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The
CALL OF HONOUR

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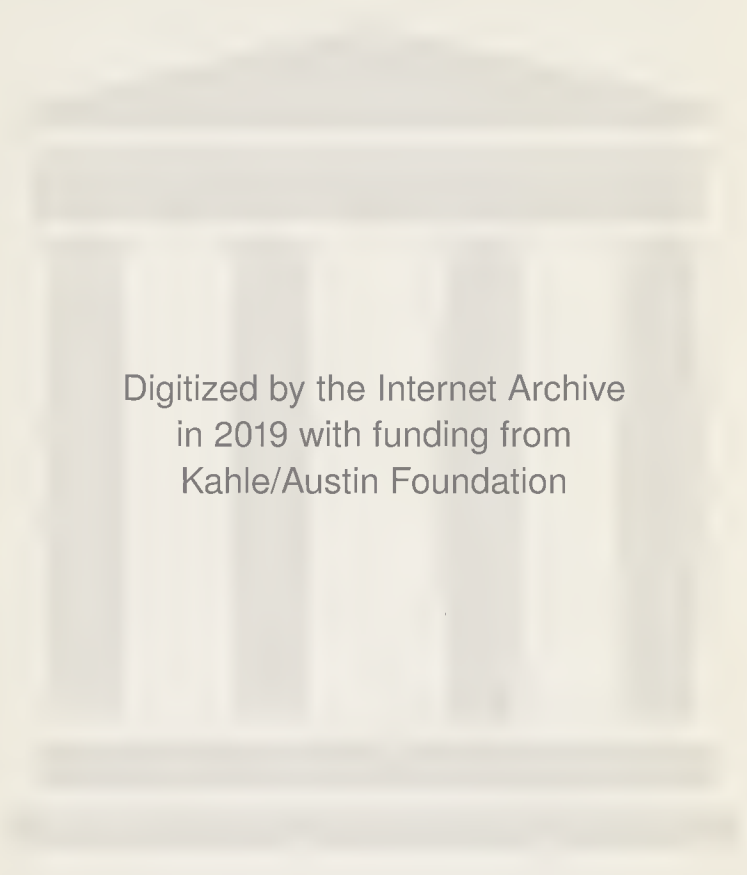
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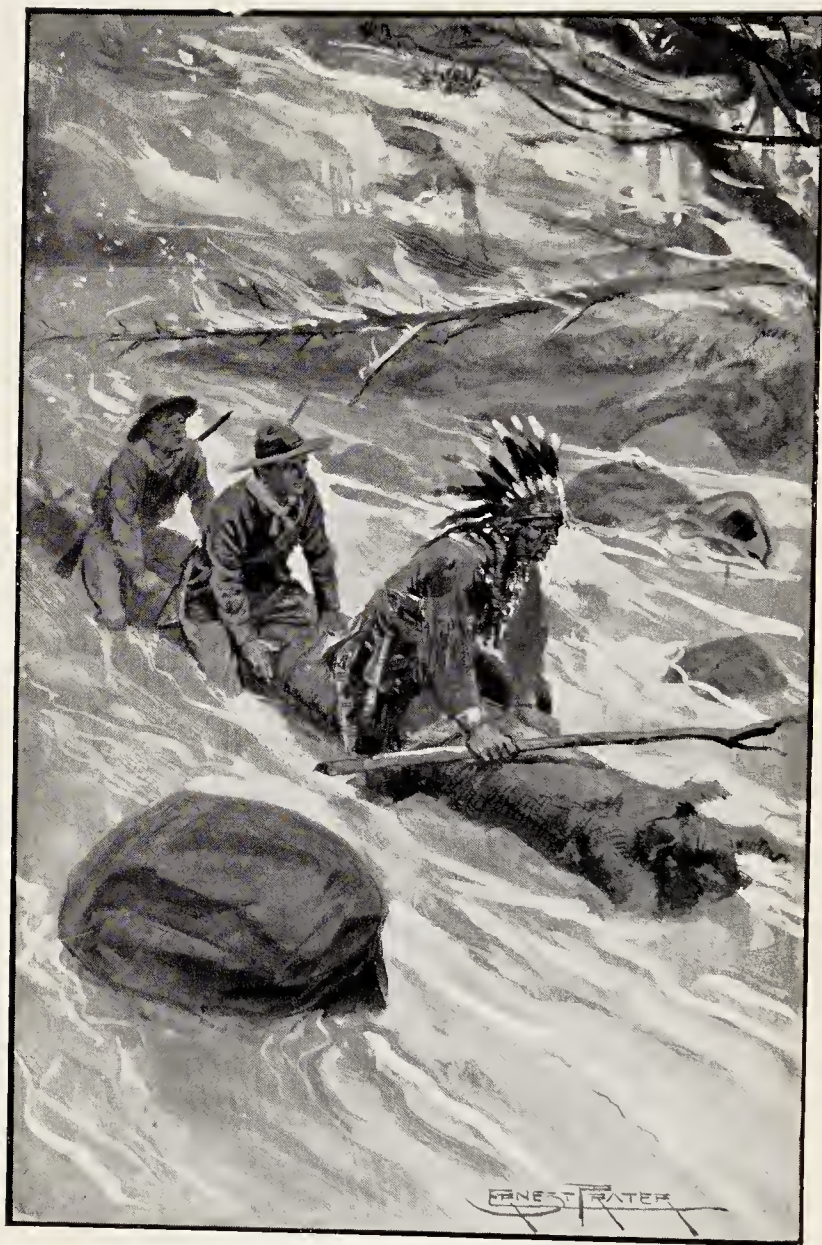
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“ ‘STICK TIGHT FOR ALL YOU’RE WORTH!’ JACK CALLED ABOVE THE NOISE OF THE WATERS THAT LEAPED AROUND.”

The Call of Honour

A Tale of Adventure in the
Canadian Prairies

By
Argyll Saxby

Author of

"Comrades Three," "Be Prepared," "The Taming of the Rancher"
"Braves, White and Red," "Brave Toviak," etc.

Publishers
PARTRIDGE
London

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(LATE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF CANADA)
AS A MARK OF RESPECT
FOR
HIS GRACE'S QUALITIES
AS
AUTHOR, STATESMAN, AND ENGLISH GENTLEMAN.

169988

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The Call of Honour

CHAPTER I

THE SCOUT'S MESSAGE

A couple of bronchoes—sleek and clean-limbed bays—that tread the grass of the prairie with an action that suggests springs instead of muscles.

A couple of lads—healthy, well-knit Saxons—who sit these bronchoes with an ease that suggests the fabulous centaurs more than individuals of human creation.

Such were the four beings of flesh and blood that were riding along one of the glades in the bosom of the Moose Valley one summer afternoon. Besides their similarity of garb and perfect horsemanship, there were other points in which the boys resembled each other. They were both about the same age; they were both well developed in frame and muscle; they both betrayed the same jolly “don't worry” countenances that mean a love for out-of-door hard work and the possession of good tempers and clean minds.

That one was dark, and the other com-

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paratively fair, were but slight differences after all. Different tuck-boxes may contain the same comestibles. The dark lad was the elder by about ten months. Jack Hansard was his name. The younger boy was named Geoffrey Beverley.

To make matters clear from the start, it might be mentioned that both the boys had been close chums ever since they met for the first time in a preparatory school at Falmouth. The father of each had died when the lads were very small, leaving their widows not too well-off as far as money was concerned. Training for any of the professions was therefore out of the question, so as soon as school-days were over Jack and Geoffrey decided to carry their chumship towards manhood and fight their way shoulder to shoulder in the Far West. A small amount of capital was provided from the purses of the widows, who, about that time, had moved into one house. Then away went the chums with brave hearts and determined wills—united in one intention: to make a home for their mothers in the new "Land of Promise." They bought a small "improved" farm in preference to taking up land which the Government provides free. The latter would have occupied too many years to get in proper order to suit their purpose. Then they engaged an elderly couple of Scotch-Canadians to coach them and work upon the

THE SCOUT'S MESSAGE

farm under certain sharing terms. Although this plan was more expensive at the outset, it was really cheaper when inexperience was considered. The boys had been well advised that inexperience is expensive, while good tuition is worth paying for, even though the first outlay be considerable; and in this way the chums soon settled down into a life that was as congenial as it promised to be moderately profitable.

At the time when our story begins, the boys were in their second year at Moose Creek, a tributary to the Saskatchewan River. On this special afternoon they were on the track of a certain rare black fox that Ab Carse (the male Scotch-Canadian afore-mentioned) had reported as having been seen in the vicinity during the previous evening.

On reaching a clearing where travellers usually camped—being a fork in the trails branching to Black Crossing and Lone Lake—Jack suddenly reined in his broncho, at the same time uttering the exclamation :

“Well, I never!”

Grammatically, of course, the words have very little meaning that goes for sense. Euphemistically, however, they imply all the astonishment that can be packed into small space.

Sympathetically, Beverley also tightened rein, at the same time turning a questioning look towards his companion.

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“What’s up now? Black fox?”

“Black fox!” retorted Jack contemptuously. “Look!”

Beverley stared his hardest in the direction that Jack indicated with his riding-switch.

“A dirty-looking camp; little time taken to clear up,” was Geoff’s matter-of-fact verdict. (Geoff was famed for his “maths” at school, and generally known by the name of “Euclid Secundus.”) “Tin cans and a half-dead fire. These mean a hurried move. But still, I don’t see any reason for you to turn up your nose at my suggestion of a black fox. You were keen enough a little——”

“Rot!” was the brusque interruption. “Look there—straight ahead of you. That tree—the big poplar!”

“What about it?”

“What about it?” echoed Jack. “Why, man, are you blind? Can’t you see anything?”

“I see some mad coon has been trying to shine as an artist with a hot iron on the bark,” the younger lad criticised.

“Is that all?”

“I—guess so,” replied the other boy cautiously.

To this Hansard made no immediate remark. He swung himself out of his Mexican saddle, and, leading his mare into the thicket, tied her by the halter-rope to a maple tree.

Geoffrey silently followed his friend’s

THE SCOUT'S MESSAGE

example, afterwards remarking with a smile of amusement :

" Well! Next move, partner? "

" Follow me," was the short reply.

Leading the way back into the clearing, Jack walked until he stopped opposite to the large poplar tree that had been the cause of present tactics. There he stopped, criticised the strange designs that had been burned upon the silver-green bark, and afterwards asked his chum :

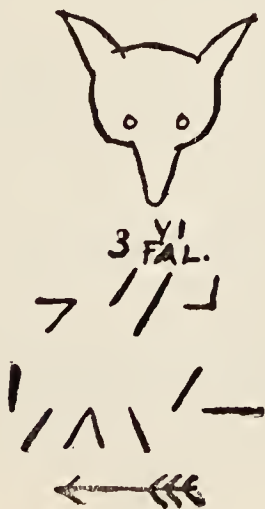
" What do you make of it, Euclid? "

" Just what I said before—madness," was the answer.

Jack smiled wisely.

" Try again," he said.

Euclid did try again. He put on his best thinking-cap and stared for some minutes at the tree, whereon was roughly branded the following signs :



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“Well?” questioned Jack, when the silence had been considerably prolonged—too long for his patience.

“It seems in parts like shorthand.”

“Wrong,” jerked in Hansard.

“It looks most like madness. But it might be sense if a fellow knew who did it.”

“And a fellow *does* know! I know!” exclaimed Jack triumphantly, to which Geoff could only exclaim in wonder, “You!”

“Yes, I!” returned the elder boy.

For a few minutes Geoffrey was too surprised to say more. Gradually, however, a smile came over his face, and he remarked chaffingly:

“Birds of a feather know one another’s signs.” Then he shook his head gravely. “Poor chap! How long have you been able to read the signs that a madman makes?”

But Jack did not return the banter, as was his custom.

“I was a patrol leader in the Boy Scouts of Falmouth. You remember that?”

“And retired with a medal for life-saving. Yes, I know all about that,” returned Geoff. “But what of it?”

“These signs were made by a Boy Scout of Falmouth,” was the answer, given with convincing firmness.

It was Geoffrey’s turn now to make use of the “Well, I never!” to which his friend rejoined:

THE SCOUT'S MESSAGE

"It's a fact. And, what is more, these signs that mystify you are as plain as a book to me."

Beverley regarded his chum with due admiration.

"Wonders will never cease!" he said at last. "Fancy meeting a scout from Falmouth away out here in the West of Canada! It sounds like what books call 'the long arm of coincidence.'"

"And a jolly long arm it is, too, in this case," Jack added. "Falmouth to Moose Creek is a far cry."

"I wonder what can have possessed the fellow to amuse himself with scout-lore in the backwoods. Red Indians can't read it, and the black fox we're after won't take much notice—though, by the way, isn't that drawing rather like a fox's head, Jack?"

"A little," returned the other boy quietly. "It is *rather* like, considering that a fox's head is just exactly what it is intended to be. The fellow who drew that was one of the Fox Patrol. See, I'll read the whole thing for you. The drawing and the figures '3, vi, Fal' means 'Scout Number 3 of the Sixth Troop, Fox Patrol, Falmouth.' The first line of shorthand-looking outlines are letters of the semaphore alphabet, when you want to write instead of signal with flags. They spell the word 'Help.' The second outline says 'Danger,' and the arrow shows the direction

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in which the scout has gone—that is to say, the Black Crossing trail.”

“Well,” said Geoff, as his friend finished, “it’s a most extraordinary thing. Of course, in a way, there’s nothing so very wonderful in a scout turning up in this place, for they’re all the world over, I know. But what takes my breath away is that he should leave a message here, and that it should be actually found and read by another scout the same day.”

“Perhaps,” remarked Jack thoughtfully—“perhaps at the same time it was a very sensible thing to do. ‘Be prepared!’ is our motto. . . . No scout worth the name ever loses his head in trouble. If he needs help he leaves no stone unturned that might signal assistance wanted.”

“Yet he must be pretty desperate to hope for such a chance in an out-of-the-way place like Moose Creek.”

“True. It was only a chance, but it has come out all right after all. The next thing to do is to get on his track as quickly as possible.”

As Jack spoke the last words he suddenly became all activity, and his eyes began to light with eagerness.

“This looks like the promise of a real adventure,” he exclaimed, with barely suppressed excitement, as he began to return to the spot where the bronchoes had been tied.

THE SCOUT'S MESSAGE

"Whoever the fellow is, he cannot be very far off yet. There's no doubt as to the camp being recent," was Geoff's comment.

"And so the sooner we get on his track the better for him. We'll get a few things together and start at once. We might be away for a day or two. There's no knowing. At any rate, it's as well to be prepared."

"I suppose," ventured Geoff cautiously, as he untied his halter-rope and fastened it back to one of the thongs of the saddle—"I suppose there's no chance of it being a false alarm—some fellow just having a lark, you know?"

It was a natural thought to come into one's mind at such a time, and, to tell the truth, it was a contingency that had also suggested itself to Jack, though he had kept that view of the matter to himself. But now that the question had been brought up, he was bound to admit the possibility of the correctness of the surmise.

"It's hardly the sort of thing an ordinary scout would do——" he began, and Geoff interrupted.

"But suppose he did?"

"Well, as he cannot be far away, little harm would have been done. What I think is that it wouldn't be right not to find out the truth. If no help is needed, we'll have wasted a little time; that's all. On the other hand, we may be really needed, and—well, there's

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no use guessing. We've got to find out. Speculating won't serve us much."

As he spoke, the boy swung himself into the saddle. Geoff was about to do the same, when he suddenly paused half-way, with his eyes directed to the sky a little way in front of him.

"Say, Jack, there's more scouting to be done before we leave this camp. Look!"

Jack followed the direction indicated, and observed half a dozen or so of large buzzards circling slowly amid the tree-tops at a given spot, with their heads bent down as if they were intently watching some proceeding that was taking place below. Two or three other birds of the same species were perched in branches in such suggestive attitudes that even the boys (comparative tenderfoots as they were in wood-craft) could not fail to recognise the significance of the signs.

"Something dying. They're biding their time for a feast," said Beverley, going straight to the point at once.

While the boys watched the motion of the birds for a few moments, they saw a large creature—evidently bolder than his fellows—slowly lowering himself through the air. His great wings were outstretched, and he descended with a noiseless, swaying movement, like a well-balanced parachute. Gradually he sank, until he lowered himself

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through the green branches and down out of sight into the thick bush.

Next instant a terrible cry rent the air, followed by the barking, snarling, growling of an infuriated dog, and immediately the bush was stirred to an uproar as the buzzards rose screaming into the air, while the mingled sounds of human and canine cries transformed the placid glade into an inferno.

Clearly there was a deadly struggle taking place in some recess of the bush—a fight for life between some helpless human being, a dog (perhaps a wolf?), and an impatient ghoul of the air.

In a flash of time Jack was out of his saddle again, and Kitty once more found a maple tree for stall.

“Come, quick! Your gun! Take that with you!” the boy said hurriedly.

“Lead on!” replied the other, no less excited, but still steady enough to show that the speaker could keep his nerves well in hand.

Then the chums plunged through the bushes in the direction from which the sounds of ugly strife proceeded.

CHAPTER II

WHITE FANG

Guided by the uproar, the boys hastily pushed their way through the thick tangle of willow-scrub, ash, and twining creepers, and when at last they reached the scene of the conflict it was a strange sight that met their eyes.

Lying on the ground, beating wildly with his arms to ward off the attacks of a pair of buzzards, was an Indian youth, aided in his efforts by a large collie dog. The birds were enormous creatures of their kind, that had apparently descended upon a sleeping and unconscious body, in the belief that it was dead. This of itself was unusual, considering that such creatures usually feed upon decaying matter, which they can scent from remarkable distances. It is possible, perhaps, that they had been disturbed while relishing some remnants from the recent camp, and, imagining an enemy in the youth and his dog, had adopted the offensive, with the result that they were soon the aggressors.

Whatever the cause, it was certain that

WHITE FANG

they were having the best of the dispute when the English boys arrived. The dog was no match for the talons of buzzards, while the flapping of their wings confused and blinded him. For some cause the Indian was also unable to defend himself properly, as he made no attempt to rise to more than a sitting posture.

Geoffrey quickly raised his gun to his shoulder with intent to make short work of the birds, but Jack's hand knocked the barrel into the air.

"Don't shoot, man!" he exclaimed. "The shot will spread and hit the Indian. Go for them with the butt; that's the only thing to do!"

Taking their guns by the muzzles, both lads dashed into the fray and laid about them like threshing grain with flails. It was hard luck for the polished butts, as the talons furrowed the wood like gouges. But it was harder luck for the buzzards, who soon found themselves no match for the strong muscles that swung the weapons. Felled to the ground by well-directed blows, the collie made short work of what life remained in the birds once he was in a position to get a fair grip. But even then his pluck paid a penalty by gaining him a lacerated muzzle.

Then the boys turned their attention to the Indian, who was lying exhausted upon the grass.

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Geoff was the first to give aid, and he at once saw that the lad was bleeding from a wound in the back of the head and a cut in the forehead.

"What's wrong? How did you get in such a plight, nitchie?" he asked, as he used his handkerchief to wipe some blood from the redskin's face.

"White man good—white man brave. He save red man's life. Red man will die for you now!" murmured the native.

"The red man came jolly near dying," was Geoff's response. "It was a touch-and-go with these buzzards. The brutes!"

"If White Fang not broken leg, he kill twenty buzzards!" exclaimed the Indian fiercely.

"Ho! that's it, is it?" exclaimed Jack. "I was wondering why you took it all sitting. A broken leg, Geoff! That's a bad job."

"How did it happen?" asked Beverley.

A dark frown came into the Indian's face at the question, and his eyes flashed fiercely.

"White man—bad white man! He strike White Fang behind—from horse. White Fang fall—horse run away—away." The speaker paused for an instant. Then he hissed through his teeth, "Some day White Fang kill him, Joe Petrie—kill him—spit upon him—dog!"

"Whew! There's a nasty temper for you,"

WHITE FANG

commented Geoff, with a humorous look at his chum.

"You've got to be mended yourself before you can think of killing people," Jack said. "Come, let's tie up that head of yours. Then we'll see what can be done for the leg."

So saying, Hansard knelt down beside the prostrate youth and proceeded with handkerchiefs (his own and Geoff's) to bind up the wound in a business-like way.

"Nothing very terrible," he remarked during the process. "Only a scalp-wound, with more blood than cut. One or two bird-scratches make it look worse; but it will heal in no time, I guess. Now for the leg."

Slitting the cloth of the leggings that the Indian wore, Jack set to work to make an examination in thorough professional style. Geoff watched him with interest.

"More scout work?" he questioned quizzingly.

"It's no break," was Jack's verdict, after feeling the limb with his fingers. Then he added with a laugh, "That's a bit of luck for me! I don't think I could manage to handle broken bones successfully, but bruised muscles are quite different. I'll get the credit for my doctoring without professional aid. But say, White Fang, give an account of yourself while I tie up the leg. (Cut a slice or two from my saddle-cloth for bandages, Geoff.) You said something about a Joe Petrie?"

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"Him bad man. Him very bad man," muttered the Indian.

"Very likely," remarked Hansard, as he received the improvised bandages from his friend, who had hastily procured the same. "But you'd better give us some sort of idea how bad he is. What is he—red, white, rancher, or what?"

"Him horse-thief; steal many bronchoes. Him very clever; police no' catch."

"H'm! A horse-thief? That sounds bad."

"What were you doing in company with horse-thieves?" asked Geoff. "Are you one of his crowd?"

At this brusque question the Indian frowned, shook his head, and in other ways expressed his hatred of that profession and his disgust at being mentioned in that connection.

"White Fang no' steal!" he replied in tones of disgust. "Indian the friend of white boy Conyers—him prisoner of dog Petrie."

Jack pricked up his ears at this intelligence.

"Conyers—a white boy—an English boy?"

The Indian nodded his head.

"He is a prisoner, you say?" pursued Jack, and again the native assented.

Hansard turned to his chum with a significant look.

"Say, Euclid! The game runs hot. Do you remember a Conyers of Falmouth who

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carried a secret despatch to London—to the Lord Mayor? It was in all the papers.”

“I remember,” replied the other boy. “He was a good plucked-one, everybody said.”

“It was he who stirred up all the interest in scouting in Cornwall. Before that feat we could hardly get any fellows to join. And then, don’t you remember the excitement about his disappearance? The papers were full of that too.”

“I remember something about it, but not very clearly. He vanished during a march out or something like that.”

“While he was scouting at night,” corrected Jack. “He was a scout leader at the time, and was out with two of his patrol about ten o’clock. They were walking along the high-road towards Bodmin. For some reason he went on ahead of the others. I forgot exactly why. But at any rate he left them, saying he would wait at a certain point. And then, when the other scouts came up, he was nowhere to be seen, and from that time completely disappeared.”

During the relating of this incident, Beverley had gradually become worked up to a state of excitement quite foreign to his usually placid nature.

“Great Scott!” was his exclamation. “I see it all now! That writing on the tree——”

“Was written by Dan Conyers. How he got here goodness only knows. Why he dis-

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appeared in that mysterious way probably he only can explain. But one thing is certain: he is in the hands of an evil person, if what the Indian says of Petrie is true, and I have heard something about the man myself."

"It is true. White Fang only speak true!" interrupted the redskin, who had been following the conversation keenly, though probably only understanding part of it.

"And so you must help us to free our white brother from his troubles," added Jack.

"White Fang glad—very glad," replied the Indian.

"You must buck up and get well, then," remarked Geoff cheerfully. "You can't do much with a game leg."

"A day or two will set that right again," said Jack. "We'll take you to our ranch, where you can rest, but——"

Hansard stopped, and wrinkled his brows as though he had just stumbled upon some obstacle in the course of his reasoning.

"Well?" asked Geoff.

"Just this. While we are waiting for White Fang to recover, what's to be done about Conyers? Just now he may be only a few miles away; in two days we might lose his track for good."

"Right!" Geoff agreed. "Having got so near, it won't do to let him get out of reach. And you remember the message read 'Help' and 'Danger.' If the chap needs help, most

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likely he needs it at once. Say, nitchie! What do you know? Is Conyers likely to be in trouble—hurt—killed, or anything of that sort?"

In answer the redskin bent his head.

"The owl of death always hoots where Petrie treads," he said. "But I no' think Petrie kill white boy—yet."

"You think that he may, in time?" urged Geoff.

"White Fang's eyes no' read footprints of death. But Petrie seek something—Petrie want Conyers tell something."

"Ugh! It makes my blood run cold to think of such things, Geoff—to think of Conyers in the power of such a man," said Jack. "I've heard of the fellow from the Warreners. He is one of the worst kind of half-breeds—one who has been partly educated. It is said that he was against the white men in the last rebellion, and helped the other half-breeds when they nearly flayed poor Duncan for spying. But it never could be quite proved against him, and now he has a kind of ranch somewhere to the south of us."

"Can such things be in this well-ordered Canada?" questioned Beverley, in amazement. "Why, we are not thirty miles from the Mounted Police barracks!"

"And, in spite of it, Petrie is still free. And Tom Warrener told me that his reputa-

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tion is so bad that he was not allowed into the camps during the Klondike rush, and was kicked out of one of the new towns there. He's a thoroughly bad lot, from what people say, even if only half be true."

"Hist!"

It was the Indian who suddenly interrupted the speaker, with the single sound of warning and a tight grip on Hansard's wrist.

The boys turned and looked inquiringly at White Fang, who was inclined to a listening attitude, as though straining to catch some distant sound. The dog had also risen, and was pointing towards the camping-ground with uncovered teeth and bristling hair, though not a sound escaped from him.

"What is it?" whispered Jack.

The Indian listened intently for a moment more.

"Horse—he come quick on trail——"

"Alone?"

"With rider. He come here. Listen!"

The boys listened, and now they could plainly distinguish the clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the dry trail—a sound that had reached the trained ear of the native before it was recognisable by the others.

A few words in Indian were rapidly uttered by the redskin, at which the dog instantly sank to the ground among the long grass.

"Lie low! Lie low!" commanded White Fang excitedly, and the boys also crouched

WHITE FANG

down so that they could view the camp without being seen by any person there.

"Horse, Firefly—Joe Petrie horse—White Fang know foot." And a shudder ran through the Indian's frame as he gave the verdict.

The boys noticed the tremble and put it down to fear; not to recollection of horrors, as was really the case.

"You need not be afraid," Jack whispered kindly. "No harm will come to you. Besides, we are three to one, and the dog is equal to another."

"White Fang no' 'fraid," returned the Indian stoutly. "White Fang is a brave, and a brave can look the death-owl in the face. But the sky grow dark when Petrie come; Indian call him 'Red Hand,' because he bring blood. The prairie blow cold wind of winter where Petrie breathe."

"Let it blow!" exclaimed Dick recklessly. "We'll soon drive it away again if it comes in our way."

And the next moment a horse and rider turned a corner of the trail and darted into the clearing in full sight of the watchers.

CHAPTER III

RED HAND, THE COWBOY HALF-BREED

Surely there was never a more incongruous pair than that broncho and his master.

The animal was a superb creature—black and glossy, without a single hair of lighter shade to hint of blemish in the sable coat that seemed to fit “like a glove.” She carried her head well in front of her, like a racer, and she moved her graceful legs with the ease of a lady in a ballroom. Alert to every sound or movement around her, she seemed to possess that intelligence that just falls short of human speech, and as her master dismounted, her eyes followed his actions with the keen attention of a well-trained servant.

As for the man! The boys involuntarily shuddered when they had the opportunity of observing him properly. Had he been of upright carriage, he would have been a giant. As it was, he was a hunchback of repulsive massiveness. His right shoulder was also much higher than his left, and this, together with the arched spine, gave a resemblance to a head revolving on a pivot (the neck),

RED HAND, THE COWBOY HALF-BREED

which was sunk deep into the hollow of shoulders and back. Clean-shaven, his mouth was plainly visible, with its pouting brutality. Sharp dark eyes lurked beneath an ambush of shrubby eyebrows, while unkempt hair straggled from beneath a cowboy hat.

But although there was much of the stranger that was calculated to repulse the new observer, there was one feature that was sure to excite nothing but admiration. That was his arms and nether limbs. These were perfectly developed and massive, conveying the impression of enormous strength. This was no more than the truth, for there was no doubt but that Joe Petrie combined the power of a bear with many of that animal's less admirable qualities.

All these points the English boys observed as they watched the stranger leave the saddle with an agility rather surprising for so ponderous and misshapen a body. So lightly did he reach the ground that there was but the faintest tinkle from the rowels of the Mexican "cart-wheels" that were attached to the heels of his top-boots.

Petrie had stopped right opposite to the poplar tree that had so mightily interested Jack and his chum a little while before. Perhaps he had come to seek for some article that had been left behind in the camp-clearing. At any rate, he immediately started peering about, with his arm through the reins

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to lead his horse. Then his eye sighted the designs on the poplar. He stopped, bent his head forward from its hollow, and stared intently at the marks.

"Fool's work or cunning? Which is it?" the watchers heard him growl.

Then he was seen to snatch a hunting-knife from his belt and commence slashing at the tree until he had obliterated every sign of the forlorn scout's handiwork.

"It's a jolly good job we got there first, old man," whispered Geoff. "It's plain enough that he suspects something, and doesn't want to take any chances."

"Joe Petrie, what white man call 'cute,' red man call 'snake,'" interpolated the Indian. Jack smiled complacently.

"His cuteness has come a bit late this time. It'll take more than his knife-hacking to chip Scout 3 of the Sixth Falmouth Patrol out of my head, or the message either, for that matter."

"What is he after, anyway?" questioned Geoff.

And not without reason, for the object of their united intentions had suddenly slipped the horse's rein from his arm, dropped upon his knees, and commenced crawling about with his face close to the ground, like some uncouth monster smelling the track of game. Now and then the man would give a grunt of satisfaction. But it did not convey the im-

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pression of pleasure. It was more gratification at finding that his surmise concerning an unpleasing supposition was a correct one. And all the time he kept close to the tree.

“By Jove!” exclaimed Jack, with sudden illumination. “I have it. He’s found our tracks!”

“Much good may that do him,” responded the other boy lightly. “Pity he wastes his time.”

But Hansard shook his head.

“There’s something that he’s mighty afraid will come to light. That is what’s troubling him. Depend upon it, if any person can tell us about Dan Conyers, that man can.”

As the last words were uttered, a sudden change passed over the Indian youth—a trembling of the body and a look of fear.

“Conyers! Conyers!” he exclaimed excitedly, and with great agitation. “You no’ speak name Conyers!”

The words were spoken at a reckless pitch, and Jack clapped a hand over the Indian’s mouth to prevent further utterance.

“Quiet, man, for goodness’ sake!” he said. “We shall be discovered and—look!”

The warning had come too late. There was no doubt but that the ill-suppressed excitement of the Indian had betrayed them; for Petrie, still kneeling, had paused, and slightly inclined his head in their direction in a listening attitude.

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"Petrie hear! Petrie come!" whispered the Indian, and there was no concealment in his voice of the dread of a meeting with the man whose very presence inspired loathing and horror.

But Jack quickly had his nerves in hand.

"Well, what matter if he does come? He can't *eat* you!" he exclaimed, without any attempt at concealment now, while he rose upright among the scrub, Geoff following his chum's example.

Jack felt a hand gripping wildly at his leg with the attempt to drag him down again, and his ire rose at the apparent cowardice of the Indian youth.

"Confound you! Can't you be a man and not a snivelling dog?" was his contemptuous comment as he kicked his leg free. "You're a coward, White Fang! That's all you are."

The voices were quite unguarded now, and must have reached Petrie; for it was noticeable that he started at the sound of the Indian's name—started in surprise, too. Then he rose up quickly, looked towards the boys for a moment, and afterwards came striding straight towards their recent ambush.

If Joe Petrie was repulsive at a distance, his looks did not decrease in odiousness at close inspection; for, as he neared the boys noticed that there was the mark of an old gash in the left side of his face that, in heal-

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ing, had slightly drawn the lid of the eye, so that an unusual portion of the white was exposed to view. But they did not have much time for inspecting the stranger. He swung along with long strides, and soon stood before them, looking darkly and suspiciously upon both.

"Where is he? Trot 'im out! I've got a little bit of an account to settle with that serpent's spawn, and the sooner it's over the better for the pair of us, I reckon!" was his greeting, thrown out with all the arrogance of a professional bully.

He spoke with the marked accent of the uneducated bushman, showing that, although a half-breed, he must have mixed freely with white men.

But Jack was quite collected by this time and quite prepared for emergencies, though possibly his companion was not as cool as he managed to appear.

"Trot 'im out, I tell you!" repeated Petrie, with angry impatience. "I thought I'd settled that coon's hash for 'im last night. 'Pears to me I was wrong. But I guess I make no mistakes a second time. You may bet your bottom dollar on that!"

The cowboy was about to push his way farther into the bush, but Jack stepped in his path.

"You're not over civil," he remarked quietly. "Perhaps you'll explain who you

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are and what you want before you start the bullying game."

The man was undisguisedly astonished. Seldom in the course of his misguided life had any person dared to come between him and his intentions. He stopped, slipped his right hand towards his hip-pocket, and glared with anger at the interloper.

But Geoff was ready for the emergency.

"No, you don't! Hands up!" he ejaculated, at the same time bringing his gun to his right shoulder. "Hands up! None of your ugly monkey tricks!"

A side glance soon convinced the bully of the peculiarity of his position. He slipped his hands in front of him, and forced a smile, which was a sort of wolf's attempt at humour.

"Well, I guess you're just about the hastiest chap I ever clapped eyes on!" he said, with an effort to laugh, thereby making his face even more hideous than Nature and accident had ordained.

"There's good need for hastiness—sometimes," retorted Geoff, as he lowered his weapon, though he continued to hold it in a position that would leave it readily available for any emergency.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the cowboy. "Why, what suspicious people some folks are! I might have been a road-agent for the way you received me. Polite, I call it."

"The 'politeness' was not all on one side," said Jack, with a sneer. "But I may as well tell you that in these parts we're not accustomed to the—the sort of way you introduced yourself. Now, perhaps, you'll tell us who you are and what you want?"

"That's a story soon told, I reckon," was the sullen reply. "Joe Petrie's my name. You may have heard tell of it. If you haven't, you know it now. As to what I want—I thought I heard you mention the name of—a friend of mine."

"A friend of yours?" repeated Jack, wondering how long he would be able to temporise with the man until he had thought out some plan to defeat the cowboy from meeting the Indian in ambush behind. He did not wish to have to resort to another exhibition of force.

"A friend of yours?" he asked a second time. "What friend of yours do *we* know?"

"Well," rejoined Petrie cautiously, "I ain't saying as he's just a particular friend of mine, and knowing his ways I hope he ain't much of a particular friend of yours neither. Men will have their little differences, you know. Me and that—friend have had ours, and—and so—well, maybe, they ought to be settled right up to date."

The crafty eyes of the speaker began to take in the surroundings as he made this little explanation, but seeing nothing to satisfy

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them he resorted again to the strategy of words.

“Yes; you see, I heard one of you say the name of ‘White Fang.’ That’s the friend I mean. I thought I heard his voice also. That’s what makes me keen on the scent to meet him.”

For a few moments the boys exchanged looks with the man, each trying to read thereby some knowledge that was unspoken by the others. Both Jack and Geoffrey were in a maze to know why Petrie and the Indian should be such enemies. Certainly they knew—for they had been told—that the cowboy had practically tried to murder the native. But it would have made matters simpler had they known the reason of their difference. Jack was also keen to discover what association Dan Conyers possessed with this uncouth creature of the plains, though he well recognised the risk of exposing his hand too soon.

On the other hand, Joe Petrie would have fain discovered how much the boys knew of any part of his connection with the Indian. Conyers did not have any share in his considerations for the time being. True, he had tried to kill White Fang, though he believed now that he had failed. Moreover, he had no intention of attempting additional assaults upon the lads, nor, in the event of White Fang being alive, would he try to complete the act that had failed. But he

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had reasons of his own for being assured on the former point. His future actions would be guided by circumstances.

But, as I said, neither side seemed to gain much from scrutinising the other, though, as a result of the examination, Joe could not help feeling a certain degree of admiration for the two lads who had opposed him. Their frank faces, good physiques, and undoubted pluck were features that appealed to a man who was more influenced by appearances than abstract qualities.

“Who are you two coons, anyway?” he blurted out at last.

Jack laughed. He did not expect drawing-room manners in the West, so was not offended.

“My friend’s name is Beverley; mine is Hansard,” he replied, and the cowboy resumed:

“Well, you’re likely-looking ranchers, and ought to do well if——”

“Out with it! Don’t be shy!” laughed Geoff at the pause.

Petrie flashed an angry glance at the boy. He did not like people to be too free with him. He was accustomed to the respect of fear, and resented any form of chaff.

“I was going to say that you’ll do well if you mind your own business,” he snapped. Then, turning again to Jack, he said impatiently: “Now, we’ve jawed long enough.

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This ain't an Indian pow-wow. What about that skunk, White Fang?"

To this neither of the boys gave any immediate answer, and Joe repeated with increasing irritation:

"Come on, youngsters! Spit it out!"

