

# Vanished Men

By GEORGE MARSH

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## INSTALLMENT FIVE

**THE STORY SO FAR:** Bound for the Chibougamau gold country, six men lost their lives on the Nottaway river. Red Malone, Garrett Finlay, brother of one of the six, and Blaise, half-breed guide, arrive at Nottaway posing as surveyors.

The trader led his guests into a large living room the floor of which was strewn with moose, caribou and bear-skin rugs. Two hundred miles from the railroad the trader lived in comfort. "So you're surveying the lakes?" he began. "I suppose that will take you all summer."

"Almost," Garry answered, his thoughts with the girl. "But we have the lower Nottaway to finish before joining our party at Rupert."

"Lucky you're not mapping the big rivers that feed this chain of lakes! You'd need canoe men—Indians."

"We left the best white-water man in Canada out there on the island but we'd need more than Indians," said Finlay pointedly, "we'd need luck."

"Oh, you have a man with you?" "Yes." So you thought Blaise was killed on the river, did you? surprised Finlay. Then he said: "I judge from the buoys you use planes here."

There was a shadow of annoyance in the other's baffling eyes. "I have to hire a plane from Quebec to bring the girls in and out. They don't like the river. I can't get them to winter here. It makes it pretty lonely."

Shortly a Montagnais girl appeared at the door and nodded. There was laughter outside and Isadore's wife and step-daughter entered the large room at one end of which a table was set.

"Hope you won't mind if we doled up and powdered our noses!" bubbled Corinne Isadore. "It's an event to have guests and—such guests!" Isadore disappeared and returned with a cocktail pitcher and glasses. The two guests watched him closely as he filled the glasses with martinis and passed them. Finlay gave the "Okay" signal to the questioning eyes of Malone as he lifted his glass.

"To our charming hostess!" he said, holding his glass at his lips until Isadore and Corinne had started to drink. He watched Lise closely as she placed her half-emptied glass on the table.

"What's making her so nervous?" he wondered. "On the surface she seems too decent to be the step-daughter of this buccaneer."

Garry caught the trader studying the bulge in Red's coat caused by the .45 in his hip holster as he bent over the effervescent Corinne. "That's sudden death, Isadore," he reflected, "if you're so foolish as to try to pull anything tonight—sudden death! Watch your step!"

There was red-fleshed sturgeon and roast ptarmigan and the hungry men did honor to the half-breed cook. When the Montagnais girl brought in bottles of red Bordeaux, Garry gave Malone the "okay" signal by rubbing his left ear. "So far, so good, mine host!" Garry mentally applauded. "The wine may make your ladies talk."

It was evident that Corinne Isadore was making a night of it. She was mercilessly flashing her black eyes at the russet-haired giant, blowing cigarette smoke in his face and greeting his low-pitched conversation with bursts of laughter while he casually filled and refilled her glass.

As he talked with Garry, Isadore's cold eyes constantly wandered to his wife's flushed face inching closer to Red's. It was different with Lise. She lit and snuffed out half-smoked cigarette after cigarette. The hand holding her fork was unsteady.

It was evident that Lise Demarais was either excited or worried. "Your home is in Calgary?" Lise asked.

"Yes," he lied. "So your work has been in the west?" broke in Isadore.

"Yes," Finlay was on his guard. There were questions he wished to avoid. "I suppose you're a Province of Quebec man?" he countered. Isadore laughed. "You think I'm French? No, my father was Spanish."

Finlay saw Corinne Isadore answer what must have been a signal by raising her black brows. She turned to Red with: "When you've finished the map of the lake, you'll let me see it? Could it be traced? I'd love a map of Waswanipi."

"That's his first move!" thought Garry. "He doesn't believe we're engineers."

"Of course, I'll trace one for you!" replied Red, beaming into Corinne's challenging eyes.

"That's fine!" applauded Isadore. "We'd appreciate it. Well, gentlemen, let's drink to a successful summer for us all! But your glasses are empty. I'll open another bottle."

