luke Darrow."

"Is that so?" said Jim coolly. "There's this difference between Luke Darrow and me. He's crooked and I'm straight."

They met Sir Angus coming out of the Reverend Mr. Pines' little bungalow where he had been taking tea. The two horsemen dismounted, and McNab presented his man in the front yard. Sir Angus's somewhat disconnected eye ran over Jim approvingly. Well, he was every inch a man. Sir Angus said:

"I've been wondering if I could persuade you to conduct my little party for a short trip into the woods."

Jim was polite but firm. "I'm sorry, sir, but I have just succeeded in getting together a good gang of breeds to work on my road. I have to be my own foreman, and if I left the job they would scatter all over the map. The men up here don't take kindly to real work. I don't see how I can do it."

"Well . . . I'm sorry," said Sir Angus vaguely.

At this moment the girl, hearing a new voice, came quickly out of the house. McNab watched curiously to see the meeting between these two.

"Is that Mr. Lockran?" she said, and instantly held out her hand. "How are you? I'm Agatha Fairburn. I want you to take me to. . . ."

She did not quite finish her sentence. It was as if her breath gave out. When her smiling, unafraid black eyes met the man's smiling and scornful blue eyes something tremendous took place in silence; something like the meeting of two worlds in space. The smile died out on both sides, and the two pairs of eyes regarded each other as they beheld Destiny and were afraid. The thought slipped through McNab's mind: Anybody might have

foreseen it. It was all over in a second. The girl's eyes trailed away; she laughed rather meaninglessly, and searched for something to say. The man lowered his eyes.

Sir Angus who had noticed nothing, said: "I'm sorry, my dear, but Mr. Lockran says it will be impossible for him to take us."

Jim came to with a start. "Oh, I'll manage it," he said in a changed voice. "When will you be wanting to start?"

Sir Angus blinked at the suddenness of this face about. "Well . . . day after to-morrow," he said.

"All right," said Jim. "I'll be ready."

Agatha made her way through the little picket gate, pointedly ignoring the man as women do when they're hit. Jim looked after her unsteadily. McNab thought: If I was Luke Darrow I wouldn't relish the look of this. Turning his head he saw that Luke's cold, pale eyes were fixed on Jim. They gave nothing away. They never did. But the polite smile was uncommonly like a grimace.

"That will be fine!" he said.

McNab thought: He is not a man to give up what his mind is set on. . . . There will be trouble here.

## 2

In the words of the old-timers work on the new road went to hell next day. At an early hour Jim Lockran pulled up in front of the log shack that served for barracks and called Sergeant Brinklow out. There was a curious change visible in the hard-boiled Jim, a new light in his compelling eyes. The only thing true to the old Jim was that he didn't give a damn who saw what had happened to him. Nobody would have ventured to josh him anyhow.

"Brink," he said, "will you detail McNab to accompany the governor's party into the bush to-morrow? His Nibs wants to have a red coat in the party to give it an official character with the natives."

"Sure," said Brinklow. He called McNab out. "Mac, you're to go with the governor to-morrow."

McNab's heart was greatly lifted up. It would be a pleasant break in the monotony of a trooper's life. He forgot his premonitions of trouble.

"Mac," said Jim, with a deprecating manner new to him, "will you get the outfit together? It's really my job, but . . . well, I thought I'd ride with the party to-day."

McNab somehow, felt a little sorry for him. Certainly he was hard hit. “Sure!” he said.

“Thanks,” said Jim. “Take your pick of the horses in my stable. Miss Fairburn wants to keep the party as small as possible, but we’ll have to have three reliable breeds to make and break camp.”

“I know where to put my hands on them,” said McNab.

“I leave everything to you,” said Jim riding away.

McNab and Brinklow exchanged a look.

“Wonders will never cease!” said the sergeant.

While McNab was getting together tents, saddles, camp cots, grub and so on in the kitchen of the French outfit, he had many volunteer helpers. Amongst them was a ragged, dirty, little Watusk Indian called Timoosis, a well-known character around the settlement. He claimed to have a white father, but as there was no evidence to support it, he was forced to “take treaty” with the other Watusks. Timoosis was a young man, but nature had not been kind to him, and already at twenty-six or so he looked almost middle-aged.

“What are you doing off the reservation?” asked McNab.

“Tom Moosenose give me leave,” said Timoosis.

His anxiety to make himself useful was so unusual among the lazy Watusks that McNab wondered what was in the wind. Presently it came out with characteristic obliquity.

“Give me horse to-morrow,” said Timoosis stolidly.

McNab was not deceived by the apparent indifference. Timoosis’ sharp black eyes glittered with eagerness. The trooper’s first impulse was to laugh.

“I good man,” said Timoosis hotly. “Spik Anglays good. In the summer I hunt that country. In the winter trap. Know every hill, every spring, every good place for grass.”

“I’ve got all the men I need,” said McNab.

“Who you got?”

“Hooliam Ward; Sharley Bee; Toma.”

Without another word Timoosis disappeared.

In a few minutes he returned with the young breed known as Sharley Bee. “Tell him,” commanded Timoosis.

“He can go for me,” said Sharley Bee.

“Hey, what’s this?” said McNab. “I’m not so sure I want him. What kind of a deal is this anyhow?”

“I give Sharley Bee my knife for go,” said Timoosis.

Next to his gun, Timoosis’ knife was his most valuable possession.

“What for you want to go so bad, Timoosis?” McNab asked curiously.

“I white man,” said Timoosis, drawing himself up. “Want travel wit’ rich white man. See how him live.”

McNab was struck by it. He could not laugh in the face of such earnestness. Timoosis had a first-rate reputation as a hunter, and it occurred to the trooper that he would be useful in providing fresh meat to the camp. “All right,” he said, “I’ll take you if you get your hair cut; if you wash yourself with soap; if you put on clean clothes.”

Timoosis disappeared like a shadow.

In a couple of hours he was back again. His hair was cut short like a white man’s; he had a clean red fillet bound round his forehead; a clean gingham shirt and fairly clean buckskin pants and moccasins. McNab who knew that the Watusks look upon cleanliness as a diseased state, felt that Timoosis had fairly earned his place in the party.

At nine o’clock next morning they were trailing around the bay, preparatory to striking north over the new road. No earlier start was necessary because they planned to sleep the first night at Obiscaw Falls thirty miles from the settlement. It was the site of Jim Lockran’s future power plant. Jim rode in advance while McNab brought up the rear.

On the wagon road they proceeded in somewhat of a huddle and the entire outfit was under McNab’s eye. Jim and Agatha Fairburn were riding side by side in the van. According to the gossip at the store Jim had scarcely left the girl’s side for a moment during the previous day. And what was more wonderful, he had never stopped talking to her, they said. Silent Jim! It was hard to believe. He was talking to her now, and she was listening with absorbed attention. Yet she had the look of one who was accustomed to do the talking herself. McNab wondered what Jim found to talk about. Jim and the girl had this quality in common: neither had the slightest regard to the effect of their actions on others. They were falling in love and they didn’t give a whoop who knew it. Possibly they had not realised it themselves as yet. They made a superb looking pair, riding together.

Luke Darrow appeared to be entirely untroubled by the state of affairs. He never so far as McNab saw, glanced at the couple ahead. Sometimes he

dropped back and rode alongside the trooper, asking him a hundred questions about the country in his smooth and courteous voice. The yellow-toothed grin was fixed on his face. It was impossible to guess what was going through his mind. McNab was reminded of one of Brinklow's pithy sayings: "Watch out for the man who makes out to be above the common feelings of a man."

On the other hand Sir Angus was clearly upset by what was happening. After all it was scarcely the way for an engaged girl to conduct herself McNab thought, but she was in deep, too deep to consider that. You do not blame a person who is struck by lightning. Sir Angus took no pleasure in this journey, and McNab guessed that he would have called it off had he not been afraid of provoking flat rebellion in his daughter. She rode alongside her young man with a defiant air that dared anybody to question her actions. Before they had put the last shack behind them McNab had the feeling that they were riding on the thin crust of a volcano.

Jim's road was of the crudest description. He was simply cutting a narrow swath through the forest, grubbing up the stumps and laying corduroy over the soft places. Anything in the way of grading was out of the question in a country where there were no spare teams to hire. Beyond the road they plunged into a thick bush innocent of the axe. The new trail they were following had been blazed by Jim himself the previous year. Here the outfit was obliged to spread out in single file, and McNab could no longer see what was going on in the van.

They spelled for dinner in a little natural opening where there was a spring and grass enough at least for a single feed. A bowl of sunlight in the dark forest, it had the beauty of all undisturbed places, and Agatha Fairburn looked around her appreciatively. Clearly, this was what she wanted. The humans having eaten their meal, were obliged to sit around the fire for a while, waiting for the horses to finish. To the eye it was a peaceful scene, but McNab could feel a tenseness in the air. Jim and Agatha seemed to be unaware of it. Jim still had plenty to say to the girl. In moving about McNab overheard snatches of his talk. There was nothing private about it.

"The great need of this country was transportation," Jim said. "I spent my first summer up here cutting down the willow bushes that lined the upper part of the little river, so they could track the York boats up that stretch in two days instead of five. For hundreds of years the boatmen have been cursing those willows, but nobody ever thought of cutting them down. Then I borrowed money to build a steamboat down at Miwasa Landing. Took me an entire summer to build her and another summer to get her up the

rapids in the little river. Twenty-five miles of rapids with maybe a foot of water over the rocks."

"How could you get a steamboat through one foot of water?" asked Agatha.

"Tied ropes to trees and let her haul herself up with her steam capstan. Every time she stuck fast we built out a little wing dam of stones behind her until she floated again. Averaged about two miles a week. They all laughed at me for putting a steamboat on Caribou Lake, but she has paid for herself already, and something over. Now I'm going to give them electric power."

"What will it be used for?" asked Agatha.

"I'll operate a sawmill and a flourmill at the settlement, and light their houses. That's only a beginning of course. I've got to manufacture something to give my steamboat full loads going out. When you've got the power there's no lack of ways to use it. When they bring the railroad through I can sell them power cheaper then they can make steam."

Jim was not boasting, but merely relating the things that interested him. Funny kind of lovemaking, thought McNab, but he had to admit that it was effective. The girl seemed to be under a spell.

Another member of the outfit was under a different kind of spell. Since before the start that morning Timoosis had attached himself to Sir Angus and Luke Darrow as a personal servant. He was like a dog with two masters; his eyes never left the face of one or the other; he was always at hand to wait on them. If anything he seemed to favour Luke Darrow with his attentions because he had been told that Darrow was the richer of the two.

Darrow teased Timoosis, much as he might have amused himself with an ugly little monkey who looked almost human. "Timoosis, where did you get that funny name?" he asked.

"My mot'er give," said Timoosis stolidly.

"What does your name mean?"

"Mean not'ing. Jus' name."

"It's got to mean something. All Watusk names have a meaning."

"I t'ink you know Watusk," said Timoosis.

"Oh, I have forgotten it years ago. Come, now, what does it mean?"

Darrow finally forced the admission from Timoosis that his name was an abbreviation of Mistatimoosis which means colt in the Watusk tongue.

The millionaire laughed heartily. "Well-named! Well-named!" he cried. "I never saw anybody more coltish! . . . And how trippingly it falls off the tongue. Mistatimoosis! Mistatimoosis! One could make rhymes about it all

day." Thereafter he insisted on addressing his little servant as "Mr. Timoosis."

"How would you like to go outside and see all the sights?" he asked him later.

"I like," said Timoosis without any expression whatever.

"I'm putting up a building in Prince George sixteen stories high."

"I t'ink you lie for joke, me," said Timoosis stolidly.

Mr. Darrow was greatly amused.

"You goin' tak me outside?" demanded Timoosis without batting an eye.

"Sure! Sure!" said the millionaire lightly. "Next year."

"All right," said Timoosis.

## 3

AT five o'clock that afternoon the little party lined up on a flat terrace of rock at the brink of Obiscaw Falls and looked over. It was a sight to shake a man's confidence in himself. Off to the left a mighty cascade of tea-brown water came leaping and bounding down a steep, straight gulch to flatten out for a couple of hundred yards in a wildly brawling rapid before it gathered itself up for the long sheer plunge into a pool below. The whole earth seemed to tremble under the reverberations of the water. On either side the walls of the gulch swept up to the sky covered all the way with spruce and fir of a green so rich and dark as almost to appear black.

Jim Lockran with a kindling eye looked up where the water was bounding down as it were a gigantic flight of stairs. "She comes down a thousand feet in seventeen miles," he said. "This is her final leap."

Luke Darrow measured the scene with the eye of a company promoter. "Good God! there are sites here for a dozen water powers," he said.

"I have options on the whole stretch," said Jim.

"Where does this river go to?"

"It falls into the Spirit River five hundred miles north. Nobody knows what lies between."

"It's so wild and beautiful," said Agatha, "it seems almost a shame to . . ."

"I can harness it without spoiling its beauty," said Jim. "All I have to do is to blast a little pool here where we are standing, and lead my flumes down to the left. The power house below will be completely hidden . . . There will be no smoke, no refuse. A hydro-electric plant is a clean thing."

Agatha pointed out in front of them to a fantastic jam of drift logs all but overhanging the brink of the falls. “It looks ready to let go at any minute,” she said.

“But it won’t,” said Jim. “Been there for ages. There’s a big rock holding it. Some day I’m going to dynamite it. It looks messy.”

“How would you get out there?” said Agatha with widening eyes. “Right on the edge of the falls . . . through that boiling water!”

“Walk out,” said Jim coolly, “with a rope tied to me. Notice how the river spreads out before it goes over. There’s not more than two or three feet of water at a low stage.”

Agatha looked at him with shining eyes.

The tents were pitched a couple of hundred feet up river from the falls under the edge of the trees. An earthen bank about eight feet high separated them from the terrace of rock below. They had packed three tents; quite an imposing affair for Sir Angus and Mr. Darrow, a smaller one for Agatha and one to be shared by Jim and McNab. At Agatha’s request her tent was pitched on the edge of the earthen bank a hundred yards from the other two.

“I want to enjoy the thrill of being alone,” she said.

The big tent was fitted with a sort of porch in front having a mosquito bar hung all around. This was to be their dining room. Supper was eaten here in a constrained silence. The situation had developed since lunch. While the meal was preparing Mr. Darrow and Agatha had walked away together and evidently some kind of showdown had taken place. When they returned Darrow was smiling still but his pale face had turned greenish, whereas Agatha was pink with exasperation.

The voice of the tumbling cascade (they could scarcely hear the falls from above) was deep and hoarse rather than loud, and conversation in slightly raised voices was perfectly feasable, but there was little conversation. Jim finding himself in a hostile atmosphere, dried up and coolly attended to his food. The girl was simmering with an anger very imperfectly suppressed. Sir Angus and Mr. Darrow made sporadic attempts to start something, but none of them prospered. Everybody avoided everybody else’s eyes. I’m thankful it’s not my funeral, thought McNab. Anyhow, I’m on the side of the young ones.

As soon as he decently could, McNab tried to retire, but Darrow stopped him upon some pretext—stopped him each time he tried to go. There seemed to be a feeling that a general explosion was bound to take place as soon as the policeman was out of the way, and Darrow was determined to avert it, or at least to delay it as long as possible. Why on earth don’t they

have it out and be done with it? thought McNab. Finally he succeeded in getting away.

It was then nine o'clock though still perfectly light. The trooper immediately turned in, meaning to get up early to see if there were fish to be caught below the falls. Folding cots had been packed for the distinguished visitors, but Jim and McNab lay upon the ground according to custom. McNab left the tent flaps up for air, and by raising his head a little he could look over his feet down to the terrace of rock with the brawling river beyond it, and the dark wall of spruce filling in the background. The big tent was close on his right, while the fire with the breeds grouped around it, was a little way off on the other side. The horses had been picketed in grass half a mile down stream.

In the big tent next door McNab could hear the murmur of voices, polite constrained voices at first with long silences. Then suddenly the low voices became honest and bitter and quick, and McNab's heart beat faster, though he could not distinguish a word. However, there was danger in the sound. He tried to close his ears to it. It's none of my business, he said to himself. Suddenly the girl's voice rang out, not loud but very distinct.

"I won't stand for having him sent away like that!"

"Agatha!" cried her father, "what a word to use! Nobody is thinking of sending Mr. Lockran away. He's a busy man. I merely suggested that now he has brought us here we are perfectly capable of finding our way back with McNab's assistance. There is no need of keeping Mr. Lockran from his work."

"That's all pretence!" cried the girl. "Luke put you up to it! I won't have him contemptuously dismissed. If he goes, I go too!"

McNab sat up in his blankets. Now it's out! he thought. How can they avoid a fight? . . . And if they start fighting how the devil am I going to interfere between these high muckamucks. I wish to God Brink was here!

But there was no fight then. He underrated the restraining influence of good form. Sir Angus could be heard imploring the girl to lower her voice. The murmur went on. McNab did not hear Jim's voice in it. He could picture the big fellow biding his time with a hard smile. Finally the girl said:

"Very well then, we'll all go back to-morrow."

McNab lay down again. A moment later Jim entered the tent. His set face gave nothing away. He did not speak to McNab, but obtained a fresh supply of tobacco from his kit, and went out again, turning towards the camp fire.

Immediately afterwards Luke Darrow crossed McNab's line of vision. He had descended to the terrace of rock. For a long time he stood motionless at the brink of the rapid, staring ahead of him. Well, his thoughts can't be very pleasant, thought McNab.

Sir Angus continued to remonstrate with his daughter in low tones. The aroused girl was unable to keep her voice down.

"I'm sorry if I have treated Luke badly," she said, "but it's not as bad as you think. He always knew that I was not in love with him because I told him so. I took him because I admired his strength and his ability—Good Lord! the young men who came around me were so wishy-washy! . . . Well now I have met a man who is just as strong and able as Luke, and something else beside. And he's young like me. How can I help myself?"

McNab warmed with admiration of her courage.

Sir Angus's agonised murmur was heard again.

"I asked Luke to release me," the girl burst out, interrupting it, "and he only laughed. A hateful laugh! If he showed his feelings honestly one could respect him! . . . He said he wasn't going to upset the applecart just because of a maiden's vagrant fancy. As if I was the kind of woman who gives way to vagrant fancies! He told me to go ahead and amuse myself, and he was sure by the time we got back to town that I would have returned to sanity. It was insulting! I told him that I considered myself free, and that I would act accordingly."

Sir Angus put a question.

"Of course I haven't told him how I feel towards him," she answered scornfully. "Naturally, he hasn't asked me. But I know my own heart. I am his if he wants me, and you might as well know it!"

Sir Angus implored her not to speak so loud.

"I can't remember," she said impatiently. "Oh, what difference does it make anyhow? There's been too much hushing up in our lives."

Sir Angus's pleading voice went on and on. Agatha finally cut him short as if she had reached the limit of endurance.

"What's the use father? You ought to know me by this time. All that means nothing to me—money, position, titles. Why, since I've been up here I seem to have burst out of a hard shell. How happy I would be living in this country and doing things for myself!"

A new note came into Sir Angus's anxious pleading, a whining note that astonished McNab. His mightiness the Lieutenant-Governor is only a

quitter, he thought contemptuously. Apparently it astonished the girl too, for she said:

"What are you saying? That I've *got* to marry Luke? Fathers don't talk that way any more."

Sir Angus became even more urgent.

"I've got to marry him to save you!" said the amazed girl. "It's only on the stage that people say that sort of thing. I'm sorry if you're in such a hole, but it's not my fault. I've got my life to lead too, and I've a lot more of it before me than you have!"

Sir Angus forgot caution. His voice rose to a wail of despair. "He holds us in the hollow of his hand!" he said.

It did not soften the girl. "If he does, that's a kind of slavery," she said, "and you'd be better out of it. Anything would be better than that!"

"No! No!" cried Sir Angus. "I can't bear it! I am too old to face life anew!"

"I'm sorry," said Agatha coldly, "but you've got to."

McNab put his arms around his head. This is terrible, he thought. An outsider oughtn't to be hearing it.

Soon afterwards the girl walked past the opening of his tent with her chin in the air. She was going to look for Jim Lockran, and she didn't care who saw her.

Luke Darrow returned to the big tent and the two old men conferred together; mumble, mumble, mumble. McNab, curious to learn what the relations between them really were, listened hard, but could distinguish no word. These old birds weren't giving anything away. Satisfied anyhow, that there wasn't going to be a fight, the trooper fell asleep to the sound of their mutterings.

He was brought out of his blankets on the jump by a sudden burst of angry voices from below. By the time he collected his wits all was still again. It was dark. Hastily feeling for his breeches and boots he drew them on and slid down the bank.

He came upon a significant group below. Jim and the girl standing together. Luke Darrow sitting on the ground, holding his head between his hands; Sir Angus bending over him, all but wringing his hands like a woman. Darrow was fully dressed; Sir Angus in his dressing-gown. Around the group circled little Timoosis like a shadow, peering at each one in turn, taking everything in.

"What has happened?" demanded McNab.

"Nothing that can be helped," answered the girl. "Mr. Darrow insulted me, and Jim knocked him down. It appears that he was spying on us."

"Agatha!" cried Sir Angus brokenly.

"Well, that *is* what happened, isn't it?" she demanded.

Her father made no reply.

McNab helped Darrow to his feet. The trooper was thinking: Well it appears that he *has* some feelings after all, even if they're only mean ones. Brinklow was right.

Timoosis took his other side, and between them they led him somewhat groggily back to the big tent. Sir Angus followed in silent despair. McNab did not see what became of Agatha and Jim. There was a lighted lantern in the tent, and when they came within its circle McNab saw that Sir Angus looked like death. He scarcely seemed to know what he was doing.

They laid Darrow on his cot, and Timoosis started to unlace his shoes, whereupon the injured man exploded in a startling fury. "Let me alone, damn you!" he cried, kicking out at the redskin. Timoosis fled out of the tent without a sound.

Hm! thought McNab; takes it out on the little feller.

Across the tent Sir Angus was sitting on the edge of his cot pressing his head between his hands like a man finally broken. There was nothing McNab could say that would mend the situation, and he quietly beat it back to his own tent.

But not to sleep right away. This is not the end of it, he thought; I'm going to need help here. He lit a lantern, and tearing a page out of his notebook wrote as follows:

DEAR BRINK,

There's hell to pay here. Jim knocked Darrow down to-night and things are ripe for worse trouble. It's all mixed up with big affairs somehow. I can't explain. It requires more than a common trooper to handle such big guns. You'd better come quick.

MAC.

McNab went to the fire, and roused up Hooliam a young breed whom he could depend on better than most. Drawing him out of range of possible listeners, he said: "Hooliam, are you game to ride back to the settlement?"

"Right away?"

"Right away."

The young fellow hesitated. It was a good deal to ask of a native.

"Take my mare," urged McNab. "Let her have her head and she'll smell out the trail for you. Can't go wrong."

The prospect of riding so good a horse tipped the balance with Hooliam. "All right," he said.

Having watched the breed button up the note in the pocket of his shirt, McNab returned to his tent and lit his pipe. It had begun to rain.

## 4

McNab fell asleep for the second time shortly before it was due to become light. Jim had not then come into the tent, but he was there when McNab awoke about six. The big fellow lay on his back staring at the canvas overhead. Something in the very stillness of his attitude suggested that he was all keyed up; his eye turned slowly on McNab with a strong light in it. But he was giving nothing away. He made no comment on what had happened. He said nothing at all.

McNab went down to take a dip in a backwater around a shoulder of the gorge. The rain had ceased and there was a delicious freshness in the air. When he got back Jim was dressing. At seven the cheerful voice of Eeliper the plump cook made itself heard announcing breakfast. To McNab the prospect of again facing those glum and strained faces over the table was anything but a pleasant one, but there seemed to be no help for it. He and Jim went out together.

Only the girl was waiting for them at the table. Her eyes with the same absorbed look flew to meet Jim's, but her greeting was casual. They sat down. From the closed tent within came the querulous voice of Sir Angus, begging to be excused. He had a head this morning, he said, and thought he would lie in until noon.

"Where's Luke?" asked the girl in her cool way.

"Must have gone for a walk," said Sir Angus. "He's not in here."

McNab told Eeliper to give him a call, and the cry of breakfast resounded back and forth between the walls of the gorge. Nobody appeared. Sulking, thought McNab and applied himself to his breakfast with a good appetite. Apparently the others thought the same.

But afterwards a nasty little anxiety began to nag at McNab. It seemed strange that a great man like Luke Barrow should be so childish. He was always one to put a good face on a bad matter. McNab wondered if he could have started back for the settlement in a blind rage. He went down the trail

to take a look. It was muddy in places, and he soon satisfied himself that none had been down that way since the rain but Jim. The size of Jim's feet was unmistakable. Nevertheless McNab went on to where the horses were picketed. Only one horse was missing; his own.

On returning to camp he met Jim. "I don't like it," said McNab.

"Well . . . neither do I," said Jim.

"Look here," said McNab, "you're an expert tracker. Strike a circle around camp, and let me know if he's gone up the hill in any direction."

An hour later Jim reported that he had not crossed Darrow's tracks heading up hill.

McNab's face turned grave. "If he hasn't gone down the trail," he said, "and he hasn't climbed the hill . . ." The trooper looked at the brawling water rushing to fling itself over the brink.

Jim, catching the significance of his look, said quickly: "That's impossible!"

"What alternative is there?" asked McNab.

Jim could only shake his head.

McNab who had the normal young man's aversion to anything tragic or emotional, forced himself to look the ugly fact in the face. Luke Darrow had certainly jumped into the river—or had been thrown in.

Parting from Jim he went down the trail again. There was a side path to the site of Jim's power house.

Below the basin that received the thundering falls, he remembered having seen a big slow whirlpool in which objects that had been carried over went endlessly sailing around and around before finding a way out. He took up a station on the bank where he could overlook it.

The potentialities of the situation staggered him. A man known all over the world. Good God! what a stink would be kicked up in the newspapers. In his mind he only skirted around the edge of the possible explanations. Suicide is plausible enough, he thought; many a man in a similar situation would have jumped in. . . . But somehow it don't seem like Luke Darrow to do such a thing. And there McNab stopped.

He watched the whirlpool for half an hour, but nobody appeared. He had no way of knowing of course what would happen to a human body that might be carried over the falls. Perhaps there was an undercurrent that would carry it straight down. If it had gone on down the river the mystery would never be solved.

He finally returned to camp. If this was *not* a suicide it was his duty to watch the other members of the party, and to make sure that no evidence was destroyed. He came first on Eeliper and Timoosis standing about on the terrace of rock neither doing anything, looking at anything, nor apparently, thinking of anything. But they had guessed what was in the wind.

"You find him?" asked Eeliper.

McNab shook his head.

Jim, Sir Angus and Agatha were seated at the table in front of the big tent. It was odd to see how the presence of a tragedy had brought them close together. Or perhaps it was something else. At any rate Sir Angus was friendly towards Jim now, and affectionate to his daughter. Her manner had likewise softened towards her father. Sir Angus was full of protestations of grief and affection for his missing friend, but McNab was startled by his face. *It was relieved!* In spite of his efforts to *look* anxious, the deep furrows of a real anxiety had ironed themselves out. His eyes, his voice betrayed a profound relief.

Of course, thought McNab, Luke Darrow's taking-off means salvation to him . . . And then a terrific possibility leaped into the trooper's mind . . . The Lieutenant-Governor . . . . It made him feel shaky for a moment. He sat down at the table staring a little wildly. How thankful he was that Brinklow was on the way!

"Poor Luke!" Sir Angus was saying. "There must have been an unguessed vein of gold in his nature. He was looked upon as such a hard man. There is no use in our trying to disguise things from each other. He chose this means of ending the painful situation which had arisen."

Agatha looked truly horror-stricken. "Oh, dad!" she gasped, "do you think that *I*. . . ."

"Nonsense my dear," said Sir Angus, patting her hand. "You are not responsible for Luke's actions. Do not let such an unhappy thought cloud your future."

Jim, observing Agatha's distress, turned grim about the mouth. "You think then that he committed suicide?" he asked.

"Why of course!" said Sir Angus, opening his eyes.

"It is possible," said Jim dryly. "Anything is possible. But it don't seem likely."

"Jim," said Sir Angus, suddenly becoming agitated, "I beg of you not to suggest such a thing to anybody but me. You know how eager people are to seize on such a story and pass it along. Such a story once started could never

be laid. It would ruin us all! . . . How *could* he have been made away with, without a struggle, a cry?"

"I don't know," said Jim.

"Besides, nobody had any reason for killing him, whereas he had the best of reasons for taking his own life."

Jim looked unconvinced, and McNab felt the same way, but neither said anything.

"Personally," Sir Angus went on, "I shall deeply regret it, if we are forced to go back without establishing beyond the shadow of doubt exactly what happened. But if he went over the falls as now seems certain and his body is being carried farther and farther into the wilderness by this unknown river I don't see how we can find out. It is very unfortunate. Luckily, accidents are not uncommon in a country like this. Everybody warned us of the dangers before we came. There will be a great sensation at the news of his death, but there need be no suspicion of any mystery about it unless one of us is imprudent."

He included McNab in his glance around the table. The young man was revolted by his smugness. Good God! he thought, Sir Angus and Darrow have been associated for twenty-five years, and all he's thinking of is the possibilities of a scandal! If that's what success does to a man, I'll stick to the woods!

McNab said: "Well, if anybody can establish what happened it's Brinklow. He'll soon be here."

Sir Angus's jaw dropped. "What?" he said blankly.

"I sent for him last night," said McNab. "After Jim had had trouble with Darrow."

"Good lad!" murmured Jim.

But Sir Angus turned pale with rage. "What do you mean . . . what do you mean?" he stammered, "by taking such a responsibility upon yourself without consulting me?"

McNab flushed and set his jaw. He suppressed the impulse to retort that Brinklow was his superior officer, not Sir Angus.

Sir Angus became incoherent in his rage. "Have I no authority in my own party? . . . officious young nincompoop! . . . Advertising our plight! . . . It will be all over the country by now that the police had to be sent for. . . !"

"Dad! Dad!" remonstrated Agatha. "Be reasonable! McNab could not foresee last night what was going to happen?"