Jack had been leaning against a tree during the latter part of the conversation, while his friend had seated himself upon a large stump where the bushman's saw had been at work. He had been postponing the inevitable moment as long as possible, but at last he resolved to face the matter fairly. He straightened himself resolutely and looked the cowboy in the face.

"Look here, Petrie," he said. "You told us a moment ago that we would succeed if we minded our own business. Well, this is our own business, and we intend to follow your advice to the letter. Do you understand?"

Like the blaze of flames among dry timber, so the cowboy's wrath suddenly flared until his whole being was hot with passion. His head seemed to lower into its hollow, his eyes seemed to flash sparks of fury, and the heavy lips fell apart to exhibit yellow fangs.

"Understand?" he cried out, with his arms bent and fingers curled like talons about to grip a prey. "I understand that you are an impudent young puppy that'll have its neck wrung one of these days."

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"It won't be your hands that will do the wringing," responded Jack quietly.

"Don't be too cock-sure!" retorted the hunchback. "Joe Petrie's fingers have torn out braver tongues than yours. But look here, my fine sparrow, if you want to live in peace in your one-horse section, don't cross me! I ain't used to it, and I reckon I can teach a lesson to them that tries the game. There's another of your kidney been trying on the same Old Country swank. But I guess he'll climb off his perch before I've done with him!"

The speaker had worked himself up to a height of passion, and his last threats were shrieked out in a shrill falsetto. But Geoff merely let his right forefinger stray gently to the trigger of his gun, while Jack received the torrent of words like a rock against which the sea was beating. He waited in silence for a space, until the birds could be heard chirruping again. Then, raising his eyes so as to look up through half-closed lids, he said quietly:

"I guess Dan Conyers is quite capable of looking after himself, Joe Petrie!"

It was a shot in the dark, but it found the bull's-eye directly. A spasm shook the cowboy's figure, and his red face paled an instant.

At first it seemed as though there would be a need for Geoff's gun to speak, as Joe's madness seemed to be almost so beyond

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control as to be reckless of results. But the next instant he turned, whistled shrilly, and the mare came cantering to his side in answer to the summons. A single leap landed the deformed giant in his saddle. Then he turned to the boys in fury.

“You think you’ve got the best of me! Well, keep on thinking. But I ain’t done with you nor White Fang yet. Keep that to chew. My time’s got to come, and, when it does come, you’ll be sorry that you were ever born. Joe Petrie never forgets! That’s something to spoil your sleep for you. And more: Joe Petrie always comes out top! That’s something to make folks wish they’d never set foot upon the prairie!”

Then he dug his spurs into the mare’s sides, and in a moment more had dashed out of sight through the bush.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHUMS' BARGAIN

Hansard and Beverley watched the departing cowboy in silence. The whole proceedings of the last five minutes had been so rapid and unexpected that they acted as a whirlwind that steals your breath and leaves you gasping.

At last Jack shook himself together and turned to his chum with a laugh.

"That's a pretty sort of customer to meet on a dark night, Geoff!"

"Bah!" the other returned with a grimace. "Talking with that chap leaves a bad taste in the mouth. The very air seems purer now that he has gone."

"That was what White Fang said. By the way, where *is* White Fang all this time?"

Hansard turned as he spoke, and peered forward through the bush towards the part where last he had seen the Indian wriggling his body towards better seclusion at the approach of Petrie.

"I don't see the coward anywhere around.

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Perhaps he's gone farther in so as to be more secure. However, we'll soon find out."

Leading the way, Jack pushed through the willow and maple shoots that were thickly clustered at this particular portion of the bush, but no sign of the native could either of the boys see.

"It's most extraordinary," remarked Geoff. "But he can't be far away with his lame leg."

"Most likely he doesn't know that Petrie has gone, and he's lying in wait. White Fang! White Fang!"

Jack made the bush ring with his voice as he called the Indian's name. But only echoes replied to the summons.

The boys renewed their search, but still without success.

"He must be a cowardly chap to clear out like that," said Geoff. "As if three of us were not enough for any one man, no matter how strong he might be! Why, I'd almost back myself in a fist bout against a stiff-back like that. But three of us! It's drivelling cowardice. That's what I call it."

"There's cowardice and cowardice," remarked Jack. "Somehow I feel that, in an ordinary way, White Fang would not be the sort to run from danger. But you must admit there was something about Petrie to give a fellow the creeps—a sort of natural shrinking that one can't explain—like a lady

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with a mouse. I shouldn't call that sort of thing 'cowardice' exactly."

"And yet you did call the beggar a coward."

"That was hasty. I didn't mean it in that way. I meant to buck him up—sort of Dutch courage, you know. Hullo! What's that? Well, I'm hanged if there are not our own handkerchiefs tied to this branch!"

"And the bandage I made from the saddle-cloth," added Geoff. "What a queer fellow he is, to be sure! He has taken them off after all our trouble—or, rather, after all your trouble."

"I am sure I don't understand it," answered Jack, in puzzled tones. "This seems to be a day of mysteries. What earthly reason he could have for removing the bandages that we gave him I cannot possibly imagine."

"I'll tell you what I think," began Geoff thoughtfully. "The chap's huffed about something, and cleared out. Doesn't want to have anything more to say to us."

"It looks precious like it. But beyond my remark when he gripped my leg, I see nothing to offend the fellow. And he must have seen that we were his friends, and that we would side with him against Petrie."

"H'm," responded Beverley, "I guess natives don't look at things the way we do. They're more touchy, and take words more

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as they are spoken than as they are meant. Depend upon it, you trod on his toes with that 'coward' business."

"And he has cleared out in consequence?"

"That's my idea."

"Yet he can't have gone far with his ankle so bad. You remember he could hardly move for pain."

"All the same, he seems to have done a bunk pretty effectively," responded Geoff. "Still, I guess it won't do any harm to keep on searching for a bit. Pride may have a fall, and he may be glad of our assistance yet."

From where they stood it was not difficult to find the tracks that the Indian had left behind. The broken twigs in the maple showed with what labour he had pulled himself up to an erect position in order to place the handkerchiefs where they would attract attention. Then the heavy marks on the earth-mounds of ants and gophers, together with a plainly-marked passage through the scrub, were simple indications of the route that had been taken, with no ease, by a fugitive on all-fours.

The boys followed these tracks for some distance, until they were led to the bank of the Moose River, at a spot where it scuttled down a rocky bed and over a small waterfall some twelve or fifteen feet in height. There the tracks ended. The spoor led across the

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short mud-flat right down to the brink of the cascade, and then ceased. There were no marks of a return journey, and no signs of a crossing, since the river was not wide and the opposite bank was easily inspected from where the trackers stood.

"He couldn't have gone up in the water," surmised Geoff.

"Nor could he have swum down," said Jack. "The lower rapids are impassable except to beavers and fish. Well, it's a pity, but I guess we've got to own ourselves beaten for the present. I had hoped to have got a hint from him as to how we were to get on the track of Conyers. Now I suppose we'll have to work on our own."

"And as it's near sunset, the sooner we get back to the ranch the better," Geoff added.

With a sigh of regret at their non-success they turned to retrace their steps through the bush to where the horses had been fastened, and for a little while neither of the friends spoke. But when the bronchoes had been found and the riders had turned their faces to the homeward trail, Jack found it necessary to relieve his mind of certain matters that had been causing him considerable trouble.

"Look here, Geoff," he remarked suddenly, and with that peculiar firmness of talk that he usually adopted when he found himself facing a distasteful matter that had to be met and

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settled—"look here. I've been thinking over things, and I've come to the conclusion that, in this matter, it isn't fair to mix you up in it."

Geoffrey turned a look of quiet amusement towards his companion, at the same time tightening his rein to a slower pace.

"Your thinking powers may be something great, old man, but I can't say much for the clearness of your speechifying," he returned banteringly. "What 'things'?"

"This about Conyers," responded Jack, without relaxing his seriousness. "You see, from what we gathered from White Fang and the little we know of Petrie, the chap is very likely in a bad plight."

"Ah, now you're talking," answered Geoff. "I am at one with you there. A very bad plight indeed, I should say."

"And so, being an old scout, pledged to help a brother scout, it doesn't seem to me that this pledge ends just because I am no longer one of a patrol. A pledge like that is given for life."

"True. Again we are agreed," chimed in Geoffrey, with the regularity of a Greek chorus.

"Consequently," the other continued, "I must get upon his tracks without delay."

"We must."

"I said 'I'," corrected Jack, to which his friend retorted:

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"And I said 'we.'"

"But don't you see," the late scout persisted, "that this is a matter that concerns me only? It was only I who took the pledge. There might be risks—dangers——"

"All the more reason for the 'we,' then," interrupted Geoff, in his most precise I've-solved-the-problem manner.

But Hansard was not going to be talked over in any such hasty way.

"See here, Euclid. You don't seem to understand what I am driving at. This is an affair between Conyers and me. It wouldn't be fair for you to run into any risks with me. It's a case of scout calling for scout."

"And chum sticking to chum," was the response. "Oh, yes, old man, I see well enough what you are driving at. You mean that you don't think it would be right for you to go into danger and have me with you. Any person with half a brain could see that. But I think differently. We've stuck together like glued wood ever since we first went to school, and we came out West intending to stick together here as well. That was our bargain, wasn't it?"

"Of course, but——"

"But you think that 'sticking' is only fair when things go smoothly. Well, that isn't my opinion. Of course I was never a scout, and don't know much about scout ways; but I guess you're right when you say that

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you've got to go to the help of a brother scout even now. But if Conyers' affair concerns you only, my chum Hansard's affairs concern me. Where he goes I go, unless—— ” The boy paused, and Jack questioned:

“ Yes—unless ? ”

“ Well, unless, of course, you—don't want me,” answered Geoff.

A touch of the rein brought Jack's horse across the trail close alongside the other, and the scout's hand reached out to grip that of his friend.

“ Don't say that, old man! You know that I always want you with me. But I thought that in this case it might not be right.”

“ Where you go I go,” said Geoff firmly.

“ Very well,” the other boy yielded. “ Frankly, I shall be mighty glad to have you, for two heads are better than one, and you are a scout by instinct, if not by name. We'll start off first thing to-morrow morning.”

“ And what about the Carse? Shall we tell them ? ”

“ Not more than that we are going off exploring and hunting for a day or two.”

“ Would it not save a lot of trouble if we were to send a message to the Mounted Police right away ? ” was Geoff's practical suggestion. “ This sort of thing seems to be more in their line than ours—though, of course, I am ready to go with you up to the neck, if you wish.”

Jack shook his head.

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"I have thought of that. But, you see, the whole business smacks so much of fifty years ago, or something out of a book. We'd find it difficult to get the police to see the same meaning from the signals that we see. Besides, we have got nothing to show since Petrie slashed the tree, and—and——"

"I know what is in your mind," the other chum chimed in. "You are thinking that possibly it may turn out to be a mare's nest after all."

"Right. And, if it did turn out like that, we'd be the laughing-stock of the whole country. So it's best to take the affair on spec. Ab is not inquisitive, and he is used to my fads by this time."

"He ought to be!" laughed Beverley banteringly, and then he added seriously: "But remember—whatever happens, we stick together. That's our old bargain, and it's got to be unchangeable. You mustn't think of anything else again, Jack."

And nothing more was said concerning these matters during the brief canter that brought the chums back to their ranch.

CHAPTER V

FRIENDLY WATERS

But what of White Fang?

His disappearance had been mysterious, but, like most mysteries, it was very simple—when understood.

As Geoff had surmised, it was the emphasis with which Jack had expressed the word “coward” that had brought the Indian to hastily consider his position and act upon sudden conclusions.

White Fang, like all young Indians of the last twenty years, had been educated at an industrial school in one of the reservations that the Canadian Government sets apart and supports for the benefit of each tribe. While there he had learnt the art of farming, together with elementary lore in English reading, writing, and arithmetic. Reaching the age of eighteen he had been offered a post on a farm, being at the same time informed that the Government had no further power to control his ordinary desires and no authority to enforce his labour. And so, like most of his race, he politely refused the

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opportunity of becoming a farm labourer. The call of the prairie and woodcraft was in his blood. It had been beckoning him more or less ever since he left his father's teepee as a child. Of recent years the call had become more intense, and he would lie awake in his dormitory, with distended nostrils, straining to catch the fragrance of the forest greenery and the aromatic odour of the camp-fire. And when at last the moment came when he was free, he bade farewell to his teachers (not altogether without regret), and dashed for the cover of the dense prairie woods, just as a captive hare might flee from its cage for the shelter of the kindly bracken.

Back to the tents of his fathers, he soon resumed the ways of his people, and began to forget that he had ever been a wild thing behind bars.

But the child of the red man who has lived with the white is never received back by the tribe to take a position as one of themselves, such as he would have held had he never left the tents of his kin. The old folks have suspicions as to the teaching of the white men. Some subtle influence may have been brought to bear upon the young Indian heart that might betray them. White men they may respect and often love, but they rarely trust one of themselves who has been so long away that "the skin is red, but the heart is that of the pale-face," as they express it.

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Of course, it is certain that a returned son of the prairie would exhibit traits of character that are foreign to natives who have never slept within stone walls. Chief of these traits is the sensitiveness to pain that the ordinary Indian would have learned to control during his youth. This sensitiveness—any outward sign of shrinking from suffering, however severe—is regarded by redskins as the most contemptible form of cowardice, and as such is often the greatest bar that keeps them from being restored to the confidence of their people.

Now, this was White Fang's weakness. Time and again he had heard the sneers of braves and old men—nay, even women—when he had been seen to shrink before some pain that they would have borne without the twinge of a muscle. They had branded him "coward" until at last he had fled from their reproaches, and disowned his tribe.

From then he had led a wandering, solitary life. He had lived in the woods, and he had lived with the white men. One year ago fate had led him to one Conyers, a rancher who was generally credited with being fabulously rich, though nobody seemed to know how he had come by his riches. Conyers had a son, between whom and the Indian there soon sprang up a strong feeling of good comradeship. When the old man died of fever, after a short illness, and young Conyers announced

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that he was going a long journey southwards to Beaver Creek, White Fang pleaded to go too. This request was agreed to, and the pair set off together. Then one night they stopped for rest and food at Petrie's ranch. Knowing nothing of the man, they had no reason to doubt their welcome. Whatever happened that night White Fang did not know, but his surprise was considerable next morning when, instead of continuing the southward trail, Petrie, together with two other half-breeds and a Cree Indian, started off on the way back to Last Mountain, taking young Conyers and White Fang with them.

During the first day neither the English boy nor the Indian were allowed any opportunity of getting together, so as to enlighten the latter as to this sudden change of his young master's plans; for, of course, the alteration was attributed to Conyers, and no one else. This separation was managed so well at first that the Indian thought it but accidental. On the second day, however, hearing some remark between Petrie and a half-breed, White Fang's suspicions were aroused, and on stopping to camp for the night he boldly challenged the cowboy to explain his actions. The result of this was the assault which we have already described, the long state of unconsciousness and weakness that followed, and which the others mistook for death, and the desertion of the victim by the camp.

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His late discovery by Jack and his friend, and their ministrations to his suffering, inclined him to friendship, and inspired the hope that they would be his allies in the cause of Conyers, who, he had no doubt, was being forced to return to Last Mountain against his will.

But the border-line between love and hatred is very thin in a savage breast. The hated word "coward" had been flung at him like a stone to a dog, and the sudden revolt in his breast was terrible.

While the boys had been talking with Petrie, the Indian had crept through the bush. His hatred had made his nerves numb to pain.

"White men all the same. White men hate the red; they think him dog; they call him coward. White Fang spit upon them—all but him Conyers. His friend White Fang love him—die for him."

Reluctant even to soothe his pain by the aid of those who had spurned him, the Indian removed the bandages that they had given him. But he would not steal. No; he resented the name of "thief" quite as much as that of "coward." So he hung the handkerchiefs where they would be easily found, and then resumed his painful crawl through the bush.

Reaching the margin of the river, he bathed his smarting head in the cool water. Then he smiled to himself.

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“ White Fang leave track in bush. White man follow track like Indian.”

Then the Indian crawled into the shallow water a little way up the river towards the falls. He next rounded a jutting rock where the cataract fell in a thin sheet. There was deep water, but it was almost smooth. White Fang then took a deep breath, and, with a great effort to fight the pain in his leg, entered the pool. A few strong strokes brought him across and through the curtain of water. Next moment he was crawling up a gravel slope into a large cave in the precipice over which the river fell, being hidden from view by the moving curtain of water that screened the entrance at a few yards distance. It was a Niagara “cave of the winds” in miniature, but, unlike that, deeper and quite dry in the farther recesses.

From this hiding-place in the security of his retreat, White Fang watched his pursuers through a parting in the veil of water. He saw them following his track on the bank of the river, and watched them stoop to examine each mark on grass and earth. Then a sneer and a smile crept over his face when they came to the last track that ended at the pool.

“ Foolish white men!” he exclaimed to himself. “ You no’ think Indian pass through tumbling waters. Huh! White Fang throw dust in eyes of the pale-face and blind him.”

Owing to the noise of the cataract he could

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not hear what they said, but he was quick to read the signs of disappointment in their faces and by their actions. Had he been able to hear their voices, he might have altered his opinion concerning their attitude towards him and the young master he loved so well. As it was, he could only satisfy himself that they were baffled, and that his retreat, though time-honoured by many of his own people, who had known it in the days of war, was safe from the prying eyes of those whose skins were not as his.

CHAPTER VI

AT PETRIE'S CAMP

Joe Petrie had not spared horseflesh on the return journey to his camp. He was in a furious temper for several reasons: first, because he had been searching for certain papers that he had lost and failed to find; second, because he had tried to kill an Indian who was in the way, and had likewise failed; third, because he had been defied by two boys who, as far as he could tell, had some interest in Dan Conyers. He dug his spurs into poor Firefly, and lashed her with a raw-hide whip whenever she showed the faintest sign of slackening speed, all the time cursing and uttering the most terrible invectives against each of the persons named.

A cowboy "in the rush" is a reckless chase-the-wind at the best of times. A cowboy, such as this, seems to shut his eyes and face the charge like a mad brute. He lashed and roared until even the plucky mare whimpered beneath the blows. The trail fairly slid behind him until he reached the Silver Buffs.

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and there he clattered into his camp as though he were possessed by an evil spirit, or chased by one. The night had closed in, but the light of the camp-fire in the centre of three tents showed the mare flaked with foam, as though she had passed through a storm of snow.

Petrie tightened his rein with a cruel jerk that brought the animal almost upon its haunches.

“Get up, you lazy brute!” cried Joe, accompanying the words with another dig of the spurs. Then he called loudly: “Baptiste! Baptiste! Here! What’s the matter with you all? Asleep?”

The figure of another half-breed was seen to start out of one of the tents and come running towards Red Hand.

“I come, Joe! I come!” he called.

“Then come ’ere like greased lightning, and give this mare of mine a rub down. Look alive!”

Joe slung himself out of the saddle as he spoke, but as he turned his back to hand the rein to his satellite, the poor and much-tried mare made an ugly snap at her torturer, and just missed his shoulder.

In an instant the cowboy had wheeled upon the animal, and while still holding the rein, he lashed her with the raw-hide upon the head and neck. Right and left he rained the blows, while the poor creature screamed and reared,

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powerless to get free from the grip of her giant master.

“You would, would you?” he cried in fury. “You’d open your ugly jaw upon me? I’ll teach you a lesson that’s got to be learned by every skunk that dares to show me his teeth. How do you like that, and that, and that? Eh?” And blow after blow fell with a sound like the snapping of sticks in the forest before a winter gale.

It was not until his arm tired that Petrie ceased to vent his brutal spleen, and flung the rein to the half-breed, who stood in trembling awe before so terrible a temper.

“Here, take the cayuse now! She’ll not forget that in a hurry, I’ll bet my bottom dollar!” he said.

Probably the speaker was right. The poor mare was frightened to move. Pouring with sweat, she stood trembling in every muscle and nerve, with drooping head—dazed, and wondering why such faithful service gained such a reward. No, she was not likely to forget the punishment, and if she was capable of reasoning, she probably registered a vow that Joe Petrie also would have good cause to recall the occasion.

With a bullying order to Baptiste to hasten with his duties and then come to his master’s tent, the hunchback strode heavily away.

Reaching a smaller tent Petrie entered, and then questioned, in a smooth voice such

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as one might expect from a shark when inviting a sprat to enter his maw :

“ Good-evening ! Still living ? ”

“ No reason to die that I can see,” answered a voice from the darkness, and Joe responded cheerfully :

“ Right for you. No reason at all. Glad to find you pegging along so merry ! ”

As he spoke the half-breed struck a match and lit a stable lantern that was suspended at the middle of the tent, thus revealing a boy who lay upon a blanket at one side. He was a lad of about seventeen years of age (Dan Conyers, as the reader will have surmised already), a sturdy chap who would have shown his dislike for the present company in a very forcible way had his arms not been tied to his sides, to leave freedom only from the elbows downwards, rendering him practically helpless.

“ Now you and me is going to have a pleasant talk,” Petrie went on, as he seated himself on an upturned pail and tried to imitate a smile, in spite of the frown with which his presence was greeted. “ You and me is going to talk about this business in a friendly way, ain’t we ? ”

The boy greeted the proposition with a laugh of derision.

“ Speak for yourself, Petrie ! For my part—well, there is not much of friendliness wasted between us, and you know it as well as I do.”

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"P'raps I do. But you'll like me a sight better when you know more of me."

"Don't want to!" was the brusque rejoinder.

But Joe kept his temper well in hand, for three days' experience of his young captive had taught him that bullying has very little effect upon the average young Briton. It may serve to arouse opposition; it seldom attains any other end. So the Red Hand bit his lip, and tried to continue the interview in what he imagined to be a pleasant tone.

"Well, you see, you don't understand things—at least, not this bit of business. Now, I reckon I can just about put it before you as plain as a piece of wood. It's simply this: out on the prairie folks have got to look after themselves if they want Johnny-cake for supper. And why not? I've got to look after myself, and you've got to look after yourself. 'Tain't always easy, but it's got to be done."

At this attempt at philosophy Conyers gave a slight exclamation of impatience.

"Chuck that nonsense, Petrie, and come to business!" he remarked. "What is it that you want to say? Out with it, and then I can have some peace! I am tired, if you're not."

"Same here, sonny," was the reply—"same here. And I am more than tired of this business. It's mighty sickening, that's what it is."

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“Then why go on with it?” was the boy’s natural question.

Joe gave a sigh, as if the whole subject was most distasteful to him, and as if he only continued it out of a stern sense of duty to Dan.

“I guess I’d be glad enough to say no more, but, as I said, men have got to look out for themselves on the prairie.”

“And what of it?” questioned the boy suspiciously.

“Just this: share-in with me! I reckon I can take your word for it. And as soon as you promise, off come them ropes.”

Dan sighed wearily.

“What on earth do you mean? I wish to goodness you would talk straight instead of dancing all round the country to get home. ‘Share’ what? I have got nothing to share with you or any other person—even if I wanted to.”

“There’s that—cipher——”

“I have already told you over and over again that I have not got any cipher,” retorted Conyers doggedly.

“But you know where to find it.”

“I do not. Honestly, at this moment I know no more where to lay my hands on it than I know how to find the north pole. Why can’t you believe that and save all this bother? You say that you would take my word if I promised to share with you. Why

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can you not take my word when I say that I have nothing to share ? ”

The young speaker's tone implied the truth of his assertion, but the Red Hand had had few dealings with truth, and was unable to recognise truth's signs.

“ See here, younker,” he jerked out in exasperation, “ you can't expect me to believe—— ”

“ Believe or not. It's the truth,” was the quick interruption. “ Whatever you may think to the contrary, I tell you that I have not had that cipher in my hands since I left Last Mountain.”

“ But there's this letter,” pursued Joe, as he took a paper from his pocket and proceeded to read it. “ This letter says—— ”

“ You have no business to know what that letter says ! ” exclaimed Dan hotly. “ When I put up for the night at your ranch I had no idea that I was lodging at the homestead of a pickpocket ! ”

For a moment after this taunt was uttered it seemed as if the half-breed's self-control were going to forsake him. His face reddened with passion, and his eyes glared at the defiant youth, whom cajolery and bullying had failed to break in. But Joe was his own master for once, and he read aloud from the letter, that quivered within trembling fingers.

“ This is what it says :

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“‘My son will deliver this to you. He will also deliver a cipher that will tell you where the gold is hidden. You will understand it, and carry out my last wishes by handing the fortune to my benefactress in England.’”

“Now, if *you* don't know where to look for the money, who does?”

“Nobody. I can find it, I suppose, when the time comes to look for it.”

“And I just about guess that this *is* the time, and that you can find it mighty quick if you want to.”

A smile flickered over the boy's face at these words.

“Yes; you've hit it right there, Petrie. *If* I want to. But, you see, it just happens that I don't want to at this minute.”

“Bah!” Joe exclaimed, at what was almost the limit to his patience. “What's the blamed good of throwing away a fortune to some coon in England? You'll have none for yourself! What's the good of it all?”

“Because it was my dead father's wish,” answered the lad solemnly. “His last words to me were: ‘You'll take these papers to my old chum Bray at Beaver Creek?’ I gave my word that I would do so, and—I'm going to do it, Joe Petrie! Don't you make any mistake about that. So put out of your mind any thought of ‘sharing,’ as you call it.

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'Stealing' would be a more suitable word. I am not a thief, whatever you may think me."

There was no more to be said after this final declaration of honour. But as Joe rose to leave the youth for the time, there was a grim smile on the man's face that boded no good for Dan. It was a grin that implied Joe's utter conceit in his own powers and his certainty of being able to fulfil his favourite motto and "come out top."

"Well, have it your own way, sonny," he said. "Have it your own way. But I bet my bottom dollar that you'll tumble to it one of these days that your way is the wrong way. And don't you forget it!"

CHAPTER VII

CONSPIRATORS

The Red Hand was in no angelic temper when he marched from Dan's tent and entered that which he shared with two others of his race—Baptiste, Slick—and a renegade Cree Indian named Wahtah. These three confederates were playing cards on the ground as their master entered, but they immediately ceased their game and looked up with humble expressions. It was plain how thoroughly they were under the power of the half-civilised bully.

Joe came to a sudden halt, forced his thumbs into the waistband of his overalls, and looked down frowningly upon his satellites.

"He's done us! The young coon has got the best of us this time!" he exclaimed, as he spat viciously upon the earth.

"You mean—paper about gold hidden?" questioned Slick.

"Hidden—made away with! Ugh! I'd like to wring the skunk's neck!" was the retort.

"But white boy safe enough," remarked

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the Cree. "I tie hands, feet. And Wahtah tie tight—so tight. But white boy no' cry out!"

"Trust him for that," replied the Red Hand angrily. "He is as stubborn as a pig."

"Baptiste here say ropes too tight. He want Conyers' hands and feet free," was the Indian's next remark.

And there was a sort of boot-licking tone in the Cree's speech that a white man would have detected immediately and regarded at its proper valuation—a cringing to a superior at the expense of the unpopular.

This Baptiste was a fellow of a different stamp from the majority of his unfortunate blood. There was more of the pure noble Indian in him than the blood of the Saxon. The two do not make a good mixture as a rule. But this youth's whole demeanour betokened one of a rarely refined and sensitive nature, and his slight, delicate figure evidenced a gentleman among his confrères. How he came to be a member of Petrie's lawless gang was a secret that was only known to the youth and his master. Probably a timid nature prevented an open rebellion when accident had thrown the two together. The masterful bully would do the rest to force sensitiveness to slavery. That he suffered pain from what he was forced to see and hear as the accompaniment of his surroundings was undoubted, and this timidity was even

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more evident as he listened to the Cree's sneering allusion to his sympathy for the unfortunate English youth.

"P'raps Baptiste would like to change places with the stubborn skunk?" Petrie suggested malevolently, as he turned upon the young half-breed, whose averted face was red with shame. "What do you say, Baptiste? It's yours for the asking."

The half-breed shuddered as he stammered an answer:

"No—no! Baptiste want not to change place. But ropes hurt when Wahtah knot them."

"And quite right, too!" laughed the Red Hand harshly. "I guess they'll hurt a sight more if they change places. So I'd make up my mind to let things be, if I was you."

"Baptiste cry out sooner than Conyers!" laughed Slick, and Wahtah added with a grin:

"I tie knots different for red man's wrists. White man easy tied. His teeth no' bite like red man's; his hands no slip from loops like red man's. Knots for red man cut in tight, deep—like knives."

Poor Baptiste shrank before the thought of this horrible suggestion, and Petrie smiled with satisfaction as he noted the signs of timidity.

"I guess Baptiste understands all that as well as we do," he said. "But he's not going to go any crooked trail, are you, Baptiste?"

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Of course not. Now clear out and fix up the bronchoes for the night. We want to make an early start for Black Crossing and a bee-line for Last Mountain. See that every-thing's square. And—Baptiste!”

The young half-breed had risen hastily to obey the order, only too glad to be free from the not unfrequent baiting. And he stopped at the flap of the tent at the sound of his name.

“Yes, Joe,” he muttered timidly.

The Red Hand stepped across the tent and lowered his face to stare venomously into the lad's frightened eyes.

“You once tried to run away from my ranch. You remember what happened?”

The youth paled at the question, that recalled a horrible memory, and the sweat broke out on his brow.

Petrie grunted with satisfaction.

“Humph! I see your memory is still good. Well, don't try-on any monkey-tricks again, Baptiste! That's all. Don't try them again, or——”

It was unnecessary to finish the sentence. Baptiste understood the threat. He bent his head and hastened away, and Joe turned to his two remaining supporters with a laugh.

“I guess we ain't got much to fear from him! There's not the pluck of a chipmunk in the coon's hide. But now about this Conyers?”

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"He no' give up paper to say where gold is?" questioned Wahtah.

And Petrie rejoined: "That's about the size of it. There isn't a stubbornner fox on the whole prairie. Bah! It makes me sick, it does. A word from him, and we could all have shaps made of dollar bills and yet have enough to buy up a hundred sections. But he won't speak."

"Wahtah can make the papoose loose his tongue," the Cree muttered, in a low tone that was so suggestive that Joe started and looked sharply into the Indian's face.

"What do you mean?" the latter demanded.

Wahtah shrugged his shoulders.

"Hot irons on back; wood splinters in breast. They make white boy speak much—much!" And the speaker grinned with delight at his horrible suggestions.

But Petrie received with silence these propositions for barbaric trial by torture. Not that he disapproved of the utility of the methods. It was the policy of the thing that made him to hesitate. Petrie was a rank bully. That was obvious. But, like most bullies, he was only ready to follow his course to certain limits, and these limits were marked by leaving tracks that the police could follow. He was careful enough to avoid that extremity. It was one thing to make a prisoner for a time and to rob. A thief can always hope

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to get clear—at least, Joe's undisciplined brain reasoned thus. But the man had also learned from experience that there is truth in the adage, "Murder will out." Of this he had a superstitious dread, even though he might have been exempt from any moral fear. And an early experience had taught him that torture is not far removed from murder in bringing vengeance upon the perpetrator. In short, the Red Hand believed that he could escape a prison, but not a scaffold. And so Wahtah's gentle suggestion was not received with the applause that had been hoped for.

"No," Joe replied thoughtfully. "No, I guess them ways won't do now. Twenty years ago—good; but not to-day. There's risk enough as it is, for the police would come like a blizzard wind if they got a hint of this business. No, we mustn't hurt the skunk if we can help it. The cries of the English reach far, and the answer comes quick across big seas, prairies, mountains, forests."

"But you kill White Fang yesterday!" expostulated the disappointed Cree, to which Petrie returned:

"Bah! He's not English! His cry died in first willow-bush. Besides, White Fang is not dead——"

"Not dead?" exclaimed both listeners at once.

"No. And what's more, as far as I know

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he's joined on with a pair of English youngers that know Dan Conyers. And they know, too, that Dan Conyers is with me!"

Words failed both Slick and Wahtah, for the moment, to express their astonishment at this unexpected element of risk in their enterprise.

"English—boys?" exclaimed Wahtah at last, and Slick made a brave effort to regard the matter lightly.

"Youngers? If they are only youngers, what does it matter, Red Hand?"

"Much," was the answer. "They are only youngers, but they are 'cute as foxes and brave as bears. It's downright blighting luck. What they suspicion, I couldn't find out. But I have an idea that they have started on our trail, and there's no turning an Englishman when he's on the scent of an enemy. We found that out in the last rebellion. I reckon we'll have to keep our eyes mighty well skinned if it's true what I suspicion."

"That's true," remarked Slick thoughtfully. "But say, you'd better send Wahtah to spy. He can creep back to where you last saw the coons——"

"At the Old Camp."

"Right on our trail! Well, he can get back there and find out what they're after. And if the three of us can't throw dust in the eyes of two green English youngers, we ought to be noosed in our own lariats."

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“A good idea!” was Petrie’s reception of his lieutenant’s proposed tactics. “Yes, Wahtah, you’ll best get a move on at once. The sooner the better, for if it’s our trail they’re following, we’ll have to lead them on a bit, and land them in a blind gully somewhere, else they’ll be off to call the police. So clear now, Wahtah. You’ll find us by tomorrow night at the Black Crossing. Sling over my blankets, Slick. Sleep’s the first thing, and you can roust me out at the first streak of morning.”

CHAPTER VIII

SLAYING THE BLACK FOX

Hansard and Beverley made their plans successfully that night without having to answer inconvenient questions from either Ab Carse or his homely wife. Thinking that merely an outing to see the country and perhaps hunt a little were the objects in view, little was said except in the way of suggestions as to the necessaries for camping.

As there was no prospect of being absent for more than one day, or two at the utmost, the preparations were not extensive. A blanket for sleeping in, a bag of provisions at the back of each saddle, picket ropes, matches, shot-guns, and a good supply of cartridges were the chief supplies.

Unobserved by the Corses, each boy fastened a revolver-case, with cartridge-belt well stocked, round his waist beneath his jacket. Then, as the sun was just creeping over the hills to light the valley, the chums mounted their bronchoes (Kitty and Meg), starting off with merriment and laughter, just as though they were *en route* for a picnic.

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At first they cantered briskly down the trail, but when out of sight of the ranch they drew rein.

"They've had a few hours' start of us, but if they don't expect pursuit that ought not to make much difference," Jack said, coming close to his friend's side.

"Don't you think that Petrie will have his suspicions roused from what you said about Conyers?" asked Geoff.

"Perhaps. But I don't think he will suspect that we intend to get on his track immediately. He might look for police—in time; but that would take a day or two. Besides, he must guess that we know very little."

"I wish we knew more. We might make the plans better."

"So do I," Jack rejoined, though he did not seem much depressed at his ignorance, for he began to whistle a scout war-song with a cheerfulness that stirred the birds in the surrounding maples, and caused the chipmunks to chirrup their little squeaking responses from the boughs, where they were performing remarkable gymnastic feats.

Geoff waited patiently without trying to "pump" his companion. He knew Jack's every mood, and he was long familiar with that peculiar smile which, combined with that certain whistled music, told exactly what the combination meant. It was Jack's way

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of thinking deeply. The whistling was a survival of the old scouting days, which taught that simple way of seeing the bright side of things.

Presently the melody ceased and the horses were allowed to walk at ease, straining their necks at intervals to grab some tempting young leaves from the berry shrubs that bordered the trail.

"Do you know, I've been thinking, and the more I think the more I have come to the conclusion that we've been a couple of fat-heads," was Jack's announcement, delivered with the utmost seriousness.

"I shouldn't have thought that that took much consideration. I've often imagined the same thing myself," Geoff returned. "But what particularly fat-headed deed have you—I mean we—been doing this time?"

"It's about that Indian," the first boy continued. "Evidently we've made an enemy of him, and as likely as not by this time he'll have found some way of warning Conyers and making him think that we are his enemies as well."

"But what of Petrie? Would not White Fang be too afraid to go near the camp, in case they fall in with each other?"

"He might. Yet it is likely that an Indian would find some way of sending his message. He might have a friend who would do it for

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him. We ought to have followed on the trail last night."

"It's too late to think of that now," said Geoff philosophically.

"Yes, I know that. But what I mean is that we have got to take these facts into consideration now. My plan is to push on until we find recent tracks, then halt until darkness, keeping a sharp look-out for White Fang or Petrie or any suspicious person. Then, when the camp is asleep, we'll press forward. Reaching it, I'll leave you with the horses and go scouting."

"Couldn't I go with you?" was the question that might have been expected. "We could tie the horses somewhere."

But Jack had a different opinion.

"I think not, old man. You see, I happen to know the scout call of Conyers' patrol. I can draw his attention without others knowing, and without words I can sign to him that I know his plight and have come to his assistance. If he wants to escape, we might have to make a dash for it. That's why the horses must be held in readiness."

The riders had reached the camping-ground of yesterday's scene by this time, and there they involuntarily paused to look at the memorable tree that had been the cause of all later events.

"On second thoughts I've half a mind to halt for a bit and have another look for

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White Fang," remarked Jack. "He can't have gone far, and he might need help again. Silly idiot that he was to clear off like that! His ankle would have been nearly well by now if he'd not played the giddy goat. Hullo! See that!"

