Romany Of The Snows, v2

Gilbert Parker

Table of Contents

Romany Of The Snows, v2

Gilbert Parker

This etext was produced by David Widger widger@cecomet.net

MALACHI

"He'll swing just the same to−morrow. Exit Malachi!" said Freddy Tarlton gravely.

The door suddenly opened on the group of gossips, and a man stepped inside and took the only vacant seat near the fire. He glanced at none, but stretched out his hands to the heat, looking at the coals with drooping introspective eyes.

"Exit Malachi," he said presently in a soft ironical voice, but did not look up.

"By the holy poker, Pierre, where did you spring from?" asked Tarlton genially.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and " Pierre responded, with a little turn of his fingers.

"And the wind doesn't tell where it's been, but that's no reason Pierre shouldn't," urged the other.

Pierre shrugged his shoulders, but made no answer. "He was a tough," said a voice from the crowd. "To−morrow he'll get the breakfast he's paid for." Pierre turned and looked at the speaker with a cold inquisitive stare. "Mon Dieu!" he said presently, "here's this Gohawk playing preacher. What do you know of Malachi, Gohawk? What do any of you know about Malachi? A little of this, a little of that, a drink here, a game of euchre there, a ride after cattle, a hunt behind Guidon Hill! But what is that? You have heard the cry of the eagle, you have seen him carry off a lamb, you have had a pot−shot at him, but what do you know of the eagle's nest? Mais non.

"The lamb is one thing, the nest is another. You don't know the eagle till you've been there. And you, Gohawk, would not understand, if you saw the nest. Such cancan!"

"Shut your mouth!" broke out Gohawk. "D'ye think I'm going to stand your "

Freddy Tarlton laid a hand on his arm. "Keep quiet, Gohawk. What good will it do?" Then he said, "Tell us about the nest, Pierre; they're hanging him for the lamb in the morning."

"Who spoke for him at the trial?" Pierre asked.

"I did," said Tarlton. "I spoke as well as I could, but the game was dead against him from the start. The sheriff was popular, and young; young that was the thing; handsome too, and the women, of course! It was sure from the start; besides, Malachi would say nothing didn't seem to care."

"No, not to care," mused Pierre. "What did you say for him to the jury I mean the devil of a thing to make them sit up and think, 'Poor Malachi!' like that."

"Best speech y'ever heard," Gohawk interjected; "just emptied the words out, split 'em like peas, by gol! till he got to one place right before the end. Then he pulled up sudden, and it got so quiet you could 'a heard a pin drop. 'Gen'lemen of the jury,' says Freddy Tarlton here gen'lemen, by gol! all that lot Lagan and the rest! 'Gen'lemen of the jury,' he says, 'be you danged well sure that you're at one with God A'mighty in this; that you've got at the core of justice here; that you've got evidence to satisfy Him who you've all got to satisfy some day, or git out. Not evidence as to shootin', but evidence as to what that shootin' meant, an' whether it was meant to kill, an' what for. The case is like this, gen'lemen of the jury,' says Freddy Tarlton here. 'Two men are in a street alone. There's a shot, out comes everybody, and sees Fargo the sheriff laid along the ground, his mouth in the dust, and a full−up gun in his fingers. Not forty feet away stands Malachi with a gun smokin' in his fist. It seems to be the opinion that it was cussedness just cussedness that made Malachi turn the sheriff's boots to the sun. For Malachi was quarrelsome. I'll give you a quarter on that. And the sheriff was mettlesome, used to have high spirits, like as if he's lift himself over the fence with his bootstraps. So when Malachi come and saw the sheriff steppin' round in his paten' leathers, it give him the needle, and he got a bead on him and away went Sheriff Fargo right away! That seems to be the sense of the public.' And he stops again, soft and quick, and looks the twelve in the eyes at once. 'But,' says Freddy Tarlton here, 'are you goin' to hang a man on the little you know? Or are you goin' to credit him with somethin' of what you don't know? You haint got the inside of this thing, and Malachi doesn't let you know it, and God keeps quiet. But be danged well sure that you've got the bulge on iniquity here; for gen'lemen with pistols out in the street is one thing, and sittin' weavin' a rope in a court−room for a man's neck is another thing,' says Freddy Tarlton here. 'My client has refused to say one word this or that way, but don't be sure that Some One that knows the inside of things won't speak for him in the end.' Then he turns and looks at Malachi, and Malachi was standin' still and steady like a tree, but his face was white, and sweat poured on his forehead. 'If God has no voice to be heard for my client in this court−room to−day, is there no one on earth no man or woman who can speak for one who won't speak for himself?' says Freddy Tarlton here. Then, by gol! for the first time Malachi opened. 'There's no one,' he says. 'The speakin' is all for the sheriff. But I spoke once, and the sheriff didn't answer.' Not a bit of beg−yer−pardon in it. It struck cold. 'I leave his case in the hands of twelve true men,' says Freddy Tarlton here, and he sits down."

"So they said he must walk the air?" suggested Pierre.

"Without leavin' their seats," someone added instantly.

"So. But that speech of 'Freddy Tarlton here'?" "It was worth twelve drinks to me, no more, and nothing at all to Malachi," said Tarlton. "When I said I'd come to him to−night to cheer him up, he said he'd rather sleep. The missionary, too, he can make nothing of him. 'I don't need anyone here,' he says. 'I eat this off my own plate.' And that's the end of Malachi."

"Because there was no one to speak for him eh? Well, well."

"If he'd said anything that'd justify the thing make it a manslaughter business or a quarrel then! But no, not a word, up or down, high or low. Exit Malachi!" rejoined Freddy Tarlton sorrowfully. "I wish he'd given me half a chance."

"I wish I'd been there," said Pierre, taking a match from Gohawk, and lighting his cigarette.

"To hear his speech?" asked Gohawk, nodding towards Tarlton.

"To tell the truth about it all. T'sh, you bats, you sheep, what have you in your skulls? When a man will not speak, will not lie to gain a case for his lawyer or save himself, there is something! Now, listen to me, and I will tell you the story of Malachi. Then you shall judge.

"I never saw such a face as that girl had down there at Lachine in Quebec. I knew her when she was a child, and I knew Malachi when he was on the river with the rafts, the foreman of a gang. He had a look all open then as the sun yes. Happy? Yes, as happy as a man ought to be. Well, the mother of the child died, and Malachi alone was left to take care of the little Norice. He left the river and went to work in the mills, so that he might be with the child; and when he got to be foreman there he used to bring her to the mill. He had a basket swung for her just inside the mill not far from him, right where she was in the shade; but if she stretched out her hand it would be in the sun. I've seen a hundred men turn to look at her where she swung, singing to herself, and then chuckle to themselves afterwards as they worked.

"When Trevoor, the owner, come one day, and saw her, he swore, and was going to sack Malachi, but the child that little Norice leaned over the basket, and offered him an apple. He looked for a minute, then he reached up, took the apple, turned round, and went out of the mill without a word so. Next month when he come he walked straight to her, and handed up to her a box of toys and a silver whistle. 'That's to call me when you want me,' he said, as he put the whistle to her lips, and then he put the gold string of it round her neck. She was a wise little thing, that Norice, and noticed things. I don't believe that Trevoor or Malachi ever knew how sweet was the smell of the fresh sawdust till she held it to their noses; and it was she that had the saws all sizes start one after the other, making so strange a tune. She made up a little song about fairies and others to sing to that tune. And no one ever thought much about Indian Island, off beyond the sweating, baking piles of lumber, and the blistering logs and timbers in the bay, till she told stories about it. Sure enough, when you saw the shut doors and open windows of those empty houses, all white without in the sun and dark within, and not a human to be seen, you could believe almost anything. You can think how proud Malachi was. She used to get plenty of presents from the men who had no wives or children to care for little silver and gold things as well as others. She was fond of them, but no, not vain. She loved the gold and silver for their own sake."

Pierre paused. "I knew a youngster once," said Gohawk, "that "

Pierre waved his hand. "I am not through, M'sieu' Gohawk the talker. Years went on. Now she took care of the house of Malachi. She wore the whistle that Trevoor gave her. He kept saying to her still, 'If ever you need me, little Norice, blow it, and I will come.' He was droll, that M'sieu' Trevoor, at times. Well, she did not blow, but still he used to come every year, and always brought her something. One year he brought his nephew, a young fellow of about twenty−three. She did not whistle for him either, but he kept on coming. That was the beginning of 'Exit Malachi.' The man was clever and bad, the girl believing and good. He was young, but he knew how to win a woman's heart. When that is done, there is nothing more to do she is yours for good or evil; and if a man, through a woman's love, makes her to sin, even his mother cannot be proud of him−no. But the man married Norice, and took her away to Madison, down in Wisconsin. Malachi was left alone Malachi and Trevoor, for Trevoor felt towards her as a father.

"Alors, sorrow come to the girl, for her husband began to play cards and to drink, and he lost much money. There was the trouble the two together. They lived in a hotel. One day a lady missed a diamond necklace from her room. Norice had been with her the evening before. Norice come into her own room the next afternoon, and found detectives searching. In her own jewel−case, which was tucked away in the pocket of an old dress, was found the necklace. She was arrested. She said nothing for she waited for her husband, who was out of town that day. He only come in time to see her in court next morning. She did not deny anything; she was quiet, like Malachi. The

man played his part well. He had hid the necklace where he thought it would be safe, but when it was found, he let the wife take the blame a little innocent thing. People were sorry for them both. She was sent to jail. Her father was away in the Rocky Mountains, and he did not hear; Trevoor was in Europe. The husband got a divorce, and was gone. Norice was in jail for over a year, and then she was set free, for her health went bad, and her mind was going, they thought. She did not know till she come out that she was divorced. Then she nearly died. But then Trevoor come."

Freddy Tarlton's hands were cold with excitement, and his fingers trembled so he could hardly light a cigar.

"Go on, go on, Pierre," he said huskily.

