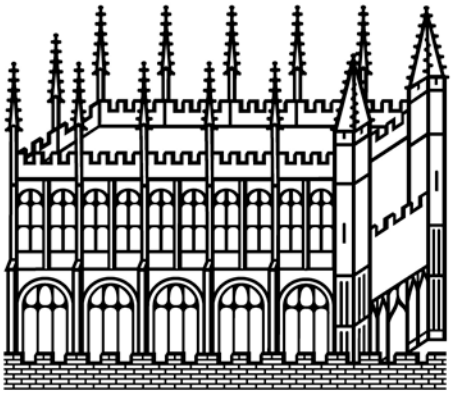


The White Man's Trail

By ROBERT LEIGHTON

THE WHITE MAN'S TRAIL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

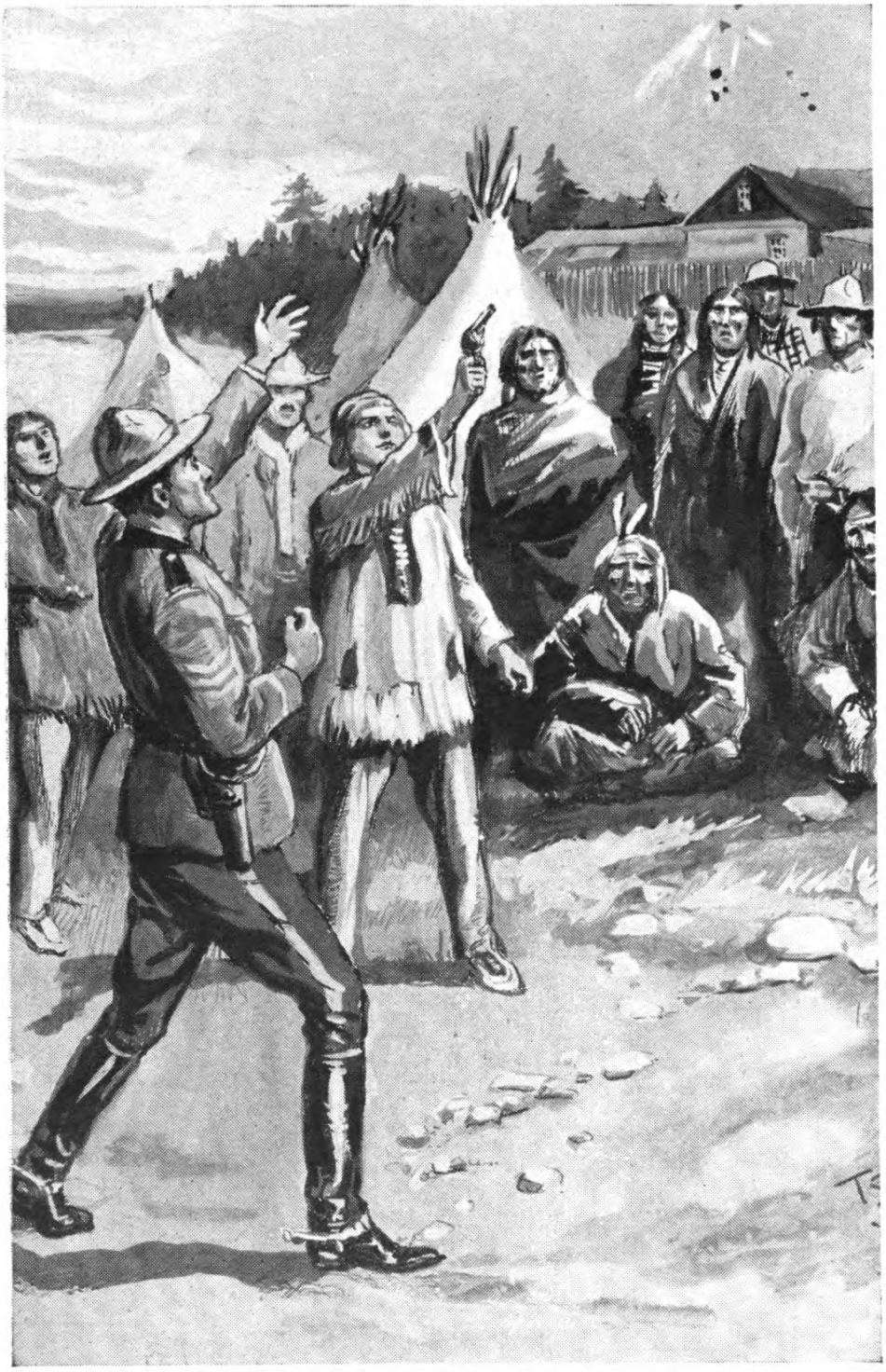
KIDDIE OF THE CAMP **3/6**

KIDDIE THE SCOUT **4/6**

COOEE! **3/6**

GILDERSLEY'S
TENDERFOOT **2/6**

RATTLESNAKE RANCH



White Calf fired. The pebble was struck so truly that it was shattered to fragments.

Frontispiece. *See page 74.*

THE WHITE MAN'S TRAIL

A Story of Adventure and Mystery in the Canadian Wilds

BY

ROBERT LEIGHTON

ILLUSTRATED BY THOMAS SOMERFIELD

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CHAPTER I

RED CHERRY

THE dark-eyed boy and girl in their shaggy fur clothing looked more like wild creatures of the forest than human children as they stood together on the trail, stamping their moccasined feet in the crunching snow to keep the sharp-toothed frost from biting their toes.

In strange wonderment, they were watching the dog train which had swung into sight from beyond the bluff of dark spruce trees, to come speeding down the glistening slope with a merry tinkle of collar bells. The dogs kicked up little sparkling clouds of spray as they plunged forward into the unbroken snow, sinking to their shoulders at each galloping stride. They did not need to strain at their traces. The two men seated in the sleds seemed, indeed, to be holding the eager teams in check rather than urging them.

"Who are they?" the girl questioned. "Why they come here?"

She drew her companion aside, and they both climbed quickly to the top of a flat boulder under one of the leafless maple trees.

"Strangers," the boy answered. "They no harm us. They white men. Good dogs; go very quick."

They waited, expecting the dog train to race past

them; but as the teams approached, the driver of the foremost sled slackened his long reins and called aloud in a sharp, clear voice of command:

"Steady! Halt!"

In quick obedience the panting, wolf-like dogs slowed down and came to a stop abreast of the boulder. The man in the leading sled laid aside his long-lashed driving whip, pushed the dark goggles upward from his eyes over the front of his bearskin busby, and glanced inquiringly upward at the picture of the two children standing together like figures in a piece of statuary. He pointed a thickly-mittened hand in the direction of a ragged mist of blue smoke that blurred the tree trunks on the far side of the coulée.

"Big Rain?" he said questioningly, moving the rugs from his knees to the frost-stiffened canvas cover of his sled.

Neither of the two answered. The boy was inquisitively admiring the dogs and their harness; the girl was dumbly staring at the stranger's face.

It was a kindly young face, glowing with the rosy flush brought into it by the fresh wintry air of the prairie trails; it was smooth and clean, not scarred with wounds or painted with vermilion, as were the faces of the warriors and braves amongst whom she lived, up there in the Indian encampment. And his eyes were blue—darkly blue as the starlit sky, or as the far-off mountains at early dawn.

"Big Rain?" he repeated, smiling up at the girl and showing his even white teeth under a small brown moustache, that was coated with the crystals from his frozen breath. He rose stiffly to his feet, standing very tall on the floor of the sled.

"Yes," she now answered him in halting English.

"Big Rain Reserve. Sweetgrass Coulée. Big Rain's lodge 'way over there." She glanced at the half-hidden village of smoke-grimed teepees showing among the dark pines at the top of the farther slope. The hood of her white fox fur parka fell back from her head, and the tall stranger's eyes rested in surprise upon her ruddy chestnut hair and her rosy cheeks.

"Say!" he exclaimed, stepping out into the snow, "you're not an Indian, then? Not altogether? What's your name?"

The girl hopped lightly from her high perch.

"It is Red Cherry," she told him, going a bold step nearer to look at the brass buttons on his fur-lined capote. The buttons, she could see, were embossed with buffalo heads, and they were astonishingly bright. "My father is white man, like you," she volunteered.

"So? A white man, eh? Then your mother is Indian? Louis Carillon did not tell me that a white man lived here."

His companion from the second sled shrugged his shoulders, and said in the broken English of the French half-breed:

"Oh, but yes; one 'ave live long, long time 'ere in Beeg Rain Agency. Ai! Ai!" he shouted, running forward. "Keep away! Those dogs, they sure bite you 'ead off!"

The boy had raised a hand to stroke the ears of the fierce-looking, wolf-like foregoer of the leading team.

"I not afraid," he said quietly. "Him good dog. Plenty big; heap strong."

"Nevertheless," Louis warned him, "they was very savage. It is best you no touch 'em."

"Come back from the dogs, Wolverine," urged Red Cherry; and her companion slowly returned to her side.

"Say, Loo," cried the man with the brass buttons, "we'll make camp right here in the open. Dogs are hungry: so am I. Get a fire going."

Watched from a discreet distance by Red Cherry and Wolverine, he drew off his big fur mittens, opened his military capote, and stood with the wintry sunlight gleaming upon the burnished cartridges in the belt which crossed his khaki service tunic of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. Then he strode in among the restless hauling dogs, talking to them as with difficulty he removed their hard, frozen, rawhide harness. When they were set free they gambolled about, rolling in the dry snow and shaking themselves; but very soon they gathered in an eager ring about the pile of wood which Louis was kindling into a blaze; for they knew that a fire gave promise of food and rest.

"Patience! Patience!" the tall trooper scolded as they made an excited rush towards him. "You're not going to splinter your fangs on this frozen tack. Wait till I thaw it out."

He emptied an armful of frozen whitefish, which he arranged in neat order round the fire. A husky snatched greedily at one of the slabs of fish, but a kick from a moccasined foot hurled the animal to the rear. The man stooped and patiently toasted each slab separately. When it was all thawed soft it was doled out, and each of the ravenous dogs slunk away with his allotted portion, to bolt it with growling throat and back-looking, suspicious eyes.

Their master washed his fingers in snow and returned

to his sled. From under its canvas cover he drew a tin biscuit box, which he opened, and carried to where Red Cherry and Wolverine now stood within the warmth of the fire.

"I expect you'll think plum cake a nice change after dry moose meat and pemmican," he said invitingly.

Red Cherry drew back a step, but the open box was thrust nearer to her, and she timidly put in her hand and took a wedge of the rich cake, which she divided, passing one portion to her companion.

"Not a bad pair of kids," smiled the trooper, watching them walking away. "Brother and sister, I'd say. The girl interests me. She looks too clean and wholesome to have been brought up among Redskins. Did you twig how she took the smaller chunk of cake for herself, giving the larger half to her brother?"

Louis was unpacking the camp outfit. He had already filled a kettle with snow and put bacon in the frying-pan. Very soon he had a pot of steaming tea ready, with an abundance of good food.

The two men ate in silence, seated on the sides of their sleds, with their feet towards the warmth and their hoods drawn over their ears. Their eight dogs had made beds for themselves in the snow.

"You go alone?" asked Louis, rolling a cigarette.

His companion was drawing on his mittens.

"Alone?" he repeated. "Why, certainly. While you are rigging up the tent and making things snug, I will slip along there and bring down our man. I shall hardly need your help. I am counting on getting Red Cherry or her father to act as interpreter. Keep a good fire. We start on our back trail at daybreak. I guess there's more snow coming."

He lighted his pipe, muffled himself up in his furs, and set off with a long, easy, swaying stride across the snow, following in the foot-tracks of Wolverine and Red Cherry.

The sun had gone down when he passed the horse corrals and came into the midst of the Piegan village. The smoke rising from the blackened vents of the encircled teepees showed that the Indians had finished their day's work and lighted their fires. The larger cooking fires outside were already deserted, and very few of the people were in sight. He was looking for the chief's totem pole, when he was approached by a tall man, who appeared to be an Indian until he opened his wolf-skin cloak to lift his hand in respectful salute.

"I was on my way to visit your camp, sir," he began, speaking in clear English. "My son and daughter saw your outfit arrive in Sweetgrass Coulée, and I guessed by their report that you were of the Mounted Police. I was hoping you'd prove to be my old-time friend Sergeant Galletly. None the less, it's good to see a member of your distinguished force."

"I am a corporal only," announced the trooper, looking into the man's unexpectedly clean face and observing that his moustache and long hair were red. "My name is Silk. What is yours? Excuse my asking you, but I am a new-comer on this patrol."

"Here in the Big Rain Agency I am known as Rising Moon," the other responded. "My true name is Martin Collis. I came out from England thirty years ago. Can I assist you, sir?"

"Thank you," returned Corporal Silk, "I am just going along to see your chief and let him know my business."

"Not that the information is needed," Collis nodded. "It is already pretty well known why you are along here. You haven't travelled for days over the prairie trails simply to inquire if we have any complaints. I am only surprised that you venture to come alone. The man you're here to arrest is a tough customer, sir. He will show fight. He has taken one life; he will not value yours. Moreover, he has many friends in the lodges. You'll need a force of armed men to arrest Black Weasel."

Corporal Silk smiled and calmly pocketed his cold pipe.

"I have come here for that Indian," he said, "and he is going back with me, dead or alive."

"Well," returned Rising Moon. "I don't like to see you running the risk. But if you're bound to try it, we will of course stand by you. The Mounted Police are the Indians' best friends, and you will have the support of our chief and all his counsellors and warriors. I need not ask if you carry a gun?"

"It is never far from my hand," Silk assured him. "Say, here comes your daughter, I think?"

They were among the wigwams now, and from one of the largest of them came Red Cherry, who advanced and took possesson of her father's hand.

Corporal Silk stood facing her.

"That is a beautiful white fox-skin you are wearing, Red Cherry," he remarked, looking at the girl's hooded parka.

"I very fond of all things white," she answered with a smile. "White snow, white clouds, white flowers, white people, white animals."

Silk smiled back at her.

"Do you know what my chum Louis Carillon and

I saw this morning as we came along in our sleds across the prairie snow ? " he said. " It was a white buffalo. There were many buffaloes—quite a big herd. All were black except one, an enormous bull, who seemed to be the king and leader over the others, and he was all white. Not as white as the snow or as your fox-skin ; but white. And quite a giant in size. And he had the most glorious big black eyes. I have never seen a white buffalo before. I don't suppose even your father has seen one. Have you—Collis ? "

" I have seen the robe of one," said Rising Moon. " It was considered a sacred thing. The Indians who owned it had dedicated it to the Sun. No. I have never seen a white buffalo alive. This is great news that you bring, sir. Our buffalo riders will rejoice when they hear that a herd has been seen within a day's journey of their own Reserve."

He turned abruptly to Red Cherry, and, whispering, told her to go to the teepee of Black Weasel, and tell Black Weasel that he was wanted in the chief's lodge.

The girl went away on her errand, and when, after a while, she conducted the unsuspecting criminal to the entrance of the great lodge and peeped within, she saw her father and Corporal Silk seated in friendly conversation with the chief, Big Rain. Corporal Silk stood up.

" Bring him inside," he requested, going himself to the buffalo-skin door-flap and holding it open.

Black Weasel walked within, passing him.

" This is your man," said Rising Moon.

At sight of the representative of the white man's law who had come to arrest him, the Indian started back in quick alarm and snatched at his knife. He leapt forward. But his uplifted arm was seized in a

grip stronger than his own, and before Red Cherry could understand what was happening she saw Black Weasel writhing and snarling savagely with a pair of steel handcuffs on his wrists and his foot on the fallen knife.

"March!" ordered Corporal Silk, and he followed his prisoner out over the snow-covered ground and down into the sheltered coulée, where Louis Carillon sat smoking in the light of the bivouac fire.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF WHITE CALF

At any other time the visit of a police patrol to their remote village and the arrest as a criminal of one of their tribe would have sent Big Rain's Indians into disorder and excitement; but on the morning following the appearance of Corporal Silk the excitement which pervaded the camp had no direct connexion with the guilty culprit.

Corporal Silk had brought word that a big herd of buffalo had been seen, and, as a consequence, every man, woman and child in the Reservation was alert and busy making preparation for riding out in pursuit or for enjoying the expected spoils of the chase.

During the night the mystery men had been praying for good fortune; the braves had burned sweet grass and sweet pine to purify themselves; the trained buffalo horses had been brought in; the women had their pack horses furnished with travois poles, had sharpened their knives for cutting up the meat, and coiled up their ropes of shaganape with which to pack the red loads and the heavy hides. Every man had looked over his weapons to see that his gun was clean, or that his bow-string was right, that his arrows were straight and strong, with points well sharpened. In the early morning mounted scouts were sent out to locate the herd. Every one was active.

Rising Moon, who was a skilled buffalo runner, was to be the leader, or captain, of the hunt. Fearing that there would be more snow, he told the men to protect themselves against the cold and to wear shirts under their blankets. He himself wore a buckskin coat over his flannel shirt, with a mooseskin overcoat and thick buffalo shaps. He was taking his son, Wolverine, with him for the first time, and he had given the boy a good smooth-bore rifle and a trained horse. It was a proud day for little Wolverine.