"A black wolf—a fox—right behind that tree, too!" exclaimed Geoff, who was all excitement in an instant, having also sighted the animal at the moment when Jack spoke.

"I must bag that!" said Hansard, taking his gun from his back. "We'll tie up the horses for a bit, Geoff. We can spare the time, since we have decided not to reach the camp till dark."

Beverley needed no further coaxing, and was out of the saddle in a moment.

"There he goes—sneaking behind the bushes!" said Jack, as he also dismounted. "We've got him between us and the river. The wood's pretty clear; so, if you take one side and I the other, we'll jam him between us for certain. Got your broncho tied?"

Geoffrey had, and so, with guns in readiness, the boys started to stalk their game with no calm pulses, for a black fox is a rarity, and hence a prize worth boasting about.

But stalking a fox in the bush is about as easy as spearing a sprat in the Atlantic. Luckily, however, the undergrowth was fairly short and thin, owing to the depredations

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made by the cattle and horses of travellers at this well-known camping-ground. Still, even then a fox seems to be able to find cover behind a blade of grass.

The plan that the boys followed was one common in such circumstances. Having sighted their game they proceeded to hem him within a triangle—taking the camp clearing as one side, and, from the extreme points, gradually converging until they would meet at the river.

But it required a sharp eye to track the sly movements of the fox. Once they saw him crouching behind a fallen log where there was almost bare ground round about, yet after cautious stalking it was found that he had vanished from that spot as effectually as if he had disappeared in the air. As a matter of fact, the hunters had almost stepped over him where he had curled into an old badger hold—not large enough to cover him, but sufficient to hide his black coat by overhanging grasses. Next moment he had leapt from a doubtful shelter into a more likely retreat among the hemlocks.

“I see him! There! Right in front of you!” cried Geoff.

But he was not quick enough to get a sight along the barrel of his gun.

“That’s the way. Close in upon him, Geoff!” shouted the elder boy. “We’ll have him yet. Once we get him to the river it

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will be our chance. Keep your eyes well skinned and your gun ready to speak!"

The fox, cutest of his race though he might be, was becoming desperate. He felt himself being crowded, and he smelt the powder on each side of him. True, he might have tried a wild dash for freedom, and possibly he might have baffled his foes by pluck. But that is not a fox's way. Cunning he is almost beyond belief, but pluck is not in his composition. He can only live and fight by strategy. But, smelling and seeing enemies on either side, this one became frightened or reckless. He gave up skulking, and began the hopeless tactics of rushing backwards and forwards, doubling and redoubling in his tracks, and only succeeding—while often exposing himself—in preventing a steady aim by either of his pursuers. But it was only postponing the evil moment. Both Jack and his chum were good shots, though they lacked the trapper's experience to take a quick sight in the woods. Still, their plan had been a good one, and sooner or later the moment of their triumph would come.

On they pressed, until at last the fox was forced to leave cover and dash for the strand of the river near the waterfall. For a moment he stood there facing the water, as though screwing up his courage to plunge into the flood.

Instantly Jack's gun was at his shoulder;

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but apparently his friend was readier, for at the same moment a loud report rang through the trees—the fox leapt into the air with a howl, and then tumbled lifeless upon the gravel.

It took but a second for the boys to rush to the spot with cries of triumph from the throat of each. It was a magnificent specimen of this rare variety, and only exclamations of admiration were at first spoken as the young hunters knelt to examine the beautiful softness of the black fur tipped with silver.

“Isn't he a beauty?” were Jack's first words. “It seems almost a pity to have killed him, though such a bag is a feather in our caps.”

“And a clean shot right through the heart!” exclaimed Geoff. “As neatly done as target practice. You must have had a fine position to get such an aim.”

“I?” returned Hansard. “Not a bit of it. There's no credit to me in this business. The praise is all yours, old chap. Of course, I must say I'd rather have had that glory myself; still, your success is the next best thing to mine.”

At this speech, Geoff opened his eyes wide with unfeigned astonishment.

“My success!” he echoed. “Why, man, you are dreaming, or spoofing! It wasn't I who shot him. It was you!”

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"Rubbish!" laughed Jack. "Don't think you can rot me like that."

"But I'm not rotting. Honour bright," persisted Geoff in puzzled tones. "If anyone is doing the rotting, it's you, old man."

For answer Jack picked up his gun, which was lying by his side, and opened the breach, exposing two cartridges intact.

"Doesn't that convince you, O unbelieving Euclid?" he laughed.

"And doesn't this convince you?" retorted Geoff, also showing his cartridges as untouched as his friend's.

"Then who fired the shot?" exclaimed Jack in amazement, voicing the thoughts of both.

Just at that moment an empty cartridge fell on the ground between the boys—as if it had fallen straight from the blue skies—and a deep voice spoke from behind:

"Huh! White man's burning arrows sleep in teepee. Red brother's more quick!"

Instantly the boys started up from where they had been kneeling by the fox, and turned to face the intruder, whom they found to be an Indian of gigantic stature, dressed in such robes as at once proclaimed him to be one of some distinction.

In these days, when the man of the prairie mixes so freely with the pale-faces from the East, it is rather exceptional to find that, while he still clings to moccasins and blanket,

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he has not adopted an incongruous motley of certain garments as well. Trousers and flannel shirt often replace the old-time leggings and tunic of deerskin; a felt hat, with the top cut away and decorated with feathers, may frequently take the place of the picturesque skin turban, with its streamers of eagle plumes, ermine tails, and bead-work.

But there was nothing of Birmingham about this man. His leggings and moccasins were a complete mosaic of beads and porcupine quills, fringed with ermine in place of the old scalp-locks that Government prohibits. His skin tunic, hunting-sheath, and tobacco-pouch and (uncommon enough) cartridge-belt were also elaborately ornamented with similar designs, as was also his medicine-bag. The entire skin of a mink, surmounted by upright eagle feathers, was shaped as a crown above the long black hair that fell to his shoulders, and round his giant figure was carelessly wrapped an ermine robe that might have been the ransom of a prince. He held his gun baby-fashion in the hollow of his left arm, and even this weapon was decorated on the butt by brass nails in such intricate designs that very little of the original wood was visible.

Yes, there was that in the attire as well as the features that instantly proclaimed this man as one of the *noblesse* of his race—always proud, fierce on occasions, but, like most

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giants, capable of showing much good-humoured kindness. There was an amused smile upon his face as he noted the discomfiture of the boys—an amusement that they did not seem to appreciate altogether. It was not a pleasant thing to have another gun forestall such a little triumph as this would have been to either.

“Who are you? What do you want to come interfering with our sport for?” demanded Jack hotly.

“It is Great Bear who speaks with his white brother,” was the answer, given with simple pride as of one who appreciates the honour of his own position. “Great Bear is the chief of the Sioux.”

“Then I wish to goodness Great Bear would look after his Sioux and not come interfering with us!” retorted Jack.

The chief smiled calmly, but did not move.

“Let the white man but turn his eyes to the dead fox. He will find that but one arrow flew from Great Bear’s gun. White man’s gun send many burning arrows, and black fox bring much money if killed by one.”

Geoff dropped on his knees to examine the wound in the dead animal’s side.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed. “A bullet! The chief is right, Jack; for the charge of buckshot would have spoiled the skin.” Then

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he turned to the Indian. "Your gun doesn't look like a rifle. How is it that you can send a bullet so well?"

With quiet pleasure to answer any question—a peculiarity of the Indian, by the way—Great Bear silently opened the breach of his gun and handed the weapon to Beverley.

"One barrel rifled for ball, the other plain for shot," intimated Geoff. "A jolly useful weapon, I should think, but not a common one for Indians to carry."

Again the redskin smiled as he received his treasure into nursing arms once more.

"Great Bear loves his gun. It was placed in his hands as a present from the great friend of the red man who drove the fire-water from the Sioux camps. Great Bear would die for the hand that did this."

"Fire-water? What we call whisky, you mean?" questioned Jack.

"The chief that slays our braves as the engines cut the grain on the white man's fields," replied the Indian fiercely, as his eyes flashed angry resentment at the thought. But the fierceness passed quickly, and a tender expression passed over his face as he resumed, nodding as he repeated: "Great Bear give his life for the hand that did this."

Then he threw off his robe, and, producing his hunting-knife, knelt down to skin the

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black fox with the native's science, that renders the operation as simple as removing one's overcoat.

"We've been properly robbed of our hunter's glory," remarked Geoff to his chum, with a comical expression of mock ruefulness as he watched the actions of the Indian.

"All the same, I dare say it is just as well," Jack returned. "Our guns would have made a mess of the fur, as the chief said, and very likely our 'prentice hands with the knife would have completed the ruin. Perhaps it is just as well not to get one's wishes every time."

CHAPTER IX

GREAT BEAR OF THE SIOUX

A few dexterous cuts with the keen blade, and one steady pull, left the poor fox in all its nakedness. Some small pieces of fat had then to be removed, a handful or two of blue clay from the river-bank had to be rubbed upon the inner side, then Great Bear stood up and held out the fur to Jack.

After the first feelings of disappointment had passed, Jack's generous nature had soon driven away all feelings of resentment. He was quick to understand the courtesy of the Indian's action, but he was equally ready to acknowledge the prowess that had been superior to his own.

"I thank you, chief. But the fox fell to your skill. To you, therefore, the fur belongs," he said.

But the Indian had his own ideas on the subject.

"White man creep, creep through bush—here, there. Black fox try to run, but white man shut the door upon him. White man clever; white man creep like wolf upon rabbit.

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Great Bear only shoot, so the fur is not his."

It was courteously said, but Geoffrey readily fell in with his chum's notions of gallantry.

"No, no, chief!" he laughed, as he shook his head decisively; "that argument won't do. It was you who shot the beast, and, as Jack says, the skin must be yours."

Great Bear looked puzzled for a moment. He turned first to one boy and then to the other, as if failing to understand why they should refuse his wish. Then he smiled gently as he answered the younger of the boys:

"The ways of the white man are as crossing trails to the red. He cannot understand the paths that their minds follow. Is he whom you call 'Jack' too proud to receive a gift from the hands of the chief of the Sioux?"

"Not too proud," interrupted Jack hastily, "but——"

He stopped, and the Indian resumed gravely:

"Then if the white man will not take the skin as a hunter's right, let him take it as a present from Great Bear. Thus surely shall it be seen that Great Bear and he whom they call 'Jack' must be friends."

"If you put it in that way, then I cannot refuse," replied Hansard, as he took the gift.

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“And of course we’ll be friends, won’t we?” added Geoff.

“Of course. Here’s my hand on it!” returned Jack.

With dignity the Indian shook hands with each boy in turn.

“Great Bear has had many friends among his white brothers, and many have smoked the peace-pipe in the camps of his people. For the sake of him who gave that gun and drove away the fire-water, Great Bear would be at peace with all white men.”

“That’s good. Long may that friendship last,” said Jack. Then he turned briskly to his chum. “Come on, Geoff. It’s time we got a move on if we’re to reach Petrie’s camp to-night.”

The boys were turning to move, when Jack was arrested by a sudden grip on his shoulder, and the deep voice of the Indian thundered out fiercely:

“Petrie you say? You friend to Petrie? Then Jack no friend to Great Bear! Petrie dog! Petrie snake that creep in grass and poison! He who is friend to dogs can be no friend to brave men.”

It was a sudden change from quiet courtesy to bitter anger, and the boys were considerably taken aback at the unexpected attack. But Jack impatiently shook off the arresting hand, and returned the Indian’s fierce look with one of utter calmness.

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"I did not say that I was a friend of Petrie. I said that I was going to his camp. That was all."

"Petrie dog! He who visits camp dog too!" retorted Great Bear in disgust.

"Thanks," retorted Jack. "But it seems to me that the friendship of Great Bear can't be worth much if it changes so soon."

"Not so good as a dog's," remarked Geoff, adopting the Indian's simile and throwing it back in his teeth. "White men do not make friends and then cast them off before six breaths. They prove friendship before they seek to break it."

The Indian was conquered. He bent his head in a dignified bow, and afterwards drew himself up to his full height, as he folded his robes around him like a judge adopting his gown before hearing the evidence of the court.

"It is well spoken. Great Bear understand. The white man, Jack, will explain."

"Well, it's like this," said Jack. "We have heard that one of our white brothers is in danger—from what, we do not know; but we believe he may be in danger of his life. Well, we wish to go to his help. The red man would go to the help of his red brother, would he not?"

The Indian bowed his agreement, and Jack continued:

"Well, what the red man would do, the white man must do also. We believe that

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this brother is in danger from one Petrie, a half-breed cowboy. The camp will not be far away, but we must creep upon it through the darkness if we would give the help that may be needed."

"Has, then, the white brother spoken with him whom he would help?" asked the Indian, during the pause that followed.

"No, but he has sent—we got a message. We do not know him, we have not seen him, but we have heard of him. Our brother is called Dan Conyers by the white man."

"Dan Conyers!" echoed Great Bear, with a distinctness of enunciation that showed how the name was no stranger to his lips; and, as he spoke, his eyes lit up with somewhat of the old light of fierceness. "Dan Conyers!" he repeated. "Is he buck or papoose?"*

"Papoose," answered Jack briefly.

And Geoffrey asked in wonder, though the question seemed hardly needed, judging by the Indian's actions and expression:

"Do you know him?"

For a few moments the Indian did not answer. He seemed to be controlling his passions, and it was not an easy task. But at last he spoke, and, when he did, he spoke with firm strength, mellowed by the softness of a memory that he revered.

"My white brothers will forgive the hot

* Man or boy.

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words that Great Bear spoke. He was wrong. He did not understand. Let the hatchet of angry words be buried and forgotten, and let Great Bear speak words of wisdom to his friends." Here his voice sank to a deeper key that thrilled the listeners. "This is what a chief says to you, and know you that he speaks with no forked tongue: If, indeed, the white brother has been frowned upon by the dog Petrie and is in his tents, then of a truth he is in danger. The white men have need to go swift if they would save him. But they shall not go alone. Great Bear can shoot straight, if need be, and Great Bear's strength shall never fail for the son of him who drove the fire-water from the red man's villages."

"His son? You mean to say that Dan Conyers is the son of the man you were speaking about who gave you that gun?" interrupted Geoff excitedly, all heedless of the offence that he might give by so great a breach of etiquette as interrupting the speech of an Indian. But Great Bear did not notice the discourtesy, or if he did, chose to overlook it.

"Great Bear would die for Chief Conyers or for any that Conyers loved. Come, let us be going. Does my brother know where lies the camp he seeks?"

"They went by the trail to Black Crossing yesterday," answered Jack.

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The Indian looked puzzled.

"Yesterday?" he repeated. "Jack will forgive the weak ears of his friend. But that word is a stranger to great Bear."

"Yesterday—oh, before this sun!" explained the boy hastily.

"Ah!" said the Indian, understanding the more familiar figure of speech. "Then before another sun we must smell the camp-fire of Petrie. The tents of my people are near—in the village where the water of Lone Lake stretches arms to embrace the plains. I shall return there. If my brother will take the trail, I will follow on my mustang, swift as the bird that flies home at evening."

"Very well. We'll go slow until you make up on us," said Jack, very pleased indeed to have such an ally on such an errand.

But the Indian laughed.

"Huh! Go swift—swift as the night-hawk! Great Bear will touch your saddle ere the mid-day camp at Silver Bluff be reached."

After which boast, the speaker gathered up his robes and hastened through the woods with stately stride.

CHAPTER X

AN UNKNOWN FOE

With the precious fox-skin rolled in a bundle under Jack's arm, the boys turned from the river to pursue their journey on the Black Crossing trail, fairly contented with the experiences of the morning, that had provided them with good sport and also found them the services of such a formidable supporter as Great Bear.

On reaching the place where their bronchoes had been fastened they were preparing to remount, when Geoff gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Great Scott, Jack! What has happened to our grub-bags?"

"Our grub——" began the other boy, when Geoff repeated in consternation:

"Yes. What has happened? They're gone!"

And gone they truly were. The bags in question (a couple of flour-sacks) had been tied securely that morning to the thongs behind the seat of each saddle, and contained

sufficient food to last for two or three days. But now there were no such articles to be seen, and yet the horses had been found contentedly nibbling the leaves that were within reach of where the boys had tied them.

A swift yet manifestly useless search was made of the immediately surrounding ground.

"It's no good. The bags couldn't have tumbled off," said Geoff. "It's impossible that the bronchoes could have got rid of them. Even if one had been loosened, it isn't a bit likely that both would have disappeared."

"And, at any rate, they would still be hereabout if it had been bronchoes' work," further resumed Jack.

Geoff gave a murmur of disappointment.

"It's all our own fault for running after that black fox when we ought to have been attending to business. Now, I suppose, this will throw us back some hours, for we can't go on without grub. It all shows how fat-headed we are."

"It may. But it's not a bad bit of luck in one way," returned Jack. "It shows us what we've got to expect."

"How?" Geoff asked, not following the drift of his friend's reasoning.

"Well, simply that we've got an enemy or enemies—someone who knows what we are after, and is trying to put a spoke in our wheel. Of course, these bags could not have

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disappeared without hands to untie the thongs and carry them away."

"Great Bear?" ejaculated Beverley.

Jack shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. Great Bear was too much in earnest to help us. A chap like that is not a thief. At least, if he were one he wouldn't trouble to sneak grub-bags."

"Then of course it must be White Fang——"

"Or Petrie—one of the two of them."

Then Jack's eyes began to glisten, and he rubbed his hands with energetic delight.

"Say, Geoff, old man! This begins to become interesting!"

Geoff looked gloomily at the robbed saddles.

"Mighty interesting, I call it. Oh, yes, quite fascinating! How we are going to explain our loss to the Carse, without making them suspicious, I don't know."

"But there will be no need to tell them," pursued Jack, with increasing excitement.

"Don't see how we are to avoid it. We can't very well go away on a trip like this without any grub."

"But we must," responded the other boy finally. Then he continued, speaking rapidly and not without excitement: "Don't you see, old man, this is a trick of someone's to keep us back and give time to Petrie? It may have been that cowboy himself, or it may have

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been that Indian fellow trying to spite us. Whichever one it was, this seems clear: we've got to see to it that the trick misses fire. We must push on, and take our chance of passing within hail of a ranch for supplies."

"Perhaps Great Bear may bring enough to go on with?" Geoff suggested.

"We mustn't take the risk of that if we get an opportunity to prevent it. It seems to me, you see, that if someone unknown is determined to come in our way, the trip may be longer than we anticipated. We've got a good supply of cartridges between us, so it is unlikely that we shall be short of meat. We shall want bread, however, and that we must take the chance of picking up somehow." Then the speaker laughed heartily as he viewed his friend's glum countenance. "Cheer up, Euclid!" he said. "We'll pull through this somehow, and I prophesy that it will be an adventure that will take all our wits to pull off successfully."

Geoffrey was seldom depressed for any length of time, and he gave himself a shake to get rid of the dumps, just as a retriever shakes himself to send the drops of water flying.

"Come on! I'm with you to the ends of the earth, on an empty stomach!" he exclaimed merrily, as he raised himself lightly into his saddle. "This double-barrelled game of hunting and being hunted will be exciting enough to make us forget hunger."

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“Don’t be afraid of that—the hunger, I mean,” answered Jack, as he also mounted, though he first tied the fox-hide to his comrade’s saddle. “You can’t starve in the bush or on the prairie, where there are plenty of chickens, rabbits, fish, and berries.”

“A Cornish pasty won’t come amiss in a few months!” was Geoff’s merry retort.

“I guess you’ll have to content yourself with something less savoury during *this* adventure,” answered Jack.

Thoroughly contented to leave all the needs of the future to take care of themselves, the boys started to continue their journey at a brisk canter. The spirit of the enterprise had thoroughly taken possession of them, being forced into flame by the realisation of the opposition they would have to contend with. It would no longer be the prospect of creeping upon a camp at night and rescuing Conyers from the hands of his enemies. That, their earlier surmise, might have been simple enough to accomplish. But now it would be a venture to task their brains and nerves. Their project was known. Moreover, it was known by someone who had something to gain by frustrating the intention. Then they could expect that their movements would be watched. Probably, too, Petrie would be on his guard to prevent the fulfilment of simple tactics. Truly a prospect to excite the enthusiasm of lads of spirit.

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The sun was bright overhead, the grass was springy underfoot, and the air was balmy around—one of those glorious days that Canada keeps for her own, making one to breathe deeply and sing joyously for the simple pleasure of being alive. I have lived in the deserts and among the mountains of the East, where the date-palms wave and the vineyards are like purple clouds upon the landscape; I have viewed the verdant slopes of Italy, where the *dolce far niente* of life and the music of Nature turns living into sweet dreaming; I have climbed the crags of the North, where the virile winds and scented heather stir the blood to unceasing activity. But only in Canada have I found all these sensations blended into that which makes one glad to live—to have the power to live without the fatigue of doing it. Such (the latter) were the feelings of Hansard and Beverley that morning. They found life all they wished it to be—full of interest loaded with joy; with joy and interest right in their grasp.

“Man, isn’t this glorious?” Geoff suddenly broke in upon the silence, as the bronchoes slackened speed to meet a steep incline where the valley trail rose to a cliff overlooking the silver Moose river.

“Ripping!” was the equally rapturous response. “Falmouth is a fine place, and has rattling good scenery; but commend me to

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Moose Valley. I can almost pity our maters being shut up in England."

"England does seem a small place when we compare it with the elbow-room of Canada," rejoined the younger boy, readily appreciating his chum's mental view. "Still, if all goes well, we can give them a taste of prairie air in another year or two."

Then followed a brief space of thoughtful silence until Jack resumed wistfully:

"I wonder what they are doing at home just now?"

"My mater will be planning a dinner; yours will be emptying her purse for some hungry tramp," replied Geoff half humorously, half tenderly.

"Yes; poor mater," sighed Jack softly. "She'll never get over that sort of thing. She's been swindled over and over again. But she always says it is better to be cheated by twenty rogues than to risk turning away one beggar who may be really hungry."

"Yet you would have thought anyone would have been disheartened by the way she has been taken in sometimes. There was that fellow three years ago, you remember. She gave him supper and offered a bed, and even while she was in another room getting things ready he stole the cash-box, and disappeared. If that had happened to me, I don't think I would ever have given away another penny."

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"Nor I," said Jack. "But my mater is made of different stuff from you or me. She simply bade 'good-bye' to the money, and said that she hoped it would be well spent. She used to say that she always had an idea that the fellow would turn up again and repay her, for she was sure he had been a gentleman once."

"Let's hope he will," Geoff remarked. "But for my part, I don't think thieves often return 'loans' of that sort. Well, here's the flat again. I guess we'd better do a bit of a canter."

Two pairs of spurs tickled the flanks of the bronchoes, and a livelier pace was resumed without further conversation. The riders had been following the course of the river hitherto. Now they continued the trail where it led northwards to the prairie, and for another hour little was heard but the rhythmic music of the horses' hoofs as they measured their way across the "rolling sea of grass."

Towards noon the boys arrived at a large bluff of poplar trees known as the Silver Bluff.

They had passed no farms, so had only the prospect of a Saskatoon berry lunch. But the sight of willows indicated the likelihood of water for the horses, so they determined to make an hour's halt before continuing their journey.

"We've made good time, so we'll allow a full hour to give Great Bear a chance to

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make up on us," said Jack, dismounting, unsaddling, and starting to lead his broncho to where the fall in the ground indicated a spring.

Just then the boy heard a horse neighing ahead of him.

"Hullo!" Geoff exclaimed. "Someone else camping here?"

"A stray horse, most likely," was Jack's decision.

Then both the boys gave a simultaneous ejaculation of astonishment; for, on rounding a bush, there they saw Great Bear sitting in a grassy sward, smoking his pipe beside a crystal spring, with his hobbled mustang grazing beside him!

CHAPTER XI

GREAT BEAR'S "DEER"

Great Bear was smiling—not sarcastically, as would have been the way with white folk at such a triumph, but just a little realising the humour of the discomfiture of his young friends.

“White man shaganappy* slow, slow!” he remarked in deep tones, with the nearest approach to chaffing that an Indian understands. Then he added with generous courtesy: “Trail turn and turn like serpent. Great Bear ride as the birds fly. Now we will eat, then seek further the camp of Petrie the Red Hand.”

The boys dismounted, watered their horses, and then put them out on picket to graze. This done, Geoff volunteered to gather berries for lunch. But Great Bear frowned disapproval.

“The fruit of the tree is good—very good; but braves cannot find strength for the body in such. Have my brothers brought no food with them?”

“We did, but it was stolen,” replied Jack,

* Native for “pony”; sometimes used by Indians as general term for “horse.”

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and rapidly described the disappearance of the food-bags.

Great Bear listened with intent interest and without uttering a word, and when the story was finished (still without speaking) he rose, untied a saddle-bag, and produced several strips of what appeared to be dried leather, also some flour tied in a cloth.

“My brothers will make a fire. I see their tin for cooking still hangs in the saddle. If they will bring this with water, the evil spirit of hunger will not live long in their bodies.”

It did not take long for Jack to have a camp-fire blazing with a readiness that would have rejoiced the heart of any scout-master, and by the time it was glowing Great Bear had mixed some flour and water into little cakes, which he buried in the red ashes. Next he took the strips of “leather,” which were really pemmican—*i.e.*, lengths of flesh dried in the sun. It was deer-flesh in this case, instead of the buffalo meat that used to be the staple food of Indians and trappers in the days before this animal was so recklessly hunted, until it was practically exterminated from the prairie.

“Pemmican good. It makes men strong,” commented Great Bear, as he sliced the meat with his hunting-knife and dropped the pieces into the water that was bubbling in the pannikin upon the fire.

The boys were hungry, and as the savour of

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stewing pemmican reached their nostrils they began to congratulate themselves on being saved from having to make an unsatisfactory meal of berries.

"It's awfully good of you to share with us, Great Bear," said Hansard.

The Indian knew that the sentiment had been correctly expressed, so he said nothing. A civilised person would have pretended that no inconvenience was likely to be suffered under such circumstances, and would have waved aside the thanks with some "Don't mention it," or similar phrase. But the savage knew he was acting unselfishly, and it gave him pleasure to do so. Moreover, it gave him pleasure to know that his guests understood that he was possibly stinting himself for their sakes, so he did not object to the compliment.

Presently the cakes were baked and the stew was cooked to the red man's satisfaction, and in primitive style the pot was set upon the grass, while the damper was dipped in the soup and hunting-knives fished up such pieces of meat as they could spear. It was not a dainty meal regarded from an "Old Country" point of view. But hunger is a sauce that makes all things palatable, and it is doubtful if the boys ever enjoyed a better meal than that which had suddenly appeared before them at a time when such a prospect had seemed very far distant.

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During the eating, Great Bear had been almost silent. When it was over, however, and the red-stone pipe was lighted, he broached the subject concerning which he had been absorbed in contemplation.

"My brothers have spoken of White Fang, and have told the story of how White Fang crept away after they had bound cloths upon his wounds. They have told of the Red Hand who would kill White Fang. Well, it is good to know your enemies when they are on the war-path."

"But it's stupid of White Fang," joined in Geoffrey. "We would have been his friends, to help him and help Conyers against Joe Petrie."

The Indian nodded slowly several times as he puffed clouds of smoke with long-drawn breaths.

"White Fang came from the tents of the boasting Crees. Crees are as women at councils: they talk big words, but think not—they know not peace-pipe from tomahawk. It was White Fang stole the food-bags. That foolish. Red Hand not foolish. Red Hand would hurt horses, that they follow not his path across the prairie."

"At any rate, the Indian's trick missed fire," laughed Jack. "It would take more than stolen grub-bags to keep us back once we had made up our minds one way. I mean to go on, if I have to feed on grass."

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"Or thistles," added Geoff quietly. "For my part, Great Bear's dinner seems more satisfying than hay. Hunger doesn't suit this kid."

"No man hungry while there is prairie and forest," the chief remarked. "The wolves and the birds live on what the Manito* send. There is plenty for white man and red; there is plenty for all that breathes."

"Right, Great Bear," said Jack, with an approving look of admiration towards the good example of faith that the Indian exhibited. "We'll leave the hunger to Manito to satisfy——"

"And we will hunger not," concluded the good chief of the Sioux.

The pipe was replenished with kinni-kanik, and then the Indian resumed, as though answering some question that his own thoughts had propounded:

"The Red Hand is as a serpent—he creep in grass and poison unseen. The fox, the wolf—they are caught in the jaws of traps; but there are few steel jaws to hold the serpent."

The boys listened attentively, fully understanding the red man's metaphor, which clearly illustrated the difficulties that would be met with in their quest. But they were not disheartened by the prospect.

* God.

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“We have a saying among white men,” began Hansard. “It is: ‘Set a thief to catch a thief.’ By that we mean that if we would wish to trap a serpent we must be as serpents ourselves.”

The old chief nodded his approval.

“Huh! 'Tis good, my brothers. Many suns ago—when Great Bear was first a brave, when the buffalo passed like black clouds across the prairie, when the Sioux went out upon the war-path against the cunning Black-feet—then men warred as men, and did not fear to face the arrow and the tomahawk. But those days have changed. Tribes war not against tribes for glory; men war against men for gold—not face to face, but in the night, when the enemy's face is turned to the grass in sleep and the blanket dulls his hearing. We, my brother, may not fight for gain, but we may fight for the good. Our enemies will no longer meet us in the prairie with the war-cry, so we, too, must tread the path of the serpent to free our white brother Conyers from the Red Hand. Hush!”

As he spoke, the chief's attention had gradually been drawn to the willow-clump near by, and, without giving any other sign of attention except the keen straining of his eyes, he had continued to expound his views until the warning “Hush!” Then he slipped his robe from his shoulders, and pointed to the clearing beyond the willows.

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"The eyes of Great Bear are no longer the eyes of a brave, and sometimes the shadows of the forest make them lie. Can my white brothers not see the form of a deer beyond the clearing?"

The Indian rose, as did also the boys, and all strained their eyes for a few moments.

"I see nothing," remarked Jack.

"Nor I," added Geoff. "Perhaps, if there was a deer, it has passed into the bush. Shall we take our guns and search?"

But Great Bear did not reply. He moved slowly forward, passing the willow-clump on his left as though it were unnoticed. Then suddenly he became all energy. He turned sharply, and dived among the bushes. There was a cry of agony mingled with fear, and the deep growl of the chief in the Sioux language. Next moment the latter emerged from the bushes, carrying in his arms the wriggling, frantic, screaming figure of a half-clad Indian.

"It is right to cry when the arms of the bear are round you!" the chief rolled out, in his deep tones, while he advanced to the camp.

There was a smile of power on his face, for he knew how futile were the spy's struggles to free himself from the great hug that held him.

Jack and Geoffrey stood watching the scene in amusement. It was unnecessary to offer

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assistance in a case that resembled the playing of a cat with a mouse.

“So that is your deer!” laughed the younger boy, as the chief approached. “He was easily trapped.”

Great Bear looked towards Jack with a humorous expression on his face.

“Set snake to catch snake!” he said, quite appreciating the sense of the parodied proverb.

All this time the prisoner was struggling violently, whereupon Great Bear strode to the camp-fire, which was now a glowing heap of log ashes, and looked down upon the face of his captive.

“It is an easy thing for the arms of the bear to crush the breath out of the fox, but the chief of the Sioux does not kill that he may laugh at death. Let, then, Wahtah cease to fight and cry, or he shall have cause to cry when the arms of Great Bear open and Wahtah fall upon eager fire!”

The glow was warm, and the hint was understood. The Indian ceased to rend the air with his screams and strain his muscles with his terror.

Then Great Bear turned, and calmly set his discomfited burden upon the grass with a final warning:

“My white friends here bring arrows in their hands, and they shoot straight. Let Wahtah rest in peace, then, and tell us why

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he comes so far from the tents of Red Hand to visit the white man and the Great Bear."

Had it not been that there were obviously serious considerations concerned with the appearance of the spy, the boys could have well enjoyed a laugh at the appearance of the Indian—naked except for a loin-cloth and leggings—sitting on a hummock, as the very picture of misery. He was thoroughly woe-begone, in drooping attitude, and completely cowed by the experience that he had just gone through. But thoughts of Conyers were in the minds of all. That drove out the lighter view.

Nothing was said for some time, as Wahtah simply sat and stared into the fire.

Presently Jack broke the silence.

"You understand English, nitchie?"

The Indian raised his head, and looked at the questioner with an expression that was its own answer.

"You do," resumed Hansard. "Well, then, tell us why you came here."

"The antelope are many——" began the Indian.

But Great Bear clapped a hand over the brave's mouth before the sentence was ended.

"Better to slay the lie before its birth than to let the evil grow from brave to warrior," he muttered. Then, removing his hand:

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"My white brother has asked a question. Let the answer come no crooked path."

"The white man has asked; he shall be answered," said Wahtah. "He of the Red Hand sent me to guide his friends to the camp at Whispering Woods."

A look of unbelief passed among the council of three, and Jack was about to attack the obvious falsehood. But Grear Bear quickly took up the matter in his own way.

"The Red Hand is good. We will gladly visit at his lodge, for we would wish to hold counsel with him. Where are his tents?"

"Where the Whispering Woods reach down to the Rushing Waters," answered the Indian. "He rests there to welcome the strangers."

Great Bear turned to the boys.

"If we ride now we may reach the Whispering Woods when the sun puts on his war-paint," he said; and Geoff returned:

"That's all right. But the question is: can we trust the Indian to guide us rightly?"

A smile flickered over the face of the chief that plainly said: "Trust him! Whoever dreamed of trusting him?" That was the expression, but the spoken words were:

"Wahtah is a Cree." And by the chief's tone the boys knew that he placed very little faith in the brave's words.

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"Very well," said Jack, addressing the red-skin. "We will saddle-up now, and you will lead us to the Red Hand's camp." Then he continued cautiously: "There is a—a white man there, is there not?"

Wahtah turned in surprise to the speaker, as though he had not understood the question.

"Do you not understand? A white man—Conyers is his name!"

The Indian shook his head.

"There is no white man but Red Hand. There is Slick. He not white."

Instantly a terrible thought passed through the minds of both boys at the same time, though Geoff was first to put it into words:

"Can that brute have killed——"

"No, no!" hastily interrupted Jack, his alert faculties reasoning rapidly as he spoke in low tones, so that only his chum and Great Bear could hear. "Conyers is safe, or there would have been no need to send Wahtah to spy upon us. Whatever Petrie's purpose may be, he does not wish us to find Dan. If Conyers were hidden, or dead, there would be no need for any precautions."

"That's true," replied Geoff with relief. "But for the moment I was afraid that we were too late. However, let's get a move on!"

"Yes; we'd better get on the trail at once. What shall we do with Wahtah, chief?"

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“Wahtah shall run between your horse and mine,” replied the Indian, instantly preparing to resume the journey.

“Run?” questioned Jack. “Do you mean that you will force him to try to keep up the pace with our bronchoes? It is impossible.”

The Indian smiled superiorly.

“The redman can travel swiftly from when the sun waken to where it sleeps. Our young men may not be braves until their feet are tireless to keep pace as the slow canter of a horse. They must not be easily wearied in time of need.”

CHAPTER XII

THE MAD WAPITI

The journey that afternoon was not rapid, since the pace had to be set to suit Wahtah's jog-trot. The Indian held Jack's stirrup-leather with one hand while Great Bear guarded the right, and he covered many miles at the native's peculiar running pace that equalled the slow canter of the horses.

Several times a pause was made to give the runner a space for breathing. Once or twice a halt was also made for the boys to try their prowess with the gun when prairie chicken were within sight. Several were bagged during these rests, and so ensured sufficient food for the meantime.

Towards sunset the Whispering Woods were approached.

Well was that forest named. As far as the eye could reach, from east to west, the dense growth rose before the travellers like a great black wall, the summit of which had been irregularly shaped by a foot-saw. On the fringe, for the most part, were thousands of poplar and aspen trees, whose leaves were

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constantly rustling with the faintest breadth, producing the peculiarity of sound that had caused the name, Whispering Woods. It was an eerie effect on a still summer night—the opaque darkness, from which came the faint twittering of birds, the occasional cry of a lynx, the scream of the night-hawk—all from unseen throats; while all the time, like the continuous murmur of the distant sea, was heard the whisper, whisper, whisper of the trees.

Great Bear was as familiar with these woods as any coyote, so much of the mysteriousness of the effect was lost upon him. On the other hand, it was the first time that either Hansard or Beverley had been in the vicinity, and the call of the woods was new and welcome music.

It was noticeable that, as the trail wound its way like a great serpent through the fringe of bush and into the farther black depths—it was noticeable that Wahtah began to show a certain degree of excitement, and his eyes kept darting like little search-lights from one side of the trail to the other. This was observed by both the boys as well as by the Sioux chief. But still they passed along the trail towards Black Crossing without uttering a word. It was necessary to ride with caution, for the darkness was so intense that it was often difficult to avoid the holes and ruts that centuries of

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trappers and caravans had dug in the road that led to the only ford in a hundred miles or so of the river known as Rushing Waters. And all the time Great Bear had his head erect and nostrils distended like a dog that is ready to scent danger. But Jack and Geoff felt conscious that there was doubt in the actions of Wahtah, so they were on the alert for danger, though they had little of Great Bear's fine woodcraft to aid them.