Sir Angus arose abruptly; took a couple of steps away from his chair, and returned to it again. With an effort he succeeded in controlling himself. "You must excuse me," he said in a voice that was still shaking. "This terrible affair has upset me so that I scarcely know what I am saying." He clapped his hands to his head. "And this damned endless roaring of the water!" he cried. "It shakes the nerves!"

McNab permitted himself to say: "You need not fear for Sergeant Brinklow's discretion, sir. He's famous for having the closest mouth in the force. As for solving a mystery, that's just his line."

Sir Angus smiled sourly. "Quite! Quite!" he said with a wave of his hand which might have signified anything.

McNab was deeply thankful when Brinklow came clattering out on the rock terrace below. Hooliam was at his heels on a fresh horse. The breed must have been in the saddle for twelve hours without resting, but naturally he did not mean to miss any of the excitement. He took both horses back to the grass.

McNab went down the bank to make his report to Brinklow. The tall, lean, grizzled sergeant stood listening to it with a perfectly impassive face. Meanwhile Jim and Agatha strolled away in the other direction, talking earnestly together. Agatha frankly slipped her arm through the man's, and Jim's blond head was bent to catch her words. It was clear to everybody that circumstances had hastened an understanding between them. Sir Angus left alone at the table, chewed his heavy moustache and watched the two red-coated policemen from under scowling brows. He would have given something pretty to hear what McNab was telling Brinklow.

## 5

McNab brought Brinklow to Sir Angus's tent, and at the same time Jim Lockran and Agatha approached from the other side. Greetings were exchanged, and they all sat down around the table. The hoarse voice of the water filled the air. Brinklow was equal to the situation. The sergeant's position in the force was somewhat anomalous, for while he was in his way a popular hero, he was only a non-commissioned officer. He had refused the offer of an inspectorship. He never forgot the respect due to a gentleman like Sir Angus, but at the same time there was a quizzical gleam in his eye that no Lieutenant-Governor could quench. Brink would have been perfectly at his ease in Buckingham Palace itself.

Sir Angus offered him a cigar. “Smoke up, sergeant,” he said; “we are not on parade now.”

Brinklow accepted it thankfully—and put it in his pocket.

“I’m sorry you were sent for,” Sir Angus went on, “it gives a sinister suggestion to an affair which is sad enough without that.”

“A sinister suggestion has no weight with me, Sir Angus,” said Brinklow. “I am influenced only by facts.”

“I suppose the news that you were sent for is all over the settlement,” said Sir Angus. He could not keep the bitterness out of his voice.

“No sir. It is not known outside of barracks, and we are not gossipers there.”

Sir Angus looked a little relieved. “Well now that you are here there is nothing for you to do,” he went on. “Mr. Darrow has disappeared. I am assured that he had not walked away from camp in any direction, so I am forced to believe that he has fallen or has leaped into the river. If he has gone over the falls there is no possibility of recovering the body.”

He paused to give Brinklow a chance to answer, but the sergeant with a polite air waited for more.

“And so,” said Sir Angus spreading out his hands, “what is there for us to do but return and report this unhappy accident?”

“There is another possibility, Sir Angus.”

“What’s that?” came the sharp question.

“Suppose Mr. Darrow was thrown into the river?”

“I have considered that,” said Sir Angus, “but there is nobody who had anything to gain by his death. . . . Perhaps you are thinking of Lockran here. It is true there was some trouble between the men but Lockran got the better of Darrow. After he had overcome the man he would have no object in putting him out of the way, surely.”

“I was not thinking of Jim,” said Brinklow quietly. . . . “How about yourself, Sir Angus?”

How boldly, how simply he asked the question. McNab was proud of him. Brinklow’s eyes were fixed on Sir Angus’s face with almost a kindly expression—always an ominous sign in him.

Sir Angus changed colour very unpleasantly. In fact his face took on a mottled hue. “Sergeant, you forget whom you are speaking to!” he said in a thick voice.

“Yes, sir,” said Brinklow. “I am permitting myself to forget that you are the Governor. I am looking on you just as a citizen who has had the

misfortune to be put in a compromising situation."

"Compromising?" cried Sir Angus in a rising voice. "Compromising? Do you presume to investigate *me*, sir?"

"Now, Sir Angus!" said Brinklow soothingly wagging one of his big hands. "I am only acting for the good of all of us. I . . ."

"Who is your commanding officer?" barked Sir Angus.

"At present, sir, I report directly to the commander-in-chief at Regina."

"Very well. Let us return to the settlement and get the wireless busy, and I promise you speedy instructions from your commander how to conduct this matter."

"I know what my commander would say," replied Brinklow with unshaken firmness, "but that hasn't got anything to do with it. I cannot leave the scene of a possible murder without a full investigation of the circumstances. That is my duty."

Sir Angus gathered himself up for another outburst, but Agatha laid a hand on his wrist. "Dad! Dad! you are in the wrong!" she whispered, and he swallowed his rage.

"The young lady is right, sir," said Brinklow with a reproachful, almost a fatherly air. "If you will excuse me, you are getting this all wrong. I am not accusing you, Sir Angus. I hope I have a little more sense . . . But others will! It will make a choice tale to be whispered from ear to ear. You will never be able to meet it then or to lay it. It is to protect your reputation, sir, that I want to make as searching an investigation as possible."

No sane man could repudiate such plain common sense. Sir Angus continued to snort, but was forced to say very unwillingly: "All right. Go ahead." McNab saw him glance at the river. "First tell me what reason you have for saying that I am in a compromising position?" he demanded.

"You had a conversation with your daughter last night," said Brinklow deprecatingly, "that was overheard by McNab."

A frightened look appeared in Sir Angus's eyes. "Ha! eavesdropping!" he said.

"Involuntary eavesdropping," said Brinklow dryly. "You must bear in mind that the trooper's bed was within three yards of where you were sitting."

"What does he say that he heard?" asked Sir Angus bitterly. "I suppose I am entitled to know that."

"Certainly, sir. You must excuse me for trespassing on very delicate ground. He heard you urging your daughter to marry Mr. Darrow. You said:

‘He holds us in the hollow of his hand!’ Miss Fairburn refused, and you said: ‘I can’t bear it. I cannot face life anew at my age!’ What did you mean by that, sir?”

Sir Angus lowered his head. “These are my private affairs,” he muttered. “What good is it to me to have my reputation protected if all this must be spread on the public record?”

“As to that,” said Brinklow soothingly, “I have a lot of leeway in making out my reports. I never put down anything unnecessary. It would be a waste of good paper.”

Sir Angus jerked his head up. “What I said had no specific application,” he said. “I was merely referring to the inextricable manner in which my affairs are tied up with Mr. Darrow’s, and the loss I would suffer if the partnership were broken.”

He glanced out of the corners of his eyes at his daughter’s face, and seeing a storm gathering there, hastily amended his statement. “This is what I referred to. I have never put any capital into the various enterprises in which Mr. Darrow and I are associated, but from time to time he has issued large blocks of stock to me in return for my services. Under my agreement with him I endorsed these certificates and returned them to him, and they are kept in his strong boxes. My income is derived from the dividends on these stocks, but in case the partnership were dissolved Mr. Darrow reserved the right to transfer the stocks out of my name.”

Everybody around the table stared.

“That was the whip he cracked over our heads!” muttered the girl. “Such a man is better dead.”

“It was not so one-sided an arrangement as it may seem,” Sir Angus went on, trying to save some remnants of his pride, “because, I hold Mr. Darrow’s agreement that all these stocks are to revert to my possession if the partnership is in force at the time of his death.”

“Ha! that’s bad!” exclaimed Brinklow.

“What do you mean?” demanded Sir Angus.

“That means you profit by his death to the extent of millions.”

Sir Angus bit his lip. “That doesn’t prove me guilty of his murder,” he muttered.

“Certainly not,” said Brinklow, “I was only referring to the look of the thing.”

“If I had killed him,” said Agatha, “I would boast of it! . . . I only learned these things last night.”

None of the men were prepared to be so outspoken as this, and there was a constrained silence around the table. Whenever the talk ceased the hoarse voice of the cataract filled the air.

"Well," said Brinklow, "McNab has told me what happened up to the point where he led Mr. Darrow back to his bed. I'd be glad to hear what you can add to that, Sir Angus."

Sir Angus chose his words carefully. "Very little," was the answer. "I returned to my bed. I suggested to Luke that he had better take off his clothes, but he rebuffed me. He continued to lie on his bed fully dressed. He fell asleep. . . ."

"He slept?" said Brinklow. "How do you know?"

"By the character of his breathing."

"That hardly bears out the theory of suicide," Brinklow pointed out.

Sir Angus bit his lip again. "Well, I may be mistaken about that," he said.

"The tent was lighted then?"

"There was a lighted lantern hanging from the ridge pole all night." Sir Angus looked over his shoulder. "It is still hanging there."

"And then?" prompted Brinklow.

"I slept too," said Sir Angus.

"Yet you were in considerable distress of mind?"

"Yes. But exhaustion finally supervened. I slept . . . When I awoke Luke was gone."

"It was then what time?"

"I can't tell you exactly. A long time before breakfast."

"Had this bed been slept in?"

"Apparently not. The blankets were not turned down."

"Did he take anything with him?"

"No."

"Was he armed?"

"No."

"Mr. Darrow usually carried a sheath knife," put in McNab.

"Oh, his knife, yes," said Sir Angus. "It was fastened to his belt."

"Then you and Mr. Darrow had no conversation after McNab left the tent?" asked Brinklow.

"None whatever," said Sir Angus.

"Have you questioned the two breeds?" Brinklow asked McNab.

"Yes. They did not see nor hear anything. Eeliper says he was up at five to make the fire. Mr. Darrow was not seen after that hour."

Brinklow stood up. "Well, that's that," he said. "Now Sir Angus I'm going to work to clear you of the slightest breath of suspicion."

Crafty old Brink! thought McNab. He's giving him the rope to hang himself.

## 6

BRINKLOW requested everybody to remain in one place while he examined the tracks around the tents. "I haven't got much of a show," he said, "because the rock shows no traces; and you've all gone in and out of the tent so many times since the rain the bank in front is a mere slide of mud. But I must do what I can."

Everybody submitted to having their footgear inspected. From a spare pair of boots in Darrow's kit, Brinklow informed himself of the size of the missing man's tracks.

Thereafter while he sat at the door of his own tent smoking, McNab watched Brinklow giving his marvellous performance of the old sleuth hound, with this difference that the man used his eyes instead of his nose, and gave no tongue. Back and forth, back and forth with his gaze fixed on the ground, frequently squatting on his hunkers to study for minutes at a time. He spent a good half-hour in front of the big tent, scanning every square inch of the ground. His investigations carried him inside the tent and out again; down to the campfire and back and up to Agatha's tent. He crawled on hands and knees across the flat rock to the river's brink studying as he went. Finally he beckoned to McNab. His face was perfectly inscrutable, a certain sign to any one who knew him that he had made important discoveries.

"What have you found?" asked McNab.

"Plenty," said Brinklow. "After midnight, that is to say after the rain, a body was dragged from the girl's tent down to the edge of the water."

"Oh God!" murmured McNab feeling a little sick, "how can the rock tell you that?"

"It isn't perfectly bare," said Brinklow. "There is a little earth in the hollows . . . As it made no resistance the chances are it was a dead body. In fact I see traces of what looks like blood on the rock, but it's been wiped up.

As I figure it, he was stabbed at the door of the tent, and probably directly through the heart."

"How do you know that?"

"When the heart stops beating a body no longer bleeds much. If he'd been cut anywhere else there'd be blood all over the place."

"Then the girl is in it too!" groaned McNab.

"I didn't say so," said Brinklow.

"What do you want me to do?" asked McNab.

"Fetch an axe and cut me a green log roughly the size of a man. I want to launch it at the spot where Barrow went in, and see what becomes of it. We've got to find that body if it takes all summer."

McNab brought the log to the water's edge on his shoulder and cast it in. Hooliam had already been sent down below the falls to watch for its reappearance. Just below where they threw it in, the rocky shore made out a little way, deflecting the current out towards the middle and creating a backwater beyond. Thus they saw their log shoot obliquely into midstream. Bobbing and disappearing in the torn water it bore so strong a resemblance to what it represented that a shiver went over McNab. So Darrow had gone in the dark.

The log struck the drift pile and was sucked under the surface. It reappeared scraping along the side of a half submerged log, catching for a moment on one projection or another. Then it floated clear and plunged over the brink, a dark shadow in the tea-brown water.

"That's about what I suspected," said Brinklow. "But a man with arms and legs sprawling out, and wearing clothes at that, would be more likely to hang up on the jam . . . Go borrow Sir Angus's binoculars, Mac."

McNab obeyed. On the edge of the rock at a point opposite the drift pile Brinklow with the glasses searched the crazy tangle of logs foot by foot, while the trooper awaited the result with quickening pulse. The sergeant with an inscrutable face finally handed over the binoculars.

"Look at that long log lying parallel with the current," he said. "I mean the big one that is whitened by the weather."

"I have it," said McNab.

"Now look at the end of it nearest the falls, and you'll see a snag sticking up from below. It waggles some in the current."

"I see it."

"Now tell me what you see between that snag and the white log . . . you'll have to look sharp for it."

“Nothing,” said McNab. Then he caught his breath. “My God! is it . . . is it the heel of a boot?”

“Nothing else,” said Brinklow. “And there’s a foot inside it . . . There is our corpus. Almost within hand’s reach.”

McNab stared at the spot in horror. “Yes,” he said, “but it will be another thing to get our hands on it.”

Sir Angus, no longer able to endure the suspense, joined them on the shore. “What is it? What is it?” he demanded nervously.

“Darrow’s out there,” said Brinklow.

Sir Angus, who was pale enough already, became slightly livid. He moistened his dry lips. “How awful . . . how awful!” he whispered.

“Better to find it than not to find it,” said Brinklow . . . He turned to McNab. “Mac, get together all the hitching lines you brought. We may have to use the tent ropes too. I’ve got to drop down on it from above, and I’ll need plenty of line . . . I’ll tie the knots myself,” he added with a grin, “so it won’t be on your conscience if anything slips.”

His humour had the contrary effect of making McNab almost want to cry. If anything happened to Brink. . . ! “Hell, Brink!” he protested. “Hell. . . !”

Brinklow gave him a playful slap. “Go fetch your ropes!”

Sir Angus meanwhile was staring at them with hanging jaw. It required some seconds for their intention to reach his understanding. “You . . . are going out there?” he said stupidly. “Wait Sergeant, we must talk this over.”

“There’s nothing to talk over, sir.”

Sir Angus drew the rags of his dignity about him. “I forbid you to go,” he said. “I suppose I have some authority here.”

Brinklow looked uncomfortable. It was on Sir Angus’s account, not his own. He hated to see a great man make a fool of himself. “I can’t turn back now, sir,” he said.

Sir Angus’s morale collapsed entirely, and the policemen turned their heads away in shame. “Wait a minute, sergeant,” he gabbled. “We are three reasonable men here. I can’t see anything out there. If it is there, none but us three know about it. Think what you’re doing before it’s too late. You are made men, both of you, if you exercise a little prudence! Why insist on stirring up a horrible scandal that will set the whole country in an uproar! Let it lie. Oh, let it lie and be forgotten!”

“Mac, go fetch the ropes,” growled Brinklow, making believe not to have heard.

Sir Angus caught hold of McNab's arm. "Wait a minute!" he cried again. "I can't permit it. Brinklow is too valuable a life to risk in such fashion. What good will it do? You can't bring Darrow back to life. You can't undo the mischief!"

"Sir Angus this is no good," said Brinklow, "and you know it, sir. The body is out there and I'm bound to bring it in, come what may. It's the rule of the force. And if I go over the falls, McNab, he will follow me out there and bring it in!"

Sir Angus turned like a demented man and went blindly back to his tent. McNab went to fetch the ropes.

Brinklow, McNab, Jim Lockran and the three breeds gathered on the shore at the point where Darrow had presumably been thrown in, and where they had later launched the log. From this point Brinklow could work down with the main current straight for the drift pile.

"The rope must be kept straight with the current," he pointed out, "if it begins to swing with me I better have no rope."

As he coiled his rope on the rock his blue eyes were very clear and his lips smiling. The sight made McNab feel emotional again, and he scowled to hide it. They had driven a stout post deep into a crevice of the rock in order to take a turn around it.

"You fellows are plenty strong enough to hold me," Brinklow had said, "but I want to feel something rigid at the end of my rope."

"Brink you ought to let me go . . . you ought to let me . . . you're too valuable to the force . . ." McNab pleaded feebly—feebly, because he knew in advance how useless it was.

"Your reasoning is faulty my son," said Brinklow with his grin. "Suppose I let you go and you got carried over. I'd have to go myself. Well, we'd be just where we are now, wouldn't we? Net result, the loss to the girls of one nice rosy-cheeked young trooper."

Brinklow fastened the rope low around his hips. When the other men looked surprised he explained: "If I fastened it higher the current would get too great a leverage on my legs. I couldn't keep them under me."

At last all was ready. Brinklow had divested himself of tunic, shirt, boots and socks. "Mac, did you pack any spare pants?" he asked grinning.

"Yes," growled McNab.

"Good! I'll be glad of them when I come out." He gave them their final instructions. "Pay out real slow, and hold all when I lift my hand. Pay out

again when I wag my hand. Don't be scared if I lose my footing, and don't haul in on the rope! I must regain my own footing. Don't haul in on any account unless you see me drowning. You'll only bash me against the rocks. When I'm ready to come back I'll haul myself in hand over hand."

Brinklow let himself over the ledge of rock. There was about thirty inches of water in that place—thigh deep. The tearing current snatched at him like something alive, but he was ready for it. He faced upstream and leaned backwards, steadying himself with one hand on the taut rope. This gave him a good purchase with his feet on the rocky bottom. The bottom was very uneven but not treacherous, for any loose stones were immediately swept over the falls. As the men slowly paid out the rope, he backed away downstream, looking over his shoulder to pick his course. The half grin was fixed on his face—a grin of contempt for danger that made McNab's heart swell.

Out in the middle the channel deepened unexpectedly, and Brinklow suddenly lost his footing. His body streamed out straight in the current and immediately began to swing violently from side to side on the end of the long rope—like a hooked fish. He coolly held up his hand for them to stop paying out, and began to struggle back hand over hand on the rope an inch at a time until he was in shallow water again. Here with a series of violent muscular efforts he struggled to regain his footing on the bottom. Over and again his legs swept out helplessly behind him. After a score of attempts he got them firmly planted in front of him upstream, and leaned back on the rope.

Proceeding more cautiously he made the deeper water without accident, though it rose nearly to his breast. The wisdom of fastening the rope low down now became apparent. But when the men on the other end of the rope felt the increased strain, they marvelled how Brinklow's body could withstand it without buckling. When he approached the drift pile he lost his footing again. As there was evidently a hole here it was useless trying to regain it. Keeping a hand on the rope he let himself float down, counteracting the side pull of the current as far as possible by using his legs for a rudder. But the billows were like wild beasts sporting with him. He was underneath oftener than he was on top. They could tell whenever he was thrown against the boulders by the vibration that came back over the rope. What McNab momentarily dreaded was to feel the rope go slack. He could scarcely resist the impulse to haul in. Was not Brinklow drowning now?

How the sergeant contrived to keep his wits about him in that wild water the watchers could not understand. But he evidently had in mind that ugly hole at the top of the drift pile where floating objects were sucked under. If

he was carried in there and his rope snagged—good-night! By striking violently to one side he contrived to drop down to one side of the pile. Then letting himself go slack, the current flung him against the side of it. He locked his arms around the projecting stump of a branch and hung there for a moment, easing the strain of the rope around his body.

Finally he crawled out on a half submerged log—the same weather-whitened trunk that he had pointed out to McNab, and spread himself on it while he got his breath. When he began to move again his first care was ever to see that the rope was in no danger of snagging itself. He edged down to the end of the log and went to work. They could not follow all his movements then. He hung his body over the big log, and reached far down into the water. He was provided with an extra length of rope to secure the corpse.

After what seemed like an endless time to the men at the other end of the rope, Brinklow stood upright on the big log and with his keen glance surveyed the course over which he must return. This would be much more difficult encumbered with the weight of the dead man. He evidently decided that he could not make it without assistance. He signalled to them to haul in with all their might, and leaped out far clear of the logs. Throwing the rope off the post they hauled in like demons and McNab instantly saw the danger. "Not so fast!" he yelled, "or you'll kill him on the rocks!"

The bodies—two bodies now, spun and swung madly at the end of the line, but they cleared the end of the drift pile, Brinklow managed somehow to hold up his hand, and the men threw a turn around the post, groaning involuntarily, because it was so hard to *stop* pulling him in. Hand over hand Brinklow started pulling himself up the rope, though buffeted, rolled, smothered as he was, he could scarcely have seen where he was going. The body of Darrow bobbed inertly behind him. The strain was terrific. When he got into shallower water he actually succeeded in gaining his feet. It was like a miracle of strength and adroitness to those who watched.

For some moments he stood sideways in the current, leaning far over and steadying himself on the rope while he rested. Then he began very slowly to haul himself up again. They could see that his strength was failing now. He was winding up the rope on his arm. Finally he could go no farther. He signalled to them to haul in. In spite of McNab's desperate warnings the men behind him on the rope pulled too fast; they pulled McNab right over. Brinklow instantly lost his precarious footing, and his body streamed out straight. But he doggedly held on to what he had gained on the rope.

The next few moments were terrible. Brinklow was cruelly battered on the rocks. But at last eager arms reached down and drew him out of the

water—and the dead man after him. The latter was allowed to lie for the moment; the living came first. McNab wondered if ever before a life so valuable had been risked to save the dead! They stripped off Brinklow's remaining clothes, and wrapped him in a blanket. Though he was as near all in as a man could be, he insisted on sitting up holding the blanket around him like an Indian brave. The grin was still etched on his pale face.

McNab put a flask to his lips. As the reviving liquor trickled down his throat he grunted with satisfaction, and his grin widened. "Who smuggled in that liquor?" he asked. "By rights I ought to arrest him!"

Sir Angus and Agatha had come down to the water's edge. All the men begged the girl to go back, but she would not. "I can stand it if you can," she said coolly. "I'm no bread and butter miss."

Sir Angus alone had shown no care for Brinklow. He was gazing at the dead man with terrified eyes. By some merciful dispensation Darrow had a peaceful aspect. He looked less ugly than he ever had in life. His eyes were closed, and the false grin was wiped off his lips. All his busy scheming was ended. His great affairs had suddenly ceased to have any importance for him whatever.

"I told you . . . I told you it was suicide!" said Sir Angus shakily. "Look at him! There isn't a mark on him!"

"Turn him over," said Brinklow grimly from where he sat.

McNab obeyed, and they all saw in the middle of the smart hunting coat the significant slit just the width of a knife blade. The trooper partly removed the man's upper garments, and there at the edge of the left shoulder blade was the clean incision a little blue around the edges.

"A downward blow," said McNab, "and aimed true for the heart."

Nobody said anything more. The roar of the cataract filled the air.

They were again grouped around the table in front of the big tent. Men must eat even in the presence of tragedy. Every face had assumed its own mask.

Down at the edge of the water the dead body was still lying in the place where it had been pulled out. It was now covered with a tarpaulin, and beside it squatted the uncouth figure of little Timoosis with his face turned towards the dead. The redskin had assumed this duty of his own volition. "Darrow great man," he said. "I watch now." There he had been sitting for more than an hour without moving. It was vaguely disquieting. The dead man's only friend it appeared, was this queer being of alien blood.

After Toma had cleared away the plates they sat on at the table. Sir Angus said, with an effort to appear at his ease:

"Well, sergeant, what is your theory?"

"My theorizing don't signify anything, Sir Angus," said Brinklow. A dark bruise on one cheek-bone was the only visible reminder of his ordeal. "The only thing I am sure of is, that Darrow was stabbed at the door of Miss Agatha's tent."

"I heard nothing," said the girl.

Her father shivered.

"As a matter of fact," Brinklow went on, "I have four different theories. The bit of evidence that will eliminate three of them is still to find."

"Four theories?" said Jim Lockran in his deep voice, smiling coldly. "And there are just four of us beside yourself at the table? . . . Do you suspect me?"

"No more than anybody else," said Brinklow. "One theory is that you may have come upon Darrow outside Miss Agatha's tent, and struck him down in a rage. It would not be unnatural."

"Not unnatural," agreed Jim, as cool as the other. "But I wouldn't have acted that way. He wasn't worth it. I would have taken him by the collar, dragged him back to his own tent and booted him inside."

Nobody who looked at Jim as he said it could have disbelieved him.

Sir Angus held up a hand that trembled a little. "He's dead," he remonstrated.

"I can't pretend to respect a man like that even if he is dead," said Jim.

Said Brinklow: "McNab tells me that when he fell asleep shortly before daylight you had not come into the tent. Where were you?"

"Just walking about," said Jim.

"Alone?"

"Sure."

"What for?"

"Well . . . I was excited. Couldn't sleep."

"What about? Your trouble with Darrow?"

"Nah!" said Jim scornfully. "That was no more than a flea bite in my life . . . If you must know," he went on—and it was curious to see Jim exhibiting confusion; "it was because Agatha . . . Agatha had just said she was willing to marry me."

The girl flashed a glance in his direction.

“Willing!” she murmured. “What a way to put it!”

“Good God!” cried Sir Angus; “you mustn’t announce it now! With him still unburied! What would people say?”

“I’m not announcing it to the world,” said Jim. “I’m telling Brink.”

“If you were walking around all that time,” said Brinklow, “did you see nothing suspicious?”

“I wasn’t around camp,” said Jim. “I walked down the trail and back. Must have been some miles.”

“I can verify,” put in McNab, “that I went down the trail early in the morning, I saw Jim’s tracks going and returning.”

There was a pause. Brinklow rubbed his nose thoughtfully. For the moment he eliminated Jim from his calculations. “Sir Angus,” he asked in the mild voice that generally presaged the explosion of a bomb; “for what reason did you go to your daughter’s tent last night after the rain?”

Sir Angus looked sick. “I . . . I . . .” he began.

Brinklow hated to see him lie. “The tracks are clearly marked in the mud along the edge of the bank,” he quickly added. “You had pulled on your boots to make the trip.”

“Well,” said Sir Angus miserably, “I just wanted to see if she was all right.”

“What reason had you to suppose that she might not be all right?”

“Well . . . Luke was not on his bed . . . He was in an ugly temper . . . Naturally I was anxious.”

“What did you do?”

“Nothing. I just peeped through the flaps of her tent. She appeared to be sleeping soundly . . . So I came back again.”

“What time would this be?” asked Brinklow.

“I can’t tell you exactly. It was dark. I didn’t sleep any after that. It soon became light.”

“Then you didn’t see Darrow anywhere?”

“No, I didn’t see him. I never saw him.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this when I first came?” asked Brinklow.

“You didn’t ask me,” said Sir Angus.

“I hadn’t found the tracks then,” said Brinklow.

He arose. “Come on Mac,” he said, “and you too, Jim, if you’re inclined to help me. The next thing I’ve got to do is to find the weapon.”

The two men went with him. As they descended the bank, Brinklow said, grinning; “Mac, I hope my pants are drying out by the fire. I got to go wading in these now.”

McNab stopped short. “Brink,” he said, exasperated, “you’re not going into the water again!”

“Oh, this will be easy,” said Brinklow soothingly. “I ain’t goin’ down to the drift pile again. Anyhow I’ll search for an hour, and if I don’t find it, you can go in.”

McNab looked at him helplessly. It was useless to protest. “Shall I call the breeds?” he muttered.

“Shan’t need them,” said Brinklow. “We’ll proceed differently this time.”

They returned to the scene of their former operations. The rope was lying where it had been dropped. McNab glanced curiously at Timoosis as they passed him. The redskin never looked at them. Was this rôle of the humble mourner just a bit of makebelieve? You never could tell about these savages. McNab knew that they were natural born actors, particularly for the benefit of white men.

At the edge of the rock Brinklow explained his theory. “He threw the body in here, and it stands to reason he threw the knife after it. There could be no other hiding-place so good. Now I’ve noticed when a man throws anything into a stream to hide it he instinctively throws it straight out from the point where he stands, and without thinking about it he will naturally aim to let it fall in the middle where the deepest water generally is. If I am right that knife will be lying in the middle of the stream opposite where we stand.”

“The current would sweep it down,” suggested McNab.

“Not far. The bottom is a rough bed of rock. The knife would lodge against the first unevenness.”

They carried the end of the rope fifty yards farther upstream where the gorge narrowed down, and tied it around a tree. This time there was no occasion for anybody to hold it, since Brinklow intended to swing on the other end straight back and forth across the current. As an extra precaution Jim Lockran remained at the tree to watch the rope.

Once more Brinklow let himself into the tumultuous water and felt his way slowly towards midstream, keeping one hand on the rope, and leaning far away from it to make leverage against the pull of the current. Sir Angus and Agatha were quickly attracted to the water’s edge to see what was going

to happen. The other two breeds came running from the fire. Only Timoosis, sitting by the body, paid no attention whatever.

Out in the middle of the stream the water was nearly hip deep. Brinklow carefully took his bearings from objects on shore, and mapping out in his mind the territory that he intended to explore, he went over it yard by yard, feeling around the bottom with one bare foot while he braced himself with the other.

To make a long story short, he had been in the icy water for nearly an hour, when suddenly the watchers saw him steady himself with extra care and duck down almost out of sight. The submersion of his entire body was too much for his balance. He was swept off his feet and dangled helplessly on the end of the line, swinging violently back and forth and rolled over and over. However, by a series of violent muscular efforts he finally succeeded in gaining his feet again. When he arose out of the water they saw that he had a knife in his hand.

A gasp of astonishment was forced from the breeds. It seemed to them as if the tall sergeant was endowed with a kind of clairvoyance. He had said the knife would be there, and there it was! He made his way slowly ashore. When they had helped him out on the ledge of rock he opened his clenched hand, and all saw the gaudy mother-of-pearl and gold trimmings of Sir Angus's hunting knife.

"Oh, God!" groaned Sir Angus. It was only too clear that he was not surprised. He knew what would be found.

