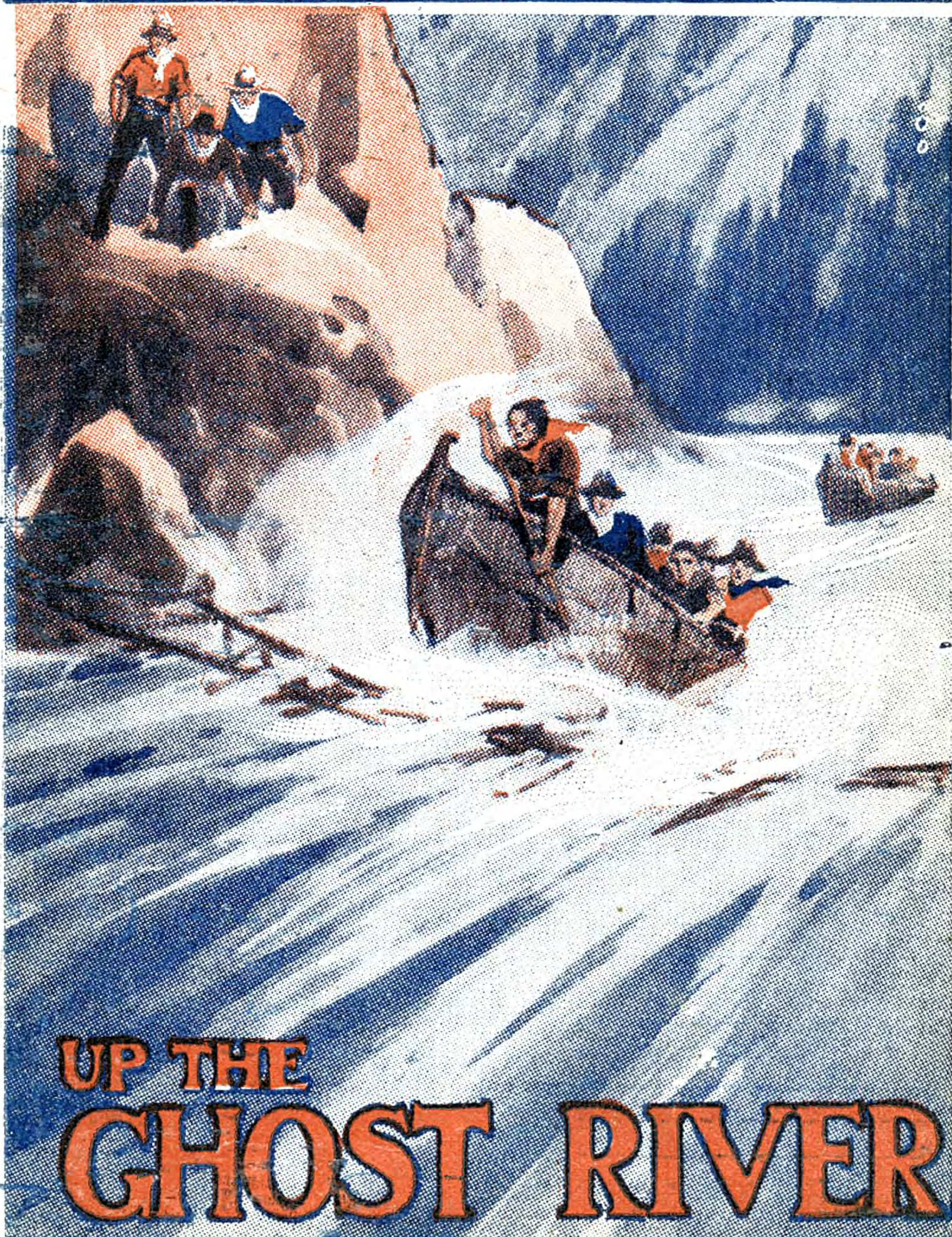


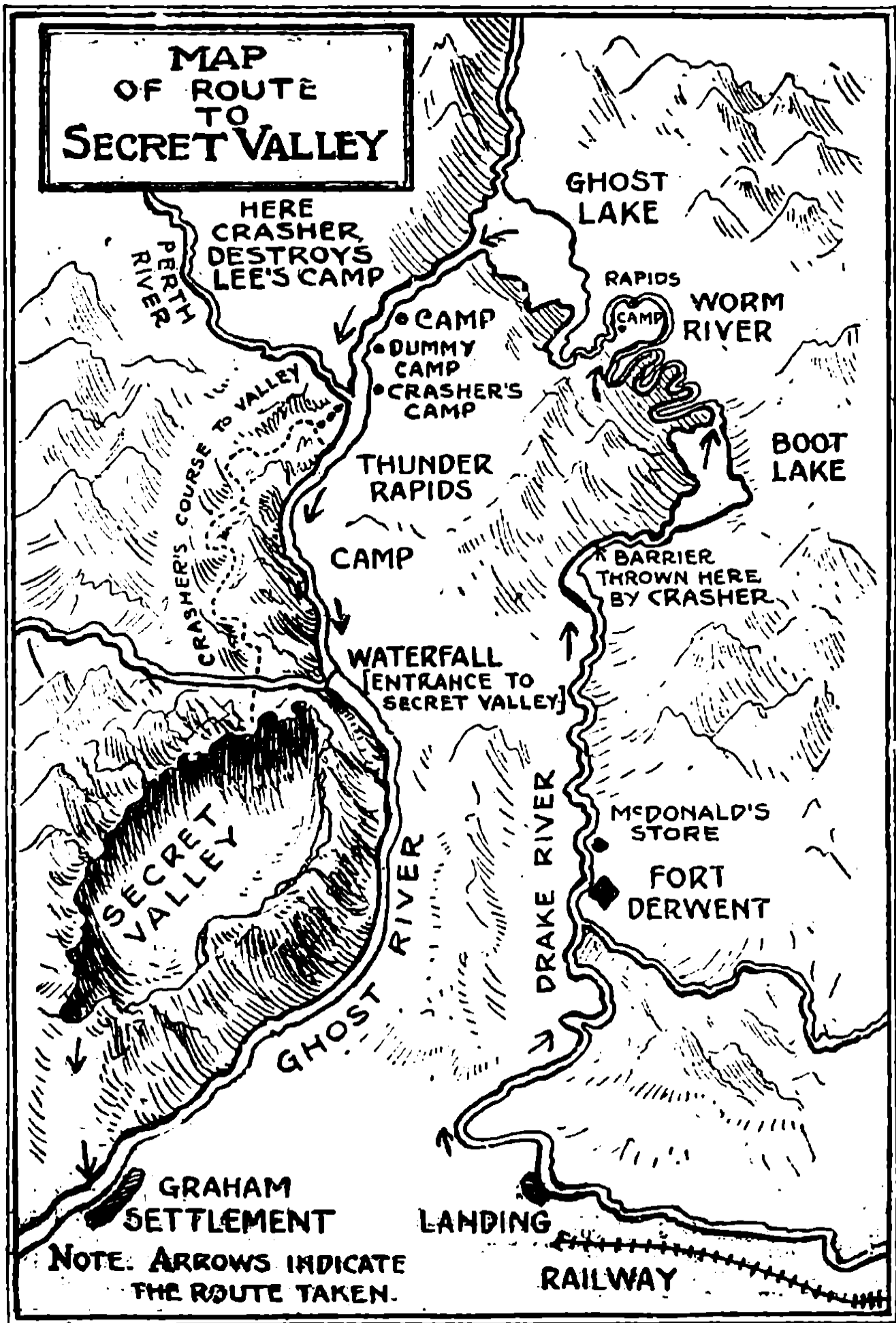
No. 323.—Story of St. Frank's Holiday Party Expedition to Secret Valley!

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UP THE GHOST RIVER

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UP THE GHOST RIVER

A Story of Holiday Life and Detective Adventure, introducing **NELSON LEE, NIPPER**, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Montana Mystery," "The Terror of Roaring Z," "The Rustlers' Secret," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

NORTH OF FIFTY-FIVE.

"**H**ANDS up and be darned slick about it!"

Angus Macdonald turned sharply and looked at the door of his squat, comfortable log store. Framed in it was the figure of a man—a big, burly brute of a fellow, with an ugly, aggressive face, revealing its owner's coarseness in every line. He was attired in rough, travel-stained garb, and he held a big revolver in his grasp. He jerked this sharply as Macdonald looked round.

"Guess I'm waitin'!" he snapped harshly.

The grizzled old fur-trader stood quite still, making no attempt to put his hands aloft. Very deliberately he laid down his pipe and pouch upon the rough counter, and then he thoughtfully stroked his iron-grey beard.

"Guess you're kinder—deaf?" said the stranger, entering the shack. "You'd best get it fixed in your head right now that I ain't bluffin'. Get me? Up with your hands or I'll fill you with daylight!"

Macdonald didn't move a hair. With the same deliberate motions he picked up his pipe and pouch, commenced filling the former, and turned his back upon this bullying stranger who threatened him. As a piece of pure coolness it would have been hard to beat.

Three other men had followed the burly rascal into the shack, and they, too, held revolvers ready.

"Say, Jake, this game ain't fizin' him any!" muttered one of the others. "Guess you'd best quit it!"

Jake Crasher snarled an oath under his breath.

"Good fer you, old 'un!" he exclaimed heartily. "I sure figgered I'd scare you some. But you've got nerve—an' a hull heap of it, by thunder! Say, Mr. Angus Macdonald, I take off my hat to you!"

The fur-trader turned and nodded.

"What's your business?" he asked bluntly. "I don't reckon to have strangers threatening me under my own roof. Your faces are new to me—I guess you haven't been in Fort Derwent twelve hours."

Jake Crasher stowed his revolver away, and leaned against the counter.

"That's right enough, I figger," he said. "We're sure strangers. An' we've come right here from Montana—arrived by the steamboat this morning. Gee! That steamboat can sure race a tortoise if it put on a bit of energy!"

"We're lucky to have the steamboat, anyway," said Macdonald. "It keeps us in touch with the outside. But you have the advantage of me. Who are you, and what do you want in my store?"

"Waal, Mr. Macdonald, I guess we've come on important business."

said Jake Crasher. "I'm figgerin' you know what that same business is. Say, Doane, I guess you'd best swing that door to."

Doane, one of the others, obeyed, and the four strangers ranged themselves in front of Angus Macdonald, and regarded him rather curiously. The fur-trader was, indeed, a man to command attention. Big, broad, with a lined, wrinkled face, and keen eyes which looked out from below bushy grey brows. His attire was of a nondescript variety, but this mattered little. The man was all that mattered, and it was quite obvious that a keen, active brain worked behind that wrinkled forehead.

His visitors were of a very different type—ruffianly looking fellows, who were undoubtedly out of their element in this peaceful little settlement on the banks of the Drake River.

Only half a mile distant lay Fort Derwent, glistening wetly in the sunshine after a great deal of rain. Just at this point the Drake River and the Silver River joined forces, and the spot was one of the most entrancing that could be imagined. It lay just below the mountains in the Athabasca region of North-west Canada. The valley was perfect—except for Fort Derwent.

This queer-looking little town was, to tell the truth, a blot upon the landscape, mainly consisting of a collection of rough shacks and tents. At the moment it was only the nucleus of a great and thriving city—if one was to believe the lively stories of the real estate speculators "outside."

Within a very short time, these smooth-tongued gentry declared, the railway would be brought up to Fort Derwent, and as soon as ever it arrived the place would begin to hum and would begin to grow at mushroom speed. It was a matter of small importance that the railhead was on the other side of the mountains at present. Any number of men with much faith in mankind had made the trip of two-hundred miles up the Silver Valley from the existing railway. It was their idea to be on the spot well ahead, so that they would be in "on the ground floor," to use one of the terms of the real estate operators.

But even these optimistic individuals were prepared to admit that Fort Derwent was as dull as ditchwater just now, and there were not many signs of

a rush. With the raw-looking new pine shacks, roofed with tarred felt and such like, and the sodden tents, the little township did not present a very inspiring view. There was only one building which pretended to be of any importance. This was the palatial new Fort Derwent Hotel. At least, it was called palatial by the owner. Other people had different adjectives to use in describing it.

The Fort Derwent Hotel, as a matter of fact, was a wretched looking shanty, and only loomed above its fellow shacks because of its larger size. These little wooden buildings and the tents stretched out in a double row, straggling away in no particular direction. Some attempt had been made to plan out the city which was coming along. Stumps had been pushed into the ground, separating the roadway from the side-walks. Everything was wet and muddy.

Just near the river bank lay the little sternwheel steamboat which had brought Jake Crasher and his three companions North. She was a queer-looking craft, and her architecture was of a nondescript character. She seemed, indeed, as though one good solid push would smash her up, with her ramshackle stern paddle-wheel and lean-to pilot house. Her smoke-stack could scarcely be likened to that of an ocean-going liner, for it consisted of nothing more romantic than several lengths of kitchen stove-pipe held together by a large number of wires. These wires were not all even, and consequently the smoke-stack was full of kinks where the lengths of pipe were joined. But the little steamboat had plied up and down the river for years during the summer months, and she performed all that was expected of her.

Further up the river, and just out of sight of Fort Derwent, lay Angus Macdonald's store. This was far more picturesque than any of the buildings in the settlement, for it had stood there for years, and was mellow-looking with age. Moreover, it fitted in with the surroundings admirably.

It was a low log shack with a roof which, surprisingly enough, sprouted quite a wonderful crop of weeds. It was a sod roof, extremely weighty, but most serviceable. The whole building seemed to cling close to the ground, as though seeking protection. There were two or

three windows, all of them crooked, and two doors, both built, apparently, for the accommodation of dwarfs. The larger door led straight into the store itself, while the smaller door was that of Angus Macdonald's living quarters.

There was something very peaceful and comfortable-looking about this weather-stained log shack, with a great belt of gigantic pine trees in the background, and nearly all around, for the shack stood within the clearing, with trees on three sides and the river facing it. There was a stony kind of beach leading down to the water. And near the shack, two vegetable patches were in evidence, with potatoes and onions well to the fore.

It was afternoon and somewhat humid after the rain. Angus Macdonald had not been expecting any visitors. He knew that the steamboat had pushed her squat nose into the river bank that morning and that some strangers had arrived. But he had had no idea that some of these newcomers had planned to call upon him. And he had certainly never dreamed that they would enter his store in such a remarkable manner.

Jake Crasher lit a cheroot and took a seat upon the rough counter. He was evidently determined to make himself at home.

"I guess it's up to me to get busy with the introductions," he said. "My name is Crasher—Jake Crasher. The others are Bob Doane, Pat Hara and Josh Sims. Mebbe you've been figgerin' that we ain't residents o' this locality."

"Well, I'll admit I guessed something of the sort," replied Macdonald. "We don't have your breed up here generally. And perhaps you'd care to explain the meaning of your aggressive entry."