Finlay noticed that the glasses of Isadore and the girls were full. That couldn't be accident. He'd watch this.

As the trader half turned to uncork a fresh bottle, held at his side, Garry saw his left hand, grasping the neck, move over the mouth as he took the bottle in his right and, raising, fill the glasses of his guests.

Finlay is told that the six men were not drowned as reported. Suspicion prevails that Isadore, rich fur man, has made a gold strike and aims to keep prospectors out of the country at any cost. The three men start out on the

Finlay's eyes found and held Malone's. His right hand lazily moved to the back of his neck. Red caught the warning and turned to Corinne. "In British Columbia," he laughed, "we always exchange glasses for a toast."

Isadore coughed sharply. The veins in his forehead swelled. "Corinne! Not another drop! You've had too much already!" His voice split the silence as an axe splits oak.

Blood flooded the girl's olive skin. Her eyes kindled. "I'm no child to be told what to drink!" she shot at the man who sat rigid watching her, then drained the glass in her hand.

On the hush that followed broke an idle tapping on the spruce table. As he watched the infuriated Corinne, Malone's straining ears caught the dots and dashes, in Morse code, of Finlay's signalling fingers. "New bottle drugged!"

Isadore's high-pitched voice, now under control, broke the tension. "I'm sorry, gentlemen! You'll excuse Corinne. She's not used to much wine."

Corinne drew deeply on her cigarette, blew a cloud of smoke into Red's face as she lounged, round arms on the table. "Do you think I've had too much wine, beeg boy?" she whispered.

"Of course not. Beautiful!" Red returned at the door and nodded. There was laughter outside and Isadore's wife and step-daughter entered the large room at one end of which a table was set.

"We've forgotten our toast!" insisted the tight-faced Isadore, raising

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ing his glass. "A successful summer to us all!"

With a "Pardon me!" Finlay reached past the surprised girl beside him and, lifting her glass, turned to his host. "To a successful summer!" His voice carried the ring of splintering ice. Eyes locked, the three men drank.

Lise turned on Finlay. "Why did you do that? It was just as if—"

"Lise!" There was bottled fury in Isadore's tone. "Will you help Corinne?"

Elbows sprawled on the table, chin cupped in one hand, a plume of hair like a drooping crow's wing masking an eye, Corinne sighed to Malone: "What has come over me? I feel so drowsy."

"Did you hear me, Lise?" Isadore's voice was as brittle as March crust.

But Lise Demarais sat frozen to her chair, her frightened eyes riveted on something across the room. Finlay followed the direction of her gaze.

Through a half-opened door peered a hideously grotesque face, framed by yellowish-white hair.

"Tete-Blanche!" Finlay muttered. "Lise!"

But the girl's obsessed eyes were still anchored to the closed door across the room.

"Lise!" She rose and went to her stepmother, followed by Isadore, while Finlay waited with folded arms, fingers glued to the stock of his hidden pistol.

"Excuse me for a moment, gentlemen!" said the trader. He raised his half-conscious wife to her feet and took her from the room, followed by Lise. At the door she turned a bloodless face toward the two men at the table, then disappeared.

Red Malone's puzzled eyes clung to his chief's. As he caught the meaning of the folded arms he stiffened, right hand on hip, and pivoted swiftly in his chair. But the door Finlay was watching remained closed. On the silence of the room broke the tapped message from the middle finger of his left hand: "Tete-Blanche was at the door behind you! It scared Lise! If Isadore doesn't return, we'll shoot our way to the canoe!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Nottaway, despite warnings. On the third day out they are ambushed from shore. They escape serious injury and start for the Hudson's Bay post. Finlay and Malone visit Isadore and meet Lise, his pretty stepdaughter.

Red nodded. Action! There was the glint of sun on young ice in his blue eyes. Stiff in their chairs the men waited. Then the trader returned.

"It is most embarrassing, gentlemen," he coolly apologized. "Mrs. Isadore took more than she's accustomed to. I hope you'll understand."