Even before the hunters and their long, straggling train of women and pack animals had made a start, a scout rode in to report that he had found the tracks of the herd. Other scouts confirmed his report, and one galloped up to the chief to tell that he had actually seen the hairy monsters travelling westward into the wind near Old Man's Creek. It was a very big herd. He had not discovered if one of them was the white buffalo of which Corporal Silk had spoken. He did not believe that any buffalo could have a white robe.

"Ha!" exclaimed Big Rain, raising his medicine staff. "Who says that the buffalo are gone? Why, it is as it has always been. The land is dark with them. Surely the good Sun has not forgotten us!"

The morning was well advanced when the long procession of mounted hunters started out from the encampment. A thick haze of glistening frost flakes filled the air, through which the red sun shone dimly; but the herd was sighted some fifteen miles to the south-east of the camp, and the hunters deployed to surround it.

At a given signal they charged in among the huge, shaggy beasts, splitting the vast crowd in such a way that about a thousand of the wild stampeding animals

broke apart and raced off with a thunderous pounding of hoofs and rattle of horns. This section was chased in the direction from which the Indians had come: for the nearer to the camp the killing was done, the easier it would be to pack and carry the meat.

The hunters, with their long hair streaming in the wind, guided their trained mounts here and there, singling out this fat cow or that choice young bull, firing their guns or leaning over and driving an arrow deep into the vital part of the great beast, until the snowy plain became dotted with black carcasses and monster animals standing head down, swaying, staggering and bellowing, and finally crashing to the white ground a limp and senseless heap.

Riding to and fro, with Wolverine always closely following, Rising Moon was one of the most daring and successful of the hunters. Many a splendid bull had fallen to his gun. But he had searched in vain for a buffalo that was any other colour than dark brown or black. Even the long telescope which he often used failed to help him in his eager search. But at length Wolverine, riding at his side, drew rein and pointed excitedly forward to a wooded hill-side where a small detached bunch of the buffaloes had sought the refuge of the higher ground.

"Ai! See! See!" the boy cried. "It is the white bull!"

He started off, whipping his pony with his short-handled quirt of stinging raw hide. But his father quickly overtook him, and two of the Indians followed.

What they saw was surely the white bull, climbing awkwardly up the slope, going very slowly, as if it were already wounded. Its great head was lowered, and there was something strange about the shape

"Wolverine raised his gun and pressed the trigger."

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of its ponderous hump and shaggy white mane: something which did not seem to be a part of the animal itself, hanging between its horns and falling like a curtain over its face and eyes. Rising Moon was perplexed.

"Stop!" he cried when they came within easy range. And when Wolverine had come to a halt he added: "Now, my son, this is your chance. Take steady aim—just behind the shoulder, where there is no mane. Steady! Take time. You cannot miss."

Wolverine raised his gun, glanced along its barrel, and pressed the trigger. His aim was true. The white buffalo staggered forward for a few unsteady strides, stumbled, wobbled, and went slowly on his knees.

Bellowing loudly, he lay down at full length with muzzle outstretched on the snow. A shudder ran through his giant frame, and the vapour of his breath faded and came no more.

Martin Collis dismounted and strode forward to the dead animal's side, but drew back in amazement, staring at the thing which he saw hanging in a tangle from the horns and hiding the eyes. It was a garment of fine white linen, mixed with flannel and fur and delicate lace, held in position by a torn strip of blanket. Something moved beneath this covering—something that was alive. He heard a faint, stifled cry, like the cry of a human child.

He went forward again and bent over to draw the piece of blanket away; but it was so twisted and entangled that he could not remove it until he used his knife. Then the covering fell aside and he saw, lying comfortably upon the soft cushion of long, deep hair between the buffalo's horns a chubby, well-nourished human infant, white of skin and fair of

hair—a child such as he might himself have been at the same helpless age.

For many moments he forgot about the white buffalo. He hardly paused to ask himself by what extraordinary circumstance or accident the child had come to be in such a place. He stooped again and took the child in his arms, covering it with its own clothing in the greater warmth of his cloak and nursing it as a woman might have done as he mounted his waiting horse.

"See to your white buffalo, Wolverine," he called. "Remember that it is sacred. Arrow-maker and Long-hair will help you. Let them make no gashes in taking off the robe. They will bring only the tongue and the robe, taking none of the meat."

With a wave of the hand he rode off through a swirl of falling snow. On and on he rode across the prairie, without pause or break until the evening, when he alighted, covered with snow, at the entrance of his own teepee.

Softfoot, his Indian wife, and their daughter, Red Cherry, pressed round him when he entered and opened his cloak to show what he had brought. Softfoot hastened to prepare warm milk and a cosy couch, but Red Cherry took instant possession of the child.

She listened in awe to her father's story of the white buffalo; but shook her head in doubt when he attempted to explain the mystery of how the buffalo came to be carrying so precious a burden. All that was Indian in the girl rushed to the concluson that the child was miraculous, sacred, a gift from the Sun.

"And he is mine," she declared. "Mine. No one shall take him from me. I, Red Cherry, will be his foster-mother, to keep him from all harm, to lead him

on his trail until he grows into a great, strong man. And his name shall be Little White Buffalo Calf."

So it was that White Calf, the child of mystery, came from the unknown world beyond the snows to live in the tents of the Piegans. And all who saw him wondered, marvelling at the mystery of his first adventure, foreseeing nothing of the adventures and mysteries that were to come.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY CHILD

THE lodge which Martin Collis called his home was in outward form and appearance very much like all the other smoke-grimed, skin-covered teepees in the vast circle of dwellings which constituted Big Rain's village on the wooded edge of Sweetgrass Coulée.

It was larger and cleaner, but like the others it was framed on a pyramid of lodge poles and painted on the outside with picture writings. He had added a log cabin to the structure, however, with a stable and a cow-shed, and he possessed more private property even than the chief himself.

He had furnished the log hut with bunks; he had bought a table and chairs at the nearest Hudson Bay post; there were books on the shelves he had made; there was a stove and a chimney and a glass window; and the walls were decorated with an almanac, pictures cut from old illustrated papers, and many weapons and trophies of the chase.

Although he was living as an Indian, with an Indian wife and an Indian name, he yet had not cast off his associations with the outer world of Canadian civilization. And amongst other things he retained his habit of taking his meals seated at a table, using a knife and fork, rather than adopting the Redskins' custom

of squatting on the ground and tearing at his food with fingers and teeth.

He sat at the table now, resting after his long ride back from the hunting grounds, enjoying a juicy steak of buffalo meat which he had fried for himself, and sipping from a can of strong tea that Softfoot had brewed for him. While he ate, he watched Red Cherry ministering to the infant needs of Little White Calf, giving the child warm milk, washing him, and making up a cot for him.

"I am anxious to find out what language he speaks," said Rising Moon. "I wish you could induce him to say something, honey. Hasn't he spoken yet?"

"He too young to speak," Red Cherry assured him. "He only cry. But I like very much to hear him cry. Always I know what he want. He cry now because he very tired. He want sleep."

Her father smiled as he saw her lay the little one very tenderly in a long whitewood box, which she had half filled with soft and fragrant musk-ox robes, covering him with a warmed blanket and a quilt of beaver-skins. The box was marked on the side with the stencilled initials "H. B. Co."

"Why you laugh?" questioned Red Cherry.

"I was thinking," said Rising Moon, "that the child might have been forwarded carriage paid by the Hudson Bay Company in that same packing-case. Where's the lid? I shouldn't wonder if it had 'With care; this side up' printed on it."

"For shame!" retorted Red Cherry. "You know he came from the Sun. Look at him once before I cover him. Is he not beautiful? Is he not white? He like the snow when the red sun shine on it."

"I allow he's white," agreed Rising Moon, gazing

into the cot. "That's what puzzles me most. I can't account for his colour. There's nothing Indian in the whole of that child's composition. He's a sure mystery. As to his being sent by the Sun—well, you are at liberty to believe it and to persuade the Piegans into your way of thinking; but your idea doesn't explain why he was wearing those fancy garments of fine linen and flannel and lace, those stockings—lined with ermine. It doesn't explain his being in the queer place where we found him. I'm trying to figure out the proposition of how this delicately nurtured, helpless little infant came to be riding between the horns of a wild buffalo out there on the wide and pathless prairie in the middle of winter. And I can't straighten it out."

He returned to his chair.

"He was not put there," he went on. "He didn't grow there, or fall there like a ripe peach from a tree. He hadn't been long on that perilous perch before Wolverine fired his gun. He wasn't even hungry."

"You not know," said Red Cherry, dropping a deer-skin curtain to shield the child's eyes from the firelight. "He may have been there many sleeps, many days and nights."

Rising Moon shook his head.

"You will remember," he resumed, "that when Corporal Silk told you about that white buffalo he made a special and particular point of the beauty of the bull's large dark eyes. He was near enough to see and admire the animal's eyes. But when Wolverine and I rode up in chase of the white bull its eyes and the whole of its face were hidden under the piece of blanket and the child's dainty clothing. We could see those things hanging about its head a mile off. A

man like Corporal Silk couldn't have missed seeing them. And he would never have lost sight of that buffalo if he had notioned that there was a living child hanging from the animal's horns."

"It is perhaps that Corp'al Silk see another white bull; not the same one," suggested Red Cherry.

"No," objected her father. "I do not think so. The Piegans saw only one—the one that carried Little White Calf, the one that Wolverine killed. Mr. Silk saw the same bull right enough when it was leader of the herd, unencumbered and able to see where it was going. The child therefore came on to the buffalo's head between the time when the police patrol saw the herd and the time when Wolverine and I singled out the white bull clambering blindly up the slope of the bluff."

Red Cherry remained standing as if on guard near the curtain.

"I very glad if White Calf was not out in the cold all night," she said. "The Sun would not let him be cold or hungry. The Sun knew that the hunters would come very soon. That is why the white bull was chosen above all the others of the herd to carry White Calf. It very clear to me. You very stupid, I think."

Rising Moon looked perplexed on hearing this argument. It seemed to him that there was some reason in supposing that the one conspicuous animal among all the hundreds of black and brown buffaloes had for some purpose been especially chosen as the carrier of the mysterious child. Had the infant been mounted on any other, it might never have been found. Mounted on the white bull, the leader, it could not fail to be observed by any sharp-eyed Indian hunting on the trail of the vast herd.

"But no," he decided. "I will not believe that any man or woman, white or red, savage or civilized, could be so heartless as to put that innocent child in so perilous a position. It's not in human nature."

"That is true," agreed Red Cherry. "White Calf he not put there by any human. But the Sun is not human. The Sun knows everything. The Sun can do all things. It was the Sun who cradled White Calf between the buffalo's horns, knowing that Wolverine would shoot the buffalo, that White Calf would be brought here for me to take care of."

"Well, well," determined Rising Moon, taking up his cloak and his fur cap, "let us leave it at that. For it's clear that White Calf himself is too young to tell us anything, and there's nobody else we can appeal to for an explanation of the mystery. Corporal Silk might have helped us. But where shall we find him?"

He went out, and, providing himself with a fresh mount, rode off again to rejoin the hunters on the prairie and to superintend the bringing in of the buffalo meat.

It was very dark and the snow had covered his tracks, but he knew his direction, and when he had gone a few miles the distant glow from many fires and the flares of torches were his guide. He dismounted in the midst of the workers.

Already the men had finished flaying the great animals that had been killed, and were busy folding and packing the hides, while the women, boys and girls were cutting the flesh into pieces convenient to be lifted. All was movement and chuckling laughter and sudden calls and shouts and light horseplay.

Before each fire a great side of fat buffalo meat

was roasting, propped up on two great cotton-wood poles, and when these were cooked the Indians with knives and strong teeth stripped the juicy flesh from the bones. The flames and torchlights playing upon the stacks of red meat in the stained snow, and on the dark figures moving to and fro, revealed an impressive spectacle.

From afar in the woodland could be heard the mournful howling of hungry wolves mingled with the sharp, impish barking of coyotes prowling around expectant. Many of the larger and more daring wolves crawled stealthily forward to snatch at rejected portions, to gnaw at the stripped skeletons, or to drag away a half-cleaned bone.

As the travois poles and pack animals were loaded a marching train was made up, and the long procession started through the darkness for home. The snow-fall had ceased, but it had been heavy while it lasted, and all tracks were deeply covered, excepting those recently made by Rising Moon's horse, and it was these that were followed.

In the Piegan encampment many cooking-fires had been lighted in expectant preparation, and when the first of the hunters arrived every pot and pan and roasting frame was ready to receive its full portion of tender-loin, boss ribs, or tongue. Some of the women and children who had remained among the lodges did not wait for the meat to be cooked, but tore off and eagerly devoured lumps of sweet fat.

None thought of sleep. Weary though the hunters were after their long day's toil, there was to be a great feast. All through the night, indeed, there was rejoicing over the rich abundance of food. Song and dance and light-hearted talk were heard on every

side, with shouting and the constant noise of drums.

Among the hunters who brought up the rear of the straggling train of pack animals Wolverine and his father rode. News of the killing of a white buffalo had spread throughout the camp, and the people were eager to get sight of Wolverine and the precious robe which he carried over the horn of his stock saddle.

As the boy dismounted in the clearing opposite the medicine lodge he was welcomed with great ceremony. He had been especially favoured by the Sun, and the Piegans honoured him as if he were a victorious general returning from glorious battle, a personage almost as important in the tribe as the chief, Big Rain, himself.

In the bright light of the council fire, where the mystery men and principal warriors stood to receive him, Wolverine unfolded his white buffalo robe and displayed it where all could see it. They agreed that the skin was uncommonly large and in good condition, and they marvelled at the whiteness of the hair. Never in the experience of the Piegans had such a wonderful robe been seen. It was decided that it should be held sacred by the tribe and preserved in the medicine lodge for all time. Softfoot, Wolverine's mother, was to have the privilege of cleaning and dressing the robe.

Most of the Indians were genuinely proud of Wolverine. Only a very few were jealous, because he was so young and had never before been out on the buffalo trail. Some were envious, and one went up to Wolverine and said coaxingly:

"I will give you eighty horses in exchange for your white buffalo robe. I want it to make a cloak for my beautiful squaw, Song of All the Birds."

Wolverine laughed.

"Not for twice eighty horses would I exchange it," he declared. "And you who are a war chief ought to know, Star Blanket, that such a trophy may never be offered for sale."

When Wolverine and his father returned to their teepee they were met at the entrance by Red Cherry, who held up a warning finger.

"Hush!" the girl cautioned. "You no waken our little White Calf. He sleeping very hard."

"But I want very much to see him," urged Wolverine. "Where you put him? You sure he real?"

"Real?" echoed Red Cherry. "He cry very real. He drink milk very real. He got blue eyes—they very real. Come, then; you see him."

She raised the curtain, allowing Wolverine to look over her shoulder at the peacefully-sleeping child

"Yes," agreed Wolverine after a long and thoughtful silence. "He plenty real. I like him. I make him my little brother; teach him many things. My life belongs to him. I give myself to him."

CHAPTER IV

MIGNONETTE

Rising Moon had encouraged his two children to speak in English; but he usually conversed with them in the Blackfoot language of the tribe, and always so in the presence of their mother, who understood no other tongue than her own.

"Two of our hunters are missing," he said to Wolverine across the blinking firelight. "They are Broken Arrow and Eagle Claw. Did you see them, my son?"

"I saw them," Wolverine answered. "They did not join in the hunt. I think it is a pity that no one rode after them when they broke off from us."

"Why?"

"Because they are the brothers of Black Weasel, whom the police arrested and took away with them."

"Ah!" cried Red Cherry with quick apprehension. "It is that they went off on the white man's trail to rescue their brother! They would perhaps do harm to Corp'al Silk."

"That is what I think," nodded Wolverine.

"The police are safe," interposed Softfoot. "They started before daylight. Their dogs travel swiftly. The snow would wipe out their tracks."

"But Corporal Silk is a stranger on our trails," reflected Rising Moon. "and Broken Arrow is a good tracker. By crossing Warm Spring Creek on horse-

back they could head off the dog train this side of the Bird Tail Divide."

Wolverine stood up.

"I will go to the lodge of these men," he resolved. "I will have speech with Mignonette, the half-breed squaw of Black Weasel."

He covered himself with a blanket and went out very quietly, crossing the circle of the camp and moving like a shadow among the teepees and shacks. From one of the shacks came a woman's voice, singing a French chanson. It was the voice of Mignonette.

Wolverine waited until she should come out and return to her own lodge. The song ceased. At the same moment he was aware of two Indians who approached, leading their jaded horses. One horse limped. When they had passed Wolverine looked down at their tracks in the light from an open doorflap, and saw the red splash of a drop of blood in the snow. The Indians stopped and turned, looking back to the shack. Wolverine recognized them. Eagle Claw's right arm hung limp at his side with a rough, blood-stained bandage on the hand. Broken Arrow had a bullet wound in his left cheek. From the shack Mignonette ran out excitedly, her long black hair streaming loose over her scarlet blanket.

"Ah, you 'ave not bring him!" she cried. "You 'ave not rescue him. Why!"

Eagle Claw lifted his wounded hand.

"That man in the sled was too quick," he explained. "His eyes are as the eyes of the lynx; he keeps his gun ready behind them."

"Ah, you dog-face! You coward!" cried Mignonette. "You failed. I am then a widow."

From the shadow Wolverine walked up to them.

"Why were you not with us in the buffalo hunt?" he questioned, tapping a finger on Broken Arrow's arm.

Mignonette turned upon him sharply.