"Trevoor said to her he told me this himself 'Why did you not whistle for me, Norice? A word would have brought me from Europe.' 'No one could help me, no one at all,' she answered. Then Trevoor said, 'I know who did it, for he has robbed me too.' She sank in a heap on the floor. 'I could have borne it and anything for him, if he hadn't divorced me,' she said. Then they cleared her name before the world. But where was the man? No one knew. At last Malachi, in the Rocky Mountains, heard of her trouble, for Norice wrote to him, but told him not to do the man any harm, if he ever found him ah, a woman, a woman! . . . But Malachi met the man one day at Guidon Hill, and shot him in the street."

"Fargo the sheriff!" roared half−a−dozen voices. "Yes; he had changed his name, had come up here, and because he was clever and spent money, and had a pull on someone, got it at cards perhaps, he was made sheriff."

"In God's name, why didn't Malachi speak?" said Tarlton; "why didn't he tell me this?"

"Because he and I had our own plans. The one evidence he wanted was Norice. If she would come to him in his danger, and in spite of his killing the man, good. If not, then he would die. Well, I went to find her and fetch her. I found her. There was no way to send word, so we had to come on as fast as we could. We have come just in time."

"Do you mean to say, Pierre, that she's here?" said Gohawk.

Pierre waved his hand emphatically. "And so we came on with a pardon."

Every man was on his feet, every man's tongue was loosed, and each ordered liquor for Pierre, and asked him where the girl was. Freddy Tarlton wrung his hand, and called a boy to go to his rooms and bring three bottles of wine, which he had kept for two years, to drink when he had won his first big case.

Gohawk was importunate. "Where is the girl, Pierre?" he urged.

"Such a fool as you are, Gohawk! She is with her father."

A half−hour later, in a large sitting−room, Freddy Tarlton was making eloquent toasts over the wine. As they all stood drinking to Pierre, the door opened from the hall−way, and Malachi stood before them. At his shoulder was a face, wistful, worn, yet with a kind of happiness too; and the eyes had depths which any man might be glad to drown his heart in.

Malachi stood still, not speaking, and an awe or awkwardness fell on the group at the table.

But Norice stepped forward a little, and said: "May we come in?"

In an instant Freddy Tarlton was by her side, and had her by the hand, her and her father, drawing them over.

His ardent, admiring look gave Norice thought for many a day.

And that night Pierre made an accurate prophecy.

THE LAKE OF THE GREAT SLAVE

When Tybalt the tale−gatherer asked why it was so called, Pierre said: "Because of the Great Slave;" and then paused.

Tybalt did not hurry Pierre, knowing his whims. If he wished to tell, he would in his own time; if not, nothing could draw it from him. It was nearly an hour before Pierre, eased off from the puzzle he was solving with bits of paper and obliged Tybalt. He began as if they had been speaking the moment before:

"They have said it is legend, but I know better. I have seen the records of the Company, and it is all there. I was at Fort O'Glory once, and in a box two hundred years old the factor and I found it. There were other papers, and some of them had large red seals, and a name scrawled along the end of the page."

Pierre shook his head, as if in contented musing. He was a born story− teller. Tybalt was aching with interest, for he scented a thing of note.

"How did any of those papers, signed with a scrawl, begin?" he asked.

"'To our dearly−beloved,' or something like that," answered Pierre. "There were letters also. Two of them were full of harsh words, and these were signed with the scrawl."

"What was that scrawl?" asked Tybalt.

Pierre stooped to the sand, and wrote two words with his finger. "Like that," he answered.

Tybalt looked intently for an instant, and then drew a long breath. "Charles Rex," he said, hardly above his breath.

Pierre gave him a suggestive sidelong glance. "That name was droll, eh?"

Tybalt's blood was tingling with the joy of discovery. "It is a great name," he said shortly.

"The Slave was great the Indians said so at the last."

"But that was not the name of the Slave?"

"Mais non. Who said so! Charles Rex like that! was the man who wrote the letters."

"To the Great Slave?"

Pierre made a gesture of impatience. "Very sure."

"Where are those letters now?"

"With the Governor of the Company." Tybalt cut the tobacco for his pipe savagely. "You'd have liked one of those papers?" asked Pierre provokingly.

"I'd give five hundred dollars for one," broke out Tybalt.

Pierre lifted his eyebrows. "T'sh, what's the good of five hundred dollars up here? What would you do with a letter like that?"

Tybalt laughed with a touch of irony, for Pierre was clearly "rubbing it in."

"Perhaps for a book?" gently asked Pierre.

"Yes, if you like."

"It is a pity. But there is a way."

"How?"

"Put me in the book. Then "

"How does that touch the case?"

Pierre shrugged a shoulder gently, for he thought Tybalt was unusually obtuse. Tybalt thought so himself before the episode ended.

"Go on," he said, with clouded brow, but interested eye. Then, as if with sudden thought: "To whom were the letters addressed, Pierre?"

"Wait!" was the reply. "One letter said: 'Good cousin, We are evermore glad to have thee and thy most excelling mistress near us. So, fail us not at our cheerful doings, yonder at Highgate.' Another a year after said: 'Cousin, for the sweetening of our mind, get thee gone into some distant corner of our pasturage the farthest doth please us most. We would not have thee on foreign ground, for we bear no ill−will to our brother princes, and yet we would not have thee near our garden of good loyal souls, for thou hast a rebel heart and a tongue of divers tunes. Thou lovest not the good old song of duty to thy prince. Obeying us, thy lady shall keep thine estates untouched; failing obedience, thou wilt make more than thy prince unhappy. Fare thee well.' That was the way of two letters," said Pierre.

"How do you remember so?"

Pierre shrugged a shoulder again. "It is easy with things like that."

"But word for word?"

"I learned it word for word."

"Now for the story of the Lake if you won't tell me the name of the man."

"The name afterwards−perhaps. Well, he came to that farthest corner of the pasturage, to the Hudson's Bay country, two hundred years ago. What do you think? Was he so sick of all, that he would go so far he could never get back? Maybe those 'cheerful doings' at Highgate, eh? And the lady who can tell?"

Tybalt seized Pierre's arm. "You know more. Damnation, can't you see I'm on needles to hear? Was there anything in the letters about the lady? Anything more than you've told?"

Pierre liked no man's hand on him. He glanced down at the eager fingers, and said coldly:

"You are a great man; you can tell a story in many ways, but I in one way alone, and that is my way mais oui!"

"Very well, take your own time."

"Bien. I got the story from two heads. If you hear a thing like that from Indians, you call it 'legend'; if from the Company's papers, you call it 'history.' Well, in this there is not much difference. The papers tell precise the facts; the legend gives the feeling, is more true. How can you judge the facts if you don't know the feeling? No! what is bad turns good sometimes, when you know the how, the feeling, the place. Well, this story of the Great Slave eh? . . . There is a race of Indians in the far north who have hair so brown like yours, m'sieu', and eyes no darker. It is said they are of those that lived at the Pole, before the sea swamped the Isthmus, and swallowed up so many islands. So. In those days the fair race came to the south for the first time, that is, far below the Circle. They had their women with them. I have seen those of to−day: fine and tall, with breasts like apples, and a cheek to tempt a man like you, m'sieu'; no grease in the hair no, M'sieu' Tybalt."

Tybalt sat moveless under the obvious irony, but his eyes were fixed intently on Pierre, his mind ever travelling far ahead of the tale.

"Alors: the 'good cousin' of Charles Rex, he made a journey with two men to the Far−off Metal River, and one day this tribe from the north come on his camp. It was summer, and they were camping in the Valley of the Young Moon, more sweet, they say, than any in the north. The Indians cornered them. There was a fight, and one of the Company's men was killed, and five of the other. But when the king of the people of the Pole saw that the great man was fair of face, he called for the fight to stop.

"There was a big talk all by signs, and the king said for the great man to come and be one with them, for they liked his fair face their forefathers were fair like him. He should have the noblest of their women for his wife, and be a prince among them. He would not go: so they drew away again and fought. A stone−axe brought the great man to the ground. He was stunned, not killed. Then the other man gave up, and said he would be one of them if they would take him. They would have killed him but for one of their women. She said that he should live to tell them tales of the south country and the strange people, when they came again to their camp−fires. So they let him live, and he was one of them. But the chief man, because he was stubborn and scorned them, and had killed the son of their king in the fight, they made a slave, and carried him north a captive, till they came to this lake the Lake of the Great Slave.

"In all ways they tried him, but he would not yield, neither to wear their dress nor to worship their gods. He was robbed of his clothes, of his gold−handled dagger, his belt of silk and silver, his carbine with rich chasing, and all, and he was among them almost naked, it was summer, as I said, yet defying them. He was taller by a head than any of them, and his white skin rippled in the sun like soft steel."

Tybalt was inclined to ask Pierre how he knew all this, but he held his peace. Pierre, as if divining his thoughts, continued:

"You ask how I know these things. Very good: there are the legends, and there were the papers of the Company. The Indians tried every way, but it was no use; he would have nothing to say to them. At last they came to this lake. Now something great occurred. The woman who had been the wife of the king's dead son, her heart went out in love of the Great Slave; but he never looked at her. One day there were great sports, for it was the feast of the Red Star. The young men did feats of strength, here on this ground where we sit. The king's wife called out for the Great Slave to measure strength with them all. He would not stir. The king commanded him; still he would not, but stood among them silent and looking far away over their heads. At last, two young men of good height and bone threw arrows at his bare breast. The blood came in spots. Then he gave a cry through his beard, and was on

them like a lion. He caught them, one in each arm, swung them from the ground, and brought their heads together with a crash, breaking their skulls, and dropped them at his feet. Catching up a long spear, he waited for the rest. But they did not come, for, with a loud voice, the king told them to fall back, and went and felt the bodies of the men. One of them was dead; the other was his second son he would live.

"'It is a great deed,' said the king, 'for these were no children, but strong men.'

"Then again he offered the Great Slave women to marry, and fifty tents of deerskin for the making of a village. But the Great Slave said no, and asked to be sent back to Fort O'Glory.

"The king refused. But that night, as he slept in his tent, the girl− widow came to him, waked him, and told him to follow her. He came forth, and she led him softly through the silent camp to that wood which we see over there. He told her she need not go on. Without a word, she reached over and kissed him on the breast. Then he understood. He told her that she could not come with him, for there was that lady in England his wife, eh? But never mind, that will come. He was too great to save his life, or be free at the price. Some are born that way. They have their own commandments, and they keep them.