Garry rose. "Of course!" he said. "Will you thank her and your daughter for a most delicious dinner and—interesting evening?"

"But you're not going? The night is young."

Finlay admired Isadore's callous nerve. "It's late," he replied. "We'll say good night."

"Well, if you insist. I'll give you a light to your canoe."

Outside the night was black as a spruce swamp. Isadore produced an electric torch and walked to the shore beside Finlay. Close on the heels of the trader followed Malone.

As he pushed off the canoe Finlay said: "The evening was most pleasant, Mr. Isadore, and—instructive."

Finlay and Malone paddled in silence until they were well offshore.

"Now what do you think of that for a dinner party?"

"Think?" snorted Red. "My fingers ached to drown him in front of his place. Drugged his own wife! Some joke on the slick Jules Isadore! And was he sore!"

"That was clever headwork of yours, Red, when I signalled that he'd drugged the wine. That strange western custom of switching glasses had him stopped dead. Nothing like an Irish imagination!"

Red chuckled. "Thought you'd like it! Say, the girls couldn't have been wise to his plan!"

"No, it didn't look so. But what was his plan when he had us doped?"

"I believe he wanted to search us. He'd let us sleep it off,—then he'd apologize for his strong wine we couldn't handle."

"Our showing up here must have staggered him. But he's got nerve."

"What interests me most is this Tete-Blanche. He seems to be a bogey man at Nottaway and Lise looked as if she'd seen a ghost when she spotted him in the doorway. She must know he's Isadore's private killer."

"I wonder how much those gals do know."

"Get anything out of Corinne? She threw a wicked eye at you, Red. I was worried—thought she'd kiss you right before King Isadore!"

Red laughed. "What a doll to trot on your knee! She's right up my alley for looks! But she didn't ask a suspicious question. How about Lise?"

"She puzzled me. She started off with a rush—was gay and flippant; then suddenly grew absent-minded. Drank hardly anything! Didn't hear half what I said!"

"She was sure easy on the eyes in those whipcords."

"And easier in that white dress at dinner! Skin sort of transparent. The distinct impression I got was that she wants to leave Waswanipi. She didn't say so, of course. But I sensed it. She's worried."

The approach of the canoe to the island where Blaise had a bright fire burning as a beacon was announced by the barking airdale.

"Well, Blaise, what do you think of it?" asked Finlay, when he had finished his story.

"We leave here, wabatch, quick!" "You mean tonight?"

Brassard nodded. "Why tonight?"

"Two Montagnais fallar come here after dark. I give dem suppair and taste of whiskey. Den dey talk. We move out, now. Onles you wish to fight."

"Well, what's it all about, Blaise?" demanded Red.

Blaise told his story. That afternoon the two hunters had brought a canoe load of sturgeon to Isadore's place to be traded for supplies. They were in the trade-room when the Peterboro was first sighted far down the lake. Labelle rushed in and called the man with the scarred face outside where Isadore was watching through glasses. Curious, the two Indians moved to the door and listened. The trader was wild with rage. "You liar!" he said to Batoche. "Here come de men you said drown in de Long Saute de de Nottaway." The trader struck Batoche in the face but Labelle stepped between them. Then they moved away out of earshot of the eavesdroppers.

Later, the Montagnais were starting with their supplies for their fishing camp when they heard an angry voice up the shore. "Wat good are you? Now Isadore send me to dat island tonight to finish your job!"

They looked and saw the man with white hair, the Montagnais called Neshived, the Killer, with a little man, Tetu, talking to Batoche. So, after dark, the hunters had come to the island with the warning.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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## The Answers

- 1. One rigged for temporary service. 2. One foot by one foot by one inch. 3. Jamestown, Va. 4. Ontario. 5. Argus. 6. An expurgated novel. 7. Robert Morris. 8. Charles Dana Gibson. 9. Napoleon. (The interval between his entry into Paris after his escape from Elba and his departure after his abdication, March 10 to June 28, 1815.)

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