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CHAPTER IX—Continued

"You met that skunk, did you?" he rasped, his control gone. Then, getting himself in hand, he went on: "And the people at Walling River—did you stop there?"

Could the free-trader have read the thoughts of the man who faced him, as he asked for news of the doomed post, he would have started as one starts at the warning of a rattler. For the mention of Walling River stirred a fierce desire in Steele to mangle with his bare hands the man who thought to obtain Denise St. Onge by bribery. But the bronzed face of the American masked his turbulent thoughts as he intentionally drawled, watching Lafamme's eyes:

"Well, it's a long story. Queer case, Walling River, very interesting to an ethnologist—like myself. They've had a hard summer."

Steele knew from the quick interest in the other's face that he had won—that however deep was Lafamme's distrust of his motives in taking the Ogoke trail, the desire for news of the girl at Walling River, for an inkling of the nature of St. Onge's answer to his offer, would result in an invitation to spend the night at the post. And he smiled inwardly as the manner of Lafamme swiftly changed.

"Mademoiselle St. Onge—was she well?"

"Why, as to that, I hardly know what to say," Steele answered. "Lascelles showed up there just as I left."

"What? Lascelles at Walling River?" exploded Lafamme, patently knocked off his feet at the news. "What—what has happened? He's not going to marry her this fall?"

"No, he's not going to marry her—this fall." So emphatic was Steele's tone—so final the statement that it drew from Lafamme a sidelong glance of curiosity, in the course of his restless pacing of the landing.

"What brought him up river, then?"

"Why, this Windigo trouble," lied Steele, anxious to learn if Pierre had brought the news to Ogoke.

The eyebrows of the Frenchman lifted in surprise.

"Windigo trouble? What do you mean, Mr. Steele?"

Steele was confident that Lafamme was dissembling.

"Why, haven't you heard that the Walling valley is overrun by man-eating Windigos?" he laughed, closely watching Lafamme's dark face. But though, a moment before, the trader had made no effort to conceal his emotion at the mention of Denise St. Onge, Steele now looked into cryptic eyes.

"Mon Dieu, no! You mean to say that the Indians are frightened?"

"Yes, you might call it that," said Steele, facetiously, "although I think that I would make it a bit stronger. You don't believe in the Windigo, Monsieur Lafamme?"

Lafamme smiled. "You are a joker, Mr. Steele. We will discuss the Indian superstition tonight over some—excellent whisky, if you like. You will do me the honor to dine with me—and my sister, Mademoiselle Rose Lafamme."

"Thank you!" And Steele, accompanied by Antoine, of the scarred face, returned to the canoe, delighted that his interview, which had started so inauspiciously, had closed with an invitation to pass at least one night at the post.

While he shaved and changed his clothes in the shack assigned to him, and whither Lafamme, with marked hospitality, had sent hot water from his kitchen, Steele held a council of war with David, who had made a hasty reconnaissance of the post.

"Did you see Pierre?"

"No, but I smell plenty whisky on de Injun."

"How many hunters are there here still?"

"Seex—seven—t'pl here. Queer 'ing, wen I ask why dey are not on de trap lines, one of dem say dey not hunt dees long snows."

"How many post servants has he got—there are eight cabins?"

"Good manee."

"Did they speak of Walling River or the Windigo?"

"No."

"Why do you suppose he is feeding all these bush Indians—what is he doing them for?"

David's dark features stiffened as his eyes sought a crack in the floor. Steele paused in his shaving to glance quizzically at his friend.

"Oh, well," he laughed, "I suppose you've promised Michel not to tell me what you think of anything you see here. I must wait until November."

The Ojibway rose, rested a hand on the shoulder of his chief. "Eet sees not so, boss; but I promise Michel something. Sometam you know."

"That's all right, David; I want you to keep your promise, but don't you see that I might get more out of La-

flamme tonight, if I knew what you and Michel had in your heads?"

David shook his head. "Lafamme sees smart man. He tell you nodding."

"Nothing about what?" demanded Steele.

"Nodding 'bout sendin' Pierre to scare de Injun—'bout stealin' de fur trade from St. Onge, wid whisky."

"Well, possibly he won't talk, but I'll give him a good opening."

The living room in the comfortable quarters of Louis Lafamme was a revelation to the man who anticipated finding the rude furnishings typical of northern fur posts. The shelves of books, the furniture—much of it brought from the railroad by canoe—the large graphophone, the pictures, were indicative of tastes which hardly squared with the reputation of the trader.

"You are extremely comfortable here," he said, as Lafamme led him into the room. "You're fond of music?"

"Ah! There's where this life is barren, monsieur," impulsively replied the Frenchman. "Why, I've hitched my dogs and traveled clear to the railroad in the middle of winter to hear some music. It's the thing I miss, and the phonograph is cold; I tire of it. If I played myself, but I don't." Then Lafamme turned a tense face on Steele. "Did she play while you were at the post?"

For an instant the muscles of Steele's body stiffened. To speak, as a stranger, of Denise St. Onge with the man who had plotted ruthlessly to



"Yes, It is My Home, but I Seldom See It."

win over her father—to buy her, sickened him. Yet menace though he was to the post at Walling River, his hatred and jealousy of Lascelles might be put to good use if the opportunity offered, and Steele intended to play upon those passions of his host this very night.

"Mademoiselle St. Onge seemed to be greatly depressed and played little the few days I was there—then Lascelles appeared," he said.

"She despises the dog, and yet he has openly boasted at Albany he would marry her," sneered Lafamme.