"He told her that she must go back. She gave a little cry, and sank down at his feet, saying that her life would be in danger if she went back.

"Then he told her to come, for it was in his mind to bring her to Fort O'Glory, where she could marry an Indian there. But now she would not go with him, and turned towards the village. A woman is a strange creature yes, like that! He refused to go and leave her. She was in danger, and he would share it, whatever it might be. So, though she prayed him not, he went back with her; and when she saw that he would go in spite of all, she was glad: which is like a woman.

"When he entered the tent again, he guessed her danger, for he stepped over the bodies of two dead men. She had killed them. As she turned at the door to go to her own tent, another woman faced her. It was the wife of the king, who had suspected, and had now found out. Who can tell what it was? Jealousy, perhaps. The Great Slave could tell, maybe, if he could speak, for a man always knows when a woman sets him high. Anyhow, that was the way it stood. In a moment the girl was marched back to her tent, and all the camp heard a wicked lie of the widow of the king's son.

"To it there was an end after the way of their laws.

"The woman should die by fire, and the man, as the king might will. So there was a great gathering in the place where we are, and the king sat against that big white stone, which is now as it was then. Silence was called, and they brought the girl−widow forth. The king spoke:

"'Thou who hadst a prince for thy husband, didst go in the night to the tent of the slave who killed thy husband; whereby thou also becamest a slave, and didst shame the greatness which was given thee. Thou shalt die, as has been set in our laws.'

"The girl−widow rose, and spoke. 'I did not know, O king, that he whom thou madest a slave slew my husband, the prince of our people, and thy son. That was not told me. But had I known it, still would I have set him free, for thy son was killed in fair battle, and this man deserves not slavery or torture. I did seek the tent of the Great Slave, and it was to set him free no more. For that did I go, and, for the rest, my soul is open to the Spirit Who Sees. I have done naught, and never did, nor ever will, that might shame a king, or the daughter of a king, or the wife of a king, or a woman. If to set a great captive free is death for me, then am I ready. I will answer all pure women in the far Camp of the Great Fires without fear. There is no more, O king, that I may say, but this: she who dies by fire, being of noble blood, may choose who shall light the faggots is it not so?'

"Then the king replied: 'It is so. Such is our law.'

"There was counselling between the king and his oldest men, and so long were they handling the matter backwards and forwards that it seemed she might go free. But the king's wife, seeing, came and spoke to the king and the others, crying out for the honour of her dead son; so that in a moment of anger they all cried out for death.

"When the king said again to the girl that she must die by fire, she answered: 'It is as the gods will. But it is so, as I said, that I may choose who shall light the fires?'

"The king answered yes, and asked her whom she chose. She pointed towards the Great Slave. And all, even the king and his councillors, wondered, for they knew little of the heart of women. What is a man with a matter like that? Nothing nothing at all. They would have set this for punishment: that she should ask for it was beyond them. Yes, even the king's wife it was beyond her. But the girl herself, see you, was it not this way? If she died by the hand of him she loved, then it would be easy, for she could forget the pain, in the thought that his heart would ache for her, and that at the very last he might care, and she should see it. She was great in her way also that girl, two hundred years ago.

"Alors, they led her a little distance off, there is the spot, where you see the ground heave a little, and the Great Slave was brought up. The king told him why the girl was to die. He went like stone, looking, looking at them. He knew that the girl's heart was like a little child's, and the shame and cruelty of the thing froze him silent for a minute, and the colour flew from his face to here and there on his body, as a flame on marble. The cords began to beat and throb in his neck and on his forehead, and his eyes gave out fire like flint on an arrow−head.

"Then he began to talk. He could not say much, for he knew so little of their language. But it was 'No!' every other word. 'No no no no!' the words ringing from his chest. 'She is good!' he said. 'The other− no!' and he made a motion with his hand. 'She must not die no! Evil? It is a lie! I will kill each man that says it, one by one, if he dares come forth. She tried to save me well?' Then he made them know that he was of high place in a far country, and that a man like him would not tell a lie. That pleased the king, for he was proud, and he saw that the Slave was of better stuff than himself. Besides, the king was a brave man, and he had strength, and more than once he had laid his hand on the chest of the other, as one might on a grand animal. Perhaps, even then, they might have spared the girl was it not for the queen. She would not hear of it. Then they tried the Great Slave, and he was found guilty. The queen sent him word to beg for pardon. So he stood out and spoke to the queen. She sat up straight, with pride in her eyes, for was it not a great prince, as she thought, asking? But a cloud fell on her face, for he begged the girl's life. Since there must be death, let him die, and die by fire in her place! It was then two women cried out: the poor girl for joy not at the thought that her life would be saved, but because she thought the man loved her now, or he would not offer to die for her; and the queen for hate, because she thought the same. You can guess the rest: they were both to die, though the king was sorry for the man.

"The king's speaker stood out and asked them if they had anything to say. The girl stepped forward, her face without any fear, but a kind of noble pride in it, and said: 'I am ready, O king.'

"The Great Slave bowed his head, and was thinking much. They asked him again, and he waved his hand at them. The king spoke up in anger, and then he smiled and said: 'O king, I am not ready; if I die, I die.' Then he fell to thinking again. But once more the king spoke: 'Thou shalt surely die, but not by fire, nor now; nor till we have come to our great camp in our own country. There thou shalt die. But the woman shall die at the going down of the sun. She shall die by fire, and thou shalt light the faggots for the burning.'

"The Great Slave said he would not do it, not though he should die a hundred deaths. Then the king said that it was the woman's right to choose who should start the fire, and he had given his word, which should not be broken.

"When the Great Slave heard this he was wild for a little, and then he guessed altogether what was in the girl's mind. Was not this the true thing in her, the very truest? Mais oui! That was what she wished to die by his hand rather than by any other; and something troubled his breast, and a cloud came in his eyes, so that for a moment he could not see. He looked at the girl, so serious, eye to eye. Perhaps she understood. So, after a time, he got calm as the farthest light in the sky, his face shining among them all with a look none could read. He sat down, and wrote upon pieces of bark with a spear−point those bits of bark I have seen also at Fort O'Glory. He pierced them through with dried strings of the slippery−elm tree, and with the king's consent gave them to the Company's man, who had become one of the people, telling him, if ever he was free, or could send them to the Company, he must do so. The man promised, and shame came upon him that he had let the other suffer alone; and he said he was willing to fight and die if the Great Slave gave the word. But he would not; and he urged that it was right for the man to save his life. For himself, no. It could never be; and if he must die, he must die.

"You see, a great man must always live alone and die alone, when there are only such people about him. So, now that the letters were written, he sat upon the ground and thought, looking often towards the girl, who was placed apart, with guards near. The king sat thinking also. He could not guess why the Great Slave should give the letters now, since he was not yet to die, nor could the Company's man show a reason when the king asked him. So the king waited, and told the guards to see that the Great Slave did not kill himself.

"But the queen wanted the death of the girl, and was glad beyond telling that the Slave must light the faggots. She was glad when she saw the young braves bring a long sapling from the forest, and, digging a hole, put it stoutly in the ground, and fetch wood, and heap it about.

"The Great Slave noted that the bark of the sapling had not been stripped, and more than once he measured, with his eye, the space between the stake and the shores of the Lake: he did this most private, so that no one saw but the girl.

"At last the time was come. The Lake was all rose and gold out there in the west, and the water so still so still. The cool, moist scent of the leaves and grass came out from the woods and up from the plain, and the world was so full of content that a man's heart could cry out, even as now, while we look eh, is it not good? See the deer drinking on the other shore there!" Suddenly Pierre became silent, as if he had forgotten the story altogether. Tybalt was impatient, but he did not speak. He took a twig, and in the sand he wrote "Charles Rex." Pierre glanced down and saw it.

"There was beating of the little drums," he continued, "and the crying of the king's speaker; and soon all was ready, and the people gathered at a distance, and the king and the queen, and the chief men nearer; and the girl was brought forth.

"As they led her past the Great Slave, she looked into his eyes, and afterwards her heart was glad, for she knew that at the last he would be near her, and that his hand should light the fires. Two men tied her to the stake. Then the king's man cried out again, telling of her crime, and calling for her death. The Great Slave was brought near. No one knew that the palms of his hands had been rubbed in the sand for a purpose. When he was brought beside the stake, a torch was given him by his guards. He looked at the girl, and she smiled at him, and said: 'Good−bye. Forgive. I die not afraid, and happy.'

"He did not answer, but stooped and lit the sticks here and there. All at once he snatched a burning stick, and it and the torch he thrust, like lightning, in the faces of his guards, blinding them. Then he sprang to the stake, and, with a huge pull, tore it from the ground, girl and all, and rushed to the shore of the Lake, with her tied so in his arms.

"He had been so swift that, at first, no one stirred. He reached the shore, rushed into the water, dragging a boat out with one hand as he did so, and, putting the girl in, seized a paddle and was away with a start. A few strokes, and

then he stopped, picked up a hatchet that was in the boat with many spears, and freed the girl. Then he paddled on, trusting, with a small hope, that through his great strength he could keep ahead till darkness came, and then, in the gloom, they might escape. The girl also seized an oar, and the canoe the king's own canoe came on like a swallow.

"But the tribe was after them in fifty canoes, some coming straight along, some spreading out to close in later. It was no equal game, for these people were so quick and strong with the oars, and they were a hundred or more to two. There could be but one end. It was what the Great Slave had looked for: to fight till the last breath. He should fight for the woman who had risked all for him just a common woman of the north, but it seemed good to lose his life for her; and she would be happy to die with him.

"So they stood side by side when the spears and arrows fell round them, and they gave death and wounds for wounds in their own bodies. When, at last, the Indians climbed into the canoe, the Great Slave was dead of many wounds, and the woman, all gashed, lay with her lips to his wet, red cheek. She smiled as they dragged her away; and her soul hurried after his to the Camp of the Great Fires."