McNab was trying to picture in his mind that unprecedented thing, the trial of a lieutenant-governor for murder. Sir Angus in the dock! It seemed to strike at the foundation of things. If the big chief was no more than a common murderer, what was there left for a man to look up to?

He glanced around at the others. Agatha, wide-eyed, was staring at her father in complete dismay. She who was always so sure of herself could not grasp what had happened. She was incapable of speaking. Brinklow was not looking in Sir Angus's face but at his belt. Following the direction of his glance, McNab saw that there was another knife hanging there now in its sheath.

"Where did you get that knife, Sir Angus?" Brinklow asked mildly.

"I had it in my bag," muttered the wretched man. "I put it on so it would not be noticed that the other was gone."

Brinklow cast a grim eye around the gaping circle of faces. "You need not be staring at His Honour as if you were satisfied that he killed Luke

Darrow," he said unexpectedly. "What you look on as conclusive evidence is proof that he *didn't* do it."

They gaped at Brinklow then.

"If Sir Angus had a second knife, an ordinary looking knife in his kit that nobody knew about, he would have used that wouldn't he instead of this gaudy bauble that has been advertised all over the country?"

By these simple words the situation was completely reversed. Everybody blinked in the effort to adjust themselves. Strangely enough Sir Angus was not relieved by the unexpected aid from Brinklow. His head remained sunk on his breast.

"Then who did it?" stammered McNab.

"I don't know—yet," said Brinklow. "However, this disposes of the second theory."

And then the girl found her voice. "But . . . but . . ." she faltered, "my father gave that knife to *me*!"

"Oh, Agatha!" cried Sir Angus, "why did you have to say that? Nobody knew! I would rather be charged with the crime than have suspicion fall on you!"

"You . . . thought *I* did it!" she murmured, "and that's why you were so broken up? . . . Poor dad! But how foolish of you . . . And yet," she went on like one thinking aloud, "I suppose there is no reason why I shouldn't have done it as well as any of you. I had reason enough after what dad told me last night . . . But I didn't do it! The knife was stolen from me."

To McNab her story had a fishy sound. The knife stolen from her—that was what they always said. It was evident from Sir Angus's crushed attitude that he did not believe her. Jim Lockran moved close to the girl and drew her arm through his. He scowled at the two policemen. Clearly he didn't give a rap whether she had done it or not.

Agatha continued to express amazement that she should be suspected. She said to her father: "I suppose you thought me capable of anything because I've always done what I liked, but that's only the modern way, dad. There's nothing really bad in me. I never displayed the tendencies of a butcher, did I?"

"When did you last have this knife in your hands, miss?" asked Brinklow.

"My father gave it to me yesterday when we came," she answered readily. "He said I oughtn't to sleep at such a distance from the rest of the party, and I asked for the knife, more in fun than anything. There were no

pistols in the outfit, and I said a gun would be impracticable at such close quarters. But I was only joking . . . I stuck the knife under my pillow and forgot all about it. So much happened. . . . This morning he asked for it back again and when I looked for it it was gone."

"You saw nothing or heard nothing outside the door of your tent during the night?"

"Not a thing," she said with seeming candour. "When it started to rain Jim took me to my tent. I went to bed and slept all night."

There was a pause. In the excitement everybody had forgotten that Brinklow had been standing in the icy water for an hour. In spite of himself his teeth were chattering, and McNab forced him to go and change. He left the others standing there, stealing uneasy glances at each other. Everybody was afraid to speak lest something still more terrible might be brought out. Hooliam's and Toma's beady expressionless eyes moved from one white face to another. God knows what they made of it all. A little way off Timoosis still squatted on the rock.

"Jim, do you think I did it?" Agatha asked.

"No," he said with a short laugh.

She laughed back. "Then it doesn't matter," she said. Their exchange of eyes created a world sufficient for them. They could afford to laugh at what happened outside.

"I don't think so either," said McNab.

"Well, thanks for that," she said with a tinge of irony that made McNab feel very young. "It certainly is funny," she went on, "to suddenly find oneself suspected of murder—Not that I consider murder the worst of all crimes. Sometimes it is justifiable, as in this case . . . But I wouldn't have stabbed my man in the back."

"Naturally," said Jim.

Sir Angus looked at them in a confused way. He was totally unable to comprehend the younger generation. McNab could feel sorry for the old boy now.

In a short space of time Brinklow returned clad in dry clothes.

"Brink," said Jim, "it stands to reason Agatha couldn't have done this thing. As McNab pointed out Darrow was struck a downward blow between the shoulders. He was taller than she is. She couldn't have struck so high with any force."

"I'm not saying she did it," said Brinklow deprecatingly, "but I must tell you Darrow appears to have been kneeling at the door of her tent when he

was struck. Apparently he was trying to peep between the flaps. His knee-prints can still be made out there."

"Well, Sergeant," said Agatha smiling, "I haven't the knowledge of anatomy to have stuck that blow. A woman's education is neglected in that respect. I wouldn't know how to reach a man's heart from behind."

"Good!" cried Brinklow, taking a grim pleasure in her quick wits. "Now you're talking Miss . . . And I guess that pretty well disposes of theory number three."

McNab's head was whirling. "What is your fourth theory?" he asked. "You don't think that I . . ."

"You might," said Brinklow with a grin. Even at such a moment he could not resist pulling McNab's leg. "But as it happens that is not what I had in mind." He suddenly assumed his parade ground voice. "Toma! Hooliam! Timoosis! Sit down there in front of me and take off your moccasins and socks. I want to have a look at your feet."

The three natives with perfectly impassive faces obeyed. A quick glance at the three pairs of brown feet was enough for Brinklow. He then produced his final surprise.

"That is the man who stabbed Luke Darrow," he said, pointing to Timoosis.

All eyes fastened on the face of the ugly little savage. He bore it without changing a muscle. McNab thought he swelled a little as if he was proud of becoming the focus of attention. He began to pull on his socks again in a matter-of-fact way. So his watching by the dead was all camouflage! He had dared to strike down a white man. Why? Why?

After his long ordeal the sudden reaction was too much for Sir Angus. He and his appeared to be saved, he scarcely knew how. His shoulders began to shake. Turning, he went hastily back to the big tent to avoid giving the exhibition of a complete breakdown.

Agatha and Jim drew close together, staring down at the grotesque figure coolly. They could feel no anger against the creature who had done them so great a service. Agatha voiced the question that was in the minds of all: "The poor little devil! What did he have against Luke?"

"That's what got me guessing," said Brinklow.

By degrees the tension eased. What a relief it was at any rate to *know* who had done it.

"Brink, you're a wonder!" said Jim Lockran.

The sergeant took out the cigar Sir Angus had given him, and bit off the end. "Oh, there was no hocus-pocus in it," he said deprecatingly. "A bit confusing, that was all, there was such a mess of tracks at the door of Miss Agatha's tent . . . She and Jim to begin with. If they had come upon Darrow prying into the tent either one of them might have struck him down in anger. Then Sir Angus had apparently followed Luke Darrow there. And lastly there were the tracks of a pair of bare feet. You must bear in mind that I couldn't follow any of these tracks through because they were all mixed up with each other."

"I knew the bare feet belonged to one of the breeds of course," he went on. "He had taken off his moccasins to keep 'em dry for morning. He must have spent the night pattering about for his tracks were everywhere. He had even been inside the big tent and out again, leaving a couple of half-formed muddy tracks on the floor cloth. When I had eliminated Jim, Sir Angus, and finally Miss Agatha, it was clear he was the murderer. He was my fourth theory."

"How could you tell which one it was?" asked Jim.

"He hadn't troubled to wash his feet before putting on his socks again," said Brinklow grinning. "There were still traces of mud on them."

"Why did he do it?" asked Jim blankly.

Brinklow turned to Timoosis. Whatever his personal feelings may have been, his manner was bland. He considered it unbecoming in a police officer to betray any animus. "Why did you do it, Timoosis?" he asked.

The savage would not answer until he had tied his moccasins. He stood up, assuming an air of bravado that was merely comic because he was neither brave nor handsome. "Luke Darrow my fat'er," he said.

Brinklow was effectually startled out of his calm. "Good God! what are you saying!"

"Luke Darrow my fat'er," repeated Timoosis stolidly. "My mot'er tell me. Say, you Luke Darrow's son. You half white." He turned towards the dead body lying under the tarpaulin. "I kill for cause him not own me," he went on with impassive face and burning eyes. "Now he is dead I own *him*. There is my fat'er. Now him belong to *me*."

Brinklow and McNab exchanged a glance. This was something new even in Brinklow's experience. But the instinct that is planted in the breast

of every fair-minded man acknowledged that if the story was true there was justice in the outcome.

"When I born," Timoosis went on, "my mot'er show me to Luke Darrow. Say, 'there is your son.' Luke Darrow him laugh. Him say, 'you got no proof. Go to hell wit' your brat.' Many tam my mot'er tell me t'at. It is burn me here." He touched his breast.

His words were convincing. He had the air of not caring whether he was believed or not. "Oh!" breathed Agatha, "And I almost married Darrow!"

"My mot'er got no proof," Timoosis went on. "So keep mout' shut. Tell nobody but me. Luke Darrow go away. Him rich; we poor. I know I white. Got feeling lak white man. But when I say I white all laugh. Mak' big fon. I got no name for cause my fat'er not own me. Can't get no gov'ment land. Got take treaty wit' Watusks. I always poor. Him mos' riches' man in worl'. . . ."

Timoosis' recital began to be dramatic. "They tell me my fat'er comin' back here. Wah! I am lak wood when I hear t'at. Can't eat, can't sleep, want see him so bad. T'ink maybe he own me then. Bam-bye big airplane come flyin'. Drop in the water lak wild swan; whoosh! My fat'er come ashore. Wah! Wah! I am lak wee-ti-go, crazee man. He so big, so white, so rich. All tam smilin'. Never see so fine man lak my fat'er . . . So I get McNab tak' me. I stay by my fat'er. I spik wit' him. He mak' fon wit' me. . . ."

"Did you tell him who you were?" asked Brinklow grimly.

Timoosis hung his head, and slowly shook it. "N'moya," he muttered. "Him so big, so rich I scare tell him. T'ink he jus' laugh and boot me out of camp. . . ."

"Well, go on," said Brinklow.

The zest had gone out of Timoosis' story now. His head remained hanging. "I know my fat'er soon goin' back," he went on. "Never come no more. Feel bad for t'at me. All tam burn in here." He touched his breast again. "I not want . . . not want . . ." Timoosis' English was not sufficient to convey his feelings. "I not want stay wit'out him. So I mak' I kill my fat'er and keep him."

Brinklow stared with wonder. Was it love or hatred—or both? His glance at McNab said: Did you ever hear the beat of it! But Brinklow could not forget the manner of Darrow's death. "You stabbed him in the back!" he said scowling.

Here the savage in Timoosis came uppermost. He could not be made to feel ashamed of his treachery. "I lil' weak man," he said, "can't kill no ot'er way."

“How did you make your opportunity?” asked Brinklow grimly.

“All tam watch,” said Timoosis. “I see there is moch trouble. When all is quiet in camp I go in big tent. I wake Luke Darrow, tell him Jim Lockran is at the girl’s tent. He jomp up and run down there. Kneel down to look. Wah! I kill!” With a distorted face he illustrated that terrible blow.

“Did he cry out?” asked Brinklow.

Timoosis became wooden again. “N’moya. I strike true.”

“And then what?”

“I drag down to water. Push in. I t’ink he carry over falls. Bam-bye when you go back I t’ink I go huntin’ up here. This my huntin’ groun’. I look down river till find my fat’er. Bury him in my huntin’ groun’. Then I know my fat’er’s grave.”

His last words gave McNab a strange glimpse into the savage heart.

“How did you get the knife?” asked Brinklow.

“I tak’ from the girl’s tent when all are eatin’.”

“So that’s the story,” said Brinklow with a kind of grim compassion. So he might have spoken to a child. “Of course you know, Timoosis, that I have to lock you up, and that you’ll be tried before the court for murder.”

“It’s all the same,” said Timoosis indifferently.

Since they had no place to confine him, Timoosis’ wrists and ankles were handcuffed, and he was laid inside McNab’s tent where he immediately fell asleep. The afternoon was wearing on, and it had been decided not to start before morning. Brinklow and McNab sat at the door of the tent smoking; Sir Angus was recuperating in his own tent; while Jim and Agatha were to be seen seated on a shelf of rock below, still deep in talk. The body had been prepared for removal and placed in a temporary shelter.

“What in thunder do those two find to talk about?” remarked McNab.

“You’ll never know,” said Brinklow grinning, “until you find yourself in the same condition. . . . But it’s a safe bet that it has nothing to do with what happened here to-day. All that scarcely touched them. That is how it is.”

“It must be a great experience,” said McNab enviously.

“Oh, all of that,” said Brinklow.

“I’ve learned a good bit from this affair,” McNab presently went on.

“Sure,” said Brinklow, “there was meat in it for a philosopher.”

“I’ve learned that things are never what they seem.”

“Well, that’s something to know,” said Brinklow.

“Aah! quit your kiddin’, Brink. You know what I mean. About the lieutenant-governor and all. When it came to a showdown his Nibs turned out to be a pretty poor tool.”

“Well, he was tried real hard,” said Brinklow.

“Sure. Tried and found wanting. A fellow is taught to respect these big guns. Never again for me!”

“One attitude is just as childish as the other,” said Brinklow with his incorrigible friendly grin. “There has got to be lieutenant-governors and brass hats of high and low degree all in due order. But the winning of a brass hat or a gold chain of office don’t change the nature of a man any. They remain just like you and me. Some are grand fellas and some are not. It’s not the man, but the office that is to be respected, son.”

“I suppose so,” said McNab uncertainly. “What I don’t understand,” he went on, “how is it you always knew Sir Angus didn’t do it, even when appearances were most against him?”

“Men are unaccountable critters,” said Brinklow serenely; “but sometimes a particular man has a keynote that gives you a line on his probable actions. Now Sir Angus’s keynote is his fear of what people will say. It governs every act of his life. You wouldn’t never find a man of that sort committin’ a murder.”

“Why, sure!” said McNab, chagrined that he hadn’t thought of it.

“I can’t help feeling sorry for that poor little rat behind us,” said McNab later. “He’s all messed up with a white man’s and a red man’s feelings. Don’t know where he’s at. Hardly seems square to judge him by all-white standards. If his story is true, I’d be sorry to see him hang for this.”

“Whether or not his story is true,” said Brinklow, “no jury will hang him after hearing him tell it. They’ll have to send him up for a long stretch out of respect to a multi-millionaire, but sho! he’ll wax fat on it! What! three squares every day and a warm bed throughout the four seasons! Timoosis’ll think he’s in Paradise instead of the calaboose!”

# THE CASE OF ADAM TASKER

## 1

NORTH of fifty-five men have a long time to wait for summer, but when it comes it's worth it. The sky shows a tender blue unknown to the lower latitudes, and the air stings like wine. On a crystal morning in late June, Sergeant Brinklow clad in singlet and breeches went to the door of the bunk-house to wash, while trooper McNab stretched himself luxuriously in his bunk preparatory to springing from it. The two of them had the hut to themselves, for the other two men constituting the detachment at Caribou Lake were out on patrol. With the addition of a single outpost at Spirit River Crossing and another down at Fort Enterprise, this little garrison policed a territory comprising quarter of a million square miles, more or less.

Though it was only five o'clock the sun was already high in the sky. The sparkle of the morning had entered into Brinklow's veins and he was gayly whistling the Kerry Dances with the addition of sundry trills and grace notes of his own. As he swung open the door the tune was suddenly called in, and an exclamation of astonishment broke from him.

"For the lova mike, Mac, come look at this!"

The grizzled sergeant had himself under such good control generally, that a start of surprise from him meant something, and young McNab was quickly at his side. Brinklow was kneeling down, the better to examine something outside the doorsill. It was a rude picture that had been scratched with a pointed stick on a hard beaten patch of earth. McNab could make out a death's head, and under it a wavy line bisected by a short straight line. Under that again was an arrow pointing north-west.

"This is some redskin work!" cried McNab.

"No!" said Brinklow with good-natured sarcasm.

McNab blushed slightly. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Picture writing," said Brinklow. "All the red tribes are good at it."

"Can you read it?"

"Sure! A skull means death anywhere on earth. The wavy line is a river. It's a big river I take it from the thickness of the line, hence it must be the Spirit River. The little line would be Spirit River Crossing where the settlement is. The arrow is pointing in the exact direction of the Crossing."

“But what does it mean, Brink?”

“It’s an anonymous letter, like. Somebody is telling us that there has been a death at Spirit River Crossing that needs looking into.”

“A murder?” suggested McNab with rising excitement.

“So you might think,” said Brinklow.

“Why in hell didn’t he come and tell us openly?”

“When you’ve been up here longer you’ll find out that the natives never do anything openly,” said Brinklow; “specially in dealing with white men. It’s the first rule amongst them that a white man is never to be told anything.”

“Then why did he tell us at all?”

“Well, there are several possible explanations of that. I would need a little more information before I picked on any one of them.”

“There must be plenty of men up here who have it in for you,” said McNab scowling. “Maybe it’s a trap.”

“Maybe it is,” said Brinklow cheerfully. “But at that, the police can’t take a dare of course.”

“Then you’re going to follow it?”

“Sure! . . . I can take one of the other lads with me,” he added, “if you don’t like the look of it.”

“Not on your tintype!” said McNab. “I was in on it first!”

Making haste with his washing and dressing, Brinklow went off to fetch the “old man.” “Barracks” at Caribou Lake consisted of three log shacks in a row facing the road; the bunk-house, the combined court and prison and the inspector’s residence. Brinklow had therefore less than a hundred feet to go.

McNab went into the lean-to kitchen to start the fire. His heart was greatly lifted up by the prospect of a journey with Brinklow. On the trail Brink was the companion incomparable. McNab had already been associated with him in the Shem Packer case, and the still more celebrated affair of Luke Darrow. Brink was far and away the most famous man on the force but he was still by his own desire only a sergeant. One of the rare men who was satisfied with his lot in life.

Hearing voices, McNab went back to the front door where he came face to face with Brinklow and Inspector Considine in dressing-gown and slippers. A surprise awaited them.

“Good God, it’s gone!” cried Brinklow. “You have nothing for it now but my word, sir!”

“Well, I can take that,” said the little inspector dryly.

The patch of earth in front of the doorsill had been carefully smoothed over.

"Gone!" echoed McNab. "I haven't been out of the shack. I went back into the kitchen, but both doors were open."

Brinklow pointed out how the artist had knelt out of sight around the corner of the shack, and reaching forward had rubbed out his work with his hand.

"Then he can't be far," said the inspector. "He's taken cover in the woods yonder. If you and McNab look sharp you can pull him out."

"If you don't mind sir," said Brinklow respectfully, "I'd like to draw him out a bit further. If we nab him, you know how they are, he will just turn dumb. And we can't prove anything on him."

"Very well," said the inspector with his admirable composure. "But I don't like it. It smells of an ambush. You are too valuable a man to be lured off by I don't know who in this underhand manner. Mackworth had better go."

McNab's heart sunk, but Brinklow's air of respectful confidence remained unshaken. He knew his own value. "Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but in case there has been a murder at the Crossing it's clear that Corporal Anders don't know anything about it, or his messenger would have got here as soon as this man. Well, if it's a secret crime, it's understood isn't it, that that's my department?"

"Go along with you, Sergeant," said the inspector with a brusqueness that scarcely masked his affection, "if you want the job you know you can have it. . . . Just the same, I don't like it," he added. "I depend on you to take every precaution against accident."

"Yes sir."

An hour later Brinklow and McNab took to the trail, leading a couple of packhorses with their outfit.

## 2

THE "long portage" as they call it, between Caribou Lake and the Spirit River is a well-travelled route, and the two policemen were able to put up for the night at a stopping-house where it was not necessary to take any precautions against surprise. So energetically did they push their way that already on the afternoon of the second day they were riding down the long hill towards the settlement by the river. A feeling of excitement took possession of McNab. It was like the moment before the curtain rises.

However, the drama did not begin right away. The inhabitants of the half-dozen lop-sided shacks on the river bank greeted the redcoats with cries of welcome. Nothing sinister suggested itself.

"Brink," said McNab, "are we to tell Anders what we've come for?"

"No."

"But Anders is a good fellow."

"Sure he is . . . But our mysterious artist friend had some reason for coming to us instead of to Anders, and we'd best find out what it is before we say anything."

"How shall we account for our coming, then?"

"We don't have to account for it. It's just 'orders.' Every policeman respects his comrade's orders."

"Barracks" was no more pretentious than the other cabins. Anders, a fine looking young Viking, greeted them with an open brow. He could not but have wondered at this unexpected visitation from district headquarters, but he asked no questions; only set before his guests the best his larder afforded.

Neither did Brinklow question Anders though, as McNab saw, the wily old boy led the talk in the direction that he wished it to go. It soon became apparent that if there had been any crime at the Crossing Anders knew nothing about it. After supper they dropped in at the store to listen to the general talk. No hint of any tragedy. It was stated that nobody had died in the neighbourhood since the winter. McNab began to feel as if they were the victims of a hoax.

"Wait a bit," said Brinklow when they turned in for the night.

"If there's no more information forthcoming what can we do?" asked McNab.

"I'm counting on our guide to give us a fresh lead," said Brinklow with a chuckle . . . "As soon as he catches up with us."

"How do you know he's behind us?"

"He wouldn't leave Caribou until he made sure we were riding. He couldn't overtake us because we have the best horses in the country."

They spent the following day visiting a little community of farmers who made a precarious living by raising wheat on the river bottoms. They went from house to house letting the people talk. No word was dropped that gave them a clue. The only thing on the farmers' minds was the danger of summer frosts. In the evening they headed back to barracks no wiser than they had set forth.

“Well, our friend must be here before this,” said Brinklow. “We can expect to see another example of his artistic talent.”

They did not have to wait until morning for it. Corporal Anders was away investigating a report that a breed living on the Great Smoky had gone mad. Consequently barracks was deserted, and when Brinklow and McNab reined up at the door they found a picture already drawn in the dust.

There was the river again with another line crossing it, and a little house pictured beside it. To the left of the river was a second house with several Indian tepees alongside, and an object that looked like a stuffed bag lying prone. The arrow now pointed to the south-west, that is, upstream.

“This is still the Spirit River,” said Brinklow, studying the picture. “Notice how true to its course he has drawn it, though he has never seen a map. Here’s the Big Smoky coming in at the right place, and the South Heart River. Here’s the big bend to the westward before you get to Cardigan. This little house stands for Cardigan. There’s a Company post there. The line shows we’re to cross back over the river at Cardigan. The other little house will be the post of the French outfit at Wehtigo Prairie. There’s an encampment of Beaver Indians at Wehtigo. Hence the tepees.”

“And what’s this other object?” asked McNab.

“That represents a sleeping man,” said Brinklow, “with his blanket pulled over his head in the native fashion. . . . But I’m hanged if I know what he’s there for.” He considered the picture for a moment or two. “I’ve got it!” he said. “That means we’re to sleep at Wehtigo and wait for instructions.”

McNab glanced over his shoulder uneasily. There was an uncanny suggestion in all this that made his blood run a little cold. “What’s his game?” he muttered. “The son of a gun is probably watching us now!”

“Sure!” said Brinklow.

“So our journey is just starting,” said McNab. “Why the hell couldn’t he have told us all this in the beginning?”

“I reckon there were two reasons,” said Brinklow, grinning. “Firstly, he couldn’t show all that in one picture, and secondly, he was afraid if he told us how far we had to go, we wouldn’t start at all.”

“We’re going on?” asked McNab.

“Sure!” said Brinklow. “I’m beginning to get real curious about this case.” He rubbed out the picture in the dust. “We’ll say nothing about it. Let it be a secret betwixt you and me and the old man.”

Travel beyond the Crossing was usually by boat up or down the river, but Brinklow knowing they would want their horses later, undertook to ride straight across the prairie for Cardigan. This vast country was uninhabited by either red man or white and McNab could not help but reflect that it would make a first-rate place for an ambush. At night they stood watch turn and turn, but saw nothing more dangerous than the usual coyotes and bears.

At the end of the fourth day they rode up to the pair of log shacks that comprised the trading post at Wehtigo Prairie. It was a pretty country, gently rolling and set out with clumps of graceful poplar trees like a park. There were no white men in this neighbourhood. The store was kept for the French outfit by a young breed named St. Pierre Fraser and the second house was occupied by a breed missionary to the Beavers, the Reverend Donald McDonald.

The policemen lodged for the night with the parson, and found him a first-rate fellow. His broad Scots speech seemed oddly inconsistent with his coppery skin. He set a good table too; the roasted haunch of moose with wild cranberry sauce, followed by raspberry tarts, was something to remember after the plain fare of the trail. Their host had no compunctions about asking them what they had come for.

"Just riding around to see if everything is all right," said Brinklow. "Had no trouble around here, I suppose."

"No more than usual," said the Reverend McDonald dryly. "An epidemic of measles and a couple of cases of bigamy amongst the Beavers."

Brinklow went to the door next morning while the worthy parson was still snoring. McNab was at his shoulder. There was the little picture etched on the caked earth. Evidently their unseen guide had been close behind them in arriving at this point.

It was a simpler picture this time; merely a few irregular lines which Brinklow said signified brûlé or burnt-over land, followed by a circle with a little house in it. The circle was a symbol for a stretch of prairie or open land. The arrow pointed west.

Brinklow opened his eyes at the sight of the house. "Didn't know there was any white man living west of here," he muttered. "Didn't know there was anything west of here." He rubbed out the picture with his foot.

In due course they sat down to breakfast with the Reverend McDonald. "Well, where do you go from here?" asked their host.

"West," said Brinklow.

"Hm!" said the parson, "you'll have your work cut out for you."

"There's a trail, isn't there? It's marked on the old maps."

"There's a trail all right, but the whole country was burned over twenty years ago, and the trail is so covered with down timber no white man has been through since."

"Yet there's a white man living out there," said Brinklow at a venture.

"Yes. Adam Tasker. I've never seen him, but the Indians tell me about him. A hard man, they say."

"What's a white man doing in that God-forsaken spot?"

"Raises horses and cattle," said the Reverend McDonald. "He's located on what they call Pouce Longue Prairie. Said to be the richest land in the country. The Indians say snow never lies on the ground there on account of the Chinook winds. They say he has acquired title to a whole township and has grazing rights over the rest."

"How is it nobody ever sees him?" asked Brinklow. "Where does he do his trading and all?"

"When this trail was blocked he blazed a new trail to the south. He goes out now by Jasper House and down the Athabasca river."

"Does he live alone?"

"No. According to my information he has a white man working for him called Ned Chambers or Chamlee—the Indians can't pronounce his name; also a light breed called Michel Dufranne besides other breeds that he brought in from the south. Tasker is married to Dufranne's sister. The Indians describe her as a very pretty woman. They say he lives in a big house, a regular palace you'd think from their description. He bought in a small herd twenty-five years ago and now his cattle and horses cover the prairie, they say. He must be a rich man."

"That is to say he would be if he could sell his stock," suggested Brinklow.

"No sir, that's the very point," said McDonald. "Twenty-five years ago this Tasker figured out that the next trans-continental railway to be built would have to cross the mountains by the Spruce river pass, and he sat himself down in line with the pass. And last summer, by God, the first party of surveyors came through. The line is going through the pass and it has to cross Tasker's land."

"Sounds like quite a character," said Brinklow. "We'll ride over and pay him a call."

When they started westward over the trail, Brinklow pointed out to McNab where two horses had gone that way only a short time before. One horse was travelling light.

"So our guide is now ahead of us," said McNab.

"Yeah," said Brinklow dryly. "He figures he's got us coming now."

McNab scowled with a healthy distrust of such mysteriousness. Danger he could face, but he dreaded being made a fool of. "We'll look nice if it should all turn out to be a joke," he muttered.

Brinklow said nothing at the moment, but later, as they were circling the edge of a muskeg, he pointed out the tracks of the same two horses in the dried mud, heading east. These tracks were over two weeks old, and at this time the second horse had carried a heavy pack.

"That bird has ridden six hundred miles to fetch us in," he said in his off-hand way. "And alone at that. You nor me wouldn't do it. He rode his hosses for every ounce they had, and he carried an outfit for the round trip so he wouldn't have to show himself in any house or store . . . That's no joke, if you're asking me, my lad."

## 3

ONE afternoon as they topped a summit in a wide, rolling sea of grass, they got their first glimpse of their goal. On another elevation to the southward stood a low spreading house with a wide porch and four big chimneys. There were trees about it, and extensive stables and corrals in connection. There was no other house like it in the whole country. As they rode on they alternately lost it and found it as they dipped into the hollows and gained the crests.

The wind being in the south, they gave no warning of their approach until they reached the foot of the last rise. A shining slough of sweet water curved around the base of the hill. As they rode up a white man appeared at the open door of the stable where he stood as if frozen in astonishment. A tall young fellow with a hard, comely face and clean limbs, the best type of range rider. He was such a one as McNab would have chosen for a friend, consequently it made him sore to see the look of unmanly terror that spread over the young fellow's face. Clearly he was not a party to bringing them there. What's he afraid of? McNab asked himself.

Brinklow dismounting affected not to notice the man's confusion. He extended his hand, saying: "Sergeant Brinklow and Trooper McNab."

The young man shook hands in a daze. Brinklow's name was known from one end of Canada to the other, and at the sound of it he looked even more terrified. "What do you want of us?" he stammered.

"Nothing in particular," said Brinklow. "We're just making a patrol."

The other man made an effort to recover his grip. “You must excuse me,” he said. “It gave me a start to see anybody coming from that side. In all the time I have been here nobody has ever come down from the north before.”

“We’ve been trying to re-establish the old trail,” said Brinklow.

The other introduced himself as Ken Chambers. He helped them stable their horses, talking all the while about nothing in particular. Yet he was obviously not a talkative man by nature. He left them for a moment to announce their arrival at the house.

Laden with their baggage they made their way to the main door. The room they entered was of fine proportions occupying the whole centre of the house.

There was an immense fireplace at either end built of rounded stones. Superb bearskins were strewn on the floor, while various weapons and trophies of the chase hung from the log walls. McNab was astonished to observe the “outside” furniture. He had never seen anything like this north of the last town.