As the travellers passed onward the darkness grew deeper, until it seemed as though it were a heavy mantle folding round them—something that they could almost touch. Now and then the fire-flies would twinkle their little flash-lamps, and the horses would slightly start as some vagrant rodent scuttled across the trail. All seemed disinclined for speech that would certainly break the mysterious charm that the spirit of the forest weaves around mortals when they are silent; and now, when they looked towards one another, all they could see were dark, ghostly shadows.

Suddenly, when the darkness seemed heaviest and the silence had become almost deathly, a wild shriek of utmost terror broke from Wahtah that nearly startled the boys out of their saddles, and made their flesh creep with the unearthly sound of it. They pulled up their horses with a jerk. Great Bear did the same. But he had been pre-

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pared for some ruse that would give Wahtah an opportunity to slip into the bushes, and, as he drew his rein, he shot out his left arm and gripped the Cree by the throat.

“Dog!” he hissed. “Does the whelp of a Cree think to cheat Great Bear by such ways? Peace, fox! Or, if you be not silent, your flesh shall feed the wolves this night!”

The chief gave the poor Indian a shake that, to a weaker creature, might have driven away his last breath.

“Mercy! Great Bear! Mercy!” shrieked Wahtah. “I am thy dog, thy slave!”

“Then see that you do our bidding as a dog to his master,” thundered the Sioux.

“Great Scott! what’s that?” exclaimed Jack suddenly. “See! straight ahead of us—in the trail!”

“The wapiti—the mad wapiti!” cried Wahtah, trembling with terror.

It was Great Bear’s turn to start now. He had heard of a great bull-moose that had taken to roaming the Whispering Woods, and seemed to delight in lying in wait for travellers in the dark, whom it attacked ferociously. Not having frequented these parts for some time, he had regarded these stories as women’s tales, and had quite forgotten the matter. But Wahtah had been more credulous. It was this monster that he had been dreading in the dark, and his eyes

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had been stirred by fear until they were keener than those of his guardians!

All then looked where the Indian indicated, and there, where a rise in the trail gave a background of sky, were plainly visible two lights, like eyes, surmounted by gigantic antlers. Only a moment was the head visible. Next moment it disappeared, and a roar like that of an angry lion echoed through the forest.

"Leave horses! The Woods!" cried Great Bear suddenly.

But the warning was hardly uttered before there came a rush like that of a hundred horsemen, a blood-curdling cry from Wahtah, and a terrible shriek from a horse. Next instant Jack felt himself jerked into the air, and then he fell crashing upon the shrubs at the side of the trail.

Geoffrey and Great Bear had dismounted in safety, and their horses were now racing in terror along the homeward trail. But something terrible was taking place where Jack had been tossed. It was impossible to see; but hoofs were trampling, a wild creature was bellowing, while an unfortunate animal was shrieking in pain.

Except for a few scratches and cuts, Jack was unhurt; for his broncho had received the impact, and the bushes had lessened the force of his fall. He quickly rose up, and unslung his gun from his back.

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Then a voice called out above the din of the conflict:

"Jack! where are you?"

"Here, Geoff. Are you all right?"

"Yes," answered the boy apprehensively through the darkness. "But you? What is happening on the trail?"

"It's my poor horse, I think," Jack replied. "The moose charged him and tossed me. I think he's going for poor Kitty. Where's Great Bear?"

"Here," answered the Indian, from the other side of the trail. "But Jack, stay! Do not come near wapiti!"

"Can you shoot him?" called Jack.

"No' shoot! No' shoot!" was the red man's excited answer. "Night dark. Burning arrows kill brother if you shoot. No' shoot—yet."

"All right," responded Hansard. "But he must be going now, for I hear nothing. Do you?"

"Shall I come to you?" called Geoff, who was on the same side of the bush as his chum.

"If you can; but be careful. Look out! He's coming this way!"

Jack had been cautiously creeping nearer to where the accident had occurred, in order to ascertain if the horse were still there. But the mad animal had paused now that its supposed enemy was slain, and, hearing the voices, it turned and charged in the direction

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from which its keen scent told it another foe lurked. That foe was Jack, who had given the warning cry. He turned and rushed blindly before him—stumbling, running again, rushing—all breathless—seeing nothing before him, hearing only the roar of the moose and the crackling of the wood as the animal crashed its way through the forest in pursuit.

Then the sound of a gun being fired was added to the other noises.

It was the Great Bear, who had exploded a cartridge in the air with the intention of either frightening the moose or distracting his attention. The latter intention was successful. The animal stopped. Surely it was mistaken? The enemy was behind, not in front.

So he turned once more and charged in the direction of Great Bear.

“Be careful!” called Jack, who had found the safety of a large tree in a small clearing, where he might have succeeded in dodging any bulky creature until there was an opportunity to use his gun with effect. “He is going back! Can you see him, Geoff?”

“I think so. But I am leeward and out of the scent. Say, Jack!”

“What!”

“Isn't this like fighting by telephone?” laughed Geoff, to whom the humorous side of affairs sometimes appealed irresistibly at even the most serious moments.

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Jack could not help laughing also at the remark, for certainly the calling through darkness, with one speaker unseen by the other, was well described as telephonic.

"You boulder!" he replied cheerfully, "there will be precious little power left to 'ring up' if that beast once gets his antlers against your ribs!"

"Be prepared, Scout Hansard!" chaffed Geoff.

At the same instant some person was evidently "prepared," for another cartridge exploded, followed by a roar from the bull.

"Got 'im! How's that for telephoning, Jack?" cried Beverley, whose high spirits had so much got the advantage of him that he was the calmest of the three, taking the whole like a game of hide-and-seek.

"Was that you who fired?" continued Jack.

"Right. I can see him in a clearing. He can't smell me."

"Good! Good!" rang out the voice of Great Bear, who had worked his way round to Geoff's side, and was delighted at the lad's prowess. "Here! Geoff take Indian's gun; fire bullet! You kill wapiti!"

"No, no!" exclaimed the boy generously. "You fire, Great Bear. You'll be more certain!"

"Hush!" replied the Indian, quietly exchanging weapons with the boy. "Great

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Bear kill black fox; Geoff kill mad wapiti!
You see wapiti's leg?"

"I can just see the shape of his body. He's got his head raised, sniffing the air."

"Then feel heart with mind, and shoot!" retorted the Indian.

Raising the gun to his shoulder, Geoff took careful aim. There was much of guess-work in it, but he took the chance and fired. Instantly the crack of the gun was answered by a deafening roar. The dark figure of the moose was seen to leap into the air and then fall crashing among the scrub.

"Good! Good!" cried Great Bear in delight.

"Middle stump first ball, Jack!" yelled Geoff in glee.

"Well done, old man!" echoed Jack, hurrying forward. "But say—there's a camp near! I can smell fire!"

Great Bear stopped on his way to the fallen moose, and he raised his head to sniff the air. Jack had found his companion by this time, and was panting with excitement.

"Can't you smell burning wood, chief?" he asked.

Again the Indian sniffed. Then he suddenly asked:

"Wahtah! Where is the Cree?"

"He has gone—done a bunk," replied Geoff. "It was his chance, and he has taken it."

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“Son of a dog!” the Indian ejaculated. “He ran away—coward!—run from wapiti. He light fire—forest burn!”

“The bush on fire!” exclaimed Jack, startled by the announcement.

“See!” was the chief’s answer, pointing through the trees to where, in the far distance, could be seen a fringe of light, growing wider and lighter each moment. “Bush burn; wind blow fire here. We must run like horses to Rushing Waters, or the flames kill us in their arms!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE

While the chums had been following the dark trail through the Whispering Woods with Great Bear and the Indian who was to guide the way to Petrie's camp, Dan Conyers had been lying in his tent wondering what the future had in store for him, and reviewing the strange and inexplicable events of the past.

The boy's life had certainly been something out of the common during the previous three years—indeed, it had been eventful as far back as he could remember. And as he lay in his blanket in the little tent that was lit by a broken stable-lamp, and reviewed some of these events, he was a very puzzled boy indeed.

He had been perfectly truthful when he assured Petrie on the previous evening that he knew nothing of his dead father's money. It had been an entire surprise to him to be told that his father had any possessions of value. He promised to convey a letter to one Bray, as we already know. It had not

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occurred to him to open the letter. But Petrie had had no such scruples. He not only opened the missive, but told Dan that the contents referred to certain valuables which an accompanying cipher (understandable by Bray) would discover, and which were to be disposed of in a manner which Bray was instructed to carry out. As we have already said, Petrie commandeered one paper in the hope of finding the key to the secret in the event of Dan becoming stubborn; the other was beyond his reach for the time. Fortunately, the boy had been able to secure the latter, and place it where it would be comparatively safe and not likely to be found by the cowboy. And now he was in the position of being imprisoned, with the prospect of being tortured to disclose a secret of which he was in total ignorance.

Then he began to rack his brains to advise possible means for escaping. But that chance seemed very remote, since he was continuously guarded by either Wahtah or Baptiste in turn. True, for some strange freak, Baptiste's manner to him had seemed quite different from the Cree's.

But then, was Baptiste really friendly or only acting a part in obedience to Joe?

That was a question that he feared to decide too quickly, for it seemed impossible that a semi-savage could be in the service of

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such a master and yet retain any of the instincts of humanity.

While Dan was thus ruminating he heard the faint sound of moccasined feet approaching, and he turned to see the object of his last thoughts lift the flap of the tent and enter.

"Well, Baptiste?" the boy said questioningly. "What is it? Another fad of Petrie's?"

The half-breed did not speak as he sat himself down beside the boy. Then he reclined on his elbow, and looked long into the English lad's face with a sort of sad smile.

In silent wonder Dan returned the look, and he felt his heart soften towards him, in whose eyes a really tender expression wonderfully replaced the usual wild light of reckless though often sly daring.

"Well, what is it? What's the matter?" he repeated, and without a motion the half-breed began to speak in soft tones that it was almost a strain to hear.

"The Red Hand gone find Wahtah, and Slick sleep in tent. Baptiste would speak in friendship."

"Fire away, then," replied Dan. Then he added bitterly: "Goodness knows I am in need of friendship at present. If my chance scout-work is not understood, I may not be long worth befriending."

Of course Baptiste did not understand much of what Dan said, but he waited patiently

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until the boy had finished speaking, after which he continued to impart the object of his mission.

“Joe Petrie say that you have friends on trail. I listened last night at tent door and heard him speak so.”

“Friends?” echoed Dan. “Then it was understood——”

“Hush!” interrupted the half-breed, as he laid a hand gently upon Dan’s mouth to choke further utterances of joy. “The forest have ears, and Slick might wake. Let us speak as the trees of these woods speak—whispering. We have much to say, so let Baptiste be chief to-night; to-morrow he be your slave.” Here the half-breed lowered his voice as he resumed in tones of sadness: “White brother, Baptiste not good. It is not easy for man to be good when blood of Indian mix with blood of white man. Baptiste do many bad things for the Red Hand. He fear the Red Hand, for Red Hand beat Baptiste, and—and once—he burn Baptiste on breast with hot iron! Yes, Baptiste bad; but he long to be free—to be good!”

“Well, that’s surely easy enough. No one need be bad if he does not want to. It’s easy enough.”

“Not when you are Red Hand’s slave,” was the dejected answer. “It easy when you have good friend.”

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“Well, that’s all right, Baptiste,” rejoined Dan kindly. “If it is only a friend you need to make you better, you can count on me.”

“But Joe——”

“There’s no need to be afraid of him. If I had only Joe Petrie to fight with, I’d soon make short work of this business. He’d never have laid hands on me in the first instance, and he’d never have got that chance to strike down poor White Fang. But at present I have four enemies.”

“Three, my white brother,” corrected the half-breed, with emphasis. “Baptiste would get free, and he would get Dan free too. Baptiste want friend, and he will make you that friend. See!”

To illustrate his assertion, Baptiste suddenly whipped out a sheath-knife, and severed Dan’s bonds with a few quick cuts.

“See! Baptiste free you from the Red Hand’s ropes, and then he give you this!”

A hand plunged into the bosom of his shirt, and then the half-breed produced a revolver and full cartridge-belt, both of which he pressed into Conyers’ hands.

“These from Petrie’s tent,” he explained. “You will keep them, and we will creep away through the forest to meet your friends.”

Dan was utterly overcome by this unexpected illustration of his new friend’s devotion. And it had come at the very moment of

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desperation—at a time when hope seemed to be almost hopeless.

“My brave Baptiste!” he exclaimed brokenly. “You will do this for me? You will betray Petrie to save me? How can I thank you?”

“You will be Baptiste’s friend. You will help him to be good,” was the simple answer.

“You are good, Baptiste; you are brave as well as good,” said Dan firmly, as he pressed the youth’s hand.

The half-breed bent his lips to touch the hands of his new friend.

“Baptiste will die for white brother! And Baptiste will kill Petrie before he let Red Hand touch Dan Conyers.”

“No, no, Baptiste,” said the English boy. “You must not think of killing people.”

But the half-breed shook his head stubbornly.

“Baptiste have own revolver, and he shoot straight. Petrie say you lie—that you know where gold is. Petrie say that he make you speak. That mean torture—Indian torture. But—but Baptiste have friend now. He will save that friend from the Red Hand.”

“Ho! Will he?” bellowed a furious voice from behind the speaker, and instantly the plotters started up and turned towards the tent door. And there, framed by the canvas, stood the ugly figure of the Red Hand, his

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yellow teeth bared, his face twisted with passion, and his head sunk low in its hollow. "You'll save your friend, will you?" he roared at Baptiste. "Have you forgotten the gad or the hot iron on your breast so quickly that you talk big of saving another's? Ugh! You filthy snake-in-the-grass!"

Baptiste was about to speak, when Joe turned upon Conyers.

"And you? Do not think you can sneak out of my power so easily?"

"I'd make a good try for it," retorted Dan, feeling comparatively calm with a good Colt's concealed behind his back.

His only dread was that Baptiste might cave in to the old master's terribly fearsome influence, and leave him to face two enemies instead of one who was a host to himself.

"And a fine try that'd be!" sneered Joe. "Why, by the time I've finished with you there won't be an inch of your body worth a buzzard's notice."

With an evil grin, Joe stepped forward to close upon the youth, but at the first step Baptiste whipped out his revolver and levelled it at the cowboy.

"Stand still, Red Hand! You no' touch my friend!"

Petrie stopped, and—to his credit be it said—he faced the revolver as a dog might face a biscuit.

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“Chuck it, you white-livered cayuse*!” he sneered. “You know that you ain’t got pluck to pull the trigger on me. Besides, even if you kill me, my ghost would come and tear your heart out while you were sleeping. You ain’t got the pluck to do it. Now, have you?”

It was evident that Baptiste had not at the moment. The fiendish power of the man seemed to be cowing the good intentions of the half-breed, and in another moment the arm that held the revolver would be lowered, and Petrie’s mallet fist would fell him to the ground. Clearly it was not the time to hesitate. Something must be done. Dan was reluctant to use his revolver if that resort could possibly be avoided. The arm was falling. Petrie’s fist was clenched to swing. But before the blow could be struck there was a sudden crash, a flare of light, and a howl. Dan had dived for a stone, and sent it crashing through the old oil-lamp and shattered the vessel to pieces.

In a moment grass and tent were in a flare.

Out of the blaze the three persons dashed, only intent now to save their skins.

The grass was dry, as was also the surrounding bush. A favouring breath of wind urged the flames to fight for the mastery. They leaped for the trees, and clutched to

* e.g. “broken-down nag.”

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the topmost branches like glowing serpents, and in almost less time than it takes to relate the circumstances, a bush-fire of the most terrible kind was fairly under way.

Petrie rushed to his tent to seize a few belongings, mount his mare, and flee for his life.

"Come, friend!" cried a voice at Dan's side, as a hand gripped his arm and dragged him into the wood at the opposite side to which the wind was blowing. "Petrie forgot us and save himself!"

"We'll stick together now," answered Conyers. "Go on. I'll follow your path."

And in single file the two refugees plunged into the bush.

CHAPTER XIV

HUNGRY FLAMES

There are few who do not realise all the horror that is implied in the compound word "bush-fire." It is the one thing that seems to strike terror into the heart of even the most hardened bushman; for it comes rushing with the exulting ferocity of a thousand fiends—screaming, writhing, leaping. "Kill! Kill! Destroy!" is its battle-cry, and it hurries forward in mad frenzy to take all within its death embrace.

But even when such dangers threaten, there is still the greater danger that is known as "losing one's head." Many a man has met a terrible death by frantic actions, and has often rushed into the arms of the foe when he might possibly have found sanctuary had he retained his reason.

Neither Jack nor his chum were the fellows to "run amuck" in danger, nor was Great Bear a man who could not meet calamity in the face without trembling muscles. The old Indian was as collected as though he

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were about to start on a hunting expedition, and each of the boys felt that he must not be outdone in pluck.

"Come!" said the chief, as soon as he had realised what the distant fire and smoke meant.

Pushing his way through the bushes, he hastened to the trail, where poor Kitty was lying, mutilated by the mad moose. Lighting a bunch of grass, he bent over the dead animal.

"Take lasso, blanket, tomahawk," the Indian said, at the same time holding the light so that these articles could be detached from the saddle of the mangled animal.

Jack felt a lump rising in his throat as he viewed the remains of what had been his pet. The sight was a ghastly one—too ghastly to bear even an attempted description. But he steeled his feelings while he obtained the two or three articles that might be of use.

"Better take the tin can as well," Geoffrey suggested. "We may need it for cooking or drinking purposes. I suppose there is no chance of the other horses being about?"

"We not wait," replied Great Bear. "Smoke come thick; we run for river. Horses run from smoke too."

"Come, then," Jack said, having untied the blanket, lasso, and axe, while Geoffrey had taken possession of the tin. "See, Geoff, you take the lasso and I'll carry the

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blanket. Great Bear, will you take the tomahawk?"

The Indian reached out his hand and grasped the axe, without which any traveller in the bush would be comparatively helpless.

By this time thick clouds of smoke were rolling through the forest, and the glow of the flames had reached enormous proportions, while the air—already heavy and warm—was perceptibly increasing in heat.

"By Jove! we'll need to move pretty quickly to get out of the way of that blaze!" Geoff remarked, as a wave of heat made him gasp.

A forest fire always generates its own wind until a hurricane seems to hurry it along.

"Well, there's nothing more to wait for. Poor old Kitty! It was rough luck that brought her on this expedition."

"Come! Come! Fire hungry!" interrupted the chief, with a slight show of impatience. "We burn if we not find Rushing Waters soon."

"All right. You lead the way and we'll follow," said Jack. "Where is it to be? Black Crossing?"

"No, no! It far—very far!" was the Indian's reply, as he turned quickly to the bush in a north-west direction. "We find water nearer. But no' talk! Run!"

The river known as Rushing Waters ran in an easterly direction at this part of the forest,

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and the fire was racing its way due east as well, hence the only hope of safety lay in the possibility of reaching the water at the nearest point, and making that a sanctuary. Although still a mile or two distant, the outlines of the flames were distinct through the trellis of a thousand trees, and the fire was beginning to cast its search-light where the fugitives ploughed their desperate way—stumbling over fallen logs, tearing a passage through twining plants and thorns that tore clothes and flesh. Now and again puffs of wind would bring a cloud of aromatic smoke, betokening the terrible destruction of pines and balsam. Then flocks of birds came screaming in terror-stricken flight, many hurling themselves against the very trees that, a few hours since, had been their play-time bowers. Hares and rabbits, too, seemed to have forgotten their underground refuges, while time and again antelope sprang through the bush, demented with fear, and heedless now of the proximity of their dreaded foe—man. And all the time the furnace pursued with steady strides, just as if it knew how hopeless was the flight of the many, how certain would be the overtaking of a multitude of victims.

Yet on, on, the boys plunged in the wake of the old chief, who neither slackened pace nor hurried beyond a certain rate that would demand no resting. The sweat was pouring from their bodies and their throats were parch-

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ing. Fortunately, the excitement rendered their flesh numb to the many wounds that the thorns inflicted.

At last the sound of the river reached their ears, and a fresher air came up to meet the stifling atmosphere through which they had passed. Next moment the water was visible at the foot of the slope before them.

Down they rushed, scattering crowds of forest creatures that had reached the limit of their race and were now running about distracted on the strand.

The boys ran quickly, but Great Bear, more used to the forest ways, was first, and before they had reached the edge of the water the Indian had found an old fir that had fallen into the water, being only prevented from yielding to the current—which was strong and deep—by a few tough cords of root that still clung to the river-bank.

“Quick! White boys break branches!” ordered Great Bear, in steady grim tones, while he plied the axe to the roots to free the trunk from the earth.

With all the strength of their muscles the lads jumped upon the tree, and commenced to tear away such branches as did not need the axe. But it was slow work, and the pursuing furnace could now be heard crackling and hissing at no great distance.

Then a dense cloud of smoke rolled over the side of the bank, almost choking and

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blinding the workers, and the fir bent before the strength of the current.

“Good!” exclaimed Jack. “She’s breaking! Chief, is it nearly free?”

Crash! crash! went the axe with steady blows, but no other answer did the Indian give.

“Thank goodness it’s dry and almost rotten!” said Geoff, still tugging away at the branches. “Most of the big ones have been broken by the river. She’ll float if we can free her in time. See, the fire has reached the top of the hill!”

“Had we not better jump for the water and chance swimming for safety, chief?” called Jack

Still no answer; only the steady blows of the axe.

“She’s bending, Jack——”

“Yes, but the fire! Oh, it’s scorching hot!”

“Wet blanket and cover heads!” cried the Indian, who was ready enough to hear and speak when there was need. Then he laughed loudly. “Huh! Fire say he catch Great Bear! But Indian cheat fire-spirit!” And the blows of the axe redoubled their speed.

Jack soaked his blanket in the river and covered his head and Geoff’s, for their eyes were smarting with the smoke, and their lungs were almost choking.

Next came a blast of wind. The flames

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leapt right down to the water's edge. At the same moment there was a crack like a blast of powder, and the boys felt the pine trunk give a roll and sway that pitched them into the water, though they still managed to retain their hold. Then the grand old Indian gave a yell of triumph and pushed with all his might.

“ Huh ! Fire lie ! He no' catch Great Bear ! ”

Another push, another laugh, and the pine trunk was launched upon the Rushing Waters with its burden of three, while the fire shrieked and hissed with rage at the barrier that it could not cross.

CHAPTER XV

THE "WOLF'S JAWS"

Though the first danger was passed, the wild experiences of that night were not yet over. The Rushing Waters was no placid mill-pond that could be navigated without anxiety by any ordinary craft such as Indians and trappers use for such voyages; and when the vehicle of transport was a log of wood not too well trimmed, it will be understood that the elements of danger were very apparent.

With the first break from the bank the pine was immediately swept out to the middle of the river. Here it was comparatively safe, for the water, though swift, was of considerable depth, enabling the travellers to have a breathing-space while they scrambled up and found a balance astride the log.

Fortunately the wind had turned a little to the south, so that while the south side of the river was a mass of flames and smoke, the air of the course was fairly pure. The water, however, was strewn with white ashes and forest wreckage. Sometimes a great tree

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would snap and fall into the river, and come bounding towards the voyagers with resinous branches ablaze like a fire-ship. Then it would take skilful manœuvring, with staves cut from the raft, to hedge off this danger when it joined the stream of *débris* and approached too near for the comfort of the refugees.

While the boys were not occupied in warding off intruders, they were kept active enough in retaining their balance, since the swiftness of the current tossed and rolled their craft as though it were among Atlantic breakers—a constant menace to their security.

Towards dawn a distant murmur was heard ahead, and, as the sun crept over the tops of the trees, that murmur gradually increased to a roar.

“Rapids! See!” said Great Bear briefly from his position “for’ard.”

The boys looked to where the Indian pointed, and in the far distance (though clearly, where the sun reached) could be seen innumerable white crests tossing to and fro like a rampant herd of white horses.

“Rapids?” repeated Jack seriously, as he realised that the danger ahead of them was no less fearsome in its way than that which they had left behind.

“By the sound, I should think there are falls as well,” suggested Geoff.

“The Wolf’s Jaws,” answered the Indian,

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without turning or removing his eyes from the white crests.

It was indeed the falls that had been so ominously named "Wolf's Jaws" by the trappers of old. Many a birch canoe with its human freight had been launched into that gaping maw never to reappear except as unrecognisable *débris* in the calmer stream beyond. Yes, it had been suitably called after the beast of prey that is always hungry and never kind.

Jack was seated immediately behind Great Bear, and he turned to his chum with face set in firm, determined lines.

"One of us *may* be saved, Geoff. But don't let that one forget Dan Conyers!"

Plucky chap! Even in the moment of extreme danger to himself, he still had room in his thoughts for the danger to his brother scout.

"I'll not forget. But somehow I don't feel particularly scared. Do you, Jack?"

"Not exactly 'scared,'" was the answer. "But it will take no ordinary luck to get us out of this scrape."

"'Be prepared,' my son!" quoted Geoff.

It was probable that had Geoff been Napoleon, he would have jested on a peak in St. Helena. It was not that he was indifferent to danger or unsympathetic. It was his peculiar way of bucking-up to face the odds.

'Be prepared! There's a mile yet to the

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falls, I guess. Anything may happen between whiles."

"Right, old chap. *Hold on!*"

The log gave a great lurch as it plunged straight upon one of the many rocks that studded the rapids into which the travellers had now entered.

"Stick tight for all you're worth!" Jack called above the noise of the waters that leaped around.

The tree swung round, struck another rock, swung again, and then plunged forward once more into the foam.

"A narrow shave that!" cried Geoff.

"Lucky this is not a canoe," answered Jack. "That charge would have splintered birch to matchwood."

"Rather like 'socket,' this sort of charging!" was the laughing comment.

"Look out! There's another rock ahead!"

But this time the old pine-tree played a dodging game, and swerved, to clear the opponent by a hair's-breadth as it swung in a cross-current towards the north bank of the river.

"Off side!" yelled Beverley.

But the log paid no heed to the umpire's call, and careered forward on its new tack.

Suddenly the river became calmer, though it was none the less smooth. The boys strained their eyes ahead. The water was yet travelling at racehorse speed. They could see a

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few jagged teeth of rocks across their path, and then, a few hundred yards in front—the river suddenly ended! It was the falls. The roar might have told them that, even had their sight been less keen.

And all the time Great Bear sat crouched in front, ready to meet his fate without a wince, like a brave warrior.

The current had now borne the pine to within some twenty or thirty yards of the north bank—an easy swim if it had been possible for any human limbs to fight against the Rushing Waters at this point.

That thought flashed through Geoff's mind as a possible salvation, but a glance at the powerful current banished this idea as hopeless.

Then he glanced at Jack in astonishment, for that boy had risen to his feet and was balancing himself with difficulty.

Geoff's first thought was that his chum was going to attempt the very desperate alternative that he had rejected as the worse of two evils.

"Don't do it! You can't swim against the current!" he cried, starting up to forcibly restrain his friend.

But Jack was calm and grimly steady.

"Keep still! Don't shake the log whatever you do, or our last chance is lost!" he called back.

Then Geoff saw that his chum was shaking

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out the noose of the raw-hide lariat that he had taken from the saddle of poor Kitty.

"Great Bear!" he called, as he swung the tying end towards the Indian. "Make that fast—tie it, and then—hold on for all you are worth!"

With ready obedience the Indian caught the end and fastened it securely to a strong arm of root.

The tree was still racing onwards, but it floated in the smoother water as level as a liner on a pond. Rocks were cleared in safety, but the roar of the cataract was nearer and the "end" of the river more plain to see.

The craft and its crew were now approaching a rock that stood up like a miniature spire midway between their course and the river-bank. It was this that Jack had seen ahead; this that had determined him as to his present actions.

Swifter and swifter became the race; louder and louder the roar.

The rock was almost level with the log.

Suddenly Jack stiffened his body. He held the coil of raw-hide in his left hand and the great loop of the lasso in his other. With calm deliberation he waited the favourable opportunity, then raised his right arm and swung the loop round his head. Once, twice, three times it revolved, until it stood open like a hoop. Next moment it darted from

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the swinger's hand towards the jutting rock, and at the same instant Jack threw himself upon the log.

"Hold tight, for goodness' sake, and be ready to jump!" he yelled.

The words were barely uttered before the tree gave a sudden shake, and reared one end in the air, entirely submerging Geoff at the stern of the craft. An instant later it was level again, and was swinging in a swift semi-circle towards the river-bank; for the aim had been true, the tough lariat had been worthy of trust, and the force of the current swung the log as on a pivot.

"Jump!" cried Jack suddenly, and at the word all three leaped for the fringe of overhanging willows. It was not a moment too soon; for, as each dragged himself up the river-bank, the log lost the impetus that had swung it within reach of safety. It drifted back to the middle of the rushing stream, then plunged over the brim of the cataract, cracking the strained lariat with the wailing twang of some giant violin-string.

The struggle being over, the strength that had been forced to the front to buoy up the fighters so long now yielded to the strain that had been put upon it, and the three sank upon the ground in attitudes of utter exhaustion.

Not a word did either speak. They just

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lay helpless—awed by the experiences they had gone through, hardly able to realise that they had looked upon the Wolf's Jaws and yet escaped the hungry gape.

True, they were now many miles from Black Crossing, and it would be a weary trudge through the forest before they could reach a known habitation. But it was fortunate that they still possessed "shooting-irons," so they would not be dependent on the mere fruits of the earth; and Beverley—with the strange unreasoning that is sometimes predominant at such times—had clung to the small cooking-tin as though it was his most cherished possession! But horses were gone, the last blanket had been necessarily left to share the fate of the pine log, and other requisites for camping purposes would have to be done without. Their very clothes were, so to speak, in rags. But what did it all matter now? They were safe! Neither fire nor water had achieved its purpose. They were safe, and that one joy had enough light to dazzle their eyes to any qualifications.

And so the three adventurers lay stretched out upon the bank of the Rushing Waters with their eyes closed in dreamy luxury of rest.

An hour or more sped by with the seeming fleetness of a minute.

Suddenly Jack sat up and stared with wide-open eyes at the river.

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"Geoff! Geoff! Did you not hear something?"

Slowly the other boy raised himself upon his elbow, and Great Bear moved his limbs to stand upright.

"I thought I heard a breakfast-bell and smelt eggs and bacon," Geoffrey remarked with a smile. "It was a grand dream—almost as good as the real thing. You wakened me just as I was raising the fork to my mouth."

"Sorry, old man," returned Jack. "But I'm certain I heard a voice crying out above the roar of the cataract. Hark! There it is again! Don't you hear it?"

Geoffrey was thoroughly awake and alert by now.

"Yes, I did. There's someone in the river—someone in our late plight. . . . That's it again!"

"Look!" exclaimed Great Bear, pointing towards the middle of the current.

And there—right in the centre of the Rushing Waters—was plainly visible the figure of a man, with head and shoulders above water, clinging to a spar of wood, while he was hurried straight for the Wolf's Jaws. He was screaming frantically, as though the very noise would save him. But his fate was inevitable. Nothing could save him now. No power on earth could reach him, and the watchers could only stand dumb with horror

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as they saw the poor victim being hastened to his fate.

Nearing the bank of the falls, the man became frantic with terror. He screamed terribly—cry after cry—and threw up his arms.

“Wahtah, the Cree!” said Great Bear.

“*Wahtah!*” echoed both the boys at the same time.

“Yes. Manito has called him. He will spy no more for the Red Hand. May the Great Spirit smile upon him in the Happy Hunting-land!” the chief answered solemnly.

And next instant, with a blood-curdling shriek, poor Wahtah was hurled over the brink of the cataract.

It was never known how the poor Indian came to such a terrible fate. Probably he had been caught in the bush-fire as his friends were, and, like them, had been forced to risk a sanctuary in the Rushing Waters. But none can tell the purpose of the Great Spirit. Wahtah's work on earth was finished, so he was called away, while the young scout and his companions were saved. There was yet more work for them to do.

CHAPTER XVI

CAMP COOKERY

Hansard and his chum turned away from the falls rather saddened in spirit.

“Poor beggar! It was a terrible end. And I suppose Joe Petrie is really the one who is to be blamed. If he had not sent the fellow spying on us, very likely he would not have been caught in the fire. He is a regular pirate—doesn't care whose life he sacrifices if he rob successfully.”

That was Jack's opinion, with which Geoff quite coincided.

“It's always the tool who has to suffer, it seems to me. A chap like Petrie is 'cute enough to keep his own skin safe. He gives other people the dirty jobs to do.”

“He'll come a cropper himself yet,” returned Jack prophetically. “A fellow of that sort can't go on forever. I wonder if it was he who set the forest on fire?”

“He?” questioned Geoff, in surprise at his chum's sudden conclusion.

“Yes. It came from the Black Crossing

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direction, I understand, from the course we were taking. Great Bear!"

The chief turned. Since the disappearance of Wahtah, the old Sioux had been standing with folded arms, looking at the falls in silent contemplation; but when addressed he turned to his interrogator in his stately manner.

"My white brother speaks?" he asked quickly.

"Yes. We were wondering in what place the fire started. Have you any idea?"

"Near the camping-ground they call Black Crossing."

"Ah! So probably I am right, and our first idea, that Wahtah lit the bush, was wrong."

Great Bear smiled a sort of courteous request for indulgence.

"The ears of the red man were deaf when his brother spoke, for his mind was far away. He was living in the days of buffalo and war—when this forest sang with the singing arrows; when the bear, the antelope, the lynx found their tents among the bushes. He was seeing the long line of warrior Blackfeet creeping upon the sleeping Sioux, and he heard the war-cry as they sprang upon their enemies. But the Sioux, they slept as foxes sleep—with open eyes. They sprang to meet the Blackfeet with laughing faces and jeering words. The arrows fly, tomahawk flash, and scalping-knife reap locks for the warrior's

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legging-fringe. And Blackfeet run—Sioux press them down, down—right into Rushing Waters; and Wolf Jaws, he open wide and swallow braves and warriors. Ah! Wolf Jaws have war-feast that day!” And the chief’s eyes flashed with the excited memory, while his actions unconsciously imitated the firing and scalping as he re-lived a scene of bygone days. “The Sioux were men before Chief Fire-water came to make them weak as women!”

“Was it the fire-water that made the Indians what they are now?” questioned Geoffrey, interested in spite of the hunger that was beginning to manifest itself in distinct calls for breakfast.

Great Bear’s face clouded, as he continued:

“Here it was the Sioux reaped a thousand Blackfeet scalps; here—in their own hunting-ground—the great Sioux nation fell by treachery. Blackfeet cunning, Blackfeet brave; but they fought not always with weapons of warriors. They have much furs and skins. They seek white man trapper, and say: ‘Give Sioux much fire-water, and the Blackfeet give trappers fur of a year’s hunting!’ Then white men bring fire-water, and the Sioux braves bid them welcome to their tents, and give presents. Then they drink the white man’s gifts, and laugh and dance bear-dance, and wolf-dance, and medicine-dance, till they fall to the ground and

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sleep. Then night spread great black wings over camp. The white men creep away, and say to Blackfeet: 'Sioux sleep. Chief Fire-water has laid hands on them.' And the Blackfeet put on war-paint, and spring upon Sioux tents like leaves driven by the north wind, and—when great Sun lift his head to waken forest, the Sioux nation was—nation—no—more."

The old chief's head sank to his breast as the last terrible words were spoken in a low, deep, solemn tone. In that attitude he stood for some moments, watched in pitying silence by the boys—the pathetic picture of the last leader of a once great people, now crushed and dispersed over the face of the prairie as a few wandering bands. After a time the Indian slowly straightened himself again, and looked upon the boys with the old pride of a man who was still brave with royal blood.

"Manito know best for red man and white," he said solemnly. "The Sioux were wrong to welcome fire-water as a guest to their tents. It was right that they should fall before the arrows of the Blackfeet."

"All the same, it was a rotten trick to play," responded Geoffrey stoutly. "It was the sort of thing Petrie might have done, and perhaps I was not far wrong in thinking that Petrie might have fired the forest last night to cut off our pursuit. It started near Black Crossing, you say?"

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"Fire born there," said the chief. "But we know not whose hand start the flames. We not say what warrior kill till we see blood on his hands. Till then—we know not."

The reproof was gently given, and we, who are aware of all the circumstances, knew that it was merited. Petrie may have been morally responsible, but we know that the prairie pirate did not purposely do that dastardly deed, at least, and Jack was ready to grasp the red man's generous suggestion.

"Right, chief," he said. "We have an English saying that every man is innocent until we prove him guilty. Perhaps Petrie had nothing to do with the fire, so we'll not accuse him of it. Now, what's the next thing for us? We can't stand yarning here all day, for we have got to get on Conyers' track again as soon as possible. What do you propose?"

"Grub!" interjected Geoff, with all his heart. "I'm starving, and if we don't get something grubable soon I'll—I'll eat my top-boots!"

"Tough tack, my son," responded Jack, with a laugh. "But the suggestion is good. I vote we set to work at once—not eating boots, of course, but scouting for breakfast."