It was long before Tybalt spoke, but at last he said: If I could but tell it as you have told it to me, Pierre!" Pierre answered: "Tell it with your tongue, and this shall be nothing to it, for what am I? What English have I, a gipsy of the snows? But do not write it, mais non! Writing wanders from the matter. The eyes, and the tongue, and the time, that is the thing. But in a book it will sound all cold and thin. It is for the north, for the camp−fire, for the big talk before a man rolls into his blanket, and is at peace. No, no writing, monsieur. Speak it everywhere with your tongue."

"And so I would, were my tongue as yours. Pierre, tell me more about the letters at Fort O'Glory. You know his name what was it?"

"You said five hundred dollars for one of those letters. Is it not?"

"Yes." Tybalt had a new hope.

"T'sh! What do I want of five hundred dollars! But, here, answer me a question: Was the lady his wife, she that was left in England a good woman? Answer me out of your own sense, and from my story. If you say right you shall have a letter one that I have by me."

Tybalt's heart leapt into his throat. After a little he said huskily: "She was a good woman he believed her that, and so shall I."

"You think he could not have been so great unless, eh? And that 'Charles Rex,' what of him?"

"What good can it do to call him bad now?" Without a word, Pierre drew from a leather wallet a letter, and, by the light of the fast−setting sun, Tybalt read it, then read it again, and yet again.

"Poor soul! poor lady!" he said. "Was ever such another letter written to any man? And it came too late; this, with the king's recall, came too late!"

"So so. He died out there where that wild duck flies a Great Slave. Years after, the Company's man brought word of all."

Tybalt was looking at the name on the outside of the letter.

"How do they call that name?" asked Pierre. "It is like none I've seen no."

Tybalt shook his head sorrowfully, and did not answer.

THE RED PATROL

St. Augustine's, Canterbury, had given him its licentiate's hood, the Bishop of Rupert's Land had ordained him, and the North had swallowed him up. He had gone forth with surplice, stole, hood, a sermon−case, the prayer−book, and that other Book of all. Indian camps, trappers' huts, and Company's posts had given him hospitality, and had heard him with patience and consideration. At first he wore the surplice, stole, and hood, took the eastward position, and intoned the service, and no man said him nay, but watched him curiously and was sorrowful he was so youthful, clear of eye, and bent on doing heroical things.

But little by little there came a change. The hood was left behind at Fort O'Glory, where it provoked the derision of the Methodist missionary who followed him; the sermon−case stayed at Fort O'Battle; and at last the surplice itself was put by at the Company's post at Yellow Quill. He was too excited and in earnest at first to see the effect of his ministrations, but there came slowly over him the knowledge that he was talking into space. He felt something returning on him out of the air into which he talked, and buffeting him. It was the Spirit of the North, in which lives the terror, the large heart of things, the soul of the past. He awoke to his inadequacy, to the fact that all these men to whom he talked, listened, and only listened, and treated him with a gentleness which was almost pity as one might a woman. He had talked doctrine, the Church, the sacraments, and at Fort O'Battle he faced definitely the futility of his work. What was to blame the Church religion himself?

It was at Fort O'Battle that he met Pierre, and heard a voice say over his shoulder, as he walked out into the icy dusk: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness . . . and he had sackcloth about his loins, and his food was locusts and wild honey."

He turned to see Pierre, who in the large room of the Post had sat and watched him as he prayed and preached. He had remarked the keen, curious eye, the musing look, the habitual disdain at the lips. It had all touched him, confused him; and now he had a kind of anger.

"You know it so well, why don't you preach yourself?" he said feverishly.

"I have been preaching all my life," Pierre answered drily.

"The devil's games: cards and law−breaking; and you sneer at men who try to bring lost sheep into the fold."

"The fold of the Church yes, I understand all that," Pierre answered. "I have heard you and the priests of my father's Church talk. Which is right? But as for me, I am a missionary. Cards, law−breaking these are what I have done; but these are not what I have preached."

"What have you preached?" asked the other, walking on into the fast− gathering night, beyond the Post and the Indian lodges, into the wastes where frost and silence lived.

Pierre waved his hand towards space. "This," he said suggestively.

"What's this?" asked the other fretfully.

"The thing you feel round you here."

"I feel the cold," was the petulant reply.

"I feel the immense, the far off," said Pierre slowly.

The other did not understand as yet. "You've learned big words," he said disdainfully.

"No; big things," rejoined Pierre sharply "a few."

"Let me hear you preach them," half snarled Sherburne.

"You will not like to hear them no."

"I'm not likely to think about them one way or another," was the contemptuous reply.

Pierre's eyes half closed. The young, impetuous half−baked college man. To set his little knowledge against his own studious vagabondage! At that instant he determined to play a game and win; to turn this man into a vagabond also; to see John the Baptist become a Bedouin. He saw the doubt, the uncertainty, the shattered vanity in the youth's mind, the missionary's half retreat from his cause. A crisis was at hand. The youth was fretful with his great theme, instead of being severe upon himself. For days and days Pierre's presence had acted on Sherburne silently but forcibly. He had listened to the vagabond's philosophy, and knew that it was of a deeper so much deeper knowledge of life than he himself possessed, and he knew also that it was terribly true; he was not wise enough to see that it was only true in part. The influence had been insidious, delicate, cunning, and he himself was only "a voice crying in the wilderness," without the simple creed of that voice. He knew that the Methodist missionary was believed in more, if less liked, than himself. Pierre would work now with all the latent devilry of his nature to unseat the man from his saddle.

"You have missed the great thing, alors, though you have been up here two years," he said. "You do not feel, you do not know. What good have you done? Who has got on his knees and changed his life because of you? Who has told his beads or longed for the Mass because of you? Tell me, who has ever said, 'You have showed me how to live'? Even the women, though they cry sometimes when you sing−song the prayers, go on just the same when the little 'bless−you' is over. Why? Most of them know a better thing than you tell them. Here is the truth: you are little eh, so very little. You never lied direct; you never stole the waters that are sweet; you never knew the big dreams that come with wine in the dead of night; you never swore at your own soul and heard it laugh back at you; you never put your face in the breast of a woman do not look so wild at me! you never had a child; you never saw the world and yourself through the doors of real life. You never have said, 'I am tired; I am sick of all; I have seen all.' You have never felt what came after understanding. Chut, your talk is for children and missionaries. You are a prophet without a call, you are a leader without a man to lead, you are less than a child up here. For here the children feel a peace in their blood when the stars come out, and a joy in their brains when the dawn comes up and reaches a yellow hand to the Pole, and the west wind shouts at them. Holy Mother! we in the far north, we feel things, for all the great souls of the dead are up there at the Pole in the pleasant land, and we have seen the Scarlet Hunter and the Kimash Hills. You have seen nothing. You have only heard, and because, like a child, you have never sinned, you come and preach to us!"

The night was folding down fast, all the stars were shooting out into their places, and in the north the white lights of the aurora were flying to and fro. Pierre had spoken with a slow force and precision, yet, as he went on, his eyes almost became fixed on those shifting flames, and a deep look came into them, as he was moved by his own eloquence. Never in his life had he made so long a speech at once. He paused, and then said suddenly: "Come, let us run."

He broke into a long, sliding trot, and Sherburne did the same. With their arms gathered to their sides they ran for quite two miles without a word, until the heavy breathing of the clergyman brought Pierre up suddenly.

"You do not run well," he said; "you do not run with the whole body. You know so little. Did you ever think how much such men as Jacques Parfaite know? The earth they read like a book, the sky like an animal's ways, and a man's face like like the writing on the wall."

"Like the writing on the wall," said Sherburne, musing; for, under the other's influence, his petulance was gone. He knew that he was not a part of this life, that he was ignorant of it; of, indeed, all that was vital in it and in men and women.

"I think you began this too soon. You should have waited; then you might have done good. But here we are wiser than you. You have no message no real message to give us; down in your heart you are not even sure of yourself."

Sherburne sighed. "I'm of no use," he said. "I'll get out. I'm no good at all."

Pierre's eyes glistened. He remembered how, the day before, this youth had said hot words about his card−playing; had called him in effect a thief; had treated him as an inferior, as became one who was of St. Augustine's, Canterbury.

"It is the great thing to be free," Pierre said, "that no man shall look for this or that of you. Just to do as far as you feel, as far as you are sure that is the best. In this you are not sure no. Hein, is it not?"

Sherburne did not answer. Anger, distrust, wretchedness, the spirit of the alien, loneliness, were alive in him. The magnetism of this deep penetrating man, possessed of a devil, was on him, and in spite of every reasonable instinct he turned to him for companionship.

"It's been a failure," he burst out, "and I'm sick of it sick of it; but I can't give it up."

Pierre said nothing. They had come to what seemed a vast semicircle of ice and snow, a huge amphitheatre in the plains. It was wonderful: a great round wall on which the northern lights played, into which the stars peered. It was open towards the north, and in one side was a fissure shaped like a Gothic arch. Pierre pointed to it, and they did not speak till they had passed through it. Like great seats the steppes of snow ranged round, and in the centre was a kind of plateau of ice, as it might seem a stage or an altar. To the north there was a great opening, the lost arc of the circle, through which the mystery of the Pole swept in and out, or brooded there where no man may question it. Pierre stood and looked. Time and again he had been here, and had asked the same question: Who had ever sat on those frozen benches and looked down at the drama on that stage below? Who played the parts? Was it a farce or a sacrifice? To him had been given the sorrow of imagination, and he wondered and wondered. Or did they come still those strange people, whoever they were and watch ghostly gladiators at their fatal sport? If they came, when was it? Perhaps they were there now unseen. In spite of himself he shuddered. Who was the keeper of the house?

Through his mind there ran pregnant to him for the first tine a chanson of the Scarlet Hunter, the Red Patrol, who guarded the sleepers in the Kimash Hills against the time they should awake and possess the land once more: the friend of the lost, the lover of the vagabond, and of all who had no home:

"Strangers come to the outer walls
(Why do the sleepers stir?)
Strangers enter the Judgment House
(Why do the sleepers sigh?)
Slow they rise in their judgment seats,
Sieve and measure the naked souls,
Then with a blessing return to sleep

(Quiet the Judgment House.)
Lone and sick are the vagrant souls
(When shall the world come home?)"