"Dat no your affair, you Wolverine," she cried in her broken English. "Why you come 'ere? You go! You quit!" She pushed him savagely. "You go tell your red-haired sister I tek big revenge on her very soon. She traitor. Pourquoi she come along for take my man, give him up to police? Ah, I hate her, your Red Cherry! I kill her, sure. I kill her one time!"

Wolverine had learned all that he had come out to learn. The two missing Indians were back in camp. They had failed in their attempt to rescue Corporal Silk's prisoner. Corporal Silk's gun had been too quick for them.

He did not think it necessary to alarm Red Cherry or caution her against the possible vengeance of Mignonette. He resolved, nevertheless, to be very watchful over his sister, and never to be far away from her in case she needed his protection.

Red Cherry, he knew, was not likely to run into danger by straying far from home. All her interests, all her occupations and thoughts, were now centred in her new responsibility of nursing White Calf, helped by her mother. She never allowed an outsider to touch him, although all the women and children of the encampment came to look at him and marvel at the white softness of his skin, the blue of his eyes, the silky fairness of his hair, and the healthy redness of his lips.

One day Softfoot was absent at her work of cleaning and dressing the sacred buffalo robe. Red Cherry sat alone at the side of the stove with the child in her

lap, when Mignonette entered softly and went up to her. Mignonette did not notice that Wolverine had glided within at her heels and that he stood watching her as she leaned over and prattled about the child's beauty.

"You will let me hold him in my arms, Red Cherry?" she asked coaxingly.

"No." Red Cherry shook her head resolutely. "He very comfortable. You no touch him, please."

Mignonette drew back, and a hard, vindictive look came into her dark eyes.

"You very fond of him, I see," she said with a forced smile. "Perhaps another time you let me nurse him. But you will not refuse now to show me the pretty clothes that he wore when he was found out there on the desolate prairie? Yes, I like very much to see them. You know I 'ave been in Quebec. I very good judge of pretty things."

"The clothes they put away in other room," Red Cherry objected. "But perhaps I fetch them. They very pretty."

She rose to her feet and turned, with White Calf clasped in her embrace, to take him with her.

Mignonette moved to spring in front of her, at the same time drawing a long-bladed knife from her belt. But even as she moved Wolverine leapt out upon her and swung her round.

"Why you come here?" he cried, repeating the woman's own words. "You go! You quit!"

Mignonette lowered her hand and went slowly past him.

"Ha!" she laughed mockingly. "It easy to see your Red Cherry she love that infant more than herself. Very well. It shall be the infant I will kill. She take away my man. I take away her papoose."

Red Cherry now knew that she had an enemy in Mignonette. But the knowledge only made her more watchful in avoiding danger and in protecting White Calf, who was with her night and day. Even when she went about the camp or into the forest glades she carried the child, Indian fashion, in a shawl over her back. But very soon he grew too heavy for her to carry, and, with Wolverine's help, she made a hand sledge for him to sit in, harnessing a team of dogs to it, and always keeping near.

White Calf was brought up as an Indian child, hardened and strengthened, and not pampered. His food was the same as the food of the Piegan children excepting that he had a more abundant supply of milk; and when his teeth appeared he would chew at a piece of dry moose meat like any Piegan papoose. His clothing, too, was Indian. Yet he was always different from the children of the lodges, as an English racehorse is different from a prairie cayuse.

The Piegans became very fond of the white-skinned, fair-haired little chap, and would stand in wondering groups watching him playing with the doll that Red Cherry had made for him and listen to him talking to it in his strange jargon of mixed English and Blackfoot.

Every morning Wolverine carried him on his shoulder down to the lake and swam out with him into the deep water. White Calf enjoyed this morning bathe beyond everything, and he was never afraid. Once he let go his hold of the reins of Wolverine's long hair and plunged head foremost deep into the water. Wolverine was alarmed; but very quickly White Calf came to the surface, shaking his wet head and moving his arms and legs instinctively to keep himself afloat. This was his first lesson in swimming. But

he was not yet allowed to go alone into the lake, as he often tried to do. He got many scoldings on account of his growing habit of venturing into forbidden places and touching forbidden things.

One day in the season of leaf falling, when Red Cherry was busy making a new pair of moccasins for him, she looked round, wondering why he was so silent. He was not there. She jumped to her feet and ran out, remembering as she ran that on the previous day she had taken him to gather sarvice berries in the forest—guessing that it was in that direction that he had wandered.

Some one was running behind her. She did not turn to see who it was, but ran on and on until she was among the trees. Far in front of her she saw little White Calf climbing over the trunk of a fallen fir-tree. Beyond him there was a woman, beckoning to him enticingly, holding up his bright-coloured doll and calling to him to come for it. The woman was the half-breed Mignonette.

Red Cherry raced forward to get in front of him. White Calf's eyes were upon his doll; his hands were outstretched to clutch it; he was not looking at the ground. Neither was Red Cherry. It was Mignonette alone who saw the venomous rattlesnake gliding along the turf as if to meet the child, with raised head and darting tongue. And Mignonette continued to beckon as White Calf advanced into the threatening danger.

But Wolverine was close behind his sister. He rushed past her, heard the snake's rattle, saw what was happening, and leapt forward, lifting the reptile with his foot and flinging it many yards away, while Red Cherry caught the child in her arms; and Mignonette, dropping the doll, took refuge in guilty flight.

CHAPTER V

THE EDUCATION OF WHITE CALF

"You saw what she would do?" cried Red Cherry, standing with the child clasped in her protecting arms. "It is that she wanted White Calf to go up to her for his doll. If he had done so, he must sure have been bitten by the rattlesnake. Oh, what a thing to do; so cruel, so wicked! I cannot think."

Wolverine took hold of his tomahawk, which hung by a loop from his belt.

"It is what Mignonette has wanted a long time to do," he said, going forward to the bush into which he had kicked the reptile. "It is not safe to take your eyes off the little one while that woman is about."

Red Cherry carried White Calf with her to get the doll which Mignonette had used as a decoy. When she returned, Wolverine had discovered the rattlesnake, guided by the harsh, cracking sound of its tail rings. He had stooped, resting his hands on his thighs. His moccasined feet were not two paces from the coiled brown body of the snake, and the evil-looking head was poised, with the venom fangs showing in the wide open mouth, ready to strike.

The girl saw what he meant to do. She shuddered.

"Come back!" she cautioned him. "Come back!"

But Wolverine did not heed her. The big rattler tucked back its head and sounded the alarm again.

Wolverine's left hand was raised, with fingers crisped. His foot moved. Instantly the snake struck; but the deadly fangs fell a few inches short of the boy's beaded moccasins. In the same instant Wolverine's hand shot out. Red Cherry could not follow the lightning leap of that hand as it darted down and fastened in a tight grip round the snake, just behind the head. The long brown body writhed and twisted about his wrist; the rattles were clacking noisily.

Wolverine lowered his arm, pressed the head firmly against the ground, and with a sharp stroke of his well-aimed axe adroitly severed the head from the writhing body, which he flung behind him. Then he smashed the skull and buried it in a hole made by his blade, stamping upon it, grinding it down, and covering the place with leaves.

"That is better," he said, turning to clean his tomahawk on the turf. "And now we carry Mr. Rattler home. Some day we make of the skin a band to fasten round White Calf's hat."

He looped a thong of shaganape round the reptile's still writhing body and slung it over his shoulder.

"I very glad you came so quick," panted Red Cherry, lowering White Calf to the ground and gripping his hand. "I think you saved his life. You kick the snake away just in time, when he would put his little foot down right in front of its ugly head. Oh, it was narrow escape!"

They lingered in the forest glades, gathering berries. White Calf's two hands were held aloft, full of the juicy fruit. He closed his fingers and pressed them tight, letting the purple juice drip into his open mouth. Then in sheer mischief he rubbed his wet, stained hands over his face and neck.

"Ah, you naughty!" cried Wolverine. "You spoil your face. You make of yourself a Red Indian. Look at him, honey!"

Red Cherry moaned despairingly at the sight.

"You vex me very much," she said reproachfully. "You great trouble to me, White Calf. I must now wash your face; and it is three times in three days that I have washed it. Where you suppose I get so much soap? Come, then."

But White Calf broke away from her and ran swiftly in advance into the clearing in front of the principal lodges. There he stopped abruptly.

"Ae, ae, see!" he laughed, pointing. "Oh, what a nice horse! What a big man! He is not Indian, that big man with funny bonnet. Who is he, Wolverine?"

The "funny bonnet" was a wide Stetson hat, and the "big man" wore the uniform of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. He stood by the head of his troop horse with the bridle rein looped over an arm of his scarlet tunic as he spoke with Big Rain, Rising Moon, and two of the medicine chiefs.

"It is perhaps, Corp'al Silk," surmised Red Cherry.

She went slowly forward, followed by Wolverine and White Calf. But at once she saw that the trooper was not the man whom she hoped he might be.

"Well, I'm glad you have nothing to complain of, Big Rain," the stranger was saying. "I've been nosing around your village. I see nothing wrong, excepting that your pitch is getting a bit stale and smelly. There's a shack across there wanting a new roof and a good clean-out with antiseptic."

It was Mignonette's shack that he indicated.

"Had much sickness among your people lately?" he then asked.

"None to speak of," answered Rising Moon, who acted as interpreter.

"You're jolly lucky," nodded the trooper, knocking out his pipe on the welt of his spurred boot. "The Crees along at Athabasca have had a lot of measles and fever this fall. Their camp was like a midden. Yours is as sweet as milk compared with it. Still, I'd advise you to move your lodges to fresh ground before winter, Chief."

He turned to Rising Moon.

"Are you keeping a written census of your population?" he asked. "It saves a heap of bother, you know, when you come to claim your Treaty money."

"One of your comrades of the Police told us to keep such a list," said Rising Moon. "That was five winters ago. Big Rain thinks the agent ought to do it."

"Do it yourself," the trooper recommended. "You're a white man. I guess you can write. And if you have no stationery, we'll send you some. Five winters ago?" he repeated as he mounted to his saddle. "Let's see, who rode on this patrol five winters ago?"

"It was Corporal Silk," Rising Moon told him. "He was here arresting one of our Indians. You know him, perhaps. You can give me news of him?"

"Corporal Silk? Oh, I know Silk. He wears his sergeant's stripes now—got promoted. Yes, he's been up at Herschel Island, away back of the north wind. Was frozen in there for two winters, in the worst station in the whole of the Territories, bar none. But Silk's a man who'd go anywhere and do

anything. He'd have discovered the North Pole years ago, only he has never been detailed for duty on the job."

While he spoke from the saddle, his eyes rested on Red Cherry, who was drawing White Calf away from under the horse's muzzle. He smiled at sight of White Calf's stained and dirty face. Then he glanced aside at Rising Moon, conjecturing a relationship. For a moment he hesitated as if about to speak of the fair-haired, blue-eyed child; but his horse was already moving, and he only returned the chief's salute as he rode off at an easy trot across the clearing.

"Always it is some one else; never Corp'al Silk," Red Cherry regretted as she watched the scarlet-coated rider disappear among the shacks and teepees.

She wished to speak with Silk, and get from him particulars concerning the white buffalo which he had seen on the prairie five years ago. But although many of the Mounted Police had in that long interval visited the Sweetgrass Reserve, yet Silk had never been one of them. And now he had perhaps forgotten all that she wanted to know, and it seemed as if the mystery attending the coming of White Calf would never be cleared.

She still believed, as most of the Piegans believed, that the boy had been a special gift from the Sun. And when her father hinted at a more commonplace origin, she vexed herself with the fear that some stranger from the outside world might some day claim him and take him from her; and she could not bear to contemplate so awful a possibility.

As he grew in strength and knowledge, White Calf became more and more precious to her. He was a great trouble to her, and a serious responsibility;

but to both herself and Wolverine he was far more than a mere brother. They regarded him as a sacred charge. All their interests were devoted to the duty of protecting him and keeping him happy and in good health. They shared all their possessions with him; they made many playthings for him, and taught him to make them for himself.

He surprised them with his quick intelligence and his extraordinary questions—questions which they could not always answer, such as: Why does stone: sink? Why does wood float? Why do the stars move? What holds the world up? What is beyond the edge of the world?

Rising Moon discovered him, one day, kneeling, beside Softfoot's washing-tub, blowing steadily at a floating strip of birch bark, turned up at the end.

"Say, young 'un," laughed Rising Moon. "You never yet saw a ship with sails. You couldn't have known by instinct that sails and a breath of wind can carry a ship along. How did you find out?"

White Calf gave another harder blow. The piece of bark fell over and he laughed merrily. His laugh was as musical as the song of a bird.

"What you mean—ship?" he asked. "Thing like that?" He pointed to one of the pictures on the wall of the shack.

"Yes, that's a ship," said Rising Moon. And he lifted the boy in his arms in front of the picture and told him about ships and the sea, and lands that lie far away beyond the blue rim of the prairie.

This method of teaching by pictures was to Martin Collis a most useful discovery which led him to search his few books and forgotten newspapers for illustrations. And often when he wanted to explain things he took

a burnt stick or a piece of soft clay and made a design on a strip of bark or the smooth side of a pelt.

White Calf became clever at picture reading and writing, and soon he knew the history of all the warriors and chiefs by reading the pictures on their lodge covers. He made pictures for himself, colouring them with the juice of berries and the pigments which the Piegans used for painting their faces. Once, having no such thing as paper, he drew a picture on the white coat of a foal. He often modelled figures of birds and animals in the snow or in wet sand or clay. He was always finding out something new ; and whenever anything puzzled him he never rested until he seized upon an explanation. The hinge of a box perplexed him, as did the spring of a jack-knife, the mechanism of a gun, and the explosive properties of gunpowder.

Usually he preferred to solve all difficulties for himself rather than refer to his elders, who could not always help him.

He got hold of Rising Moon's telescope and laughed with delight when he discovered that the large lens could be screwed apart from the long tube. He took the lens outside to try if by itself it would bring the mountains nearer. Then he found that the glass magnified things.

He held his hand on his naked knee and examined it through the glass. The result astonished him. When he withdrew his hand, he saw on his knee a circle of light which became larger or smaller as he moved the glass forward or backward with the sunlight shining through it. He tried to see how small he could make the spot of bright light, and then he felt a sharp stab of pain, as if the glass had bitten his knee. After-

wards he focussed the light on the dry grass, and was amazed when it produced fire. This was a great discovery.

Carrying the burning glass in his hand, he was returning to the teepee to question Rising Moon concerning it when he saw Rising Moon seated with the chief and other important Indians in a circle in front of the medicine lodge. Big Rain was in the act of trying to light his stone pipe with a flint and steel and a bit of punk, but somehow he could get no spark.

White Calf went up behind him, leaned across his shoulder, and held his hand over the pipe bowl with the sun shining through the burning glass concentrated upon the tobacco. He got the proper focus, the tobacco smouldered, and Big Rain presently drew smoke through the long stem.

The Indians leapt to their feet with shouts of astonishment. They believed that White Calf had asked the Sun to light the chief's pipe, and that the Sun had obeyed him. Here, surely, was certain proof that White Calf was great medicine, an inspired worker of mysteries beyond the knowledge of the Indian.

Rising Moon did not undeceive them, and from that time onward White Calf was more than ever recognized as the sacred Child of the Sun.

CHAPTER VI

THE WOLF TRAP

VERY early in his boyhood among the Piegans, White Calf showed a peculiar love for flowers and trees, insects and birds, and all the abundant living, growing things of woodland, lake and prairie.

He knew the birds by their notes, the animals by their calls and cries, and their tracks in the snow and sand. He invented fancy names by which to identify particular trees and flowers. His name for the aurora borealis, which flashed its rosy streamers in the wintry sky, was The Merry Dancers ; he called the moon Night Light. He took notice of all things, and always remembered what he had seen and heard. His memory was wonderful. All his faculties and senses were made acute by constant exercise. His eyesight and his sense of hearing were surprisingly sharp. And he was physically strong and agile. None of his Indian boy companions could excel him in climbing trees, in swimming, running, or jumping, and no boy of his age in the camp was more skilful in games or in marksmanship with the bow and arrow.

He was not yet old enough to learn to ride, or to handle a gun, or to go on the lake alone in a canoe. Until he was twelve years old he never went more than half a dozen miles away from Sweetgrass Coulée. But within that distance, he knew almost every tree

and rock, and the haunts of all the birds and animals ; for he went out trapping with Wolverine, and Wolverine was his most attentive teacher.

At first White Calf did not like to see the animals struggling painfully in the cruel jaws of a trap or straining to escape from a snare ; but soon he realized that men, like the wild animals themselves, must kill in order to live, and that without trapping and hunting the Piegans would quickly perish. Neither food nor clothing, neither comfort nor shelter could be procured in any other way. Even such necessaries as tea and sugar, pots and pans, guns and knives and gunpowder could only be bought at the Hudson Bay forts in exchange for buffalo robes and the skins of fur-bearing animals. So he overcame his sensitive objection to trapping.

What White Calf loved most was to see the beavers at work in the creeks, and to watch the living creatures of the woodland following their natural habits in their various haunts and homes. He would climb tall trees and sit for long, long minutes silent and motionless, looking down at the birds feeding their nestlings, or he would track a lynx to its distant lair just to see where and how it lived.