"Quite in my line," Geoff agreed. "I can see a green spot a little to the left. It looks like a spring. Suppose you start a fire, Great Bear, while my chum and I take the guns into the wood?"

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With work to do—and perhaps also a hunger that his pride had kept him from pressing into much notice before—the chief was all energy.

“Huh! Good!” he said. “White brothers go shoot; Indian light fire.”

“Have you matches?” Jack questioned.

“Matches!” repeated the red man, with a smile and curl of the lips, expressing contempt at being dependent on such small matters. “There is wood—plenty wood,” he said, waving an arm to include the whole forest. “Great Bear make fire!”

“Oh, I see—Indian fashion: one piece rubbed against the other?” said the other boy, not wishing to show that he was less ignorant of fire-making methods than an Indian. “I’ve tried it myself at scout-camping, Geoff. But I made more blisters on my hands than sparks on the wood.”

The chief smiled with an air of superiority.

“My white brothers will shoot. There will be a big fire when they return with food.”

“Right-o! A saving of precious matches. Come along, Jack! We’ll see which will be first: the grub or the fire to cook it.”

As it was the season when berries were ripe and seeds plentiful, it was not long before the guns began to speak, and four fat prairie chickens fell before the young nimrods. Then they hastened the return to the spring, in the hope of stealing a march on the Indian

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before he was prepared for their share of breakfast preparations.

But the chief was sitting contentedly on a carpet of green grass, feeding a blaze with billets of wood.

“Done again!” exclaimed Geoffrey merrily. “But never mind; we got enough grub to satisfy the empty feelings, so we’ll swallow our defeat as well!”

“I’m going to do the cooking,” announced Hansard, as he took out his sheath-knife and led the way down to the river. “You bring the birds, Geoff, and I’ll show you a wrinkle of woodcraft that is worth knowing.”

Taking one of the chickens, Jack immediately proceeded to pluck out the larger wing and tail feathers, after doing which he slashed open the bird and removed the inside.

“Aren’t you going to pluck the whole bird? I thought that was always the first thing they do,” remarked Beverley.

“If you had never been a boy scout in camp, it might be the only thing to do. Otherwise it’s tedious, and not altogether the best way of cooking.”

As he spoke, Jack was washing the cavity of the bird in the running water, and next moment he was plastering the whole body—feathers and all—with a thick paste of clay mud.

“Now the next one!” he requested, and soon he had three in the same condition.

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Geoff's face began to fall

"I'm hungry enough to eat pretty nearly anything, but I guess a roast before the fire would be better than a mummy in clay."

"Wait and see," replied Jack "You'll smack your lips over my cooking yet."

The boys returned to the camp, where Great Bear was sitting patiently smoking. He greeted the boys with a smile of approval, indicating perfect familiarity with that particular branch of culinary art. The mummies were then placed where the glow was thickest, and heaped over with red-hot ashes. Desultory conversation followed for some time until a hiss, followed by a jet of steam, came from the fire, and the Indian pointed to the 'oven' with his pipe.

"It is time to eat!" was all he said.

With a couple of long sticks Jack fished the birds from the fire and laid one on the grass before each of the campers. Geoff stared in doubt at the great burnt cinder that was his share. But Great Bear did not wait for permission to eat. He took out his knife and gave the lump of clay a sharp blow. Immediately it fell aside in two halves, taking feathers and skins with them, and displaying something hot and steaming that set up such a delicious odour that Geoffrey's ravenous appetite was increased three-fold.

"Lummie!" was all he said, and, without further waiting, he gave his breakfast a furious

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blow that threatened to break the whole thing into fragments.

"What do you think of it, Euclid?" asked Jack with amusement, as he saw his chum's attack upon the savoury flesh.

"Scrumptious!" was all the boy had time to reply, for his knife and jaws were working at a high speed.

After that, nothing was heard for some time but the sounds of a hasty meal in progress. With keen appetites the usual accompaniments to breakfast were not missed. Even the lack of bread was barely noticed. As for plates, silver, and condiments, these luxuries were not thought of.

A good drink from the handy spring completed the repast, and all three leant back on the bank and sighed contentedly.

"I never had such a good tuck-in in my life," announced Geoffrey, with utmost satisfaction.

"I never had one that I enjoyed so much," Jack added guardedly. "How do you feel, Great Bear?"

"Like a Wolf's Jaw with a thousand Blackfeet," replied the Indian grimly.

Breakfast had dispelled gloomy thoughts, so that he was able to joke about what, a short time since, had led to melancholy reflections.

The boys laughed at the speech, but they thoroughly appreciated the force of the simile.

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After some time had passed in rest, the question next arose as to what their future actions should be.

“We’ve got to find Conyers,” was Jack’s reiterated opinion, as soon as the question was raised.

“But we’ve got no horses,” Geoff answered; and his chum replied at once:

“We’ve got feet, and much better they are, too, for this forest work.”

“Perhaps, if we need them, we’ll be able to pick up three bronchoes at some ranch.”

“Perhaps. In the mean time, Shanks’ mare is more service to us. We’ve got to make our way through the forest towards Black Crossing, and then try to pick up the track that we’ve lost. It would take us as long to get back to our ranch, and then Petrie and his gang would be just that distance more ahead of us.”

“That’s true,” said Geoff, in ready agreement with his friend’s ideas, as usual. “After all, that is what we set out for——”

“To help Conyers?”

“Yes. And now it’s ‘in for a penny, in for a pound.’”

“Right, old man!” assented Jack. “And it’s my firm intention to get that ‘pound’ before I’m many days older. Say, chief! How far would you reckon it is from here to Black Crossing?”

“Two suns, if path good; three, if forest be

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not glad to let us pass," replied the Indian

"That means about fifty miles, I should imagine, Geoff. We ought to cover that distance in a couple of days if, as Great Bear says, the scrub is not too thick to oppose us."

"In that case, the sooner we start away the sooner we shall reach Black Crossing."

And in a short time the three travellers had picked up their few belongings, stamped out the camp-fire, and started on their way through the forest, that was gloomy in many places even though the sun stood high in the heavens.

CHAPTER XVII

SEALING A FRIENDSHIP

While the three voyagers are pursuing their way on the first few miles of their journey, let us revert a space to follow the fortunes of those we left at the first starting of the fire at the Red Hand's camp.

For them it was no great difficulty to avoid the furnace, for the wind that set it travelling was blowing to the east. The only caution for safety was to keep on the windward side. A forest or prairie fire does not burn readily against the wind. That which does spread in this way is easily kept under control if need be. In any case it is never a source of danger to life.

When first the accident with the lamp had taken place Baptiste had kept his head. It was not from the fire that he had rushed with Dan; it was from the toils of Petrie. The opportunity was one that could not be missed. It must be made the most of. He knew that Petrie—old bushman that he was—would soon realise the position once the first effects of the scare were over. Then there would be

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pursuit by him and Slick—ruthless pursuit, in which rifle-bullets might play their part if the difficulty of catching the fugitives was otherwise increased. So he determined to make as much space as possible between himself and Petrie, and, with himself, of course Conyers was included.

It was strange this sudden affection that had sprung up in the half-breed's heart for the English boy. Such unexpected revulsions from one person and attractions to another are not uncommon, however, where the circumstances attending, or leading up to, that change of feeling are similar to those that surrounded Baptiste. Perhaps it was just another example of the proverbial worm that turned, and that hatred for the one man inspired staunch friendship for the other, primarily out of the pig-headed ambition to thwart the plans of his enemy. There was no doubt, also, that the half-breed had been touched by Dan's sympathy. It had been as gall to Baptiste when commanded to exhibit the evidence of the means that had been brought to bear to bind him in slavery. Bad enough it had been to suffer the torture itself. In a way it was worse to be made a show of—to have his shame exposed in that brutal way.

Of course there was always the danger that, face to face with Petrie, he would again yield to the serfdom of the past. There was some-

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thing so inhuman in that man's nature and ways, and also something so evil and fiendish in his appearance, that he was regarded by most natives with a sort of superstitious awe that cowed them and bent their wills to his. Joe was well aware of this fear that he inspired, and he revelled in the fact, as he also rejoiced in the figure that aided this terrorising influence so successfully. His enemies could plot behind his back and be brave in his absence, but in his presence they were docile as children—just like clay in the moulder's hand—and he shaped them to suit his pleasure.

Therefore in many ways we must not blame Baptiste too hardly for the evil that he had done in the service of his evil master. We must look to the future, and see how well he will be able to redeem himself for the past.

It was some satisfaction to both Dan and Baptiste to feel that they were armed. That would afford them protection, perhaps, if they were again nearing such straits as those from which they had just emerged; and, as they plunged through the darkness of the forest, each felt a certain degree of pleasure at the freedom, even though they knew that their difficulties were far from being at an end.

For about an hour they forced the march, the half-breed leading and Dan following closely behind.

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At last Baptiste stopped and found rest upon a fallen tree.

"The forest burns, but it comes not to us," he remarked, as he looked in the direction of the blaze that was plainly discernible through the trees.

"It seems to have grown very large," said Dan. "Do you think it will do much harm?"

"Miles—hundreds miles burn, burn. Fire no' stop till Deer Loop. That is where Rushing Waters turn back in many miles. There fire stop."

"I hope my friends will not be caught," remarked Conyers. Then he added with a shudder: "Ugh! What a horrible end it would be to be trapped in a bush-fire."

"There are things worse—things that linger, and are slow, and nearly kill, but not quite," muttered Baptiste under his breath, and Conyers knew that the half-breed was speaking of the memory of the torture inflicted on his scarred body.

Dan put out his hand in the darkness, and felt around until he could touch the half-breed's figure.

"Don't think of those things now, Baptiste," he said kindly. "That is all over, and, whatever happens, we'll stick together, won't we?"

"We are friends. Friends die for friends,' was the assurance. "But the evil eye of the Red Hand——"

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“Will not trouble you any more. Do you really believe that any person can have an eye that works evil when it looks upon anyone?”

Baptiste shuddered at the thought.

“Red Hand looks, and all obey him.”

“Bah! It would take a lot of ‘looking’ from that ugly hunchback to make me obey him!” retorted Dan. “He looked at me in the tent, and looked pretty wildly too. But all his squinting stare wasn’t going to make me change my mind.”

“You are a white man.”

“Leave out the ‘white.’ The colour of the skin doesn’t make a scrap of difference. You’ve seen a snake creep upon a bird, haven’t you?”

“Many times. And bird sit still and scream. But it move not even when serpent have it by teeth.”

“Well, that’s terror—fear,” said Conyers. “There is no evil eye in the snake. The bird is frightened, and is not able to move. Just the same with Red Hand. You know the horrible things he has done, and the horrible things he may do again. That makes you frightened. But as for an evil eye, chuck that out of your mind, Baptiste. And remember this: no person can force you to do wrong, if you don’t want to.”

“No man shall!” exclaimed Baptiste fervently, being carried to conviction point

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by the reliance with which Conyers spoke. "Though Petrie burn flesh from bones next time, Baptiste will be brave."

"I know he will," added Conyers. Then changing the subject: "What shall our next move be? You see, I rely upon you in this difficulty. You know more of bush ways than I do."

The half-breed was thoughtful for some time before he spoke.

"The Red Hand can follow trail in bush as footmarks on sand. To-night is dark. He cannot follow tracks till sunrise. We will go to Black Crossing, then creep through woods on other side to police——"

"But Petrie will find our tracks on the other bank, will he not?"

The question was a natural one, but Baptiste gave a chuckle of amusement.

"Petrie is strong, but Petrie is not master now. I will wait for to meet him in bush if he follow, and you will go on to place I tell you of. If the Red Hand find track, I will shoot; if he comes not, I will follow my friend quickly."

Conyers listened to the proposal, but immediately rejected it. He would not let another sacrifice himself in his place. Moreover, he feared that the evils of Petrie might prove too much for the simple half-breed.

"No, no!" he said. "I know a better way than that—and that will make Joe wait and

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think for a time. It's a bush trick that I learned in England."

"In England?" questioned the half-breed in astonishment. "White men ever tell me there is no bush in England—only houses, miles and miles of stone."

"So there is, but there is a sort of bush as well. And there is a sort of tribe of boys there that they call Boy Scouts, and they practice many bush ways that are very useful. This that I will show you is one of the things that they learn. I was a boy scout once, Baptiste, but I left very suddenly one night. I shall tell you about it one day."

"Then the Boy Scouts, if a tribe like Indians, they are brothers," commented the half-breed, with interest. "They would fight for each other and help each other."

"They would. You remember my burning pictures in that tree that Pierre laughed at—where our camp was two nights ago?"

"I remember—the big poplar."

"Yes. Well, to you it looked like nothing; to any one who was not of the scout tribe it looked like nothing. But if a scout saw it, he would read a call for help, and come at once to assist me against Petrie."

"And he *is* coming!" exclaimed Baptiste excitedly. "You know Red Hand say that friends follow. He said so. And I hear him say that he saw them at camp—near tree

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How they know to follow if they read not picture writing?"

For once the brain of Baptiste was actively clear to reason beyond ordinary woodcraft, and Conyers was not slow to follow that reasoning to the almost certain conclusion that his shot in the dark had found its mark.

"Upon my word, Baptiste, I believe you are right!" he exclaimed. "How else could these people have found out, if not by reading the scouts signs? I have no friends but a few near Last Mountain, and they know nothing of my journey. The only person, other than Petrie and his outfit, who knew where I was going and the difficulties I met, was White Fang."

"And he tell no one—now," said Baptiste softly.

"Poor White Fang! He was faithful to me and to my father. And his dog too—he was trusty. That is another reason why we must reach Last Mountain as soon as possible, Baptiste. I have an idea that Tracker (that's the dog, you know) will turn for home now his master is dead. That dog must be found."

The half-breed gave a slight sound expressing lack of interest in that part of the future proceedings.

"Tracker common Injun dog. He not worth dollars."

"He may be worth thousands of dollars!"

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retorted Dan with energy. "I can't explain to you why, Baptiste. But this I can tell you: if Tracker isn't found, all our troubles have been for nothing."

It was a mystery to Baptiste, but he yielded the point.

"The prairie shall give him up to your hands again, though it seems little to risk life for."

"Not 'little' when you understand," answered the boy, as he rose up. "However, I guess we'd better be pushing on and making the most of the night. It can't be very far to the Black Crossing, for our camp was quite near to it."

"Not far, but we must go crooked path. Red Hand have eyes like night-hawk and ears like coyote."

"We've got to chance that. Come on. You lead the way by the shortest path without striking the main trail."

Refreshed by their rest, and stronger in friendship with their talk, the two new comrades resumed the march. Baptiste was a perfect child of the forest. He could push his way through the densest scrub, without cracking a twig or disturbing a leaf, with no more sound than a fox might occasionally make while stalking his prey. Conyers was not such an expert. Moreover, the top-boots he wore were not so well adapted to the silent tread as the moccasins of the half-breed. Still, he

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had been long enough in the West to have learned considerable of the elements of this branch of scouting, and the result received several expressions of approval from Baptiste.

In time they came within sound of the Rushing Waters, as they hurried over the pebbly reach known as the Black Crossing, so named because of the slaughter by Indians of an emigrant caravan in the pioneer days. It was the only safe ford in an otherwise treacherous river for many miles, and at certain seasons of the year was utterly impassable owing to floods, thus lengthening the road to Last Mountain by some eighty miles or more.

The banks of the river at this point were precipitous, and necessitated taking the main trail for the last hundred yards or so, in order to reach the level before the crossing. This the travellers managed to accomplish without difficulty, and they were just emerging from the bush that bordered the path on either side when Baptiste started back and caught Dan by the arm.

“What is it? What do you see?” questioned the boy in a whisper.

“Hush! See! By Black Crossing—Petrie and Slick!” came the answer, jerked out in tones of barely suppressed excitement.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAPPER TRAPPED

Cautiously Dan crept to the margin of the bush by Baptiste's side and peered out, and there, right by the edge of the water, and not fifteen yards away, were the black outlines of the two horsemen.

Even in the darkness it was impossible to mistake the great huddled figure of the Red Hand and the gracefully moulded limbs of his broncho. The other man was not so plainly recognisable; but the watchers were not long held in doubt, for the riders were unguarded in their voices, never doubting but what they were entirely alone and unobserved.

"Look here, Slick," Petrie was saying, in his usual overbearing tone, "it's no derved use your jawing. I know what I'm talking about, and you don't. I tell you, I've been over every inch of this trail here on my knees, and do you think I'm such a blamed idiot that I couldn't spot a track in the mud?"

"I don't say that, boss——" began the

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other man, when Joe interrupted with a snarl.

"Seems to me you don't know very well what you do say—or what you mean, for that matter! I tell you the skunks ain't crossed this way. They're gone west through the bush, and I know a game worth two of that."

"Well, I guess you're going to have your own way, boss."

"I do, and don't you make any mistake about that!" snapped Joe. "That Conyers reckons he's given me the slip."

"And he's done it," added Slick, with a certain evidence of pleasure at the thought of his master having been "done" by a boy.

But Petrie was not easily disheartened.

"For a time he's got the best of me; but it's only for a time. You can bet your life on that, Slick. I've got a score to settle with him for burning up my camp—and it'll be a score that'll take a long time to settle. 'Injun ways' is my motto for dealing with skunks, and it's 'Injun ways' my score will be straightened with Dan Conyers. Now, what you've got to do is just to stay right here. They're bound to make for the crossing sooner or later; and if you let them slip through your fingers, Slick, I'll not rest till I've ripped every inch of skin from your living carcase. D'yer hear?"

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"I hear, boss," replied the half-breed sullenly. "They'll not pass me—if they come this road."

"And they will come! I'll make them!" returned Joe.

"Make them?"

"Of course. Didn't I say that I knew a game worth two of theirs?"

"Yes, I reckon, boss."

"Well, I'm going to carry it out. See? I know a short trail through the forest that'll get me and my mare ahead of them in no time. They'll have stuck to the bush, heading right west, for they won't dare to take a known road. Well, when I'm ahead of them I'll fire the bush, Slick. That's what I'll do, fire the bush and jam them between two blazes—the one they set and the one I'll set. I reckon that'll drive them back to Black Crossing right enough, and then your work begins."

"What about you?" asked the half-breed at the disclosure of this plot.

"Don't you worry about me," was the answer. "I guess, if you play your cards right, you can cover one coon with your rifle while you make him tie up the other. Then you can take them across the ford; I'll follow later. It's rank easy."

"Easy enough," replied Slick, who, to tell the truth, was in no way delighted at being left alone at such a time. Indians and half-

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breeds are nothing if not superstitious, and this man dreaded what ghouls might not come to him out of the darkness. "It's easy enough, but—but they've got shooting-irons, haven't they?"

"So have you," retorted Joe. "And one who's watching is fit for two innocents any day. Tie your broncho out of sight in the bush; then hide yourself, and wait."

"And if they don't come?"

"I tell you they *will* come, you white-livered half-caste!" roared Petrie with anger. "You don't think they're going to stay and be roasted, do you?"

"I ain't white-livered!" retorted Slick, being goaded to lack of control by Joe's taunt. "And I ain't half-caste more than you."

"What do you mean?" demanded the Red Hand, at the same time edging his horse nearer to that of his companion. "Ain't a half-caste, ain't you?"

Slick felt that he had gone a little too far, and he answered less courageously:

"Well, there's Injun blood in you same as in me."

But the words were hardly spoken before the thick end of Joe's raw-hide whip met with a dull thud upon Slick's head, and he rolled from his saddle to the ground.

"Take that, you half-caste! Do you hear me, half-caste!" Petrie roared in passion.

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"Come on? Speak! Do you hear me? Speak, or I'll get off my broncho and larn you. Do you hear me?"

"I—hear," came a faint murmur from the ground.

"Then get up, half-caste!" ordered Joe, repeating the hated name as though the very sound gave him pleasure, since it gave another pain. "Get up, and catch that mare of yours. And think twice before you try monkey-words with me. Get up!"

Dazed with the blow and the fall, yet not too bewildered to understand and fear Joe's threat, Slick staggered to his feet and shuffled forward to catch his horse, that had started a little to the side as its master tumbled.

"I'm up, right enough, boss," he muttered, thoroughly cowed. "Yes, go off and—and I'll do—as you said—here."

"That's better," was the retort. "Mules that kick against me get their legs broken. And don't you forget it, Slick."

Then the rider wheeled his broncho, and started off on his evil quest.

With excited interest Dan and Baptiste had listened to the foregoing conversation, and the hand of the former had darted to the butt of his revolver when the brutal blow had tumbled the lieutenant in the dust. But second thoughts are best on such occasions. Nothing less than shooting would have conquered Petrie in his mood, and Dan had no

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desire to soil his hands with human blood. Only the direst extremity for self-defence merits such a measure, and while there remained the possibility of outwitting the enemy by guile, second thoughts told Conyers that such must be his actions.

But, as Joe rode away, they could hear Slick cursing the man in terms that boded no good for his master should the positions ever be reversed and the Red Hand fall into the half-breed's power.

Then they waited to consider what steps should be taken next. Baptiste and Slick were no great friends. One thing was therefore certain in the former's mind: Slick would have no compunctions about withholding a bullet such as had restrained Dan's hand.

"We must cross that ford before Petrie fires the bush," Conyers whispered.

"Slick see straight and shoot quick," was Baptiste's significant reply.

"Is there no possible way of reaching that crossing except by that path?" Dan questioned. It began to seem that a fight would be inevitable after all, for the half-breed's answer suggested no alternative.

Meantime Slick had tied his horse to a tree in the shelter of the pass. Then he unslung a repeating rifle, examined it carefully, and afterwards strolled across the trail to the very side where the watchers were in close proximity. Through the darkness they could

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just observe him stop, turn his head this way and that to listen for any distant sounds, and then bend down to hearken to the ground. In this latter position he crouched for some moments. Then he rose up again, evidently satisfied that he was not to be troubled with visitors for some time.

In his excitement at watching Slick's actions, Dan moved slightly. To the ordinary ear, such a movement would have been almost imperceptible, but to the half-breed—long accustomed to mentally discern the cause of each whisper of the bush and differentiate between the breath of man and that of beasts—to such as he, the faint springing of a twig told a whole story.

He started, turned to the direction of the hidens, and gripped his rifle.

"Who is it? Speak! I shoot you quick!" he called out.

Baptiste was as motionless as a statue, and Dan strained his muscles also to stiffness, though his heart thumped so loudly with excitement that he thought the sound would certainly reach Slick's ears.

"Who is it?" again the half-breed called.

But no answer being given, or sound being heard, he apparently concluded that his ears had deceived him; for he lowered his rifle and sat down with his back against the bare trunk of a young poplar, not half a dozen

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yards from where two pairs of eyes fixed upon his movements with steady gaze.

For some time Slick sat in silence and nursed his rifle, while Dan's muscles began to ache with the fixed position in which he stood. But a native's patience is not long-enduring when activity is absent, and soon Slick began to fumble about in the search for tobacco.

For the time being the sentry seemed to have forgotten the service that was required of him, for his rifle was laid on the ground, and he was careless of the noise he made—quite sufficient to warn anyone who approached in the dark to beware, and advance with caution. The probability is that he had become sceptical of the need of sentry-go, and simply settled down to pass the time with as little boredom as the circumstances would allow.

Dan turned his head to whisper something to his companion, and it gave him quite a start to find that he was alone! He looked around in wonder, for so adept had been Baptiste's movements that he had disappeared as noiselessly and effectively as if he had been suddenly dissolved into air. But there was nothing ethereal about the half-breed. Taking advantage of Slick's relaxed vigilance, he had simply slipped to the ground and crept forward with the gliding motion that the native has so successfully copied from the lower creatures; and, when next Dan

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saw him, he was rising up from the ground within a few feet of the unsuspecting Slick with a peculiar movement that gave the impression of a human growth coming straight out from the earth.

The pipe was clogged, and Slick gave an exclamation of impatience as he rapped the bowl against the stock of his rifle; and Baptiste's arms were seen to be moving silently as he unwound the thick woollen girdle that half-breeds use in place of belts.

It was a moment of tense excitement to Conyers. He was only able to surmise half of his friend's purpose, and he was forced to maintain a motionless attitude, that hardly permitted of breathing, lest a gasp of breath should startle Slick and discover his enemies.

The bowl was cleaned at last and filled with tobacco. A match was struck, and, as it flared, Baptiste's arms were around the tree, holding the girdle above the other half-breed's head.

Puff, puff, puff. The tobacco was lighted. In calm content Slick leaned back against the tree to enjoy the smoke that was curling around him.

At the same instant Baptiste's arms descended. A sharp tug brought the woollen girdle over Slick's mouth and rapped his head with stunning violence against the tree. Next moment he was winding the bond to fix the head to the poplar trunk.

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“Dan! Quick! Bring lariat from horse!” Baptiste cried out.

Fully alive to the proceedings now, the boy ran for the broncho, slipped the lasso from the thongs that held it, and returned to Baptiste's side.

It was but the matter of a few moments more before the unfortunate Slick was bound in a helpless position to the inhospitable poplar, though the knots were barely secured before he recovered from his stupor and tried to move. But beyond twisting his nether limbs, no action was possible; for the raw-hide lariat was strong, and it had been fastened by an experienced hand. Even his tongue was a useless member, as the wool was thick and made an effective gag.

Baptiste chuckled loudly.

“Ah, Slick! You would shoot Baptiste, would you? That easy, very easy—when Baptiste sleep. But Baptiste awake—wide awake. He leave you here to wait for the fire and Red Hand!”

While he was speaking, Baptiste bent down and removed Slick's belt, that held his hunting knife, also the cartridge-belt. These he handed to Conyers, as he was himself already provided with the former as well as a revolver, and meant that Dan should be doubly armed with rifle and revolver too.

“You take rifle, Dan,” he said. “Friend Slick have no need now.”

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Next he hurried across the trail to the tied broncho, and was delighted to find a small supply of flour, as well as the inevitable tomahawk. These he took possession of, freed the horse, and returned to Conyers.

"Come!" he said with sly humour. "Friend Slick want to sleep. He tired with long watching."

"Shall we leave him like that?" questioned Dan hesitatingly. "Suppose the fire comes?"

"He will be warm, very warm," replied Baptiste with a laugh. "And when Red Hand come, he be very happy to see Slick wait for him. So come. I smell smoke in distance. Red Hand drive Baptiste and Dan to Black Crossing, and Slick trap Baptiste and Dan!" And again the half-breed laughed at his own wit.

But Conyers did not join in the joke.

"See here, Baptiste," he said sternly. "We've got the best of Slick, but it isn't a scout's way to leave even an enemy in danger. We must free him."

"Free him!" cried the half-breed, in utter amazement, to which the boy rejoined:

"Yes, free him. He can't do any harm now, for he is unarmed, and it isn't the first time that I've had a rifle in my hands, by a long way."

"But if we take away lariat——"

"We save his life," completed Dan firmly. "Leave him like that, and he'll have to face

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the fire, or Joe Petrie, in helplessness. He must have a chance."

"Slick would have given us no chance," urged the half-breed sullenly.

"That is no reason why we should not give him one," returned Dan.

Baptiste gave an exclamation of contempt for this theory, that was so unsportsmanlike according to his half-savage ideas of sport.

"Slick safe with lariat round arms; he not safe free," he protested.

But Dan wheeled upon him angrily.

"Look here, Baptiste! You said something a while ago about being my friend. If you are my friend, you ought to understand that your friend knows what is the right thing to do. But in any case, friend or foe, I am not going to help you to commit murder now or at any other time. Understand that. Now, are you going to free that man and afterwards continue as my friend, or are you going to force me to do it and leave you to go back to Red Hand as my enemy? You can make your choice."

"Baptiste never go back to Red Hand," muttered the half-breed.

"Then do as I wish! We are wasting time here, and ought to be well on our way," returned Dan sharply.

Still grumbling to himself, Baptiste crossed the trail to perform the order. He took his knife to save time, and with a few slashes

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undid what he had taken such pains to carry out thoroughly. The gag was not removed, by Dan's instructions. That was an operation that Slick could easily do for himself, while the time occupied would delay any plans that he might have for communicating the alarm to Red Hand. Then Baptiste and the English boy hurried down to the crossing.

Looking towards the west, the forest could now be seen thoroughly alight in the distance.

"Joe Petrie has kept his word," Dan remarked, as he drew his companion's attention to the light.

"Joe Petrie always keeps his word—when it is bad," the half-breed answered.

They had entered the water by this time and were struggling knee-deep through the current.

"What puzzles me is how he is to get back to the crossing again," the boy continued. "It's like cutting the bridge that you are sitting upon. He has put a fire between himself and Slick. Of course Slick would be safe enough, for he could easily cross the river if the fire came too near. But it passes me to understand how Joe is to get here himself."

"Joe Petrie go where he pleases," said Baptiste, with the lingering awe for the man who was known to get his way in every matter, so much so that he had been almost credited with having the special favour of some supernatural beings of evil.

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It did not take long to cross the Rushing Waters, for, although the river ran swiftly, the ground was firm, and it only required ordinary care to maintain a balance.

On reaching the other side, Baptiste was about to step to firm land, when Dan stopped him.

"I said that I would show you a little scouting trick, Baptiste," he said. "If you don't know it (though I suppose you do), it is something worth knowing. See, take off your moccasins and put them on your hands. I'll do the same with my boots. You've got bare feet. Good. Now, if we walk on hands and feet, we'll leave four sets of tracks behind us to puzzle any who take it into their heads to follow. My stockings will look like moccasins, so there will be two pairs of moccasins, one of boots, and one bare. That ought to set any person thinking when he comes across them."

Suiting the action to the word, Dan bent down on all fours and began to crawl up the bank of the river, closely followed by Baptiste, who had adopted the same attitude.

"We'll go like this until we get a little way into the bush," Conyers said, as they passed the mud-flats and reached the grass. "After that, I guess we can risk it in the ordinary way."

"No doubt, no doubt!" answered a deep voice in front of them.

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Dan started up, and Baptiste gave a yell of fear, for he had recognised the voice at the first syllable.

"*The Red Hand!*" the half-breed cried out.

"That's about the size of it," returned the cowboy, who was sitting on the stump of a tree smoking—the calm observer of Dan's now futile tactics, with his right arm passed through the reins of his mare, Fire-fly.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SCHEME THAT FAILED

To say that both Conyers and Baptiste were astounded at being suddenly brought face to face with Joe Petrie, who at that moment they supposed was miles away, is to express their surprise in the very mildest way. Indeed, it was almost like dealing with a wizard who had the mysterious power of transporting himself for leagues by some supernatural agency; and even though Dan, at least, had no such superstitious belief, for the moment he could hardly believe that he was not a martyr to some incomprehensible illusion.

But it was Petrie right enough. It was Petrie in flesh and blood. The faint dawn of morning revealed the fact with indisputable plainness.

As soon as the boy had collected his scattered thoughts, his fingers immediately wandered to the trigger of the rifle that the force of circumstances had obliged him to commandeer from Slick.

The Red Hand did not move from his post.

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His heavy lips stretched in what was meant to be a smile.

"Well, youngster? I guess we've got to cry 'quits,'" he said. "I ought to have known better than to try bush ways with coons of your breed."

"Bush ways? What do you mean by 'bush ways'?" asked Dan, though he did not lower his rifle from its readiness to meet any craft on the part of the first speaker.

"'Bush ways' has been my ways—force," was the explanation. "You're youngish yet, but when you're a bit more of a buck you'll find that the usual way to get a thing done is by force. Asking's no derved good—no, nor hinting neither. It's 'do this' and 'do that' out West when a boss speaks. And that's always been my way——"

"Together with—'Indian ways'?"

Joe's face reddened a little at this direct thrust, but he swallowed his anger and continued apologetically:

"Well, I'm not saying but that these ways has not been needed with some of the stubborn cattle that's been in my corral. But there's a difference in cattle. There's them that needs the goad to drive them to stable; there's others that know a good stall when they see it. My luck's been most with them that won't see it."

"Meaning that I am one of those who do?"

"Just so, boss—just so," returned Petrie

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smoothly. "I reckon I made a mighty mistake in thinking you was one of the other breed."

"Thanks," said Conyers quietly, in a sarcastic tone that Joe did not miss.

"Most all of us make mistakes at times," he said, and Dan replied sharply :

"Yours was no mistake in the way you mean, Joe. It was failure—rank failure. That was what it was. You thought that bully or brag would help you to do a crime, and, according to your low way of thinking, you would be able to carry out your intention. But you failed because you left proper caution out of your plans, and kept Slick in them. You were bested in the fight, as rotten ways always are bested in the long run."

"I know, I know," the Red Hand replied, with an effort at humility. "And now—now——"

He paused, and stammered, for the rôle of the humble was not easy to him.

"Yes? Now?" repeated Dan.

"Well, now I reckon we'd best come to terms," the man blurted out, just as if he had at last succeeded in heaving a heavy weight from his chest.

Conyers smiled suspiciously, but did not say anything. He preferred to play the waiting game, and left Petrie to continue his proposals without interruptions.

"Come to terms," Joe repeated. "Yes, that's just about the rise of it. We can't do

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anything by fighting. Neither of us can. And so we'd just best give in one to t'other. You see, you're a likely young fellow that's got to fight his way in the West. Ain't that so?"

"I have decided nothing about the future yet. It is the present that occupies my mind," answered Dan guardedly.

"Quite so—quite so. But it's the present that'll make the future—if you follow my leading," was Joe's reasoning.

At this moment Baptiste came close to Dan's side and whispered a warning not to trust the cowboy, no matter what he might propose. The boy thanked the half-breed, although the warning was quite unnecessary, for it would have taken more than Petrie's guile to deceive him. His craftiness was as clumsy as his bravado had been. But he deemed it as well to let Joe have his way. It might result in a better footing of mutual understanding as to future tactics. So he agreed to listen to any proposition that might be made, reserving to himself the right to accept or reject.

"You ask what my 'leading' may be?" Joe resumed. "Well, it is just this, in plain words: You stick to me and I'll stick to you."

"In whatever purpose, Joe?"

"So as you can reach the end of the same trail as I'm making for."

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"I am afraid I don't understand you," Dan said, though in truth he had a very fair idea of what the suggestion implied. But he desired plainer words so that he might give a plainer answer.

"Why don't you go straight to the point instead of tackling it in this roundabout way? It's much simpler."

Joe rose up briskly, as though he were impatient with the bonds of arbitration.

"Well, it's just this, and it's your last chance," he exclaimed, relapsing somewhat into the old bullying tones. "You'll need dollars to help you along, and I'll need them too. Show me where your old man put his treasure, and I give you my word that we'll go share and share alike with the gold. That's fair enough, I reckon. There's not many another hereabouts that would deal so squarely. You point out the spot, and there'll be no quarrelling over the dividing. Honest Injun, there won't. Now, what have you got to say?"

"Very little," replied Conyers quietly. "Very little, except to say that I have no intention of making myself a thief or helping you to be one. I told you that last time you made the proposition."

"A thief?" echoed Joe, with feigned surprise and perhaps a hint of being hurt by the suggestion. "A thief? Why, Dan Conyers, do you think that's what I would propose to you?"

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"It sounded very like it," was the flat answer, to which Petrie raised his hands to wave away the very idea.

"Why, sonny, that idea never came into my head! I may have done a few crooked things in my life, and I'll not say different. But I ain't done that—not made boys into thieves. What I meant was that there's all that money hidden by your old man. You're his son, and of course what he left is yours by right; and, for the sake of squaring up things between you and me, you'd give me a share. That's all. There's nothing about thieving. You can't steal from your dead father, I reckon."

"That is where we do not think alike," responded Dan to this bluff of reasoning. "It is very easy to steal from the dead as from the living. So drop that idea out of your head. Besides, even though I did agree to what you say, it would be impossible to carry it out, since I don't know where it is hidden any more than you do."

"But you've got the paper," urged Joe.

"I told you two nights ago that I had not."

"Leastways, you know where it is."

"Again I tell you that I do not. It is safe from you; that I can tell you. But where it may be at this present moment I have not the faintest idea."

"You mean that you have lost the derved

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thing?" demanded Joe, with a slight show of anger.

"No, it is not lost. It is hidden."

"But—but if it's hidden you wouldn't be such a sick coon as to forget where you put it?" Red Hand persisted, and Dan replied as quietly as ever:

"I know perfectly well where I put it; I am sure that it is still in the same place; but—*I do not know where it is at present.*"

Joe's cavern mouth dropped open with amazement.

"Well, of all the contrariest youngsters I ever met with, you take the cake, Dan Conyers! Here you say you know where you put the paper, it is still where you put it, and yet you don't know where it is now? Has some—some other coon got it?"

"It is in no person's possession," answered Dan calmly.

He was greatly enjoying the evidence of exasperating confusion in Petrie's mind, but he considered it would be a distinct advantage to bewilder the man and thus render the hiding-place doubly secure. "You may take it from me, Joe, that I gave the paper to no person."

"I don't believe a word of it!" was the hasty interruption, as Petrie's self-control began to show signs of weakening, and he stamped his right heel with impatience as he turned to adjust Fire-fly's bridle. "It's

plain enough to a blind-eyed coyote that you wouldn't have made away with that paper if you didn't know what was inside it. And, if you gave it to no person, it's plain shooting that you mangled it somehow."