He reflected upon the words, and a feeling of awe came over him, for he had been in the White Valley and had seen the Scarlet Hunter. But there came at once also a sinister desire to play a game for this man's life− work here. He knew that the other was ready for any wild move; there was upon him the sense of failure and disgust; he was acted on by the magic of the night, the terrible delight of the scene, and that might be turned to advantage.

He said: "Am I not right? There is something in the world greater than the creeds and the book of the Mass. To be free and to enjoy, that is the thing. Never before have you felt what you feel here now. And I will show you more. I will teach you how to know, I will lead you through all the north and make you to understand the big things of life. Then, when you have known, you can return if you will. But now see: I will tell you what I will do. Here on this great platform we will play a game of cards. There is a man whose life I can ruin. If you win I promise to leave him safe; and to go out of the far north for ever, to go back to Quebec" he had a kind of gaming fever in his veins. "If I win, you give up the Church, leaving behind the prayerbook, the Bible and all, coming with me to do what I shall tell you, for the passing of twelve moons. It is a great stake will you play it? Come" he leaned forward, looking into the other's face "will you play it? They drew lots those people in the Bible. We will draw lots, and see, eh? and see?"

"I accept the stake," said Sherburne, with a little gasp.

Without a word they went upon that platform, shaped like an altar, and Pierre at once drew out a pack of cards, shuffling them with his mittened hands. Then he knelt down and said, as he laid out the cards one by one till there were thirty: "Whoever gets the ace of hearts first, wins hein?"

Sherburne nodded and knelt also. The cards lay back upwards in three rows. For a moment neither stirred. The white, metallic stars saw it, the small crescent moon beheld it, and the deep wonder of night made it strange and dreadful. Once or twice Sherburne looked round as though he felt others present, and once Pierre looked out to the wide portals, as though he saw some one entering. But there was nothing to the eye nothing. Presently Pierre said: "Begin."

The other drew a card, then Pierre drew one, then the other, then Pierre again; and so on. How slow the game was! Neither hurried, but both, kneeling, looked and looked at the card long before drawing and turning it over. The stake was weighty, and Pierre loved the game more than he cared about the stake. Sherburne cared nothing about the game, but all his soul seemed set upon the hazard. There was not a sound out of the night, nothing stirring but the Spirit of the North. Twenty, twenty−five cards were drawn, and then Pierre paused.

"In a minute all will be settled," he said. "Will you go on, or will you pause?"

But Sherburne had got the madness of chance in his veins now, and he said: "Quick, quick, go on!" Pierre drew, but the great card held back. Sherburne drew, then Pierre again. There were three left. Sherburne's face was as white as the snow around him. His mouth was open, and a little white cloud of frosted breath came out. His hand hungered for the card, drew back, then seized it. A moan broke from him. Then Pierre, with a little weird laugh, reached out and turned over the ace of hearts!

They both stood up. Pierre put the cards in his pocket.

"You have lost," he said.

Sherburne threw back his head with a reckless laugh. The laugh seemed to echo and echo through the amphitheatre, and then from the frozen seats, the hillocks of ice and snow, there was a long, low sound, as of sorrow, and a voice came after:

"Sleep sleep! Blessed be the just and the keepers of vows."

Sherburne stood shaking, as though he had seen a host of spirits. His eyes on the great seats of judgment, he said to Pierre:

"See, see, how they sit there, grey and cold and awful!"

But Pierre shook his head.

"There is nothing," he said, "nothing;" yet he knew that Sherburne was looking upon the men of judgment of the Kimash Hills, the sleepers. He looked round, half fearfully, for if here were those great children of the ages, where was the keeper of the house, the Red Patrol?

Even as he thought, a figure in scarlet with a noble face and a high pride of bearing stood before them, not far away. Sherburne clutched his arm.

Then the Red Patrol, the Scarlet Hunter spoke: "Why have you sinned your sins and broken your vows within our house of judgment? Know ye not that in the new springtime of the world ye shall be outcast, because ye have called the sleepers to judgment before their time? But I am the hunter of the lost. Go you," he said to Sherburne, pointing, "where a sick man lies in a hut in the Shikam Valley. In his soul find thine own again." Then to Pierre: "For thee, thou shalt know the desert and the storm and the lonely hills; thou shalt neither seek nor find. Go, and return no more."

The two men, Sherburne falteringly, stepped down and moved to the open plain. They turned at the great entrance and looked back. Where they had stood there rested on his long bow the Red Patrol. He raised it, and a flaming arrow flew through the sky towards the south. They followed its course, and when they looked back a little afterwards, the great judgment−house was empty, and the whole north was silent as the sleepers.

At dawn they came to the hut in the Shikam Valley, and there they found a trapper dying. He had sinned greatly, and he could not die without someone to show him how, to tell him what to say to the angel of the cross−roads.

Sherburne, kneeling by him, felt his own new soul moved by a holy fire, and, first praying for himself, he said to the sick man: "For if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Praying for both, his heart grew strong, and he heard the sick man say, ere he journeyed forth to the crossroads:

"You have shown me the way. I have peace."

"Speak for me in the Presence," said Sherburne softly.

The dying man could not answer, but that moment, as he journeyed forth on the Far Trail, he held Sherburne's hand.

THE GOING OF THE WHITE SWAN

"Why don't she come back, father?"

The man shook his head, his hand fumbled with the wolf−skin robe covering the child, and he made no reply. "She'd come if she knew I was hurted, wouldn't she?"

The father nodded, and then turned restlessly toward the door, as though expecting someone. The look was troubled, and the pipe he held was not alight, though he made a pretence of smoking.

"Suppose the wild cat had got me, she'd be sorry when she comes, wouldn't she?"

There was no reply yet, save by gesture, the language of primitive man; but the big body shivered a little, and the uncouth hand felt for a place in the bed where the lad's knee made a lump under the robe. He felt the little heap tenderly, but the child winced.

"S−sh, but that hurts! This wolf−skin's most too much on me, isn't it, father?"

The man softly, yet awkwardly too, lifted the robe, folded it back, and slowly uncovered the knee. The leg was worn away almost to skin and bone, but the knee itself was swollen with inflammation. He bathed it with some water, mixed with vinegar and herbs, then drew down the deer− skin shirt at the child's shoulder, and did the same with it. Both shoulder and knee bore the marks of teeth where a huge wild cat had made havoc and the body had long red scratches.

Presently the man shook his head sorrowfully, and covered up the small disfigured frame again, but this time with a tanned skin of the caribou. The flames of the huge wood fire dashed the walls and floor with a velvety red and black, and the large iron kettle, bought of the Company at Fort Sacrament, puffed out geysers of steam.

The place was a low but with parchment windows and rough mud−mortar lumped between the logs. Skins hung along two sides, with bullet−holes and knife−holes showing: of the great grey wolf, the red puma, the bronze hill−lion, the beaver, the bear, and the sable; and in one corner was a huge pile of them. Bare of the usual comforts as the room was, it had a sort of refinement also, joined to an inexpressible loneliness; you could scarce have told how or why.

"Father," said the boy, his face pinched with pain for a moment, "it hurts so all over, every once in a while."

His fingers caressed the leg just below the knee. "Father," he suddenly added, "what does it mean when you hear a bird sing in the middle of the night?" The woodsman looked down anxiously into the boy's face. "It hasn't no meaning, Dominique. There ain't such a thing on the Labrador Heights as a bird singin' in the night. That's only in warm countries where there's nightingales. So bien sur!"

The boy had a wise, dreamy, speculative look. "Well, I guess it was a nightingale it didn't sing like any I ever heard."

The look of nervousness deepened in the woodsman's face. "What did it sing like, Dominique?"

"So it made you shiver. You wanted it to go on, and yet you didn't want it. It was pretty, but you felt as if something was going to snap inside of you."

"When did you hear it, my son?"

"Twice last night and and I guess it was Sunday the other time. I don't know, for there hasn't been no Sunday up here since mother went away has there?"

"Mebbe not."

The veins were beating like live cords in the man's throat and at his temples.

"'Twas just the same as Father Corraine bein' here, when mother had Sunday, wasn't it?"

The man made no reply, but a gloom drew down his forehead, and his lips doubled in as if he endured physical pain. He got to his feet and paced the floor. For weeks he had listened to the same kind of talk from this wounded, and, as he thought, dying son, and he was getting less and less able to bear it. The boy at nine years of age was, in manner of speech, the merest child, but his thoughts were sometimes large and wise. The only white child within a compass of three hundred miles or so; the lonely life of the hills and plains, so austere in winter, so melted to a sober joy in summer; listening to the talk of his elders at camp−fires and on the hunting−trail, when, even as an infant almost, he was swung in a blanket from a tree or was packed in the torch−crane of a canoe; and, more than all, the care of a good, loving if passionate little mother: all these had made him far wiser than his years. He had been hours upon hours each day alone with the birds, and squirrels, and wild animals, and something of the keen scent and instinct of the animal world had entered into his body and brain, so that he felt what he could not understand.

He saw that he had worried his father, and it troubled him. He thought of something. "Daddy," he said, "let me have it."

A smile struggled for life in the hunter's face, as he turned to the wall and took down the skin of a silver fox. He held it on his palm for a moment, looking at it in an interested, satisfied way, then he brought it over and put it into the child's hands; and the smile now shaped itself, as he saw an eager pale face buried in the soft fur.

"Good! good!" he said involuntarily.

"Bon! bon!" said the boy's voice from the fur, in the language of his mother, who added a strain of Indian blood to her French ancestry.

The two sat there, the man half−kneeling on the low bed, and stroking the fur very gently. It could scarcely be thought that such pride should be spent on a little pelt by a mere backwoodsman and his nine−year−old son. One has seen a woman fingering a splendid necklace, her eyes fascinated by the bunch of warm, deep jewels a light not of mere vanity, or hunger, or avarice in her face only the love of the beautiful thing. But this was an animal's skin. Did they feel the animal underneath it yet, giving it beauty, life, glory?