"Aw, I'll allow that was jest a bit o' foolin'," said Jake Crasher smoothly. "Say, we were kinder testin' you, pard. Gee! I'll allow you've got some nerve. Waal, it ain't my way to hang around blowin' hot air an' sayin' nothin'. I'll get down to facts."

"I was wondering how long you would be," said the fur-trader dryly.

"I've let on that we come from Montana," went on Jake. "It won't surprise you a heap, I reckon, when you learn that we're from Roaring Z Ranch, owned by Mr. Big Jim Farman

—one of the whitest men who ever took in air!"

Macdonald looked at his visitors keenly.

"You've come from Mr. Farman?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"Have you any letter from him?"

"Say, we don't figger t' carry no darned letters of introduction," said Jake Crasher. "Jumpin' coyotes! Guess we'd look a fine set o' boobs goin' around wi' a bunch o' dog-gone letters. Big Jim is my boss, an' I'm guessin' he's your boss, too. Is that right?"

The fur-trader removed his pipe from between his teeth.

"There's no secret about the fact that this outfit belongs to Mr. James Farman," he said. "I've been here for a good few years, and I've served Mr. Farman well. I guess he is getting—careless!"

Jake Crasher scowled

"I don't reckon on no rough talk," he said harshly. "Them insults don't affect me none. I'm the manager of Roaring Z Ranch, an' I've come out here on a special mission. You'll probably guess what that is."

"Guessing doesn't help much," said Macdonald shortly. "What is your business?"

Jake Crasher leaned forward.

"Mebbe it's connected with—gold!" he said, in a low voice.

The fur-trader started slightly.

"Gold!" he repeated quickly. "Has Mr. Farman told you—"

"Aw, ther's no hoss-sense in bea'in' about the bush," interrupted Jake impatiently. "Say, you sent a letter to Mr. Farman lettin' on about a blamed strike—the biggest strike that ever hit the country. Waal, we've come up here to—get busy on th' job."

Angus Macdonald made no reply. He stood quite still, apparently as immobile as ever. His face betrayed no sign of the emotion which was going on within him. But inwardly, he felt startled and alarmed. He had never imagined that his employer would send such men as these up North.

It was quite true that Macdonald had dispatched a letter by special messenger to Roaring Z Ranch, in Montana. In that letter he had given news of an amazing gold strike—which was unknown to any white man save

himself. And Macdonald had fully believed that Mr. Farman himself would come.

It was disquieting to find this bullying brute of a man in possession of the truth. But Macdonald gave no sign of his thoughts.

"The letter was delivered safely, then?" he asked shortly.

"Guess you'll recognise it?" said Jake, producing a soiled and crumpled envelope out of his pocket. "This is the dope, I figger?"

He handed over the letter to the trader, who took it at once and glanced at it. It was his own letter, personally addressed to Mr. Farman. He handed it back to Jake, and nodded.

"Yes, this is the letter I wrote," he said. "I guess I'm sorry—I was expecting the chief up in person. I'd like you to explain."

"Sure, that's an easy job!" replied Jake Crasher. "Y' see, the boss hes got a hull crowd o' visitors on the ranch, an'—waal, he jest can't leave. It couldn't be done, pard. An' seein' as I'm his manager, an' trusted like I wus his own brother, he gives th' letter over t' me, an' hands out the notion that I should hit the trail for Fort Derwent without hangin' around a minute. Waal, I hit th' trail, an' I guess I've arrived. These boys are t' help some, if they're needed. We've come t' get the hull yarn from you, Macdonald, an' t' look into this strike an' fix things proper. It's up t' you t' deliver th' yarn."

Macdonald remained silent. He was a hard-headed old fellow of Scotch descent, and it was not a difficult matter for him to define that this story of Jake's lacked the real truth.

However, he did not betray any of his thoughts as he looked at the ranchman.

"You want th' whole story?" he said. "You want me t' tell you about this gold?"

"Sure, we do!" replied Jake Crasher, bending forward. "But see here, pard, Mr. Farman didn't take no sorter interest in your letter—he jest kinder luffed at it, an' figgered that you wus as funny as a cirkis clown. But he reckoned he'd best look into t' thing, an' that's why we're right here. Do you get me?"

"I understand perfectly," said the trader. "Maybe I'm wrong, but I was

expecting something different to this. It's a real pity that Mr. Farman couldn't come up—"

"Pity?" interrupted Jake. "Not on your durned life! Say, if this strike is the goods, as you let on, we'll sure be a parcel o' dog-gone fools if we let in more than is necessary. Say, Mac, I guess we ken run this outfit without no sorter help from the boss. Get me? It's a sure cinch!"

Macdonald narrowed his eye-lids.

"What are you trying to suggest?" he asked bluntly.

"Waal, see here," said Jake. "Ther's gold knockin' around, I take it. Say, what d'you guess 'ud happen if we let the old man inter this? I sure reckon he'd grab t' hull thing an' leave us as cold mutton. He's a millionaire. I calc'late, an' he don't need no more dollars jest now. See here, Mac, we ken do this thing real proper if you'll only jine. Is it on the table? Do we hit this?"

"We don't!" said Macdonald curtly.

"But, see here, a feller doesn't often hev the chance o' gettin' in first in a play o' this kind," exclaimed Jake Crasher cunningly. "The chief don't want no more—savee? We'll run this lay-out as we stand. What's more, we'll keep our hands on everythin' we touch!"

The trader smiled.

"And Mr. Farman sent you up here to look after his interests?" he asked. "I'm ready to admit that the whole crowd of you ain't fit to be trusted with a twisted cent piece! My friend, there's nothing doing. It doesn't go down. Until I see the chief in person, well, there'll be no talk. Take my advice and hit the trail South for the outside. We don't hanker after entertaining your kind up in this part of the country."

Jake Crasher scowled and swore.

"I guess I've been real patient," he said. "But this stuff kinder gets my goat. We want that information—every blamed word. We're mortal anxious t' know wher' this gold is located, an' you've got t' put us wise t' what's doin'."

Macdonald went behind the counter and commenced sorting out a number of furs. Then he looked up.

"Not going yet?" he asked casually.

"Gosh durn you fer a skunk!" snarled Jake. "Say, take my advice—

can this durned stuff right now! D'you get me? We ain't takin' none of it, an' you'd best re'lise before we go a yard further that we've come here for the information. I guess we're goin' t' get it!"

The old trader chuckled.

"You'll be needing to guess again," he said, without raising his voice a note. "This yarn of yours doesn't bluff me—no, sir! I'm not believing a word. You'd better quit now!"

Jake reached out an arm and seized the old man.

"Aw, see here!" he snapped. "You'd best get it right fixed that we don't take no talk o' that sort. We've given you a fair chance. If you don't choke up the information willin', waal, we'll need to press you some. An' I calc'late the pressin' won't be—pleasant!"

The trader made no reply. He simply went on with his work as though the four men did not exist. His air of calm indifference and supreme confidence irritated Jake Crasher more than he could express.

"You've got five minutes!" he rapped out. "If you don't give us the yarn by that time—I guess I've got a gun in my belt!"

"But you wouldn't be fool enough to use it," interrupted the trader. "These threats of yours amuse me. See here, how would you get the secret if you plugged me fatal? I'm guessing you wouldn't get it at all."

This time, Jake Crasher made no reply. He took out his watch and examined it with studied care, probably believing that he would impress Macdonald, but the latter was as immobile as a stone image.

For five minutes not a word was said in the shack. Jake and his three companions stood there with their hands on their guns. And Angus Macdonald went on with his usual work as though this kind of thing was an every day occurrence. He did not look up when Jake returned his watch to his pocket.

"Now, boys—time's up!" exclaimed Crasher harshly.

They drew their revolvers, at the same moment closed round the trader, and pressed the muzzles of their weapons into his broad chest.

"Mebbe you'll catch on that we're meanin' this," exclaimed Jake fiercely. "We've sure got you wher' we want

you, an' our patience is jest about used up. You've got t' speak up now about that durned gold, or——"

Jake left his sentence unfinished, except for a click from his revolver. If he had expected the fur-trader to crumple up, he made a big mistake. Angus Macdonald laughed squarely in his face, with a light of grim amusement twinkling in his shrewd old eyes.

"Trying to scare me?" he asked smoothly. "See here, my friend, it won't do. Put those toys away. You won't shoot—you daren't. So what's the good of bluffing? There's something behind all this, and I suspect that you've stolen that letter, and think you can get the information you require out of me. You can't! I'm not that kind of a man. The door opens easily, and you can leave it open."

Jake Crasher nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"Hang you!" he snarled thickly. "You'd best knuckle under, or we'll make you change your tone. You're dead right about the guns—we ain't goin' t' use them. But ther's somethin' else we ken use. Now, it ain't my way t' be hasty or unjust. I guess I'm goin' t' give you fair warnin', an' if you don't like t' take it—waaal, that's your funeral."

"And what is this interesting warning?"

"We'll fix you so that you can't jib any more," said Jake darkly. "I'll allow ther's more ways o' killin' a cat than wringin' its neck. Say, we'll come back after night-fall, an' talk t' you again. If you're wise you'll sling out the stuff we want. If you're hankerin' after trouble, you'll remain obstinate. An' I guess the trouble will be almighty bad. An' see hyar, if you try any durn tricks with us I'll shoot you down as you stand. An' I mean that this time. If we can't get this yarn, no other cuss will!"

Jake swung towards the door and opened it. His three companions passed out, and he turned his head for a moment.

"We'll be gettin' back later!" he said curtly.

He went out and slammed the heavy wood door after him. And Angus Macdonald smiled quietly to himself for a moment or two. Then his face became grave, and he stood looking straight before him, thinking hard.

So far he had defeated these bullies with comparative ease. But would he be able to defy them when they paid their return visit?

CHAPTER II.

WATCHERS AT THE WINDOWS.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST adjusted his pince-nez.

"Dear old boys, it's all frightfully interestin'," he said, looking round. "Begad! We've passed some glorious scenery, and it seems a shockin'ly long time since we were on Roaring Z Ranch."

"Rather!" said Tommy Watson. "And the country's totally different up here, too—everything's different. I'm not sure that I don't like it better. These rivers are wonderful, and everything else is so—so fresh and ripping. What do you think of it all, Nipper?"

"My dear old chaps, I've got the same opinion as you," I said. "But I haven't been studying the scenery, to tell you the truth. I'm worried about that murderous Jake Crasher and Mr. Macdonald. Jake and his gang got into Fort Derwent this morning, and goodness knows what might have happened by now."

"I don't think Crasher would do anything drastic by daylight," said Nelson Lee. "I'm not particularly concerned about Macdonald—it is most improbable that any harm has occurred to him so far. Taking everything into consideration, we have done extremely well."

"By glory, you're right!" exclaimed Big Jim Farman, nodding. "It's just as well that we did miss the steamboat down the river. We've done the trip in canoes—in practically the same time. And Crasher knows nothing of our arrival."

"There's not a soul in Fort Derwent knows that we're in," said Nelson Lee. "Having arrived after darkness, we were enabled to slip by and to land at this point, which is only a few hundred yards from Macdonald's store."

It was practically dark—up in those latitudes it never actually gets pitchy dark at this time of the year. And the scene was peaceful and quiet. Fort Derwent lay just a little down the river, hidden from the spot by thick trees.

Now and again the faint sound of a barking dog could be heard, but little

else. And here, at this particular point of the river bank, three canoes had been hauled up out of the water.

The camp was a small one and very private. For the bank here was curiously formed, making a short cliff which overhung at the summit. Anybody passing along the bank in that dim light would never know that a camp existed. It was equally invisible from the river.

The party was not a large one, consisting, in fact, of Mr. Farman, Nelson Lee, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Reginald Pitt, Bob Christine, Justin B. Farman, and myself. In addition there were two cowboys from Roaring Z Ranch—Square-Deal Reeve and Twirly Sam. There were ten of us altogether. It had been a headlong rush over a section of Montana, across the border into Canada, and then up to Fort Derwent by train and canoe.

The other six St. Frank's juniors were not included in our party—Handforth, Fatty Little and the rest. And neither Dorrmore nor Umlosj were with us. We had left Montana in grim chase of Jake Crasher and his murderous companions. We reckoned that we had done very well to arrive in Fort Derwent only a few hours later than our quarry, who were in ignorance of our presence.

And now we were intent upon interviewing Angus Macdonald, the trader. We wanted to know the real truth concerning the letter which he had sent to Mr. Farman—the letter which, by a curious set of circumstances, had fallen into evil hands.

Our host—Mr. Farman—had implicit faith in Macdonald. The hard-headed old Scotchman had been in sole charge of this fur-trading outpost ever since it had been created. He had served Mr. Farman well, and the affair was a flourishing one.

For days we had been discussing the possibilities. To a large extent we were in the dark, and did not know what the real position actually was. And now that we had arrived at our destination our first thoughts were to direct our steps towards the trader's store.

The flies had been a bit troublesome earlier, but now that darkness had descended they were more quiet. And we were ready for our brief journey—

for Macdonald's shack was only a little distance away through the trees.

We were not all going, of course—three of the juniors would be left behind with Twirly Sam. The other six of us would descend upon Angus Macdonald, and we would do so quietly, for we had no desire that our movements should be seen.

Nelson Lee gave the word when all was ready.

"I'm not at all sure that we are wise in taking you boys," he said. "In any case, you must remain in the background and refrain from speaking. These precautions may not be necessary, but it is just as well to be on the safe side."

"We'll keep mum, sir," I said. "You can trust us."

Tommy Watson and Justin B. Farman agreed with me, for they were the other two. Mr. Farman, the gov'nor, and Square-Deal Reeve had their revolvers ready for action if necessary.

"I guess you'd better follow me," said Mr. Farman. "I haven't been here for a couple of years, but I reckon I know my way."

We followed without comment, and Big Jim set off through the trees without hesitation. We were soon swallowed up in the dense gloom. It seemed that we were penetrating into a deep forest, but this proved to be a false impression.

For presently we emerged into the outer circle of a little clearing. And there, sitting squatly in the middle of it, was the straggling log shack, with two lighted windows showing with remarkable distinctness in the dimness.

"I reckon I wasn't far wrong," whispered the ranch owner. "Say, Mr. Lee, what do you reckon is the best thing now? We don't want to give Macdonald too much of a shock by stealing up like so many ghosts—"

"Hush!" whispered Nelson Lee abruptly.

There was something in his tone which caused Mr. Farman to cease speaking on the instant. And we all stood there, invisible against the background of trees, wondering why the gov'nor had commanded silence.

It was not long before we knew the truth.

Nelson Lee's eyes were remarkably keen, and he had spotted something which did not claim our attention at the first moment. Then we became

aware of some moving figures on the other side of the clearing, evidently approaching from Fort Derwent along the recognised trail. There were four men, and it did not need a large stretch of imagination on our part to know who they were.

Jake Crasher, Bob Doune, Pat Hara and Josh Sims!