Once he discovered the earth of a beautiful black fox among the gnarled roots of a balsam poplar. He saw the vixen go in, carrying a sage hen as a meal for her young ones. Day after day he visited this tree, always lying concealed in the same hollow, until the vixen lost all fear of him, as if he were a natural part of her surroundings. She would bring her two kits into the open and play with them in front of him. White Calf loved those woolly little kit foxes, and often he would take a feed of buffalo meat to

throw to them. They became bold enough to run quite close to him; but he never attempted to touch or startle them.

One day on his way into the forest he passed Mignonette and Broken Arrow, who had been along to their traps. Mignonette carried a rich black skin folded over her arm. White Calf quickly recognized it as the skin of the black vixen, and he realized with sorrow that the two kit foxes were orphans.

He went on to their earth. After a long wait one of the kits peeped out expectantly. White Calf threw a piece of meat, then another piece. The kit came closer each time. Then instead of meat he threw his lariat. The loop fell over the kit's head and was drawn gently nearer.

"Hai-ya, little brother, I have caught you!" cried White Calf. And wrapping a fold of his robe round it, he hurried home to his lodge.

This kit fox became a great pet with him. He called it Thunder Cloud, because it was so black. It wanted to follow him wherever he went, and at night would crawl under the robes and sleep beside him. When it got scared by one of the camp dogs it would run to him, making short, gasping little barks. As it grew older it would prowl around the lodge. Not a mouse wandered under the lodge skin but Thunder Cloud found and killed it, and often he would bring in a bird or a ground squirrel.

After the lodge fires had died out one night and every one was asleep, Thunder Cloud wakened White Calf and Wolverine by barking. "Stop barking and go to sleep," commanded Wolverine. But Thunder Cloud would not stop. The moon shone through the smoke hole, and over by the doorway there was a

dark, motionless object that looked like a person crouching.

"Who are you?" called Wolverine, reaching for his gun. "Get up and talk, or I will shoot you."

There was no answer. Wolverine took aim and fired. With a fearful shout, a man sprang up and ran limping from the lodge, leaving a track of blood on the snow outside.

On the next day Broken Arrow was seen at the door of his shack nursing a wounded leg. That day it was Mignonette alone who went the round of Broken Arrow's traps. White Calf for once went in the same direction. He was following on the trail of a fisher-marten, and of a rabbit which the fisher was pursuing. At one place these trails were crossed by the prints of a woman's small moccasins. He knew whose foot-prints they were.

Mignonette herself was very near. She was at work putting a new bait into a wolf trap. Above her was a spruce tree, heavy with snow. She turned as White Calf strode past with his eyes on the ground. Now, she thought, was her chance to do harm to him and take her revenge upon Red Cherry.

Just at that moment, while she held her right hand within the open jaws of the wolf trap, a heavy clump of snow fell from the branch above her, dropping upon the trap. The strong steel spring was instantly released, and the sharp teeth snapped upon Mignonette's hand, burying their points deep in the soft flesh.

She screamed and tried to drag her imprisoned hand away. But the teeth had taken too firm a grip, from which there could be no escape, and again and again she screamed.

No wolf when once seized by those sharp steel teeth

had ever been able to escape, and how could she, a woman, expect to do more than an infuriated wolf could do? She could not reach the spring to open it. Even if she dared to think of the desperate course of cutting off her hand, her knife was at her farther side, many inches away from her free fingers.

The more she struggled to release herself the more surely she realized the impossibility. Terror was added to pain—terror that help might not come to her and that she might be imprisoned here in her agony for hours and hours. She was far away from any dwelling or frequented trail; and soon, when darkness fell, she would be an easy prey to the prowling beasts of the forest.

She knew that White Calf had been near to her when the accident happened, that perhaps he was still within hearing distance of her screams. Would White Calf come to her help? He knew by many signs that she was his enemy, that she had often tried to do harm to him. He might well believe that her call for help was but another of her tricks to lure him into danger, as when she had tried to entice him towards the deadly rattlesnake.

As she moved, she felt the sharp teeth of the trap rasping on the bones of her hand. Her arm was throbbing with acute, unbearable pain. Again and yet again she screamed with frantic insistence.

"Help! Help! White Calf, come to me!"

White Calf had heard her from the first. But he had been warned to avoid Mignonette, and it was quite true that he believed she was calling him only to draw him into peril. But at length he realized that her cries were genuine, and, leaving the tracks of the fisher-marten that he had been following, he turned and ran back through the woods.

He found her quickly. She was kneeling, piteously moaning, beside the wolf trap, supporting the elbow of her imprisoned arm with her free left hand.

"Quick, quick, White Calf!" she cried. "It is that my hand is caught in this cruel trap. The pain it is terrible."

White Calf went nearer, approaching her from behind. He could not at first see her arms and hands. He began to doubt her.

"You are sure there is no rattlesnake this time?" he questioned. "You are not deceiving me?"

"Oh, come quick!" she implored. "Open the trap! In pity open the trap!"

Then seeing the snow about the trap he understood what had happened, and he leapt to her help. One swift glance was enough for him. He went round in front of her and dropped to his knees.

"Be ready," he told her. "As I open it, you draw out your hand."

He had seen Wolverine opening traps in which large animals had been caught. The work of forcing down the powerful spring needed strength and cunning. If it were not done properly and fully the jaws would snap back again and perhaps cut off the limb that was between them, or at least smash the bones. White Calf had never been allowed to attempt it. Nevertheless, he understood the mechanism, and now he planted a knee on the spring and gripped the lower cross-bar. Then steadily, firmly, he pressed the spring downward with his knee, and the jaws opened inch by inch, wider and wider apart.

Mignonette withdrew her torn hand just in time. For White Calf could not fasten the collar in its clip. The spring flew up and the jaws clashed together

again with a snap which must surely have severed the woman's hand from the wrist had she been less prompt.

The blood flowed freely from the jagged wound, dripping upon the beaded front of her white doeskin skirt. White Calf took her scarf from her waist and bound it tightly about her arm.

"You very good to me," she moaned, closing her dark eyes. She was faint from the pain and the loss of blood. It was long before she had strength to stand. Many times she faltered as he led her out of the forest and across the clearing at the rear of the corrals. But at length they arrived among the lodges and at the door of Mignonette's shack. They found Broken Arrow within, nursing his lame leg, which he was anxious to hide from White Calf.

"Where is Eagle Claw?" Mignonette asked him.

"I do not know," he answered, "unless he is still gambling with Star Blanket. His medicine is good. He is winning everything."

"I will go to look for him," decided White Calf, "I will tell him to come to you very quick, if you will see to Mignonette."

He ran out. Half-way across the clearing he saw Red Cherry coming quickly towards him. She had missed him and had come out to search for him.

"You have been alone in the forest again," she began reproachfully. "You make me very vexed. I think you get lost, or eaten up by wild beast."

"Go to the help of Mignonette," he bade her. "She caught her hand in a wolf trap. She is badly hurt. Go to her."

Red Cherry stared at him in surprised annoyance. Mignonette was the last person whom she was willing to help.

"It is not for me to go near that wicked woman," she objected warmly. "She is enemy. Why should I?"

"Because I tell you to," returned White Calf in a tone of command. "Go! Go now."

This was the first time that he had ever ordered Red Cherry to do anything against her will. It was clear that he was growing up; that he was no longer a child. She bit her lips in irritation and was about to refuse obedience. But presently she ran to do what she could for the half-breed woman whom she hated.

White Calf turned away to continue his search for Eagle Claw.

CHAPTER VII

A FATEFUL GAME

He knew where the man was most likely to be found. For days past there had been heavy gambling going on in one of the lodges reserved for such purposes. Eagle Claw, who was recognized as one of the cleverest players of the bone in hand game, had been steadily winning from every Piegan against whom he played, and now it seemed that he was making a victim of Star Blanket, a very rich Indian and the owner of many horses.

It was Star Blanket who had offered Wolverine eighty horses in exchange for his white buffalo robe. He had a beautiful lodge, decorated with picture writings and scalp locks, his war bonnet was made of many splendid white eagle plumes and ermine skins, and his beautiful young wife, Song of All the Birds, was a daughter of the chief Big Rain. He was himself a war chief, very strong and handsome and much respected for his skill in battle.

Already from time to time Star Blanket had lost to Eagle Claw a large number of his best horses. He had staked as many as six at a time, only to lose them. And now, in spite of his ill-luck, he had become desperate over the game. During all the morning he had been losing, until he had very few horses left. The lodge was so crowded with eager spectators that

White Calf had difficulty in forcing an entrance. Many gave way to him, but one caught at his arm.

"This is no place for you," said Wolverine. "Go away."

"I want Eagle Claw," protested White Calf. Slipping past, he shouldered his passage into the excited throng until he could see the two principal players seated facing each other on a carpet of buffalo skin. He did not dare to interrupt the unfinished game, but stood silently watching.

By the side of Eagle Claw lay a pile of small, red-painted, cylindrical sticks, used for markers. Each represented a horse which he had won. Star Blanket had but seven left.

"These are the last," White Calf heard him announce as he laid the stake. "They are my seven best war horses."

Eagle Claw smiled; a cruel, sinister smile it was, and his evil little eyes sparkled with malicious fire. His eyes were set close together in his hatchet-like face, and his large nose was very thin and hooked like an owl's beak over his thin lips. He placed his seven markers in the pool and took up the bones, one red-painted, the other white with black bands.

While the onlookers chanted a slow monotonous song and beat time with their feet he manipulated the two little bones, deftly passing them from one hand to the other, back and forth, back and forth and up and down with bewildering speed, sometimes hiding both hands within the folds of the robe across his knees while he changed the pieces.

It needed a very quick eye and very sure judgment to tell which hand held the marked bone when at length the song suddenly ceased. He extended his closed

fists towards his adversary, looking him steadily in the eyes.

Raising his right hand with the forefinger poised outward above the other palm, Star Blanket slapped it down, pointing to the hand in which he guessed the winning bone was hidden. Eagle Claw opened the hand and displayed the losing red bone. He laughed wickedly, loudly. The surrounding Indians clapped their hands to their mouths in surprise and disappointment. There was not one of them who had not hoped that Star Blanket would win. And now every one of the horses in his great herd was lost. When he delivered them, his corrals would be empty.

Star Blanket shivered. He had not anticipated such bad luck.

"Well," he said, "come over to-morrow and I will turn them out to you."

"Wait!" Eagle Claw exclaimed. "I will give you one more chance. I will give you the chance to win back everything you have lost. You still have your rifle, a lodge, a saddle, war clothes, blankets, robes, and your wife. I will bet everything I have won from you against these."

Amid the exclamations of horror and disapproval which followed this proposal, White Calf pushed his way forward. He got behind Eagle Claw and touched him on the shoulder.

"Stop!" he said. "You will play no more. Listen! Your woman, Mignonette, is hurt. She has torn her hand in a wolf trap. You must go to her. She needs you. She is asking for you."

Eagle Claw roughly flung the boy's hand from his shoulder.

"Go away!" he cried impatiently in the sudden

hush. And then, looking across at Star Blanket, he said: "Well, will you take your chance?"

Star Blanket hesitated, weighing the possibilities.

"I must get back my horses," he ruminated. "And I cannot lose everything. Yes, I will take my chance. I will play again. I am sure that I will win. I shall pray. I shall make a sacrifice. I must win. Yes, let the stakes be as you say."

White Calf looked across at him, pointing a warning finger.

"Your medicine is against you, Star Blanket," he called out. "You have lost your horses. Are you now going to risk the loss of everything else? Think what it means! Everything that you possess! If you lose, you will be a ruined, broken man. You will be as poor as the outcast Indian who has no horse to ride, no lodge to live in, no squaw to comfort him. Think!"

"I have thought," said Star Blanket with grim determination. "I will play. The stakes are laid. Let us begin."

"Listen!" cried White Calf, going nearer to him, unhindered by the crowd. "The stakes are laid—yes. But you will lose. There is a mist in your brain, you cannot think clearly. Even now you are shaking like a blade of grass in the wind. Stand up and let me take your place in this game."

Some of the Indians laughed, others nodded wisely.

"He is powerful medicine, this White Calf," said one. "It was he who called upon the Sun to light Big Rain's pipe. The Sun obeyed him. Let him play. Let him play."

Now this was an exceedingly bold thing for White Calf to propose. He was known among the boys and

girls of the camp to be clever at the bone game; he seldom guessed wrongly. But Eagle Claw was a grown man who had practised for long years the arts of hiding the bone and deceiving his opponents. It was skill, not trickery, which gave him his good fortune. He was sly, he was cunning; but he did not cheat.

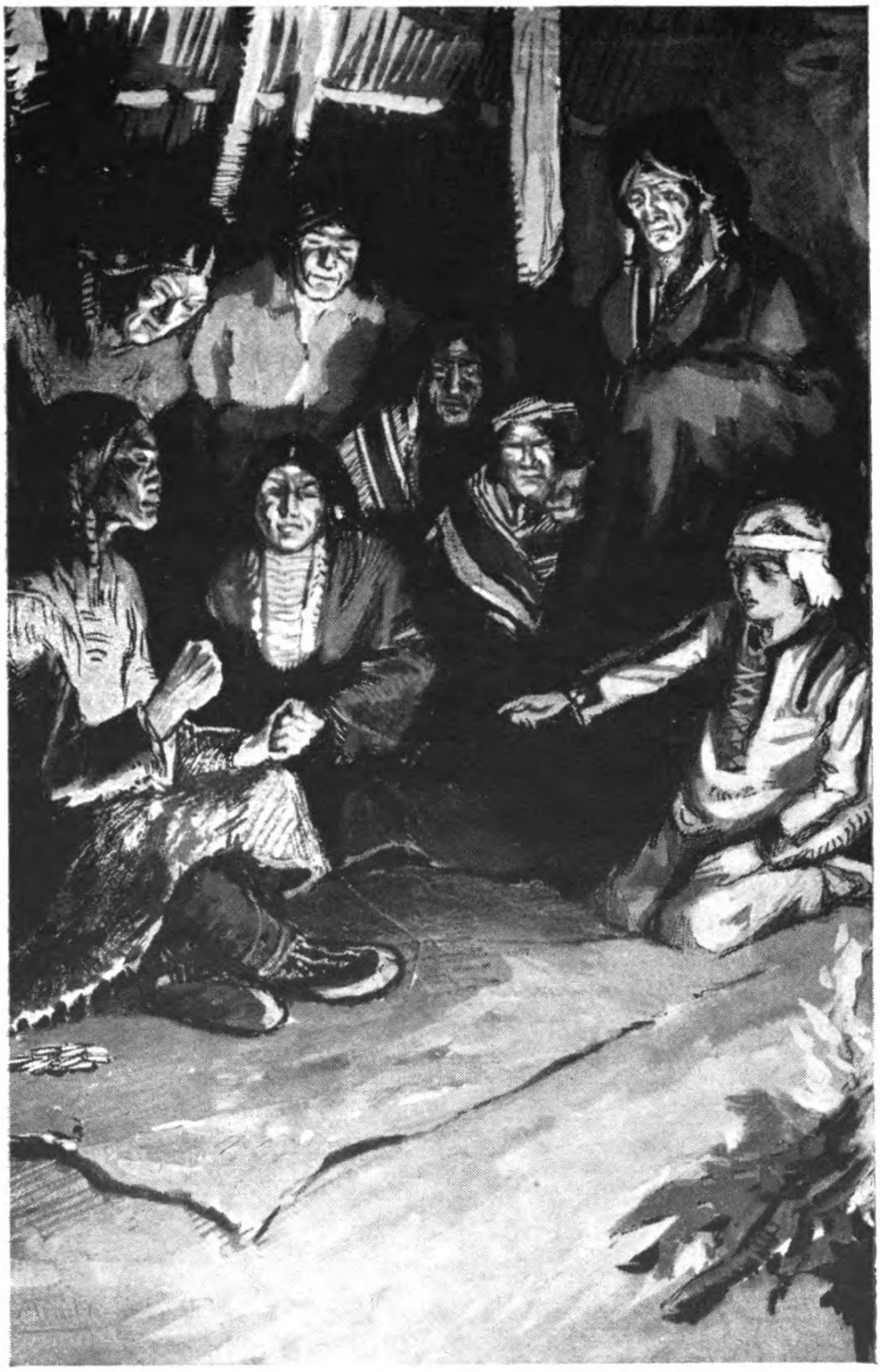
"I do not play against children," objected Eagle Claw. "It would not be fair. But if Star Blanket agrees that a child should take his place and play for the same stakes, I am willing. For me it will be very agreeable to be rich, to own many horses and a fine lodge and beautiful clothes, and to have the Song of All the Birds for my squaw. White Calf shall play, then."

He picked up the bones and began to sing, but no one joined in, and looking at the rows of sullen, scowling faces staring at him, he went on manipulating the pieces in his hands, watched intently by White Calf, who now knelt in front of him astonishingly still and not at all nervous, although he knew, as all the watchers knew, that upon his decision depended the happiness or the ruin of a rich man's home.

At the doorway of the lodge stood Song of All the Birds. Her handsome figure, in its beautiful Indian clothes of richly embroidered doeskin, swayed like a sapling in the wind; her face was pale almost as that of a white woman. She was tearfully pleading to Rising Moon and Wolverine to go in and put a stop to the game.

"He will lose," she cried. "Do something, say something to end it!"

Wolverine forced his way within. He reached the inner circle. But there he stopped and drew a step backward, fearing to break the concentrated attention



At last White Calf pointed to the left fist. 'Open it! Open it!" he demanded.

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of White Calf, whose eyes were intently following the swift bewildering movements of his opponent's hands.