A door at the back of the room opened and a girl entered. McNab caught his breath at the sight of her. In any company of women she would have stood out. Her ivory skin betokened just a dash of Indian blood. She was very pale, and her dark eyes were strained with terror. She came forward with uneven steps. A moment later a young man followed her in, her brother by the look of him, and as handsome in his way as she was in hers.

Chambers introduced them: “Mrs. Tasker . . . Michel Dufranne.”

“Where’s Tasker?” asked Brinklow off-hand.

There was an ugly silence. The three young people lowered their eyes. But somebody had to speak. It was Dufranne who filled in the breach.

“He’s dead,” he said.

Brinklow rubbed his lip and made sounds of condolence. It was impossible to say of what he was thinking. McNab thought: Our work is here all right. He was sorry for the three simply because they were so good-looking. Which was illogical perhaps, but human.

“Since when?” asked Brinklow.

Dufranne made a mental calculation. “Sixteen days,” he said.

“What was the matter with him?”

Dufranne spread out his hands. “We don’t know. He just dropped down and never spoke again. We suppose it was a heart attack. There was no doctor, of course. We wanted to fetch the parson from Wehtigo Prairie, but

we didn't know how long it would take to get through the brûlé. We couldn't keep him in summer weather."

"Where did you bury him?" asked Brinklow.

This simple question produced another dead silence. It was only too clear that these young people taken by surprise, were desperately trying to think up a lie to meet the situation. As before it was Dufranne who finally answered. He masked his fright under an inscrutable manner that he had inherited from his red ancestor.

"We didn't bury him," he said.

"What!" cried the surprised Brinklow.

"Tasker hated the idea of burial," Michel went on glibly. "He made us promise that we would lash his body to a little raft and set it adrift on the big river. He wanted to be carried down to the sea. So that is what we did."

"If he dropped dead without warning how could he tell you all this?" asked Brinklow mildly.

Dufranne bit his lip. However, he quickly recovered himself. "He'd been sick before," he said. "It was then that he told us."

"Hm!" said Brinklow. It suited his purpose to ignore the ugly look of the situation; and he added with apparent sympathy: "A thing like this certainly is hard on folks when they're cut off from everybody."

The three young people looked relieved.

The girl bestirred herself. "You will want to wash before supper," she said softly. "I'll show you to your room."

Brinklow looked humorously at his partner. That look said: Pretty soft, eh, being "shown to your room" on Pouce Longue Prairie.

The simple plan of the house was evident at a glance. The big living-room occupied the centre of the building, having windows to the front and the rear. There was a bedroom in each corner and a lean-to kitchen at the back. Their young hostess led them into one of the front rooms, which had a window opening on the porch with a view over the slough below. They were freshly surprised to discover that it contained a bedstead, a dresser and a washstand all finely made and polished. On the last-named piece there was actually a china bowl and pitcher.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Brinklow, "but how did you get these nice fixings away up here?"

"My husband made the furniture," she answered. "It was his hobby. The china was brought in from outside. My husband liked to have nice things about him. He came of a very good family in England."

“How long have you been married?” asked Brinklow with a fatherly air.

“Five years,” she said sadly.

He glanced at her in surprise. She did not look twenty years old.

“I was only a child when I came here,” she explained. “Fourteen years old.”

“I see,” said Brinklow gently.

She went away, but presently there was a tap on the door, and her soft voice said: “Hot water.”

“Well, if this don’t beat the Dutch!” murmured Brinklow, going to fetch it.

While they were tidying themselves, the grizzled sergeant pursed up his lips in a noiseless whistle as was his custom when he was thinking hard.

“A bad business, Brink,” murmured McNab, to draw him.

Brinklow nodded without saying anything.

“It’s clear that none of these three had any hand in bringing us here,” McNab went on. “All three of them looked as guilty as hell.”

“Guilty or scared,” said Brinklow. “It’s not always the same thing. . . . You must bear in mind they was knocked silly by the appearance of redcoats at the door.”

“Why should they be if their consciences are clear?”

Brinklow merely shrugged.

“What do you suppose has become of our artist friend?” asked McNab.

“I don’t know,” said Brinklow dryly. “But I reckon he won’t abandon us.”

“What do you make of it, anyhow, Brink?”

“I don’t make nothing of it, yet. Give me a chance to find the body first.”

“All three of them are so darn good-looking,” murmured McNab.

“Take the brother and sister,” said Brinklow. “Those of mixed blood run to extremes of beauty and ugliness. And the same goes for their characters. You are apt to find them either angels or devils!”

## 4

As the chill of evening made itself felt, a fire was lighted in one of the big chimneys, and the supper table pushed up in front of it. This table with its lighted candles, its white napkins and its appetising food was a grateful sight to two bachelors like Brinklow and McNab; nevertheless the meal that

followed was an uncomfortable one for all at the table. The three members of the household were on the rack, and they could not quite hide it.

The strain showed itself in Sophie Tasker's expressive eyes which looked when you were close to her as if they had not had their due of sleep lately; and in the way Ken Chambers' sinewy brown hands trembled slightly when he passed a dish. Dufranne had himself under better control, and he bore the brunt of the conversation; but McNab, watching him, would see his eyes give a sudden, involuntary roll like those of a horse in pain. He was on the griddle too.

There was a strong resemblance between brother and sister; both had the same large, dark, Italian looking eyes that suggested a power of emotion. Inconsistently enough, what attracted McNab in the girl antagonised him in the man. One of these passionate fellers, he thought; like an actor. For all that, Michel was very much of a man, with his slim, well-knit frame and close mouth. It was impossible to guess what he was thinking about. He could make his big eyes as expressionless as glass. He seemed to be about twenty-five years old, that is to say the same age as Ken Chambers and as McNab himself. Both brother and sister were well educated. It transpired that they were the children of a missionary who had married the half-breed daughter of a trader.

In the general state of nerves it seemed to McNab that Brinklow could easily have forced a showdown. Brink could be a deadly inquisitor when he chose.

But at the present he was as mild as milk. His talk was all of their journey in, and how he intended to make a big swing back to the Spirit river at Fort Cheever and return over the bench to the north. It was only occasionally that he inserted a sly question as if by accident.

Thus he asked Dufranne what other employees there were on the ranch. Dufranne replied that there had been one other regular employee, a Cree half breed named Eeliper John. This man had worked for Adam Tasker ever since he first came into the country. But about a month before he had expressed a wish to return to his own family, and had departed for Jasper House en route to Prince George. They had sometimes employed Beaver Indians to ride the range, Dufranne went on, but found them unreliable. Ken was going out to Jasper House shortly to try to hire a couple of breeds.

When they had finished eating the girl retired to the kitchen on the plea of having to wash the dishes. For a while Ken sat on at the table smoking in an uneasy silence, then he too got up, and mumbling something about having to attend to a sick horse in the stable, he went out by the front door.

Brinklow suggested another casual question to Dufranne. “You all appear to have thought a heap of Tasker?”

Dufranne’s answer was, unexpectedly, a cynical shrug.

“No?” said Brinklow in mild surprise.

“He was a square man,” said Dufranne cautiously. “He kept his agreements.”

“But you weren’t exactly crazy about him, eh?”

“I don’t wish to speak ill of the dead.”

“It’s not speaking ill to tell the plain truth.”

“Well, I’ll tell you, sergeant,” said Dufranne with an attractive frankness, “there isn’t a word you could say against him, but he was a hard man to live with—that is for anybody who had warm blood in their veins. A cold sneering kind of man; sarcastic. Never let himself go. Took a pleasure in showing up the worst in everything and everybody.”

“I get you,” said Brinklow. “But the breed was crazy about him.”

“Oh, yes, Tasker was Eeliper’s god,” said Dufranne carelessly.

After some more idle talk Brinklow said, “Did Tasker make a will?”

“Yes,” said Dufranne. “Left everything to Sophie, of course.”

“Have you taken steps to have it proved?”

“Proved? What’s that?” asked Dufranne.

“When a man dies you have to prove his will,” said Brinklow. “I don’t know exactly what the process is. Any lawyer could tell you.”

“What difference does it make?” said Dufranne. “There’s nobody to question Sophie’s claim.”

“Sure,” said Brinklow. “But it’s something you’ve got to do in order to establish her rights legally.”

Dufranne let the subject drop.

When Ken failed to return it occurred to McNab that he ought to be kept under observation. He might make away with valuable evidence. So McNab with a byplay of yawns, bade good-night to the other two and retired to his room. Inside he blew out the candle, and quietly let himself out through the window to the porch.

He made his way softly around the house. There was a light burning in the kitchen, but the room was empty. His heart hardened against the girl. She was not then, such a fine character as she had seemed. He went on to the stable, keeping close in the shadow of the different outbuildings. In that latitude it never becomes completely dark in June. The stable door was

opened and as he flattened himself against the wall outside, he heard an agitated whispering from the dark. McNab listened, blushing. He hated the part of eavesdropper, but duty was duty. He could hear only a part of what was said.

He heard the girl's whisper soft as a breeze amongst birch-trees. "Oh, Ken, why is it a sin for me to love you?"

"It's not!" returned the man. "You can't help yourself no more than I can! . . and anyhow, you're free now!"

"But how?" she said wildly.

McNab felt that he was on the brink of a terrible disclosure, but they lowered their voices, and the rest was lost. By and by he heard her whisper:

"Anyhow, I should have been dead long ago, if you hadn't come here. Living with that man was like a slow poison." Her voice suddenly scaled up hysterically. "Oh, what am I saying? Poison! . . . Poison! . . ."

Her utterance was choked by a soft sobbing. Ken was trying to soothe her.

Later he broke out into a low savage cursing. "Oh, God, I hate him! . . . I hate him!"

McNab had a sense that she put her hand over his mouth. "Oh, don't, Ken!" she murmured. "He's dead!"

"I don't care!" he persisted. "I hate him still! Look how he kept us on the rack. For three years. He knew we were crazy about each other. Nothing could be hidden from him. He knew, too, that you would never kick over the traces as long as he lived. So he felt safe. He had us like two flies stuck on pins, because I couldn't leave you. And he took his pleasure in watching us, and taunting us. Such a man is better dead, I say!"

The next words McNab could distinguish were in the girl's voice. "What are we going to do?" she whispered tremulously. "What brought these policemen here?"

"It was just accident," answered Ken. "They know nothing."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Sophie. "They wouldn't send the famous Sergeant Brinklow so far on an ordinary patrol."

"How could he know anything? Nobody knows except us three."

"Ah, don't fool yourself!" she murmured agitatedly. "That man is deep . . . deep! His eyes are sunk a foot in his head. He looks right through you. I want to scream when he looks at me!"

"How *could* he know?" reiterated Ken. "There's no such thing as second sight. That's only redskin foolishness."

"That's what's driving me crazy," murmured Sophie. "*How could he know?*"

After a silence McNab heard her agitated voice again. "All those lies that Michel told him! How are we going to carry it through?"

"We had to say something," said Ken. "Michel told a better story than I could have made up."

"I know," she whispered. "That's the trouble. We are not good liars. . . . But we've got to lie now," she went on. "We've got to prove these lies somehow. We've got to convince him."

"As soon as the policemen go to bed," answered Ken, "we three will meet in Michel's room and make up a story that we can all stick to."

There was some further talk that McNab could not catch. Finally he heard the girl say, "All right." This sounded like the end of their talk, and he lost no time in putting a corner of the stable between him and the door. Presumably they came out of the stable but he did not see them. By outhouse and fence he made his way around the far side of the main building. Through the living-room windows he saw Brinklow and Dufranne still sitting in front of the fire. He slipped through the window into his own room.

He lay down on the bed to wait for Brinklow. He was profoundly stirred by what he had heard. After all, these three were young like himself. McNab was all for them—unofficially. Officially he believed them guilty, and he had his duty to do.

Brinklow soon came in, and McNab told him what he had overheard. The sergeant listened with a grave face, rubbing his lip. Like his junior he was moved by the tale, but he seemed to regard it as of less importance than McNab had expected.

"It don't get us much forrader, does it?" he said.

"The girl admitted that everything Dufranne told us was lies," said McNab.

"Well, I knew that already," said Brinklow.

"She as good as accused herself of the crime!"

"You can't attach a literal meaning to everything a hysterical woman may say," remarked Brinklow.

"She and Chambers are in love with each other," insisted McNab. "There's the motive for your crime."

"Oh, there's no lack of motives," said Brinklow coolly. "This Tasker appears to have been a first-class stinker. There's motive enough for

anybody to kill him." He began to undress.

It seemed to McNab that Brinklow was derelict in his duty. "The three of them are conspiring together in Dufranne's room this minute!" he insisted.

"What is that to me?" said Brinklow, unlacing his boots. "Let the poor kids conspire. My job is to find the body!"

## 5

McNab was awakened by a low call from Brinklow. His tall partner was standing at the open window of the room. It was just day, that is to say, between two and three o'clock.

"Our guide is still on the job," said Brinklow in his dry way.

McNab ran to his side. The window was neatly fitted in a hand-made frame. It had a broad sill resting on the log wall beneath. On the sill lay an oblong piece of birch bark weighted down with two stones. A rough picture of closely growing trees was drawn on the bark with charcoal, and underneath the usual arrow, this time pointing to the south-east.

"Follow the direction of the arrow with your eye," said Brinklow, "and tell me what you see."

"Only the slough and then the prairie," said McNab.

"Look just beyond the top of the second rise."

"I see a dark patch there."

"That's the top of a poplar bluff. I take it that's the thickly growing wood the picture refers to."

McNab's pulses began to pound with excitement. "What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Get your clothes on," said Brinklow, reaching for his own. "I reckon we'd better go over and take a look before the folks are up. If there's a grave there we'll need a spade," he added coolly.

McNab's blood ran cold. An ugly business. "There's a spade in the stable," he said. "I saw it when we put our horses up."

"Very well, fetch it."

They went out through the window in order to avoid opening and closing two doors. The poplar bluff was less than half a mile away, so they did not take out their horses. McNab procured the spade and joined Brinklow by the slough. Circling around the water they climbed the rise, crossed a depression, and mounted a higher rise behind. McNab looked back as they went over the crest, but could see no movement around the house.

The poplar bluff lay in a hollow before them. Brinklow sent McNab in one direction while he took the other. The young man had not taken more than twenty paces before he came upon a cleft stake with an arrow pointing in among the trees. He called Brinklow to his side. A man could make his way between the little trees with a certain amount of twisting and turning. Brinklow walked in advance with a pocket compass in his hand to help him keep a true course with the pointing arrow. In spite of his care they wasted a good bit of time searching to and fro. Finally they found another stake and arrow. This arrow was tipped up so that it pointed almost directly down.

"This is the spot," said Brinklow.

The ground was covered with leaf mould and with the remains of last year's dead leaves. To a superficial glance this spot looked no different from the rest, but when they examined it closer they saw that there were too many leaves there. When they were swept off it was immediately apparent that the ground underneath had been disturbed, for there was pure loam mixed with the leaf mould and even flakes of the clay sub-soil. Brinklow began to dig.

After a while he stopped with an exclamation.

"You've struck something?" said McNab, with his heart slowly rising in his throat.

Brinklow nodded. "Something yielding. They had no coffin for him."

McNab shivered.

Working very carefully the sergeant by degrees uncovered a human body neatly enshrouded in canvas. Lifting it out of its shallow grave they laid it on the ground. Brinklow cut the cords that bound it round, and the body of a handsome, stalwart man of fifty came to light. It was in a perfect state of preservation. Even in the composure of death the waxen face bore a suggestion of a sneer.

"This is Tasker all right," said Brinklow grimly. "Still sarcastic. Maybe he thinks it's the best joke he's played on anybody yet."

There was no mark of any wound upon the body.

"Maybe after all he died a natural death," said McNab hopefully.

"Maybe so," said Brinklow grimly, "but if I recollect rightly, the young lady was harping on poison."

"Oh, God, yes!" groaned McNab. "I'd forgotten that."

Brinklow wrapped the body up again.

"Are you going to take it back to the house?" asked McNab, foreseeing the horror that its appearance would create.

"Not yet," said Brinklow. "I want to try to find out where we stand first."

"How can you prove poison?"

"If it's a vegetable poison, I can't," said Brinklow. "It's too quickly absorbed by the tissues. But a mineral poison leaves traces. Most poisoners use arsenic," he went on, "because it's easily had and easily administered, having but little taste. I have hydrochloric acid in my medicine case. With that and a bit of copper I can prove arsenic."

McNab was staring at the body. A few days before this lump of clay had been a living breathing man with a loud voice, a will of his own, and a hearty appetite. And now?

Brinklow clapped him on the shoulder in friendly fashion. "Snap out of it, lad. I must go back to the house for what I need. Leave the spade here, so it won't set them thinking."

It was near six when they got back and the household was up and about. Sophie Tasker was setting the table when the two policemen entered the living-room. Evidently believing that they were still in their room, it gave her a start to see them come in the front door.

"We just been for a walk to work up an appetite," said Brinklow cheerfully.

An appetite! This seemed like too grim a joke to McNab.

Soon afterwards they all sat down to breakfast. The three young people had themselves better in hand this morning. Far from seeking to avoid the subject of Tasker's death, Dufranne opened it of his own account.

"Tasker was struck down just as he finished breakfast," he said. "He had just risen from his chair and was loading his pipe when we heard the pipe fall. He had partly fallen forward and was supporting himself against the back of the chair. His face looked awful. Before any of us could reach him he slumped down to the floor. Ken and I carried him into his room and laid him on the bed."

"Which was his room?" asked Brinklow.

"The one you're in."

Ken took up the tale. "He was still breathing then. His face had turned bluish as if from cold, so we undressed him and chafed his body. We wrapped him in all the blankets we could find."

"I put on water to heat," said Sophie.

"Before the water was hot he was dead," Michel said.

"We didn't know what to do then," Ken went on. "The Indians had told us that the Parson at Wehtigo Prairie was something of a doctor, and we wanted to fetch him. But we didn't know if we could get through the brûlé.

Then we thought we ought to carry the body out to have an autopsy performed, but one of us couldn't have made the journey alone, and if we had both gone it would have left Sophie here alone. We couldn't do that."

"Certainly not," said Brinklow.

"And if all three of us had gone," added Michel, "the Beavers would have stolen everything we had. So there seemed to be nothing to do but set the body adrift as he had requested."

"I hope you think we did right," put in the girl timidly.

"Under such circumstances I don't see how you could have done any different," said Brinklow dryly.

To McNab this was ghastly comedy. He could not meet the eyes of the speakers. He wanted to tell them it was useless. It was clear that lying didn't come natural to them, and it seemed a shame to let them go on incriminating themselves.

When the meal was over Brinklow asked Sophie if he could borrow a wide-necked bottle or jar with a cover. She looked at him in astonishment.

"I want to get a sample of the water from the slough," said the sergeant carelessly. "It's a part of my job to make tests of these sloughs."

The explanation seemed to satisfy them. After she had fetched him the bottle, Sophie returned to the kitchen, while Michel and Ken disappeared into the yard to do their chores.

In their own room Brinklow said to McNab, "No need for you to come back with me this time. Get out the medicine case. I need the little alcohol lamp, a couple of test tubes, hydrochloric acid and a bit of copper. Have you got a copper cent on you?"

"Yes."

"Hammer it out as thin as you can. If these people see me climbing the hill the cat will be out of the bag. You'd better keep an eye on them."

McNab found a flat stone in front of the house and a round stone to hammer with. He was still patiently beating out his little sheet of copper when Sophie came out on the porch. Every time he saw her it gave McNab's feelings a fresh wrench. Even when she was lying her face had a look of nobility. Under happier circumstances she might have been a heroine. But life had caught her in a trap. It seemed a shame . . . a shame!

"Mr. Brinklow is gone a long time," she said in her soft voice. "I don't see him anywhere."

McNab had not the heart to answer.

"What are you making?" she asked.

"Brinklow asked for a thin piece of copper," he said. "I don't know what he's going to do with it."

While she lingered on the porch Brinklow's red tunic became visible descending the distant rise. A glance was enough for Sophie. She caught her breath and all the colour faded out of her face. McNab felt a little sick with pity on her account. She ran into the house without a word.

In a moment or two she returned with Ken and Michel. Ken's honest open face had turned grey and lifeless, while Michel's face was a yellow mask. They watched the approaching Brinklow with an awful fascination. Nobody spoke. They were too terrified to ask McNab how much he knew.

When Brinklow came up to the porch they drew back a little, still staring and speechless. McNab saw that the sergeant was concealing the bottle under his tunic. Brinklow took the piece of copper that McNab held out to him, and went into the house and into his own room, closing the door behind him.

The three young people followed him as far as the living-room as if they were under a spell. McNab went with them. The moments that followed were truly dreadful. They stared at the closed door of Brinklow's room. It might have been ten minutes or half an hour.

Finally the door opened and Brinklow appeared with a grim face and icy blue eyes. He said, "As you have already guessed, we found the body. I have made a chemical test of the contents of his stomach and I find that he was poisoned with arsenic."

There was a silence.

The girl said in a dreadful husky whisper, "How—how did you find the body?"

"I was led to it," said Brinklow simply.

His words carried a supernatural suggestion to his hearers. Ken's chin dropped to his chest; Michel flung an arm over his face and the girl with a choked cry sank down, fainting.

## 6

ALL five persons were sitting around the living-room table.

"Now who will tell me the truth about what happened?" said Brinklow, as one reasonable person to another.

There was no answer.

"Come on," he said. "It's got to come out in the end."

“Why ask us since you know so much already,” said Dufranne bitterly.

“I know that Tasker was poisoned, but I don’t know who poisoned him,” said Brinklow mildly. “You tell me, Michel.”

“I don’t know.”

“You, Chambers.”

“I don’t know.”

“You, Mrs. Tasker.”

“I don’t know,” she whispered.

Brinklow shrugged. “I’ve had several cases of arsenic poisoning,” he said, “and I can see by the state of the man’s body that he had been fed arsenic for some little time, probably in small doses. But the murderer became impatient and gave him a thumping big dose at the end. If this is so, Tasker had been sick for some days before he died. Is that right?”

“Yes,” admitted Michel. “He had been sick.”

“Did you suspect that he had been poisoned?”

“No. He wasn’t very sick.”

“Did he suspect that he had been poisoned?”

“No. He called it stomach trouble. He’d had it before.”

“But when he was taken violently ill you must have suspected that he was poisoned.”

“Sure, we all knew it then.”

“Did he know it?”

“Yes, he knew it.”

“Whom did he accuse?” demanded Brinklow sternly.

Michel hesitated briefly before answering. “All of us,” he said sulkily.

McNab judged from the startled look on Ken’s face that this was a lie.

Ken, unfortunately for all of them, had too open a face.

“All of you?” said Brinklow, raising his eyebrows. “Had you all had the opportunity to poison him?”

No answer from Michel.

“Michel,” persisted Brinklow, “had you ever given him food or drink?”

“I refuse to answer,” said Michel, scowling. “I suppose I have a right.”

“Sure!” said Brinklow serenely. “You, Ken, had you ever given him anything to eat or drink?”

“I refuse to answer,” said Ken, taking his cue from the other.

It was only too obvious that they were trying to shield the girl. Brinklow did not repeat the question to her. All noticed the omission.

The sergeant then took a new line. “Where do you get your mail?”

“At Jasper House,” said Michel. “That’s the end of the mail route.”

“How far is it from here?”

“Six days journey south in good weather and with good horses.”

“How often do you go?”

“Three or four times a year?”

“When did you make the last trip?”

“Early in May. The first mail of the season arrives at Jasper then.”

“Who went for it?”

“Ken and me.”

“I take it you got a lot.”

“Oh, yes, with the packages and all there was enough to pack two horses.”

“Mostly for Tasker?”

“Sure.”

“Well, we can disregard all that. What did you get personally, Michel?”

“Not much. None of us gets much in this mail because there’s no opportunity to write out for anything since Fall.”

“But you did receive one or two little packages?”

“Two.”

“What was in them?”

“One was a package of razor blades, and the other was some cough drops that had missed the mail in the Fall.”

“Ken, can you corroborate the fact that Michel received only two packages?”

“I saw one or two little things addressed to him, but I couldn’t swear to the exact number, there was such a raft of stuff.”

A somewhat lengthy questioning of Ken along this line failed to reveal that he had received any packages at all.

Brinklow finally turned to the girl. “What did you get, Mrs. Tasker?”

“A lot of things,” she said. “Many of the packages addressed to Mr. Tasker were for household use.”

“Never mind that,” said Brinklow. “What packages came addressed to you personally.”

“I—I can’t remember,” she stammered. “I can’t think of anything now.”

“But there were some packages?”

“One or two. I can’t think——”

“One was a package of buttons,” prompted Michel.

“Silence!” commanded Brinklow. “Let her answer for herself!”

“Yes—yes, buttons,” she stammered. “Plain white buttons, such as I sew on their shirts.”

“What else?”

“Let me see . . . there was a book . . . a small book . . . Longfellow’s *Evangeline*. I can’t think of anything else.”

“There were only two packages for Sophie,” said Michel hardily. “I can swear to it.”

“Well, let us come back to the day of Tasker’s death,” said Brinklow. “When was he taken violently ill?”

“At breakfast,” said Michel.

“So,” said Brinklow, “then that much of your first story was true, eh?”

No answer from Michel.

“What did he do?” asked Brinklow.

“He was taken with a violent cramp,” said Michel impassively. “He went into his room. He was very sick.”

Brinklow turned to Sophie. “You knew then that he was poisoned?” he said.

“I suspected it,” she murmured.

“Didn’t you know that the first thing to do in the case of poisoning is to force the patient to take an emetic; mustard and water or syrup of ipecac or olive oil.”

“I knew that?”

“Then why didn’t you give it to him?”

Very low. “I couldn’t go near him?”

“Why not?” demanded Brinklow in surprise.

Sophie’s beautiful head was bowed low over the table. “He—he was trying to shoot me,” she whispered.

“So you were the one he accused!” said Brinklow.

“Not her no more than the rest of us!” cried Michel passionately. “He accused us all of being in league to do him in!”

“Well,” said Brinklow dryly, “your actions since his death pretty well bear that out, don’t they?”

Michel compressed his lips tightly together.

“Tell me exactly what happened when he was taken sick,” said Brinklow.

“His gun was in his room,” muttered Michel sullenly. “He swore he was going to take us all with him. Between the spasms of pain that took him, he came out. He chased us all out of the house. Afterwards he staggered down to the slough to drink. He collapsed there. He couldn’t get up again.”

“And so he died alone.”

“He still had the gun. We couldn’t go near him.”

“One of you three fed him the poison,” said Brinklow in the mild way that was so deceptive. “There was nobody else here.”

“We all ate exactly the same food at the breakfast table,” cried Sophie agitatedly, “and drank the same coffee.”

“Tasker wasn’t poisoned at the breakfast table,” said Brinklow quietly. “It takes arsenic at least half an hour to act, and usually longer. He got it before breakfast.”

A dreadful silence descended on the table. In particular Ken Chambers’s face became ghastly. McNab made believe not to look at him.

“Was he in the habit of taking anything before breakfast?” Brinklow asked softly.

“No! No! Never!” both men protested at once.

“Not a cup of coffee when he first got up?” suggested Brinklow even more softly.

“No!” cried both men.

But the girl spread her arms on the table and dropped her head between them. “Oh, what’s the use of lying!” she cried brokenly. “Yes, he had coffee every morning, and I made it for him!”

“Oh, Sophie! Oh, Sophie!” cried Ken heartbrokenly. Careless of the others, he flung an arm around the girl’s shaking shoulders and pressed his cheek against her hair.

Michel looked at Brinklow with terror in his dark eyes.

“How—how did you know about the coffee?” he asked hoarsely.

“No magic in that,” said Brinklow carelessly. “I saw marks on the polished dresser that looked as if a hot cup had been set down there on various occasions.”

There was a silence while Brinklow deliberated, broken only by the girl's smothered sobs.

"When did Tasker first show signs of sickness?" Brinklow asked Michel.

Michel was still under the spell of awe. "A week before he died," he said slowly.

"Were any of the rest of you taken sick during that time?"

Michel, who had had himself so well in hand, broke down at last. He suddenly covered his face with his hands. "Not that! Not that!" he cried wildly.

"Answer me!" Brinklow sternly commanded. "Were *you* taken sick?"

"It was nothing," stuttered Michel. "I soon got over it."

"Had you by any chance drunk Tasker's coffee?"

"Yes!" yelled the man, now completely distraught. "Oh, God! Oh, God! Nothing can be hidden from you! I came in this room. The cup of coffee was on the table. I knew that Tasker was in the oats field and wouldn't be back in time to drink it. So I drank it. I drank it. . . ."

Ken Chambers shrank away from Sophie as if he had been stung. "Sophie! Oh, my God! *You!*" he cried in horror.

She raised an agonised face—not to Brinklow but to Ken. "I am innocent!" she cried. "I swear it! How would I get hold of any arsenic? And if I had it I wouldn't know what to do with it!"

Michel sprang up and ran around the table to Sophie. Facing Brinklow, he flung a protecting arm around his sister. "She's innocent!" he cried passionately. "I'll stake my life on it!"

Ken stared at the pair in horror. "Sure, she's innocent," he muttered between dry lips. There was no conviction in the sound.

"How do you know she's innocent?" asked Brinklow of Michel.

"Because I know her!" cried Michel. "I know her heart! She is incapable of such a thing!"

"Hm!" said Brinklow dryly. "That does you credit, but it's not evidence." He pushed his chair back. "That's all now," he said.

McNab followed him out on the porch, thankful to shut the door on that scene. The sergeant walked up and down with bent head, and the younger man respected his thoughts by keeping silent. Finally Brinklow appeared to come to a conclusion.

"Come on," he said, "I want you to rebury the body before nightfall. I'm going to ride about for a bit."

McNab hesitated. “Shouldn’t one of us keep the girl under observation?” he suggested.

“No,” said Brinklow striding on. “I’m not prepared to arrest her yet.”

McNab was consumed with curiosity as to what was passing through Brinklow’s mind. Finally he said as a leader, “Well, our work here appears to be pretty nearly finished.”

Brinklow glanced at him quizzically. “Think so?” he said. “I’d say it was just beginning.”