It was a curious coincidence that our enemies had arrived at Macdonald's shack at the exact moment that we entered the clearing. But they were much nearer to the store than we were, and therefore reached it well in advance. Moreover, they were making no secret of their movements.

We remained perfectly still, watching.

The door of the shack was thrown open, and the four men entered, one after the other. They closed the door with a bang, and we felt the tension slightly relax. Mr. Farman was the first to speak.

"By glory!" he muttered. "The infernal rogues! They've beaten us after all, Mr. Lee! If we'd only come three minutes earlier—"

"It is just as well, perhaps, that this has happened," whispered Nelson Lee.

"Why?"

"Because we may be able to find out Crasher's exact game," replied the gov'nor. "You will observe that the windows of the shack are open, and that bushes grow near by. We can creep up and watch—and use our ears. If Macdonald is in any danger, we can quickly surprise these rascals and put them to flight."

"I'm allowin' that's an elegant stunt, Britisher!" murmured Square-Deal Reeve. "Say, I guess we'd best be movin'. It don't take long to draw a gun, an' I'm figgerin' that Jake Crasher is dog-gone handy with an automatic!"

We moved forward silently through the grass. A faint breeze was blowing through the trees, and the rustling of the leaves served to drown any slight sound that we made.

And we drew nearer and nearer.

Nelson Lee and I approached one window, and Mr. Farman and Square-Deal Reeve crept up to another. Farman junior and Tommy Watson were just behind, both of them mightily excited, but quiet.

We had hardly expected anything of this nature, and it rather added to the interest of the proceedings.

The night was distinctly warm, and out through the open windows came the voices of the men within. We had no difficulty in hearing every word that was said; but we, of course, were quite invisible to the occupants of the shack. It was impossible for them to know of our presence.

Craning my neck, I could see Jake Crasher standing in the centre of the store. Behind a rough log counter stood a big man, advanced in years, with a firmly set jaw and hard eyes.

"Waal, we've come back!" said Jake Crasher curtly. "I'm calc'latin' that you've had sufficient time to figger on the chances, Mr. Macdonald. Mebbe you'll be kinder reasonable?"

The trader shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I can add nothing to what I've already said," he replied bluntly.

"You won't tell us the yarn?"

"No."

"Say, we're wastin' our durned time!" put in one of the others, with an oath. "Gee! This obstinate old coyote gets my goat! Say, there's only one way to deal with him—we'll be needin' to use force!"

"Yep! You're sure right, Josh!" said Crasher harshly. "D'you get that, Macdonald? I'm guessin' it's up t' you to do the sensible thing. I ain't the kind o' man to cause trouble. Guess I hanker after peace; but if you don't sling out the information we require—waal, things'll be almighty uncomfortable."

"I shall tell you nothing," said the trader, in that same imperturbable manner. "Your threats do not affect me. I am convinced that you were not sent to me by Mr. Farman, and by remaining here you are wasting your time. I guess I'm a plain man, and I'm not wasting any more words."

Mr. Farman nodded.

"Good man!" he muttered, under his breath. "I knew you had a wise head screwed on your shoulders, Mac!"

Nelson Lee gave Mr. Farman a warning glance.

Within the shack, Jake Crasher shook a hairy fist in Macdonald's face.

"You obstinate old coyote!" he snarled. "See hyar, we've come out to Fort Derwent to get the information about this blamed gold strike. We're goin' to stay right hyar until that talk is handed out. Get me? I'm allowin'

that this country is wild, an' a killin' don't count much. The police don't come to this one-hoss settlement, an' if we lay you out it won't matter a cuss. D'you agree to choke up the yarn, or shall we stir you up some?"

Macdonald brought his hand down with a crash on the counter.

"Understand this!" he thundered. "I don't care a cent for your threats, and if you're not out of this shack within one minute I guess I won't be answerable for what happens. I'm not taking any of your bluff, and any information that I have to give will be handed to Mr. Farman in person—or nobody. Have I made that plain, or would you like me to repeat it?"

Jake was taken aback for a moment, and before he could reply, the trader produced an enormous revolver of an old pattern. His eyes were blazing, and his face was flushed crimson with fury.

"I'll ha'e ye know I'm no man to be bullied!" he roared, dropping into a pronounced Scottish accent in his rage. "By Mackinaw! I'm thinking ye'll be safer if yet got ootside!"

Jake started back.

"You durned old fool!" he raved. "Put that gun——"

Crack!

The revolver shot rang out so suddenly and so unexpectedly that I gave a jump. My heart seemed to leap at the same time. My view was obscured for a moment by a cloud of hazy smoke, and then I saw that the trader was holding his right wrist, and his big revolver was missing.

The next second Jake and his three companions leapt upon the trader, and held him firm.

"Good work, Pat!" said Crasher approvingly. "You hit the gun, an' didn't even scratch him. Hold him, boys!"

"Gee! This ain't goin' to be healthy!" said Bob Doane, glancing apprehensively at the windows. "Say, that shot might ha' been heard——"

"Aw, can that snivel!" snapped Jake. "Heard? By the all-fired dorg, eh? Guess ther's no human bein' within a mile o' this shack. Pat done right—guess this guy was dangerous with that gun in his paw!"

Macdonald was putting up a grim

fight, but he was helpless in the grasp of his four assailants. They held him tightly, and with brutal force. At last his struggling ceased, and he stood there, breathing hard.

"Well, you brutes, you've got me!" he panted. "By Heaven, you'll pay

"Guess it's you're the one who's goin' to pay!" interrupted Jake. "We come to you fair an' square, I reckon. I put the thing before you as man to man, an' you kicked. Come into this play with us, and you'll be a millionaire. It ain't too late, even now, I figger. I reckon we've proved that we mean business."

"I won't say a word to dirty hounds of your breed!" replied Macdonald.

Jake brought his hand round and clapped it upon the trader's face.

"Insult me, 'would yer?" he rapped out. "Waal, I ain't goin' to argue no more. We've done what we could to be peaceful; now we're tryin' some other game. If you don't speak I guess you'll be sore for a month!"

I looked at Nelson Lee anxiously.

"Aren't we going to do anything, guv'nor?" I breathed.

"Hush!" whispered Nelson Lee.

"But, hang it all, we can't—"

"Leave it to me, young 'un," whispered Lee. "I know what I'm doing."

We were, of course, simply boiling over with anxiety to rush to Angus Macdonald's assistance. So far the trader was in no danger, and, cooling down a bit, I understood that the guv'nor was anxious to find out just what Jake Crasher's intentions were. It was not long before we knew.

Some rope lay handy, and Macdonald was quickly taken to one of the upright posts which supported the roof, and placed with his face towards it. His ankles were bound round the post near the ground; then his jacket was torn off, his shirt followed, and his brawny back was bared.

"Now, boys, tie him up!" said Jake, with relish. "By gee, I'll give him a taste of somethin' that'll make his tongue run that loose we'll sure think a phonygraph has got goin'!"

Macdonald was soon bound up by the three others, and Jake amused himself—to judge by his expression—by knotting a length of rope. He wound

one end round his wrist, and sent the rope hissing through the air.

"Best tie somethin' round his mouth!" he said. "I'll allow he's likely to yell some. Say, we're goin' to knock blazes out of his durned hide! Twelve strokes I'll give him, and then see if his tongue's worked loose."

Jake swung the rope in the air again, and now we know exactly what the plan was. The trader was to be flogged unmercifully until he revealed the secret. This brutal bully took a keen delight in adopting this course. It was a pleasure to him, for it exactly suited his bestial tastes.

Macdonald had refused to say a single word about the gold discovery which had been mentioned in that letter to Mr. Farman; and Jake Crasher was fool enough to imagine that the old Scotchman would be forced into submission. If it had actually come to the test, the trader would have uttered no word.

But, before Jake could swing down the first lash of the rope, an interruption came.

"Hands up—and be quick about it!" commanded a quiet, calm voice.

The bully swung round, his jaw dropping. That voice seemed to come from nowhere—a soft, refined voice which seemed strangely out of place in these surroundings. Jake glanced at the first window—and gasped.

Nelson Lee's head and shoulders could be seen, but Jake did not pay much attention to the guv'nor. What claimed his full vision was something in the famous detective's grasp, for Crasher was looking directly down the barrel of an automatic.

"By thunder!" he gasped, clutching for his own revolver.

"Up with your paws, darn you!" snapped another voice.

The four men within the shack stared at the other window. Mr. Farman and Square-Deal Reeve were there, and their revolvers were also ready. There was no mistaking the gravity of the position.

Jake's three companions flung their hands roofwards with all speed, and only for a second did Jake himself hesitate. He made a slight move towards his holster, and three distinct clicks sounded. The next second Jake's hands went aloft, too.

CHAPTER III.

LEON, THE HALF-BREED.

NELSON LEE turned to me quickly.

"Slip in and disarm these men," he said briefly. "They won't dare to touch you, Nipper. If one of them makes the slightest move he will be shot down without mercy."

I scrambled through the window at once. Jake Crasher eyed me with evil malevolence, but he was unable to do anything. He knew well enough that Nelson Lee's words were not idle ones.

It only took me a few moments to seize the weapons of the four men. I placed them in a heap on the counter, far out of their reach. Jake was swearing foully, and his fury was awful to see.

"By thunder, you'll pay for this, you interferin' scum!" he snarled. "How in blazes did you get up hyar in Fort Derwent—"

"I figger it's fer you to keep your ~~peezed~~ mouth shut!" interrupted Square-Deal Reeve, as he dropped into the shack. "Now, you coyotes, you'll jest stand wher' you are. Say, I'd sure be kinder amused if the boss would let me plug holes through your carkises!"

The capture was perfect in every way. Jake Crasher and his men were unable to do a thing. Threatened by instant death if they played any tricks, they could do nothing but stand there with their dirty hands raised towards the roof. They were mortally afraid to lower their arms.

"Hoots!" said Angus Macdonald, turning his head. "I guess this is a surprise, chief; but I'm mighty glad to see you right here in this store. I reckoned that these hounds were trying to double-cross you!"

"They don't belong to my ranch at all, Mac," said Mr. Farman. "They're a bunch of murdering cattle rustlers, and if they had been caught by my boys back in Montana they would have been lynched by this time!"

"Guess it ain't too late, boss!" said Square-Deal suggestively.

"No, we can't take the law into our own hands," replied Mr. Farman. "In fact, I'm sure puzzled regarding what I shall do. Have you got any suggestions to make, Mr. Lee?"

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"Well, to begin with, I want that letter which was delivered to Crasher," he said. "You'll hand it over at once, my man!" he added, turning to Jake.

"Letter?" snarled Jake. "Guess you've hit the wrong game, cuss you! I ain't seen no gosh-durned letter! You're kinder talkin' loco! We come up north on our own business——"

"Quit that babby stuff!" snapped Square-Deal sharply. "Say, Mr. Leo, shall I search the hobo?"

Nelson Lee nodded, and Reeve soon began his task. Within a minute he had found the letter, dirty and crumpled, and he handed it at once to the gov'nor. One glance at it was sufficient to tell Nelson Lee that it was the article which was required.

By this time Tommy Watson and I had cut Macdonald free, and he was now getting into his jacket again. He still remained calm and collected, and there was a twinkle of satisfaction in his eyes.

"I was figuring on paying a visit to Doc Judkins to-morrow, chief," he said dryly. "These brutes had me at their mercy, and I wasn't expecting to get such an easy way out of it. I guess I'm puzzled a heap, and it's up to you to explain what all this mystery means."

"Before we go into any details, Mr. Macdonald, I'd like to say a few words to these men," put in Nelson Lee. "We can't very well make them prisoners, and we can't hand them over to the North-West Mounted Police—for the simple reason that there are no police within a hundred miles of Fort Derwent at this particular moment. I'm very much afraid we shall have to let them go."

Jake Crasher started.

"Say, I was forgettin' that!" he exclaimed. "You're sure right, you blamed Britisher! You jest can't do a thing. Gee! I guess you're feelin' kinder mean, ain't you? Thought you was goin' to get busy——"

"I'm doing the talking, Crasher, and you've got to do the listening," interrupted Lee curtly. "Don't think for one minute that I've any idea of being lenient towards you. If the police were in this settlement I should hand you into their charge at once. But it's too much trouble to hold you, and the only alternative is to let you go; but before kicking you out of this store I want to

give you a word of warning—and you'd better heed it."

"I don't want none o' your hot-air!" snapped Jake.

"You are mistaken, for my warning is one that you will be wise to take seriously," said Nelson Lee. "You are badly wanted by the Montana police for cattle stealing and other crimes—all four of you. You may think that you are fairly safe up here, so far north of the border. But if you dare to interfere with our plans at any future time you will be treated by us in just the same way as we should treat rattlesnakes. Your object has failed, and the best thing you can do is to leave Fort Derwent before daybreak. Now you can get out!"

Jake seemed to swallow something with difficulty.

"Say, I'll get even for this one day," he snarled. "By thunder! You can do the talkin' now, but it won't allus be this aways. I figger we can have our guns?"

"You figure wrong!" said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"Say, look hyar——"

"Quit!" shouted Square-Deal Reeve abruptly. "Say, my eyes are that sore with lookin' at you I'm feelin' kinder tuckered out! Get—before my trigger finger becomes jumpy!"

Jake Crasher and his fellow rogues had nothing to say. They were helpless and had to accept their dismissal. They passed quickly towards the door, opened it, and went out into the night.

It was the only thing that could be done. The North-West Mounted Police only came into Fort Derwent on their regular rounds once in three or four weeks. It might have been possible, perhaps, to have locked the scoundrels up, but this would have been a most unwise proceeding.

For the whole settlement would have been set talking, and talk was the very thing which we wished to avoid. Suspensions would be aroused, and it would probably be only a matter of a few hours before the inhabitants put two and two together. And neither Mr. Farman nor Macdonald had any desire for the news of the gold strike to leak out.

Square-Deal Reeve went after the defeated quartette. He made sure that they left the vicinity of the shack. There was nothing to fear from them,

since their weapons had been taken away.

"I'm mighty pleased to see you, Mr. Farman," said Angus Macdonald. "I knew there was something wrong, but I'm still a heap puzzled. I sent you an important letter outside with Tom Hanshaw, and I instructed him to deliver it into your hands. I've got an idea that something went wrong."

"Wrong?" echoed Mr. Farman. "Say, Mac, there's been some excitement on the ranch, but I don't reckon to tell you all that yarn now. We had trouble with cattle rustlers—Jake Crasher and his gang. They trapped us in a canyon, and went along to the ranch to create blazes. While they were there, Hanshaw arrived, and gave your note to Crasher, thinking he was me."

"I thought Hanshaw had more sense," said the trader grimly.

"I don't blame the man—the circumstances were peculiar," said Mr. Farman. "Well, this letter was read by Crasher, and he afterwards shot Hanshaw in cold blood, and then quit as quickly as he could."

Macdonald looked grave.

"Hanshaw is dead?" he asked anxiously.