The silver−fox skin is the prize of the north, and this one was of the boy's own harvesting. While his father was away he saw the fox creeping by the hut. The joy of the hunter seized him, and guided his eye over the sights of his father's rifle, as he rested the barrel on the window− sill, and the animal was his! Now his finger ran into the hole made by the bullet, and he gave a little laugh of modest triumph. Minutes passed as they studied, felt, and admired the skin, the hunter proud of his son, the son alive with a primitive passion, which inflicts suffering to get the beautiful thing. Perhaps the tenderness as well as the wild passion of the animal gets into the hunter's blood, and tips his fingers at times with an exquisite kindness as one has noted in a lion fondling her young, or in tigers as they sport upon the sands of the desert. This boy had seen his father shoot a splendid moose, and as it lay dying, drop down and kiss it in the neck for sheer love of its handsomeness. Death is no insult. It is the law of the primitive world war, and love in war.

They sat there for a long time, not speaking, each busy in his own way: the boy full of imaginings, strange, half−heathen, half−angelic feelings; the man roaming in that savage, romantic, superstitious atmosphere which belongs to the north, and to the north alone. At last the boy lay back on the pillow, his finger still in the bullet−hole of the pelt. His eyes closed, and he seemed about to fall asleep, but presently looked up and whispered: "I haven't said my prayers, have I?"

The father shook his head in a sort of rude confusion.

"I can pray out loud if I want to, can't I?"

"Of course, Dominique." The man shrank a little.

"I forget a good many times, but I know one all right, for I said it when the bird was singing. It isn't one out of the book Father Corraine sent mother by Pretty Pierre; it's one she taught me out of her own head. P'r'aps I'd better say it."

"P'r'aps, if you want to." The voice was husky. The boy began:

"O bon Jesu, who died to save us from our sins, and to lead us to Thy country, where there is no cold, nor hunger, nor thirst, and where no one is afraid, listen to Thy child. . . . When the great winds and rains come down from the hills, do not let the floods drown us, nor the woods cover us, nor the snow−slide bury us; and do not let the prairie−fires burn us. Keep wild beasts from killing us in our sleep, and give us good hearts that we may not kill them in anger."

His finger twisted involuntarily into the bullet−hole in the pelt, and he paused a moment.

"Keep us from getting lost, O gracious Saviour." Again there was a pause, his eyes opened wide, and he said:

"Do you think mother's lost, father?"

A heavy broken breath came from the father, and he replied haltingly: "Mebbe, mebbe so."

Dominique's eyes closed again. "I'll make up some," he said slowly. "And if mother's lost, bring her back again to us, for everything's going wrong."

Again he paused, then went on with the prayer as it had been taught him.

"Teach us to hear Thee whenever Thou callest, and to see Thee when Thou visitest us, and let the blessed Mary and all the saints speak often to Thee for us. O Christ, hear us. Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Amen."

Making the sign of the cross, he lay back, and said "I'll go to sleep now, I guess."

The man sat for a long time looking at the pale, shining face, at the blue veins showing painfully dark on the temples and forehead, at the firm little white hand, which was as brown as a butternut a few weeks before. The longer he sat, the deeper did his misery sink into his soul. His wife had gone, he knew not where, his child was wasting to death, and he had for his sorrows no inner consolation. He had ever had that touch of mystical imagination inseparable from the far north, yet he had none of that religious belief which swallowed up natural awe and turned it to the refining of life, and to the advantage of a man's soul. Now it was forced in upon him that his child was wiser than himself, wiser and safer. His life had been spent in the wastes, with rough deeds and rugged habits, and a youth of hardship, danger, and almost savage endurance, had given him a half−barbarian

temperament, which could strike an angry blow at one moment and fondle to death at the next.

When he married sweet Lucette Barbond his religion reached little farther than a belief in the Scarlet Hunter of the Kimash Hills and those voices that could be heard calling in the night, till their time of sleep be past, and they should rise and reconquer the north.

Not even Father Corraine, whose ways were like those of his Master, could ever bring him to a more definite faith. His wife had at first striven with him, mourning yet loving. Sometimes the savage in him had broken out over the little creature, merely because barbaric tyranny was in him torture followed by the passionate kiss. But how was she philosopher enough to understand the cause?

When she fled from their hut one bitter day, as he roared some wild words at her, it was because her nerves had all been shaken from threatened death by wild beasts (of which he did not know), and his violence drove her mad. She had run out of the house, and on, and on, and on and she had never come back. That was weeks ago, and there had been no word nor sign of her since. The man was now busy with it all, in a slow, cumbrous way. A nature more to be touched by things seen than by things told, his mind was being awakened in a massive kind of fashion. He was viewing this crisis of his life as one sees a human face in the wide searching light of a great fire. He was restless, but he held himself still by a strong effort, not wishing to disturb the sleeper. His eyes seemed to retreat farther and farther back under his shaggy brows.

The great logs in the chimney burned brilliantly, and a brass crucifix over the child's head now and again reflected soft little flashes of light. This caught the hunter's eye. Presently there grew up in him a vague kind of hope that, somehow, this symbol would bring him luck that was the way he put it to himself. He had felt this and something more when Dominique prayed. Somehow, Dominique's prayer was the only one he had ever heard that had gone home to him, had opened up the big sluices of his nature, and let the light of God flood in. No, there was another: the one Lucette made on the day that they were married, when a wonderful timid reverence played through his hungry love for her.

Hours passed. All at once, without any other motion or gesture, the boy's eyes opened wide with a strange, intense look.

"Father," he said slowly, and in a kind of dream, "when you hear a sweet horn blow at night, is it the Scarlet Hunter calling?"

"P'r'aps. Why, Dominique?" He made up his mind to humour the boy, though it gave him strange aching forebodings. He had seen grown men and women with these fancies and they had died.

"I heard one blowing just now, and the sounds seemed to wave over my head. Perhaps he's calling someone that's lost."

"Mebbe."

"And I heard a voice singing it wasn't a bird tonight."

"There was no voice, Dominique."

"Yes, yes." There was something fine in the grave, courteous certainty of the lad. "I waked and you were sitting there thinking, and I shut my eyes again, and I heard the voice. I remember the tune and the words."

"What were the words?" In spite of himself the hunter felt awed.

"I've heard mother sing them, or something most like them:

"Why does the fire no longer burn?
(I am so lonely.)
Why does the tent−door swing outward?
(I have no home.)
Oh, let me breathe hard in your face!
(I am so lonely.)
Oh, why do you shut your eyes to me?
(I have no home.)"

The boy paused.

"Was that all, Dominique?"

"No, not all."

"Let us make friends with the stars;
(I am so lonely.)
Give me your hand, I will hold it.
(I have no home.)
Let us go hunting together.
(I am so lonely.)
We will sleep at God's camp to−night.
(I have no home.)"

Dominique did not sing, but recited the words with a sort of chanting inflection.

"What does it mean when you hear a voice like that, father?"

"I don't know. Who told your mother the song?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose she just made them up she and God. . . . There! There it is again? Don't you hear it don't you hear it, daddy?"

"No, Dominique, it's only the kettle singing."

"A kettle isn't a voice. Daddy " He paused a little, then went on, hesitatingly "I saw a white swan fly through the door over your shoulder, when you came in to−night."

"No, no, Dominique; it was a flurry of snow blowing over my shoulder."

"But it looked at me with two shining eyes."

"That was two stars shining through the door, my son."

"How could there be snow flying and stars shining too, father?"

"It was just drift−snow on a light wind, but the stars were shining above, Dominique."

The man's voice was anxious and unconvincing, his eyes had a hungry, hunted look. The legend of the White Swan had to do with the passing of a human soul. The swan had come in would it go out alone? He touched the boy's hand it was hot with fever; he felt the pulse it ran high; he watched the face it had a glowing light. Something stirred within him, and passed like a wave to the farthest courses of his being. Through his misery he had touched the garment of the Master of Souls. As though a voice said to him there, "Someone hath touched me," he got to his feet, and, with a sudden blind humility, lit two candles, placed them on a shelf in a corner before a porcelain figure of the Virgin, as he had seen his wife do. Then he picked a small handful of fresh spruce twigs from a branch over the chimney, and laid them beside the candles. After a short pause he came slowly to the head of the boy's bed. Very solemnly he touched the foot of the Christ on the cross with the tips of his fingers, and brought them to his lips with an indescribable reverence. After a moment, standing with eyes fixed on the face of the crucified figure, he said, in a shaking voice:

"Pardon, bon Jesu! Sauvez mon enfant! Ne me laissez pas seul!"

The boy looked up with eyes again grown unnaturally heavy, and said:

"Amen! . . . Bon Jesu ! . . . Encore! Encore, mon pere!"

The boy slept. The father stood still by the bed for a time, but at last slowly turned and went toward the fire.

Outside, two figures were approaching the hut a man and a woman; yet at first glance the man might easily have been taken for a woman, because of the long black robe which he wore, and because his hair fell loose on his shoulders and his face was clean−shaven.

"Have patience, my daughter," said the man. "Do not enter till I call you. But stand close to the door, if you will, and hear all."

So saying he raised his hand as in a kind of benediction, passed to the door, and after tapping very softly, opened it, entered, and closed it behind him−not so quickly, however, but that the woman caught a glimpse of the father and the boy. In her eyes there was the divine look of motherhood.

"Peace be to this house!" said the man gently as he stepped forward from the door.

The father, startled, turned shrinkingly on him, as if he had seen a spirit.

"M'sieu' le cure!" he said in French, with an accent much poorer than that of the priest, or even of his own son. He had learned French from his wife; he himself was English.

The priest's quick eye had taken in the lighted candles at the little shrine, even as he saw the painfully changed aspect of the man.

"The wife and child, Bagot?" he asked, looking round. "Ah, the boy!" he added, and going toward the bed, continued, presently, in a low voice: "Dominique is ill?"

Bagot nodded, and then answered: "A wild−cat and then fever, Father Corraine."

The priest felt the boy's pulse softly, then with a close personal look he spoke hardly above his breath, yet distinctly too:

"Your wife, Bagot?"

"She is not here, m'sieu'." The voice was low and gloomy.

"Where is she, Bagot?"

"I do not know, m'sieu'."

"When did you see her last?"

"Four weeks ago, m'sieu'."