“There can be no doubt but what the girl did it.”

“Well, I haven’t got evidence enough to convict her. I’d have to prove that she had procured arsenic or had it in her possession.”

“I hope to God she gets off!” said McNab fervently.

“So do I,” said Brinklow with a provoking grin. “But of course I’ve got my duty to do.”

McNab saw that he was holding something back, but he knew that it would be useless to question him directly.

Still trying to dope the matter out in his own mind, McNab said, “After all, there was another person here when Tasker was killed and when they buried him. There was our mysterious guide.”

“Well, now!” said Brinklow. “When did that occur to you?”

“Quit your kiddin’, Brink! Who is he? Some Beaver Indian?”

Brinklow shook his head. “What the hell is it to a Beaver if a white man gets bumped off?” he said. “The more the merrier, say they.”

“Then it must have been——”

“The Cree half-breed, Eeliper John.”

“Then he never went away from here,” said McNab excitedly. “He hung around watching. Maybe he did it.”

“Maybe,” said Brinklow, “but it don’t seem likely that he would commit a murder and then ride three hundred miles to bring in the police.”

“No, it don’t seem likely,” said McNab.

## 7

As darkness was falling that night Brinklow and McNab rode to the bank of the Watusk River at a point just below its junction with the Musqua, where the stream spread out wide and shallow, making the only ford within miles. They were in search of the breed, Eeliper John, who had become the key to

the situation. Brinklow figured that having done his work in leading them to the body, the breed would now make himself scarce, since his object from the first had been to keep himself out of sight in this affair. There was nowhere for him to ride but south, and they had ridden south after him. They felt safe in leaving the three persons at the ranch, since evidence of the crime was now secure, and there was no place for them to run to.

No regular trail had been established over the grass country, and the two troopers had no way of knowing whether their man was before them or behind them. But he had to pass this spot and they had headed directly for it. A moment's examination of the muddy foreshore showed them nobody had crossed the river lately.

"Good!" said Brinklow. "We'll sit down and wait for him."

They tethered their horses out of sight in a poplar bluff, and ate a cold supper under some willow bushes.

"Better take a sleep," said Brinklow. "He may not come until morning."

McNab obeyed and was almost instantly asleep—and it seemed to him instantly awakened again by the sound of a struggle. In the dim twilight he saw two figures rolling on the ground on top of the bank. Snatching his flashlight out of the duffle bag he turned it on them.

Brinklow had a little man firmly pinned to the ground, nevertheless he still struggled like a terrified animal. "Hold still! Hold still!" the sergeant cried, half laughing. "I'm not going to hurt you!"

The breed redoubled his frantic struggles.

"The crazy little fool has gone loco!" said Brinklow to McNab. "Put the irons on him."

McNab had brought a couple of pairs of handcuffs against eventualities. He laid the flashlight on the ground and snapped them on the breed's wrists and ankles. Brinklow got up and dusted his clothes. The breed lay moaning in a brutish manner. McNab hoisted him to a sitting position and propped him against a tree, so they could see what they had. A withered, ugly little man over fifty years old, he was dressed like a white man except for the moccasins on his feet.

"Well, Eeliper—I reckon that's your name," said Brinklow humorously, "what's the big idea?"

"Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!" moaned the breed. But his little black eyes gleamed with intelligence, and McNab guessed that his terror was in the nature of camouflage.

"What's the matter with you?" said Brinklow good-humouredly. "You're on the side of the police, ain't you? You brought us in. We ain't agoing to hurt you."

"I not bring you in," muttered Eeliper in English. "I know not'ing."

Brinklow laughed. "You didn't bring us in? Well, we won't go into that. Just answer my questions."

"I know not'ing," repeated the breed.

Brinklow shrugged. "I'm not going to stay here all night," he said. "Hoist him up, Mac. We'll lay him over the horse and take him back with us."

"No! No! No! No!" gabbled the breed. "I tell! I tell!"

"All right," said Brinklow. "Listen. These people told me you started south for Jasper House a month ago. Well, you didn't go, eh?"

"I start to go," muttered the little man sullenly. "I come back."

"Why?"

The breed scowled and twisted in his unwillingness to speak. Brinklow knew the only way to handle him was with infinite patience and good humour. In spite of himself, Eeliper was finally forced to yield some kind of an answer to the white man's strong quiet gaze. His eyes glinted with a ratlike sharpness, and McNab thought: What's the use? He's going to lie.

Eeliper said, "I go away. Never come back here. Save my pay twenty year. Live easy outside. First night I camp here beside Watusk River. Hobble my horse and lie down." The breed began to warm to his tale, and to illustrate with quaint graphic gesticulation. Like all the natives he was a born story-teller. "I ver' tire'," he went on. "Glad lie down. River mak' li'l music and coyote howl up on bench. I sleep. . . . Wah! There is Tasker stand beside me. Wah! Wah! I am lak wood to see that!"

Brinklow made believe to take this quite seriously. "So," he said, "Tasker's spirit appeared to you while you slept."

"*Wehtigo*," said Eeliper with a byplay of terror. "I not know what white man call. *Wehtigo! Wehtigo!* It is dark, but I see him good. Him come in smoky light!"

"Did he speak to you?" asked Brinklow.

"Sure, him spik me. I am lak wood for hear that. Him say"—Eeliper imitated a terrifying sepulchral voice—" 'Come back, Eeliper; come back! Somebody mean bad to me here. Come back!' "

"He didn't tell you who had it in for him?"

The breed shook his head. "N'moya. Jus' say somebody."

"And what did you do?"

"I work for Tasker twenty-five year," said Eeliper. "Him fine man. I lak moch. I got go back. I go back when light come. But when I come to Tasker's house I scare for show myself. When they say, 'What for you come back, Eeliper?' I not know what to say. So I hide."

"Where did you hide?"

"I hide in li'l bluff. When dark come I go to house. Look all roun'. Hear not'ing. See not'ing. When light come again I hide in granary. It is empty now. Nobody go there. Three four day I hide. I watch. See not'ing bad."

"Why didn't you let Tasker know you were back?" asked Brinklow.

"I scare'," said Eeliper, hanging his head. "Tasker not know him what you call, him spirit come to me when sleep. I t'ink him only laugh me."

"Well, go on."

"I am hide in granary," said Eeliper with great dramatic effect. "It is morning. Wah! I hear Tasker yellin' in the house. So I know there is bad trouble. Bam-bye Tasker run out the front. I run along by house. Hide by corner and look. I see Tasker with him gun. Try shoot Sophie. Her run away. Tasker go down to slough. Fall down. Bam-bye he die."

"Why didn't you go to him?" asked Brinklow.

"I too moch scare'," muttered Eeliper. "I t'ink me, they kill Tasker, they kill me next for know too much."

"So you didn't save him by going back," said Brinklow.

Eeliper ignored this. "Bam-bye," he went on, "Ken and Michel go down. Lift up Tasker's arm. It fall so. Him dead all right. Bam-bye they wrap him up. They make bed of poles so, for carry. Carry up hill. So I go long way round behind hills and come from ot'er side. I watch through the trees. They dig grave. Cover up Tasker and smooth the dirt all round. Spread leaves. So I know there is a murder done. I go to bring the police. That is my story."

Brinklow still feigned to take it at face value. "The question is, who fed him the poison?" he said.

"I t'ink you know," said Eeliper.

"What do you think, Eeliper?"

Eeliper shrugged significantly. "Who give Tasker food and drink?" he said.

"The girl," said Brinklow. "That's what I thought. But I can't prove it on her."

"Why for no can prove?" asked the breed.

"I can't prove that she ever had any poison in her possession. Can you help me?"

Eeliper's face turned wooden again. "Know not'ing, me," he said stolidly.

"Well, then, I reckon I'll have to let her go," said Brinklow.

"Wait a minute," said Eeliper. "I tell you something. Me, I see Sophie put sugar in Tasker's coffee. Maybe that is fonny sugar."

"When did you see her put sugar in his coffee?"

"In the morning that day Tasker die. I kneel down outside kitchen. Look through window. See Sophie pour coffee. See her open cupboard and get old silver sugar bowl. Put sugar in coffee. When I see I t'ink not'ing bad, me. When Tasker die I t'ink maybe that is not sugar in that bowl. I never see that bowl before."

"Hm!" said Brinklow, "would you be willing to swear to this story in court?"

Eeliper became restive again. "N'moya!" he muttered, scowling. "I not go in white man's court. Too moch scare', me. I tell you everyt'ing. You go get the sugar bowl. Prove it with that. Let me go."

"Well, let's go back to the ranch and look for it," said Brinklow, rising.

"Let me go! Let me go!" cried Eeliper suddenly wild with terror. "You foolish tak' me back."

Brinklow was struck by the word. "Foolish?" he said. "Why?"

"You let me go," gabbled the breed; "say not'ing, people never know how you fin' this murder. T'ink you got ver' strong medicine. You be big man. . . . You tak' me in, everybody know I bring you here. Then you get not'ing."

"Ha!" said Brinklow with a grin. "So that's the milk in the coconut, eh? You figured that I'd leave you alone so's the mystery would strengthen my reputation! Very ingenious! However, my reputation will have to take care of itself. Take the cuffs off his ankles, Mac. Come along."

Eeliper began to rave and to fling himself about in real or assumed terror. But when he saw that it had absolutely no effect with his captors, he suddenly shut it off and asked for a cigarette.

His horse had run off a few yards. They caught him and put Eeliper on his back. McNab led the horse behind his own.

"This bozo is lying," murmured McNab to Brinklow.

"Mostly," said Brinklow cautiously. "But all the versions of how Tasker died agree in the main particulars."

"Then we're no further advanced than we were before."

"I wouldn't say that," said Brinklow.

"What do you mean, Brink? What you got up your sleeve?"

"Wait a bit!" said Brinklow.

## 8

THEY got back to the ranch about four. McNab turned the horses into the corral and the three men entered the kitchen. Brinklow made a light. Eeliper, who now had a perfectly impassive air, pointed out the cupboard, which was a neatly-made affair hanging to the wall. It was locked. He illustrated how he had knelt outside the window peeping over the sill, where Sophie had moved and stood when she poured out the coffee and went to the cupboard for the supposed sugar.

They made but little noise, however, there were three uneasy sleepers in that house, and they presently entered the kitchen together, Sophie in kimono and slippers; Ken and Michel partly dressed. They looked at Eeliper in frozen astonishment, and each of them exclaimed in his own way:

"*Where did you find him?*"

"Oh, I just picked him up on the prairie," said Brinklow lightly.

The three continued to stare at the breed in doubt and fear. Eeliper took refuge behind his wooden expression and said nothing.

"He says," Brinklow went on, "that early in the morning of the day Tasker died he was kneeling outside that window peeping over the sill. He says he saw Sophie pour out Tasker's coffee, and afterwards go to the cupboard yonder, where she got out an old silver sugar bowl and sugared it. The inference being that there was something in the bowl besides sugar."

"He is lying!" gasped Sophie. "There is an old sugar bowl in the cupboard. It is an heirloom in Mr. Tasker's family that he brought from England with him. But I didn't use it that morning or any other morning. There's been nothing in it since I came to this house."

"Would you mind letting me see it?" asked Brinklow politely.

"Certainly not."

She unhesitatingly swung open the cupboard door, and they saw her neatly arranged kitchen stores. She put her hand down in the corner and lifted out an antique sugar bowl with cover. They all saw her start and hesitate. When she turned around they were struck by her sudden ghastly pallor.

"There—there *is* something in it," she faltered.

McNab felt a little sick at heart. Brinklow with a bland face lifted the cover and set it on the table. Inserting thumb and forefinger into the bowl he drew out a little pasteboard mailing case such as druggists used for bottles. It was stamped and addressed: "Mrs. Adam Tasker, Pouce Longue Prairie, via Jasper House." Inside it was a small bottle. The onlookers drew their breath sharply. It had a staring red label with a skull and crossbones and POISON in big letters. Underneath was the word ARSENIC. It contained a white powder, two-thirds of which had been used.

"I—I never saw it before," stammered the girl.

That's what they always say! thought McNab. Ken, with a sick groan, turned his back and looked out of the window. Michel who up to this moment had loyally stood by his sister, now seemed to give way to despair.

"Oh, Sophie!" he cried accusingly. "Oh, Sophie!"

"I want time to think over this," said Brinklow with an impassive face. "Mac, take the breed out and put him in the granary. Spread his blanket for him and handcuff his ankles. But leave the door open or he might suffocate."

Eeliper was led out. To the others, Brinklow said, "Go back to your own rooms."

They filed out of the kitchen like automatons. The horror of what had happened divided them. Each was miserably alone.

When McNab returned to the house he found Brinklow in their own room weighing the contents of the bottle on the apothecary's scales that he carried in his medicine case. "It just about comes out," he said. "Tasker got what would be enough to fill the bottle."

"Shouldn't one of us keep an eye on the girl?" suggested McNab.

"Where could she run to?" said Brinklow mildly.

"She couldn't get away of course, but she could give us a lot of trouble chasing her. Suppose she tried to make away with herself?"

"I don't reckon she will."

McNab sat down on the edge of the bed. "Gee! I feel rotten about it all! That poor girl! It's almost justifiable murder, Brink."

Brinklow having finished his task, turned round. "Murder by poison is pretty rotten." McNab was astonished to see that his face was calm and satisfied. "I told you not to get stuck on her," he said.

"Oh, gosh, Brink! Don't gloat over her."

"Who's gloating? Maybe she never did it."

"*What!*"

"Easy there! We don't want to advertise our conclusions to the whole household!"

"But, Brink, she looked so damn guilty when she turned around from the cupboard with the bowl in her hand. She admitted there was something inside it."

"She had just that moment discovered it from the weight," said Brinklow. "Naturally her heart failed her. You must bear in mind that a sensitive person can be crushed down merely by the knowledge that everybody thinks they are guilty."

"Do you think when you look up the order for the drug you can clear her," asked McNab.

"I think I will find an order in her handwriting."

"Brink!"

"But orders can be forged."

"It would make a perfect case against her."

"Too perfect," said Brinklow dryly. "Is it conceivable that she would be foolish enough to leave the stuff lying around? She's had a hundred chances to dispose of it. Why, you and I were out of the house near twenty-four hours."

"Of course she wouldn't!" cried McNab with a clearing face. "Brink, you're a wonder!"

"Sure, sure!" said the grizzled sergeant, grinning broadly. "One of the seven great ones."

"Then who did it?" demanded McNab.

"I could give a guess," said Brinklow, "but I have no proof of it yet." He ran a hand high up along the log wall at the foot of the bed. Brinklow's sinewy fingers had pads that registered like sensitive plants. "There are two screw holes here," he said. "The screws have lately been removed because the edges of the holes are quite sharp. There's been a wall cupboard here for a long time. Probably ever since the house was built, because you see the logs are fresh in colour underneath. I'd like to find that cupboard. You take a little sleep while I look around the house."

## 9

AN hour later all the persons in the house gathered around the table in the big room. When Brinklow sat down with his back to the wall, and McNab beside him with a notebook on the table, the scene took on the aspect of a

trial. Eeliper stood facing Brinklow with his manacled hands resting on the table, and a face as expressionless as wood. Opposite McNab stood the comely brother and sister, so alike in features, so different in expression. Ken, feeling perhaps that he no longer had any direct interest in the scene, kept unhappily in the background.

"There's one thing that has never been brought out," said Brinklow in his deceitfully mild voice, "Tasker was a drinking man."

His words created a sensation. Michel and Ken exclaimed in astonishment. Sophie kept her head down.

Brinklow addressed her. "Mrs. Tasker, you knew your husband was a drinker?"

She nodded. "How could I help but know?"

"It's news to me!" cried Michel.

"How heavy a drinker?" asked Brinklow.

"He was always drinking, but he was never drunk," murmured Sophie.

"But give me an idea how much he took."

"Well, a swallow or two every hour or so during the day."

"So!" said Brinklow. "Say a pint a day. The swallows mount up. That would be about forty gallons a year. What I want to know is, where did he get it?"

"I don't know," said Sophie. "I never asked."

"How did you find this out about Tasker's drinking?" demanded Michel.

"There's no magic about it," said Brinklow. "There was a wall cupboard hanging at the foot of his bed up to the time he died. It was then moved to Ken's room."

"Nothing strange in that," said Sophie quickly. "Ken had no place to keep his books."

"Sure, sure," said Brinklow soothingly. "But I knew whisky had been kept in it many years because it still stinks of it."

His quiet air affected them more than bluster. They stared at him with strained faces.

"Where did he get it?" asked Brinklow again. "How could he bring it in without Michel or Ken knowing about it? The Beaver Indians can't make it. This was good rye whisky, and there's no rye grown in this country."

There was no answer forthcoming.

"I been looking around the last hour," Brinklow went on in his deprecating manner, "and under the shack where Eeliper slept I found four

ten-gallon kegs and ten stone jugs hidden in a pit. The kegs were empty. Four of the jugs were empty; one had some whisky in it, and the other five are full. The corks are sealed with wax bearing the imprint of Tasker's ring." Brinklow addressed the breed. "You and Tasker went out every summer to bring in the year's supply of grub, I understand."

Eeliper nodded.

"Then you might as well come across about the whisky. For it stands to reason you and Tasker brought it in."

"All right," said the breed with a walled glance.

"He bought it at Jasper House?"

"Man from Prince George meet him there," said Eeliper. "I don' know name."

"Oh, that's all right," said Brinklow. "I'm not interested in putting down the whisky traffic just now, but in proving a murder. Why did Tasker go to all this trouble to keep knowledge of the whisky from Michel and Ken?"

"He say whisky too hard to get up here. Got none for oder man. If him want whisky, got bring it himself."

"I see. Did he give you any?"

"N'moya," said Eeliper. "All seal up. No can get."

"How did you keep knowledge of the whisky from the other men when you came in with the pack train?"

"Leave kegs in the bush and shift the loads. Go back at night and fetch to my shack."

"I see. And Tasker would just broach one keg at a time, and fill the ten jugs?"

Eeliper nodded.

"And he would always keep one jug going in the cupboard at the foot of the bed?"

Another nod.

"Well, when the jug was empty how could he change it for a full one without being seen?"

"I do that," said Eeliper in his wooden fashion. "Tasker tell me when he want noder jug. I bring under my coat when nobody there and tak' empty jug back."

"The cupboard was locked of course?"

He nodded.

"Then you had a key to it?"

"I got key."

"You had a key and Tasker had a key. Were there any other keys?"

"N'moya."

"You are sure of that?"

"I sure. If anybody tak' Tasker's whisky, hell to pay. He keep lil stick to measure the jug."

"I reckon you tried it, eh?"

No answer from Eeliper.

"Now tell me why all the jugs were numbered. That is a funny thing. Numbered one to ten."

"Tasker not want drink too fast. Forty gallon got last the year."

"Prudent," murmured Brinklow. "Which jug was Tasker on when he died?"

"Number four."

"Now let's go out and examine the jugs," said Brinklow cheerfully.

Eeliper's shack was a tiny structure built of logs and roofed with sods, standing about a hundred yards from the big house. Brinklow had already taken up the loose poles covering the hole in the floor, and there was scarcely room for the six of them to squeeze in around the walls. All could see the kegs and the jugs lying in the little pit. The door was left open to give light. McNab noticed that Ken looked in with frank curiosity, while Michel and Sophia averted their heads. The girl had drawn a mask over her face which made the resemblance between her and her brother even more striking.

Brinklow let himself into the pit, and picked up the jug that had a four painted on it. "So this was the jug that Tasker was using when he died," he said dryly. "The question is, how did it get back into the pit afterwards?"

Nobody answered.

"Eeliper, can you tell me?"

"N'moya," answered the breed sullenly. "I never go in big house after Tasker die."

"That seems obvious," remarked Brinklow. "The key to the cupboard was evidently overlooked when Tasker was buried, because I found it in the small watch pocket of his pants. Mrs. Tasker? Michel? Ken?"

All denied any knowledge of the jug.

"Who first opened the cupboard?"

"I did," said Ken unhesitatingly. "I had to break it open to get at the screws that fastened it to the wall. It was empty when I opened it."

"I was present when he opened it," said Sophie. "It was empty."

"And who drunk the whisky out of number five? Eeliper wouldn't have dared while Tasker was alive, and he left here the night of Tasker's death."

Nobody answered.

"Well, here's a first-class mystery," said Brinklow in his mild way. "We'll come back to it in a minute."

He picked up the jugs beginning with number one and smelt each. Brinklow was famous for his sense of smell. All watched him in keen suspense. After smelling number four lingeringly, he put his lips to the mouth of it, and tossed it up.

"It's just as I thought," he said in a casual voice. "Tasker died from drinking poisoned whisky. There are still a few drops in the jug. I can taste the arsenic."

There was a breathless silence around the little pit, then Michel cried out, "Arsenic has no taste!"

"Why, how do you know?" asked Brinklow, affecting great surprise.

"It's—it's something everybody knows. I read it in a book."

"Oh, that's ordinary arsenic," said Brinklow. "Tasker was poisoned with citrate of arsenic which has a distinctly acid taste."

"Let me taste it!" demanded Michel.

"Sorry, I can't do it," said Brinklow deprecatingly. "There's only a few drops in the jug and I'll need that for evidence."

From a certain glint in his eye McNab perceived that the wily sergeant was putting up a little game. McNab was sure there was no such thing as citrate of arsenic. The breed was not clever enough to suspect he was being fooled. Terror showed through the mask on his dark face, and fine drops of sweat broke out on his forehead.

"This looks pretty bad for you, Eeliper," said Brinklow gravely. "Tasker was poisoned by his whisky. Nobody had access to this whisky but you. Nobody had a key to the cupboard where the jug was kept but you. Nobody could have poisoned him but you. You will certainly hang for it."

The breed's dark face turned ashy. He looked sick with terror. "No—no!" he stuttered. "I got no poison!"

"Did you ever see a man hanged?" Brinklow continued cruelly. "They tie his hands behind him and put a black cap over his head. They lead him up to a platform and slip the rope around his neck. Then when he's not

expecting it, they let the platform drop from under him and click!" He made a gesture horribly expressive of a body dangling in air.

The breed dropped his forehead on his manacled wrists, and moaned with terror. "I no kill Tasker! I no kill Tasker!"

"Then who did?" demanded Brinklow sharply.

"Michel!"

Michel took it standing. "He lying!" he said scornfully. "Naturally he's got to accuse somebody."

But the comely face that had always appeared so open and manly had suddenly turned ugly. Michel's eyes glittered, and his lips rolled back over his teeth.

Sophie did not shrink from him. It was clear to McNab that she was not surprised by the charge. Entirely self-forgetful, she went to him with her arms out. "Michel, my brother," she murmured. "I will never forsake you!"

He thrust her away from him. "Wait a minute my girl," he said harshly; "this is a long way from being proved yet."

Brinklow's blue eyes, usually so mild, flashed like steel. "You skunk!" he said quietly. Then to Sophie: "Don't waste your sympathy, Mrs. Tasker. You haven't heard the whole of this story yet."

Sophie shrank back, staring at him confusedly. Ken was gazing at Sophie full of longing. His own lack of faith in her was accusing him now; he dared not approach her.

Brinklow said to McNab: "Bring the breed back to the house where we have more room." He dropped a heavy hand on Michel's shoulder. "Come along, you!"

## 10

ONCE more they were grouped around the table in the big room.

"Now tell the whole story, Eeliper," said Brinklow sternly. "How did Michel get a key to Tasker's cupboard?"

The breed now had a quiet, fatalistic air that carried conviction. "Michel alla tam ask me give that key," he said. "Say want tak' lil drink when Tasker is out. I say: 'N'moya!' Tasker think I drink it. Michel say: 'How he know?' I say: 'Tasker got lil stick to measure wit'. Him kill me if I drink his whisky.' I not give Michel key till I go way."

"What was the reason of your going away?" asked Brinklow.

Eeliper went on in his toneless voice: “One day Michel say to me: ‘Eeliper, I t’ink my sister goin’ poison her ’osban’ so she get the land and the stock and marry Ken. Then you and I get fired from here.’ ”

A cry of horror broke from Sophie. Her eyes sought reassurance in her brother’s face, but Michel only scowled at the table.

Eeliper continued: “Michel say to me: ‘You mak’ believe you goin’ home outside, Eeliper. Say good-bye to all. You stay around here and help me watch them, I bring you grub nights.’ ”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Brinklow. “Did you believe Michel when he suggested Mrs. Tasker was going to poison her husband?”

The little breed’s eyes crept to Sophie’s face like those of a whipped cur; then fell. “N’moya,” he muttered. “I jus’ mak’ out I believe. I sorry now.”

“Why did you make out to believe him?”

“I t’ink I get somet’ing out of it, me.”

“Well, go on.”

“Before I go Michel say: ‘Give me key now so I get lil drink when I want.’ I say: ‘Before I go Tasker will ask for the key.’ Michel say: ‘Give to me and I mak’ ’noder key by it.’ So I give and he mak’ ’noder key, I see him mak’. Michel give back my key. I give to Tasker.”

“Did you suspect then that Michel meant to put poison in Tasker’s whisky?”

Eeliper twisted uneasily. “How I know what is in a white man’s heart?” he muttered.

“Go ahead.”

“I go. I come back,” said Eeliper. “I hide in poplar bluff. At night Michel come to me. We talk.

“Michel give me grub.”

“Then you never did any watching around the house?”

“N’moya. I never came around house, me. One night Michel say: ‘Well, it happen jus’ I say. My sister put poison in Tasker’s coffee to-day. He die.’ Tell how Tasker run out wit’ gun try shoot Sophie, then go down by slough and die.”

“That much anyhow seems to have been true,” put in Brinklow.

“Michel ride wit’ me to ’noder lil poplar bluff,” Eeliper resumed. “Show me place where Tasker is bury. Michel say: ‘You go out to Caribou Lake. Bring Brinklow.’ I say: ‘N’moya! I too scare.’ ”

"Michel say: 'Huh! you foolish. Don't have to show yourself at all. Mak' picture tell Brinklow where to go. All red men can do that.' We talk moch. Long tam I say I won't go. Brinklow catch me. Michel say: 'Brinklow won't try catch you. He want people think he prove this murder by his own medicine.' "

"What did Michel offer you?" asked Brinklow dryly.

Eeliper continued without the least change of expression: "Michel say: 'When Brinklow come here he prove the crime on Sophie all right. Tak' her away for try before judge. When Sophie is hang all the stock and land is mine. You my partner. We rich men when the railway comes through. If you don't hurry up Sophie she marry Ken and he get it.' So we shake hands and I go."

McNab gaped at the cool villainy of this plot.

A heartbreaking cry broke from Sophie. "Oh, Michel!"

Michel merely turned a shoulder to her. Sophie staggered blindly from the table, holding out her hands. "Ken! Ken!" she murmured. Ken sprang forward and gathered her in his arms. Sophie's loss was his gain. He led her away to the other end of the room.

"I guess that will be enough," said Brinklow grimly to Eeliper.

"Wait a minute!" cried Michel harshly. "Have I got any right to speak here?"

"Sure!" said Brinklow coolly. "And anything you say can be used against you, too."

"I want to ask this lying breed a few questions."

He shot a threatening forefinger across the table.

"Listen you! Did I ever say to you that I was going to poison Tasker?"

Eeliper, knowing he had the support of the police now, stood his ground. "N'moya," he said sullenly.

"Did you *see* me poison Tasker?"

"N'moya."

"Did you ever see any poison in my possession?"

"N'moya."

"Well, there you are, Brinklow!" cried Michel in ugly triumph. "No jury will hang me on the unsupported word of this mangy breed! You've got no evidence, old man!"

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Brinklow. "If you're innocent, why did you have to remove the whisky jug from Tasker's cupboard? And why did you

have to wash number four? It's still got a few drops of water in it. None of the other jugs was washed."

# THE CASE OF ANGUS BLAIR

## 1

ON a pleasant morning in August in the settlement at the head of Caribou Lake, Sergeant Brinklow and Constable McNab were seated in the sun outside the door of police headquarters, smoking, chinning and cleaning their guns. A feeling of peace and freedom pervaded their breasts for the inspector was off on a tour of the Wabiscaw country; weather was lovely and work was light. A man could relax.

The principal duty of the police at the moment was to keep a fatherly eye on the new settlers straggling in over the wagon road just opened by the government over the Raspberry hills. It followed the old horse track from railhead at the town of Edson, north to Caribou Lake, a mere trifle of two hundred miles. "Opening" it had consisted merely of cutting a swath through the timber thirty feet wide, without any attempts at grading. Consequently it was strenuous going for wagons, particularly when driven by tenderfeet. Only half a dozen outfits had succeeded in winning through to the lake during the summer.

Young McNab suddenly straightened up. "Good God, Brink, look at that!" he exclaimed.

The sergeant, following the direction of his glance, perceived a bent and aged Indian hobbling along the road supporting himself on a stick. Nothing uncommon in that, but at the redskin's heels followed a dog such as neither policeman had ever seen in that country. A high-bred collie with a noble head, fine limbs and lustrous coat. He walked in a measured fashion, with lowered head and plumy tail almost dragging in the dust like a dog in his master's funeral procession.

"That's Tommy Moosenose all right," said Brinklow, "but where'n hell did he get that dog?"

It was such a dog as every man dreams of having for a companion in the solitudes. However, the white men masked their excitement as the Indian came up, and the customary ritual of politeness was carried out without anybody looking at the dog. Tom Moosenose though ragged and dirty, was one of the older generation who think well of themselves, and neglect none of the forms.

"How, Brinklow? You are well?"

“I am well, thanks. Have you eaten, Tom Moosenose?”

“I have eaten. How, McNab?”

“How, Tom Moosenose. The people are well?”

“There is some sickness among the people. Joe Mistatim’s boy . . .”

As Tom entered into a detailed report of the health of the tribe, McNab could no longer contain himself.

“Here boy!” he said softly to the dog. The collie came to him, and looking mournfully and searchingly in his face, laid a paw on his knee with a touching gesture of confidence.

“What’s the trouble, old boy?” asked the young man, stroking his head.

The dog barked a single mournful note, and running a little way down the road, stopped and barked again. He came back to McNab, barking and searching the young man’s face to see if he was understood. The other two men, breaking off their talk, watched him.