"He wasn't when we left, but mighty near it," replied the millionaire. "They plugged him, but he was still conscious, and heard them talking about the letter and about gold. Then we came on the scene, having escaped, and I knew at once that the only thing I could do was to come up North without delay. I think we were wise in taking this course."

"You were, chief," said Macdonald. "This letter doesn't matter now you're here, that's the main thing. What's the size of your party?"

"There are four others down by the canoes—a cowpuncher and three school-boys," replied Mr. Farman. "I thought it better not to bring too large a party. I know how careful we must be where gold is concerned. I want you to tell me exactly what your discovery consists of, Mac. And right now I'd like to say that whatever the result is, you get a half share in the first claim."

"Gold doesn't interest me a lot, chief," said the fur-trader. "I'm getting on in years, and I don't reckon I'd quit this store anyway. I was fairly certain you'd be generous. And I can

tell you at once that my half share will make me ten times richer than you are at this present moment."

"Gee! I guess it's sure some strike!" muttered Square-Deal.

"It is—the greatest that has ever been made. I believe," said Macdonald. "Here's the letter, chief—there's not much in it. I simply asked you to come up as quickly as possible, seeing that I had news of gold. Naturally, I put no real information in the letter—and Crasher got nothing out of me."

Mr. Farman glanced at the crumpled letter.

"And is this strike as valuable as all this?" he asked interestedly.

"There is somebody can tell the yarn better than I can, sir," said the trader quietly. "A French half-breed, he is, and one of the whitest men I've ever met. Looks an Indian, but has a white soul. I've lived among Indians for the best years of my life, and I know them—treacherous, cunning, and without the slightest knowledge of gratitude. Indians need to be treated like children, and I've never come across a pure-blooded red-skin I'd care to trust. But Leon Ascara is one of nature's gentlemen—and one of the worst treated heroes I've ever met."

"I guess you make me interested, Mac," said Mr. Farman. "Who is this half-breed, Leon Ascara? Do I understand that you obtained the secret of the gold from him?"

"Yes, chief."

"Rather queer he should give it away like that, isn't it?" asked Nelson Lee. "These half-breeds generally have a habit of looking after themselves."

Angus Macdonald turned.

"I'm a man who believes in saving time, sir," he said. "We shall be wasting it if we talk. Please stay here, and I'll be right back with Leon Ascara. His story will keep you real interested."

The trader passed out of the shack, and we looked at one another curiously. We had already nearly forgotten Jake Crasher, and we were strangely stirred. For we were about to hear a secret which men would have killed one another to know. We were to learn the truth about the great gold strike.

Macdonald was back in less than ten minutes, and he brought with him a round-shouldered, elderly man, whom anyone would have taken for a full-

blooded Indian, so dark was his colour, and so pronounced the redskin characteristics. Indeed, he looked quite a repulsive individual.

"Now, Leon, you mustn't be nervous," said Macdonald. "These gentlemen are my friends—one of them is Mr. Farman himself, and they can all be trusted. I want you to tell them the whole story that you have already told me."

The half-breed made no comment, but walked slowly across the shack, and squatted on a bale against one of the walls. He looked up, his face quite expressionless, his eyes apparently staring into space.

"I, Leon Ascara, me," he said, in fairly good English. "I talk plentee, an' you listen. I tell you story lak you never hear before. Trader him good man, an' he listen all w'at I say. I talk plentee, me, an' I tell you all w'at I know."

"Very well, Leon, talk away, and we'll pay great attention," said Mr. Farman.

The half-breed nodded gravely.

"Me, I not long in Fort Derwent," he said. "I moch bad w'en I com'—hardly not'ing left of me. Angus Macdonald, him save me out of river, an' give me life. Wa! I thought I die, me."

"You haven't begun at the beginning, Leon," said the trader. "Tell the gentlemen what you did twelve years ago, and let us have the story in the right order."

"Me onderstan'," said the half-breed, nodding. "Twelve years ago I have big idea. I not lak way t'ings goin'. Wa! Everyt'ing all wrong—an' him been all wrong since ver' long tam. I get w'at you call big scheme to mak things different. You onderstan'? Spik bad Ingleesh, me."

"It's quite all right, Leon, we understand it perfectly," said Nelson Lee. "Twelve years ago you got a big idea to make things different? Go ahead. We are listening with great interest."

Leon Ascara nodded.

"I moch pleased," he said. "I travel a lot, me—I go down to Winnipeg, one tam. My mot'er and fat'er they died many years ago—me moch sorry. Me travel about anywhere, and not care. And I see things lak mak me sad. Me, I t'ink me lak to mak big

alteration. Me not good frens wit' white men at Landing, down Silver River. Me called trouble maker."

"And did you make trouble?" asked Mr. Farman.

"Me. I not try to," said the half-breed, shrugging his shoulders. "Me see t'ings which were moch wrong. Me no wish you misonderstan'. Me lak white man—me know white man good. Him do moch for country up here. But I seen moch to worry me. White man good for white man. You onderstan'? White man moch bad for red man. It better if white man no mix wit' red man at all."

"There's a great deal in what you say, Leon, but these things have got to be," said Angus Macdonald gruffly. "The Red Indian left alone, would probably be a much better man than he is at the present time. The contact with the white man during many generations has not improved him."

"Mak him moch bad," said Leon quickly. "Red man poor and sick, and dirty and lazy. Him brain gone. Ver' foolish. I t'ink. Not moch savee. Everyt'ing bad. Yong white men come around tepees and mix wit' Red girls, and som'tams marry. All this plenty bad. Red man get whisky, and him brain lak fire. This bin going on moch generations, lak I say. Red man go down—him not lak him used to be."

"Perhaps that's just as well," said Mr. Farman drily.

"Me. I not Red man—my fat'er white," said Leon. "But I see all t'ings in bad way. Me t'ink I mak big improvement. Red man gottin' lak children—copying white man lak monkeys, spend money on dress and fine t'ings. No want to work. They become thieves, and live in w'at you call houses instead of tepees. They get the sickness which mak's bad the lungs. Red man not meant for life lak that."

"I try improve t'ings—you onderstan'? Me not bad man—no wish to stir up trouble. Wa! It is twelve years since I get my big idea. It hit me lak a blow, an' I moch excited. Me t'ink now will do t'ings for Red man, and bring peace to my mot'er's tribe."

Leon shrugged his shoulders again rather hopelessly.

"Me. I work hard," he went on. "I find won'erful valley up in mountains—

up the Ghost River, long way from here. Wa! Wa! This valley mos' strange place I ever been in. All enclosed, an' no man know of it. Even to-day, this valley still secret—still hidden. It lov'ly place, wit' moch grazing lands and plenty food for t'ousands. Gold there, too. Wa! Moch plenty gold! Gold lak you never seen—it lay about lak you want to pick it up. But me no tak notice of this. Gold no good to Red man—mak him plenty mad."

"If this valley is all enclosed, how did you get into it?" asked Mr. Farman.

"I tell you that later," replied the half-breed. "I fren's wit' my mot'er's people. We mak plans. We tak all the tribes wit' the little children, and we disappear in this valley—far from white man. Him moch puzzled—him not know wher' we gone. No t'ink of looking in valley, because valley unknown. And we live happy in valley, lak Indians lived before white man came."

"I see," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "It was rather a daring scheme of yours, Leon. In brief, you founded an Indian colony in this valley, and you hoped that your mother's people would live peacefully and quietly in their secret retreat without any interference from the white man."

"Yes. I t'ink lak that," replied Leon, nodding. "Everyt'ing go well for many summers. I'poooses grow up into fine young men and maidens. Me moch happy, an' see t'ings going just lak I plan. No white man—no trouble. Indian by himself, and him grow into fine tribe. But all this too good for be true. Everyt'ing moch nice for ten year. But then come a change."

"I feared so," said Lee. "Go on, Leon."

"Red man grow restless," said the half-breed. "Children now grown—young men of tribe moch plenty in number. My plans wrong, I t'ink—no no t'ought Red man would change lak this. Instead of being peaceful and content to stay in valley, the yo'ng men want fights. They thirsting for blood. Big, powerful yo'ng men, and not satisfied wit' valley."

"That was bad for your nice little scheme," said Mr. Farman.

"I chief of tribe, mo," continued Leon. "I brought them into valley

and rule. I try mak' them onderstan'—I do moch to keep peace. But the yong men tak no notice of me—my voice lak whisper. Wa! I sorry. I see all t'ings goin' different to w'at I plan. Red man instead of being peaceful, him warlike. Yong braves get together and talk moch. They angry wit' me for tryin' to mak peace. They turn on me one day, an' t'ink they kill me. Wa! Wa! An' I done all this for mak red man happy!"

"Gratitude does not enter into the Red man's composition," said Angus Macdonald gruffly. "I have had twenty years experience of Indians, and I know what I'm talking about. Your white blood, Leon, has made you very different from the men of your mother's race."

"Red man—I hate him!" exclaimed Leon, with the first touch of emotion that we had seen. "Wa! Him moch wicked and deceitful and bad! Not all Red man—but him of my tribe. I tellin' you w'at happen. One day yong braves turn on me for becos I try mak t'ings peaceful. They beat me wit' sticks till I no more no sense. I lak dead—they t'ink me dead, and t'row me in river. But I float down, an' my senses com' back before I drown. Wa! But I sore an' almos' gone. I no strength to pull myself ashore. For mile an' mile I float down river lak I corpse. I know not'in' of this. Then I found by Mist' Macdonald, who was in dugout on river. He pull me in his dugout, I t'ink me. I fin' myself in his shack."

"I think I can tell you the rest," said the trader. "I was on a trip up the Ghost River to visit a little Indian village which is perched just on the edge of Horse Lake. I had heard that there were a couple of pelts to be had—black fox. As you know, Mr. Farman, pelts of that kind don't come my way onco in three or four seasons. The last black fox I had fetched over a thousand dollars, I believe. And I had heard there were two in this little village. I got them all right, and paid a good price—I never believe in taking advantage of the Indians. I treat them well, and they do their business with me. It was on my way back that I came across Leon. I thought he was dead at first, but after I had hauled him out of the water I found that he was still breathing."

"So you brought him home and cared for him?" asked the millionaire.

"That's it, chief," said Macdonald. "All this happened about two months ago, and for weeks Leon was in delirium, and I was expecting him to die every day; but the crisis came, and he pulled round. I guess he's still pretty weak, but quite alive now."

"And I grateful, me," put in the half-breed. "Me no lak red man. Mist' Macdonald, him save my life. You all fren's. Me lak to mak you rich. Also I get even wit' treacherous red men. Wa! I moch angry wit' them."

"You have every reason to be," said Nelson Lee. "They treated you abominably, and it is only natural, I suppose, that you should wish to have your own back. But would it not be wiser to avoid this valley——"

"I guess you haven't heard the whole yarn yet, Mr. Lee," put in the trader. "Leon started this little valley community with the best intentions in the world. I'm sure certain of that; but these accursed Indians have grown into an aggressive band of braves. On several occasions recently they have broken out of the valley and created blazes around the other Indian villages. They've murdered and plundered, and brought whole contingents of the mounted police into the district; but the police could do nothing, because it was impossible to find this valley. I reckon it's up to us to put down this pest—and get a hand on the gold at the same time."

"I suppose you are certain that the gold really exists?" asked Mr. Farman.

Leon Ascara started forward.

"I no tell lies, me!" he exclaimed. "I no reason for tell you somet'ing that is wrong. Moch gold in this valley. Wa! Gold lak it was dirt! Never did I see soch a sight! It lie in river beds—on banks—everyw'ere! You pick it up wit'out trouble by handful! I spik truth—no mak no lies. W'at for I tell you this if not true? I only bring trouble on me, myself. Gold not good for me, so I tell you. You mak somet'ing of it. Me tell you how to get into valley."

There was certainly something about Leon's words which was convincing. As he had said, there was no earthly reason why he should tell us a false

story, and we all listened eagerly and interestedly to the half-breed's talk. Mr. Macdonald had perfect faith in him—and this in itself was enough. The old trader was a perfect judge of human nature, and he had lived among the Indians long enough to judge them well.

"I reckoned the best thing I could do was to get word down to you, chief," said Macdonald. "I can't leave the store at this time of the year, and a gold strike of this kind can't be left lying around loose. Others may get in before us if we're not slick, so I suggest you should go up the Ghost River, locate this valley, and get your claims staked out."

"And find plenty of trouble, too, eh?" asked Mr. Farman.

"The Indians?" asked the trader contemptuously. "Heots! They'll not frighten you, I'm thinking. Indians may be brave when they're facing Indians, but their blood turns to water when they're up against white men. I'd go among the whole crowd unarmed, and I'd cow the lot! They haven't got the pluck to stand up against a real man. There'll be no danger."

"I lak t'ink you right," said Leon slowly. "But these red men, they moch different. They more strong and brave."

"They wouldn't dare to interfere with a party of white men," said the trader. "You needn't be alarmed about that, Leon. I'd let you go on this trip, but you're not strong enough."

"But if Leon doesn't come, and you don't come, how shall we know the way to this valley?" I put in. "How can we get there, Mr. Macdonald?"

"I've got that all planned, I guess," said the trader. "Of course, if the chief insists, I'll come on the trip; but it wouldn't be wise. The folks in Fort Derwent would get talking, and they might smell a rat. We don't want a stampede, I'm thinking. As for the difficulty of finding the valley—that doesn't exist. There won't be any trouble at all. Leon has described every yard of the journey to me, and I've got it all down on a map."

"That, at all events, is very satisfactory," said Nelson Lee. "We should greatly like to have you with us, Mr. Macdonald, but you know your own business best. After all, there is no necessity for us to go a yard further

than Fort Derwent. We have completed our mission."

"You mean you've saved me from Jake Crasher and his crowd?" asked the trader. "Yes, I'm obliged to you for that, gentlemen. Crasher would have made things bad for me, and I'm thinking he'll still be hanging around."

"By glory, if that skunk tries to interfere again, he'll wish he'd never been born!" said Big Jim Farman grimly. "I wouldn't have let him go now only Tom Hanshaw was improving when we left the ranch, and is practically certain to recover. And Crasher as a prisoner would be more trouble than he is as a free man. What can he do? We shall be constantly on our guard, and any tricks that he may get up to will be futile, I guess."

"You no goin' to valley?" asked Leon abruptly. "Wa! I moch sad, lak I was in pain. I t'ink you go and put down red man. Him plentee bad."

"Well, it's up to you, Mr. Lee," said the millionaire. "We're here now—on the spot. What do you say? Shall we return to the ranch, or are you game for this grand adventure? Gee! A journey up the rivers to a mysterious valley where gold lies about by the handful! I guess we'd be wise to get on the trail!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, perhaps you are right, Mr. Farman," he agreed. "It would be a pity to return with things in their present state. If everybody is agreeable, we will start on this trip as soon as possible. We ought to do it within a week or two, and still have time to get back to England according to our original programme."