A tense silence had fallen over the eager watchers. Breasts heaved and eyes flashed with hatred of Eagle Claw. In each man's heart there was an almost uncontrollable desire to spring upon him and bury hard fingers in his throat. It seemed as if he himself was reluctant to meet the decision, for he prolonged his efforts to perplex and confuse the calm and smiling boy who sat in front of him.

Twice White Calf raised his hand to denote that he had made his choice. Twice he drew it back. But at last his finger leapt out and pointed to the left fist.

"Open it. Open it," he demanded.

Very slowly, very nervously, Eagle Claw's fingers unwrapped themselves, and in the palm of his left hand lay the marked white bone. Eagle Claw had lost all his winnings. Star Blanket had won back all his horses, and his home was saved. Wild yells of exultation and delight filled the lodge and were repeated outside.

White Calf leapt lightly to his feet.

"And now," he said to Eagle Claw, "you go straight to Mignonette. If you had gone when I told you, the horses would still have been yours. Go!"

He watched the disconsolate loser striding out through the lane that was made for him. None spoke to him, none pitied him. And when he had gone the Indians crowded around White Calf, raising their hands aloft in salutation, telling him their thoughts about the great thing that he had just done. He did not heed them, but, turning to Star Blanket, he said:

"My friend, you will promise me one thing. It is that you will never, never again join in a gambling game. Gambling is bad medicine for both the winner and the loser; and you, who are a great warrior and a wise man, ought not to blacken your good name by joining in the folly of fools. I have spoken."

Star Blanket thrust out his hand.

"You have saved me from myself, White Calf," he said solemnly. "There is nothing that I am not ready to promise you, nothing that you may ask for that is not already yours. Until my dying day you are my master, I am your servant."

On the following morning White Calf and Wolverine went out to gather their ermine snares at the farther side of the coulée. They had collected many ermine skins during the winter to send to the fur-traders at the Hudson's Bay fort, but now that the season of green grass was approaching, the little snow-white animals were changing colour, and the snares were of no further use.

Already the warm chinook wind was blowing; the ice on the lakes and creeks was breaking up, the mountain torrents were flooded with melted snow, and flowers were lifting their heads in the prairie grass.

"It is good for you to be going on the long trail to Fort Sinclair," said White Calf. "When I am old enough, I, too, will go to see the great world, to sleep in the woods and to sail through the lakes and rivers in the loaded canoes. It will be a big adventure. And perhaps I will buy a rifle, and a knife, and a revolver like the one the red-coated policeman carried."

"It may be that our ermine pelts will buy the gun," Wolverine suggested. "What are you looking at?"

White Calf's alert eyes rested on a man and a woman who approached from a neighbouring lodge. The man was leading a magnificent, high-stepping bay horse, saddled and bridled. The woman held the halter of a beautiful white pony.

"It is Star Blanket and Song of All the Birds," said White Calf.

Star Blanket beckoned to him, and when the two boys went up to him he said:

"When White Calf learns to ride, he will want a war horse. This one is his. Berry is his name. He is well trained and gentle."

"And if the war horse is too big for White Calf to mount," added Song of All the Birds, "here is a pony that he can surely ride. Her name is Snowdrift."

White Calf drew back amazed. These two horses were meant for him, to keep as his own! He could hardly believe it. Very well did he know that among the Indians it was considered wrong to refuse a gift; yet he demurred to take possession of these two beautiful animals, the pick of Star Blanket's well-chosen herd.

"It is perhaps because of what happened in the game," he said. "But I looked for no reward, and wanted none. I risked nothing. Whether I won or lost, it would have made no difference."

"To you, no" smiled Song of All the Birds. "But to us—ah, White Calf, what misery you have saved us! Never can we repay you; never can we forget."

She signed to him to mount the beautiful milk-white pony. The saddle was gorgeously decorated, the stirrups were of bright wrought steel, the bridle reins of soft buckskin. When he was seated, Star

Blanket drew a small, light, English-made rifle from under his robe and placed it in front of the boy across the saddle horn.

"Come, Wolverine," laughed White Calf, fingering the reins, "mount you the bigger one and ride in front of me along the white man's trail."

Just as they rode slowly off, Wolverine glanced aside and saw an Indian glide stealthily out from behind one of the near lodges. It was Eagle Claw, and there was a look of burning hatred in his narrow beady eyes as he fixed them upon Star Blanket. Wolverine afterwards had cause to remember that look of bitter enmity.

CHAPTER VIII

FORT SINCLAIR

"GOING to make a start now, O'Connor? That's right. The reports and accounts are in the sealed envelope on my desk. I've entered the necessary evidence against your prisoner. I don't think he'll give you a whole lot of trouble, if you don't peeve him."

Sergeant Silk ceased stropping his razor and tested the edge of the blade on his thumb-nail. He began the operation of shaving in front of a triangle of mirror hardly larger than one of his bronzed hands. The upper part of his sunburned face looked peculiarly ruddy, in contrast with the lather of soap on the cheeks and chin. He manipulated his razor very adroitly.

Wherever he happened to be, whether in barracks or on the lone patrols, no day was so full of duties but Sergeant Silk could take from it five minutes for a shave and three more to brush his hair. He was at present in charge of a remote police outpost where there were no near neighbours to see him; but he was as particular over his toilet as if he were preparing for a parade.

"I guess you'll be back here inside of a week, with the treaty money," he went on. "By that time the first batch of the trading Indians will have come along,

and I shall need you. What trail are you planning to take ? "

Trooper O'Connor stood in front of a large scale map of Canada hung on the wall of the orderly room.

"I will get round north of the Pelicans," he answered, " avoidin' Werwolf Forest. I will hit the Athabasca above the fork of Tearing River. That will bring me out to the east of Two Medicine Lake."

" Exactly," Sergeant Silk stroked his smooth chin. " But what's the matter with Werwolf Forest, Pat ? You ought to make camp there to-night. It's a lovely place by moonlight, and you'd wake in the morning to a charming chorus of singing birds. I'd give a wide birth to Tearing River. It justifies its name, and you couldn't cross the rapids on horseback, you know. By the route you plan, you'll be in the middle of Back Fat Prairie at high noon to-morrow. You'll be choked with dust and frizzled as dry as an overcooked kipper, and your plugs will want gallons more water than you can give them. I'd keep to the hilly country along Moose River and Calling Creek, hitting the Athabasca by way of Cloudy Coulée. It's a longer trail, counting mileage, but quicker in the end, and more comfortable all the way."

" I'm followin' you on the map, Sergeant," said O'Connor. " I will be after takin' your advice entirely. But I wasn't anyways sweet on the idea of sleepin' in that forest, wid only a greasy Injin for companion. Almost-a-Dog hasn't as much English on the tongue of him as you could spread on a threepenny bit, and there's nothing makes me so lonesome as forest trees and the dismal howlin' of the wolves. They're after tellin' me that Werwolf Forest is badly haunted. But it's that way I will be going."

He took the envelope from the table, saluted and went out.

Sergeant Silk presently followed him outside and, mounting his troop-horse, rode off in an opposite direction. The morning sun, glowing on the chestnut of his horse and the flaming scarlet of his tunic, kindled a line of star specks on the brass cartridges in his belt and brought out many a point of glittering light on harness and accoutrement. He sat in his saddle as if he and his mount were one ; not with the free and lazy indifference of the ordinary prairie rider. With his carbine poised across the horn of his stock saddle, he held himself erect in the military manner, bearing in his every movement the signs of discipline and of physical fitness, hardened by years of toughest adventure in the wildest of places.

From the high ground above the lake, he watched Trooper O'Connor and his Indian prisoner riding along the trail. When they disappeared amid the feathery green of a bluff of spruce trees, he turned and continued his journey along the side of the lake until he came abruptly among the log huts and warehouses of Fort Sinclair and could see the familiar red cross flag of the Hudson's Bay Company fluttering above them in the clear air.

The large courtyard was crowded with canvas-covered wagons, and beyond the stockades many draught horses, mules and bullocks were grazing on the luscious grama-grass. At long trestle tables outside the main gates many freighters, bull-whackers and half-breeds sat at breakfast. Sergeant Silk touched the rim of his Stetson hat in return to their salutations as he rode past them into the courtyard.

At the open door of the Factor's white-painted dwell-

ing-house he dismounted, dropped his reins over his chestnut's head, and strode within with a metallic clink of spurs.

"Good morning, Factor," he called out as he entered the living-room and glanced at the breakfast table.

"Ah, Sir Hector," he then exclaimed in surprise, "you are up early! I expect it was those lake trout that drew you out of your bunk, eh? Good, aren't they, sir?"

"Excellent, Sergeant—quite equal to your recommendation," returned the man at the end of the breakfast table. "I caught them myself, at sunrise. And the flies you sent me could not have been improved upon. I have just been telling the Factor how sorry I am to be going away to-day. I could put in a very enjoyable fortnight at this station if I might spare the time. But one must attend to duty before pleasure."

"Why, certainly," nodded Silk, seating himself in an easy chair near the open window, and taking out his pipe. "But in any case you wouldn't have been left undisturbed. We shall be crowded out with noisy Indians in a day or two—perhaps even before another sleep—and I guess there's no man in Canada who knows better than you do, what an H.B. trading post can be like when there are Indians around."

Sir Hector Allardyce was one of the governors of the Hudson's Bay Company. He had come to Fort Sinclair on a visit of inspection, and was about to continue his tour of other trading posts in the far West. He rose from the breakfast table now, a very tall and handsome man, wearing a tweed riding suit with brown leggings and spurred boots.

"I have no feeling against the Indian when he is treated with sympathy and understanding," he said.

"But he is changing, Sergeant. The Indians of to-day are very different from those I knew when I first came out to Western Canada. Then, although fighters by nature, they were peaceable among themselves; they were honest, truthful, courageous, industrious and sober. Now they are too often lawless, dishonest, cowardly, idle, and intemperate. You men of the Mounted Police have done wonders in keeping them within bounds; but since the coming of the white man, the Redskins as a race have steadily deteriorated."

"Exactly," agreed Silk. "That is the point. We have demoralized them. We've restricted their freedom by hedging them round in Reservations; we've occupied their hunting grounds, and now we are systematically robbing them of the buffalo, their main source of livelihood. There is no doubt about the buffalo getting killed off. I have known of a herd so large that it took twelve hours to pass a given point, going at a full stampede. The plains were black with them. But now you can seldom find a herd big enough to fill this court-yard here. In a very few years, the buffalo will be extinct."

"And when that time comes," said Sir Hector, looking out at the Factor's well-kept garden, "the Indian will turn to agriculture."

"Agriculture is not what he wants," rejoined Sergeant Silk. "He wants the buffalo. He is naturally improvident. He never understood the folly of slaughtering more than he needed for his own use. If there was too much meat, he took the choice bits and left the rest for the wolves. He could always sell the robes to the white man. And what has the white man given him in return? Fire-water! Doped fire-

water—the biggest all-round curse that ever was invented for the ruination of red humanity."

"And white no less than red," concluded Sir Hector. "I am happy to think, however, that the responsibility for the demoralization of the Indian does not lie with the Hudson's Bay Company."

"Perhaps not," admitted Silk. "But there are still a good many traders who don't see the iniquity in selling alcohol to the Indians. It's good sport, I suppose; and there's always a spice of adventure in the trade of smuggling. But since whisky running is against the law, it has to be checked, the same as horse stealing and cattle rustling, or any other crime. But Fort Sinclair at least is free from blame. I've been nosing around the trade-rooms here. They're stocked to overflowing with useful merchandise which the Indians will appreciate, but I'm glad to say I haven't yet detected anything in the form of a beverage more harmful than Pain-killer."

"We've got a fair big stock of that commodity, Sergeant," interposed the Factor. "I am anticipating a heavy demand for Pain-killer when the Redskins arrive."

"By the way," said the Governor, turning to the Factor, "our English customers are clamouring just now for more and more ermine—ermine and silver fox, as well as black. I wish you could induce the trappers to bring in more."

"If I were a trapper instead of a policeman," said Silk, accompanying the other two men to the door, "I should start an island farm on one of the lakes and devote myself exclusively to the breeding of ermine and silver foxes. There's a pile of money in the idea of breeding wild animals in comfortable captivity, sir."

"There is a fortune in it," nodded Sir Hector, preparing to mount his waiting horse. "Come along to Ottawa, Sergeant, and we'll talk it over. Come whenever you like. Lady Allardyce, I am certain, will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

Sergeant Silk, standing on the doorstep, was looking downward to the lake. Far away in the blue distance he saw a long, straggling procession of canoes, their wet paddles flashing in the sunlight.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "Here come some of our trade Indians! I shall have to go down and see to their camping-grounds. I'm sorry, Sir Hector. I had intended to ride a few miles along the trail with you; but it is not possible. Good-bye. I hope we shall meet again some day."

They shook hands, and the Governor rode off, escorted by three armed servants and as many pack horses, while Silk made his way down to the landing-place to superintend the mooring of the canoes and the discharging of their heavy cargoes of furs.

CHAPTER IX

A LESSON IN GUN PLAY

"THAT is the place," announced Rising Moon, pointing forward along the lake. "That is Fort Sinclair—the big white lodge among the pine trees, with the red flag beckoning to us."

His large canoe lagged at the rear of the straggling fleet. Wolverine was perspiring at the nearest paddle. His naked, sunburned back, shining with moisture, was only partially shielded by his long black hair. With every strong backward stroke of his blade the knitted muscles of his arms and shoulders moved like swelling waves under the smooth, healthy skin. Behind Wolverine, on the soft cushion of a bale of pelts, sat White Calf, gazing in silent wonder at the first white man's dwelling that he had ever consciously seen.

"Do you see it?" asked Rising Moon.

"I see it," White Calf answered. "It is beautiful. And look! Down by the water side there is a horseman with a red coat!"

"Always where there are many Indians you will find men of the Mounted Police ready to help them," Rising Moon told him.

Ever since the day of their starting on this long canoe journey through the rivers and lakes of Alberta he had been explaining to the boys all the strange and wonderful things that they had seen. To both Wol-

verine and White Calf this first sight of the great world beyond their home had been a constant succession of surprises.

From Sweetgrass Lake they had entered the great Wabiskaw River, now flowing smoothly through prairie lands ablaze with flowers, now rushing through gloomy cañons or darksome forests, or opening out into silvery lakes that mirrored the mountains. Many times when the river narrowed into rapids too fierce to be faced, or tumbled over rocky shelves in dangerous cataracts, the canoes and scows were all unloaded and carried by land over difficult portages, again to be loaded when the difficulty was passed. But heavy labour was a small price to pay for days and days of indolent enjoyment.

At night the weary Indians pitched their tents and teepees on the shore, lighting their cooking fires and mosquito smudges. White Calf and Wolverine chose always to sleep in the open, under a tree or against a rock, with a fragrant couch of balsam branches for their bed, and the starlit sky for a canopy, and there they would lie and listen to the sounds of many a woodland tragedy, or watch the antlered moose wading knee-deep in the moonlit creek where the soft-eyed caribou came in countless herds, stalked by the stealthy lynx and the prowling timber-wolf.

In the early morning and often during the day, the two boys would plunge into lake or river for a swim, and often when the canoes were at rest, they would wander into the forest glades in search of adventure. Never in all his life had White Calf been so happy.

And now as the canoes neared their destination a yet greater interest was opening out to him. On the farther shores of the lake his sharp, observant eyes

caught a glimpse of four horsemen. Their dress was new to him, and he could see that they were white men. He had never before seen so many white men all together. He wished that he had been nearer to hear them talk. He wanted very much to discover by comparison if Rising Moon and Red Cherry spoke true English.

With every moment as the fleet drew nearer to the Fort, his excitement increased. It was not an important trading post ; but the windows, the chimneys, the flag-staff, with its flag of the red cross and caribou, the loopholes for defence of the stout stockade and the cannon mounted on the corner towers, filled him with wonder.

Near the gates he saw for the first time a freight wagon with wheels. There were no horses in the shafts, and he was disappointed at not seeing the wagon in movement with its four wheels revolving.

At last the canoes came abreast of the landing-place. In turns they were brought alongside the jetty to be unloaded, and then towed out into the lake to their temporary moorings. Star Blanket was in command of the expedition. The Big Rain Piegans were the first of the trading Indians to arrive at Fort Sinclair. Soon other bands of different tribes—Crees, Bloods, Assiniboins, Crows, and Kutenais—would come from other Agencies ; but Star Blanket as first comer was allowed to choose his own camping ground, and the lodge poles were accordingly carried up to a stretch of level grass behind the fort, where they were set up in a wide circle in the bend of a stream of pure water.

It happened that the canoe next to Rising Moon's belonged to Eagle Claw. It followed that the bales of peltry from each would come together in the great stack of furs being piled upon the quay, and it was therefore easy for Eagle Claw to abstract a small

bundle of silver and black fox-skins from Rising Moon's store, and add them to his own. But from a distance White Calf was watching him. Often during the voyage he had seen Eagle Claw's beady eyes covetously fixed upon those precious fox-skins. He went boldly up to him now.

"You are taking what does not belong to you, Eagle Claw," he said, laying his hand on the furs. "They are mine—mine and Wolverine's. I will take them back."

The Indian snarled angrily; but he was afraid of White Calf. Ever since the incident of the game of fate he had been afraid; not of the boy himself, but of his "medicine" and of his influence among the Piegans. And he turned away like a dog that has been whipped, while White Calf took the fox furs under his arm, together with a large bundle of ermine pelts, which were also his own private property, marked with his sign.