"That was September, this is October winter. On the ranches they let their cattle loose upon the plains in winter, knowing not where they go, yet looking for them to return in the spring. But a woman a woman and a wife is different. . . . Bagot, you have been a rough, hard man, and you have been a stranger to your God, but I thought you loved your wife and child!"

The hunter's hands clenched, and a wicked light flashed up into his eyes; but the calm, benignant gaze of the other cooled the tempest in his veins. The priest sat down on the couch where the child lay, and took the fevered hand in his very softly.

"Stay where you are, Bagot," he said; "just there where you are, and tell me what your trouble is, and why your wife is not here. . . . Say all honestly by the name of the Christ!" he added, lifting up a large iron crucifix that hung on his breast.

Bagot sat down on a bench near the fireplace, the light playing on his bronzed, powerful face, his eyes shining beneath his heavy brows like two coals. After a moment he began:

"I don't know how it started. I'd lost a lot of pelts stolen they were, down on the Child o' Sin River. Well, she was hasty and nervous, like as not she always was brisker and more sudden than I am. I I laid my powder−horn and whisky−flask−up there!"

He pointed to the little shrine of the Virgin, where now his candles were burning. The priest's grave eyes did not change expression at all, but looked out wisely, as though he understood everything before it was told.

Bagot continued: "I didn't notice it, but she had put some flowers there. She said something with an edge, her face all snapping angry, threw the things down, and called me a heathen and a wicked heretic and I don't say now but she'd a right to do it. But I let out then, for them stolen pelts were rasping me on the raw. I said something pretty rough, and made as if I was goin' to break her in two just fetched up my hands, and went like this! " With a singular simplicity he made a wild gesture with his hands, and an animal−like snarl came from his throat. Then he looked at the priest with the honest intensity of a boy.

"Yes, that is what you did what was it you said which was 'pretty rough'?"

There was a slight hesitation, then came the reply: "I said there was enough powder spilt on the floor to kill all the priests in heaven."

A fire suddenly shot up into Father Corraine's face, and his lips tightened for an instant, but presently he was as before, and he said:

"How that will face you one day, Bagot! Go on. What else?"

Sweat began to break out on Bagot's face, and he spoke as though he were carrying a heavy weight on his shoulders, low and brokenly.

"Then I said, 'And if virgins has it so fine, why didn't you stay one?'"

"Blasphemer!" said the priest in a stern, reproachful voice, his face turning a little pale, and he brought the crucifix to his lips. "To the mother of your child shame! What more?"

She threw up her hands to her ears with a wild cry, ran out of the house, down the hills, and away. I went to the door and watched her as long as I could see her, and waited for her to come back but she never did.

"I've hunted and hunted, but I can't find her." Then, with a sudden thought, "Do you know anything of her, m'sieu'?"

The priest appeared not to hear the question. Turning for a moment toward the boy who now was in a deep sleep, he looked at him intently. Presently he spoke.

"Ever since I married you and Lucette Barbond, you have stood in the way of her duty, Bagot. How well I remember that first day when you knelt before me! Was ever so sweet and good a girl with her golden eyes and the look of summer in her face, and her heart all pure! Nothing had spoiled her you cannot spoil such women God is in their hearts. But you, what have you cared? One day you would fondle her, and the next you were a savage and she, so gentle, so gentle all the time. Then, for her religion and the faith of her child she has fought for it, prayed for it, suffered for it. You thought you had no need, for you had so much happiness, which you did not deserve that was it. But she: with all a woman suffers, how can she bear life and man without God? No, it is not possible. And you thought you and your few superstitions were enough for her. Ah, poor fool! She should worship you! So selfish, so small, for a man who knows in his heart how great God is. You did not love her."

"By the Heaven above, yes!" said Bagot, half starting to his feet.

"Ah, 'by the Heaven above,' no! nor the child. For true love is unselfish and patient, and where it is the stronger, it cares for the weaker; but it was your wife who was unselfish, patient, and cared for you. Every time she said an ave she thought of you, and her every thanks to the good God had you therein. They know you well in heaven, Bagot through your wife. Did you ever pray ever since I married you to her?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"An hour or so ago."

Once again the priest's eyes glanced towards the lighted candles.

Presently he said: "You asked me if I had heard anything of your wife. Listen, and be patient while you listen. . . . Three weeks ago I was camping on the Sundust Plains, over against the Young Sky River. In the morning, as I was lighting a fire outside my tent, my young Cree Indian with me, I saw coming over the crest of a land−wave, from the very lips of the sunrise, as it were, a band of Indians. I could not quite make them out. I hoisted my little flag on the tent, and they hurried on to me. I did not know the tribe they had come from near Hudson's Bay. They spoke Chinook, and I could understand them. Well, as they came near I saw that they had a woman with them."

Bagot leaned forward, his body strained, every muscle tense. "A woman?" he said, as if breathing gave him sorrow "my wife?"

"Your wife."

"Quick! Quick! Go on oh, go on, m'sieu' good father."

"She fell at my feet, begging me to save her. . . . I waved her off."

The sweat dropped from Bagot's forehead, a low growl broke from him, and he made such a motion as a lion might make at its prey.

"You wouldn't wouldn't save her you coward!" He ground the words out.

The priest raised his palm against the other's violence. "Hush! . . . She drew away, saying that God and man had deserted her. . . . We had breakfast, the chief and I. Afterwards, when the chief had eaten much and was in good humour, I asked him where he had got the woman. He said that he had found her on the plains she had lost her way. I told him then that I wanted to buy her. He said to me, 'What does a priest want of a woman?' I said that I wished to give her back to her husband. He said that he had found her, and she was his, and that he would marry her when they reached the great camp of the tribe. I was patient. It would not do to make him angry. I wrote down on a piece of bark the things that I would give him for her: an order on the Company at Fort o' Sin for shot, blankets, and beads. He said no."

The priest paused. Bagot's face was all swimming with sweat, his body was rigid, but the veins of his neck knotted and twisted.

"For the love of God, go on!" he said hoarsely. "Yes, 'for the love of God.' I have no money, I am poor, but the Company will always honour my orders, for I pay sometimes, by the help of Christ. Bien, I added some things to the list: a saddle, a rifle, and some flannel. But no, he would not. Once more I put many things down. It was a big bill it would keep me poor for five years. To save your wife, John Bagot, you who drove her from your door, blaspheming, and railing at such as I. . . . I offered the things, and told him that was all that I could give. After a little he shook his head, and said that he must have the woman for his wife. I did not know what to add. I said 'She is white, and the white people will never rest till they have killed you all, if you do this thing. The Company will track you down.' Then he said, 'The whites must catch me and fight me before they kill me.' . . . What was there to do?"

Bagot came near to the priest, bending over him savagely.

"You let her stay with them you with hands like a man!"

"Hush!" was the calm, reproving answer. "I was one man, they were twenty."

"Where was your God to help you, then?"

"Her God and mine was with me."

Bagot's eyes blazed. "Why didn't you offer rum rum? They'd have done it for that one five ten kegs of rum!"

He swayed to and fro in his excitement, yet their voices hardly rose above a hoarse whisper all the time. "You forget," answered the priest, "that it is against the law, and that as a priest of my order, I am vowed to give no rum to an Indian."

"A vow? A vow? Name of God! what is a vow beside a woman my wife?"

His misery and his rage were pitiful to see.

"Perjure my soul? Offer rum? Break my vow in the face of the enemies of God's Church? What have you done for me that I should do this for you, John Bagot?"

"Coward!" was the man's despairing cry, with a sudden threatening movement. "Christ Himself would have broke a vow to save her."

The grave, kind eyes of the priest met the other's fierce gaze, and quieted the wild storm that was about to break.

"Who am I that I should teach my Master?" he said solemnly. "What would you give Christ, Bagot, if He had saved her to you?"

The man shook with grief, and tears rushed from his eyes, so suddenly and fully had a new emotion passed through him.

"Give give?" he cried; "I would give twenty years of my life!"

The figure of the priest stretched up with a gentle grandeur. Holding out the iron crucifix, he said: "On your knees and swear it, John Bagot."

There was something inspiring, commanding, in the voice and manner, and Bagot, with a new hope rushing through his veins, knelt and repeated his words.

The priest turned to the door, and called, "Madame Lucette!"

The boy, hearing, waked, and sat up in bed suddenly. "Mother! mother!" he cried, as the door flew open. The mother came to her husband's arms, laughing and weeping, and an instant afterwards was pouring out her love and anxiety over her child.

Father Corraine now faced the man, and with a soft exaltation of voice and manner, said:

"John Bagot, in the name of Christ, I demand twenty years of your life of love and obedience of God. I broke my vow, I perjured my soul, I bought your wife with ten kegs of rum!"

The tall hunter dropped again to his knees, and caught the priest's hand to kiss it.

"No, no this!" the priest said, and laid his iron crucifix against the other's lips.

Dominique's voice came clearly through the room: "Mother, I saw the white swan fly away through the door when you came in."

"My dear, my dear," she said, "there was no white swan." But she clasped the boy to her breast protectingly, and whispered an ave.

"Peace be to this house," said the voice of the priest. And there was peace: for the child lived, and the man has loved, and has kept his vow, even unto this day.

For the visions of the boy, who can know the divers ways in which God speaks to the children of men?

AT BAMBER'S BOOM

His trouble came upon him when he was old. To the hour of its coming he had been of shrewd and humourous disposition. He had married late in life, and his wife had died, leaving him one child a girl. She grew to womanhood, bringing him daily joy. She was beloved in the settlement; and there was no one at Bamber's Boom, in the valley of the Madawaska, but was startled and sorry when it turned out that Dugard, the river− boss, was married. He floated away down the river, with his rafts and drives of logs, leaving the girl sick and shamed. They knew she was sick at heart, because she grew pale and silent; they did not know for some months how shamed she was. Then it was that Mrs. Lauder, the sister of the Roman Catholic missionary, Father Halen, being a woman of notable character and kindness, visited her and begged her to tell all.

Though the girl Nora was a Protestant, Mrs. Lauder did this: but it brought sore grief to her. At first she could hardly bear to look at the girl's face, it was so hopeless, so numb to the world: it had the indifference of despair. Rumour now became hateful fact. When the old man was told, he gave one great cry, then sat down, his hands pressed hard between his knees, his body trembling, his eyes staring before him.