"Good egg!" I exclaimed heartily. "That's the stuff, guv'nor!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Dear old boy, I rather fancy we're booked for a frightfully excitin' time—I do, really!"

CHAPTER IV.

TOWARDS THE SECRET VALLEY.

DAWN had come, and everything was ready for a swift departure. A day and two nights had elapsed since the confab in Angus Macdonald's shack, and during that time active preparations had been made. Everything had been done secretly, and even now the inhabitants

of Fort Derwent were in total ignorance of what was going on.

The river was looking exquisite in the early morning sunlight. The water gleamed wonderfully under the pale blue sky, and on the other side of the river stretched a meadow of intense green. Altogether the scene was beautiful.

Not that we had much eye for scenic effect just then. We were preparing to leave Fort Derwent on this big adventure. The canoes had been discarded, for they were too frail to negotiate the rapids which lay ahead.

And, in place of the canoes, we were provided with sturdy dugouts—two of them. They looked clumsy and awkward craft, but they were exactly suitable for the purpose. Hollowed out of the trunks of cotton-wood trees, these dugouts were extraordinarily long and slender. Paddles were used to propel them, and it required skill and experience to negotiate such craft down these rivers, where rapids were frequently encountered.

We had everything with us, neatly stowed away in the dugouts—food, neat little tents, and everything to serve us on our trip, which would probably be one of several days' duration.

Nelson Lee had the map in his pocket, and upon this every little detail of the route was carefully described; but, at the last moment, Leon Ascara had decided to come with us, in spite of Macdonald's protests.

The half-breed was by no means strong, but he declared that he was greatly worried, and would not care to send us off on this trip without him. He would be able to guide us without trouble, and he further insisted upon taking the paddle in the bows of the leading dugout.

Nelson Lee would guide the second craft, for the gov'nor had quite a lot of experience, and could be relied upon to manipulate his paddle with good results. And so we were all ready to start.

"I com' too, me," said Leon, in a satisfied voice. "If I stay behind I miserable lak a sick dog. I no go into valley—non! Red man moch wild on me, and kill me plentee quick. I guide you all way."

It would have been useless to remonstrate with Ascara, for he was deter-

mined to come—he had, in fact, been very miserable since the night of our talk; but now, knowing that he was included in the party, his spirits were of the highest.

Altogether there were eleven of us, including Leon. In the first dugout the half-breed was in the bows, and his load consisted of Mr. Farman, Twirly Sam, Farman junior, Bob Christine, and Reginald Pitt. The second dugout carried Nelson Lee, Tommy Watson, Sir Montie, myself, and Square-Deal Reeve.

The latter was in the highest possible spirits, and he grinned cheerfully as he surveyed the scene.

"I kinder figger we're out of our element some," he observed. "Say, boys, this hyar scenery don't come up to the high standard of Montana. Howsum, I sure 'lows it's an elegant country."

"Personally, I reckon it makes Montana look like a cent!" I said, with a chuckle. "In the winter-time it may be different, but just now the Drake River country is glorious. And we're going after gold!"

"I'm sure guessin' that's somethin' wuth chasin'," said Square-Deal.

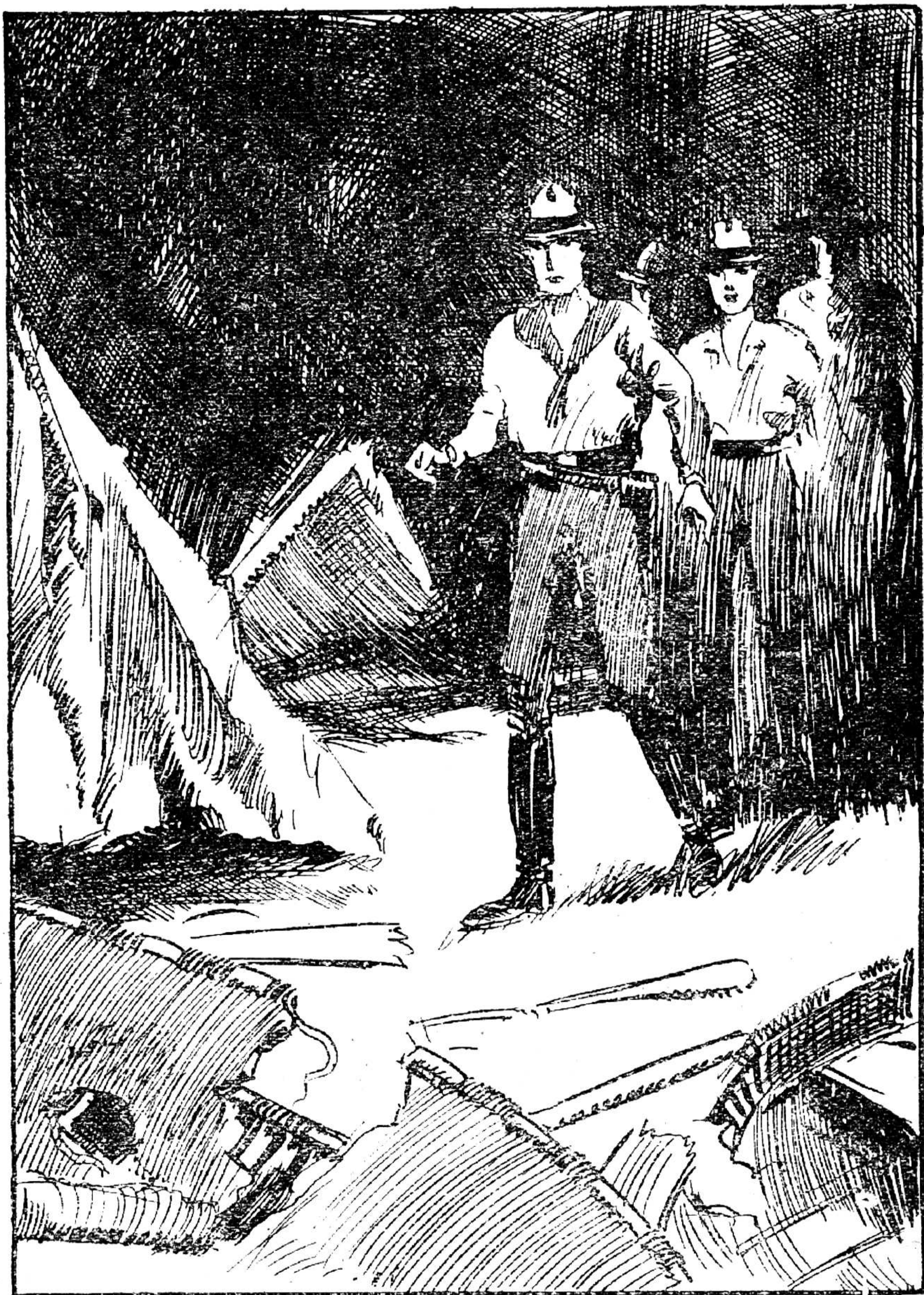
The first dugout had already pushed away from the bank, and Nelson Lee soon brought our own craft into the current. He plied his paddle with the dexterity and experience of an Indian.

Angus Macdonald stood on the bank, watching our departure. He was just as stolid as ever, and one might have imagined that we were setting off on a few hours' journey of no importance.

Once out in the centre of the river, we found the current to be fairly swift, and we were soon carried round a bend, and out of sight of Mac's motionless figure on the bank. We were now in a land which was cut off from all signs of human habitation, and we were going into the wilds.

The whole adventure was rather thrilling, and we glowed with enthusiasm as we considered all the possibilities. Of Jake Crasher there had not been the slightest sign, and we believed that the rascal had left Fort Derwent for good. Of what use was it remaining? He certainly could not hope to gain anything.

"By Jingo! It's glorious up here," said Tommy Watson. "I always thought this part of Canada was



At last we arrived at the Camp. But we were too late. Jake Crasher had done his foul work! (See page 24.)

covered with snow and as cold as ice! It's simply wonderful to find all this luxurious green grass and trees!"

"But it's summer-time, you ass!" I exclaimed.

"I know that; but we're so far north that I thought they had snow all the year round," said Tommy. "My only hat! This is better than being on the ranch! This is what I call a real adventure."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "Rather, dear old boy!"

There was undoubtedly a great deal to charm and delight us. It was my first visit to this part of the world, and I was hoping that it would not be my last, and, although I tried to dismiss the matter, I couldn't help feeling eager and excited when I remembered that we were on our way to a secret valley which contained Red Indians of a totally different type to the usual—a valley where gold lay loose.

It seemed almost too wonderful to be true, but Leon's story had had the ring of conviction. Indeed, the very fact that he was accompanying us proved that there was no spoof about it. He would never have dared to come otherwise.

That story of Indians and gold had us all in its grip—even including Nelson Lee; and our one thought was to press on with all speed to this wonderful El Dorado of the Far North.

But we had a fairly long journey before us.

If we had imagined that this journey was to be tedious, we had made a mistake, for it was proving to be a trip of exceptional interest. And it was not to be without its perils, either—natural perils in addition to those provided by human agency.

For our assumption regarding Jake Crasher was by no means correct.

Even then, as we were gliding placidly down the Drake River, the enemy was preparing a surprise for us, which Jake considered to be a master stroke. The rascally ex-foreman of Bar S ranch was a bully and a blackguard, and not the type of man to give in tamely, and, as he had explained to his companions, there was gold to be got on this adventure—enough gold to make them all multi-millionaires! It was worth taking any amount of risk.

The Drake River, some twenty miles beyond Fort Derwent, emptied itself

into Boot Lake—so called because its shape closely resembled that of a boot. The Drake River entered the lake at the toe of the boot, and passed through a narrow gorge, where the current was swift and exceedingly strong—but not a rapid in the ordinary sense of the term.

As Jake Crasher cunningly pointed out to his companions, this discovery of gold was obviously somewhere in the unknown interior. Our party, therefore, would be compelled to come up through Boot Lake, since this was the only possible route.

"An' I guess we're got them good an' fixed!" declared Jake grimly. "Say, boys, they kinder reckon we're finished with. Waal, they've made a dog-gone mistake, you kin take it from me."

And, then and there, Jake had outlined his plan. The rascals had not entered Fort Derwent after being kicked out of Macdonald's store. They were well supplied with food in a little camp which they had made among the trees. They had canoes, too, having purchased them in readiness.

And Jake, having made a brief survey of the river, got out his scheme quickly, for he knew that no time must be lost. For eight solid hours he and the others worked like men possessed, and the result of their labours was very evident.

They had selected a section of the gorge near Boot Lake, where the banks of the river were close together, and where the water sped through silently and with terrific power. And here the operations had been performed.

"I guess it's a cinch!" declared Jake, with an eager chuckle. "Say, their dugouts will sweep around the bend like electric trolley-cars, an' I guess they won't be able to put on no brakes. We'll have the skunks where we need 'em in less'n ha'f a minute!"

And Jake surveyed the gorge with satisfaction. What he saw was undoubtedly something of a formidable character. Right across the river, within an inch of the water, a barrier had been placed.

Stout ropes had been stretched from side to side of the gorge—numbers of them; and these ropes were filled with tree branches and debris of a similar character. The barrier was apparently strong enough to stop the Drake River steamboat itself.

"I guess we've had a heap of trouble, but it's wuth it," said Bob Doane. "Say, it's a great stunt o' yours, Jake. I'll allow you've got brains. When them galoots come sweepin' round the bend in their dugouts, they'll get mussed up good an' proper in this durned trap."

"Suro!" agreed Crasher. "That's jest the idea, I guess. Afore they can know what's hit 'em, they'll be hollerin' 'Help'! An' we kin kinder step in an' jump the hull durned outfit!"

Jake did not know how long it would be necessary to wait. It was morning now—the morning of our departure, as a matter of fact; but Jake and the others were not aware of this. They were prepared to camp there, on the banks of the gorge, and await their opportunity. Sooner or later we should be bound to come.

While Jake and Bob Doane and Josh Sims stood regarding their handiwork, Pat Hara was preparing breakfast a little distance off. The sun was well up, and the morning was a glorious one.

Hara came running up abruptly, his face flushed with excitement.

"Git ready, boys!" he panted. "They're comin' right now!"

"Jumpin' coyotes!" shouted Jake. "How d'you know——"

"I jest seen th' dugouts from our camp," replied Pat quickly. "We'd best git ready fer th' cirkis, I figger."

Meanwhile, we were sweeping along, serenely unconscious of the peril which lay ahead. Not even Nelson Lee had suspected that Jake Crasher would adopt a scheme of this kind, and we had no thoughts of danger.

For some little time the river had been narrowing, the current growing swifter and swifter, until we were shooting down through the gorge at great speed, held tightly by the current. There was no danger, for the water was deep, with no projecting rocks or obstructions.

Leon Ascara, in the first dugout, was only using his paddle occasionally, for it was hardly necessary to steer the craft. They were kept in the centre of the stream by the force of the rushing water.

And then, as the leading dugout swung round the bend, Leon uttered a startled gasp. He turned his head swiftly.

"Wa! Somethin' wrong!" he shouted. "Moch trees fallen——"

"Great Scott!" shouted Bob Christine, jumping up. "What——"

"No do that—upset us lak we were shell!" interrupted Leon, as the dugout tipped dangerously. "You mus' keep still, or we turn over. Wa! Wa! This moch bad!"

We could all see the peril by this time, and we knew that nothing could be done to avert it. No matter how the paddles were plied, the dugouts could not be forced out of the current. We were sweeping down helplessly on to that barrier, and Nelson Lee caught his breath in sharply as he saw the four figures on the bank.

"Crasher!" he muttered. "By James! We ought to have guarded against anything of this nature! But we could never have known——"

"Look!" gasped Tommy Watson faintly. "The first dugout's hit the obstruction! Oh, why, what—— My only hat!"

To say that we were not scared would be untrue. The thought of becoming tangled up in that barrier was an appalling one; a picture of what would happen flashed through my mind. The dugouts would upset, we should be flung into the icy water—for, although summer-time, the water of these northern rivers was intensely cold—and we should be utterly helpless to save ourselves.

Leon Ascara knew well enough that nothing could be done to stop the headlong rush of the dugouts. Just before hitting the obstruction he drew his paddle in, and flung himself down low, so that his head was almost under the bows.

And then——

The dugout struck the mass of ropes and tree branches. There was a splintering crashing of wood, and the dugout swept on! Not for one second did it pause in its rush. It smashed clean through the barrier as though the latter had been made of paper, so tremendous was the force of the current which carried it down.

And we, following only about thirty yards in the rear, swept on to the same spot. Bending low, we shot past, the trailing ropes and tree branches sweeping against us as we went through.

On the bank, Jake Crasher swore with terrible fury.

"Gosh darn my hide!" he raved. "The blamed thing weren't strong enough, boys! We're sure left out o' this hyar game!"

"The durned thing hez let us down," snarled Doane.