Dan shrugged his shoulders with indifference as to Petrie's opinion.

"You're quite free to think exactly what you please," he said. "All the same, I tell you for the last time that you are wrong. That letter and cipher that you're nagging about were given to me by my father when he was dying. He told me to deliver them at Beaver Creek—unopened. You are the only person living that knows what my father wrote, for even when they came into my hands on the night you killed poor White Fang, I still kept my promise and did not read a word. It would have been little use to me if I had, for I have no key to that cipher, or any other cipher, for the matter of that."

"And you won't go in with me? Hold up, you son of a skunk!"

The last words were addressed by Joe to the mare, that had made an ugly snap at one of the hands that had been tightening the chin-strap, only to receive a blow upon the muzzle from a clenched fist.

"Chuck that, Petrie!" exclaimed Conyers angrily at seeing the blow. "Can't you see that your treatment of the mare is making

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her hate you? Take my word for it, she'll have her revenge upon you one of these days."

At this prophecy, Joe laughed loudly with derision.

"She? Revenge herself upon me? Gee-whiz, sonny! What do you take me for?"

"That's an opinion that I'd better keep to myself, though I think you can guess it pretty correctly by this time," retorted Dan. "All the same, I'd advise you to take warning, and try a little kindness with the mare. It'll pay you."

Petrie bowed to the boy with mock respect.

"Many thanks," he sneered. "It's late in the day to begin learning horse-ways, but I'm always willing to be taught." Then he stepped into the saddle. "And so there's no chance of us working in double harness, eh?" he asked.

"Not the slightest," was the reply. "Baptiste and I will go on our way."

"Eh! Baptiste's in it now, is he?" exclaimed the man, with a grin at the half-breed that caused Baptiste to turn away his head. He knew that grin. It was often more dangerous than a scowl. "Baptiste's in it? Well, since you have given me kind advice, I reckon I can give you some that's as good. Don't you put too much hope in Baptiste. He'll turn and bite you like you say of my

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mare. Besides—I've only got to call him when I want him, and——”

“Baptiste *never* go back to your tent!” the half-breed broke out hotly, whereupon Petrie laughed ironically.

“Pshaw! So you think now. Wait till I want you. You'll come then like a lamb.”

“Never! Never!”

“Wait, my rabbit,” returned Joe. “As long as there's iron and fire in the world, there's always servants for the Red Hand. Ha, ha! you can't get away from me, Baptiste, so don't reckon that you can! You can't look me in the face neither, and not do as I tell you. Can you, now?”

The poor half-breed had been too much in fear of Joe, and had too much superstition in his nature to resist the man's horrible influence.

“See, Baptiste!” he commanded with a laugh. “Look at me, and let me see you refuse! Come here, Baptiste! Do you hear, you lazy skunk? Come!”

As he spoke, Petrie had gradually allowed his voice to drift into the old brutal tones of the slave-driver, and he grinned to himself as he saw the poor half-breed trembling before his words, wavering and gradually yielding to the sway of the old tyrant. Baptiste took a step forward.

“Come here, you low-down half-breed!” was the brutal order.

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Again the poor fellow moved forward with wavering steps, until Dan suddenly broke the spell by clapping his rifle to his shoulder.

"Baptiste! he cried sharply. "Move another step and I'll shoot in your tracks!"

It was a risk, for of course Dan would never have considered the threat; but it was successful. Baptiste turned his face to Conyers with a helpless, pleading look.

"Come back to me, Baptiste!" the boy commanded. "I give you twenty seconds!"

"You'd best go," laughed Petrie. "I don't want your carcass—yet. Ta-ta, Dan Conyers! I ain't done with you by a long chalk, so don't think it. Joe Petrie always comes out top. You'll step into the teeth of the trap before you're a much older chicken, and don't you forget it! I let you go your own way to-day. But you'll go mine when I'm ready for you."

"Take care you don't step into a trap yourself," called Dan, as the rider and broncho disappeared into the bush.

The boy stood silent for a few moments as he watched Joe's departure. Then he slung his rifle on his back and put on his top-boots, which he had dropped on first seeing the enemy. Next he turned, and walked sharply in a westerly direction without a word to Baptiste.

"Boss!"

The word came from the half-breed's throat in a tone of surprise, as he looked after Dan's

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quickly departing figure. But the boy did not turn his head, neither did he slacken pace.

“Say, boss!”

This time there was something of bewilderment as well as unspoken questioning wonder in the sound. But still Dan walked on.

Then a piteous cry rang out in the morning air.

“You ain’t leaving me, boss, are you?”

This time Dan stopped and turned with a firm look upon his face. It hurt him to be hard at any time, but he knew that it was necessary to assume a certain cruelty if he were to bring Baptiste to his senses.

And poor Baptiste! He was kneeling on the ground, a very picture of despair, with his arm stretched before him and his face evidencing all the signs of mortal pain.

“You ain’t leaving me—here—alone?” the half-breed repeated, and Dan replied firmly:

“I guess that’s what I’m doing, Baptiste.”

“But why, boss?”

“You prefer Red Hand to me. You can follow him.”

Conyers turned away again, but before he had gone six paces Baptiste had gone forward, and knelt upon the ground, clutching the boy’s feet passionately.

“Oh, Dan, don’t go! Don’t go! Baptiste can’t make life alone!”

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“Go to Petrie. You chose him when he called you. Go to him!” was the stern reply.

“No, no, no!” cried the half-breed. “The Red Hand cruel. He kill Baptiste. He torture!”

“Yet you were ready enough to answer his call——”

“Because none can face his evil spirit!” wailed Baptiste. “He look—look—and all must obey. He evil spirit, or—him be cross the river?”

“Bah! Fool that you are, Baptiste,” retorted Dan. “Did you not see that he was dripping wet? His horse, saddle—everything wet as well. He swam the river on Fire-fly’s back. That’s what he did. Evil spirit! Bah!”

“But Dan—good Dan—he not leave Baptiste alone in forest! Red Hand come back and kill him!”

“So that’s all your friendship amounts to?” quoth Dan. “You’d stick to me for fear of Joe? No, thanks. You can go back to Joe, for I don’t want friendship of this sort.”

The boy shook himself loose from the restraining fingers, and moved a step or two aside.

“No, no!” Baptiste wailed piteously. “It not that! Baptiste love his friend, and die for him. But Baptiste was weak; he not weak

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again. He be brave against Red Hand. Don't leave him!"

Dan paused, and looked in silence into the face of the distraught man.

"Very well," he presently said in quite serious tones, "I'll try you once more, Baptiste. But you must be faithful. I make no threats. If you wish to leave me at any time you may go, and—and if you waver again—I'll *make* you go!"

"Baptiste be always faithful to white brother!" interrupted the half-breed.

"Then see that you are," responded Conyers.

"I will! I will!" repeated Baptiste with all his strength.

"Then come," said Dan. "We must hurry towards Last Mountain, for there only can we hope to find poor White Fang's dog. Without Tracker, my father's wishes can never be carried out."

"But we no' go straight trail. We go Death's Creek."

"That will take much longer, will it not?"

"Yes," replied the half-breed. "But Red Hand have friends. He watch Last Mountain trail. If we go Death's Creek, he think we find police. Then he very 'fraid, and we blind his eyes."

Dan paused for a few minutes to consider this more.

"Very well," he said ultimately. "I daresay you are right. But we can do without police

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on this trip, though I guess it won't do any harm to let Petrie imagine otherwise. You lead the way, Baptiste. I'll follow."

"And Dan—he no' look angry on Baptiste again? Baptiste *will* be brave and faithful."

"That's all right," said Conyers. "So long as you do your best, there's no need for worry. I'll stick to you——"

"And Baptiste die gladly for his friend," rejoined the half-breed fervently.

CHAPTER XX

A GRIZZLY BEAR

It was a very different little procession that started from the cataract of the Wolf's Jaws as compared with that which had left the peaceful Moose Valley twenty-four hours before, with Ab Carse and his buxom wife waving to the boys and wishing them a pleasant outing. Then they were well horsed, well clothed, and well provisioned. Now they were reduced to trudging afoot, to clothes that were smoked and water-soiled as well as much torn, to the fragments of their fourth prairie chicken spared from breakfast.

Yet they were still cheerful. It was impossible not to be cheerful; for, in spite of the seriousness of their quest and the trials they had undergone, the spirit of adventure was in their breasts and the charm of the backwoods was all around them. I defy any healthy mind and body to have been miserable amid such surroundings as those of Whispering Woods. Wild life abounded on all sides, and the pungent aroma of the pines was a tonic to brace the nerves and inspire contentment.

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Greenery—thick, tangled vegetation—was all around. Much of the pathway had to be carved out with force of muscle, leaving little time for repining thoughts, and the glorious colours of wild-flowers delighted the eyes. Great faces of morning glory would bob cheekily against the travellers' foreheads, and the honeysuckle would dangle before their nostrils to boast their perfume.

What more could man want? Prolific Nature all around him, a good gun slung on his back, and happiness is his.

By the natural right of greatest experience, the leading place had been instinctively yielded to the Sioux chief. Hansard and Beverley followed in single file, chatting cheerfully of the many interests that they saw as they passed through the bush, and having but one thought before them: to reach Black Crossing and Dan Conyers.

Very soon they left the smoking remains of the south side of the river well behind them. They did not follow the course of the water, for it travelled a sinuous course, and took many miles to cover two as the crow flies. Great Bear led them due north for a considerable distance to avoid these bends, and it was not until a mid-day meal had yielded to the gun (and hungry jaws) that he began to steer slightly to the west.

During the afternoon march, the boys noticed that the Indian became more silent than

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had been the case during the earlier half of the day, and his manner suggested a certain alertness, as though he were constantly on the watch for any surprise. Now and then he would stop to pick up a leaf or examine a piece of bare ground or a twig. At such times he would give a slight grunt, that might mean anything from surprise to satisfaction or suspicion.

On one of these occasions Jack ventured to question the reason of these observations, at which Great Bear turned with a peculiar smile upon his face.

“Brother seek brother,” he remarked mysteriously.

Then he grunted and continued his way, never relaxing his close scrutiny of the signs that interested him so keenly.

Seeing that the Indian was not disposed to be communicative, Jack did not question him further, until at last the mystery solved itself.

It was late in the day—towards sunset, in fact—when our three travellers were beginning to feel the need for rest, and all eyes were open to find a suitable clearing for a camping-ground. A few birds had been shot, so supper was assured, and not even Great Bear seemed to look forward to the halt with anything but welcome.

“There good camp!” said the Indian at last, as he pointed through the trees to a patch of green that sloped down to a small gully

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in which a stream would be probably found.

"Yes, that looks all right," replied Jack.

"And jolly glad I'll be to see the fire lighted and stretch my legs for a bit," added Geoff.

"Good ground—good ground," repeated the Indian aloud. Then he gave a sort of chuckle as he shifted his gun from the hollow of his left arm to a position of readiness at the right.

"Good ground," said the chief a third time; "but—Great Bear brother there first!"

"Your brother!" exclaimed Geoff.

"The brother of Great Bear," replied the Sioux, as he advanced cautiously.

"What is he talking about, Jack? I can see no other Indian there. Can you?"

"Not a sign of him. Great Bear has sharper eyes than I have, for the clearing seems quite empty."

Just as the boy spoke there was the sound of cracking twigs, and a dark figure was seen to rise up from among the bushes at the farther side of the grass plot.

"See! My brother!" laughed the Indian in triumph.

And sure enough, as the boys watched they saw the form of a great bear—not Indian, but grizzly—rise up on its hind legs and face them, sniffing the air with fierce suspicion.

The Sioux's gun was at his shoulder for a steady aim, but the glory of shooting a grizzly was too much for Jack.

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"Let me, please!" he said. "You've shot hundreds, chief. I'd give anything to have such a bag as this."

With instinctive courtesy the chief lowered his gun at once, and handed his weapon to the eager boy.

"Shot no good; only bullet," he remarked briefly, as he made an exchange of guns.

"Oh, thanks!" exclaimed Jack. "It's awfully good of you, chief. But I may never have a chance like this again."

"Grizzly live in rocks, in hills. He no' come to forest except he chase food," explained the Indian. "My white brother will look steady. He fire under left arm, but—*he no' miss.*"

"I'll not miss!" returned Jack, rather boastfully, as he handled the gun and watched the bear, which was cautiously advancing to investigate the cause of the voices, whose owners he could not yet see. He was looking round him with fierce anxiety.

"There's another one—there—a little way behind him!" Geoff suddenly broke out.

"Where?"

"Don't you see? Back in the bushes there. He's creeping out of sight."

"That squaw-bear," the Indian decided. "She run and leave buck to fight like red man."

"Can't we bag her as well?" questioned Geoff, at which the Indian laughed ironically.

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"Huh! Geoff take bears like rabbits with loops of string—one, two, three bears. Easy! A game for papooses!"

"Sat upon!" remarked Geoff, taking the snub in good part. Then he exclaimed quickly: "Look out, Jack! He's spied us!"

The grizzly had indeed discovered his enemies at last. He glared at them through his fierce, red-bordered eyes. Then he gave a roar that made the woods ring, and hastened clumsily forward.

"Jack, shoot—shoot—bear's arm——"

Bang! The Indian's words were cut short by the report, that was echoed by another tremendous roar.

The shot had failed to reach the right spot.

In a second the gun was snatched from the boy's hand and the cartridge ejected. But quick though the Indian was, the bear was quicker. It opened wide its great jaws and bellowed furiously. An instant more, and it rushed forward with swinging arms to deal a deadly blow with its great paws, that could crush a skull as a boy might crack a hazel-nut.

Jack had been standing a little to the front for the better advantage of an aim, and upon him the great creature of fury rushed. The boy whipped out his revolver, but he had not time to use it, for the bear was so close that the hot breath met his face.

Geoff thought that all was over with his

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chum, and certainly Jack himself thought that his last moment had come. But before the great paw had time to swing forward, the old war-whoop of the Sioux drowned the animal's roaring, and the Indian whipped out his long hunting-knife and had leapt right into the bear's embrace.

"Welcome, brother!" he cried. "The arms of Great Bear greet his brother!"

Then began a terrible struggle that the boys could only stand still and watch—a fight between man and beast, the like of which had hardly been seen even in the arenas of Rome. They dared not use their firearms, since a bullet sent to save might travel amiss.

Slash went the great blade at the animal's side, while the Indian clung close to the fur, so that neither paws could reach nor arms get a chance to embrace, since they were met at each attempt by the lightning dart of steel.

Backwards and forwards they swayed, while the bear roared deafeningly and the man laughed jeeringly.

"Fight, my warrior brother!" he cried. "Do you fear the arm of your namesake?" And again the knife darted forward, and a red stream spurted from the creature's breast.

The foaming jaws tried to aid the claws, but the blade put a mark that warned the animal from repeating the attempt.

"It will kill him—the brave chief!" ex-

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claimed Jack, in agony at the result of his weak aim. "Oh, why was I such an idiot as to take the gun from him!"

"He'll not be beaten," declared Beverley emphatically. "See, the bear is weakening already!"

It was true. The bear was weakening, for blood was pouring from his body in all directions, and all his efforts now were the frantic ones to free himself from the evil thing that clung to him and dealt such torture. He roared and staggered. Still the Sioux kept close, and veritably clutched with tooth and nail, while he laughed aloud and whooped each time the bear struggled to free himself.

Then for a moment the bear seemed to rally, and the left paw was raised for a descending stroke that would assuredly rip the flesh from the Indian's back.

That was the moment for which the chief had been waiting. With the agility of a weasel he slipped from his grip and darted round to the left, under the upraised paw. Then followed a flash of the knife, a howl from the bear, and a yell of triumph from the Indian as he sprang to one side. Next instant the great animal reeled and fell back heavily, with the chief's hunting-knife in his heart.

"Well done!" cried Jack, springing forward and gripping the Indian's hand. "A wonderful fight! Great Bear, you are a terrible hunter!"

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“ Never heard anything like it in my life ! ” exclaimed Geoff, also hurrying up to add his congratulations to those of his chum.

But the Indian simply stepped forward and only said :

“ Much good meat for supper. Will the white brothers gather wood for the fire ? ”

It is thus that great men do great deeds.

That night, when Geoffrey and Great Bear were fast asleep on their luxurious couches of young pine branches, Jack Hansard was wide awake. The excitement of the afternoon—particularly his careless shot, that must have cost him his life had not the Indian leaped in between him and destruction—this excited his nerves until the inclination to sleep left him entirely. There was also the mortification at having lost the bear to his gun. That was humiliating. Many a hunter spends his life in the backwoods without a single grizzly to his bag.

And yet it was not altogether the blow to his pride that was troubling him. There was another aspect of the case that caused him equal self-depreciation. As an old scout, he ought to have taken every precaution to “ be prepared ” for any emergency, and ought not to have allowed himself to be outdone by a grizzly. At the same time, we of more experience than Jack know how difficult it is to be prepared for every tactic that a grizzly

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may take it into his head to adopt. I once saw a man's head scalped as clean as with a scalping-knife by the paw of a bear that was supposed to be dead with an explosive bullet in his vitals. No grizzly is dead until the skin is off his body.

Nevertheless, although we may make many adequate excuses for the weaknesses and inexperience of youth, Jack was always a severe master to himself. He accused himself of being untrue to his motto, and gave himself, mentally, as good a "dressing-down" as every form-master, or even head, had delivered.

Then gradually there came into his mind the recollection of what Great Bear had called the "squaw grizzly."

Surely she would not be far distant from her slain lord, whose skin was now stretched between the branches of the trees opposite? Why could he not prove himself ready for emergencies by bringing another fur in triumph to the camp?

The more he thought of this, the more the idea grew upon him, and plans for carrying out the suggestion began to evolve themselves.

Yes, with the first streak of dawn he would creep out of the camp, taking Great Bear's gun with him. It would not be difficult to find the track of a heavy creature like that. This part of a scout's woodcraft would be the easiest to carry out. Indeed, the more he

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thought of it, the simpler the scheme seemed to be. He would "be prepared" enough after his experience of that afternoon, and, if he failed to bag his game, he determined that it would not be through lack of calmness nor readiness.

With these thoughts to satisfy his disturbed mind the boy at last began to feel the inclination to sleep. He closed his eyes and wriggled his body to a position of comfort upon the pine branches. Then he drifted off to slumber, confident that he would awake in time to start unseen upon his adventure. He knew by experience that the best alarm-clock to rouse a sleeper is the fixed determination to awaken at a certain hour.

And so, with the first streak of dawn, Jack might have been seen to rise up cautiously, creep towards Great Bear, and gently take possession of the gun and a few of the cartridges that were in the belt that lay beside him. A glance at Geoffrey, to make sure that his chum had not been disturbed, then he tiptoed across the clearing towards the bush, rejoicing at the success, so far, of his plans, and thinking of how he would surprise both Geoff and the artful Indian when he returned with another bear-skin to prove how difficult it was to daunt the spirit of one of the great brotherhood of scouts.

He did not look back, for he was soon on the yesterday's trail of the squaw-grizzly.

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Had he done so he might have discovered that his secret was less secure than he had imagined; for he would have seen Great Bear leaning on his elbow, and looking after the departing figure with a peculiar smile upon his face that implied a complete understanding of the boy's stealthy movements. It was just the sort of thing that the Indian would have done himself under similar circumstances. So he smiled and wished his white brother good luck.

CHAPTER XXI

A HUNTER'S CAMP

It does not at any time demand any remarkable powers of woodcraft to follow the spoor of a bear, and, when the tracks are recent to within a few hours, the art is reduced to the uttermost simplicity.

Knowing where the animal had last been seen, Jack soon struck a trail that could be followed with ease. But the bear had travelled fast. Warned, no doubt, by the cries of her lord and master in his death combat, she had taken flight, and endeavoured to separate herself from such enemies by a safe distance in the shortest possible time.

Jack was eager, and he was energetic. The pursuit of such big game fires any true hunter's ambitions, and lends strength to his muscles and fleetness to his feet.

Through the bush he pressed at a steady pace. It rather surprised him when he found how far the bear had travelled. He had imagined that she would have remained somewhat in the vicinity of where her companion had been last seen. A more experienced

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hunter would have told him that the old bear's howls were sufficient to warn off all his relations for miles around.

Nothing daunted, however, he plodded on. He was quite determined that no shadow of disappointment should cause him to turn back now. He would return to the camp with a bear's hide upon his back, or he would stay away. And it is to be feared that this all-absorbing ambition so took possession of his mind that, for the time being, all thoughts of Conyers were banished. Of course, he never imagined that his little exploit would make any difference to the progress of the expedition. That had been a consideration before he started out. He never supposed otherwise than that he would be able to return to camp in time for breakfast after an hour or two at the utmost.

Passing onwards, in spite of the unexpected length of the journey, Jack found the spoor gradually becoming fresher. He came to one place where a hollow in a blue grass indicated the probable resting-place for the night. Beyond that, the tracks were still more plain. The dew had been heavy, and to the boy's delight he was able to know that his journey was nearing an end, for the dampness showed up tracks that must have been as recent as an hour before.

In the end he very nearly tumbled over the creature. She was resting to lee of the wind

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at the farther side of a large log that lay across the path, and so she had neither scented her enemy nor heard his approach.

With his senses all alert, and his mind prepared for any emergency, Jack was not disconcerted by the sudden find. He had been expecting to sight the bear at any moment, and now that half of his ambition was accomplished he was ready to tackle the balance in a manner worthy of a good scout.

He drew back and raised the gun to his shoulder.

At the same moment the bear sighted the enemy, and raised herself with an ominous growl of anger.

At first she looked round her for means of escape, but something seemed to tell her that, wherever she fled, the bullet of her foe would follow. There was nothing for it but to face the music and fight for her life.

Yes, Jack had learned his lesson. He breathed deeply to steady the beating of his excited heart, and his fingers did not even twitch on the trigger as he saw the animal rear itself upright and come towards him with open mouth and glaring eyes. There was always that log to dodge around while he reloaded, in the event of the first shot failing. An active lad can outdo any clumsy creature like a bear at such a game as that. This knowledge gave him confidence. Then he

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took steady aim and fired—bullet first, then the buckshot of the right barrel.

A tremendous roar of anger and pain followed the two shots.

Swiftly Jack ejected the used cartridges and inserted fresh ones. But the precaution was unnecessary. The bear had stopped short in her advance. In a moment she swayed in a dazed fashion. Then a roar came from her massive chest, and she fell on her side in a lifeless heap.

“A fine shot, my son—clean through the heart!” said a voice at the boy’s side.

Jack started, and turned sharply to see a tall, fine specimen of manhood standing close to him.

“Gave you a bit of a start, did I? I’m sorry,” said the stranger, in quiet, well-bred tones. “You were too much occupied with your grizzly to pay much attention to visitors, and I didn’t speak for fear of spoiling your aim.”

Although dressed in the rough attire of a bushman, there was something about the erect carriage, fine forehead, clean-cut features, and pleasant smile of the stranger that instantly unarmed any suspicions that might have arisen in Jack’s mind.

“You—you did startle me a bit,” he acknowledged. “But I’m glad to see you, all the same, for perhaps you’ll be good enough to help me with skinning the bear? I’ve never done one before.”

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“That I will, with pleasure,” answered the stranger, at the same time producing his sheath-knife and setting to work readily. “It’s not an easy job to do well without practice. A grizzly’s hide is easily spoiled. Ever seen it done before?”

Jack acknowledged that he had—on the previous evening; and then he launched out upon the whole story of the bad shot that had determined him to redeem his character in the morning.

When he had finished his tale the man laughed, while his knife passed deftly to part the skin from the adhering muscle and fat.

“Well, you’ve come off with first-class honours, my son. If this doesn’t make the Indian respect you, nothing will. By the by, what did you say the Redskin’s name was?”

“Great Bear.”

“Oh, yes; the last Sioux chief. One of the best. You could not have a better guide, or a better friend.”

“I believe you,” rejoined Jack. “He has already proved himself to be both.”

“I suppose you are not on a hunting expedition?” the man next questioned.

The boy did not reply at once, for he did not know how far it would be safe to trust a stranger with the motive of his journey.

But the man was not slow to observe the reluctance to answer his direct question.

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"All right," he said. "None of my business, I suppose."

"It's not exactly that," began Jack slowly. "You see——"

"You don't know anything about me, and don't care to trust a stranger? Quite right."

"I am sorry," said Jack quietly. He felt that he had been discourteous when he had only meant to be cautious. "I did not mean to be rude, or to give offence——"

"And you have not done so," added the man cheerfully. "We all have our secrets in this world, and it would be impertinence in a stranger to ask us to divulge them. It would also be foolish of us to be offended just because a confidence is refused at first meeting." Then he stood up with the loose hide in his hand. "There now; that's done. And a finer winter robe than that will make I've never seen. Here you are! Roll it up, and, when next you camp, you can scrape it and stretch it to dry. Now, come along to my tent and have breakfast. My solitary camp is quite near. I've been out for a month's hunting, you know."

"It's awfully good of you to take so much trouble," Jack said, as he rolled the skin in a bundle for convenient carrying. "I am afraid, however, that I ought to make my way back to the camp. My chum and Great Bear will be wondering what has become of me."

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"Nonsense," replied the stranger. "An hour one way or another can make little difference. You'll travel all the faster with a little grub inside you. So come along! I'll take no refusal. Besides, I haven't heard a white man's voice for nearly four weeks!"

"All right," said Jack. And, truth to tell, his inner man rather welcomed the invitation, though the outer man rather unpleasantly urged the duty of returning to his friends to allay any anxiety that might have been caused by his absence. But hunger is a bit of a tyrant at times. It sometimes forces duty to self to come foremost. "Since you put the invitation in that way, I can't refuse," he explained. Then he added with a laugh: "Now that you speak of it, there is something inside of me that says how a peck at a little grub would not be unwelcome!"

"Good!" said the man briskly, as he set off to lead the way through the bushes. "That little 'something' will soon have its wish gratified. You follow me. The tent is no distance. We'll be there inside of five minutes."

The hospitable stranger's tent was soon reached, and with all the art of a practised camper, a meal was soon in progress. Bacon, fried potatoes, and fragrant coffee are no things to be despised at any time, and when that time happens to be a sort of season of plenty, following one of comparative famine,

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it may be imagined that Hansard did ample justice to the providing of his host.

The man was a good talker, and he filled up the blanks "between bites" with many anecdotes of his varied experiences since he came from England to seek his fortune in the West—first as a gold-pro prospector and afterwards as a rancher. Jack, in his turn, related many of the experiences of his chum and himself since necessity and inclination had led them to the prairie. Then, when the meal was ended, the latter courteously urged the propriety of returning to the last night's camp.

"Very well, my son," the man assented kindly. "Under the circumstances I won't detain you. I'm glad to have seen you, and if ever it chances that your business or pleasure takes you near to Beaver Creek, don't forget to ask for Mark Bray. Everybody knows me in these parts—and you'll be jolly welcome."

"Thanks," the boy replied. "I'll be glad to meet you again. My chum and I ranch at Moose Creek. Hansard is my name. Perhaps we shall be lucky enough to meet again one of these days."

"I hope so. Well, if you must be off, good-bye for the present. And every good luck to you wherever your journey may be leading."

"Good luck to your hunting!" responded Jack cheerfully.

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Then he shouldered the roll of bear's hide, and started to retrace his steps to the camp.

The morning—as long Canadian summer mornings go—was well advanced by this time, and Jack stepped out merrily. His conscience was troubling him and quickening his steps, for he feared that both Geoffrey and Great Bear might have become anxious at his absence and have started out to search for him.

Judge of the boy's surprise, however, when, after covering little more than a mile, he suddenly rounded a clump of willows and found himself face to face with his late companions, who were plodding on the way to meet him!

"Great Scott! This is a knock-out surprise!" were his ejaculations. "What brings you here? What did you think had become of me?"

"Gone bear-hunting," replied Geoff promptly, with a meaning grin towards Great Bear. "We waited breakfast for a short time; then, finding you didn't return, we packed up our traps and followed on the trail to save you coming back too far."

"But—but how did you know?" Jack gasped in astonishment, though not without relief at knowing that his prolonged absence had not been the cause of any anxiety. "Whatever made you take it for granted that I had gone off after the old she-bear?"

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Beverley grinned again, and looked significantly at Great Bear, who was evidently enjoying some little joke in secret.

"Ask him," the boy said. "He'll tell you."

The Indian laughed.

"Great Bear sleep—sleep like his brother bear in winter. Then his slave that fires two burning arrows cry out: 'Master! Master!' Great Bear open one eye—little—very little; he see hand (white hand) creep slow, slow to little slave, and little slave cry out: 'Master, white hand come steal me!' Great Bear then look through shut eyes, and see only hand of Jack, so he whisper: 'Little slave! white hand friend. You go now and send arrows straight, for he would kill the great squaw-bear.' Then Jack take little slave, shoot little slave, and—little slave shoot straight. Huh!"

The Indian chuckled to himself over his joke, and pointed to the skin that Jack was carrying rolled up on his left shoulder, and the boys could not keep from laughing also.

"But I don't understand yet how you knew that I was going after the bear," Jack said, as the first merriment subsided a little.

Great Bear's answer was enough.

"If Jack go not for bear, why should he need that which shoots but one arrow?"

"True," agreed Jack, and again he laughed. "It's rather a come-down, Geoff, isn't it?"

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There was I fondly imagining that my errand was a secret, and there was old Great Bear watching me all the time!"

"Great Fox would suit him better than Great Bear," chimed in Beverley. "A fox always sleeps with one eye open, they say."

"Well, well," laughed Jack. "One thing—I got my wish by showing that I could shoot a grizzly. Now, I've got some more news for you!"

"News? About Conyers?"

"No—unfortunately. But I fell in with an awfully jolly chap from Beaver Creek. He's a rancher out by himself on a hunting expedition. It was he who skinned the bear for me."

And Hansard launched out on a description of his adventures, at the conclusion of which Beverley remarked:

"Well, you were in luck's way. A good tuck-in of bacon and potatoes is not to be sneezed at in these times. All the same, I wouldn't have been sorry to have heard some news to help us on our quest."

"All in good time, Mister Impatience!" returned Jack chaffingly. "Good luck always follows a spell of bad, they say. There is one thing, however. If we are to follow on this trail, you'll have the pleasure of meeting my Beaver Creek friend. This is the direct way to his camp."

At this second reference to Beaver Creek,

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the chief, Great Bear, was seen to prick up his ears like a hound on the scent.

"Did my white brother speak the name of his friend, the pale face of Beaver Creek?"

"He called himself 'Bray.'"

"Ah!" the chief returned, with a sigh of satisfaction. "Mark Bray is his name."

"Do you know him?" questioned Geoff, and the Indian smiled with a wide smile of amusement at the ignorance that such a question displayed.

"Who is the man—white or red—who knows not the great Mark Bray of Beaver Creek?" he exclaimed.

"I am one, at any rate," responded Beverley. "Who and what is this wonderful person?"

"He is a white man who has many lands and many horses. And he traps the fox and the lynx better than any child of the prairie; his burning arrow flies swifter and surer than those of the shamoganees (police). It was he that ruled Dunmore of the white man when they hastened as buffalo herds to seek gold at Klondike, and it was he that drove away the Red Hand so that he dared not show his face where brave men dwelt. Ah, he can follow a scent like a sharp-nosed dog, and—he hates the Red Hand! It would be well if my white brothers would seek the aid and counsel of that pale face to travel with us on the track of the Red Hand."

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The boys listened with keen interest to the chief's speech, and, as he finished, Geoffrey exclaimed enthusiastically :

"Bravo! That's straight for the bull's-eye! By the way, Jack, did you tell Bray what we were after?"

"No," said Jack. "At the time I thought it would be better not. I wish now that I had."

"Well, it isn't too late. As Great Bear says, the more allies we have the better it will be for success, especially in our present destitute condition—minus horses and camp outfit. I vote that we hurry on and do what we can to enlist Bray as a recruit in this 'rush to the rescue,' as they would head it in the 'Falmouth Herald'!"

With this incitement to quick travel, the three friends pressed forward, and it was not long before Bray's camp was reached. The hunter was delighted at the early return of his recent guest, and was equally pleased to make the acquaintance of Beverley. The Sioux chief was an old friend.

And then, in a haphazard, get-a-gait-on-to-the-end way, Jack dived at his story, and soon had it related without any unnecessary frills. The four friends were squatted in varying attitudes of ease on the ground in front of Bray's tent, while the host and the chief puffed peace-pipes, no one speaking to interrupt the relater of adventures. It was

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noticed, however, that at the first mention of the Red Hand Bray's face took on a frown, and as the story progressed that frown became darker, until the man's displeasure seemed thoroughly roused. But he did not make any comment. And even when Jack concluded, Bray did not speak at first. He gave a deep sigh, removed the pipe from his mouth, and knocked out the ashes on the heel of his boot.

"The Red Hand," he remarked at last, speaking quietly, as though merely expressing a thought to himself. "I pity the poor chap who has fallen into that scoundrel's hands." Then he asked in a louder tone: "And this boy? Do you know anything more of him?"

"Very little, except that he is a scout, and gave the scout's message that I told you about. His name is Conyers—Dan Conyers, White Fang told us."

The answer that Jack made seemed of little consequence to the speaker, but it was certainly of no slight importance to him who heard it for the first time; for no sooner had the words of the name passed Jack's lips than Bray sprang from the ground, exclaiming excitedly:

"Conyers? Dan Conyers? The son of old Conyers of Last Mountain?"

"I know nothing about the father," returned Hansard, greatly astonished at Bray's conduct and not a little taken aback at the vehemence

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of the question. "But I do know a little about the son, and that little I have told you. But did you know him—the son, I mean?"

Bray laughed with the peculiar laugh that recalls a sad memory. There is nothing of joy in the sound at such times. It is more the nervous evidence that is caused by doubt of the self-evident.

"Did I know old Hal Conyers?" Bray repeated. "Why, Hal and I were boys together; we came West together; we prospected gold together—and got none!" And again the speaker laughed. Then his face became suddenly sad. "But we had some hard times, Hal and I. I took to the ranching business to seek fortune, and he—well, he took another way. Then—we quarrelled. I went to Beaver Creek while Conyers stayed at Last Mountain. I heard some time after that he went to England, but I never heard of his return. Poor old Hal! I wish I had known before it was too late to heal old sores."

"But it is not too late to help his son," suggested Jack, and the man returned with inspiring energy:

"Yes! That's true, lad! And it's good for you that you told me of this, for I can help you—at least, I would spend the last ounce of my strength to rescue my old chum's son from the toils of that fiend, the Red Hand. We must waste no time. We must

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set off at once. Ah, but I had forgotten: you are unmounted, and I have only one riding-horse here. Let me see—I wonder——? Yes, Great Bear.”

The Sioux chief slowly raised his eyes at the sudden address.

“Does the white man speak to his red brother?”

And Bray went on, as though relating a story, without answering the direct question:

“In the years that I have lived upon the prairie, our hands, chief, have often met in friendship. But, many years ago, there was one that you loved better than me—one that we both loved as brothers, when the gold hid its face, and we were lonely on the mountain. Conyers was that brother's name. He has now been laid to rest, and is with the Great Manito, Who loves us all and Who smiles alike upon the red man and the white.”

“My brother speaks the pure air and the light of the morning,” said the chief gravely, as Bray paused for a space.

“And so,” the former resumed, “the great chief of the Sioux will not think it a shameful thing to take a message from Conyers' friend to—Hawk Eye.”

And then, for the first time in the boys' experience of the man, the Indian seemed suddenly to forget the strong self-restraint that usually controlled him; for, at the name of Hawk Eye, he threw up his arms as though

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he were calling down the wrath of heaven, while his great sonorous voice rang out on the clear air of the forest :

“ Hawk Eye ! Shall the chief of the once mighty Sioux soil the fringe of his moccasin by stepping where the evil Blackfeet chief has his dwelling ? Blackfeet are dogs ! Blackfeet bury tomahawk in daytime, but they scratch with their fingers to dig it up at night. Ugh ! I spit upon the name that only evil spirits can speak with pleasure. Why does the friend of the great Chief Conyers, who loved Great Bear—why does he seek to insult Great Bear, whose eyes have never once been covered by shame ? ”

The proud words were eloquent in their appeal against the insult that the old chief believed to have been offered to him. There was no trace of anger on his face, only pain at the wound that his honour had sustained.

Bray saw that look, and he understood it.

“ You are wrong, chief,” he said quietly, “ when you think that I would insult an honourable warrior. But you forget—the *old* chief of the Blackfeet is dead. This is his son. He lives apart from his people now—a life as harmless as that of the bluebird on the tree.”

“ Yet the blood of the Blackfeet is in his veins ! ”

“ And for that alone must he be thought a dog ? Come, Great Bear ! You are too great

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a chief and too brave a man to hate another just because he bears a hated name. That is not what our brother Conyers would have done. That is not what the Great Manito would have us do. What would our hopes be if, when we offended, the Great Manito turned His face away and—never forgive?”

The poor chief felt the truth of such reasoning, and began to show signs of relenting, so Bray pressed his wishes.