He was carrying them away towards the camp when he met Wolverine.

"Ha!" cried Wolverine. "But the trade room is not open yet. It is no use you taking our furs to sell."

"They will be safe in the teepee," said White Calf. "Come with me."

By the gates of the fort they halted to watch one of the Mounted Police riding out on a beautiful chestnut. He drew rein and looked down at them with curious scrutiny. Wolverine now wore his buckskin shirt and leggings. White Calf was dressed in doeskin, very soft and ornamented with coloured beads beautifully worked by Red Cherry. His moccasins also were of soft doeskin, and round his head there was a wide band of pure white buffalo skin, edged with blue beads.

His face and neck and hands were so deeply sunburned that he looked almost as dark in complexion as Wolverine himself. He looked Indian in spite of his fairness.

Wolverine met the fixed gaze of the horseman's blue eyes.

"Is it that you are Corp'al Silk?" he asked, speaking in English.

"Why, certainly, that's my name," came the quick sharp answer. "And if I'm not mistaken your own name is Wolverine. I'm surprised at your remembering me. It's years and years since we met on that winter evening in Sweetgrass Coulée. It's likely your brother was only a tiny papoose at that time. Say, how is Red Cherry? I've often thought of Red Cherry and her fondness for white things. You've got a nice collection of white ermine there, I notice. What's your notion? I'm curious to know what you intend to buy in exchange for those pelts. They're worth a heap—especially the black fox."

"My brother would buy a gun," returned Wolverine. He was accustomed to calling White Calf his brother.

"Gee!" exclaimed Silk. "A gun, eh?" He glanced at the younger boy.

"Yes," added White Calf, "a gun like yours."

Sergeant Silk laughed, turned in his saddle, and dismounted.

"Come along with me," he beckoned, leading his horse back into the compound. At the door of the trade-room he found the Factor. "Say, Factor," he cried. "I've brought along your first traders of the season. You're not opening for business until to-morrow, but you'll favour me by taking charge of these ermine and black fox pelts and reckoning up the highest price you can allow for them, see? We'll take

a bit on account. Let us have that little silver-mounted six-shooter you showed me a while back."

The Factor glanced at the furs. He saw that they were especially good in quality. Then he looked dubiously at Sergeant Silk. "You shall have full market value, Sergeant," he said. "As for the gun—say, ain't it some dangerous, him bein' a mere kid?"

"Depends on who handles it," said Silk. "That kid has a clean eye and sure nerve. He covets a gun, same as mine." He turned to White Calf. "Hold your hand out," he ordered. "Point your finger at the middle of my right eye. Now hold it so. See, Factor? There ain't a quiver in that hand. It's steady as a rock. Quit and fetch that gun. Take the pelts along with you. We'll conclude the deal to-morrow."

He followed into the trade room, leaving the two boys to admire his troop horse, tethered to the tie post. When he returned he held a beautiful little revolver in his hand, and a packet of cartridges. He gave the weapon to White Calf.

"'Tain't loaded," he said, showing the boy how to hold it. "Now aim at my eye, same as before. Press the trigger six times."

White Calf obeyed him. He was excited; his hand trembled very slightly. He found the trigger astonishingly easy to work.

"Good," nodded Silk. "Now come down to the beach and we'll find a target."

They were followed by many freighters and Indians, amongst whom was Eagle Claw. At the waterside there was quite a crowd around them. Silk, having loaded the revolver, gathered a handful of large pebbles and laid them in a pile at his feet.

"I'm going to throw these one at a time, straight up

in the air," he told White Calf, handing him the gun. "When the stone is falling, you shoot at it. Ready?"

"I am ready," said White Calf with his finger on the trigger.

At the first throw he took aim, but did not shoot. At the second he fired too quick, at the third too late. He missed the fourth and fifth, but the sixth stone swerved aside in its descent as it was touched.

"You've still another shot," cried Silk. "Now!" And he threw the stone very high.

This time the pebble was struck so truly that it was shattered into fragments in mid-air as it fell.

"Heap good!" cried one of the Indians.

"Very good indeed," exclaimed Silk, patting the boy on the shoulder.

"Say, Sergeant," called one of the freighters. "Serpose you shows the comp'ny how you kin do that thar stunt with your own six-gun."

"Why, certainly," agreed the Sergeant.

The Mounted Police were all good marksmen, and it was to their interest to show the Indians how smart they could be with the gun. Silk told the freighter to throw the stones two at a time.

The man threw them high. As they left his hand, Silk whipped out his revolver and fired. One of the rising stones broke into splinters, the other as it fell was struck sideways. Of the remaining four that were thrown, one was missed and three were hit.

The freighters and Indians yelled their appreciation of such good marksmanship. But Eagle Claw slunk away.

"Wough!" he grunted. "It is the man of the dog-sled!" And he looked on the back of his hand at the livid scar brought there by this same man's bullet a dozen years before.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST SHY

STAR BLANKET had dressed himself with care. He wore his great feathered war-bonnet and his mantle of ceremony, decorated with ermine and many stars worked in porcupine quills. He had even painted his face, to signify that he was acting in his official capacity as a Piegan chief. The trading Indians, crowded about the entrance to the fort, made way for him as he passed through, accompanied by White Calf and followed by Wolverine.

Within the gates he was met by Sergeant Silk, who greeted him with a formal hand-shake.

"Maybe you're anxious to get along with the treaty money business, are you, Chief?" said the red-coated officer. He spoke in the tongue of the Piegans.

"We have many people," returned Star Blanket. "They are very poor. They would have the money before they begin to trade. Rising Moon has written their names on the paper which I have brought."

Sergeant Silk took the document and passed it in turn to an orderly who sat at a trestle table in the shade of the veranda, bidding him attend to it.

"The Factor is ready, and your people can begin trading right now," he then told Star Blanket. "But before the crowd comes in"—he glanced aside at White

Calf and Wolverine—"I guess these two boys are entitled to have the first shy."

His eyes were bent in strange and calculating curiosity upon the figure of White Calf.

The weather was hot, and but for a necklace of beads, White Calf was naked down to the belt which held up his fringed doeskin leggings. The belt was made of the plaited skin of a rattlesnake and bows of blue ribbon. From it was suspended the boy's new revolver. His face and hands were very clean, and his long brown hair had been newly combed and bound round with the band of white buffalo skin. His ornaments and clothing, from his head-dress down to his beaded moccasins, were distinctly Indian, and yet there was something about him which betrayed his difference in race. What surprised Sergeant Silk was the extreme ivory whiteness of his skin beneath his bare arms and under his chin, where the scorching sun had not caught it.

From White Calf, Silk looked at Wolverine, and then back to White Calf. He realized now that he had been mistaken in supposing that they were brothers. They were not at all alike in feature.

"What is your name?" he inquired of the younger boy.

"It is White Buffalo Calf," he was told.

Silk nodded, looking into the boy's clear blue eyes.

"Is that the only name you've got?" he asked wonderingly.

"Yes. Only White Calf. Red Cherry gave me my name."

"Ah," said Silk. "Red Cherry is fond of things that are white—white birds, white flowers, white people—and I guess she is fond of you, eh? But where did you come from? I'd lay dollars to dough-

nuts there isn't a drop of Indian blood in you. Who was your father? Who was your mother? Where were you born?"

White Calf turned to Star Blanket and spoke to him.

"He had no father—no mother," Star Blanket proceeded to explain. "He came to the Piegans as a gift from the Sun. He is great medicine. He is sacred. He can talk to the Sun, and the Sun listens; the Sun obeys him; the Sun keeps him from all harm. To me—Star Blanket—he is more than all else. Everything that is mine is his. I and my squaw, Song of All the Birds, would rather die than that any harm should come to White Calf."

Sergeant Silk knitted his brows in perplexity. His interest in White Calf was aroused. There was something mysterious about the boy, something which puzzled him, and all the more because of Star Blanket's vague and inconclusive explanation. He wanted to get to the bottom of the mystery. But for the present he said nothing further, and only led the way into the trade room and up to the long wide counter where the Factor stood waiting to deal with traders.

In front of the Factor were several stacks of tokens or tallies of exchange. They were made of lead and stamped with the arms of the Hudson's Bay Company. Of no value in themselves, they represented value, and an Indian receiving a certain number of them in exchange for his furs could at once purchase whatever goods he chose from the loaded shelves of groceries, tobacco, ironmongery, cloth and haberdashery. Sergeant Silk explained the commercial process to White Calf, and told him that the money on the counter was his in return for the ermine and fox skins that he and Wolverine had brought in.

"But it is too much," White Calf demurred at sight of so much wealth. "Our furs are not worth such a big price. How many pieces must we pay for my gun?"

"The gun is already paid for," Silk assured him. "You've got to spend the rest on anything you like—glass beads and satin ribbons for Red Cherry, tea, sugar, flour, pots and pans—have a look round. Go behind the counter and overhaul the shelves. Take one of those bottles of scent for Red Cherry. Say it's from me."

"It is beads that I want," said White Calf, "beads and ribbon and red cloth, a pair of scissors and needles. Can I have all those?"

"Why, certainly, and heaps more than that—as much as you can carry away."

"Can I have another gun?"

"Say, ain't one enough," laughed Silk. "What do you want a second one for?"

"For Wolverine," White Calf answered quickly.

The Factor produced the required articles, deducting payment.

"Go ahead," urged Silk. "You're too modest. You'll want some new steel traps, won't you? Did you trap those ermine and black fox yourselves?"

"For the ermine we used snares," said White Calf. "It was Wolverine who trapped the best black fox. I was sorry, because she was the sister of Thunder Cloud."

"And who is Thunder Cloud?" asked Silk.

"He is my brother—a beautiful black fox that I caught when he was a little cub. Red Cherry is feeding him while I am away."

"A tame black fox, eh?" reflected Sergeant Silk, remembering his recent conversation with Sir Hector Allardyce. "Then you could breed from him, if you

got a black vixen to mate him with ? Look here, you two boys, I'm going to give you a good tip. There's a big demand for black fox pelts. The Company would buy all that you can bring in at a hundred dollars a skin. You'd make a fortune if you started breeding them, the same as you might breed rabbits or chickens or ponies. Likely I will ride along some time soon to Sweetgrass and tell you how to go about it, shall I ? "

" Red Cherry would be very glad to see you among our lodges," White Calf told him.

Silk conducted the two boys round the trade-room and helped them to select their miscellaneous purchases. When the final balance was struck it was found that the credit was on the wrong side, but the Factor would not take any of the commodities back.

" You will pay me the next time you come," he smiled as he turned to his next customer and began to look over a bundle of peltry.

Sergeant Silk noticed in passing that the Indian who had been opening the bundle had turned abruptly at sight of him as if to hide his face. Silk strolled round into the now crowded space in front of the counter and casually glanced at the man. He did not remember ever to have seen him before. Rejoining Star Blanket, he said in a half whisper to the chief :

" Look at the man who is now at the counter drinking out of a bottle of pain-killer. He appears to have seen me before—to know me. What is his name ? "

" His name is Eagle Claw," Star Blanket answered. " He has perhaps reason to know you, to fear you. But I think that it is for me, not you, that the evil is in his eyes. For many moons Eagle Claw has been my enemy."

CHAPTER XI

A PROBLEM FOR SERGEANT SILK

MANY bands of trading Indians from the outlying agencies arrived at Fort Sinclair that week. Some had come by the waterways in their deeply laden canoes, but most of them had travelled laboriously with their pack animals and camp equipment across the long prairie trails.

There were many tribes, speaking different tongues; but each band was kept apart in its own allotted encampment. Sergeant Silk was on active duty amongst them, keeping them in order, seeing to their water supplies and grazing grounds, helping them to check and count their close-packed greasy bales of buffalo robes and their smaller bundles of deer, elk, beaver, and other pelts that had been tanned and dressed for market during the previous winter.

He rode into their midst unattended, directing them by sign and commanding voice, shepherding them with wonderful skill. None dared to disobey him. They recognized him as their master, the representative of the white man's government, and they knew that while his ways with them were easy and considerate, yet he was watching them all the time with his alert and certain eyes.

It was only the white men and half breeds, the bull whackers and freighters, who had come west with the

freight wagons, who ventured to take advantage of him. Some seemed to think that because he was alone and could not be in two places at once they might be bold enough to transact some illicit trade with the Indians. But it was not easy to hoodwink Sergeant Silk.

Whilst riding to and fro he missed nothing. He noticed that a certain wagon stood somewhat apart from the rest, and that its white canvas cover was conspicuously marked with a smear of green paint. Time after time Indians either singly or in pairs loitered beside this wagon, talking with the freighter who was in charge of it. Silk watched these Indians with suspicion. One of them, a Piegan wearing a blue blanket, went off to a distant part of the encampment. Silk presently followed and rode up to him, but did not betray that he recognized him as Eagle Claw.

"Open your robe and let me see what you are carrying under your arm," he ordered.

Very reluctantly Eagle Claw obeyed.

"Exactly," nodded Silk, holding out his hand. "Give it to me."

He took the bottle, pulled out the cork, and poured the contents of fire-water to the ground, handing back the empty bottle.

"That's all right," he said, and rode directly to the suspected wagon.

Halting at the tail board, he looked inside and sniffed.

"Just let me see what you've got hidden beneath those gunny sacks, Lee," he demanded quietly.

"Thar's nothin', Sergeant," said the wagoner, lighting his pipe with nervously trembling fingers, "nothin' but a few pelts I bin buyin', kinder private, for my missus back east in Toronto."

"I want to look at what's under those sacks," pursued Silk. "Climb up and show me. Don't keep me waiting."

The man climbed by one of the wheels, raised the corner of a sack, and held up a small bundle of skins.

"Them's beaver," he declared.

"Now move the cover of that freight case," Silk commanded. "Take out the bottles, one by one, and empty them over the side of the wagon. Be smart. I am waiting to see the job finished."

He waited until the last bottle was emptied.

"That's all right," he concluded. "And now you will go right away to the captain of your outfit and report yourself. Tell him that you are under arrest for selling smuggled whisky to the Indians, and that he is to keep an eye on you until it's convenient for me to put you in prison, see?"

"Prison?" echoed Lee.

"Why, certainly. That is the penalty for the crime you've committed."

It was not necessary for Silk to accompany his prisoner. Later in the day, indeed, he found Lee at the police barracks, safe in the custody of the corporal in charge.

Early in the summer evening, Sergeant Silk rode on a short and leisurely patrol along the trail to the encampments. Instead of his loaded carbine he carried a large basket over the horn of his saddle. His first purpose was to assure himself that the Indians had settled themselves in peaceful comfort. Passing through the circles of lodges, he saw the Redskins enjoying themselves noisily over the wheel and arrow game and gambling in the game of hide-the-bone. Squaws were busy over cooking fires, airing blankets

or chopping wood, laughing and chattering at their work.

He came at length into the camp of the Piegans, and made his way to a particular lodge, where he drew to a halt and dismounted. The door flap was wide open. Beside it on the clean skin cover there was painted a large white buffalo. He looked at it and smiled.

"Not half bad," he ruminated. "Couldn't do a whole lot better myself. Hullo, White Calf! I'm admiring your totem. Who is the artist? Yourself, eh? Say, now, what's your idea making a buffalo white instead of black according to nature? You might as well have painted it blue while you were at it."

"Mine is a Sun buffalo," White Calf answered, and he raised a finger to the white band above his forehead. "This is from the robe of a white buffalo," he explained.

"Won't you come in, Sergeant?" Rising Moon invited, appearing at the door.

Sergeant Silk stooped his head and shoulders and entered the lodge, still carrying his basket, which he deposited on a wolf-skin floor mat. Wolverine brought forward a camp chair for the unexpected visitor and then turned to a trestle table, clearing it of a collection of groceries and haberdashery.

"I hope you won't think me rude, Collis," Silk began, "but I'm inviting myself to take supper in your lodge. Don't be alarmed. I've brought the goods, and I guess there's enough for the four of us. That's right, Wolverine. We'll have a clear table. But you've heaps of time to fold that ribbon neatly, and don't mislay that packet of needles. A needle is proverbially a difficult thing to find once it's lost. Yes, we'll need whatever you have in the shape of chairs."

Very quickly and methodically, having opened his basket, he spread a white cloth on the table, produced plates and knives and forks, brought out a loaf of white bread, a dish of butter, a couple of roasted chickens, lettuces, cheese, a large plum cake, a bunch of black grapes, and about a dozen ripe Canadian peaches.

"The fruit wasn't grown at Fort Sinclair," he announced. "It was given to me by one of the Governors of the H.B.C.,who was along here. He left just as your canoes entered the lake."

"We saw him riding along the trail," said White Calf, staring with wondering eyes at the table. "Why did you not eat the fruit yourself? Don't you like it?"

"Why, certainly I like it. And so will you when you put your teeth into one of the peaches. But we'll try you on roast chicken first."

Much to his astonishment when they were all seated and served, he saw White Calf bow his head and heard him say grace. Further to his surprise, the two boys handled their knives and forks as if they were accustomed to the use of them; and they ate daintily.

Half-way through the meal he looked across at White Calf and said:

"What were you going to tell me about that buffalo? You said it was white. In all my experience I have seen only one white buffalo. I am curious to know if mine and yours can possibly have been the same animal."

"They were the same," White Calf answered. "It was a big white bull. Wolverine killed him."