"I don't think he ever will," threw out Steele, lighting the cigarette passed him and watching the play of emotion on the handsome face of the other.

"Why?"

"Because she would kill herself first."

"Nonsense! Women don't do it, monsieur," scoffed the trader, but the fleeting look of approval which Steele caught belied the words. Lafamme's nature was elemental. To him, her death was preferable to having her the wife of Lascelles.

Steele writhed in his chair as the other paced back and forth, but the welfare of the girl at Walling River demanded that he smother all outward reflection of his thoughts, so he fought himself slowly into a state of callousness at the mention of her name, necessary, if he were to draw out his host.

"Monsieur," Lafamme stopped his pacing and glared down at the man smoking in the chair, "you are right." Then, as he walked to the end of the room, added: "She will never marry that rat of the Revillon people—she will marry—me."

"You seem hard hit," said Steele. "Although she spent but one evening with her father and myself, I found her charming, and I congratulate you."

"She is the—Shish! Rose!" And both men looked up to see a woman enter the room. Steele got to his feet. "Rose, this is Monsieur Steele."

The woman who joined them and—

to his surprise—said graciously, in English, with an accent, "Monsieur, you are verree welcome." was not at all what Steele had expected to find at Ogoke lake. Instead of belonging to a type more or less common to the frontier railroad towns, the girl posing as the sister of Lafamme was undeniably handsome, with a mass of straight, black hair, and the brilliant olive skin which so often characterizes the quarter or eighth blood. For that she was a breed, he had no doubt.

Extending a round arm, she gave Steele her hand with something more than the pressure demanded by hospitality, as her white teeth flashed in a smile.

"It is kind of you, mademoiselle, to take me in tonight," he said, and the thought shaped itself swiftly, as her thick-lashed eyes made a bold appraisal of the stranger at Ogoke, that this girl, of whom Lafamme had tired, might have knowledge invaluable—might even, by the adroit use of her evident vanity, betray the plans of the lord of Ogoke lake. For that she should be in ignorance of the infatuation of the latter for Denise St. Onge was unlikely.

"Oh, la, la! Eet sees to ourselves we are kind. Ees eet not so, Louis?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Lafamme with a leer, "judging from the toilet of mademoiselle, one should say it is to Rose that you are kind. You have not worn that thing in months, Rose."

"No? I had reason. I do not waste myself on the blind."

"Ah! But monsieur is not blind, eh?"

"No man sees blind who has been months seen the north with no one but the squaws to see, eh, Monsieur Steele?" And she smiled suggestively into Steele's amused eyes. Then her face darkened. "Oh, I forgot, monsieur has come from Walling River," she said in a low tone, husky with emotion.

Good, thought Steele, she knows, and will talk.

Then he gambled with: "One can never see too many beautiful women, mademoiselle."

"Oh, you think her beautiful, eh?" replied Rose Lafamme, tapping the floor with the toe of her slipper. "Louis says she es not."

"Come, monsieur," interrupted the trader, with a scowl at the speaker, as an Ojibway woman stood in the doorway, announcing dinner.

As they seated themselves at the table, Steele was highly optimistic of what his stay at the post might disclose. Whether Lafamme had decided to take him at his word, or still suspected his presence at Ogoke, David had more chance of learning that night than he, but that the outraged pride of Rose Lafamme would lead her to talk, if the opportunity offered, he was now sure. Her reference to Walling River had cleared any doubt on that score. The canker of jealousy and the fount of woman's instinct for revenge would play havoc with the half-breed in Rose Lafamme.

"You are from New York, Monsieur Steele, that wonderful city I have never seen?" the hostess was saying.

"Yes, it is my home, but I seldom see it."

"Seldom see it? And all the life there to enjoy—the theaters, the beautiful women?"

"But there are beautiful women elsewhere, mademoiselle; Ogoke lake, for instance," Steele hazarded, lifting his glass to the girl as he glanced furtively at Lafamme.

"Mon Dieu, but you are the flatterer! You are a man of three ladies, monsieur, even eef you desert them to travel seen this wilderness."

"It is only that my inspiration is great this evening," he returned.

Lafamme laughed unpleasantly in the girl's face, kindling with pleasure at the remark. In a flash, she turned with what was near a snarl, her dark eyes flaming. "You see, from others there is appreciation!" Then, lighting a cigarette, she rested her round elbows on the table, and leaning toward Steele with a challenging look, startled him with: "Say more pretty words to me, you big American!"

Steele threw a sidelong glance at Lafamme, to find only amused tolerance. He was in doubt whether the girl was making a forlorn attempt to arouse the trader's jealousy or merely set on his own conquest. Since his ready answers to a few well-chosen questions of Lafamme's regarding New York, Steele believed that the latter's suspicions had faded. But it was too early to hazard an attempt to learn anything. He was dealing with a man both ruthless and powerful. So Steele was discreet, but he saw that little more whisky was needed to loose the tongue of the girl beyond control. For that he waited.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Nothing but Justice

In this God's world, with its wild whirling eddies and mad-foam oceans, where men and nations perish as if without law and judgment for an unjust thing sternly delayed, dost thou think therefore that there is no justice? It is what the fool had said in his heart. It is what the wise in all times were wise because they desired and knew forever not to be. I tell thee again there is nothing else but justice; one strong thing I find here below—the just thing, the true thing.

• • • If the thing is unjust, thou hast not succeeded, though bonfires blazed from north to south, and bells rang, and editors wrote leading articles, and the just thing lay trampled out of sight to all mortal eyes—an abolished and annihilated thing.—Thomas Carlyle.

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