It was Father Halen who told him. He did it as man to man, and not as a priest, having travelled fifty miles for the purpose. "George Magor," said he, "it's bad, I know, but bear it with the help of God. And be kind to the girl."

The old man answered nothing. "My friend," the priest continued, "I hope you'll forgive me for telling you. I thought 'twould be better from me, than to have it thrown at you in the settlement. We've been friends one way and another, and my heart aches for you, and my prayers go with you."

The old man raised his sunken eyes, all their keen humour gone, and spoke as though each word were dug from his heart. "Say no more, Father Halen." Then he reached out, caught the priest's hand in his gnarled fingers, and wrung it.

The father never spoke a harsh word to the girl. Otherwise he seemed to harden into stone. When the Protestant missionary came, he would not see him. The child was born before the river−drivers came along again the next year with their rafts and logs. There was a feeling abroad that it would be ill for Dugard if he chanced to camp at Bamber's Boom. The look of the old man's face was ominous, and he was known to have an iron will.

Dugard was a handsome man, half French, half Scotch, swarthy and admirably made. He was proud of his strength, and showily fearless in danger. For there were dangerous hours to the river life: when, for instance, a mass of logs became jammed at a rapids, and must be loosened; or a crib struck into the wrong channel, or, failing to enter a slide straight, came at a nasty angle to it, its timbers wrenched and tore apart, and its crew, with their great oars, were plumped into the busy current. He had been known to stand singly in some perilous spot when one log, the key to the jam, must be shifted to set free the great tumbled pile. He did everything with a dash. The handspike was waved and thrust into the best leverage, the long robust cry, "O−hee−hee−hoi!" rolled over the waters, there was a devil's jumble of logs, and he played a desperate game with them, tossing here, leaping there, balancing elsewhere, till, reaching the smooth rush of logs in the current, he ran across them to the shore as they spun beneath his feet.

His gang of river−drivers, with their big drives of logs, came sweeping down one beautiful day of early summer, red−shifted, shouting, good− tempered. It was about this time that Pierre came to know Magor.

It was the old man's duty to keep the booms of several great lumbering companies, and to watch the logs when the river−drivers were engaged elsewhere. Occasionally he took a place with the men, helping to make cribs and rafts. Dugard worked for one lumber company, Magor for others. Many in the settlement showed Dugard how much he was despised. Some warned him that Magor had said he would break him into pieces; it seemed possible

that Dugard might have a bad hour with the people of Bamber's Boom. Dugard, though he swelled and strutted, showed by a furtive eye and a sinister watchfulness that he felt himself in an atmosphere of danger. But he spoke of his wickedness lightly as, "A slip a little accident, mon ami."

Pierre said to him one day: "Bien, Dugard, you are a bold man to come here again. Or is it that you think old men are cowards?"

Dugard, blustering, laid his hand suddenly upon his case−knife.

Pierre laughed softly, contemptuously, came over, and throwing out his perfectly formed but not robust chest in the fashion of Dugard, added: "Ho, ho, monsieur the butcher, take your time at that. There is too much blood in your carcass. You have quarrels plenty on your hands without this. Come, don't be a fool and a scoundrel too."

Dugard grinned uneasily, and tried to turn the thing off as a joke, and Pierre, who laughed still a little more, said: "It would be amusing to see old Magor and Dugard fight. It would be so equal." There was a keen edge to Pierre's tones, but Dugard dared not resent it.

One day Magor and Dugard must meet. The square−timber of the two companies had got tangled at a certain point, and gangs from both must set them loose. They were camped some distance from each other. There was rivalry between them, and it was hinted that if any trouble came from the meeting of Magor and Dugard the gangs would pay off old scores with each other. Pierre wished to prevent this. It seemed to him that the two men should stand alone in the affair. He said as much here and there to members of both camps, for he was free of both: a tribute to his genius at poker.

The girl, Nora, was apprehensive for her father; she hated the other man now. Pierre was courteous to her, scrupulous in word and look, and fond of her child. He had always shown a gentleness to children, which seemed little compatible with his character; but for this young outlaw in the world he had something more. He even laboured carefully to turn the girl's father in its favour; but as yet to little purpose. He was thought ful of the girl too. He only went to the house when he knew her father was present, or when she was away. Once while he was there, Father Halen and his sister, Mrs. Lauder, came. They found Pierre with the child, rocking the cradle, and humming as he did so an old song of the coureurs de bois:

"Out of the hills comes a little white deer,
Poor little vaurien, o, ci, ci!
Come to my home, to my home down here,
Sister and brother and child o' me
Poor little, poor little vaurien!"

Pierre was alone, save for the old woman who had cared for the home since Nora's trouble came. The priest was anxious lest any harm should come from Dugard's presence at Bamber's Boom. He knew Pierre's doubtful reputation, but still he knew he could speak freely and would be answered honestly. "What will happen?" he abruptly asked.

"What neither you nor I should try to prevent, m'sieu'," was Pierre's reply.

"Magor will do the man injury?"

"What would you have? Put the matter on your own hearthstone, eh? . . . Pardon, if I say these things bluntly." Pierre still lightly rocked the cradle with one foot.

"But vengeance is in God's hands."

"M'sieu'," said the half−breed, "vengeance also is man's, else why did we ten men from Fort Cypress track down the Indians who murdered your brother, the good priest, and kill them one by one?"

Father Halen caught his sister as she swayed, and helped her to a chair, then turned a sad face on Pierre. "Were you were you one of that ten?" he asked, overcome; and he held out his hand.

The two river−driving camps joined at Mud Cat Point, where was the crush of great timber. The two men did not at first come face to face, but it was noticed by Pierre, who smoked on the bank while the others worked, that the old man watched his enemy closely. The work of undoing the great twist of logs was exciting, and they fell on each other with a great sound as they were pried off, and went sliding, grinding, into the water. At one spot they were piled together, massive and high. These were left to the last.

It was here that the two met. Old Magor's face was quiet, if a little haggard; and his eyes looked out from under his shaggy brows piercingly. Dugard's manner was swaggering, and he swore horribly at his gang. Presently he stood at a point alone, working at an obstinate log. He was at the foot of an incline of timber, and he was not aware that Magor had suddenly appeared at the top of that incline. He heard his name called out sharply. Swinging round, he saw Magor thrusting a handspike under a huge timber, hanging at the top of the incline. He was standing in a hollow, a kind of trench. He was shaken with fear, for he saw the old man's design. He gave a cry and made as if to jump out of the way, but with a laugh Magor threw his whole weight on the handspike, the great timber slid swiftly down and crushed Dugard from his thighs to his feet, breaking his legs terribly. The old man called down at him: "A slip a little accident, mon ami!" Then, shouldering his handspike, he made his way through the silent gangs to the shore, and so on homewards.

Magor had done what he wished. Dugard would be a cripple for life; his beauty was all spoiled and broken: there was much to do to save his life.

II

Nora also about this time took to her bed with fever. Again and again Pierre rode thirty miles and back to get ice for her head. All were kind to her now. The vengeance upon Dugard seemed to have wiped out much of her shame in the eyes of Bamber's Boom. Such is the way of the world. He that has the last blow is in the eye of advantage. When Nora began to recover, the child fell ill also. In the sickness of the child the old man had a great temptation far greater than that concerning Dugard. As the mother grew better the child became much worse. One night the doctor came, driving over from another settlement, and said that if the child got sleep till morning it would probably live, for the crisis had come. He left an opiate to procure the sleep, the same that had been given to the mother. If it did not sleep, it would die. Pierre was present at this time.

All through the child's illness the old man's mind had been tossed to and fro. If the child died, the living stigma would be gone; there would be no reminder of his daughter's shame in the eyes of the world. They could go away from Bamber's Boom, and begin life again somewhere. But, then, there was the child itself which had crept into his heart, he knew not how, and would not be driven out. He had never, till it was taken ill, even touched it, nor spoken to it. To destroy its life! Well, would it not be better for the child to go out of all possible shame, into peace, the peace of the grave?

This night he sat down beside the cradle, holding the bottle of medicine and a spoon in his hand. The hot, painful face of the child fascinated him. He looked from it to the bottle, and back, then again to the bottle. He started, and the sweat stood out on his forehead. For though the doctor had told him in words the proper dose, he had by mistake written on the label the same dose as for the mother! Here was the responsibility shifted in any case. More than once the old man uncorked the bottle, and once he dropped out the opiate in the spoon steadily; but the child opened its suffering eyes at him, its little wasted hand wandered over the coverlet, and he could not do it just

then. But again the passion for its destruction came on him, because he heard his daughter moaning in the other room. He said to himself that she would be happier when it was gone. But as he stooped over the cradle, no longer hesitating, the door softly opened, and Pierre entered. The old man shuddered, and drew back from the cradle. Pierre saw the look of guilt in the old man's face, and his instinct told him what was happening. He took the bottle from the trembling hand, and looked at the label.

"What is the proper dose?" he asked, seeing that a mistake had been made by the doctor.

In a hoarse whisper Magor told him. "It may be too late," Pierre added. He knelt down, with light fingers opened the child's mouth, and poured the medicine in slowly. The old man stood for a time rigid, looking at them both. Then he came round to the other side of the cradle, and seated himself beside it, his eyes fixed on the child's face. For a long time they sat there. At last the old man said: "Will he die, Pierre?"

"I am afraid so," answered Pierre painfully. "But we shall see." Then early teaching came to him, never to be entirely obliterated, and he added: "Has the child been baptised?"

The old man shook his head. "'Will you do it?" asked Pierre hesitatingly.

"I can't I can't," was the reply.

Pierre smiled a little ironically, as if at himself, got some water in a cup, came over, and said: "Remember, I'm a Papist!"

A motion of the hand answered him.

He dipped his fingers in the water, and dropped it ever so lightly on the child's forehead.

"George Magor," it was the old man's name, "I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Then he drew the sign of the cross on the infant's forehead.

Sitting down, he watched beside the child. After a little he heard a long choking sigh. Looking up, he saw tears slowly dropping from Magor's eyes.

And to this day the child and the mother of the child are dear to the old man's heart.