"You will perhaps remember, Sergeant," interposed Rising Moon, "that when you came among our lodges to arrest the man Black Weasel, you told us of a buffalo

herd and of a white bull that you had seen that same day. You have not forgotten ? "

" Forgotten ? Why, no, I remember the animal well. I was very close to him and saw his beautiful dark eyes. I could almost have stroked the deep, fluffy white wool between his horns."

" Ah ! " exclaimed Rising Moon. " Then there was nothing over his face ? He carried no burden ? "

" How do you mean ? " Silk looked up blankly. " A wild buffalo is not a beast of burden."

" Sergeant," resumed Rising Moon, " I am going to tell you a very strange thing. It is this—that when Wolverine and I rode up to that white bull and Wolverine shot him dead, there was a quantity of cloth and wearing apparel entangled about his horns and hanging over his face like a curtain. In amongst that clothing we discovered a human child, a white boy child. That child, sir, was White Calf."

" What ? " cried Sergeant Silk, in amazement. " Are you telling me a fairy tale ? "

" I am telling you a plain fact," averred Rising Moon. " I took the child home. I gave him into the care of Red Cherry. The Piegans still believe that he was a gift from the Sun. They hold him sacred. Can you throw any light on the mystery, Sergeant ? "

Without speaking, Silk passed round the plate of peaches, taking one himself and beginning to peel it. He sat for a long time thinking in silence.

" No," he said at last. " The problem is beyond me. I am not superstitious enough to imagine that the sun or any supernatural agency had any hand in the business. But I cannot explain. It is too long ago for me to remember if we noticed in the snow any other tracks than our own. Yet there must sure have

been tracks—the ruts of wagon wheels or of sled runners, or the hoof marks of horses. Did none of your own people notice any ? "

" There were no tracks," declared Wolverine; " none except the trails of our own scouts, who saw no signs until they came upon the buffalo herd."

" Queer ! " ruminated Silk. " But wait. When Louis Carillon and I were some miles out on our journey, we were attacked by a couple of Indians, who attempted to rescue our prisoner. They were Piegans who had tracked us from your own village. Did they see nothing ? "

" They were not asked," said Wolverine. " But one of them—Eagle Claw—is now here at Fort Sinclair. Perhaps he will remember ; but I do not think he will tell."

" Why not ? " questioned Silk.

" Because," said Wolverine, " Eagle Claw is the enemy of White Calf. He is a bad Indian, and he is afraid of the Mounted Police. His tongue is crooked and he will not tell you the truth."

CHAPTER XII

SERGEANT SILK'S THEORY

"I THINK we shall find him over there," said White Calf, pointing across the open ground to one of the largest of the many groups of noisy Indians. "Wherever there is much gambling going on, there you will find Eagle Claw. He is a great gambler."

Sergeant Silk had taken his troop horse to the trading-post, and now, as he walked with White Calf and Wolverine amongst the brown teepees of the Piegans, he carried a small bundle of beaver pelts under his arm. He had taken it from one of the freights wagons. White Calf did not know what he intended to do with these furs.

"Tell me," said Silk, "why is this chap Eagle Claw your enemy, and the enemy of Star Blanket?"

"It is because of a gambling game," White Calf told him. And he proceeded to explain how Star Blanket, playing in the hide-the-bone game against Eagle Claw, and having already lost all his horses, had come to the point of laying all the rest of his belongings as a final stake in the desperate game.

"How did it end?" asked Sergeant Silk. "I don't see how it could affect you, however it turned out."

"Oh, well," White Calf went on, "I did not want Star Blanket to lose his lodge and his squaw and everything, and so I took his place in the game. I played

instead of him. I guessed in which hand the bone was hidden, and Star Blanket won all his horses back again."

"Exactly," Silk nodded. "That made them quits. Naturally Eagle Claw was rattled at losing such a good haul. But you must sure be a clever gambler yourself, sonny, to win in such company."

"There is no one who can play quite so well as White Calf," observed Wolverine. "The Piegans say that the Sun always helps him."

Approaching the throng of gamblers, Silk quickly singled out the man of whom he was in search. He stood behind Eagle Claw for a little while, watching the two principal players as the bones were juggled to and fro in the hands of the man facing him. When the gambling song ceased and the onlookers had settled their bets, he touched Eagle Claw on the shoulder.

"I want you," he said.

At sight of the red sleeve against his blue blanket, Eagle Claw moved in alarm as if to escape.

"Don't be afraid," said Silk, accompanying him out of the crowd; "I have nothing against you. I took the fire-water from you to-day. It was my duty to take it. But that is no reason why you should lose the pelts that you paid for it. Here are your beaver skins. We men of the red coats try to be just. We do not want to rob the Red Man. Our laws are hard; but it was not Eagle Claw who broke the law. It is the man who sold him the fire-water who will be punished."

"Wough!" grunted Eagle Claw, reaching out his hand. "Heap good."

Sergeant Silk's glance rested upon the back of the man's hand, where there was the mark of an old bullet wound.

"Where and when did Eagle Claw come by that scar?" he asked very quietly.

Eagle Claw shrank back.

"Exactly," pursued Silk. "You do not forget me, I see. But we'll let that pass. You did not rescue your brother that time, and he paid the penalty for his crime. That was many winters ago. We will bury the hatchet. But listen to me, Eagle Claw. There is something that you can tell me—something that I want very much to know. Let your thoughts fly back to that morning when Black Weasel was taken away with the dog-train. It was the day when the white buffalo was killed—when Little White Buffalo Calf came among the Piegans. You remember?"

"Eagle Claw remembers."

"Right!" said Silk. "Now think hard—think deeply—and tell me if, when you were riding beyond Warm Spring Creek and the Bird Tail Divide, you saw any tracks on the snow?"

Eagle Claw shook his head.

"It is many winters ago," he answered; "but there were the tracks of the buffalo herd."

"None else? No tracks of dog-sleds, of wheels, of horses, or travois poles?"

"No; there were no tracks. The snow was new and clean."

"That's sure so," reflected Silk. "If there'd been any tracks the snow had covered them before you got there."

"Wait," said the Indian, fixing his beady eyes on the Sergeant. "Eagle Claw remembers now. His medicine has told him to remember that the snow had melted on the ground where there had been a camp fire."

"Ah!" cried Silk; "then there had been a camp fire? The ashes were still warm enough to melt the snow that fell on them!"

He questioned Eagle Claw further, but no information was added to that one fact that within a few hours of the time when the white bull was killed, and almost certainly during the previous night, a camp fire had been burning on the plain which the buffalo herd had crossed. By what extraordinary means the buffalo bull had come to be encumbered with its burden of a living human child remained, however, a baffling mystery.

Very reasonably, Sergeant Silk connected White Calf with that camp on the prairie; but this did not lead him to any satisfactory theory as to who and what the people had been who had made camp in the place. White men, apart from the Mounted Police, were not in the habit of trailing across the plains in winter time; there was no conceivable reason for them to do so. And yet, if the camping party had been Indians, as seemed most likely, how did they come to have a white child in their company? White Calf was assuredly not the offspring of any Redskin parents; there was no slightest trace of Indian blood in his fair complexion, his wavy brown hair, his blue eyes and red lips, and his Anglo-Saxon features.

Puzzling over the problem, Silk came to this conclusion—that a party of marauding Indians had made a raid on some ranch or habitation where white people lived, and that they had carried off the rancher's wife and baby as their captives.

This theory did not account for the circumstance of little White Calf being found on the dead buffalo bull. But the bull was a white one: it was conspicuous

among the herd of its black and brown companions. Silk believed that there was some design in this—some human intention.

He argued to himself that the conspicuous white bull had been purposely chosen as the one that was to carry White Calf ; that the infant's distressed mother, unable to escape from her savage captors, and fearful lest she should die and the child be left in the possession of the Indians, had deliberately stolen out from the camp with the baby in her arms, and bound it by its clothing between the horns of the sleeping white buffalo.

It would have been an inhuman thing for even a desperate mother to sacrifice her child in such a way, and it seemed improbable to Silk that, even if the buffalo herd were sleeping near at the time, the leading bull—a wild and ferocious animal—would allow anyone to approach him. But if the woman had not done this, then an Indian must have taken this means of getting rid of the child.

One thing was certain. So many years had gone by since White Calf had been brought among the lodges of the Piegans that there could be very little hope of tracing his parentage. Was it possible that the clothing he had worn at the time of his strange discovery might supply some clue ? Sergeant Silk resolved to pay an early visit to the Big Rain Reserve and pursue his investigations. But in the meantime he could do nothing further towards a solution of the mystery.

CHAPTER XIII

A CHALLENGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

"WHY," Eagle Claw asked himself as he turned away from Sergeant Silk, carrying his restored bundle of beaver pelts, "why has this white man with the red shirt put all these questions to Eagle Claw? Why does he want so much to know about the prairie trails of so many winters ago? It is that his eyes see what the Piegans are too blind to see. He sees that White Calf is not an Indian; that he is a child of the Paleface; that he did not come as a gift from the Sun. And that is true. White Calf is not a child of the Sun; his medicine is not strong—it is weak. It can be broken; Eagle Claw can break it. Too long has this White Calf been held sacred in our lodges. I do not like him. He is against me; he is my enemy. He is my enemy, because he is the friend of Star Blanket and Song-of-All-the-Birds. I will take him away from Star Blanket. *I will kill him.*"

"Yes," he went on, "I will kill him; but first I will break his medicine. I will prove to myself that he is not the sacred child of the Sun, but only a weak paleface waif of the White Man's Trail. Soon, if he is not wiped out, if he is allowed to grow into a man, they will give him the war-path secret; they will make him a brave, perhaps even a war-chief. That must not be. I will break his medicine, and then they will see

how little he owes to the Sun. I will break it now. And then afterwards, when I know that the Sun does not shield him—I will kill him, even as I would kill a rattlesnake."

Watching furtively until Sergeant Silk's red tunic could no longer be seen, Eagle Claw returned to the throng of gamblers. There, among the watchers on the fringe of the circle, he found White Calf and Wolverine. He pressed his way in between them.

"White Calf no longer plays in the bone game?" he said casually.

"No," returned White Calf.

"He is, perhaps, afraid of losing," went on the Indian. "And the Piegans think that he is afraid of nothing."

"It is not that he is afraid," said White Calf. "It is because he does not wish to gamble and to take what belongs to others."

"Huh! That is a woman's reason. It is silly when you are not sure that you will win. I think it is because you are afraid to lose."

"I am not afraid to play against you, Eagle Claw," rejoined White Calf.

"Then play against me now," Eagle Claw challenged him. "You need not think that you will win. You will surely lose. Play against me now, before the Sun goes to sleep. Let your new little gun be your stake."

"No," White Calf objected; "I do not want to risk my gun on the chance of a game."

"Then it is true that you are afraid," pursued the Indian. "If you were not afraid to lose it, you would run the risk."

White Calf felt the justice of this taunt.

"And what would you stake against my gun?" he inquired.

"Anything," answered Eagle Claw, confident in his skill, "anything that I have with me here—my best canoe and all that is in it; all the good things that I have bought in exchange for my peltry. You see, I am not afraid to risk what I cannot lose."

White Calf was aware that Eagle Claw had been trading heavily, that he had bought many beautiful rolls of cloth, many ounces of glass beads and gunpowder, as well as chests of tea, bags of sugar, steel traps, and useful manufactured goods. The proffered stake was of far more value than his own revolver. But he remembered how he had himself warned Star Blanket of the evils of gambling, and he shrank from showing weakness of will.

"No," he decided.

"Then your medicine is not good," declared Eagle Claw. "The Sun has forsaken you. You are weak; you are afraid: you are a coward!"

Upon this, White Calf turned proudly.

"You have asked me to play against you, Eagle Claw," he said steadily. "You have challenged me. Very well. I will play against you. The stakes are my gun against your loaded canoe. Let us begin."

The excitement among the Indians on hearing that White Calf had accepted a challenge from Eagle Claw spread like a prairie fire throughout the lodges of the Piegans, who crowded in a vast circle round the place where the game was to be played. Those in the inner ring lay flat, with their chins on their folded arms; those behind them crouched, and so, backward, they ranged themselves, kneeling, bending, stooping, and standing, with the tallest on the outside. The bones

were examined, umpires were appointed. There could be no possibility of either player attempting to cheat or to take an unfair advantage. It was agreed that there should be six turns—three for each of the two players.

The two opponents—the cunning, beady-eyed Indian, and the calm, open-faced, blue-eyed boy—took their seats, facing each other, on the carpet of Eagle Claw's blanket, and the monotonous, crooning gambling song was started.

White Calf began as holder of the bones. He displayed them in his open palms—the red bone and the white one with black bars. He tossed them from hand to hand very quickly, and then juggled them, now in sight, now under cover of the robe spread across his knees, while he joined in the gambling song.

Quicker and quicker he juggled, but his every swift movement was studied by the watchful eyes of his antagonist. It seemed almost as if Eagle Claw could tell by the twitch of a muscle, the shape of a knuckle, or the grip of the flexible fingers in which fist the winning marker was hidden.

At length the boy held his hands apart in front of him. The song was stopped suddenly. Eagle Claw guessed the left hand, and he chuckled exultantly as the fingers opened and the winning white bone was disclosed.

White Calf renewed his juggling, swifter and more bewilderingly than before. This time it was he who won, and they were now equal. At his third turn, however, he won again, and Eagle Claw snarled in vicious anger at his bad fortune. And now it was he who took up the bones. He manipulated them very cunningly, very adroitly, making many passes and

sleights-of-hand to deceive and confuse his opponent, trying his utmost to bewilder and perplex. White Calf watched him intently and without any sign of agitation, without so much as the blink of an eyelash ; and when the moment of decision came, out went his pointing finger with unerring certainty to the hand in which the winning bone was held.

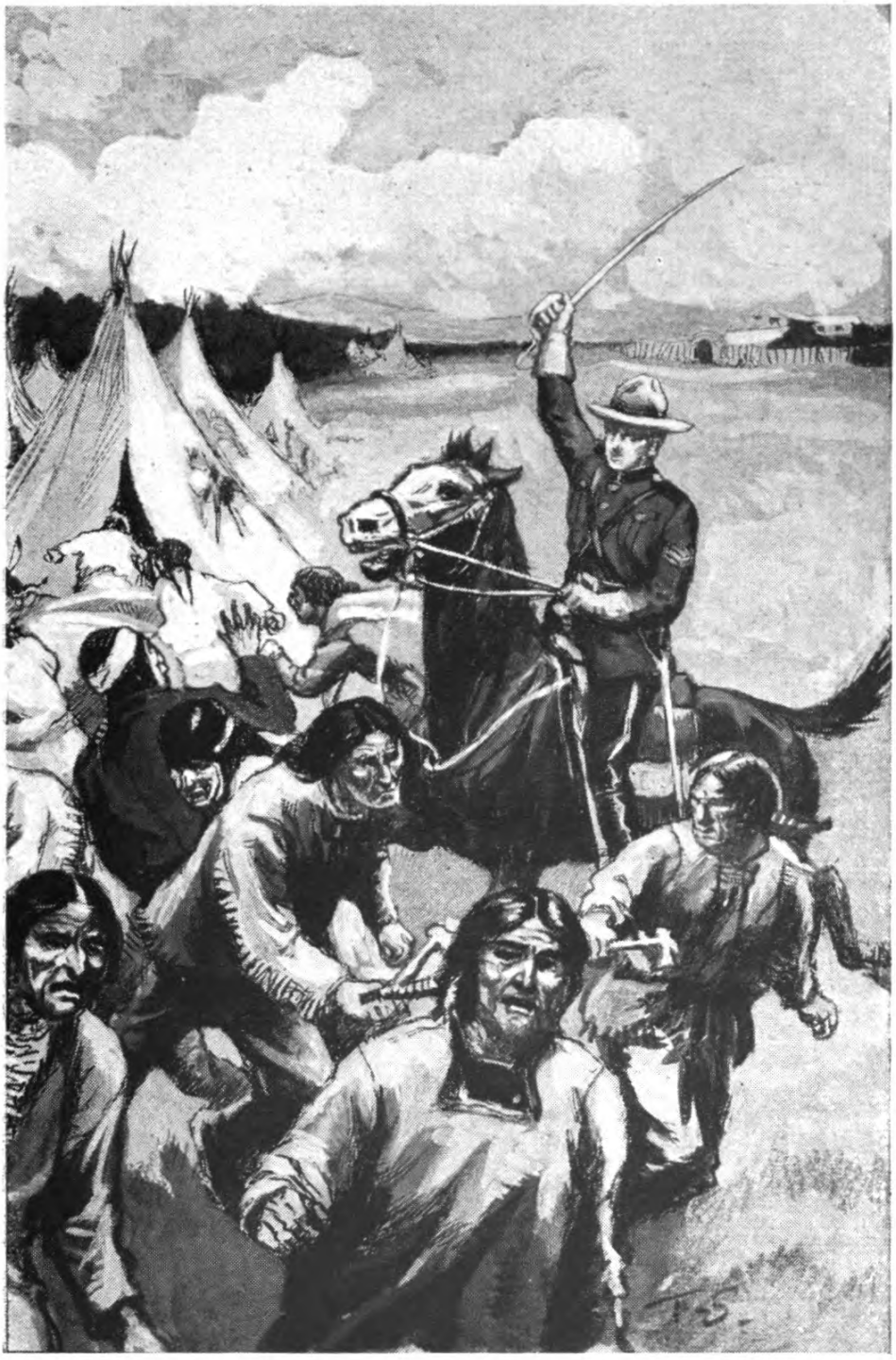
The Indians crept nearer, and the excitement was tense during the next try. Wolverine, lying near, bit his lips until a red drop trickled to his chin. Star Blanket leaned eagerly forward over the bent shoulders of Rising Moon, whose gaze was concentrated upon the calm, smiling face of White Calf.