Like twigs in a street gutter, we were swept on down the gulley, and we only caught one more glimpse of Jake Crasher and his rascally companions. That glimpse was one which made us all rock with laughter—after the tension had relaxed.

The four scoundrels were fairly dancing with rage, shaking their fists, and relieving their feelings by quantities of profane language. Their whole scheme, so carefully planned, had come to nothing.

It was as much a surprise to us as it was to them, for we had certainly believed that we should be trapped by that carefully made barrier. And now we were entering Boot Lake, well over a mile from the spot.

For Jake Crasher and Co. to follow was impossible. Thick forest lands lay on both banks of the Drake River, and it would take the enemy well over a couple of hours to cover the distance.

Instead of delaying us they had caused us not the slightest amount of damage, and they themselves were not even in a position to follow. Our feelings can readily be imagined as we glided into the placid waters of the lake.

"Wa! Him moch bad man!" exclaimed Leon, showing his teeth in a smile. "I t'ought we crumple up lak we was made of paper. These men moch fools—don't onderstan' not'ing of these rivers. Current plenty quick!"

"You're right, old man," said Mr. Farman, wiping his brow. "By glory! I thought we were taking tickets for above that trip! That barrier looked as strong as the Colorado canyon, and we went through it as a knife gets through cheese!"

Intense relief filled us all.

"We were very lucky to have got through," said Nelson Lee, "and we only did so because of Jake's bad judgment. We certainly did nothing to help ourselves. It ought to be a lesson to us."

"I'll sure allow you're right ther', Mr. Lee," said Square-Deal Reeve. "Gee! I figgered we wus on the last

trail right then! Say, it 'ud please me a heap to fill Jake Crasher's hide with lead!"

"The rotter!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Ho tried to kill us all, guv'nor! That's what it would have meant if we'd have been upset by that barrier. We should never have survived in that awful current!"

"The only consolation is that we are now well beyond the scoundrel's reach," said Nelson Lee. "Not that I'm afraid of him. His interference would be a nuisance, and we are better without him. He can never hope to overtake us."

Square-Deal Reeve shook his head.

"I guess ther's trouble coming along," he said slowly. "I ain't the guy to figger on the dark side; but I'm allowin' that Jake Crasher is a feller who sticks to the trail. He don't knuckle under none, an' he'll sure foller."

"Let him!" I said grimly. "We'll be ready to give him a hot welcome!"

CHAPTER V.

ON THE GHOST RIVER!

"**B**EGAD! Ain't it simply rip-pin', dear old boys?"

Sir Montie spoke with enthusiasm. He had a great eye for beauty, and he was admiring the scene with a full appreciation of its charms. As a matter of fact, we were all very much impressed.

Nearly an hour had elapsed since we had shot through that gorge—to the intense discomfiture of Crasher and Co., who had been planning such nice little troubles for us. And now we were approaching the far end of Boot Lake.

Right in the centre of the wide stretch of water lay two little islands, with yellow beaches, willow trees, and a pine or two. The scenery on every hand was impressive. Around the shores rose unbroken masses of jack-pines, and the hills rose, tier after tier up into snow-capped mountains.

And the sun shone down peacefully and with grateful warmth. Leon was leading us with care, paddling steadily. His weakness seemed to have left him, and he was now full of enthusiasm for this trip.

Nelson Lee found a chance now and again to have a look at the map which

Macdonald had prepared. According to this, after entering the "toe" of Boot Lake, we were to go right to the heel, and then almost to the end of the "upper." Here there was a narrow stream, winding its way off to the left.

Leon Ascara was keeping to this plan exactly. To all intents and purposes, the lake had no outlet. Search as I would with my gaze, I could see no stream down which we could pass. It seemed that we had come into a blind alley.

But Leon kept steadily on, now threading the dugout through patches of lillies and masses of reeds. Then he turned off to the left, as though making for the shore. There was certainly no outlet.

"What's the idea, guy'nor?" I asked. "We're not going ashore yet, are we? I thought we were planning to land for grub at noon, and that's in about four or five hours' time."

"I think Leon knows what he is up to," said Nelson Lee. "Appearances are sometimes deceptive. At all events, we will follow him."

We soon found ourselves in a kind of backwater, with the banks growing nearer. The water became an ooze, scarcely any flow; then, almost before we became aware of it, the dugout was carried on.

A current had become perceptible. Tree branches bore down over the water, nearly touching the surface. It certainly seemed that we were about to strike the bank; then, with the leaves sweeping over our heads, we passed through this strange bower of green. Then we saw, to our astonishment, that we were entering a tiny stream.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed. "Who would have guessed that this river could have been here? We shouldn't have found it without Leon."

"I rather fancy we should," said Nelson Lee. "Here, it is all clearly set down on this map."

"This moch big river," said the half-breed, in the other dugout. "No look moch, I guess, but him big soon—big lak Drake River—plenty current and moch wide. Wait—you see. I know what I doin', me."

"I'm quite sure that you do," said Mr. Farman. "What river are we on now?"

"Me not know," replied Leon. "This

river got no name among white men, but I call him Worm River—him so much like li'l twistin' worm."

Leon's description was quite apt. For a considerable distance the river scarcely altered its character, winding round in the most extraordinary manner, and so narrow that at times it was awkward to ply the paddles. In other places the water was so shallow that there was scarcely enough to keep the dugouts afloat; we touched the sandy bottom frequently.

Willow trees lined the banks, and the branches thrust themselves into our faces first on one side, and then on the other. And we were always encountering sharp bends, with here and there an insignificant rapid which was negotiated with no trouble and no danger.

"Dear old boy, this is an amazin' little river—it is, really!" observed Sir Montie, after we had left Boot Lake behind for quite a couple of hours. "We don't seem to be gettin' on at all, begad! The river's twistin' so much that we keep comin' back on our own bally tracks, you know!"

There was a great deal of truth in this. As Leon explained later, for hours we should keep to the Worm River, and only progress a mile or so in actual distance, for the stream was so crooked. But there was no other way.

At noon we all landed, Leon choosing a delightful little meadow on the right bank of the stream. After stretching our legs, and filling our insides, we felt quite ready for the next spell.

And, without any delay, we took our places once more in the dugouts, and then we once more proceeded serenely down the river.

But we were only serene for about an hour; then we noticed that the current was growing much more rapid, and after we had passed round a gradual bend, we saw before us some rapids, which boiled and hissed with considerable power. Without turning his head, Leon waved his paddle aloft.

"Be careful, Mist' Lee!" he shouted. "Go moch cautious here!"

Almost before we knew it, we were borne headlong into the rapids. We shot down, with the water swirling all around us, and with rocks jutting out on both sides; but, after all, this rapid was not a big one, and we were soon

in quiet water again, with the river increased in size.

Hour after hour we kept on, finding fresh beauties to claim our attention at every turn of the river, and the size of the stream increased always, for, at irregular intervals, it collected in insignificant little tributaries—mere creeks and brooks. They were nothing in themselves, but they added their waters to the parent stream.

The banks were now well apart, and the water deeper, so that we could keep in the middle, with the current, with no difficulty. By the time nightfall came, the Worm River was no longer like a worm, but comparable to a big snake. It had increased enormously in size.

There was something quite charming in camping out, with a roaring fire to cheer us, and with our little tents set up. Leon took it upon his shoulders to provide our beds, which consisted of spruce bows. They were surprisingly comfortable, and kept us well clear of the damp earth.

We slept like tops, and arose soon after dawn, feeling refreshed and ready for another day's adventure. The morning was sunny and warm, with hardly a breath of wind to worry us.

It was strange to realise that we were on a river which white men had scarcely ever traversed before. Indeed, it was quite likely that we were the first whites to come this way. And we were getting nearer and nearer to the wonderful valley of gold, where the Red Indians held full sway.

We had been troubled quite a lot by the mosquitoes during the previous evening, but now, of course, these irritating little fellows were all quiet. And we partook of breakfast in comfort.

The scene all around us was one which reminded me of a fairy glade in a pantomime—only, of course, a thousand times more exquisite. For while the scene in the pantomime was one of paint and cunningly contrived lights, this was real—this was the actual thing.

The sun shone down through the green branches, and the water of the stream caught the rays and set thousands of sparkling scintillations at work. And beyond, the pine forests rose majestic and solemn.

"Wonderful scenery here, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Montana can claim

nothing like it. We are seeing a new world."

"Rather, gov'nor!" I said. "It's simply ripping, and the further we penetrate, the lovelier everything is."

While we were speaking a somewhat startling interruption came. Just down the stream—in fact, at only twenty yards' distance—a huge, hairy head was thrust through the trees. It was a head which caused me to give a violent start, for I recognised it at once. A body followed, for the brute was unaware of our presence.

It was, in fact, a huge brown bear!

Then, for the first time, he caught sight of us. His ears cocked up, his mouth fell open, and his tiny eyes seemed to be full of consternation. The bear instead of attacking, as some of the juniors thought it would, gave a snort of sheer fright and lumbered away. He trundled off at express speed.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Tommy Watson.

Leon Ascara laughed.

"No scare of him bear!" he said. "Bear moch scare of you! Him no mak' attack, I guess. Him lak big coward!"

"Well, it certainly looks like it," said Bob Christine. "But, by jingo, I got the wind up properly for a minute!"

We were soon on our way again, squatting in the dugouts, and gliding serenely down the stream. Twirly Sam in the one dugout, and Square Deal Reeve in the other—both in the stern—were now provided with paddles. And the going was much faster on account of this, for the cowboys used their strength to advantage.

I could describe the scenery to the full if I were able, and it would give me great delight—but I am afraid it would take altogether too long, and and might, indeed, become tedious.

But all the morning we were carried down a river of fairyland with graceful willows and brilliant green meadows constantly appearing in view, with the sombre pines overlooking all, and now and again some brawling rapids down which we spun at a great pace.

Here and there the forests came in, shutting out all vision. And at other places the trees swept away, making the river wider and with meadows gleaming greenly on either side. It was while we were passing one of these meadows that we saw a fully grown moose. He

was standing there, quite at his ease, with his noble head raised aloft. He was possessed of enormous antlers, which seemed to bear him down somewhat.

But he was soon gone. After one sight of us he fled, disappearing into a belt of trees two or three hundred yards away.

And soon after this the Worm River came to an end.

Without knowing anything about it, we were swept round a point where the ground was elevated, and we found ourselves upon another lake. For the first time that morning the whole arch of the cloudless sky was in evidence. Woods and hills went back on all sides, and the waters of the lake were as clear as crystal. And a cooling breeze came across.

"Where the dickens have we got to now, guv'nor?" I said.

"This, I believe, is the Ghost Lake," replied Nelson Lee. "We ought to be entering upon the Ghost River soon. And it will be somewhere in that direction that this strange valley exists. At all events, we are getting nearer and nearer to our destination as we progress."

The Ghost Lake was very much larger than Boot Lake—a fairly wide, imposing stream which swept along with majestic force. We were in a real river at last—a river even larger than the Drake at Fort Derwent.

But it was now growing dusk, and we made our camp for the night. According to what I understood, the next day would be even more exciting than this, for we should have to negotiate some very formidable rapids. But at present the river was calm and peaceful.

We camped in a quiet little spot with a natural meadow all around us, and with willows as a background. The mosquitoes got to work early, but our big camp fires helped to keep them off. And our tents were provided with nets, so that we should not be troubled as we slept.

Up in this latitude it never got exactly dark, and the evenings were long drawn out. Therefore, we would all be in our tents, asleep, before the semi-darkness fell. At present we were chatting round the camp fire, sleepy and tired after the long day.

Nelson Lee and Mr. Farman went for a stroll, smoking. They were not gone very long, but returned rapidly. I had seen them on a little rising piece of ground some distance away. And when they came back I could tell that something was amiss.

"Anything wrong, guv'nor?" I asked.

"I'm not at all sure, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "But there's a camp fire burning about a mile down the stream."

"Jake Crasher!" I exclaimed.

"Undoubtedly."

"The awful rotter!" I said wrathfully. "He's followed us, sir! What are we going to do about it?"

"That we must decide," replied Lee. "The camp fire can mean nothing else. Crasher and his gang have got canoes, I know, and it is obvious that they followed as quickly as possible, and saw us enter the Worm River. They have had no difficulty in keeping on our trail since."

"But we can't let them keep up this game, Mr. Lee!" said Big Jim Farman. "Say, those rascals are capable of any mischief, and if they once get into this secret valley, they'll—"

"I don't think we shall let them get as far as this valley, Mr. Farman," interrupted Nelson Lee. "In fact, I think our best plan will be to take the bull by the horns. In other words, we'll descend upon Crasher's camp at once. And we'll tell the scoundrels point blank that there'll be trouble if they do not return. We are certainly not going to have them following us!"

"Who's going?" I asked eagerly.

The party was soon made up—Lee, Mr. Farman, Square-Deal Reeve, Twirly Sam, myself, Watson, and Farman junior. The others—Leon, Bob Christine, Pitt and Sir Montie, were to remain behind in camp.

We set off at once, all the men fully armed, and prepared for anything that might turn up. With the juniors, I was instructed to remain in the background. But, if it came to a hand-to-hand fight, we could join in. But Nelson Lee didn't want it to come to a fight at all.

We experienced some difficulty in getting through a thick belt of woodland which separated us from the other camp. But at last, we got through, and could now see the thick spiral

smoke from the camp fire going straight upwards into the still evening air, about two hundred yards away. Some willows concealed us from the actual camp.

Our idea was to take the men by surprise, so that they would have no chance of resistance. And we walked cautiously, not one of us speaking. We approached the camp without making a sound.

Then we turned round the willows.

Nelson Lee was in advance, and suddenly he came to a halt.

"Good Heavens!" he muttered. "The infernal tricksters!"

We ran forward—and understood.

No camp existed—only a half burnt out fire in the centre of a little patch of grass. Nelson Lee hurried forward and looked round keenly. There were no traces of the camp. Indeed, it was quite obvious that a camp had never existed. This fire had been built purposely.

Twirly Sam burst into a laugh.

"Say, we've been kinder fooled, I guess," he exclaimed. "Gee! Them guys ain't around hyar—"

"You don't seem to understand, Twirly," interrupted Nelson Lee. "It's a trick—performed deliberately, with only one object!"

"Say, I don't catch on."

"And yet it is quite simple," said the gov'nor grimly. "The enemy has made a move and succeeded in deceiving us. This fire was lit on purpose so that we should be attracted—so that we should descend upon the camp in exactly the way we have done. Jake Crasher and his men are not here at all."

"Then what was the idea of fetching us over on a fool's errand, sir?" asked Tommy Watson wonderingly.

"Crasher has more sense than I gave him credit for," said Nelson Lee grimly.

"While we have come here—a mile from our own camp—those rogues have probably descended upon Leon and the boys. Heaven only knows what has been happening there! Bah! What a fool I was to be tricked so easily!"

We were all looking intensely alarmed, and now we lost no time in hurrying back along our own tracks at full speed. The thought of what might have happened at the camp filled us with dismay.