“He wants you to go with him, Dan,” said Brinklow.

“Sure, I’ll go with you, old fellow,” said McNab.

“What’s on his collar?”

“Just his name; Wully Wallace.”

“Where did you get this dog?” Brinklow asked the Indian.

The old man was not to be hurried. “I tell you,” he said. “Him white man’s dog.”

“So I see.”

“White man’s dog no follow him no more,” said Tom Moosenose. “I t’ink t’at ver’ fonny, me. So I come tell you.”

“Well, give me the whole story,” said Brinklow.

Tom Moosenose politely accepting tobacco, sat down on the ground and filled his pipe. The sergeant, knowing that nothing was to be gained by trying to hurry him, quietly resumed the cleaning of his gun. The collie withdrew himself from young McNab as much as to say this was no time for mere caresses. He lay down a little way off, extending his head on his paw with a curious air of alertness, and keeping the tail of an eye on McNab. The young man and the dog eyed each other like a man and a girl who are strongly attracted to each other, but make out at first to be indifferent. McNab approved of the collie’s reserve. A man does not value a dog who makes friends too easily.

“Me and Joe Mistatim and Musq’oosis is pitch by Otter Lake, wit’ women and children,” the old man began with quaint gesticulation. He loved

to tell a story. “We fishin’ there and dressin’ leather. Mak’ ready for winter. Yesterday mornin’ when light come I hear my dogs barkin’ ogly. Wah! Wah! Wah! I go outside to see. I see white man’s dog little way off lookin’ at me wit’ ears up. My dogs not let him come close. So I tie my dogs and bring him in. He got old bag tied round his neck. Mos’ choke him. So I tak’ off. I give meat. Him white man’s dog, not lak red man ver’ moch. Him want me go back wit’ him. Him almost spik want me go back. So I go. Him tak’ me troo the bush, two, t’ree hour. Come to new wagon road. I see fresh camp beside the road and the bush is burnin’. . . .”

“Fire?” said Brinklow, springing up. “And people on that road?” He looked anxiously towards the southward, but the hill behind them cut off all view in that direction.

“Be easy,” said Tom Moosenose calmly. “Fire burnin’ away from road. Burn to the south-west. There is no people in there. Pretty soon it will stop at Watusk coulee.”

“Well, go on,” said Brinklow, sitting down again.

“I see fresh wagon track in the road,” said Tom Moosenose, “and I follow. White man’s dog not want come; hang back. But I want see who them people is. Bam-bye I see them camp beside road. The sun is high,” he pointed to a position indicating about ten o’clock in the morning, “but they sleepin’ yet. There is two white men sleepin’ in blankets, and white girl in little tent. . . .”

“A white girl!” exclaimed McNab with a quickening pulse. He had not seen a white girl in months. Neither man noticed the interruption.

“So I sit down wait,” the old redskin went on. “They got big high wagon wit’ moch goods. Six horses. Horses poor and sore. White man’s dog him won’t come near that camp. Bam-bye people wake up. Men call Wat Parran and Bull Bracker. Girl call Shoolia. She Wat Parran’s daughter.”

“This is the outfit Ed Denman has been looking for this month past,” remarked Brinklow. “He’s going to settle them on land near his post.”

“Wat Parran is li’l old man, quick as a link,” said Tom Moosenose. “All tam talk; good worker. Bull Bracker big man; strong lak moose; all tam say not’in’.”

“What was the girl like?” asked McNab eagerly.

“Wah!” said the redskin with a sweeping gesture. “*Miwasin!* Her fine pretty girl. Never see none lak t’at before, me. Her mout’ is red lak mooseberries!”

McNab experienced a kind of shortness of breath. He was young. He lowered his eyes to keep the others from guessing anything. He felt that it

was ridiculous to become so excited at the mere mention of a girl, but—he was like a starving man hearing of food. After a moment he said in a very casual manner:

"Is she married to the younger man?"

Brinklow laughed, and McNab felt his skin getting hot. Tom Moosenose saw no joke.

"She not marry," he said.

"Well, get on about the dog," said Brinklow.

"Wat Parran, him and me, we talk," resumed the Indian. "I say: 'This your dog?' He say: 'Yes, that my dog. Where you find him?' I say: 'Him come my camp.' Wat Parran hold out hand; call: 'Here, Wully, Wully, Wully! Good dog.' Dog no come to him. Hair rise on neck; show teeth; growl. Wah! I t'ink t'at fonny t'ing, me. White man's dog no go to him!

"Wat Parran get meat and show to dog. Call some more. Dog no go. Wat Parran go little way to him wit' meat. Dog back up snarlin'. Then Wat Parran get crazy mad. Face get red; neck swell. Him yell and curse that dog. Run and get gun to shoot him. Dog run away in bush.

"Well, Wat Parran him mak' out don' care at all. Say to me you can have him if you want. He is crazy. Watch out he don' bite your children and mak' them crazy too. If he come round your camp you better shoot that dog, Wat Parran say: 'he is dangerous.' But me, I know Wat Parran is only mad wit' that dog. That dog not crazy; he is wise dog. You can see.

"So bam-bye I go back to my camp. In the bush the dog come to me. Him follow me. Tom Mistatim, Musq'oosis and me, we talk. All say ver' fonny t'ing white man's dog no follow him no more. There is somet'ing bad there. So I say: 'to-morrow I tak' him to Brinklow and tell all.' I t'ink maybe that old bag tell somet'ing. So I find it. I bring it to you." He exhibited a common jute bag, the bottom of which had been torn out. Brinklow examined the bag and folding it small, thrust it inside his tunic.

"You're right, Tom Moosenose," he said. "Something damned queer here. We'll ride down the road and take a look at this outfit."

## 2

THOUGH they offered him a horse, Tom Moosenose politely declined to accompany the policemen on their ride south. He had no wish, it appeared, to seem to be bringing the police down on the white man's outfit. Instead, the old Indian prepared to sit down in the settlement until they should come back with the news. Time meant nothing to him.

When Brinklow and McNab mounted and rode away, Wully Wallace the dog accompanied them as a matter of course. Once he found the white men, he paid no further attention to the Indian. For reasons of his own he had adopted young McNab for his new master.

"Him white man's dog," said Tom Moosenose philosophically. "No lak' red man's smell."

Wully ran ahead of the horses, leaping and barking as a dog will, but with nothing of a dog's usual delight upon starting a journey. He kept his grave air, and his bark still had a mournful ring. McNab was reminded again of dogs he had known who had lost their masters by death. The young man had a foreboding that they were riding into an ugly situation, and apparently Brinklow from his sober look felt something of the same. They did not discuss the matter.

The "settlement" had no other name because it was the only settlement. It was scattered around the shore of an almost landlocked bay at the head of the lake. They had to cross the narrow neck of the bay upon a scow which Maroney of the French outfit kept for the purpose. As soon as they had rounded the hill which cut off their view, they saw a pillar of smoke mushrooming in the sky towards the south-west.

"These blasted tenderfeet," growled Brinklow, "think nothing of burning up a million dollars worth of timber. Let alone spoilin' the beauty of the country."

Across the bay they single-footed over wide natural meadows of blue grass, which furnished the whole settlement with winter fodder. Beyond lay the timber with the distant blue hills showing over the trees. Over the grass the going was first-rate, but among the trees the widely advertised waggon road was nothing but a morass of stumps and mudholes. As they picked their way over it, Brinklow said:

"Loney Beale came in over this road with a pack train two weeks ago. It's like he passed this waggon outfit somewhere down the line. We'll stop by his place and see what he can tell us about it."

Beale's log shack was not built alongside the road, but lay concealed in the bush a couple of hundred yards to the right. A little natural opening or "prairie" as it was called, stretched down to a spring. McNab had not been there before.

"Funny place to set up," he remarked.

"Oh, I dunno," said Brinklow dryly. "Depends on what you're setting up for. I believe this is the headquarters of the whisky trade of Caribou Lake,

but I ain't been able to get the goods on Loney yet. You want to keep your distance with Loney, kid. Don't let him make a friend of you."

The sound of their horses brought Loney to the door. He was a big fellow, youngish, but already fat and unwholesome looking. His expression on beholding the redcoats was mixed. "Howdy, men! Howdy!" he cried heartily. "Come on in!"

"Can't dismount," said Brinklow civilly. "Just want a word with you. We're looking for this dog's master."

"Gee! he's a dandy dog!" said Loney.

"When you came in did you pass a waggon outfit anywhere on the road?" asked Brinklow. "Two men and a girl. Names of Parran and Bracker."

"Sure," said Loney, "I overtook them fourth day out from railhead. That would be about three weeks ago. They were making slow going."

"Was this dog with them?"

"No," was the answer. "They didn't have no dog."

Brinklow and McNab exchanged a look. "That's funny," said the former. "You're sure of it?"

"Sure I'm sure! Didn't I spell a couple of hours with them alongside the road? Wat Parran give me a letter to bring to Ed Denman, sayin' he was on his way. I never seen that dog before."

"Hm!" said Brinklow. "What did you make of this outfit?"

"They was all-right people," said Loney. "Of course they was ignorant of the country, but ev'body is ignorant when they first come in. Had a big high kind of express waggon mounted on springs. Imagine that on the stumps. And all loaded up with the foolishest stuff you ever heard of; furniture they could better make for themselves after they got here, and a case of toilet paper, so help me Bob!"

"Well, they will do it," said Brinklow. "What like man was this Wat Parran?"

"All right," said Loney. "Me and him hit it off fine together. He's an old feller but he ain't takin' nothin' 'count of his age. Spry and cheerful as a cricket. Dead game. Now the big fellow, Bull Bracker, I didn't cotton to much. Silent, he was; surly, like."

"And the girl?" (McNab pricked up his ears.)

Loney whistled to express his feelings. "A peacherina!" he cried. "A lallapaloosa! Gosh blame me, men, but she'll set this country by the ears! We ain't had nothin' like her in here before. At that, I didn't make much

runnin' with her. Both men kinda fended me off, like; the old man because he was afraid of losin' a good housekeeper maybe, and the young one because he aimed to get her for himself. But he ain't got a chance in God's world. Anybody could see that. Why he's a mere lump of clay, a clodhopper, and she's a queen!"

McNab felt secretly relieved.

"What date was it when you fell in with them?" asked Brinklow.

"I left railhead on July 12th. It would be the sixteenth when I met up with them."

"Well, they can't be far away from here now," said Brinklow. "Come on, Mac."

"Do you want I should come with you?" asked Loney Beale eagerly.

"No, thanks," said Brinklow. "We don't want to scare them to death."

The policemen rode on, Wully Wallace in advance, gravely leaping and barking to signify his approval.

## 3

AT three o'clock while they were still picking their way between the stumps and splashing through the mudholes, the horses suddenly put up their ears and nickered.

"Other horses near," said Brinklow.

A moment later their horses were answered by shrill whinnies from ahead. At this sound the dog stopped dead in the road, and looked around at his new masters with a doubtful air. Drawing to one side to let the horses pass, he fell in behind, coming very slowly with downcast and sullen mien. His actions and expressions were extraordinarily human.

"Certain, Wully don't like these folks ahead of us, whoever they are," remarked Brinklow.

Soon they perceived a man standing alongside the road, leaning on his axe handle. He had evidently been interrupted in the act of chopping firewood. He was recognisable at a glance from the two descriptions they had had of Wat Parran. A smallish man over sixty years old, still full of energy and vigor. He had a round head covered with a closely cropped white thatch, and the dark bright eyes of a youth. At the moment his eyes were bloodshot as from prolonged drinking. While the policemen were still some yards off he cried out jovially:

“Hello, officers! This is a surprise. Didn’t know there was any of your sort hereabouts!”

The brisk and lively air was natural to the man, yet McNab felt that he was forcing it at the moment. All was not well here. There was a desperate look lurking in the bottom of the bright glancing eyes.

Brinklow introduced himself and his companion. “We know that you’re Wat Parran.”

“How do you know that?” he asked quickly.

Brinklow glanced over his shoulder. The dog had loitered so far behind, Parran had not yet perceived him. The sergeant said lightly: “Oh, nothing can be hid up here. Loney Beale told us you were on the way.”

“It’s been a hard trip,” said Wat. “What with breakdowns and the horses givin’ out on me, we’ve been all of a month on the road . . . How far is the settlement?”

“Matter of eighteen miles,” said Brinklow.

“Oh,” said Wat, disappointed. “Thought maybe we’d make it to-night. I was goin’ to pack a bundle of wood so I wouldn’t have to spell again short of dark. They tell me there’s good grass at the end of the road.”

“There is,” said Brinklow, “but you won’t make it to-night. Where’s your outfit?”

“Right here,” said Wat. “Come on.”

Rounding a bend, they saw the laden waggon standing in the road, with the harness thrown over the pole. In an opening to the left, the bony and dispirited horses were cropping grass. On the right, a woman was kneeling on the pine needles packing the grub-box, and near her a man sat nursing his knees and smoking. These two had heard the voices, and both wore an oddly self-conscious air.

“My daughter Julia,” said Wat in his brisk way, “and my partner Jack Bracker, better known as Bull.”

When the girl raised her head the first sight of her face affected McNab like a stab. He had been eagerly anticipating beauty, a beauty that would charm and delight a man, but this was something different. It was the face of a tragic madonna. Her fine strong body made her fit to be a frontiers-woman. But her face was the saddest he had ever seen. It made him feel savage. He scowled from one man to another, thinking: Which one of you has made her suffer like this? Then he caught a warning glance from Brinklow, and lowered his eyes.

The girl greeted the policemen without smiling; the young man came forward with outstretched hand. His friendly smile did not sit very naturally on the heavy sullen features.

"What brings you down this road?" asked Wat Parran.

Brinklow gave his mare an affectionate slap and she went off to touch noses with the other horses, and to crop the grass. McNab's horse followed. The young man was stealing glances at the beautiful grief-stricken face of Julia Parran. What a woman!

"Well," drawled Brinklow, "it's about a dog . . ."

He looked significantly at his young partner, and McNab whistled. All five persons were now squatting on the pine needles in the companionable manner of the north. Wully Wallace came slowly into view around the bend. There was a startling change in the gentlemanly dog's appearance. His beautiful white ruff stood erect around his neck, and his black lips were drawn back over his gleaming teeth. Yet he made no sound. Keeping his hostile mask turned in the direction of Wat Parran, he circled around him, and came up behind McNab.

Brinklow looked from one to another of the three travellers as the dog came in sight. Wat changed colour and drew his breath sharply. The girl stared at the dog with horror. Bull Bracker looked on the ground, making his face like wood.

Wat, feeling that the sergeant's eyes were upon him, laughed in a strained fashion, and said quickly: "That damned dog again! I swear he's locoed!"

"Is he your dog?" asked Brinklow.

"No!" said Wat loudly.

"The Indian who brought him to me said you claimed him yesterday."

"Sure I claimed him," said Wat readily. "Any man would want to own a dog like that. He's too good to live around the tepees. I thought if he was lookin' for a master it might as well be me."

"But he wouldn't go with you?" suggested Brinklow quietly.

"No, he wouldn't go with me. I think he's crazy."

"Does he feel the same towards all of you?" inquired Brinklow mildly. "Bracker, you call him."

"Wully! Come here! Good dog," said the young man, endeavouring to butter his harsh voice.

The dog, partly hidden behind McNab, rose up showing the same ferocious aspect. His ruff quivered with rage. A deep growl issued from his

throat.

"Hm! you too," said Brinklow. "Miss Julia, would you mind?"

The girl called him in a tremulous voice: "Here, Wully! Here Wully!"

The dog turned his back on her, and lay down behind McNab, completely hidden. It was as if, being a gentleman, he could not bring himself to threaten a woman, however little use he had for her. McNab's hand involuntarily dropped on his head, whereupon Wully looked up at his new master full of eager affection, and thumped his tail on the ground. He wished to let him know, it seemed, that he had a heart full of love for those whom he could trust. It was terribly human.

"He's crazy, I tell you!" cried Wat excitedly. "He'll do somebody a mischief. He ought to be shot!"

"Was that why you tried to shoot him yesterday?" asked Brinklow in his mild way.

Wat gave him a sharp look, then shrugged and spread out his hands. "I admit my temper got the best of me," he said. "Nachelly a man don't relish bein' turned down by a dog when he's tryin' to befriend him . . . I got to admit I got a hasty temper," he added. "It's my curse."

At these words a feeling of strain made itself felt such as one always feels in company when an awkward disclosure is made. There was a silence. Julia and Bracker were both looking on the ground, very still. Wat tried to recover himself by saying: "Well, I guess I ain't alone in that. I ain't alone in that;" laughing and looking from one to another for support.

"Had you ever seen the dog before yesterday morning?" asked Brinklow.

"Never!" said Wat quickly.

"Or either of you?" asked Brinklow.

"Never!" said the girl, faintly.

"Never!" rumbled Bull Bracker.

"In that case," asked Brinklow in his deceitfully mild voice, "how did you know his name? I mean yesterday when you called him to you."

Wat looked at the sergeant blankly, then the blood rushed to his face. "The Indian told me," he said quickly.

"But how could the Indian have known his name? He can't read."

"I don't know how he knew it," said Wat, blustering a little, "but he told me." As Brinklow did not seem to be much impressed, Wat added: "I expect the redskin knows whose dog it is, all right. Wanted to make a trade with me for him, I reckon."

Brinklow slowly shook his head. “You don’t understand this country yet,” he said. “It’s big enough, God knows, but we’re all tied together the same as if we lived in a small village. Every man is known, and the least of his possessions is marked. There is no dog like that in the country. Where did he come from? He couldn’t have come in alone. A civilized dog can’t hunt for himself, yet this dog is in prime condition. Whose dog is he?”

“You can search me!” said Wat, blustering. “Ask the redskin.”

“The redskin thinks he is your dog,” said Brinklow. “He came from the direction of the waggon road, and led the Indian back to the camp where you spelled two nights ago. The Indian said: ‘White man’s dog won’t follow him no more. I think that is a funny thing.’ And so think all of us.”

## 4

AN uneasiness among the horses at grass warned them of the approach of other travellers. Presently they heard the lurching of a waggon in the road, and the loud voice of a man urging his team. A mud-splashed outfit appeared, consisting of a loaded waggon drawn by four horses. A white man drove it, and a breed boy walked behind. This was Dick Stivers bringing in goods for Maroney of the French outfit. He was an experienced freighter. His waggon was a low-hung springless affair, and his horses were in good condition.

Stivers himself was a little terrier of a man with a merry eye, an old friend of Brinklow’s. Hailing the party jovially, he steered his waggon round the standing waggon, and jumped off. Hands were shaken all around.

The newcomer was a stranger to Wat Parran and his party. When Stivers caught sight of the dog, he cried instantly:

“Hallo, Wully, old boy!”

The collie submitted to having his head patted, and gravely wagged his tail. The others stared as if they were beholding a phenomenon.

“You know this dog,” said Brinklow.

“Sure!” cried Stivers. “This is Angus Blair’s dog.”

“Who’s Angus Blair? Friend of yours?”

“Never seen him till I met him on the trail. We slept together one night. Seems he’s a famous character in the Hudson’s Bay country along of the journeys he makes with no outfit beyond a tomato can, a blanket and his gun. Tomato Can Angus, they call him.”

Brinklow’s next question was the inevitable one: “Where is he now?”

"You should tell me that," said Stivers with a look of surprise. "He ought to have been here ten or twelve days ago. I was held up for three days by a freshet on the Little Smoky."

"The dog is here, but his master is missing," said Brinklow.

"Sho!" said Stivers, scratching his poll, "and an experienced traveller like him, too!"

Wat Parran and his two companions were listening to this dialogue with blank faces.

"Will you turn out your horses and spell here with us?" asked Brinklow.

Stivers shook his head. "I want to get through to the blue grass to-night," he said. "What with one thing and another I been three weeks makin' this trip. Maroney'll be as sore as hell. I'll come back after I deliver my load, if I can help you search for the man."

"Well, tell me what you can about him before you go," said Brinklow.

"Darn little I can tell you," said Stivers. "Me and Loney Beale left railhead together on July twelfth. We on'y made a few miles that day, and camped together the first night. Of course Loney can make his thirty miles a day with the pack train against my fifteen or twenty with the waggon, and the next morning he passed right out of sight, and I never saw him again. Two days later, that's the fifteenth, this feller Angus Blair come along the road with his dog when I was already camped for the night, and he stopped with me until morning."

"When had he left railhead?" asked Brinklow.

"The morning of the day before, the fourteenth. Havin' no horses to graze, he could make his thirty miles a day easy. In fact he could do fifty, he told me, if there was an object in it, but when he was making a long trek he gen'ally held himself down to thirty, so's he would arrive fresh."

"What sort of fellow was he?"

"A tall well-made feller, twenty-eight years old," said Stivers. "Yellow hair. A lively feller. Full of jokes and stories by the fire. He was an elegant companion on the trail. Tried to get him to stay with me, I did, but my outfit was too slow for him. In the morning he went on. Say, he and his dog was just like two pals together. That dog can do anything but speak. And at night he's as good to have at your back as a gol-durned stove."

"What was his object in making these journeys?" asked Brinklow.

"Well, that's the part I don't rightly understand," said Stivers. "He said he wrote books and stories about his travels, and got money for it. But it don't seem likely."

"I've heard of it's being done," said Brinklow.

"Said he'd pretty well covered the Hudson's Bay country," Stivers went on, "so this summer he headed north-westward. He had heard of the opening of the new waggon road, and thought there might be a good story in it, what with the new settlers comin' in and all."

"But all this might have been just a stall to cover his real purpose."

"Sure it might have been," Stivers agreed, "but he weren't like a young feller with anything on his conscience at all. Lighthearted as a pair of schoolboys him and his dog was. He mentioned that he liked this country 'cause it was easy for a feller to keep straight up here and I took from that that he had a keen taste for liquor."

"Did he tell you anything else about himself?"

"On'y stories about his travels eastward."

"Anything about his folks or where he hailed from?"

"No. And of course a feller don't like to question a feller about his antecedents."

"Was it true he had no outfit?"

"Pretty near true. Of course that about the tomato can was on'y a story. But he travelled light all right. He was proud of it. Spread out his outfit to show me how little a man could do with. A pair of grey Hudson Bay blankets, three and a half point; a little cooking pot and skillet; knife, hatchet and gun. A little bag of flour and packets of salt and yeast powder. Said he could do without bread when need be, but he liked to pack a little. His gun supplied him and the dog with meat." Stivers stood up. "That's about all I can tell you, Sarge," he said.

"Angus Blair was heading for the settlement?" asked Brinklow.

"Surest thing you know! Said he'd push through to the Spirit river if he could get out again before the freeze-up. Why, I mind the last thing he said to me was 'See you later, Dick. I'll be stickin' round the settlement until you come in.' Then walked off amongst the trees whistling, and the dog friskin'." Stivers turned to Wat Parran. "When did these folks leave railhead?" he asked.

"July sixth," said Wat.

"And didn't he overtake you on the road? Didn't you see him anywhere?"

"Never laid eyes on him," said Wat stolidly. "Only his dog come around yesterday."

"On'y yesterday?" said Stivers, surprised.

"Angus Blair ought to been here twelve days ago the rate he travelled. Yet the dog's in good condition. He's been fed regular. I can't understand it."

"No more can any of us," said Brinklow dryly. "One question," he added; "did you take notice of what Angus Blair wore on his feet?"

"Shoe-packs," said Stivers; "the kind they sell at the eastern posts; walrus hide."

With hearty good-byes Stivers drove on. "Back to-morrow evenin' to help you, if you ain't found him before that," he said to Brinklow.

"Do you still say you never saw Angus Blair?" Brinklow asked Wat Parran.

"I never seen him!" said Wat truculently.

"Never seen him," echoed Bull Bracker.

"I haven't seen him," murmured the girl.

McNab was sure that they were lying. It hurt him to hear the girl lie. Lying was not her style.

"Well, let's try to figure this thing out," said Brinklow. "You left railhead on July sixth, and Loney Beale, who left on the twelfth, overtook you on the sixteenth. Well, Angus Blair who left on the fourteenth and travelled at about the same speed as Loney, ought to have come up with you two days after him, or the eighteenth. Give me some idea where you were on the eighteenth."

"How can I do that?" said Wat sullenly. "I don't know the names of the places along the road. And every day was just like another."

"There was one night when we left the road, dad," the girl timidly suggested.

"Sure! Sure!" said Wat with a brightening eye. "What day did you say? The eighteenth. That's about half-way. It was just around that time. It was the night after we got mired in the muskeg, and had to make four trips with our stuff to get across. There was no grass, and we had to go half a mile off the road. The horses were so tuckered out we laid there half the next day. He might easy of passed us then."

The explanation was too glib to be convincing. Brinklow with a stolid face sat smoking and mulling things over. Presently he got up and went to the waggon, the eyes of the three travellers anxiously following every move. He threw back the canvas cover protecting the load, and pulled amongst the camp duffle lying on top. There were three rolls of bedding; one, the girl's, consisting of two double red blankets; the other two each consisting of a pair of red blankets, with a single grey blanket on the outside. The sergeant

beckoned Wat to him, and pointed out three black lines and a shorter line woven into the corner of the grey blanket.

"The Hudson's Bay mark," he said, "three and a half point."

"Well, are them the only ones in the country?" cried Wat excitedly.

"Where did you get them?"

"In the Hudson Bay stores in Prince George. Before we left town, Bull and me reckoned we wouldn't be warm enough with a single pair apiece, so I bought an extra pair and cut 'em in half."

"These are old blankets," said Brinklow quietly. "They've been used more than one season."

"Then we was cheated in the store," said Wat. "I bought them for new."

McNab, stealing a sidelong look at the girl, saw that her face had become as white as paper.

Brinklow examined the grey blankets further, and the others involuntarily drew near. From the woolly surface the sergeant picked a yellow hair, coarser than human hair, and handed it over to McNab. The two blankets yielded many such hairs. Before ever they were compared with the collie's coat, it was clear to all whose hairs they were.

Before Brinklow had said a word, Wat cried out shrilly: "What of it? What of it? You can't hang us for a dog's hair!"

It was one of those fatal things that ought never to have been said. The hardest-boiled policeman, hearing it, would want to look somewhere else.

"Ain't thinkin' of hangin' you yet," said Brinklow. "Just explain to me how these hairs got in these blankets, if the dog never spent a night in your camp."

"How do I know? How do I know?" cried Wat. "Picked 'em up in our camping places, I suppose. The man and his dog were ahead of us, weren't they? Well, pretty near every night we slept in a regular camping place; a place that had been slept in often. Well, that's how we must have picked up the hairs."

"There are none on the girl's blankets."

"She always had a special place apart. Under her tent."

"Well, maybe so," said Brinklow, carefully stowing the hairs in an old envelope that he found in his pocket. He went to the collie and lifting the dog's head on his hand, said gravely; "Wully, where's your master, old fellow? Where's Angus?"

The dog sprang into action, barking mournfully. He ran down the road a little way, and stopped, looking back at Brinklow and barking. His meaning

was as plain as if he had pronounced the words, This way. This way!

Brinklow said to Wat Parran: "I'll have to ask you and your friends to retrace your steps with me a ways. Leave the waggon here. It will be perfectly safe. Catch horses to ride, and fetch an extra horse to carry your beds and a little grub."

## 5

BRINKLOW rode at the head of the little procession in order to study the tracks in the muddy road. Young McNab brought up the rear, and was thus able to watch their three companions while they travelled. Wat Parran rode with an unwilling and sullen air. Yet it was evident that under ordinary circumstances he was a cheerful and talkative soul. Bull Bracker's heavy, wooden face gave nothing away, and the girl seemed entirely apathetic. To McNab she had the look of one who had received so crushing a blow that nothing which might happen to her afterwards made any difference. When she found the policeman's eyes upon her, her effort to brighten up, to act as if nothing was the matter, was very painful to see. His heart was soft for her.

Wat Parran and his party had only made ten miles that day, and within a couple of hours they had reached the sight of their previous night's camp. This was the place where Tom Moosenose had found them still sleeping at midday. A hasty inspection of the tracks surrounding this camp satisfied Brinklow that there was nothing to his purpose here. Moreover, the dog was still urging him forward. They proceeded.

Three miles farther they came upon the next camp. This was the spot to which the dog had first led the old Indian, and where the bush fire had started. It had started at a point about a dozen paces to the right of the road, and had burned away to the south-west, spreading out fanwise as it went. There had not been much wind, consequently it had never assumed the proportions of a first-class fire. Only the pine needles and the down timber had burned; the standing trees, while scorched and blackened, had not been consumed. The dog ran up to the edge of the burned-over ground and barked pitifully. He ran in a little way and ran out again. The ground was still smoking. There were little fires burning here and there, and hot embers everywhere.

"So this is the place!" said Brinklow gravely. "We'll have to wait a bit before we can go in there, old man."

Wully sat down facing the place, and nothing would tempt him away from there.

Brinklow looked around him. “How did the fire start over there?” he asked Wat. “Here are the ashes of your camp fire nearer the road. Here are the ashes of two fires.”

“I can’t tell you how it started,” said Wat sullenly. “Maybe it was started by somebody ahead of us, and only happened to blaze up while we were here.”

“The last traveller over this road came in two weeks ago,” said Brinklow. “We have had hard rains since then.”

“Maybe it was this Angus feller himself started it.”

“We’ll find that out,” said Brinklow.

“Maybe Bull or me dropped a dottle out our pipes,” Wat volunteered sullenly. “I can’t tell you.”

“Why didn’t you put it out when it first started?”

“Didn’t see it start. It woke us out of a sound sleep. It was too late to put it out then. We had to hustle and hitch up, and get out of its way.”

Kneeling on the ground, Brinklow blew into the ashes of one camp fire and then the other. In each instance the ashes puffed up lightly. “Both of these fires were made two nights ago,” he said. “Why did you build two fires so close together?”

The ready-witted Wat appeared to be stumped by this simple question. “Can’t we have two fires if we want?” he growled. “Is there any law against it?”

“Sure,” said Brinklow mildly, “as many as you want. But it seems a little unusual.”

Bull Bracker spoke up. “The first fire smouldered,” he said. “It was easier to start another than to make it burn.”

“Hm!” said Brinklow, unconvinced. However, he dropped the subject of the fires for the time being.