“Hawk Eye has been faithful and kind to me in many things. He once risked his life for Conyers when the fever laid us both low. Will you do less than that for Conyer's son?”

Here Jack ventured to suggest that he might carry the message to Hawk Eye, recognising the chief's reluctance to meet his hereditary foe. But Bray did not accept the offer.

“The place is not easy to find from here, and time is precious. Great Bear knows every inch of this forest. He knows the old camping-ground of the Blackfeet, and can reach it in an hour. You see, we must not delay longer than is necessary. That boy's life may not be actually in danger, though frankly I have little doubt but that it is, if the Red Hand cannot have his way. So, if Great Bear starts now on my horse, he can be back here in time for dinner, after which the chase will resume. Well, Great Bear? Which is

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it to be? Will you do this service for the sake of your old friend while I am preparing things here for departure? Will you go to Hawk Eye and ask him for the horses that we need, or must the hours be wasted while I do my own errand?"

"Great Bear will go," replied the chief quietly. "Where is the horse that I must ride?"

"Over there—in that clearing," answered Bray, as he pointed to the spot.

"Then Great Bear will ride to the tent of the Blackfeet, and"—here he stepped forward and held out his hand for Bray to take it in the grasp of friendship—"and—Great Bear is grateful to his white brother that he has shown him what the Great Manito would have him do."

Then the proud chief strode away, none the less proud that he had yielded a point of stubborn hatred to the influence of Right.

CHAPTER XXII

A COUNCIL OF WAR

Great Bear fulfilled his mission faithfully. He found the place where Hawk Eye, the hereditary chief of the Blackfeet, had built a cabin, and where, with his squaw and papooses, he followed the peaceful calling of a trapper and a fairly extensive rancher. Being friendly with the white man, he had seen the advantages of copying their ways of life to a large extent, and he had become so successful that his ranch and native cowboys had earned the respect of all who had dealings with him. Of course he was looked down upon by many of his own tribe, and regarded as a sort of outcast by other chiefs. Even a fine old character like Great Bear had little but contempt for the chief who could so far forsake the traditions of his fathers as to follow the ways of the pale faces. But Hawk Eye went on his own course until undoubted wealth gained him the respect that his colour had kept at bay.

Hawk Eye received the Sioux chief with welcome, and, when told of Bray's wish, he

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immediately saddled-up and accompanied Great Bear to his friend's shanty.

The two chiefs arrived with extra horses just as the English boys had prepared a noon meal that was to be partaken prior to the renewed pursuit of Conyers and the Red Hand. While they were eating, Bray explained his wishes. He told Hawk Eye as much of the story as was necessary, and the Blackfeet chief listened with the interest that combined the keen instincts of the native with the practical experience of a trained cowboy.

Then, at the pause that followed Bray's statement, he laid down his knife and fork and addressed the meeting.

"This is a great day," he said seriously. "It is a great day of sorrow and it is also a great day of joy, for have not the Sioux and the Blackfeet buried the hatred of years and smoked the peace-pipe? But"—and he turned to Great Bear, who was sitting a little to one side as though he felt rather awkward and perhaps resentful at the presence of his old-time foe—"but before we speak of other things, ought not rejoicings to be secure? Great Bear, there has been a long hatred between our nations. The blood of the Blackfeet has flowed before the tomahawks of the Sioux, and the arrows of the Sioux have dyed the green prairie with the blood of the Blackfeet. But now a common love for a white brother's danger has called us out to

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one purpose. On this war-path we must march together. Shall we not first, then, join our hands as the white man does and swear friendship forever?"

The plea was earnestly made, and as Hawk Eye spoke he rose from his seat and stretched forward his hands to Great Bear with an invitation of friendship.

Great Bear also rose, and drew himself up, proud and dignified. He looked steadily into the eyes of the Blackfeet chief, while the boys and Bray remained silent observers of the scene.

"Great chief," he said at last in slow, measured tones, "when Great Bear was a brave, the Sioux and the Blackfeet buried the tomahawk by morning, and by night your warriors fell upon our peaceful tents, and slew our young men while they rested trustfully. You were not chief then. You were papoose in the tent of your mother. But the story was told in after years by the camp-fires with boasting by your warriors. Shall it be possible that words can ever wipe out such a memory? Can it be possible that Great Bear can ever forget how his proud nation lived one day and was dead when the next sun came?"

"It can be," answered Hawk Eye solemnly. "The great Manito of the red man and the white man bids us forgive our enemies that we may ourselves be forgiven by Him."

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"But—forget?" questioned Great Bear in ringing tones.

"Kawin, Kawin," answered Hawk Eye. "We cannot forget these things. But from the memory of the evils that are past, we may see the path that leads to the good deeds of days to come. We seek the fair prairie when our fire has destroyed the forest behind us. Let us then leave the ashes of hatred and find the prairie of love! Let us be as brothers!"

Again the inviting hands were held forward.

The Sioux stood in thoughtful silence for a moment. Then he stepped forward like the brave man that he was and met the proffered hands with his.

"The words of Hawk Eye drive out hatred from the heart as the camp-fire chases winter cold from the wigwam. Let us, then, be as brothers," the old chief said.

Thus was the feud of centuries healed at last.

"Now let us get to business," said Jack, in matter-of-fact tones, when this interesting scene had ended. He instinctively felt that a sudden change of subject was needed to remove any feelings of embarrassment that the two chiefs might otherwise experience if the situation were prolonged. "I vote that we saddle-up and get on our way immediately."

"Well said," rejoined Bray. "But there are one or two matters to be settled first. What are your plans?"

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“ To make for Black Crossing in the first place. That was Great Bear’s idea.”

“ Very good. Black Crossing is the direct trail for Last Mountain, and it seems as if they were heading there. But there is another matter. Petrie is a desperate man, and he has many friends in these parts.”

“ Friends that would be likely to help him in an unlawful business ? ” Geoff questioned, and Hawk Eye answered :

“ The Red Hand has friends for every evil purpose all over the prairie. What he can’t do alone, he will find plenty to help him. Great Bear knows where these wolves dwell. Yes ; what Petrie fails alone, he will accomplish with numbers.”

“ And we are only four or five,” added Jack. Then he sighed, though immediately afterwards he commented with forced cheerfulness: “ Well, it can’t be helped. Five to five or five to twenty, it’s all the same. We’ve got to do our best, haven’t we, Geoff ? ”

“ Right-o,” replied that youth, whose spirits were seldom depressed by the darkest prospects for more than a minute at a time. “ ‘ Be prepared,’ is the motto, isn’t it, Jack ? We must be prepared when the enemy is not prepared, and take all their wickets with twisters when they’re expecting slow underhands.”

During this discussion, Great Bear had been a silent listener, courteously reserving

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his opinions until everyone else had spoken. But now, with the pause that followed Geoffrey's speech, he entered the arena.

"The Red Hand has many servants, but they are of the Cree, they are out of the Blackfeet. They are not of any nation that makes warriors. Their blood is the mingled blood of the red man and the white, and a few brave men would scatter many half-breeds like grains of sand before the wind."

Great Bear looked straight into the eyes of the Blackfeet chief as he spoke. The moment had come for him to show his trust in his new-sworn brother, and he was quick to take advantage of it. Somehow, all seemed to know what he was going to say next, but they would not anticipate his thoughts nor rob him of the pleasure of making the suggestion. Hawk Eye also felt instinctively what would follow, and his face began to light with eager pleasure.

"But," the old chief resumed, "my brother of the Hawk Eye is known to have, at his tents, at least ten good braves in whose veins run the pure blood of Blackfeet nation. The eye of a Blackfeet was never known to tremble before even death itself. Let, then, these ten good braves follow on the trail with Hawk Eye. Then shall the Red Hand find no shelter dark enough to hide him—no power strong enough to do evil to any white brothers. I have spoken."

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"And spoken well! Bravo, Great Bear!" exclaimed Beverley, who could hardly restrain his excitement during the latter portion of the Sioux's speech. "Old Red Hand, as he is called, will find himself jolly well bowled over for once. What do you say, Jack?"

"That soon Petrie is going to have the hottest time of his life," responded the elder boy enthusiastically. "Well, Hawk Eye, what have you to say to Great Bear's suggestion?"

"My cowboys shall be ready—in another day. Then shall they come quickly on your track."

"Could they not go right now?" suggested Bray.

Fate, however, was not altogether in the boys' favour that day.

"I am alone at my ranch," Hawk Eye explained. "My men have gone to Touchwood with horses to sell. They return tomorrow morning."

"I understand," said Bray. "Well, that is a difficulty that we cannot avoid. You have done me many kindnesses, Hawk Eye, but none greater than you are doing for the son of my old friend Hal Conyers."

Then Great Bear rolled out in bass tones for all the world to hear:

"All good men loved Chief Conyers!"

"And for his sake the son must be saved."

"And for the sake of the Scout Law!"

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interpolated Hansard, to which Bray concluded:

"For the sake of right, which I take to be much the same thing. Now, I think the best plan is for you, Hansard, to set off with your chum and Great Bear for Black Crossing. I'll have to take my traps to Hawk Eye's ranch, as I can't leave them here, nor can I carry them with me on such an errand. If you pick up certain tracks, you'd best follow on first thing in the morning—or sooner, if you see need for urgency. But soon after noon to-morrow I'll be after you with Hawk Eye and his braves. We'll soon find your tracks."

"Right you are," agreed Jack, who was now all impatience to resume the pursuit. "Come along, Euclid! Help me to saddle up, and we'll get under way. Good-bye for the present, Mr. Bray."

"Good-bye, boys. I've packed some grub in these two bags for you to take with you. Good-bye! When next we meet, I hope it will be to find that your travels and Conyers' troubles are nearly over."

"I shan't be sorry to make tracks for home," said Jack as he took the man's hand in his. "Good-bye, Hawk Eye."

"Good-bye," responded the Anglo-Redskin as he shook hands with each boy in turn. Great Bear had gone to prepare the horses, so was not included in these farewells. "My

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braves will soon be following ; as good riders and rifle shots as are on the prairie, they are."

Then the boys left the shanty and hurried round to the stable, with the Blackfeet chief following, to speed the parting guests.

In a few minutes the trio were cantering along the well-defined track that led towards Black Crossing, with Great Bear leading as usual, though there was room for the chums to ride side by side. They appreciated the treat of being astride of horses again in place of the trudging that had been their lot for the previous forty-eight hours or so. Hawk Eye's bronchoes were all of good class, and the trappings showed their owner understood the comfort of good leather for both man and beast. Jack had not forgotten his bear-skin. That was fastened in a roll at the rear of the saddle, as was also the one that fell to Great Bear's skill attached behind the chief.

Recalling Bray's warnings of Petrie and his friends, all three kept their eyes well open for any signs of a lurker among the trees through which their winding path led. It would have been a fairly easy thing for any concealed man with a good rifle to pick off each rider and be himself perfectly secure. Such a contingency was always possible when dealing with such a character as the Red Hand, but fortunately all fears in this respect proved groundless, and several hours passed without any incident to mar the peace

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Towards evening the Black Crossing was reached. Here the travellers dismounted to water the horses; and, while Geoff and Great Bear were performing this duty, Jack set to work to do a little spoor-scenting on his own account.

He was rather puzzled to find a number of pairs of footprints in the mud at the side of the river—some boots, some moccasins, and some bare-feet. He was more surprised still to find, on following these tracks forward, that the four suddenly ended and only two pairs remained—one of boots, the other an ordinary native's track. Then it occurred to him that there seemed to be very little difference in the sizes of the footprints, so he measured them with a piece of stick, and came to the satisfactory decision that the bare-feet following one pair of moccasins were much of a size; moreover, the distance in the paces was exactly the same as if one man had been closely following another without varying the space between them.

So far, Geoff had been watching his chum with mere interest, but a few moments later he was shaking his sides with laughter; for suddenly Jack had dropped down on all-fours and begun to crawl along slowly up the bank as if he had gone back to the days of his creeping childhood.

"What's the matter, old man? Playing circus?" called Beverley, with a laugh.

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“Eureka! I’ve found it!” answered Jack, forgetting that all his reasoning had been inwards, and that his present actions must seem ludicrous to the uninformed.

“Found what?” asked Geoff, leading his horse from the river.

“Why, the meaning of these footprints. There are four sets, and they’ve been made by two fellows!”

“Now, that’s a fat-headed thing to say,” remarked Geoff. “Who ever heard of two fellows making four sets of footprints? They’d need four legs each.”

“Or boots or moccasins in their hands,” retorted Jack, triumphantly. “That’s an old scout dodge to make people think that four people have been there instead of two. It’s an old scout dodge, and that’s enough to tell me that Dan Conyers and some friend have passed here—and not very long ago either, for the marks are still clean, nor rounded in any way by the wind.”

Geoff listened to his simple reasoning with open-eyed wonder.

“Man, you’re a perfect wonder!” he exclaimed. “What a thing it is to be a scout——”

“With brains!” added Jack, with a sly smile at his chum. Then he resumed seriously: “It’s sunset now. I don’t see that we can do much to-night, so we’d best camp here in the bush. It won’t do to light a fire,

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or it might attract Petrie, so we'll gnaw some of the biscuits that Bray gave us and yarn quietly until we turn in for the night. Conyers has some twelve hours' start of us. Likely as not he'll travel half the night as well, since he has no tracking to do."

"That's so," returned Geoff, as he commenced to unsaddle his broncho. "Luckily, the bush is fairly clear, so we'll be able to cover more ground in a day than he will."

"We ought to be near enough to signal by to-morrow night. Perhaps, with fortune, we might even make up on him!" continued Jack, with growing interest, as the idea appealed to him. "That'll be something worth taking all this trouble for! Think of it: two scouts meeting for the first time in the backwoods of Canada!"

"We'll shout 'hurrah' when the time comes. For the present, we'll tackle old Bray's biscuits," remarked Geoffrey dryly.

The thought flashed through his mind that the meeting might not be so very full of joy. The pathway might lead through something of sorrow, since the Red Hand would likely pass that way as well.

"All right, thou starving Euclid!" said Hansard chaffingly. "Thou shalt be appeased, and—what's that?"

Quickly the last two words were rapped out as the speaker started alert and listened.

"A horse—galloping for the crossing—the

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other side!" he exclaimed, and at the same moment Great Bear came quickly towards the boys, leading the two bronchoes, his own and Jack's.

"In bushes, quick! Hide!" he directed. "But keep horses so they not speak!"

The bronchoes were quickly led into the shelter of the neighbouring willows, while their muzzles were firmly held to prevent a friendly neigh betraying their presence. Then the three watchers strained their eyes to pierce the gloaming to see the approaching rider, who, as yet, was hidden from view on the winding trail beyond the Rushing Waters.

But the clatter of hoofs being urged at breakneck speed grew louder, and presently the dusty figures of a horse and a rider were seen to enter the slope to the crossing, hasten downwards, and then rush splashing into the river.

"A red man!" whispered Great Bear, whose eyes, old though they might be, were yet keener at such times than those of his less trained companions.

Just then the horse in the water, scenting others of his kind, gave a loud neigh.

"Molly! Your mare, Geoff!" exclaimed Jack; "I'd know her anywhere!" And before any person could stop him he had sprung from his hiding-place and rushed down the river bank to meet the rider, who was just emerging from the water. "Stop! Stop, or I'll shoot!" he cried.

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Seeing that the fat was in the fire, so to speak, both Geoff and Great Bear ran to Jack's side. The Sioux gripped the bridle and forced the horse back on its haunches.

"Great Scott! It's White Fang!" exclaimed Geoffrey. "Look out, Jack!"

Something had leaped out from the water straight for Hansard's throat, but Geoff's arm shot out at the same moment, with revolver as a knuckle duster, and dealt a good right-hander that stretched the assailant on the ground. It was a dog—White Fang's dog, Tracker—not killed, but, until Great Bear captured him, dazed.

"Come down!" commanded Jack. "This is not your horse. Get off—and explain yourself!"

With apparent ready obedience the Indian dismounted, while Jack replaced his revolver in his pocket. A moment later there was a flash of steel in the native's hand, and a yell of fury, while, like a wild animal, White Fang sprang upon the man who had once called him "coward."

CHAPTER XXIII

FISTS *VERSUS* KNIFE

Had not Jack Hansard thoughtlessly pocketed his revolver there would probably have been no more White Fang; for the scout was a good shot, and could have bowled over the Indian as easily as playing skittles.

As it was, however, he met the Cree's attack with a good right-hander, catching him square on the left side of the jaw and tumbling him into the water. Such a greeting was certainly a surprise to White Fang. But the Indian was no funk. He jumped to his feet in an instant, and again sprang wildly upon the boy.

At the first onslaught, Great Bear made a move to go to his young friend's help; but Geoff, seeing how matters went, forbade him.

"You watch that dog, chief! He's waking up again," the boy said. "Jack's equal to any savage with a knife, and I'll see fair play. Look at that!"

It was an occasion for admiration of the "noble art," for White Fang's second attack had been met with a beautiful postman's

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knock that sent him leaping into the air with a howl of rage and pain.

The Indian did not fall this time, but he staggered on his feet, and his eyes could be seen glaring fiercely in the semi-darkness of the evening.

“Try it again?” jeered Jack, with a laugh.

The answer did not come with words. There was a ringing in the air as the long knife sprang from the Indian's hand like an arrow from the string. But the aim was weakened by excitement, for the blade whizzed past Jack's left ear and sank into the body of a tree beyond with a sharp, quivering “ping.”

Finding his enemy still unhurt, and knowing himself now weaponless, White Fang gave a scream of fury and once more sprang for the English youth with tooth and nail, regardless of all caution. It was foolish and reckless, for the savage knows nothing of the science of fisticuffs, no matter how much of an adept he might be at wrestling. With the spring, Jack stepped smartly to the right, landed the Indian a full-weight blow on the ear as he passed, and ended the fight with his enemy lying moaning at his feet.

“That settles him, poor beggar!” remarked Jack, when the actual downfall of his adversary was completed.

The “poor beggar” was characteristic of the speaker; so were the actions that fol-

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lowed, for he immediately knelt down and began to soothe the pain as assiduously as, a moment before, he had been bent upon administering the punishment.

"'Tis good. So fall all the cowardly Crees," said the stolid chief, who had watched the encounter with interest while he held the growling Tracker by the collar.

"White Fang die! White Fang die!" the young Indian moaned.

"Bosh!" retorted Geoff brusquely. "What on earth are you going to die for? A hiding such as you've had is not going to kill any fellow."

Tenderly Jack sponged the bruises with a wet handkerchief, and in other ways did his best to comfort the thoroughly cowed Indian.

"Never mind, Geoff, old man," he said: "we won't rub it into the beggar, seeing that he has got the worst of the scrap. If I were you I should take charge of that broncho of yours. Great Bear has got both it and the dog to look after."

"Tracker not fight now," said White Fang weakly. "Tracker! Lie down! Quiet, good Tracker!"

Great Bear released the dog, which instantly obeyed his master's orders, while Beverley took possession of his mare, which he found saddled and equipped, plus the black fox-hide, just as she was when she bolted on the night of the encounter with the mad wapiti.

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In a little time White Fang recovered sufficiently to be led to the place where it had been decided to camp for the night. The youth was fed and a blanket spread for his comfort, in all of which attentions Jack exerted himself, much to the disapproval of Great Bear, though he said nothing, having learned never to be surprised at, or interfere with, the strange ways of the white man.

When they had had supper and all was snug, and whispered conversation began to while away the time prior to sleep, White Fang suddenly broke in upon a pause in the talk.

“The pale faces are strange—very strange—to the redskin. Their ways are as unknown as the secrets of the medicine man.”

Jack laughed quietly, and the Cree resumed:

“The ways of the pale face are strange—very strange—to the red man. He strike hard upon his enemy, then he take enemy in arms like a brother.”

A slight laugh broke from Jack's lips at this criticism of his dealing with the Indian.

“You're a bit of a papoose in some ways, White Fang,” he said, though he smiled kindly upon the redskin, whose face was turned towards him with a light in the eyes that was almost affectionate. The moon had now arisen to make these things plain to the sight. “Didn't you see me in the dark, or were you afraid for something you had done,

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that you attacked me in the way you did ? ”

“ If you had remembered the trouble that was taken over your leg and your head that day when you were attacked by the buzzards, you would never have behaved in such an idiotic way,” commented Geoffrey.

“ Ah ! ” the Indian uttered this single word with a long sigh, as if he had recalled something, for which he was now sorry. “ The pale face kick White Fang from him like a dog. The pale face call White Fang ‘ coward. ’ Could such a pale face be a friend to the Indian ? ”

“ Of course—if the Indian was not a thick-skinned donkey,” Geoff retorted. “ These were only words. They meant nothing. And if you had only shown yourself instead of running away, you might have saved us a lot of trouble in finding Conyers. ”

At these words, White Fang started and asked with nervous hesitation :

“ Is Conyers—alive ? ”

“ As far as we know, he is,” replied Hansard. “ He has escaped from the Red Hand ; but he is still in danger. ”

“ But you ? ” exclaimed the young Indian with excitement. “ You ? Are you—to save him ? ”

“ Of course, you idiot ! What else do you think we are here for ? ” answered Geoff.

Instantly White Fang moved nearer to Jack, and, with tears streaming from his eyes,

gripped the English boy's hands impulsively.

"Oh, White Fang was wrong! A mist fell over his eyes when pale face called him 'coward,' and he hate pale face—leave him—hide from him. And he forgot that they help white brother Conyers. He steal food from horses while white boys hunt black fox, and he hide behind falling waters. Then he find horse. He remember Conyers alone with Red Hand, and ride, ride, ride to help him. But White Fang wrong to hate pale face. Will the white brother forgive the red man? His heart very sore now he understand. Forgive him!"

"Of course—of course," replied Jack, who was considerably touched by the disjointed appeal. "But you were wrong to do what you did—to take the food-bags."

"White Fang no' steal for self. White Fang no' cut string and eat!" interrupted the Indian.

"Well, well, we'll say no more about it," said Jack. "You can make up for the mistakes of the past by helping us now."

"White Fang will prove that he no coward," was the rejoinder, as the Indian sat up proudly to deliver the boast, and Great Bear—who had hitherto sat with silent attention—muttered:

"A good warrior needs no boast. He is brave; he do brave deeds; so no brother put tongue in cheek and call him coward."

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"And no doubt White Fang will do many brave deeds yet," said Jack, for the chief's reproof, though not unmerited, might have a discouraging effect that was not desirable. "The Red Hand will have his hands full now. By the way, I wish I knew more of Petrie's intentions. It's rather walking in the dark as we are, don't you think, Geoff?"

"It is, old man. But what can we do? I suppose in the morning our only course will be to follow up Conyers' tracks, if possible."

"I suppose so," returned Hansard thoughtfully. "At the same time it seems rather a slow way to go to work. Perhaps also Petrie knows more than we do, and may take a shorter cut to carry out his schemes."

"That's true," said Geoff. "What do you think about it, chief?"

The old Sioux shook his head.

"The track is easy to find and easy to follow."

"But it's slow," interrupted Jack, and the other boy remarked with quiet chaffing:

"I suppose it would be howling cheek for an ordinary fellow like myself to make suggestions to a scout?"

"That depends upon what suggestions were made," Jack returned, in the same humour. "Euclid was famed for his sense, you know. But fire away. Let's have the words of wisdom."

"Well," began Geoff, "I may be wrong—

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probably I am ; but, in my humble opinion, we are going the wrong way to work."

"And you call that opinion humble ?" retorted Jack, laughing. "To dispute the actions of a chief of Sioux, a scout, and goodness knows how many others! Humble, indeed! Then what does our excellent Euclid suggest as an alternative ?"

"Find Petrie's friends, and let Petrie take care of himself."

In an instant Hansard dropped all raillery and became serious.

"By Jove, man! You've hit the nail on the head!" he exclaimed, to which appreciation Geoff replied quietly:

"It's a way I have—sometimes, though you hardly believe it."

"It's the fact this time, at any rate," acknowledged Jack. "Of course it is clear as the day. No doubt Petrie has got his spies, as we have been told, and may be joining him. They'll know better than we do where to find the man. Even if they don't, it's a chance worth risking. But I think he'd be sure to hunt up his pals to watch us, knowing that we are in pursuit. And he does know that, or he wouldn't have sent out poor Wahtah as he did. Euclid, you are a genius!"

"Thanks."

"And a thorough scout into the bargain. What do you think, Great Bear? How can we best find out where the Red Hand is now ?"

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The chief was thoughtful for a few moments before he committed his wisdom to words.

"The Red Hand is near friends," he ultimately said. "He would wish to make great net to trap white brothers in the forest."

"By which you mean that he would get his friends to help him?"

"You speak well," answered the chief.

"Where are these friends that you speak of?" Geoffrey then questioned. "Are they anywhere hereabout?"

"There is a house—a small journey—where people eat and sleep when they travel. There is much fire-water there, and half-breeds gather to drink and play for money with pieces of papers."

The chief paused, and Jack turned to Geoff with all a scout's keenness.

"Say, old man. This is quite after my heart. Let's go and do a bit of scouting round the haunt of these 'birds of prey.' Are you game?"

"Rather!" was the hearty response, and the speaker rose in readiness to be off at once.

"All serene," said Jack. "See, chief. My chum and I are going on foot to see what we can find out about Petrie. You will stay here with White Fang and the horses."

"My white brothers will keep eyes as foxes," warned Great Bear. "Red Hand not

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easy to spy, and if he find you on his trail——”

“We’ll take our chance at that, and try to be as ’cute as he is,” rejoined the scout. “If we are in trouble and need help, three shots will call you.”

“We will come,” replied the Sioux. Then he added as an afterthought: “Would it not be better if Great Bear came also? His eyes are keen; he can smell a track.”

But Jack did not approve of the suggestion.

“I think not,” he said. “Where two can hide, three would be seen. We might manage to escape suspicion, for of course Petrie does not know for certain that we are after Conyers. But it would be difficult to explain why you were with us. And more, you have said that you and he are not friends. He might have suspected you, though possibly we might escape notice. No, I think it will be best for Geoff and I to go alone.”

“The words of Jack are as the words of the medicine man. They are wise and they are good,” acknowledged the chief, and Beverley remarked, in agreement with the sentiment:

“That’s a good name for you, old chap: the Medicine Man—or the Medicine Scout would be better.”

“Piffle!” was the polite acceptance of the compliment. “A medicine man is a chap who works wonders.”

“And don’t you?” queried Geoff.

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"Not that I know of."

"What about the affair of the lasso at the Wolf's Jaws?"

"A lucky shot. Nothing else."

"And the patching up of White Fang—leading up to his friendship?"

"Common sense."

"All the same," laughed Geoffrey, "there has been wonder-working ever since we left our ranch. Bears killed, Indians mended, feuds between Sioux and Blackfeet settled, and Conyers saved."

"H'm. That isn't done yet. Time to call that a 'wonder' when it is over."

"But it will be over soon," persisted Geoff. "Oh, yes, you may laugh, if you like. I know what I'm talking about. That 'Be prepared' of yours is a magic 'open-sesame.'"

Jack forced a yawn.

"When you've quite done yarning, old man, we'll start business. I vote we leave our guns behind. They'd be in the road if there's much bush-creeping to be done. Revolvers are good enough for this job."

"Right," was the brisk reply. "I'm quite ready. It wouldn't be a bad plan to have the horses waiting saddled until we come back. We might need them in a hurry."

"We might. Great Bear will see to that for us. Now, where are we to find this hotel, or inn, or whatever you call it, chief?"

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The Sioux rose up and began to walk a few yards with the boys.

“Follow trail up hill. House stand there,” was the brief explanation, indicating that the inn was to be found at the right hand side of the road.

“Good,” said Jack. “Now, we’ll leave you. And remember, three quick shots mean ‘come quickly.’ Otherwise expect us—when you see us, and don’t worry about us.”

“It is well,” replied the chief, and then, with a short “good-bye,” he stood and watched the boys as they hastened along the trail.

CHAPTER XXIV

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It was a night for seeing ghosts. The moon had risen high up to the arc of the sky and flooded the forest with that mysterious white light that causes strange shadows to dance across the traveller's path, and that makes each harmless bush and shrub to assume all sorts of uncouth, monstrous forms.

Neither Hansard nor Beverley were nervous, however. They had lived too healthy lives to believe in apparitions that were not the results of babyish fear or indigestion. The average native would have hesitated before he ventured in such a place by night; for, although you might assure him that the perpetual whisper was only the wind acting upon the leaves, he would run contrary to his sense, and shudder at each breath that caused an increase in the chatter of the trees. But the boys passed on, heedless of such trifles as shadows and leaves. They bent their backs to the steep slope that led from the river, and it was not long before they reached level ground, where the trail twined its course for many miles through the northern part of the Whispering Woods.

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Hitherto they had only spoken to each other in whispers, and their footsteps had been so light that the sounds could barely have been heard at the distance of twenty paces. They had need for caution. They judged well that it was impossible to divine what tricks Joe Petrie might be up to. He might even have spies whose eyes were now watching each step that the scout and his friend made. There were few stratagems of woodcraft with which Petrie was not familiar. This the boys recognised from the first, but they hoped to be able to pit their wits against his, to the confusion of evil cunning.

After a little more than two miles had been covered, a light was seen at a short distance beyond, some two or three hundred yards to the right among the trees. It was the clear steady light that comes from an open door or window, so the spies decided that this must be the inn that Great Bear had described.

Here Jack stopped, and went close to his companion.

"See here, old man," he began, "if Petrie's there, we want to find out what he's got to say for himself. That'll take careful scouting. Remember, even the snapping of a twig might give us away."

"I'll watch out," replied Geoff. "We'd best go single file through the bush instead of following the trail, don't you think?"

"Yes, that will be best. There might be

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some fellows about, and we'd jolly soon be spotted in the open."

But, as luck would have it, the boys had not gone another dozen yards before they startled a covey of prairie-chicken that rose with cries and whirring wings. The sound was instantly taken up at the inn by a dog, which commenced to bark furiously.

"Bother it! That's unfortunate!" exclaimed Jack. "It's enough to bring Joe and his men scouring the bush. See! They've opened the door."

It was certainly disheartening to meet such an obstacle right at the outset, and the boys felt their hearts sink with disappointment as they saw four figures plainly outlined by the light in the doorway. Fortunately their presence in the neighbourhood was concealed by the bush, but they were near enough to discern the form of Petrie, though his harsh voice would, in itself, have been a sufficient means for identification.

"What's the trouble, Pete? See anything?" he was heard to ask.

"Narey a sign," was the reply from the man addressed. Then he cursed the dog. "Be quiet, Snake, you cur-tailed mongrel!"

"It might have been a coyote," suggested a third. But this opinion was received with sneers by Joe.

"A coyote? Think a coyote sets chicken buzzing like that? It something with two

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legs and not four. For the land's sake, Josh, wring the dog's neck and stop his yapping! And, Pete, you go and take a look around. Like as not it's only one of the boys on the prowl."

"Say!" interpolated a fourth speaker. "D'you think it might be that coon Conyers found his way here?"

"Likely!" retorted Petrie sarcastically. "That's the sort of thing that would come from an unhung half-breed like you, Slick! I tell you, Conyers and Baptiste have gone right west. But I'll derned soon see who it is. Stand clear!"

At these words Hansard suddenly threw himself upon the ground and drew Geoff with him.

"Watch out!" he exclaimed, for his quick sight had seen a particular movement in the doorway that was immediately followed by a flash of light, a loud report, and then the sound of buckshot rattling among the trees.

The firing was sudden, but beyond a slight start neither of the boys made the slightest sound to draw suspicion in their direction.

The man at the inn paused and listened for a few moments. Then Petrie gave a loud laugh.

"I guess you must have been right, Josh. It's a coyote. Nothing on two legs would stand a sudden blast like that without a whine. But, all the same, I reckon we'd best

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have a watch. See, Pete! You clear out and see if you can pick up any tracks. Take this gun with you. One barrel's loaded."

Evidently the half-breed referred to as Pete was too well drilled to obedience to venture objection to the order, for he said nothing, but took the gun and started slowly across the clearing to where the two boys were hiding.

"Keep your eyes well skinned and let's hear your voice if you find anything," said Petrie. Then he added: "Now come on, boys. Let's get to business. There's a heap of talking to be done yet."

The men retired and the door was banged, and for the moment Jack and Geoffrey breathed freely. But it was only for a moment, as, in the moonlight, they realised that Pete's instinct was guiding his footsteps in a bee-line for their direction.

"What shall we do? Stay here or clear out?" whispered Geoff in excitement.

"Stay where we are," replied Hansard. "It's fairly dark here. He may pass us by if we lie low enough. But if he finds us we've got to stop him from giving the alarm."

"That's easily said. He's a hefty-looking chap, and he'll rouse the neighbourhood in a second."

"We've got to take our chance of that," returned Jack firmly. "But whatever you

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do, don't shoot unless you've got to. And then——”

“Shoot three times. I know. Great Scott, he seems to have eyes like a cat! He's coming straight for us!”

It was certainly an exciting moment.

Lying flat on the ground, with Geoffrey a little to one side at the rear, the two boys watched the cautious approach of the half-breed, who came forward with bent back and face pushed forward, and apparently with little fear. Of course the scout and his chum had no way of knowing that they were hiding at the very spot where Pete was accustomed at times to meet a friend of his own colour to do a little whiskey deal with a flask purloined from the inn for that purpose. He thought that in all probability it was the same friend who had caused all the trouble by coming a night before the usual appointment.

“Sid! Say, that you?” he questioned under his breath, as he craned forward and advanced with stealthy steps.

Then Jack gave his chum a slight kick to draw his attention as he quietly pulled an old envelope from his pocket and laid it on the long grass about three feet in front of him, where the white square was distinctly visible in the gloom.

Hearing no answer to his first questioning, Pete again repeated the interrogation.

“That you, Sid?”

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Then his quick sight discovered the envelope, and he bent low to investigate. But just when the half-breed's eyes were within a foot of the paper a pair of hands darted out of the grass, gripped the long hair, and brought the head with a jerk, face-downwards, upon the sod. The attack was so sudden that Pete fell flat, his mouth being choked by the grass and mould.

"Quick! On his back!" exclaimed Jack, though hardly above his breath.

Geoffrey was not slow to seize the situation. He jumped up and tumbled himself upon the half-breed, while next second he pinned the cold point of his revolver just behind Pete's ear.

"Move a muscle and you're a gone coon!" were the words that accompanied the action, and Pete knew from the tone that his plight was helpless.

"Keep him there," said Jack, as he untwined his fingers from the black hair that was in no degree pleasant to the touch.

At the same time he rose, untwined the man's sash, which was made of wool, and was sufficiently wide to make two excellent bands when ripped down the centre. A steady draw with a sheath-knife quickly accomplished the latter purpose, after doing which Jack tied Pete's hands at the back and also bound his ankles firmly together. He then took a handful of grass and rolled it into a ball,

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which he put inside his handkerchief. A few twists of the opposite ends of the cloth resulted in making a good solid pad with cords at each end for binding. Then the boy forced the pad into the half-breed's mouth and tied the ends behind the prostrate man's head. This done, he and Geoff rose, rolled the captive on his back, and finally gave themselves a good stretch.

"That's a neat job done," remarked Beverley, as he stood by his chum's side and critically surveyed the helpless man.

"Yes; we may flatter ourselves that we have done the work thoroughly," responded Jack. "It's a pity. But there was no help for it. He'll find a way to call attention and get released after we've—after our other little job is finished."

"I guess so. Now, what's the next move?"

"You stay here, please," Jack answered. "It'll be best for only one of us to go forward. You watch Pete, and give him a tap with the butt of your revolver if he worries."

"But——" began Geoffrey anxiously.

"No, no, old man," interrupted the elder boy, divining his friend's thoughts. "It would be risky for two of us to cross the clearing. It's bad enough for one, with that dog about. But I'll manage to work round to the other side and get under the shadow of those waggons and things. You watch Pete and see that he behaves all right; and—don't

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forget the warning if you find it necessary from any cause."

"In other words, 'Be prepared!'" laughed Geoff. He could not neglect a chance to chaff his chum with an old joke, even at a critical time.

"True—for once," returned Jack good naturedly. "Well, I'm off! Ta-ta!"

"Ta-ta! And good luck to you!" replied Beverley.

The shanty inn faced that part of the bush where the recent little adventure had taken place, so it was Hansard's plan to creep round the skirt of the clearing and approach the building from the rear. A hay-rick, a waggon, and several articles of farm machinery formed screens from which the boy could dart across each little plain of open moonlight to the security of shadows, and these were the tactics that he pursued until he found himself at his goal—the back of the inn.

Seeking the end of the house, the boy found that the window of the only lighted room was half-draped with dirty-muslin, which thus afforded him an opportunity for observing whatever took place within, while at the same time it prevented any likelihood of the men noticing the presence of the young spy.

Cautiously the scout took up his position, and as guardedly raised his head so that he could peep above the window-ledge.

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He saw four men seated at a table in the middle of a room that evidently served the double purpose of kitchen and saloon. Two or three glasses were on the wood, as well as a stone jar. All were smoking, and the air was thick with the blue mist of the tobacco.