With only Leon Ascara and the three juniors to deal with, Jake Crasher and Co. would have had no difficulty.

Perhaps they had killed all of them—perhaps they— But I did not care to think of the possibilities.

At last we arrived.

And although my worst fears were not realised, we nevertheless found things in such a state that we were almost helpless with rage for the time being. We had left behind us a peaceful, orderly camp, and we returned to find—havoc.

Bob Christine, Pitt and Sir Montie came rushing towards us with scared faces. They were quite unharmed, but bubbling over with words which they allowed to tumble out one from the other.

At first we did not listen, for our attention was claimed by the sight of our camp.

It was a wreck. The tents had been slashed to shreds, the food boxes smashed up and their contents thrown upon the fire. And worst of all, our dugouts were hacked about as though with an axe. Great holes were smashed in their sides, and they were no longer river worthy.

In fact, the destruction was complete and absolute.

CHAPTER VI

THE TABLES TURNED.

SQUARE-DEAL REEVE took a deep breath.

"By cripes! We'll fill their durned carkises with lead fer this!" he exclaimed grimly. "Say, wher's Leon? Geo! I'm guessin' that Jake has took a fancy to our durned guide!"

"Leon!" exclaimed Mr. Farman. "Yes, you're right. Jake must have captured him. This means that we're left without our guide— Ah, but we've got the map, I guess," he added, with relief.

"No, we have not even got the map," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"What?" I gasped.

"If you will remember, Nipper, we were all looking at the map during supper," said Nelson Lee. "Leon expressed a wish to examine it, and I left it in one of the tents. There is not the slightest doubt that Jake has secured it. There is no use disguising the fact that this disaster is a real one."

"We— we can tell you everything

sir!" panted Bob Christine excitedly. "It all happened just after you went——"

"You hadn't been gone five minutes, sir——" began Pitt.

"Begad! It all came so suddenly——"

"Now, boys, please calm yourselves," said Nelson Lee. "One of you must tell what happened—I cannot listen to all three at once. Pitt, you can explain what took place. Please do so as briefly as possible."

Reginald Pitt tried to calm himself.

"The first we knew anything about it was when Leon ran away," he said. "We couldn't understand it at all. Leon was sitting by the fire, quietly smoking, when he suddenly jumped up. He told us to run, and immediately went like a hare into the trees. And then Jake Crasher and those other men appeared."

"So Leon fled?" said Mr. Farman grimly. "The infernal coward!"

"Of course, we couldn't do anything," went on Pitt. "The men told us to sheer off or take the consequences. We simply scooted into the trees. And then we watched those rotters smashing up the dugouts and destroying the whole camp. We couldn't do anything but look on."

"Do you know if they took the map?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir, they did."

"I thought so—they would hardly be likely to miss that," said the gov'nor. "Well, it is no good crying over spilt milk. We must make the best of a bad job. Ah, Leon is returning! I am glad that he was not captured by Jake and his ruffian crew. We will hear what he has to say."

Leon Ascara came up looking very serious, and he was met by several grim looks from Square-Deal Reeve, Twirly Sam, and the juniors. The half-breed went straight up to Nelson Lee and Mr. Farman.

"I see everyt'ing that happen, me," said Leon. "Wa! Wa! White men moch bad. They bad lak Red man, I guess. Do moch damage."

"Say, you all-fired coyote!" snapped Twirly Sam. "Why did you quit?"

"Why I run?" asked Leon. "Wa! What else I do? Me not strong. Me

do no'ing wi' soch men. They catch me an' troat me jus' lak child, I guess. I no use for fightin', me."

"You are quite right, Leon," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "I think you were very wise to slip out of the way."

"I no coward—I no run away when danger," said the half-breed proudly. "But I t'ink me moch—all quick inside. when I see bad men comin'. You onderstan'? If they tak me, no good. Me wanted here, I guess—me guide. I could not fight, an' they tak me easy. Me t'ink quick. Best t'ing run away lak I rabbit till they gone. Me heap sorry."

"By glory! The man's right!" said Mr. Farman. "There was nothing cowardly in what he did. If he hadn't quit, Crasher would have captured him and taken him off. That would have been worse still for us. I guess Leon showed a great deal of sense."

"Waal, I'm allowin' that's sure right," said Square-Deal. "Guess I didn't figger it out this aways to begin with. But, say, we're sure fixed good'n proper. I figger them boats don't look ezac'ly whole."

We examined the dugouts carefully, and our first impression was not improved. Both craft were terribly knocked about, and Nelson Lee estimated that it would take at least forty-eight hours to thoroughly repair them.

And we were without a proper supply of food, and our tents were of no better use than a mass of rags. But the worst disaster of all was the loss of the map. True, Jake and Co. would have to study very carefully before they fully understood everything on the map. But they had it in their possession, and they had a clear forty-eight hours start on us.

It seemed as though they would be able to get to the valley of gold in advance. We should be left out in the cold.

But once again appearances were deceptive.

Jake Crasher and his men were undoubtedly camping some little distance up the river—perhaps two or three miles—fully satisfied that we were unable to follow. With our dugouts useless, we were powerless.

But Jake Crasher need not have imagined that he was to have everything his own way. Hardly an hour

passed before a somewhat surprising interruption came. The river lay in semi-darkness, and all was gloomy.

And then, upon the bosom of the water, we espied two sturdy dugouts turned in towards the bank, and as they grew nearer, a paddle in the leading one was raised aloft. The figure it was held by was a huge, dusky one.

"Wau! We come, Umtagati, my father!" boomed a deep voice.

"As large as life, an' as chirpy as crickets!" came another voice.

"Dorrie!" I yelled. "Dorrie and Umlosi!"

"Yes, rather, and we're here, too!" came another voice, which I instantly recognised as belonging to the one and only Edward Oswald Handforth. "You awful bounders! What do you mean by getting so far ahead?"

Our camp was now fairly dancing with excitement.

And as the two dugouts came in we saw who the occupants were—Umlosi, Lord Dorrimore, Handforth, Church, McClure, Fatty Little, Talmadge, Lawrence and Ace-High Peter, the latter being one of the cowboys from Roaring Z Ranch.

It was a tremendous surprise.

Lord Dorrimore was in charge of one dugout, and Umlosi conducted the other. The great Kutana Chief was in his element at last. On the ranch he had been somewhat miserable. But now he was in all his glory. He had cast aside most of his clothing, and merely wore a pair of white trousers cut short at the knee. His burly chest and shoulders were bare.

And he was as much at home in a dugout as Leon Ascara himself. These rivers were not the same, perhaps, as those of Africa. Umlosi's native land, but a dugout is much the same the world over, and Umlosi was an expert of experts with a paddle in his grasp.

Dorrie, who had lived almost half his life in Africa, was just as proficient in the art of paddling as Nelson Lee.

They all landed, and for the first five minutes one might have supposed that babel had been let loose. We all talked at once. The juniors clapped one another on the back, danced and capered about, and generally behaved as though they had "gone off their rockers."

"My hat!" said Handforth. "It's topping to see you all again, you chaps. Why, this is the first time we've set eyes on you since you left Montana. It seems weeks ago. Thank goodness we're all together again!"

"Rather!" said Church. "The party's complete!"

"The two sections have joined forces," put in McClure. "And we're not going to be parted again—not likely!"

"You've been having a high old time, I reckon," said Handforth. "I say, It's a grand country up here, and everything is terrific! I've been enjoying myself gloriously; but what's all this yarn about a secret valley and gold?"

"I don't know," said Bob Christine. "Blow that! Jake Crasher has busted up our camp, and goodness knows what we're going to do."

And while the juniors were talking like this, the men were gathered together discussing the situation. Lord Dorrimore, as languid as ever, puffed a cigarette while he talked.

"I did exactly as you suggested, Lee, old man," he said. "It was a good dodge of your's, too. We all arrived in Fort Derwent—or rather at MacDonald's shack—the evening of the day you left. I timed it exactly."

"I knew I could trust you," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, Mac told us the yarn—explained everythin'," went on Dorrie. "He gave us a copy of your map, an' we had no trouble in findin' the way. But it wasn't long before we found out that you were bein' followed—by Jake Crasher an' his gang, in dugouts or canoes, or somethin'. By gad! We kept well behind and didn't let the beggars know that we were close at hand."

"I was reckoning on that," said Nelson Lee. "Well?"

"That's about all," replied Dorrie. "We're here."

"But why did you come on this time?"

"Because Crasher and his lot only went ashore for a short time," replied Lord Dorrimore. "They just lit a fire and got back into their dugouts. I smelt somethin' fishy at once. So we waited a bit, and then came on."

"I am happy, my father," rumbled

Umlosi. "Wau! These rivers are magnificent—they are even as the streams of Kutaland. Here I can feast mine eyes with the wondrous sight, and there is work for my arms. My muscles no longer grow flabby, and I can work as a man should."

"I am glad you like the country, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee. "And, talking about work, there's a job for all of us at once. I am ashamed to tell you that I was caught napping by Crasher—with the result that you have already seen."

The gov'nor indicated the wreckage.

And now I was beginning to understand how really astute Nelson Lee had been. On the ranch, when we had first started out, Nelson Lee had divided our party into two, and those of us who had come straight to Fort Derwent had believed that Dorrie and Umlosi and the others were to be left behind.

But this, as we now knew, was not the case.

They had followed on a day later. And ever since, they had been hard on our trail. This precaution had been taken so that any sly move of Crasher's could be countered promptly.

Jake had already made a sly move, and it would not be so very long before he received a pretty considerable shock. For Nelson Lee, Umlosi, Dorrie, and all the other men of the party prepared to take grim steps.

The position, in fact, was not nearly so bad as it seemed. True, our camp was wrecked, but this was a matter which could soon be remedied. And not one minute was to be wasted. Our whole party was together again—one unit—and we were all feeling in the very highest of spirits.

We were upon the Ghost River, and well on our way to the ultimate goal. But for Jake Crasher's intervention, everything would have been smooth. And we were not going to allow this rascal to interfere with our plans.

And sublimely unconscious of the change which had taken place in our camp, Crasher and his men were celebrating about three miles up the river, in a little clearing round a bend. They had brought whisky with them, and they were imbibing freely.

"Say, boys, we put it over on them real good," said Jake thickly. "Gee!

I'm guessin' those galoots won't be gettin' on the river again in less than two days—and their durned boats will be kinder leaky."

The others roared with rough laughter.

"This hyar map will come in mighty handy, too," went on Jake. "Say, I can't quite fix it right, but we'll sure have time to examine it to-morrow. We ain't doin' no brainwork to-night, I guess. We're after gold, pards!"

"Yes, an' we'll get it, by thunder!" said Josh Sims.

The camp was an untidy one, everything being littered about, and the tents were simply thrown up. The rascals knew well enough that they could not be interfered with, for it was impossible for anybody to get to them by land—for they had made their camp on the other side of the river.

They felt in merry mood, and having eaten their fill, they were now drinking. And they talked constantly all the time.

They knew well enough that they had two days start, for the damaged dugouts could not be repaired quickly. Even then, things would be very bad. Jake Crasher considered that he had performed a master stroke.

"There's no getting away from it, boys, we've hit them good'n hard," he said. "They can't get at us, I guess, seein' that we're on the other side of the river, and their dugouts are about as much doggone use as parlour sifters!"

The more they discussed the situation, the better it seemed.

And while they were celebrating in this way, and congratulating themselves upon their great success, something was happening which would have made them extremely uneasy if they had known.

Two dugouts, well filled, had stolen out upon the bosom of the Ghost River, like ghost-craft themselves. The night had become dim, and the stars were twinkling hazily overhead. Away north, the mountains rose majestically, with the pine forests showing like black blots, and with the snow-capped peaks shimmering dimly.

In the dugouts were six men—Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, Big Jim Farman, Square-Deal Reeve, and

Twirly Sam. They were all grimly determined to pay Jake Crasher and Co. back in their own coin. They had fully loaded revolvers, and were prepared to fight this matter out.

The dugouts crept silently along, and those on board kept their eyes sharply open for the first sign of Jake Crasher's camp. They easily guessed that the enemy would make no attempt to conceal their camp-fire, for they believed themselves to be secure.

"It's a ten-to-one chance they'll be on the other side of the river," murmured Nelson Lee. "They think we can't move on the water at all, and they wouldn't risk camping on the same side as us."

"Wise words, Umtagati," whispered Umlosi. "Wau! I like this adventure much; it stirs my blood, and it will strengthen my muscles even more to fight as a man should."

"You'll have your chance soon, old man," said Dorrio softly.

And then, after they had moved up another three or four hundred yards, a faint glow appeared on the opposite bank—just a suspicion of a red haze away in the distance. It could only be caused by one thing—a fire.

And later, after progressing some way, they saw the fire blazing, and then they distinguished figures moving about near it. No watch was being kept by Crasher, for he had not the slightest suspicion of coming trouble.

Nearer and nearer the dugouts slipped down the river, moving with the current, and making no sound. Nelson Lee and Umlosi, with their paddles, edged the dugouts nearer and nearer to the bank.

And, finally, both craft were brought to land and hauled up in safety. The six determined men drew their revolvers and set off through the trees. Nelson Lee led the way.

"No shooting unless absolutely necessary," he said softly.

"Guess it's a durned shame!" muttered Square-Deal. "Say, boss, I'm kinder itchin' to let some lead fly loose!"

They went on, and then broke clear of the trees, and came upon the camp. As they had half expected, Jake Crasher and his companions had rolled themselves in their blankets for the night—

sodden with drink, and content with victory.

The attacking party approached quietly; but Jake himself was not asleep, and suddenly he started up with a hoarse cry. He rubbed his eyes, and stared into the gloom.

He heard nothing, but he thought he saw figures coming near—dim, ghostly figures, which loomed nearer and nearer. He reached over and shook Pat Hara roughly. The latter swore.

"You darned fool!" hissed Jake. "Wake up! Ther's—ther's spirits around, I guess! Or Injuns—mebbe I can see Injuns—"

"Aw, quit that stuff!" grumbled Hara. "Guess you've bin soakin'—"

But Jake leapt to his feet, and grabbed for his revolver.

"No, not just yet!" snapped Nelson Lee curtly. "Up with your hands, you rascal! Up, I say!"

Jake Crasher snarled out an oath.

The next moment the battle started. Not a single shot was fired. Umlosi rushed in and got to work with his brawny fists. He hit out right and left, and Nelson Lee and the others assisted ably.

All the men were on their feet now, fighting desperately, but putting up a poor show. They could do little else, since they were befuddled with drink. One after the other they were knocked out.

And, cowed and frightened, and deprived of their weapons, they lay on the ground, sore and furious. Jake was held securely, and his pockets were searched. The map came to light at once.

"Gosh darn you fer a set of coyotes!" snarled Jake thickly. "By thunder! I'll get even for this—"

"I rather think it is a question of us getting even," interrupted Nelson Lee. "We intend to make you pay fittingly for the damage you caused in our camp."