He gave orders for the seven horses to be tied to trees for the time being, so that he could examine all tracks in the vicinity before they became confused with fresh tracks. For the same reason McNab and the other three persons were required to sit on the pine needles until the sergeant gave them leave to move about. For an hour after that Brinklow wove his way to and fro and around the camp site, up and down the road like an intelligent hound on the scent. McNab, who had witnessed this performance of Brinklow on former occasions, waited with accelerated pulses to hear the result of his search.

In the end Brinklow came back to them carrying a stone jug of one gallon capacity. The cork was missing.

"Found this under the branches of the spruce yonder," he said.

"I never saw it before," said Wat Parran truculently.

Bull Bracker and Julia Parran corroborated him.

Brinklow sniffed at the jug. "It can't have been there more than a day or two," he said. "The smell of spirits is still strong about it. That soon goes off when it's left lying without a cork."

"Well, Dick Stivers went through here this morning," said Wat. "Why couldn't he have thrown it there?"

"Dick has the name hereabouts of being an abstainer," said Brinklow. "His clear eye kind of bears it out."

"I'm an abstainer too," said Wat violently. "Anyhow since I come up here. My outfit was frisked by the police at railhead. I got a clean bill of health."

"Then you were not always an abstainer," suggested the sergeant.

"No," he said hanging his head. "I don't mind tellin' you that. Liquor has been my curse . . . I'm a hard-workin' man," he went on in a subdued voice, "anybody who knows me will tell you as much. And average intelligent, I guess. But all my life long whenever I made a bit of an advance the booze dragged me back where I was before. I would go blind . . . blind—I never knew what I did such times; but when I come to I found I had drunk up or pitched away all I had."

His voice sunk lower still. "I don't doubt but what it hastened my wife's end," he went on, "as good a wife as man ever had! And latterly Julia's pale cheeks reminded me that she had to bear the same as her mother did—though she never reproached me. So I took a brace to myself at last. Me and Julia we talked it over candid. We heard about this country up here which was prohibition north of a line drawn through Miwasa Landing, and strictly enforced too, by the mounted police. So I wrote up here for information, and I got a letter from a trader offering me good land gratis, if I would agree to sell him my grain every year. So I sold up all I had left in Ioway, and I got this outfit together, and we come. We brought Bull Bracker along because he had served me faithful since a lad. And he was keen to come. Under these circumstances," Wat cried passionately, "I ask you is it likely that I would bring liquor in with me?"

While her father was making this statement Julia sat with her back turned towards the men. The droop of her head suggested to McNab that the tears were running down her cheeks. Certainly Wat was speaking the truth

then. There was a simplicity about this confession that won the young man's sympathies. He suspected that his superior felt the same.

"No, it don't seem likely," said the sergeant mildly. He put the jug down behind a tree. "We'll just save this for future reference," he said.

After further searching, Brinklow, who was then some twenty yards along the road from where they sat, beckoned to Wat.

"Here's something I want to show you," he said. "You, too, Mac."

The sergeant was pointing to a track alongside the road. McNab perceived the print of a human foot. One might almost have supposed it a bare foot, except that the toes were not outlined.

"Big man wearing a moccasin," said Brinklow succinctly. "This is a perfect print in soft earth. Look close at it. See the three wrinkles under the arch of the foot. Shoe-pack moccasin made of a heavy hide of some kind, maybe walrus. Shoe-packs are not worn hereabouts at this season, so I take it this is the track of Angus Blair. Do you concede that?"

"Oh, anything you like," said Wat with feigned indifference.

"You'll find these tracks everywhere," said Brinklow, "as far back along the road as you want to look. Those and the dog. But neither the dog nor his master went on from this camp."

"What does that prove?" cried Wat, "except that they were ahead of us on the road, and turned off here."

Brinklow shook his head. "Not quite that," he said. "Take your own tracks. You have a medium size foot in a boot with a heavy leather sole and heel. Sole and heel are studded with peculiar star-shaped nails. A child could follow your tracks."

"Well, I ain't denyin' I passed along here," said Wat with attempted facetiousness.

"There's Bull's track," said Brinklow, pointing. "He wears a boot similar to yours, but a larger size. And here's Dick Stivers' strathcona boot without nails. Dick was walkin' when he passed by here. I don't see the tracks of his breed anywhere, so he must have been drivin' Dick's team. He wore the common mooseskin moccasins, if you remember. I don't see the young lady's tracks either, so she must have been ridin' on your waggon. There's the whole story. All the older tracks have been dimmed by time and rain."

"What of it all?" said Wat.

Brinklow led the way a little farther along. "Look at this one."

McNab and Wat saw a print of the hobnailed boot with the print of a moccasin partly superimposed upon it. The moccasin being worn by a

heavier man had partly pressed out the first print.

Wat was sweating now. “Then he was behind us all the time!” he cried. “That explains why we never saw him!”

Still Brinklow gravely shook his head. Taking them to another part of the road he showed a print where the nails of the boot were freshly pressed into the moccasin. Wat stared at it with starting eyes.

“Sometimes he was behind you, sometimes he was ahead. In other words he was going along with you. But he did not leave this camp with you. There’s no use tryin’ to face down the plain evidence of your senses, Wat.”

Wat flung up his hands. His chin went down on his breast. The ready tongue was silenced at last. “I give up,” he mumbled. “Angus Blair was with us.”

“Let’s sit down and talk this thing over,” said Brinklow.

## 6

WITHDRAWING from the road, the three men sat down on the pine needles. Bull Bracker and the girl, full of anxiety, drew within earshot.

Brinklow took out his pipe and filled it. “Tell me the whole story, Wat,” he said encouragingly.

But the older man hesitated. He was obviously thinking up what to say. His face looked pinched and tormented with the effort. He glanced at Julia. McNab watching him, could see him as a boy, a sturdy bullet-headed boy, resolute and game. He looked like a boy now, a boy cornered. He bit his fingers and the silence lengthened. Brinklow glancing at him shrewdly, said:

“Wait a minute, Wat, before you begin . . . What’s the use of tryin’ to string me along? The truth is bound to come out. And if you lie to me it’ll only put you in worse than you are already.”

“Who said I was going to lie to you,” muttered Wat.

“I like you, Wat,” said Brinklow, puffing at his pipe. “I can see when things are going right you’re a hearty feller, hard-working and cheerful. Just what we need up here. You’d make good up here, Wat. Well, there’s been some kind of accident. Any man’s liable to have an accident. Out with the whole thing. It ain’t natural to you to lie; you only get yourself balled up. Tell the truth and you’ll find friends. Mac here, will tell you the same.”

“Sure, sure!” said McNab eagerly. “I liked you from the first, Wat.”

Brinklow sucked in his cheek. He was wondering, maybe, if McNab would have liked the old man so well had he been childless.

However, Wat Parran's wary, cunning look did not alter. "It's true Angus Blair was travellin' with us," he began slowly. "But I don't know what's come of him. We missed him at the time of the fire. He'd been with us over two weeks. He come upon us first off when the waggon had cast a wheel. He was a handy feller. Helped us fix it. Then he stayed on with us. For company, he said. In the beginning I was glad to have him. He was an A.1 partner on the trail, so ready-witted and humorous and all. Then I got sore at him."

"Why?"

"Well, he set out to charm Julia," said Wat scowling. "He had a way with women as they say. That always makes other men sore. Got so he wanted to walk with her all day. Wanted to take her away from the fire nights so we couldn't hear what he said to her. Made me sore. Hell, I on'y come up here on Julia's account, and I wasn't goin' to let the first yellow-haired, slick-tongued rascal that come along cop her away from me. What would I have done up here without her? It made me sore!"

"Did Miss Julia favour him?" asked Brinklow.

"Not any more than was polite," said Wat. "She wouldn't go away from the fire with him. But he might have wore her down in the end. He was a determined feller."

"Well, why didn't you tell him that you preferred his room to his company, and let him go on?"

Wat hung his head. "I meant to do that," he mumbled, "but I kept puttin' it off from day to day. You see me and him . . . well, we got in the habit of drinkin' together every night after Julia went to bed. I told you what a hold the stuff had on me. I kinda got dependent on it."

"Where did the stuff come from?" demanded Brinklow.

"I don't know. He brought it."

"But you've heard Dick Stivers describe how Angus Blair spread out his whole outfit to show him. He didn't have any liquor then."

"Aah!" said Wat, "if Angus did have it, Dick wouldn't have give him away to you."

"Was the jug his?"

"No. He only had a flat bottle he brought out of his pocket every night. I told you the truth about that jug. I never saw it before."

“But if you and Angus drank together every night for two weeks, the flat bottle would never have held out. What was it filled from?”

“I don’t know,” said Wat. “Never gave it any thought.”

Brinklow turned to the other man. “Bull, did you ever see the bottle refilled.”

“No,” said Bull.

“Loney Beale passed your outfit on July sixteenth,” said Brinklow. “Did you buy any liquor from him?”

“No,” said Wat. “I bought no liquor.”

“Did you?” asked Brinklow of Bull.

“Hadn’t no money,” said Bull in his stolid way. “Put everything I had into the outfit.”

“Well, that liquor had to come from somewhere,” said Brinklow. “Would it have been possible for Angus to hide his jug in the waggon?”

“Maybe,” said Wat. “We never had any occasion to unload the waggon since he was with us.”

“Now, coming to the night you all camped here,” said Brinklow. “What happened then?”

“Nothin’ in partic’lar,” said Wat. “After Julia went to bed, me and Angus sat by the fire drinkin’ and talkin’.”

“And Bull?”

“No. He never touched the stuff. Bull was here and gone again. I didn’t take notice.”

“Did you and Angus quarrel?”

“No. Maybe a few hard words was passed. But not to say a quarrel.”

“Can you bear that out, Miss?” Brinklow asked, turning to the girl. “Where were you lying?”

Julia coloured up painfully. “Yonder among the trees,” she said with an odd breathlessness. “My tent was pitched about fifty feet from the fire.”

“What did you hear?”

“My father and Mr. Blair were disputing a little. It made me anxious. . . .”

“What were they disputing about?”

Julia’s face was deeply suffused. “I . . . I couldn’t rightly understand,” she faltered. “But they quieted down afterwards. So I was relieved. I went to sleep.”

“Can you add anything to this?” asked Brinklow of Bull Bracker.

A shake of the head. “They was just arguing like men with a little liquor in them. Didn’t signify nothin’. They rolled up in their blankets early.”

Brinklow deliberated over his pipe. There was a feeling of strain in the air. The girl’s hands trembled and her eyes were haunted. McNab wondered what *had* happened that night.

“Wat,” said Brinklow, “you told me when you drank you became blind; you didn’t know what you were doing. How do you know what may have happened that night.”

“I wasn’t drunk,” said Wat, aggrieved. “These two will bear me out. I didn’t have but four or five, and the bottle was empty.”

“Well, let’s get on,” said Brinklow. “When did you miss Angus?”

“Near morning we was all awakened by the fire,” said Wat glibly. “It was burnin’ fiercely then. Angus and his dog were gone. I thought he’d taken offence at my remarks and beat it. Anyhow we couldn’t look for him then. If there’d been a shift in the wind it would have been all day with our outfit. We had to hitch up and pull out in a hurry. Three miles north of here we come on grass, and as there seemed to be no danger of the wind shiftin’ then, we went into camp to finish out our sleep.”

“And there the Indian found you about ten o’clock.”

“Yes.”

“When you saw the dog with him you knew of course that Angus was not ahead of you.”

“I reckon.”

“Why didn’t you tell the Indian the truth?”

Wat shrugged his shoulders.

“Here was a white man you had travelled with a couple of weeks. Were you going to let him disappear without saying a word? If he was lost in the bush the Indians were the right ones to tell about it.”

“Angus was nothing to me,” said Wat sullenly.

“That sort of talk don’t go down in this country,” said Brinklow sternly. “White men whether friendly or otherwise have a feeling of responsibility towards each other . . . When I came up with you the next day why didn’t you tell me the truth?”

“By that time I thought there was something wrong,” muttered Wat. “I didn’t want to be mixed up in no trouble.”

“Nobody had ever seen Angus in your company, and you thought you could get away with it, eh?”

“Well, yes, if you want to put it that way,” said Wat defiantly.

"Have you any explanation to offer of what became of him?"

"No," said Wat.

"Hm! Wully Wallace seems to have a theory," said Brinklow grimly. "As soon as the ground cools off a little we'll investigate it."

## 7

IT was time for the evening meal. McNab built a fire in the ashes of one of the previous fires, and fetched water from the spring, while Brinklow went off to take care of the horses. Across the road, partly screened by a fringe of trees and bushes, lay an oval grassy opening like a natural paddock. Brinklow led the horses in here, and picketed them separately with ropes and stakes, that they might not stray around during the night, and obliterate tracks that were important to his case. The spring was at the farther edge of the grass.

Meanwhile Julia was beating up biscuit dough in an enamelled basin. McNab watched her deft movements with fascinated eyes. She had thin, strong hands, tanned by the weather, somewhat hardened by work, but beautifully shaped. With every moment he was falling deeper under her spell. He did not understand what was happening to him. He had a gone feeling, as if he had lost some essential part of himself.

Julia filled the two skillets they had brought with her dough, and inclining them towards the fire, raked hot embers beneath them. When her loaves were firm enough to stand alone, she took them out of the pans, and stood them up before the fire, braced by little sticks, occasionally turning them. Meanwhile she sliced bacon to fry, and made the tea.

Supper was eaten in an almost unbroken silence. Brinklow was the only one who showed a serene brow. Upon Brinklow, McNab, Julia and Bull Bracket, the enforced silence entailed no hardship, for they were naturally silent persons, but Wat Parran's quick nature chafed under it. He made several attempts to start the talk in a tone of forced joviality, but it was like speaking in a void. He gave it up. His irascible eyes darted this way and that while he bolted his food, and he muttered under his breath. Finally he sprang up.

"Aah! what's the matter with you all?" he cried. "Are you struck dumb? You look like a bunch of mutes at a funeral. That's no way for Christians to sit to their meat. Yah! you make the food stick in my throat!"

He flung away to the other side of the fire, and ostentatiously rolling up in his blanket, made believe to go to sleep.

Brinklow and McNab helped Julia to wash up and put things away. Bull Bracker sat smoking with an indifferent air that seemed to say: Oh well, if they wanted to do such woman's work, they were welcome to. The two young people were painfully constrained with each other.

"A fair night," said Brinklow, cocking an eye at the sky between the tree tops. "It's pleasant to lie out on such a night, and fall asleep under the stars. A roof oppresses you. Your folks did well to come in late in the summer, Miss. In June the mosquitoes would have et you alive. But they're pretty near gone now. Their brief day is over."

Julia's tent had been set up in its former place some twenty paces from the fire. As soon as the work was done she softly bade them good-night, and turned towards it.

"Don't go yet," McNab cried involuntarily. "Sit down for a little and talk."

With a shake of the head, she left them. She entered her little tent, and the flaps fell behind her. McNab was most unreasonably sore!

He was recalled to himself by hearing Brinklow say facetiously: "Keep a grip on yourself, Mac! 'Ware the rapids around the bend!"

"I can't help myself, Brink," the young man muttered.

"Well, what of it?" said Brinklow, gripping his shoulder. "Many a good man's gone that way before you. If he's got grit it's the makin' of him. But keep a hold of yourself until you find out where you are." He went off to look to the horses.

When he came back, he said low-voiced to McNab:

"I'm goin' to turn in now. I want you to stay awake until midnight and then call me."

McNab looked at him in some surprise.

"Oh, I don't expect them to run away," said Brinklow. "There's no place for them to run to. But there's a good bit of evidence around this camp that I haven't yet fitted into its proper place. If they are not watched they might try to destroy it during the night."

Brinklow rolled up in his blanket next to Wat Parran, across the fire.

This left McNab and Bull Bracker sitting together. Bull was a complete enigma to McNab. He had scarcely opened his mouth all day. He appeared considerably less intelligent than Wully Wallace, the dog. McNab set himself the task of drawing him out a little.

"What part of Ioway did your outfit start from?"

"Near Charles City."

"Were you farming there?"

"Yep."

"How long you been working for Wat Parran."

"Upwards of ten years."

"Then Miss Julia was only a little girl when you started."

"Yep."

"Did you drive the whole way up here?"

"Nope. Come by train to railhead."

"How did you manage about the horses?"

"Put our whole outfit in a box car with feed for the journey. I travelled with it, and Wat and Julia come by passenger train."

"They tell me they have hard winters in Ioway?"

"Yep."

"So you'll feel at home up here?"

"Yep."

"I suppose you'll take up a homestead for yourself, and you and Wat work the two in partnership?"

"Yep."

Trying to get talk out of Bull Bracker was like digging with a pick in concrete. The results were negligible. McNab wearied of the effort. Soon Bull arose, and taking his blanket lay down on the other side of Wat Parran, and was almost immediately asleep.

McNab filled his pipe, and settled himself for his long vigil. Wully Wallace had gone across the road to lie down. McNab called him softly, and the dog thumped his tail on the ground, but refused to come closer to the men he hated. So McNab let him be.

The utter silence of the northland enveloped him. The fire had burned down to red embers. There were no strumming insects, no night birds, and the little four-footed creatures of the forest were giving the man's camp a wide berth. He could hear the deep breathing of the three men across the fire and an occasional sigh from the tree-tops. Once in a while a horse stamped or blew grass from its nostrils. No other sounds. McNab loved this silence without realising that he did so. Once having known it, the bustle of cities would always make him uneasy.

And then he heard a new sound that caused his heart to miss a beat. The merest whisper of a sound from Julia's tent, a catch in the breath that he would never have heard had not his ears been stretched in that direction. He

heard it again; a little strangled sound. And again. There was no mistaking the nature of it. Julia's breast was shaken with sobs that she was trying to stifle.

It released a sort of emotional hurricane in the young man. Without knowing what he was doing, he hastened to the tent and fell on his knees at the door. "Julia! Julia!" he whispered. "What is the matter?"

Silence within the tent.

"Julia, what is the matter?" he repeated. "I can't stand to hear you cry. What is the matter?"

"Go away!" she said in a carefully schooled voice. "Please go away."

"I won't go until you tell me what's the matter. I can't stand it. Come to the door and speak to me."

She came to the door. Without parting the flaps, she whispered urgently: "Oh, go away! Go away! You cannot help me. If they were to wake and see you it would only make things worse!"

"I care nothing for them. Only for you. I can't go away and leave you crying. What is it?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"I want to be your friend."

"You're a policeman."

"Oh, forget it! forget it! I'm a man first."

"You're talking wildly," she whispered.

"Sure!" said McNab. "To-night I am living for the first time!" He put his hand between the tent flaps, and feeling around, found her hand on the ground, and gripped it hard. She snatched it away.

"Listen," she said. "It's plain to be seen you don't know anything about women. They cry easily. It relieves them. There's nothing the matter. It's only the stillness and the lonesomeness. I am afraid of this country. Go away now. I won't cry any more."

"You're lying," said McNab. "Something is tearing you to pieces!"

A soft groan was forced from her. "Oh, go away!" she whispered. "You're only making it worse."

"I will save you from it whatever it is!" he murmured. "Let me save you. I love you. Nothing in the world means anything to me but you!"

She swayed and fell partly against him, though the canvas still divided them. For a moment he bore her weight, the blessed warmth of her striking

through the canvas. “Ah! you’re crazy, you’re crazy!” she whispered. “You never saw me before this afternoon. What do you know about me?”

“What difference does that make?” said McNab. “We’re dealing with fundamentals. A man knows when his number is called. I’ve been waiting for you. You own me for better or worse. If I can’t have you I’ll have none!”

She straightened up.

“Ah, don’t leave me!” he said, reaching for her.

She withdrew farther into the tent. “You mustn’t . . . you mustn’t talk like this,” she whispered.

“Why not? There is no shame in it.”

Her voice died away. “I am pledged.”

“Pledged? . . .” echoed McNab stupidly. “Pledged . . . To whom?”

“To John Bracker.”

“Bull Bracker? That farmhand! That lout! You couldn’t give yourself to *him*! A woman like you!”

“I am pledged!”

“What of it? You hadn’t met me then. God knows I’m not crazy about myself, but as against Bull Bracker . . . Do you mean to say you would prefer him to me?”

No answer from Julia.

“You can unpledge yourself!” said McNab. “Such a pledge is no pledge at all!”

“I’m going to marry him,” she whispered obstinately.

“Do you love him?” he demanded.

“Yes.”

“You’re lying! It’s against nature! You’re going to love me!”

“Go away!”

“Julia. . . !”

“Go away!” she repeated in a stronger voice. “Or I shall call him!”

McNab went blindly back to the fire.

## 8

NEXT morning McNab was awakened by the barking of the dog. He found that all his companions were astir, and all watching the dog with strained eyes. Brinklow’s face was grim. McNab looked at Julia prepared to hate her

for the pain she had given him; but when she turned her dark eyes on him, he found it impossible to do so. Though she were pledged to another man ten times over, he loved her more than ever. He turned away from her with an inward groan.

It was a grey morning with a raw chill in the air. Wisps of fog were floating through the forest enveloping the black tree trunks in ghostly shrouds. The dog was leaping at the edge of the burned land, barking with a strange poignancy. Occasionally he would run in a little way, only to be forced out as the hot embers burned his feet. His attention seemed to be directed towards a mound of ashes among the trees.

"How come such a quantity of ashes in one spot?" Brinklow asked of Wat Parran. "There must have been a big pile of wood heaped up there and burned. What was that?"

Wat's face was livid. Cold though the morning was, his forehead was moist. "You can search me," he said with an air of bravado. "I mind nothing there."

McNab had the feeling that they were on the verge of a discovery. Thinking of the girl, it sickened him.

Finally the dog gathered his courage, ran all the way in, careless of his burned feet. He nosed around the mound of ashes while the five persons watched him with starting eyes. Separating the mound with a delicate paw, the dog explored it to the bottom. It was a lengthy business. To the onlookers it seemed as if an age passed. At last he picked up what seemed to be a lump of ashes, and coming back slowly with hanging head and drooping tail like a mourner, dropped it at McNab's feet.

McNab handed it over to Brinklow. It looked like nothing but a shapeless little lump of ash. Brinklow blew the loose ash from it, and rubbed the lump on the leg of his breeches. The dog stood motionless, looking gravely into his face. Brinklow rinsed the lump in a pot of water, dried it on his handkerchief, and with the point of his penknife picked out the ash that still clung in the interstices. Gradually it resolved itself into a piece of partly calcined bone with several teeth imbedded in it. The two middle teeth were in a fair state of preservation. At first glance they might have been the teeth of any middle-sized animal, but a further careful investigation with the penknife revealed in one tooth a filling of bright gold.

"Part of a human jaw bone," said Brinklow.

A silence of horror fell on the onlookers. For a space nobody moved.

Then a groan was forced from Wat Parran. He collapsed on the ground. "I'm done!" he cried, writhing abjectly, face down in the pine needles. "I

can't stand any more! . . . I did it! I did it! Make what you like of it! I killed Angus Blair in a drunken rage. I split his head open with an axe! Afterwards I heaped up a pile of wood and flung his body on it and set it afire. I started the woods burning to hide the traces!"

Nobody wanted to look at him. The dog circled around behind McNab, and remained close at his heels. McNab's heart near broke, thinking of the girl. Stealing a glance, he saw her kneeling on the ground, her body bowed over, her arms wrapped around her head. Her stillness was more eloquent than any outcry. Bull Bracker stood like a stock of wood, never looking at the girl. His heavy face was apparently incapable of expressing feelings. McNab hated him blindly.

Wat was still writhing and wailing on the ground. "I made a beast of myself!" he groaned. "I drunk all my senses away. Like I often done before . . . often done before! I had plenty of warning this would happen some day. And now it's come. It drives me crazy thinkin' what I brought down on my girl's head. All my life I been a curse to them that loved me. I ain't fit to live on this earth . . . Well . . . in my own way I can pay! . . ."

He suddenly sprang up, and in the same movement had his knife out of its sheath. Julia shrieked once. Brinklow and McNab leaped on the man simultaneously, and bore him down. Brinklow pinned his wrist to earth, and pounded the hand that held the knife until its grasp relaxed. Securing the knife, Brinklow ordered McNab to fetch handcuffs from the pocket of his saddle. A moment later the steel bracelets clicked on Wat's wrists. Brinklow arose, dusting his knees. Julia crept to her father's side.

Seating herself with her back to the others, she took the groaning man's head in her lap, and stroked it until he quieted.

Brinklow addressed himself to Bull Bracker. "What can you tell me about this affair?"

"Nothin'," was the sullen answer.

"Weren't you present?"

"No. The horses had strayed off, and I was lookin' for them."

"What did you find when you came back?"

"I refuse to answer."

"What's this?" cried Brinklow with a hard scowl.

But the other man faced him out. The silent one found his tongue at last. "For ten years Wat Parran has been my boss," he said, "and now he's my partner. I ain't goin' to testify agin him. I'm goin' to stick to him through this business, so you can make what you like of it. If I have to go to jail

alongside Wat, all right; I'm ready to go. What's more, I tell you here and now that I helped him to dispose of the body afterwards; that's all I got to say."

Though McNab hated the man he commended his blunt loyalty. Brinklow on the other hand did not seem to be much impressed by it. He listened to Bull's manifesto with a smile.

Later, Wat Parran having got his grip again, Brinklow questioned him. Julia had left her father and was invisible within her tent. Brinklow invited Wat to give an account of what had happened.

"Ain't much to tell," said Wat dejectedly. "Me and Angus was drinkin' beside the fire. We drunk more than usual—that is, I did. I reckon he was plyin' me with the stuff. The bottle must have been filled more than once. He said we'd be in the settlement next day, and we might as well finish it up. I was gettin' good and drunk. I remember I was tellin' him to keep away from Julia, and he was tryin' to soothe me down. When I get drunk I get sore. All the things I heard against Angus come back to me. . . ."

"What things?" asked Brinklow.

"Oh, Bull would be tellin' me how Angus tried to get ahead with Julia when I wasn't watchin'."

McNab whispered to Brinklow—suggested a question to ask.

Said Brinklow: "Why didn't you sidetrack Angus once and for all by telling him that your daughter was pledged to Bull?"

Wat was greatly taken aback by this question. "How did you know Julia was pledged to Bull?" he demanded.

"McNab just told me," said Brinklow coolly.

"How did he know?" said Wat, scowling at McNab.

"Never mind that, but answer the question."

"Well," said Wat sullenly, "they wasn't pledged then. It was afterwards they come to an understandin'."

This answer gave McNab considerable food for thought.

"Go on," said Brinklow.

"All of a sudden it come into my mind," said Wat, "that Angus was just getting me drunk to smooth the way for him to court Julia. He was makin' me drunk while he stayed sober. Rage gripped me then. The desire to kill come to me. I had felt that before in my life, but something always stopped me. It's like a deathly sickness. The whisky was in my brain like fire. I wanted Angus's blood. I looked around for the axe . . . That's all I can remember."

"When did you come to?"

"Bull slung a bucket of cold water over my head. That fetched me to my senses all right. I seen Angus lyin' beside me with his head split open and blood pourin' out. That was why we made the second fire there, to hide the blood. I was sick then . . . sick! Bull said he'd stand by me. Nobody had seen Angus in our company. Nobody would know. We gathered a big pile of wood amongst the trees yonder, and laid the body across it. We set fire to it, and started the woods burnin' to hide all traces. Then we hitched up and beat it down the road."

"Did Miss Julia know what had happened?" asked Brinklow.

"She was asleep when it happened. Afterwards we had to tell her . . . that was the worst! . . . We wouldn't let her see nothin' . . ." Wat flung himself down and hid his face. Lamentable sobs shook him. The two policemen looked away; only Bracker appeared to be unmoved.

"Well, shall we start back?" McNab said to Brinklow in a low voice. "Shall I bring over the horses?"

The sergeant smiled. "Not yet," he said dryly.

McNab was in the little prairie shifting the stakes so that the animals could get fresh grass. Brinklow would not yet let them be turned out. Suddenly from the camp across the road he heard alarming sounds; a cry from Julia, and Bull Bracker's coarse voice raised in anger. He ran back.

He found that Brinklow had already intervened between the pair. Julia was sitting on the ground weeping, while the sergeant was edging the red-faced, cursing Bracker slowly back. McNab burned to get in it, but Brinklow warned him off. Bull had fifteen or twenty pounds advantage of the sergeant, but the latter's steely eyes held the farmhand steadily.

"What's the matter?" demanded McNab of the girl.

"He came to my tent," she gasped. "He wouldn't go out."

McNab's fists clenched involuntarily. "Let him be!" warned Brinklow. "This is not a case for private punishment." From the ground a few yards off the helpless Wat cursed Bracker. All the values in the complicated situation had been suddenly shifted.

"Well, why shouldn't I have come to your tent if I wanted a bit of a private talk with you?" snarled Bracker. "Am I a leper? Ain't you my girl? Ain't you pledged to me?"

"No! No! No!" cried Julia in a passion of relief. "I don't have to go through with *that* now! . . . I promised to marry him," she explained to the two policemen, "so that he would keep his mouth shut! I thought I'd die if I

had to go through with it; but I promised. . . . I promised! What else could I do? But now that my father has confessed there's no need to keep it up."

"Oh, Jule!" groaned Wat Parran, "if I had known you felt that way I wouldn't have let you!"

A spring of gladness welled up in McNab's breast. He kept a sober face. He was ashamed of feeling glad but he could not help himself. To hear Julia break the tie that bound her to Bull Bracker was like waking from a nightmare.

Bull's heavy red face turned purely hateful. "So *that's* the way the wind lies, eh?" he snarled. "Well, I guess that lets me out too, then. That frees my tongue. I'm ready to tell you all I know now, sergeant."

"Go ahead," said Brinklow.

The handcuffed Wat and Julia were sitting on the brown pine needles facing each other at a distance of half a dozen paces, like two sculptured figures of tragedy. The girl's bowed head rested on her knees. Brinklow and Bracker stood in the centre of the little camp. The policeman's face wore a mask; Bracker's face worked venomously as he turned from Wat to Julia. McNab was hard put to it to keep his hands off the man. The young man could not remain still, but drifted back and forth as he listened.