From the manner and general bearing of one of the men, it would not have been difficult to decide that he whose back was towards the window was the Red Hand, even though Jack had not known the "pirate." The other three were also half-breeds, and from general appearances it was plain that Joe had been laying down the law to them. Their faces were all turned towards their chief, and he was addressing the company in his usual dogmatic manner.

"Now, then, there you have it—the whole bag of tricks," he was saying. "The business is as clear as water, and it means fifty dollars apiece if you catch the coons."

"Down on the nail, as the English say?" questioned one of the listeners, Jean, by name, to whom Joe replied calmly:

"One month from to-day. "I'll have to get back to my ranch first. I don't carry a hundred and fifty greenbacks about with me on the prairie. But you can trust me, I reckon, Josh. Can't he, Slick?"

"Pretty near," answered that honest referee. "What Joe promises, he'll do."

"And that's a sight more than can be said

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for some folks," was Joe's grateful return for the compliment.

Slick hung his head. The taunt hit very near home.

"Easy, boss," he muttered sulkily. "Guess it's mighty hard work we do for you at times. Watching Black Crossing with a fire coming for you at one side, and two rats—a white one and a red one—coming for you at the other. Well, 'tain't easy watching two sides at once."

"Bah! Them that grows on the prairie should have eyes all round. Think if it had been me! Would I have let Baptiste and Conyers snaffle my gun right out of my hand?"

"It was a terrible hard fight, and—two of them to me!" returned Slick, from which it will be gathered that the half-breed's account of the incident had not been entirely in accordance with fact.

But Petrie had his own reasons for extending indulgence to the delinquent on this occasion.

"Well, well," he said, "say no more this time. It ain't to be expected that you'd be up to the monkey-tricks of whites as well as your own colour. I'll let it slide this time if you come off best in this other matter. That's fair enough, boys? Though I'll admit you were easily kicked from the roost. Now, what do you say, boys?"

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Josh lazily rose from his seat to find matches on the dresser.

"It 'pears to me, Joe, that *you're* not making much of a deal," he remarked.

"How?" Petrie questioned.

"Well, you say you pay us fifty dollars each to help catch English boy. But why?"

"'Cause I've got a little account to settle."

"But you not get dollars too?" pressed Josh cunningly, as he lit his pipe and leaned against the dresser.

But the half-breed's suspicions were quite dispelled by the laugh that greeted his question.

"Dollars? I get dollars? Narey a cent, Josh, and that's a fact. It'll be a dead loss to me paying you three."

"It much money for nothing," commented Jean, to which Joe promptly responded:

"Right. It's a mighty deal of trouble. But you ought to know me well enough by this time. You ought to know that when Joe makes up his mind about anything, that same thing's going to come off. You can just bet your bottom dollar that Joe Petrie comes out top every time, and don't you forget it! No, boys, it ain't money I'm after. It's—well, something else that don't concern none of you. But there's no more time for pow-wow. Just make up your minds right now. Is it a deal or is it not?"

"Fifty dollars'll do me," replied Josh.

"Me too," added Jean.

"And you, Slick?" questioned Joe, at the same time giving his lieutenant a look that implied that, though he agreed, there was a fuller understanding in secret that meant something more than fifty dollars in Slick's pocket if the adventure succeeded.

But it was Joe's policy that the others should think that Slick was in the same ignorant position as they were.

"Are you satisfied?" the Red Hand urged.

"I guess it'll be enough for me if I can only lay my hands on that coon Baptiste," the half-breed growled. "That will be as good as dollars to me."

"Good," said Joe. "But don't forget what I've told you. You can do what you like with Baptiste, but there's to be no rough-handling of the English boy. Scare the younker half out of his skin if you like, but—nothing more, or—well, you know what happens to them that disobeys me. We've got to remember them riders-of-the-plains."

"I know, I know!" interrupted Slick hastily, as he involuntarily shuddered at the thought of these prairie eagles.

No man—red or white—has not learned to appreciate the force of the Canadian Mounted Police. There is something about the dogged way in which they track down evil-doers and deal certain punishment that strikes awe into

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the hearts of law-breakers when they hear the name mentioned. To have one of these scouts on your track is like hearing the sound of doom. You may skulk and hide for months—nay, years—but all the time in your heart there is the certainty that your trail is being followed by eyes that are almost supernatural in their discernment. And inevitably the day comes when a muscular hand is laid on your arm and a voice at your ear speaks the words of warning to take no further risks with the power of the law. The chase is over, and punishment is at hand. That is, if your life has been in the wrong rut. Have you been going straight, there is comfort to be found in the knowledge of this same force in the name of Right. You can sleep in peace in your shanty, no matter how isolated you may be, feeling safe in knowing that that same power is driving evil from the prairie.

But Slick was not one of the latter. His sleep was often broken by the thought of the hand that might wake him when his sins had betrayed him, and the shudder with which he greeted Joe's reference to the riders-of-the-plains was one of genuine fear.

Jean diverted the discussion from painful quarters.

“ I s'pose you know where white boy is to be found ? ” he questioned of Joe.

“ He's not gone Last Mountain way, that's

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certain; for I've watched the trail," replied Petrie. "Nor he ain't gone back, for Whispering Woods is still red-hot. There's but one trail more, and that's Death's Gully."

"But there's police six miles past the Gully!" ejaculated Josh, with agitation, that showed how Slick was not alone in his dread of "the riders."

The Red Hand gave an exclamation of disgust.

"You coons ain't got the pluck of a gopher!" he said. "Didn't I tell you that Joe always comes out top?"

"That's so, boss."

"And do you think that he ain't going to come out top this time as well as others? Likely! Why, before Conyers gets to this end of the Gully, we'll be in at the other. We'll go by Trapper's Trail. Plenty time if we start in the morning, but—— Gee-whiz!"

As Joe uttered this last exclamation he started as suddenly as if he had been struck, and, for the moment, speech forsook him. The other half-breeds turned to their leader with questioning looks that were not free from dread.

"What is it, boss? What's gone wrong?" were the questions that broke from their lips.

But Petrie only looked at Slick as he whispered hoarsely:

"Say, Slick! Them other younkens! I'd

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forgotten all about them—them of the Old Camp, I mean!”

This sudden recollection of an additional element of danger made the half-breed gasp. He, too, had entirely forgotten the possibility of their themselves being followed, and Jack chuckled outside the window at the consternation that this recollection caused.

“We’ve heard narey a sound of them,” Joe resumed in low tones.

“P’raps they not follow?” suggested Slick.

But Joe received the amendment with a sneer.

“Bah! Wahtah has not come back!”

“P’raps he afraid of fire?”

“Not likely. Wahtah could find a way, as I did.”

“Then——”

Slick got no further with his remark, for Joe suddenly banged the table with his great fist, and started up, exclaiming fiercely:

“I guess I know what that means! They’re on our track, Slick! We must set off at once. Fool that I am! I felt from the beginning that these boys would come in my way, and now I am certain of it. They’ve caught Wahtah in a trap, or I’m sure he would have found his way back by this time. Boys, we must set off at once. Josh, you go with Jean and saddle-up the cayuses. We must make a bee-line for Death’s Gully right now.”

Jack had heard enough. Every moment

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was now of value if he was to be the means of assisting his brother scout in his trouble.

But even at that time, when carelessness might have been pardonable, he did not forget his scout's training and take needless risk by any reckless action. "There is haste sometimes in slowness," his scoutmaster had often said. Jack recalled that saying, and pursued the same care of deliberate movement from cover to cover that he had exercised when first approaching the inn.

He reached his chum again without incident, and found Geoff chatting pleasantly with poor Pete, who was still a bound prisoner.

"Well?" Beverley asked shortly.

"We must get back to Great Bear without delay," answered Jack. "I'll tell you all about it as we go."

"But what about this fellow?"

"H'm. It won't do to let him go, as he might warn his friends. And we can't leave him tied here."

Just then voices were heard at the inn, and shortly afterwards came the sound of horses' hoofs beating the trail, gradually becoming fainter and fainter.

"That settles it," said Jack, as he drew his knife and cut Pete's bonds. "They're off. And even if he rides after them, he can't do us much harm now. They would not turn back now that they have started on the road. Well, good-night, Pete! Sorry to have had

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to treat you so impolitely, but it could not be helped! Come on, Geoff, old boy!"

And leaving the surprised half-breed busily engaged in picking loose grass out from his mouth, the chums started back towards Black Crossing.

CHAPTER XXV

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Reaching the trail, Hansard and Beverley took the return journey at a smart trot, while, in a few words, the former gave an outline of his experiences.

It was not long before the camp was reached. There they found Great Bear awaiting their arrival with calm expectation. He had heard their footsteps while some distance away. White Fang was resting with his head against the faithful dog, Tracker.

"My white brothers have succeeded?" questioned the Sioux, going immediately to the important point.

"Yes," Jack replied. "But we must not waste any time. Petrie and his friends (three half-breeds) have gone to Death's Gully by Trapper's Trail."

"And the son of Chief Conyers? He is with them?"

"No. Evidently he has escaped, together with one whom they call Baptiste. Petrie says that the two have gone to Death's Gully, and he has set off to stop them by another trail."

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“Do you know the Gully?” Geoffrey then asked.

The chief nodded his head, and pointed his right hand due west along the banks of the Rushing Waters.

“Death’s Gully is big ravine with high rocks like walls—walls that no foot can climb. If the Red Hand come there in time, he must meet the boy Conyers. We must go now—quick—follow tracks of Conyers and Baptiste. Perhaps Manito still let us be in time to save our brothers from the Red Hand.”

“Right!” said Hansard, all alert for the chase. “See, White Fang. You must set off for Hawk Eye’s ranch. You know where it is? Good. You will find our friend Bray there, and you will tell them to follow with all speed. You understand?”

“White Fang understand,” replied the Indian.

“And, remember, we trust you, White Fang,” added Jack, with an impressiveness that was not lost upon the native.

“It is good. White Fang can do his best for his white brothers.”

“I am sure of that,” said the scout. “Now, change horses. Geoff will have his own mare. You take the one that Hawk Eye lent him.”

These arrangements were quickly made, and very soon White Fang was scampering off to do the errand that was to prove his faithfulness.

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“How shall we go, Great Bear?” was the next question. “We must go the quickest way, for these cut-throats have got a good start ahead of us.”

“There is trail by river—short trail that cut great bend of water.”

“Then that’s the way for us,” chimed in Geoff. “Can we go by night?”

“By night or day. The Red Hand he go by Trapper’s Trail. It short to far end of Death’s Gully. We go by short way to near end.”

“Then it depends upon how far Conyers and Baptiste have gone which of us makes up on him first?” resumed Jack.

Great Bear grunted his assent of this view.

“Then come on! Let’s mount, and waste no more time,” said the scout, as he swung into his saddle, and Beverley remarked in puzzled tones:

“But look here, chief. If we are to cut across the bend of the river, as you say, how is that to be done? Rushing Waters is deep, is it not—all except at the Black Crossing?”

“My brother Geoff speaks truly,” replied the chief. “The water is deep, and runs like wild buffalo tossing their manes.”

“Then how——” began Geoff, when the chief interrupted briefly:

“Bronchoes swim. They carry us.”

“Right!” was the cheerful rejoinder. “I suppose it’s all right. Well, I’m ready, Jack.

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But I see Tracker has not gone with his master. I wonder if he'll follow us ? ”

“ White Fang speak Indian tongue to dog ; tell him stay. He ride too hard for dog to follow long,” explained Great Bear.

The three riders were soon on their way again, hastening back towards Black Crossing, where the Sioux chief told them they would pick up the trail that they sought. Fortunately the moonlight was bright, and would be sufficient to show the path until morning dawned. But it was hard riding all the same. Once the forest was entered and the main trail left behind there was a morass to be crossed, one that only an adept in wood craft could have possibly traversed at night ; for even as they followed his leading, the ground sank beneath the horses' hoofs, and the turf moved in waves like the surface of the sea, with a slight swell. A touch of the rein, guiding too much to right or left, would have plunged the animal into depths of fluid mud. But Great Bear steered his course with the certainty of long experience that earned the boys' confidence. Yet it was a relief to all when the morass was crossed and terra-firma was reached once more.

Even on solid ground the progress of the travellers was still slow. Sometimes they even had to dismount to avoid a great tree that had fallen in a storm and barred their way. Such hindrances were galling to

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the boys, who were all anxiety to push forward in haste. But they had to curb impatience as best they could, and look forward to the dawn, when they would be able to make more rapid progress.

When morning broke the Indian called a halt, not so much for the sake of man as for the sake of beast. The horses had hard work to perform, and it was wisely decided to rest them at intervals in order to fit them for further tests of endurance that might follow.

With plenty of green grass at hand in the forest glades, and abundance of water in creeks and springs, the animals had no difficulty in procuring a satisfactory breakfast.

With the riders, however, the case was different. There was no time for killing and cooking, so an unsatisfactory diet had to be made from biscuits and wild berries, washed down with *aqua pura*. Then once more they mounted, and pressed onward in the chase that all knew to be one of life or death.

Towards noon one part of the river loop was reached, and the prospect of crossing this was not inviting when the flood of tumbling water was viewed from the steep bank.

But Great Bear went grimly forward. He rode to a spot some four feet from the surface, and bent forward to pat his steed's neck and whisper a few encouraging words. Then he gave the bridle a shake, and the brave animal

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took the water like a Newfoundland, closely followed by White Fang's faithful Tracker.

The Indian does not cross deep water holding by the horse's tail, as some races and armies do. He believes there is greater safety in sticking to the saddle, and this is the usual method of the cowboy also in similar straits. Jack's mare was not quite so ready to take the dive, and ultimately, on being urged, tumbled in awkwardly and nearly unseated the rider. Geoff was more fortunate, however, and soon the three horses were struggling with the current, churning the water with their fore-legs in strenuous efforts to reach the farther bank.

The force of the water was great, but for some inexplicable reason Jack's mare, after being the most difficult to persuade to water, seemed to "get her back up" at the antagonism of the current, and proved the best swimmer of the lot.

"Bravo!" cried the scout, as his steed passed Great Bear's like a tug-boat. "This is the one to swim the Channel, Geoff! What price Holbein on its back?"

"Don't brag! I'm after you!" was Geoff's merry retort. And true enough, Jack and Geoffrey were first to reach the farther bank, while Great Bear was fully three lengths behind!

All that day the chase was continued, except for brief periodical rests. The second loop

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of the river was reached towards night, but it was not so easily negotiated as its predecessor. The water was narrower and swifter, and the struggle was a long one before the brave animals managed to land their riders in safety. And then they had been carried nearly half a mile down-stream. At the farther side they dismounted, for the poor beasts were panting and trembling after the strain, and a long pause was necessary before they could risk a further advance. Even Tracker had had more than enough.

But though hungry and tired, neither the boys nor their Indian guide had any wish to delay longer than was just necessary. Berries again had to supply the evening meal, while an attempt was made to dry their clothes, and "shooting-irons" were wiped free from moisture.

The night closed again as they resumed their journey, and once more they had to rely upon the moon for light.

The course of the river was being followed now, and gradually it was noticed that the woods became darker and the trail less easy to see. Yet the sky overhead was clear, and the stars twinkled, undimmed by a cloud. It was just as if one were travelling between high walls—so high that the moon's slanting light was shut out.

They had entered Death's Creek—that narrow way where, in old days, many a

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wandering tribe had been trapped by enemies from either end. To such it was indeed a place of death, for the precipitous rocks of red sandstone rose up two hundred feet or more on both sides of the river—rocks as upright and smooth as though they had been cut by a sharp knife, and up whose even surface no human foot had ever been known to scale.

“I see a light ahead of us—a camp-fire, or something of the sort,” Jack suddenly announced, as he pointed through the trees, a little to the right, where the creek apparently widened somewhat.

“I wonder if it's Conyers or—hullo, what's the matter?”

As Geoff spoke, his chum's horse had suddenly shied at something at the side of the road, causing it to charge into its companion. Great Bear had lagged a little way behind the others.

“What's wrong?” Geoffrey asked as he pulled rein.

“Don't know. There's something in the road that's scared my broncho. Guess we'll have a look and see.”

The boys dismounted, as did also the chief, who had reached the spot by this time, and they soon sighted an object lying at the side of the road.

“It looks like a log of wood,” said Geoff, but at the same instant Jack gave an exclamation of horror:

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"Great Scott! It's a body—a man."

He went down upon his knees to examine more closely, but it took no time to discover the worst.

"He's dead," said the scout in tones of awe, and Geoff whispered huskily:

"It isn't——?"

"No, it's not Conyers. As far as I can make out it's a native—a half-breed."

"Baptiste," said Great Bear, who had turned the body on its back. "Baptiste. I knew him well. May Manito forgive him, for he has done much evil."

"Perhaps he was sorry, since he helped Conyers," said Geoffrey softly. "But——"

The boy stopped. He could not give utterance to the thought that had rushed upon his mind.

"I know what you are thinking, old man," said Jack, as he tenderly spread his handkerchief over the dead man's face. "This means that—that the Red Hand has got here—first! God grant that poor Dan has not met an equal fate!"

A slight pause followed. Then Jack rose up.

"We mustn't leave poor Baptiste like this. The wolves will tear him to pieces. See, chief! You and Geoff will carry him near the river. We cannot dig a grave, but you can find some hollow where you can lay him to rest beneath rocks, that the wolves

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cannot move. I must go on and see to Dan."

"But the danger, Jack!" exclaimed Geoff, with a voice full of alarm for his chum's safety, as he gripped him affectionately by the arm.

"Danger?" repeated Jack firmly, as he pressed his friend's hand. "Baptiste gave his life for his friend. Shall I do less than he?"

"No," returned the other boy sadly. "No; but—but I must come with you, Jack. Where you go, I go. You know that was the old compact!"

"Great Bear can lay his red brother to rest—alone," the chief said, fully understanding the affection that bound these two friends together.

"Then come," said Jack. "And, chief, you'll follow when—when your duty is done. We'll tie up the horses, and go. Keep Tracker with you."

Very warily the boys then crept through the bush towards the light, and soon they were able to discern several figures grouped around a fire.

Closer and closer they moved, and after a time they got near enough to distinguish the forms of the half-breeds, together with the great humped figure of the Red Hand. But there was no sign of Dan Conyers.

"Perhaps he has escaped?" suggested Geoff in a whisper.

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"Perhaps. But we must make sure, for the Red Hand will stop at nothing now. Wait!"

The boys paused, and then Jack suddenly uttered a yelp in imitation of a fox, so closely imitated that Beverley started and looked around him.

"Hark! Don't move. It's the call of the Fox Patrol," Jack whispered.

Then a second time he repeated the cry, and this time the men were obviously attracted, for they turned their heads to listen, and the watchers could distinctly hear Slick say:

"Foxes! Guess they have good supper on Baptiste!" At which fine wit the other men laughed, and Jack took the opportunity of repeating the call a third time.

Then the chums waited with anxiety, while they strained their eyes to discern some figure resembling that which they sought. But nothing could be seen but the half-breeds, and nothing could they hear but idle talk having nothing to bear on the matter of momentous interest.

"We must risk a bit," Jack then said. "We must get nearer; and if Dan's alive I can make him understand. Give me your knife, Geoff. It's got more spring in the blade than mine."

Taking the knife that Beverley handed to him, Jack then led the way cautiously, step by

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step, pausing after each pace, until they were actually at the very fringe of the clearing where the camp had been made. Here he stopped, and, picking out a tree with a large trunk, fairly dry and rotting in part, he took the knife by the point and commenced to tap sharply with the handle against the wood :

Tāp Tāp Tāp, Tāp Tāp Tāp Tāp.

It was the Morse signal. "Are you ready?"

Over and over again he repeated the call, until one of the men was heard to exclaim :

"Woodpeckers hungry too, by the sounds of things!"

But apparently there were no suspicions aroused as to the proximity of a human woodpecker, so Jack persevered, increasing and slackening the speed of the message to imitate the irregularity of the bird's strokes with its bill.

Then suddenly someone began to cough—a regular fit of coughing, it seemed.

Petrie turned towards the long grass at a little distance behind him and cursed the sufferer. But the attack was evidently severe, for the threats of sudden death did not seem to have any effect; and Jack's heart leaped with delight, for only *his* ears noted the pause after each three coughs—two long and one short—that flashed the message :

"Go on!"

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"That's Dan!" he whispered excitedly, and immediately the woodpecker resumed operations, spelling out the words:

"Be prepared—be prepared—be prepared!"

"Dry up!" cried Petrie suddenly, as he picked up a stone and sent it flying towards the boys. Then he addressed his lieutenant:

"Come on, Slick! Time's flying. Finish your pipe, and then we'll see what we can do to loosen that younker's tongue."

"Right, boss," came the answer from one of the half-breeds, at which Jack bent close to his chum.

"Wait here, old man. I'm going to Dan. If necessary, fire. You've got six shots, and so have I. I don't think any but Joe are armed, except with knives. But nothing will stop Joe now but gunpowder. I don't want to kill him if I can help it. But—*be prepared!*"

"Right, old man, and—good luck!" replied Geoff, fully determined that no one should attack his chum—and live.

Jack immediately crouched down and began to scout in a circle round the clearing towards where he now knew Conyers to be lying—probably bound, since he had not shown himself. It was slow moving, for every footstep had to feel its way to avoid breaking a twig or even crushing a dead leaf. But at last he reached the spot, and from where he stood he

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could distinctly see a figure lying on the ground with head towards him.

Here the scout sank upon his knees and gradually bent forward on his hands, until he was lying flat upon his face. He was carrying the knife between his teeth now, and he loosened the flap of his revolver-case in readiness for emergency. Then he began to wriggle forward, inch by inch, breathing softly and evenly—no haste, no excitement.

At last his head parted the grass before him, and his face looked into that of the brother scout for whom he had braved so much.

Their greeting was a smile and a sigh. They knew better than to speak.

Then Jack wriggled forward again. As he expected, Dan was bound, but a few swift cuts with Geoff's knife severed these, and the boy was free. Then, still without speaking, Jack bent sideways and commenced to wriggle back to the bush. Dan understood and followed.

"Ain't you finished that pipe yet?" Joe was heard to exclaim.

But even then the boys did not hasten. They knew that haste would betray them.

Such tactics were no little test of patience and self-control. The impulse of each was to rise up suddenly and make a reckless dash, risking whatever the consequences might be. But prudence held the mastery. "Slow and

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sure" was the motto to which their reason bade them adhere, and they stuck bravely to that policy.

At last they reached cover and were able to stand up in safety.

Only a moment they waited, while in silence they gripped one another's hands with the secret clasp of the great scout brotherhood. Next moment they continued the retreat with swift, though silent steps.

Dan Conyers was rescued at last!

CHAPTER XXVI

NEMESIS

The meeting with Geoffrey was none less cordial than that with Jack, though poor Dan was too overwhelmed by his unexpected release from the ordeal that Petrie was preparing for him to express his thanks in more than the simplest words.

"I can't say properly what I feel just now," he said. "Another time I may be able to say it better; but at present——"

"Don't try," cut in Hansard. "We're jolly glad to have been of use so far. But we're not out of the wood yet. We must make tracks for Great Bear, an Indian who is minding our horses for us, and—burying Baptiste."

"Ah, Baptiste! Poor Baptiste!" sighed Conyers. "They shot him—at least Joe did. But he was a good fellow, and did his best. It was cruel to have such a death just when he was learning what it means to go straight."

Just then a howl of men's angry voices in the distance told the boys that the flight of the prisoner had been discovered.

"Come! We must make a sprint for it!" exclaimed Geoff.

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"We can't go far before we'll have to fight," said Dan. "You have horses, you said?"

"Yes——"

"But only three, of course. Then you'd better peg on ahead——"

"And leave you?" added Jack. "Not likely. We'll fight for victory rather than do a low-down trick like that. Besides, I don't believe any of the fellows have firearms except Petrie."

"That's true," responded Dan. "But no——Slick's armed. He took the weapons from Baptiste. Joe has mine tied to his saddle."

"Well, there's no use shooting if we can do without," was Geoff's comment on the situation. "It's better to show our heels and get into hiding, if we can, than shoot people. So come on!"

Of course, there was always the chance that the half-breeds would mistake the direction that the fugitives had taken, and pursue their hunt in the opposite locality. But, as luck would have it, they divined that the side of the clearing on which Dan had lain would be the way in which he would flee. In this they were correct, and soon there followed the sound of hasty riders, of horses stamping, and finally the approaching clatter along the trail.

The boys had a good start of the pursuers. They made the most of it, darting off at full

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speed until they reached the place where Great Bear had been left.

But where were the horses ?

As they approached they could distinctly recognise the place where they had left them, but not a sign of an animal was visible.

Then a voice spoke out from the bushes at their side.

“ Here ! Come ! Far in the bushes—a cave ! ”

It was Great Bear. His instinct had warned him of the possible contingency that had arisen, and he had secured the horses in a cave that opened upon the cliff itself.

“ My white brother safe here, ” the Indian whispered, as he led the way to the retreat. “ Half-breeds no’ track through bush at night ; and by day—burning arrows keep a hundred from door of this wigwam. ”

It was a splendid sanctuary—a narrow entrance opening into a large single chamber.

“ By Jove ! ” exclaimed Geoff. “ You’re a perfect brick, chief ! ”

The Indian smiled in acknowledgment of the compliment that he but half understood, and afterwards turned with outstretched hand to Conyers.

“ The great chief, your father, loved Great Bear. We were friends. Shall it be that the son will be the friend of Great Bear also ? ”

“ Of course ! ” responded Dan heartily, as

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he grasped the Indian's hand with a cordial grip. "My father often spoke of you, and I know you were his true friend. Hark!"

It was the clatter of horses' hoofs upon the trail. They came like a storm, but passed rapidly.

A sigh of relief came from the breast of each of the listeners.

"Until morning, at any rate, we are safe from interruption," Jack remarked. "It's pitch dark in here, but I suppose it would not be good to show a light. Still, we can hear each other's voices——"

"So we'll just sit down and yarn till daylight," rejoined Beverley. "I suppose you can guess, Conyers, what it was that started us upon your track?"

"As a matter of fact I can't, unless——"

"Unless it was a certain drawing on a poplar tree? True. That was it. We found that, or rather my chum did, and he was able to read it—he being a scout, you know."

That was the beginning of a long swapping of yarns and relating of experiences that lasted well through the night. Incidentally it was mentioned that White Fang had gone off to call the reserve forces. This was great news for Conyers to hear. He had, of course, hitherto believed that his Indian companion was dead. To the wonder of the listeners, however, he seemed even more delighted to find that the dog, Tracker, was not only alive

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as well, but that he was even an occupant of the cave as well as they.

"Dog good friend, but Tracker not worth many dollars," remarked Great Bear, unconsciously paraphrasing Baptiste's comment.

Dan laughed softly.

"You may think not," he replied, as he fondled the animal and kept him close at his side. "You may think not; but time will show that he is of a great deal more value than you imagine. Aren't you, Tracker, old boy?"

Tracker beat his tail loudly upon the floor of the cave in assent to the question.

As dawn appeared, and there was no sign of the returning enemy, the boys and Great Bear ventured out to start another day upon a sustaining diet of berries. They were reluctant to expend any ammunition upon shooting birds, not knowing how much might be needed for the defence of their bodies. There was also the risk of telegraphing their whereabouts to undesirable watchers.

For some time the quartette, accompanied by the faithful Tracker, strolled along, picking the fruit from the bushes at either side of the trail; and they were just beginning to enjoy the comfort of feeling a certain freedom from alarms, when their thoughts were recalled to the sense of danger by the sound of horses rapidly approaching from the direction they themselves had come on the previous night.

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Instantly all four hastened into the bush, and scarcely had they found cover than they saw the Red Hand charging at furious speed on Fire-fly, hotly pursued by Bray, Hawk-Eye, and several Blackfoot cowboys.

With one accord the three boys and Great Bear sprang to the middle of the trail, with levelled weapons, to bar the way. Fire-fly, startled at the sudden appearance before her, fell back upon her haunches, then rolled over, throwing Petrie violently upon his side. But the mare was up again in a moment. So was the Red Hand, and, strange to say, his first thought was one of revenge against the animal that had failed him by not charging through the line that barred the trail ahead.

Mad with passion, Joe whipped out his revolver and fired straight into poor Fire-fly's breast. The attack was done in a flash of time, but in that brief moment was also summed up all the resentment that the mare had harboured for years against the brute who had used her so vilely and repaid her faithful service with such savage mercilessness.

"Stop him! Don't let him pass!" cried Bray.

But, before human hands could reach him, the mare gave a shriek of pain, plunged forward with lips thrown back, seized the torturer's neck with her teeth, then dropped him—*dead!*

The riders came up, while the boys rushed forward to where Petrie lay, huddled upon the

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ground beside Fire-fly, who was now breathing her last.

“He’s done for, poor beggar!” said Dan sadly.

All his sufferings were forgotten for the time being when he witnessed the terrible punishment that the Red Hand had brought upon himself.

“You may well say, ‘poor beggar!’” Bray remarked, as he dismounted. “His sins have left him a beggar for all that is worth possessing. God have mercy upon him!”

Then he turned upon Conyers with a smile.

“I expect your name is Dan! I am glad to meet you, though I expect my pleasure is nothing to that of yours when you met our plucky young friends there.”

The boy’s face lit up with a smile of gratitude at this reference to Hansard and Beverley.

“They saved my life at great risk to their own. They know how I feel. I cannot put it into words.”

And with the death of Petrie our story comes to an end, except for a few explanations that may be necessary to clear up one or two little mysteries that were hidden from all until then.

After searching Joe’s clothes and finding the stolen letter, which Conyers took possession of, the Red Hand was reverently buried beside

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poor Baptiste. Petrie's confederates had all escaped, having deserted and hidden in the bush when first the enemy was sighted. Joe had turned tail and fled, apparently divining that an end had come to his career.

"Now we'll have grub. After that we can discuss the next move," Bray had decided, and the whole party readily fell in with his views.

The rancher of the road had come well supplied with the necessaries for this function, and a hearty meal was soon shared by all. The boys, Bray, and the two chiefs were seated a little apart from the others; and when the pipes were lighted, and positions of ease adopted, Mark turned to Dan.

"Now, old man, give us an account of yourself! We had a bit of excitement about you, so the least you can do is to tell us exactly what it was all about, so that we can best decide what to do next. You need not be afraid of my confidence. I was once your father's best friend. My name is Mark Bray. I come from Beaver Creek."

Dan looked at the speaker with a puzzled expression.

"Bray—Mark Bray?" he questioned, and the man replied:

"I was your father's chum before—well, it does not matter what. But it is a fact that is easily proved."

"I understand," returned Dan.

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And next moment he did a curious thing. He called Tracker from where he was lying, at a little distance beside White Fang, and unbuckled the dog's heavy leather collar.

"If you are Bray of Beaver Creek, then my troubles are at an end this very moment," he said cheerfully. "Your knife, please, Hansard."

Jack's hunting-knife was passed over, whereupon Dan proceeded to slash the sewing that bound the two layers of leather together. And when the collar was laid open, he took therefrom something that looked like a sheet of thin parchment folded lengthways.

"It was put in through an opening in the point of the strap, but this is the quickest way to extract it," he explained to the onlookers, who were observing the operation with close and wondering interest.

Jack was the first to guess the riddle.

"A letter!" he exclaimed with delight.

"A cipher for 'Mark Bray of Beaver Creek,'" added Dan quietly, as he handed over the paper. "It was the safest hiding-place that I could think of. Even White Fang did not know the treasure that Tracker guarded ever since that night when Red Hand tried to kill the Cree."

Geoff's eyes were sparkling with appreciation of the clever dodge, as Dan handed the parchment to Bray, together with the letter that he had taken from Joe Petrie.

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“By Jove, man! It was a splendid idea. No one could ever have thought of looking for the papers there!”

“No one did. It was a scout’s trick——”

“Worthy of the Chief Scout himself!” added Jack with enthusiastic delight.

Meantime, Bray had been reading the letter that accompanied a piece of parchment with cipher lettering. He continued in silence for a time, while the boys patiently waited for such enlightenment as he might care to favour them with. Great Bear and Hawk-Eye were sitting together, sharing a red-stone pipe of peace in quiet contemplation.

At last Mark uttered a quick ejaculation of surprise as he turned the last page of the missive, and, raising his eyes, asked Jack:

“Your name is Hansard, is it not? And you come from Falmouth?”

“That’s right,” replied Jack, wondering in what way the reading of old Conyers’ letter could have suggested such a question. “But why do you ask?”

“Because,” began Bray, with a curious smile—“because wonders will never cease in this world. And this letter concerns you even more, perhaps, than it does me! Yes, you may well look surprised. But I’ll read it aloud. It can do no harm, Conyers, for it’s got to be known sooner or later; and we are all friends here.”

“I have no objection,” said Dan quietly.

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He gathered from Bray's latter words that something unpleasant had to be told; but, knowing how those present had already proved themselves more than ordinary friends, he had no compunctions about sharing any secret with them. Besides, from previous knowledge, he had a very fair idea what that secret might be.

“DEAR OLD MARK,

“I am very ill, and I think I am dying. If I do die, I shall send this letter to you by my son, as I wish to atone for an evil I once did. You will carry out my wishes, I know. You always thought me a good man. Well, you were wrong. I was a gambler all my life since boyhood. Some time after you left me I went to England, intending to fetch my son, who was living with my sister in Falmouth; but before I reached the old country I gambled away every cent that I possessed, and when I arrived in England I was destitute. I walked from London to Falmouth, begging my way as I went, and, by the time my destination was reached, I was so poor and beggarly-looking that I was ashamed to go to my sister's door. I said ‘beggarly-looking,’ and that was the truth. I was a beggar in every sense, for I had sunk so low that I used to plead for money from passers-by, so that I might have food to eat. There, one night,

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when I was almost desperate with hunger, a lady took pity on me, and asked me into her house. She left me in one room while she went to another to prepare a bed, and while she was away I saw a little box standing open, and my eyes caught the glint of golden money. To my everlasting shame I stole that box, and fled from the room before the lady returned. Her name was painted on the lid. It was Mrs. John Hansard ! ”

(There followed a slight pause as the reader came to this part of the letter, a pause broken only by someone quickly catching his breath and a deep sigh from Dan. Then Bray resumed.)

“ As soon as I found myself in the street I regretted what I had done, but in my state of poverty I had not the courage to return to the house. There were twenty-five sovereigns in the box. That meant food to eat and a covering for my head. The temptation was too great for me. I ran from the street, and did not stop till I was well into the country. And there, by a strange fate, I met my son, whom I had left in England four years before. I knew him at once, even though I had only the moonlight to guide my eyes, and I begged him to come away with me then and there, and help me to atone for my misguided life. I did not even allow him time to say farewell to his friends. I could not trust myself alone, for I was a thief, Mark ! Think of

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it—a *thief*! Well, Dan came with me, brave boy that he is. He came with me, and we struggled our way to Canada at once. And from the day I arrived again at Last Mountain I began to prosper in the old place. I struck gold—piles of it. And I worked. Why? Only to return a thousandfold that which I stole that might—that which saved me from greater degradation. And now I die—a rich man! It is all hidden safely in a place that you will be able to find from a cipher that my son will also give you. One quarter is for Dan, one for you, and the rest for Mrs. Hansard. I know I can trust you, Mark. You will take the gold in my name to Falmouth. Perhaps she will forgive me the wrong I did her when she knows that from that terrible night I have done my best to live my life as pure as the day. My son will deliver this to you. He will also deliver the cipher that will tell you where the gold is hidden. You will understand it, and carry out my last wishes by handing the fortune to my benefactress in England.

“Now, dear old Mark, it is ‘Good-bye.’ Our friendship on earth has drifted, but we will meet again, and be the same dear chums once more. Do my last request, and look after my boy for old friendship’s sake.

“Your old chum,

“HAL CONYERS.”

NEMESIS

As the reading closed, Mark's voice shook and his eyes filled with tears.

"Can you trust me—Dan—do you think?" he asked wistfully. "I never had but one friend, and him I threw aside. But I will try to make up for it now. Will you trust me to carry out your father's wishes, and take me as your guide?"

"With all my heart!" answered Dan, and from the tone of his voice there was no doubting but that he meant what he said. Then his thoughts wandered back to the subject of the letter, and he remarked: "The first thing to do will be to make tracks for Last Mountain. After that it'll be a race to Falmouth. We must lose no time. I suppose there will not be any difficulty in finding that Mrs. Hansard?"

"I don't think so," returned Bray, with a twinkle in his eye, as he turned towards Jack, whom he then asked:

"I suppose you know your mother's present address?"

Hansard laughed self-consciously, and Dan broke out with utter astonishment:

"You don't mean to say that he—that she——"

"Is the mother of your rescuer?" said Jack. "Yes. That's just what I do say."

"Why, Hansard, that makes my gratitude all the more——" Dan began impulsively.

But Jack interrupted brusquely:

"Rot! Don't begin to talk of gratitude be-

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tween brother scouts. It was duty—nothing more.”

“And rattling good fun as well!” chimed in Geoff.

Then the camp relapsed for a time into thoughtful silence, while the Indian chiefs smoked the peace-pipe and the cowboys slept a well-earned rest after their all-night pursuit of the prairie pirate.

THE END

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