"Say, you don't mean to smash our dugouts?" screamed Bob Doane, starting up in a frenzy. "We'll die out here—ther's no way of gettin' back to civilisation. You can't do it—it 'ud be murder!"

"You had no scruples when you played the trick on us, had you?" asked

Nelson Lee grimly. "However, it is not our way to commit ruthless destruction. My intention is quite clear. You smashed our boats, so you can have no objection if we take yours in exchange for them."

"What?" gasped Jake. "Gee! You—you don't mean—"

"Rather neat, eh?" said Dorrie calmly.

"We shall take your dugouts, and we shall take your tents," said Nelson Lee. "They're capable of being repaired, but I am afraid it will be a longish task. That, of course, is your look-out."

The others were delighted with this idea. Nothing could have been more fitting. Crasher had wantonly damaged our dug-outs and equipment. Well, we were taking his in exchange. Any repairs that had to be made—well, they would have to be performed by Jake and his men.

Nelson Lee and his party towed the captured dug-outs back to our camp,

leaving the rascals nearly mad with fury and dismay. Later, the damaged dug-outs were temporarily patched—just so that they would float—and handed over to Jake. It was impossible to leave these men here without any means of escape, for they would surely wander into the wilderness of forest and die of exposure and starvation. The only way out of this country was by means of the river.

All this took place when most of the juniors were asleep. When they awoke at dawn, everything seemed as usual. Jake Crasher and his ruffians had been paid back as they deserved.

And later, when we set off down the Ghost River, we passed the enemy's camp. They were working feverishly on the dugouts, and they shook their fists and shouted vile imprecations at us.

And we passed on down the Ghost River—on towards the secret valley and further stirring adventures. The present episode was closed.

But others were to follow!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY

Will be entitled "REDSKIN CUNNING." It is another magnificent yarn dealing with the further adventures of the Holiday Party. Introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, Mr. FARMAN, Lord DORRIMORE, and the Juniors of St. Frank's. *Order in Advance.*

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The Ghosts of Marsh Manor



BEGIN TO-DAY THIS THRILLING NARRATIVE OF

THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

INTRODUCTION.

Mr. Herbert Drake, otherwise NELSON LEE, secures an appointment as games master at Marsh Manor School. His real purpose is to investigate the alleged appearance of a ghost at the school.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER III. (Continued.)

Nelson Lee Lays Traps.

WHEN Nelson Lee left the study he was delighted to see his suit-case had just arrived, Nipper having sent it off by passenger train at once, and the postman had brought it over from Huntingdon in the mail-cart; and, having nothing to do until the first interval at eleven, he made a tour of the grounds, and carefully inspected the ruins of the ancient abbey.

These lay, as we have already told you, beyond the playing-field, from which they were divided by a hedge and a fence, which latter had several convenient gaps in it, through one of which the detective passed.

The broken fragments were spread over an area of quite two acres, and, climbing on to a piece of mossy wall, he found himself looking over into the kitchen garden of the Belgian hostel.

In the far distance a lady was sitting in a deck-chair, reading, under the magnificent walnut-trees; but he saw no sign of his travelling acquaintance of the previous day.

It was, as Mr. Adolphe Malines had described it, a peaceful spot, with nothing to remind those homeless refugees of the havoc that had ravaged their own country, unless, indeed, the scarred and broken masses of the abbey ruins might have recalled poor martyred Ypres.

As he retraced his steps, and passed along the hedge of sweet briar that skirted the Principal's private garden, he became aware that Joan Chard and her sister were playing tennis, and, without appearing to see them, he stopped, drew out a note-book, and proceeded to make a quite masterly sketch of the beautiful west wing of the Manor House.

He knew that, as the hedge only reached to his middle, the girls were bound to see what he was doing, and at the end of a few minutes he was rewarded by their voices at his elbow, with only the thickness of the hedge between them.

"Good-morning, Mr. Drake," said the tall Monica of the dark eyes. "We didn't know you were an artist!"

"I didn't know it myself," laughed the new master. "I only do a bit of sketching in quite an amateur way. Do you think this is anything like the house?" and he held the note-book out to them.

"Oh, how positively ripping!" they cried, in a breath. "Will you do something in our albums?"

The eyes of the handsome master were all atwinkle at this request, which was just what he wanted.

"I have sworn solemn vows that every young lady's autograph album I am called upon to deface shall be the very last; but I will make a final exception in your cases—on one condition."

"Oh, what's that?"

"That you both write your favourite quotation in mine. I had a perfectly beautiful one given to me two days before I came down here, and yours shall be the first contribution. Is it a bargain?"

"Rather!" laughed Joan.

"I should think we will!" chorused Monica. "Joan is sentimental, you know. She'll do you something from Tennyson, I don't mind betting."

"And you, Miss Monica?"

"Oh, I'm mad on Kipling; there's no one like him!" And he fell to wondering what her selection would be.

"May we get our books now?" asked Joan. "It will be such a splendid opportunity."

"If you will," and Joan ran off. "By the way, I don't know whether I'm transgressing any rules, Miss Monica, in talking to you over the hedge. Are you supposed to have communication with the masters?"

"Oh, yes, if they're nice; but we mustn't speak to the boys," said Monica, her mouth perfectly expressionless, and her eyes flinging that defiant challenge that he had detected in the drawing-room.

"Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A.," bowed as one who accepts a compliment, and Joan came racing back with the two books.

"You'll do something jolly, won't you?" she laughed.

"I'll try," he said, depositing the albums in the poacher-pockets of his well-cut tweed coat. "You shall have my book some time this evening. But here are the fellows," and as the boys came out into the sunshine the new master joined them.

In the quarter of an hour's break he increased his popularity, somewhat to the disgust of Mr. Williams, the science master, who was rather a disdainful sort of individual, crammed full of "isms" and "ologies," and having a secret contempt for the games side, which, however, he wisely kept to himself.

As for the trio, the keen disappointment they felt at no letter from Nelson Lee was almost forgotten in their joy of at last having a real live man in their midst.

When the bell rang they felt they would go through fire and water for Mr. Drake, and that afternoon they went through a good deal of the latter, for the first paper chase of the term came off, and Nelson Lee was glad his bag had arrived; for it enabled him to appear in running shorts, which displayed his athletic figure to advantage.

The way he shepherded his pack and brought them in without a straggler three minutes after the hares was a revelation, and Sutcliffe and Gurling, the hares aforesaid, vowed it was the closest shave of their lives, and the best run they had ever had.

"I want you to give this to Miss Monica Chard, Boyle," said the new master after tea, and he handed him a crimson leather-bound book, with "Autographs" in gold stamped on the back, and on the flyleaf inside: "To Herbert Drake, from Sister Emmie," dated two days previously.

He had purchased it from the beady-eyed young person at the general shop an hour before, at the same time buying two balls of black worsted.

"When a man is a bachelor," he had said, "one must learn to darn one's own socks;" to which perfectly correct observation she had retorted with a sniff, and put her tongue out at him when he had turned to go, forgetting the little mirror marked 2s. 11d. which showed him that very unladylike performance.

It took Nelson Lee forty-eight hours to learn the habits of his companions in the old Manor House, and to arrange a plan of action.

Nine o'clock seemed to be the ghost's favourite hour, and by that time, as a general rule, pupils and most of the masters had retired to their rooms.

Mr. Jackson, Monsieur Vilotte, and himself had their quarters in the east wing. Mr. Williams slept at the opposite end of the corridor, at the head of that other staircase.

The Frenchman usually played for half an hour on the oboe in the seclusion of his own

chamber, to which Mr. Jackson, being an elderly man, who slept on his back with his mouth open, snored an appropriate bass, and on the Friday night, which was the third evening after his arrival, Nelson Lee's door opened noiselessly.

Lifting the oil lamp at the head of the great staircase from its bracket, he blew it out, and crept like a shadow until he reached Mr. Williams' room.

The boys were safely housed, there was no sound from the science master, and after a keen glance about him he proceeded to lay a series of traps which he had previously prepared.

The secret panel at the head of the stairs had not been tampered with, but by the help of drawing-pins he fastened lengths of the black worsted across the staircase, each of them knee high—one at the top, another halfway down, and a third at the bottom.

By arrangement with Mr. Chard all the clocks in the establishment had been surreptitiously advanced a quarter of an hour, every door on the ground floor had been locked, and the keys removed, and the Headmaster, arrayed in dressing-gown and slippers, waited behind the green baize door for the single blast on a whistle, which had been agreed upon between the pair.

The entrance hall of the Manor House was very large, paved with green and white Tudor tiles, and had a ceiling of oak beams. The main staircase was in the centre, the two others placed one at either end; and in the walls were niches containing half a dozen figures clad in half armour, sadly in need of repair.

Across the bottom of the main stairway Nelson Lee stretched another piece of worsted, repeating the process twice before he reached the upper floor again, where, creeping back to his own door, he took up a position commanding the entire length of the passage.

Scarcely had he done so when something white crossed the other end of the corridor where he had seen it before, and, slipping off his shoes, for rubber had a habit of squeaking on the polished floor-boards, he darted in pursuit.

It was the merest glimpse he had caught, but it was enough, and as he turned the angle of Mr. Williams' room he stooped and felt gently with his hand.

The first thread had just been broken, but there was nothing in sight, so he switched on his torch, to find that the piece of stamp paper was still where he had placed it. The "ghost" had not used the door in the panelling, and the great detective smiled.

There were undoubted elements of flesh and blood about the monk. An apparition would have left the worsted strand untouched, but the second and third had been broken likewise, and he knew that he was on the right track.

From the point where he gained the tiled hall to the foot of the grand staircase the distance was twenty-five strides, and as he reached the bottom of it he was rewarded by

another glimpse of a white garment whisking out of sight round the corner of the upper floor.

Nelson Lee took the shallow steps four at a time, but all to no purpose. The corridor was empty, and there was nothing to show where the masquerader had vanished to.

He walked to the green baize door again, flashing the powerful beam of the electric torch right and left without avail. Then he went into each dormitory in turn, to find every boy sound asleep, and finally returned to his study to think.

"This is a two-man job," he said to himself, as he tapped out the ashes of his second pipe. "Nipper will be here to-morrow, and Master Monk shall have a good run for his money to-morrow night."

CHAPTER IV.

How Nipper Saw the "White Abbot!"

SATURDAY'S dinner was always a joyful meal, and they were half through pudding when the purr of engines announced that a powerful car had drawn up at the hall door.

Nelson Lee recognised the note, but made no sign, and Boyle brought in a card, which he handed to the headmaster.

"Eh? Who's this? 'Captain Barton, M.C., Cavalry Club, Piccadilly.' Don't know him," said Mr. Chard.

"There's a young gentleman with him, sir, and I've shown them into the study," volunteered Boyle.

"Ah! Sounds like a new boy."

And the Head left the room.

As the diners rose, with the pleasing prospect of a soccer match before them, Boyle appeared again, with a request for "Mr. Drake's" presence, and he found Roddy Miles, his solicitor, reclining in the padded chair reserved for parents and guardians, while Nipper, looking very demure in an Eton jacket and white collar, sat on the extreme edge of another one, nervously playing with his bowler.

"This is Mr. Drake," said Mr. Chard, introducing the new arrival, "an old Cambridge Blue, Captain Barton."

And the two men bowed, as though they had never met before in their lives, although Roddy Miles' eye twinkled behind the glass he screwed into it.

"Mr. Drake, this young gentleman is the captain's nephew. It is the case of a boy who has overgrown his strength and been allowed to lie fallow, from the educational point of view, in consequence. It has occurred to me that you might coach him

in the subjects in which he is deficient, eh?"

Nipper put on an expression of almost frightened timidity, which was so well done that his master had to keep his own face straight by a strong effort.

"Oh, yes!" nodded Nelson Lee, with reassuring friendliness. "What are you most backward in? Know any history?"

"I know my dates, sir," said Nipper. "William the First, 1066; William the Second, 10——"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" laughed Lee. "We don't trouble much about that sort of thing; we have a new system altogether. History is one of the most interesting subjects in the world when we get away from dates and make it live."

"That's what I've always said," drawled Roddy Miles. "I say, you know, I think this is just the place for Guy. Don't you think so, old chap?"

"Yes, uncle," responded Nipper promptly. "See, they're just going to play soccer!"

At the end of five minutes the new master and the new boy left the room together, leaving the uncle and the Head to make the business arrangements, and, once outside, Nipper and the great detective clutched each other by the arm, the former rocking with silent merriment.

"Found anything?" he whispered.

"Enough to go on," was the reply.

"But have you seen it?"

"Yes, twice."

"Oh, joy!" gurgled Nipper. "And what sort of a show is this?"

"Topping!" said Nelson Lee. "The Head's a white man, the boys are a first-class crowd, and, as for the house—well, you can see for yourself!"

"Why, it's like Hampton Court!" said Nipper.

And he wasn't far wrong.

"I'll put you on to those three young beggars who wrote that letter," said Nelson Lee, as they mounted the staircase. "There's a vacant bed in their dormitory—next to the door, too—and only just across the passage from my room. I want you to chum in with them; the other fellows don't count. Under pretence of coaching you up, we shall have lots of time in my study to discuss the situation. This is my den."

And he ushered the delighted Nipper into a charming panelled apartment, with one of its windows looking over the grounds to the abbey ruins in the distance.

"Hullo!" said Lee. "So soon?"

And, while Nipper walked to the window, he picked up his autograph-album, which Boyle had placed on the table.

A low whistle made Nipper jump to his side, to find him with a scrap of crumpled paper spread out against the open book, as Lee compared the two handwritings.

The detective had made a discovery!

(To be continued.)

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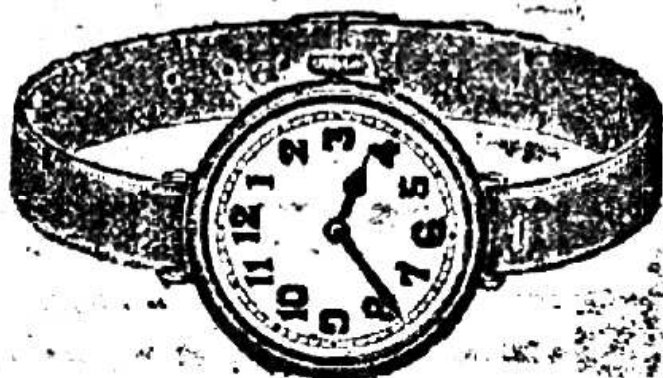
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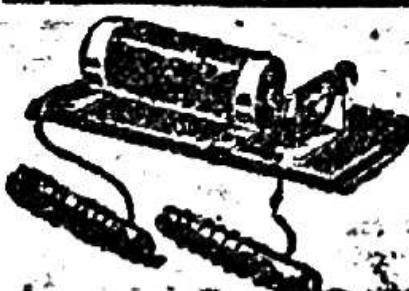
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