"Angus Blair and him was drinkin' and quarrellin' all evenin'," said Bull. "I didn't pay no attention to them. I don't tech it myself. Wat is lyin' when he says Angus was holdin' back and makin' him drunk. Angus matched him drink for drink. I had to put them both to bed reg'lar."

"Where did all the liquor come from?" asked Brinklow.

"I dunno."

"Was it hid in the waggon?"

"Maybe so."

"Why didn't you find out—for Wat's sake? for the girl's sake?"

"Aah! I ain't no prohibition officer. I warned Wat which way he was headin', and if he didn't take no heed that was up to him."

"Go on."

"I always had the horses on my mind. We had hung a bell on the bay gelding because whatever he did the others would follow. Bime-bye I hear him makin' off through the woods, so I goes after him. I was gone maybe half an hour. . . ."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Brinklow. "Where was the dog?"

"I left him here lyin' beside his master. When I come back he was gone."

"What did you find here when you came back?"

"I see Wat lyin' on the ground in a drunken sleep," Bull went on with a perfectly callous air, "and Angus lyin' beside him with his head split open. The bloody axe was beside Wat, and he had blood on him. One of the first things I had to do was to clean him."

"Was there any indication of a struggle?"

"No. They was lyin' there just the same's I'd seen 'em many a night before. As the girl hadn't been wakened up, I figgered Wat musta split Angus's skull while he lay drunk."

"No! No!" groaned Wat. "I couldn't a done that!"

"Aah! how do you know what you done?" snarled Bull.

Wat was silenced.

"Go on," said Brinklow.

"I doused Wat's head with a bucket of cold water just like he said," Bull resumed. "When he come to he was sick. I'll give him that much. He was sick. Carried on like a crazy man. Cried and begged me to stand by him. Offered to let me marry the girl if I would help him dispose of the body and say nothin' after."

"That's a lie!" cried Wat. "He made that the price of helpin' me, and I put it up to Jule."

"Yes, they put it up to me," she murmured. "What could I say?"

"They're both lyin'!" cried Bracker.

"Never mind that," said Brinklow. "Go on with your story."

"Well, it was just like he said," said Bull sullenly. "We heaped up a pile of wood amongst the trees yonder, and lay the body on it, and set it afire. We made a fire here to cover the place where the blood had run. We set the woods afire, we beat it up the road."

"Whereabouts was the axe lying when you left camp?" asked Brinklow.

"I don't recollect," said Bull.

There was a silence. Brinklow pulled out his pipe, and started to fill it with a thoughtful air. "There's a curious discrepancy in this here story," he said with a grim smile.

"What are you getting at?" demanded Bull, scowling.

"Well, according to you, these two men got drunk together every night for two weeks. Now it takes a quart of liquor to make two men drunk, or more if they are seasoned topers as these two seem to have been. Fourteen times a quart is three gallons and a half; five gallons would be more likely. It stands to reason, don't it, that Angus Blair wasn't walkin' through the bush

with four or five stone jugs of liquor hangin' from him? Where did it come from then?"

"You can search me," said Bull sullenly. "I don't use the stuff."

"Yeah," said Brinklow, "you make quite a point of that."

They set to work to make their breakfast. As before, McNab helped Julia. At a moment when no one else was near he whispered:

"What I said last night goes, see?"

Julia shrank from him sharply. "Oh, please," she whispered, "I can't stand any more."

"Ah," said McNab, "it isn't going to add to your troubles, is it, to know that somebody loves you and means to stand by you?"

"You don't understand," she whispered. "I wasn't thinking of myself. If they convict my father. If they . . . if they . . . well, you know what will happen. No decent man could afford to look at me then."

"Aah . . . cut out that kind of talk!" said McNab shakily, "or I can't hold myself in . . . I don't want to worry you about this now . . . but I've got to go on record. All that means nothing to me. If it isn't considered fitting for a policeman to marry you, well, I'll be something else, see?"

Julia lowered her head.

## 9

BREAKFAST was the same as supper the night before; bacon, bannock and tea. It was hardly a sociable meal. Wat having given his word to make no further attempts to do away with himself, was freed of the handcuffs. The little man sat on his heels, all the bounce gone out of him, drearily shoving the food down his throat. Julia, her great eyes fixed on him, made no pretence of eating, and McNab could look at nothing but Julia. Bull Bracker, already suspicious, scowled poisonously at the constable. Only Brinklow seemed to be upborne by an inner cheerfulness.

While they were eating, the sound of hoofbeats made itself heard. A single horseman was approaching from the direction of the settlement.

Brinklow said: "If my theory about this case is correct, I bet I can tell you who is coming."

McNab was struck by his phraseology. "Theory," he had said, as if there was still a mystery to be solved. "Who is coming?" he asked.

“Loney Beale,” said Brinklow.

“What should bring him over here?”

“Curiosity.”

Sure enough Loney Beale presently rode into sight. The fat man shook all over with every step of his cayuse. He was startled at the sight of the breakfast party, and his little eyes searched their faces, one by one. Dismounting, he tied his horse to a branch, and came forward with outstretched hand and loud greetings.

Brinklow said: “Must have got up early this morning, Loney.”

“Sure did!” said Loney, laughing heartily. “When you and Mac didn’t come back last night I was anxious, kind of. Thought I better ride down the road and see. Thought maybe I could help you.”

“Certainly was neighbourly of you, Loney. As a matter of fact you’re the very man I was wantin’ to see.”

Loney changed colour and glanced anxiously at Wat and at Bull. They gave him nothing to go on. “When I see the loaded waggon standing in the road three mile back, didn’t know what to make of it,” he said.

“Loney,” said Brinklow, “for a poker player your face is too easy read.”

“How come?” said Loney.

“I bet I can tell you what you’re thinkin’ about this minute.”

“Shoot, Sarge.”

“You’re wonderin’ if I searched that waggon yet.”

Loney laughed uproariously. “Wrong!” he shouted. “I got no interest in that waggon.”

“Wouldn’t have done no good to search it, Loney, for the stuff was all drunk up.”

“I don’t get you, Sarge.”

Brinklow arose, and went behind a tree. He returned with his hands behind his back. Producing the stone jug he said: “Here’s a bit of your property I want to return, Loney.”

Loney recoiled. “It’s none of mine,” he stammered.

“What do you allow for the return of jugs?” Brinklow asked.

Loney’s eyes bolted. “You get me wrong, Sarge,” he said plaintively.

“Useless, Loney,” said Brinklow. “I have the whole story.”

The fat man’s face suddenly reddened with rage, and he took a step towards Bull Bracker. “You—— fool!” he cried. “What you want to tell him

you got it off me for? That didn't do you any good, and it's ruined me! It's easy to see you don't belong up here. Men stand together up here!"

Bull sprang to his feet in a fury. "Fool yourself!" he shouted. "The policeman didn't know nothin'. He was just fishin' for information, and you've given the whole thing away, you fool! You've blabbed on yourself and you've blabbed on me. Call yourself a rum-runner! Oh, my God, you had ought to sell milk!"

Bull rushed at Loney, and the fat man quailed. The policeman stepped between them. Brinklow was grinning.

"Much obliged, gentlemen," he said. "You've told me what I already suspected, but now I know it!"

Loney was almost weeping now. "Anyway, this happened a long ways back," he whimpered. "It was two weeks ago and more. Away outside your district, sergeant, what do you care? You wouldn't ruin me, would you, for somethin' down near railhead. Up here I always been a law abidin' citizen. . . ."

"Ah, shut up, Loney!" growled McNab. "Brink's got more on his mind than whisky smuggling now."

"Thought you had no money?" said Brinklow to Bull, with a hard smile.

"Well, I had a little," growled Bull. "Fifty dollars."

"Just the price of five gallons, eh? What did you buy whisky for? You don't drink it."

"Just for a speculation. Wanted to bring in somepin to trade with."

"Profitable speculation," said Brinklow with a stony stare. "Paid a dividend of murder!"

"Aah! Could I foresee that?" snarled Bull.

"Not in just that form maybe; but I reckon you wasn't countin' on bringin' anybody to salvation with the stuff. . . . Did Wat know you had it?"

"No."

"You sold it to Angus Blair?"

"Yes. He gave me no peace when he found I had it."

"You sold it to him pint by pint?"

"Yes."

"At a handsome profit, I take it?"

No answer from Bull.

"Trebled your money or more," persisted Brinklow.

"That's my affair," growled Bull.

"Well, at that you did better than Judas," said the sergeant. "He only got thirty pieces of silver."

Bull snarled wordlessly like an animal.

"You knew the stuff was the same as poison to your partner," Brinklow went on.

"Aah! Am I Wat Parran's keeper?"

"That's what Cain said."

Bull, purple-faced, broke into a wild cursing. "Let me be!" he cried. "Just because you wear a red coat does that give you the right to browbeat me? Do you want to drive me wild?"

"Sure," said Brinklow. "Then maybe the truth will come out."

Bull, with a violent effort controlled his excitement. "You'll get no more out of me," he muttered.

## 10

TELLING the others to remain by the camp fire, Brinklow took Bull Bracker and McNab a few paces down the road. Some fifty feet away from the fire there was a natural opening into the grass. They entered it. The dog followed close at McNab's heels, always giving Bull Bracker a wide berth.

"On the night of the murder were your horses hobbled?" asked Brinklow.

Bull Bracker now studied every answer before he spoke. "Only the bay gelding," he said. "The other horses wouldn't stray unless he led them off. But he had learnt to walk almost as good with the hobbles as without them."

"They do," said Brinklow. "When you heard him wandering off which way was he heading?"

Bull pointed vaguely into the woods on the farther side of the grass. "In there," he said.

"Retrace your steps that night."

"How can I do that?" grumbled Bull. "It was dark. I was following by the sound."

"Well, you can find his tracks," said Brinklow.

Entering the woods, Bull made believe to search to and fro, while the sergeant waited grimly. Finally Bull said: "Well, maybe it was on the southerly side. How can I be sure, dark as it was."

"You needn't look any further," said Brinklow. "As a matter of fact the horses never left the grass. I have made a complete circuit of it, and there are no tracks leading away. Tired and hungry horses are not going to leave good grass for the pleasure of a promenade over the pine needles."

"Maybe he went down the road."

"He didn't go down the road either. There are no tracks of a hobbled horse in the road."

"Well, have it your own way," growled Bull.

"Now come with me," said Brinklow, "and I'll show you where you went and what you did."

He led the way to a point opposite the campfire. Here a thin screen of trees and bushes separated the grass from the road. Holding them back from treading on it, Brinklow pointed out a spot where the soft earth was tramped down for a little space. The prints of the star-shaped hobnails crossed and recrossed it. From the size of isolated tracks and parts of tracks it was evident at a glance that they had been made by Bull.

"A man squatting here could watch the campfire through the leaves," said Brinklow grimly. "Judging from the number of times he shifted his feet, Bull squatted here for a long time watching his friends by the fire. He wanted to make sure of the outcome of the drinking bout. It was the last night and the last of the liquor, and he was hoping his partner would not fail to make a job of it."

"That's a lie," growled Bull. "You can't prove it."

"All along the trail you were poisoning Wat's mind against Angus," said Brinklow. "Angus was too good-looking a fellow; too popular. You were afraid of his effect on Julia."

"It's a lie! I watched them to keep them from doing each other a hurt."

"Then why didn't you stay with them that night?"

Silence from Bull.

"Did you see the murder?"

"Yes," growled Bull.

"Describe to me what happened."

"Well, Wat and Angus was quarrellin'; Angus fell over in a drunken sleep, and Wat split his skull with the axe."

"But give me a little more detail. How were they sitting?"

"They was sittin' side by side facin' me with the fire in front of them!"

"Then the firelight was strong in their faces as you watched them?"

"Sure."

"What did they say to each other?"

"I can't tell you. Their voices was too thick and drunken. I couldn't make out. The whisky was all drunk and Angus had pitched the bottle away. Wat was sore because the whisky was gone. Wat was ugly, and Angus was tryin' to smooth him down. Then Angus fell over asleep, and Wat snatched up the axe."

"Where was the axe?"

"Leanin' against the pine tree to the right of the fire."

"Why didn't you stop him?"

"He was too quick for me. Seems sometimes like a drunk could move like greased lightnin'!"

"True enough. I suppose you sprang across the road to stop him?"

"Sure!"

"Where are your tracks?" asked Brinklow quietly. "Here's a space of soft earth three yards wide between us and the road. I see no tracks in it. I don't suppose you'd claim to leap it from a standin' start."

"Aah! it was you put the words in my mouth," growled Bull. "I suppose I went around by the opening. I was so excited I don't rightly remember."

"I wouldn't call you an excitable man," remarked Brinklow. "You didn't go that way either. You turned to the right and crossed the road a few yards above. You circled around through the trees to the back of the girl's tent. I found a place where you had knelt there listening."

"Sure," said Bull, "I mind that now. Wanted to see if she was sleepin'. Didn't want her to see what had happened."

"And was she asleep?"

"She was."

"Then you went to the fire and woke Wat up."

"Sure."

Brinklow deliberated for a moment with hanging head, stroking his mustache. "According to this story," he said slowly. "There was no space of time between the quarrel and the murder. As you describe it, Angus fell over asleep right in the middle of their talk, and Wat snatched up the axe on the instant."

"That's right," said Bull.

"You must have heard the sound of that blow as it fell," suggested the sergeant quietly.

Bull bared his teeth in a painful fashion. “Yeah,” he muttered, “an ugly softish sound.”

McNab’s blood ran cold.

“Did you actually see the blow delivered?” asked Brinklow.

Bull nodded. “Wat, he stood astride the fellow’s legs facing him and swung the axe,” he said.

“Where was the dog?” asked Brinklow softly.

Bull was completely taken aback by the simple question. He stared at Brinklow clownishly. “The dog . . .” he stammered, “the dog . . . I don’t mind him . . . He wasn’t there.”

“Where was he?”

Bull moistened his lips. “I . . . I don’t rightly recollect.”

“Hadn’t he been there while they were quarrelling?”

“Yes, he was there, lyin’ beside his master.” Bull took a breath and clamped his jaw shut. “Now I mind,” he said in a stronger voice. “A little while before this, the dog stood up growling, and walked away in the bush. He musta heard somethin’ in there.”

“When did he come back?”

“He never come back,” said Bull confidently. “I never seen him again.”

“Doesn’t that strike you as strange?” queried Brinklow.

“Well, maybe he come back,” said Bull, “and seein’ his master dead he run away for good. A dog won’t defend a dead master. Anybody will tell you that.”

“Hm!” said Brinklow. A faint smile wreathed his lips. “Let’s go back to the fire.”

Bull followed him, his heavy brows drawn together.

## 11

In camp the three persons were still sitting on the pine needles as they had left them; Wat Parran and Julia with hanging heads; Loney Beale with his foolish fat face all agog with curiosity. He had evidently been trying to pump the Parrans without success. He set out to square himself with McNab.

“Say, Mac, for the lova Mike what devil’s work’s been goin’ on here?”

“Keep your ears open and you’ll learn soon enough,” said McNab.

“Miss Julia,” said Brinklow, “I’m countin’ on you to help me throw a little more light on this matter. Do you want to change anything you told me

before?"

She shook her head.

"What time did you go to bed the night the . . . er . . . accident happened?"

"I can't tell you the hour," she said. "Our watches had stopped long ago. We travelled by sun time."

"Well, by sun time?"

"It was beginning to grow dark under the trees. It would be past eight o'clock."

"I recollect you told me you didn't go to sleep right away."

"No," was the low-voiced answer. "I was too anxious."

"You could hear the two fellows getting noisier as they drunk and beginning to quarrel?"

A nod of the head.

"How long would this be going on?"

"A long time. Two hours maybe."

"Did you ever hear Bull Bracker's voice amongst the others?"

"I never heard his voice."

"Did you ever look out to see what they was doin'?"

"I could not see the fire from the door of my tent. There were too many trees between."

"And then they fell quiet at last."

"They became quiet."

"Did they seem to get quiet together like, or did one voice go on after the other stopped?"

"They stopped together."

"And then you fell asleep."

"Yes."

"Right away?"

"Not right away. I listened for awhile to make sure they weren't going to begin again."

"How long?"

"I couldn't say."

"Fifteen minutes?"

"Oh, longer than that."

“Well, let’s take quarter of an hour as a minimum. You heard no suspicious sounds in that time?”

“None whatever.”

“Let’s be sure of that. Can you go on the stand and swear that for quarter of an hour after the men ceased quarrelling all was silence?”

“Certainly.”

“Fine,” said Brinklow with a sudden smile. McNab now began to perceive the direction Brinklow’s examination was taking, and a hope sprang up in his breast.

Bull Bracker saw it too. He pulled out his pipe with a great parade of unconcern, but his hand shook a little.

“Bull says,” Brinklow resumed, “that the axe was leaning against yonder tree to the right of the fire—left of the fire looking at it from this side. Can you verify that, Miss?”

Julia considered for a moment. “It was not there at supper time,” she said. “Because my father ate his supper with his back against that tree.”

“Wat, can you remember seeing the axe there later?”

Wat nodded apathetically. “When the impulse to kill first come to me,” he muttered, “I looked around and I seen the axe there.”

“Right handy to your hand,” murmured Brinklow. “Had you placed it there?”

“No.”

“Had you put it there, Miss?”

“No.”

“Then Bull put it there . . .

“Wat,” he continued, “if you had the impulse to kill, and the axe was right handy, what made you hold your hand then?”

“The dog,” muttered Wat. “He lay close to Angus on the other side, and if I made a move towards Angus he growled and raised the hair on his neck. I figured I could get Angus all right, but the dog would certainly have been at my throat before I could raise the axe a second time.”

“I see,” said Brinklow. “But later you dared it anyhow.”

“So it seems,” said Wat miserably. “I can’t recollect what happened later.”

“Yet the dog would let you approach his master in friendliness,” Brinklow pursued.

“Bull has told me how many a night he covered Angus when he had fallen asleep drunk. The dog never objected to that, did he, Bull?”

“No,” growled Bull.

“Seems when he saw you comin’ to Angus with a blanket he understood you was going to perform a friendly act.”

“I reckon,” said Bull.

Brinklow suddenly went off on a new tack. “Miss Julia,” said he, “what do you carry your personal effects in? Spare clothes and so on.”

“An old gladstone bag,” she said.

“Wat, what have you for your duds?”

“Canvas dunnage bag.”

“And you, Bull?”

McNab saw the man swallow before he answered. A muddy look had come into his red face. “I on’y got a grass bag,” he said. “That’s good enough for me.”

A slowly mounting excitement filled McNab. Brinklow’s casual air suggested to him that they were approaching a crisis.

“Was there any other jute bag, or as you call it, grass bag, in the outfit?” asked the sergeant.

“No.”

“Is this bag still in your possession?”

Bull hesitated. Julia spoke up. “He hasn’t got it,” she said. “Yesterday morning I noticed he was carrying his things tied up in an old sweater.”

Bull moistened his lips. “I used the bag to clean Wat off with,” he said. “I hadn’t nothin’ else to do it with. Afterwards I burned it. You recollect that, Wat?”

“I don’t recollect what you used,” muttered Wat.

“Were there any distinguishing marks on this bag?” asked Brinklow.

“Not as I mind,” growled Bull.

“Yes, there were,” said Julia suddenly. “I gave that bag to Bull before we started. It came with chicken feed. It had a black D stencilled on it within a circle.”

“Good!” said Brinklow. Unfastening a button of his tunic, he thrust in his hand, and drew out the folded bag. Shaking it out and holding it up for all to see, he said in his cool way:

“The bottom of the bag is torn out by the dog’s teeth, but the D is intact, and most of the circle surrounding it.”

"That is the bag!" cried Julia.

Brinklow turned to Bull Bracker with a grim air. "Then I charge Bull Bracker with the murder of Angus Blair," he said.

Bull, with a hoarse cry, flung himself upon the sergeant. Brinklow, prepared for such a move, withstood it like a rock.

They crashed to the ground, Brinklow uppermost. Bull struggled with the strength of desperation. The dog leaped around the pair, barking madly.

"Mac, the handcuffs!" cried Brinklow, cool even then. "Loney, sit on his legs, and help hold him down!"

A moment later, Bull, bound wrists and ankles, was left to roll and fling himself about on the pine needles until he should exhaust himself.

McNab secured the frantic dog, who appeared to doubt efficacy of the steel bracelets to hold the prisoner.

Meanwhile, Wat Parran and Julia having risen to their feet, were gazing at each other in a dazed fashion. It had come too swiftly; they could not take it in. The tears were running down Julia's cheeks.

She looked over at the writhing figure of Bull Bracker and suddenly comprehension came to her.

"Dad!" she screamed. "It's all right! You didn't do it! Brinklow has saved you!"

They flung themselves in each other's arms. Both wept unrestrainedly.

McNab solemnly shook Brinklow's hand.

"Brink," he said, "they ought to make you an inspector for this."

"Sho, lad," said Brinklow, highly pleased and self-conscious. "Nothin' to it! I ain't got the education!"

## 12

JULIA brewed a fresh pot of tea, and they sat down in a circle to recover themselves. But peace of mind restored them quicker than the tea. Bull Bracker was lying quiet over beyond the fire. Wully Wallace lay at McNab's back with his head on his paw, still keeping a watchful eye on the prisoner.

"A case like this," said Brinklow, "is like one of these new jig-saw puzzles. When you open the box you got a whole lot of funny-shaped pieces that don't seem to bear no relation to each other. You don't even know what kind of lookin' picture you got to make. Then bye and bye maybe two pieces fit together, and two more, and if you have luck they join up. And so

it goes. And when all your pieces fits together with none left over, there's the picture!" He took a swallow of tea.

"This is what happened," he resumed. "Of course I can't prove every single detail, but I know they're right because they fit. For years back, I take it, Bull Bracker has had a secret hankering for Miss Julia. He ain't to be blamed for that; it was his misfortune. He knew he had no show, a no-account farmhand, with nothin' to recommend him but his strength, and that would explain why he was keen to come up here. In a rough new country social distinctions would be levelled out, he figured; up here strength ought to serve a man better than brains. It's a notion that folks outside has of this country, but there's nothin' to it.

"So they started. As to the whisky Bull bought of Loney Beale, I figure that was the true reason he gave me; he bought it for a speculation; he wanted to bring something in to trade with. But he may have had some notion at the back of his mind that the possession of the stuff would give him a strong hold over Wat who craved it so. A few days later Angus Blair come along; a handsome, yellow-haired young fellow, they all say; full of life and fun, an educated fellow, a writer and all. Of course he had a way with the ladies. The very sight of such a one would make Bull Bracker sick with jealousy. From the first day he joined them I reckon Bull was studyin' how to put him out of the way. But he couldn't take any direct means, of course, without convictin' himself.

"Well, the whisky suggested a plan of action to him. Seems Angus had a taste for it just like Wat. So Bull he fed it to them day by day, meanwhile he poisoned Wat's mind against Angus, and for aught I know poisoned Angus's mind against Wat.

"I ain't tasted this particular lot of whisky, but if it's anything like the other contraband we've seized up here, it's deadly. Bull poisoned 'em body and mind. Night after night he watched them drinkin' and quarrellin', and waited for them to fight and one do the other in. Either way it would have worked out to Bull's advantage; if Wat had been killed, Miss Julia would naturally have come under Bull's protection.

"But it didn't work out the way he figured. However the two men quarrelled, some instinct of decency or the presence of the girl in the tent, kept them from each other's throats. When the last night came and the last bottle, you can figure how keenly Bull watched them through the bushes yonder. It was no go. They drank the last drop and threw away the bottle. It was touch and go at that moment, but the dog saved Angus. The two men fell over and slept. Miss Julia's evidence proves that. Can't you see Bull cursing? He had to act for himself then.

"He made a circuit around through the trees, and come up behind Miss Julia's tent, where he knelt listenin' until he satisfied himself she was asleep. Then he went to the fire. The two men was lyin' there in a drunken sleep, the dog watchin' beside his master.

"Now Bull had covered Angus up on former occasions, and the dog was accustomed to it. I take it Bull approached the dog showin' him the blanket, and keepin' the jute bag hid behind his back. He slipped the bag over the dog's head and secured it. Why he didn't kill the dog then and there I can't tell you. Maybe he'd taken a fancy to him, and, not knowin' dog nature, thought that Wully would accept him for a master after all was over; or maybe he meant to kill him later.

"At any rate he killed the man first. The dog tore his way through the bottom of the bag and escaped. When Wat came to his senses the dog was already gone. Bull sprinkled blood on Wat's clothes, and woke him up in the way you have heard them describe. He laid the crime at Wat's door, and he near got away with it. For Wat, havin' a guilty conscience, took the murder upon himself. Was ever such a situation? Wat and Miss Julia were driven to beggin' the real murderer to help and save them. And Miss Julia pledged herself to marry the man.

"Fortunately the dog won through to Tom Moosenose's camp, with the remains of the jute bag still tied around his neck. The old Indian tried to return him to Wat's outfit, but the dog refused, so he brought him to me. Tom's suspicions were aroused, so he hunted around until he found the rag of jute which he had thrown away, and he brought that valuable piece of evidence with him. Thus the picture was completed."

Brinklow swallowed the balance of his tea. "Certainly was an error of judgment for Wat and Bull to divide the dead man's blanket, and add it to their beds," he remarked, "but I suppose they slept cold nights . . . Well, Mac, let's fetch in the horses. If we have luck we can make the settlement before dark."

They were making the noon spell in another grassy opening alongside the waggon road. The loaded waggon stood in the road with the harness thrown across the pole. Bacon and bannock had been eaten, the grub-box packed and loaded on the waggon again, and the men were lying around smoking while they waited for the horses to make a feed.

Julia Parran sat on the grass with her knees folded under her, a highly self-conscious expression on her face, due to the fact that McNab, supporting himself on his elbows close by, was gazing into her face.

It pleased her, but she wished he wouldn't. Under the influence of joy, Julia's natural blooming had reasserted itself.

Presently she said, to create a diversion: "Mr. McNab, the ribbon around your hat is torn a little. Hand it to me and I will mend it."

McNab handed over the hat. "Mr. McNab?" he said reproachfully.

From one of the pockets of her khaki jacket Julia took a little housewife containing needles, thread, etc.

"What else should I call you?" she said. "We only met yesterday."

"What's that got to do with it! A whole lifetime has passed between yesterday and to-day!"

"I don't know your name," she murmured.

"Yes, you do!" he said. "You've heard Brink address me by it."

"Well . . . Dan!" she whispered.

"Oh, gosh!" cried McNab. "How lovely it sounds when you say it!"

"Hush!" she said. "The others will hear."

"What do we care?"

The ribbon required but a stitch or two, Julie handed the hat back.

"Walk down the road a little way with me," pleaded McNab.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she said. "It wouldn't be fitting . . . after what has happened."

"You mean poor Angus Blair?" said McNab. "God knows I'm sorry for him, but after all he's nothing to us."

"What would Sergeant Brinklow think," she murmured; "or Mr. Beale? After so short an acquaintance."

"They would wish they was me," said McNab. "*Please*, Julia."

"I couldn't," she said firmly—and immediately added: "Well, just a little way."

They sauntered self-consciously out of sight. Wully Wallace followed gravely at McNab's heels.

McNab paused. "Julia," he said, "I'm not a bold man with women. What I said last night was surprised out of me. Under ordinary circumstances I wouldn't have dared to say it until weeks or months had passed. But it's said now. Can't I love you, Julia?"

"All right," she murmured, hanging her head, "if you don't expect me to . . ."

"Ah, love me back again," he pleaded. "I don't want to rush you into anything, but it drives me wild when you talk about what this person or that

person will say. I just want you to be yourself."

"Very well," she said, raising her eyes to his, "I won't pretend any more. I love you, Dan, and you know it!"

"Wully," said McNab dropping on one knee, and putting an arm around the dog's neck, "this is Julia. You mustn't blame her for what happened, old boy. She didn't have anything to do with it. I love her, and you must love her too. Let's make it a partnership of three, old scout."

The dog looked up into Julia's face, and gravely wagging his tail, offered his paw in token of amity. Julia dropped to the ground and embraced him.

THE END

# HULBERT FOOTNER

HULBERT FOOTNER has had a most adventurous career. At fourteen he was earning his own living in New York. After an unsuccessful attempt to make a career on the stage, he turned journalist. He landed a job on the *Albertan* in the typically Western town of Calgary, by posing as a star reporter from the *New York Herald*. From Calgary he embarked, alone, on a twelve hundred mile trip into the almost unknown northern region of the province, up the Peace River to Poce Coupe Prairie at the foot of the Rockies, where it was said white men had never been. Some years later, haunted by stories of a marvellously beautiful waterfall in that unexplored country, he returned there, this time making a trip of four thousand miles. The route lay through the Yellowhead Pass, down the Frazer River to Giscomb Portage and across the height of land to Summit Lake, the true source of the Peace River.

Hulbert Footner lives now in Maryland, in Charlesgift, a house dating from 1650.

## The Dark Ships

Neil didn't like his girl Janet running round with Fanning, who was crooked, and said so, but Janet would take no advice, and the next time Neil saw her she was in a faint, with a revolver by her side, and Fanning dead at her feet. A dramatic situation for a hot-paced tale.

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Agatha Christie has some new and clever idea for each novel. This time it is a dog—and a most lovable dog at that. A "dumb witness" by nature, he yet helped Poirot to solve the mystery of Emily Arundell's death. You must read the story yourself to see how brilliantly Poirot made his deductions from the scanty clues available.

## Ill Met by Moonlight——*Leslie Ford*

Sandra Gould was by nature one of those women whom every other woman, and every man not actually in love with her, would like to murder. And in the end Murder claimed her as its victim. Leslie Ford has constructed a tense puzzle of crime and detection, thrown into high relief by an unusual love story.

## These Names Make Clues——*E. C. R. Lorac*

A publisher gives a party to some of his authors, including four thriller writers, four straight novelists, and one or two outsiders. It was meant to be a social, light-hearted affair, with a treasure hunt for entertainment. But while the hunt was on, one of the authors was found electrocuted.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed. Mis-numbered sections have been corrected in the last story, The Case of Angus Blair.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this eBook and is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Tortuous Trails* by Hulbert Footner]