Eagle Claw was now so nervous that, in passing the bones, he dropped one, which was considered very bad luck, particularly as the dropped bone was the white one. But he began again, crossing and re-crossing his fists, jerking them to and fro, flinging them from side to side, hiding them under his robe, and going through many amazing contortions until at last time was called, the song ceased, and in deep silence White Calf levelled his finger and pointed.

Eagle Claw opened his cramped hand very slowly, and flung the white bone angrily to the ground with the red one after it.

White Calf had won four out of five times, with a sixth chance to spare. But there was no use in playing this last chance, for Eagle Claw had already been hopelessly beaten.

There followed a tremendous uproar of wild, barbaric yells and whoops and shrieks from the Indians who had been betting. Blows were struck, knives and tomahawks flashed. The confusion threatened to become a free fight until Sergeant Silk galloped along



Sergeant Silk galloped among the Indians, waving his naked sword.

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from the fort to disperse the clamorous crowd with a compelling wave of his naked sword.

Wolverine, swept into the midst of the scattering rabble, made his way down to the lake shore to lay claim to the loaded canoe. Star Blanket and White Calf came together.

"It is not good for White Calf to gamble against Eagle Claw," the chief was saying. "He was your enemy before. He will be a yet greater enemy now that for a second time you have beaten him. It would have been better if you had let him be the gainer—better still if you had not entered the game against him at all."

"But he challenged me," White Calf protested. "He said that I was afraid. It was not for the winning of his canoe that I played. I do not covet his canoe. He said that my medicine was broken, that the Sun had forsaken me, that I was a coward. I will not let any man say that I am a coward."

"Still," pursued the chief, "you have humiliated him, you have trampled upon his pride. He will take vengeance upon you. Be very careful, White Calf. Do not let him come near you when you are alone. In a crowd you will be safe; he will not touch you, for he is cunning, his heart is black; he does his evil work secretly, like the serpent in the grass."

Sergeant Silk dismounted beside them.

"Say, Chief," he cried, "there's too much gambling going along among your people. You must check it, or there'll be mischief. What's the meaning of this last row? What's all the noise about?"

"It is my fault," declared White Calf, stepping nearer to him. "I have been gambling against Eagle Claw. He challenged me."

"That so?" said Silk. "He, the 'cutest player in your tribe, challenged you, a kid? Of course you lost?"

"I won," explained White Calf. "He said I was afraid, that I was a coward. I played him, and he lost."

"That's all right," Silk smiled. "I'm glad to hear he didn't make a victim of you; but take my advice, sonny—don't you get gambling again. It isn't healthy exercise."

Early on the following morning Sergeant Silk made a very complete tour of the freight wagons. In one of them he discovered Eagle Claw's lately restored bundle of beaver skins. He also discovered, hidden in the double floor of the same vehicle, a secret store of contraband whisky. He confiscated this fire-water, arrested the responsible wagoner, and went off in search of Eagle Claw.

It was clear that Eagle Claw had again bartered his beavers in exchange for strong drink. Silk wanted to run the Indian to earth before the fire-water should be consumed; but he searched in vain. At the end of that day he was forced to the conclusion that Eagle Claw had quitted the camp and did not intend to return.

CHAPTER XIV

STAR BLANKET'S BARGAIN

EAGLE CLAW had disappeared. He seemed to have quitted the camp in the darkness immediately after his gambling game with White Calf. All that was known of him was that he had gone off by way of the lake in one of the small canoes, and that he had taken with him several bottles of smuggled fire-water. It was supposed that he was so humiliated by having been defeated by the greater skill of White Calf that he was ashamed to face the ridicule of his companions, and that he had sought refuge in seclusion to drown his sorrows in strong drink.

He had left behind him the large, heavily-loaded canoe that he had rashly staked on the game, and had not waited even to claim his due share of the treaty money which was to be distributed on the following day.

Corporal O'Connor had returned from Athabasca with a haversack filled with Canadian dollar bills, and Sergeant Silk was engaged in the duty of apportioning the annual grant of five dollars to each and every Indian in his district. He was beginning with the Piegans of the Big Rain Reserve, who numbered about four thousand individuals, men, women and children.

Silk had come nearly to the end of his job, when he hesitated and turned to Rising Moon, who stood near him in the courtyard of the trading post.

"Look here, Rising Moon," he said, tapping his long list of Indian names with the point of his pencil, "why isn't White Calf's name on this list? Why haven't you claimed treaty money for him?"

"You think it is due to him, then?" questioned Rising Moon.

"Why, certainly. I allow he's not an Indian; but he is living as one, I guess, and has never known any other home than your lodge. He ought to have been drawing his bit every year. How old d'you make him out to be?"

"I do not know. Twelve—thirteen, perhaps."

"Thirteen sure," decided Silk, "and more likely fourteen. Say, there's a heap of arrears due to him. Sixty-five dollars, anyhow." He counted out the amount. "Quite a decent haul for him, eh?" he smiled as he slipped an elastic band round the packet of bills. "You'd better lay that money aside for him. He'll need it one day; and look here, you mustn't neglect that boy's education. It's high time he could read and write and figure up a sum. The Government ought to send a school-master along your way."

"I had begun teaching him myself," said Rising Moon. "He is very quick. He remembers everything. It is easy to teach him; but Red Cherry does not want him to read and write. She is dead against it. She believes that if White Calf gets reading books and news-sheets he will not be happy any longer among the Piegans; he will want to quit right away and go wandering into the world of the white people."

"Exactly," agreed Silk. "That is sure what he will want—as sure as daylight, But what has that got to do with Red Cherry, or you, or me, or anybody else? It's your duty as a loyal Canadian to give

White Calf every opportunity, every chance. that education will open for him. Already he is badly handicapped—he can't write his own name; but I have been watching him, Collis. I am interested in him. I see a whole lot of possibilities in that boy, and I shouldn't like to think of him being kept in ignorance of the book-learning which makes such a pile of difference between the white man and the Redskin. Do you follow me?"

"I follow you, Sergeant," said Rising Moon. "White Calf shall learn to read and write. Red Cherry will yield when she hears that you have urged this. She thinks great things of your opinion, Sergeant."

Rising Moon had not gone from the courtyard many minutes, when White Calf entered with Star Blanket. The Chief went up to Sergeant Silk's table under the veranda, while White Calf strode onward into the trade-room.

"There is still no sign of Eagle Claw," the Chief reported, speaking, of course, in his native tongue. "He is gone; he will not come back."

"No; he will not come back, I think," said Silk, "not even when he has emptied those bottles of fire-water. You will likely find him when you return to Sweetgrass Coulée."

"That is what I fear," Star Blanket said very seriously. "My medicine tells me that Eagle Claw means to do evil work at Sweetgrass."

Sergeant Silk glanced up from his account-book in sharp surprise.

"Fear?" he repeated. "Do you mind explaining? What evil work is he likely to do?"

"It is this," Star Blanket responded, leaning forward earnestly. "White Calf told you that when

he played in the great bone game for me against Eagle Claw the stakes were heavy. If I had lost, I should have been a ruined man. Eagle Claw would have won from me not only my herd of war horses and my lodge, but also Song-of-All-the-Birds—my beautiful squaw."

"Ah," cried Silk with quick apprehension, "and you have left Song-of-All-the-Birds at home, unprotected? Eagle Claw can be back there many days in front of you. This is serious, Chief. I guess you'd best break camp, put on a hustle, and get your brigade started on the back trail right away."

He stood up, taller by inches than the tall and dignified warrior, and followed Star Blanket into the trade-room. There, at the trade-counter, he discovered White Calf.

"Making your final purchases, White Calf?" he inquired, going to the boy's side. "Gee! What's that you're buying? What d'you want all that pile of paper for, and those pencils and pens, and ink? What's the idea, sonny?"

White Calf looked a little uneasy.

"I am going to teach myself to write," he answered bashfully. "Star Blanket told me to buy whatever I wished. But I do not understand these things. Will you help me?"

"Help you? Why certainly," laughed Silk, and, turning to the counter, he said: "Fork out all the literature you've got, Factor—school books, story books with pictures, and poetry, a Bible too; and say, I think you have a box of water-colours and brushes."

"There ain't a great demand for this line of goods," said the Factor. "We don't keep them on show. This yer boy's the first to inquire for any truck of this natur' for a long while past."

"What put this notion into your head, White Calf?" Sergeant Silk questioned. "Was Rising Moon talking with you before you came in?"

"It has been in my head for many winters," White Calf answered; "but, you see my head is so much bigger since I came here to Fort Sinclair."

"Exactly," smiled Silk. "You've had your first taste of civilization. You've gotten your moccasins planted on the white man's trail. Well, go ahead."

At sight of what was brought from hidden shelves and drawers White Calf vaulted upon the counter.

"Now isn't that box of paints just great!" exclaimed Silk. "It makes me want to start right away and paint a picture. Yes, you'll want that drawing-book. That's a good figure of a horse, but it's some weak in the hindquarters. You'll enjoy this story—it's about a man who lived all alone on a desert island and kept goats. And here's a spelling-book with the multiplication tables thrown in. Say, sonny, you'll need to get those tables stowed away in your head. They'll be useful."

The selection of literature, drawing materials, and stationery was soon made. An assistant began to pack the purchases in an empty sugar-box, while the Factor wrote out the account. Star Blanket then produced his fat wallet and drew out a thick handful of dollar bills, which he passed ungrudgingly across the counter. Some of the notes were returned to him with the receipted account.

"Star Blanket," said Sergeant Silk, offering his hand, "believe me, this is the best bargain you have ever made in your life, or perhaps ever will make. You are starting White Calf on a trail that will lead

him to big things. On behalf of our country, Canada, I am thanking you."

"And I, too, thank you, Star Blanket," added White Calf, jumping lightly from the counter and grasping his benefactor's hand.

Sergeant Silk stood wistfully watching the tall, picturesque Chief and the agile, clean-footed white boy as they went out, carrying the box between them.

"That's all right," he said to himself; and looking round at the counter, he added: "There's something about that boy that takes my fancy, Factor—the looks of him, his elegant figure, his honest eyes, his musical voice. He is sure thrown away on these Indians. He's happy with them now; but he won't always be. He is meant for something better, and I guess it'll not be very long before he finds that out for himself."

"Your interest in him surprises me, Sergeant," observed the Factor. "I'm not excited any about that boy or the problem of his mythical origin. His bein' white don't puzzle me a whole lot. Many Injuns are nearly as white."

"Then how do you account for him?" questioned Silk.

"Why, that he's just a freak—an albino, the same as the white buffalo. As for his arrival, ridin' on the head of that white bull, I don't credit that steep yarn no more'n if you told me he'd fallen from the skies."

CHAPTER XV

IN THE FOREST TRAIL

THE backward voyage of the fur traders from Fort Sinclair was difficult. The weather was exceedingly hot, the canoes and scows were heavily laden with cumbrous merchandise, and the current was against them. On the wide, calm lakes paddling was easy and pleasant, and those who were not at work could lie back on the bales, gazing into the drifting clouds or making dream-journeys through the far-stretching forests; but in navigating the swiftly-running creeks that connected the chain of lakes none could be idle. Progress was possible only by the use of hauling-ropes in addition to paddles, and the work of hauling fell heavy upon the shoulders even of the strongest.

White Calf was not expected to do man's work, but he did his share. In places where the narrowing stream raced wildly between high, rugged walls of rock, or where the banks were steep and overgrown with brush, the sagging lines would often get caught, and it was he who leapt ashore and climbed the heights to set the rope free. But Wolverine was among the toilers, treading the difficult track where the dry grass was slippery under heel, where branches whipped their faces, and cut banks broke under their hands; dragging the obstinate load by the raw hide that rasped on

naked shoulders; bending half double, panting and sweating and bitten by ravenous flies.

And there were the long portages, where the rapids were too fierce to be faced, and where the stream tumbled over ledges in great white cataracts. Then the canoes had to be unloaded and their cargoes portaged, piece by piece, over the rocks or through the forest trails. But the night brought rest when camp was made in the deep woods, warm and odorous with the resinous tang of spruce and jack-pine, and the toil of the day was forgotten.

On the second evening the teepees were pitched in an open glade on the wooded shores of Lake Utikuma. Rising Moon was cooking a meal of caribou ham and bullberries; Wolverine had flung himself at full length on the turf beside a newly-lit mosquito smudge. White Calf had been gathering fuel, and had returned to the fire with an armful of balsam boughs.

"Back there in the forest trail," he said to Wolverine as he dropped his burden, "a red dog-fox flashed past me: a huge brown bear loped by. I came upon the fresh tracks of a family of moose—the bull, the cow, and the calf. I heard the call of a timber wolf, I saw a porcupine, and a fisher; and then it seemed that some big animal came tracking me myself, for I heard the rustle of leaves, the snapping of dry twigs, first on one side, then close behind, and again on my other side. I took out my gun to be ready, but I did not see the animal; yet I am sure it was tracking me. Wolverine, what has become of your gun? I have not seen it—no, not once—since we left Fort Sinclair. Why do you not carry it, Wolverine?"

Wolverine sat upright.

"My—gun"—he repeated awkwardly—"my revolver? I—I think I must have lost it. I have searched, but I cannot find it."

"Lost it!" cried White Calf. "But how can that be? You had it; I saw it in your hand when you were in the crowd before Sergeant Silk rode up waving his sword."

"I had it then," said Wolverine. "I drew it when the fighting began. Star Blanket wanted to take it from me. He said that I could not be trusted with a six-gun. I think Star Blanket may have taken it. I cannot ask him: he is not pleased with me. We do not speak."

"Then I will ask him," decided White Calf. "I am going to tell him about the moose, back there. I think he will agree to our going moose-hunting, if you will come too."

"I will come," said Wolverine.

After the evening meal, White Calf, taking his rifle with him, sought the Chief in his tent. He was very friendly and familiar with Star Blanket, while respecting him as a medicine chief whose wishes must be obeyed.

"It seems," he began, "that Wolverine has lost his six-gun."

"Then I hope that no one will find it," said the Chief. "It is a dangerous weapon, meant only for white men like Sergeant Silk—like you, too; for you can be trusted. I am not sorry that Wolverine has lost his gun. If he had been careful, he would not have lost it. I cannot help him to find it. Why have you brought out your own gun, White Calf—your rifle?"

"It is that I have seen the tracks of a bull moose,"

White Calf told him. "The Piegans are in need of fresh meat. I would follow the moose tracks."

"You must not go alone," cautioned Star Blanket. "It is not safe for you to go alone. We are in the country of the Crees, who are our enemies. There are wolves; also you do not know these forest trails. It is easy to lose your way in places that are strange to you. I will go with you, White Calf, to see that you come to no harm."

He wrapped his red blanket over his broad shoulders, took his sporting rifle in the crook of his arm, and his hunting-knife in his belt. Before leaving his tent, he went aside and handled a tiny, very dainty moccasin, richly ornamented with silk threads and coloured beads. Bending his head, he reverently pressed the sole of the moccasin on his brow.

"Why?" asked White Calf. "It is the moccasin of Song-of-All-the-Birds."

"That is so," returned the Chief. "Star Blanket always remembers her when he is going into danger."

"Danger?" repeated White Calf.

"Yes. We are in Werwolf Forest, where there is always mystery—misfortune—danger."

Wolverine joined them at the edge of the forest as they entered among the giant pine-trees. He carried no weapon. White Calf led them to the side of a rivulet and pointed to the spoor of the moose. The bull's hoofmarks were large and deep in the moist ground; the footprints of the calf were hardly bigger than those of a goat, and close together, showing that the little one was very young and therefore not able to travel fast or far.

The trail led on into the silent woodland depths, through a glade wide enough to admit the passage of

the bull's spreading antlers, and it could easily be followed in the lingering northern twilight; although already the full moon was shining in a clear sky across the lake, sending shafts of silvery light between the tree trunks.

White Calf told Wolverine to go round by the westward and try to headoff the animals. He himself was to go by the other side, while Star Blanket would go between them, following on the direct tracks. They were all three to keep within earshot of each other.

As he strode forward, Star Blanket paused many times to listen. His two companions were soon out of sight—White Calf to his left, Wolverine to his right; but he could hear them occasionally chirping like disturbed birds. Once it seemed to him that White Calf was going too quickly, and he quickened his own steps. Again he paused and listened. He had the Indian's superstitious belief that these green groves were haunted by the werwolf and the wandering spirits of dead men. As he stood still and silent, he saw something glistening on the ground in front of him. At first he thought it was the bright eye of a wolf reflecting the moonlight; but it did not move. He went nearer until he stood over it. He stooped and touched it, caught hold of it, and sniffed at it curiously and then dropped it.

"Wough!" he muttered. "Fire-water!"

His quick brain had leapt to an explanation of why the corked neck of a broken bottle should be lying here on this forest trail. Heedless now of the moose tracks, he bore to the leftward and went swiftly on in search of White Calf.

As he went, he became nervously conscious of strange, unexpected movements in advance of him.

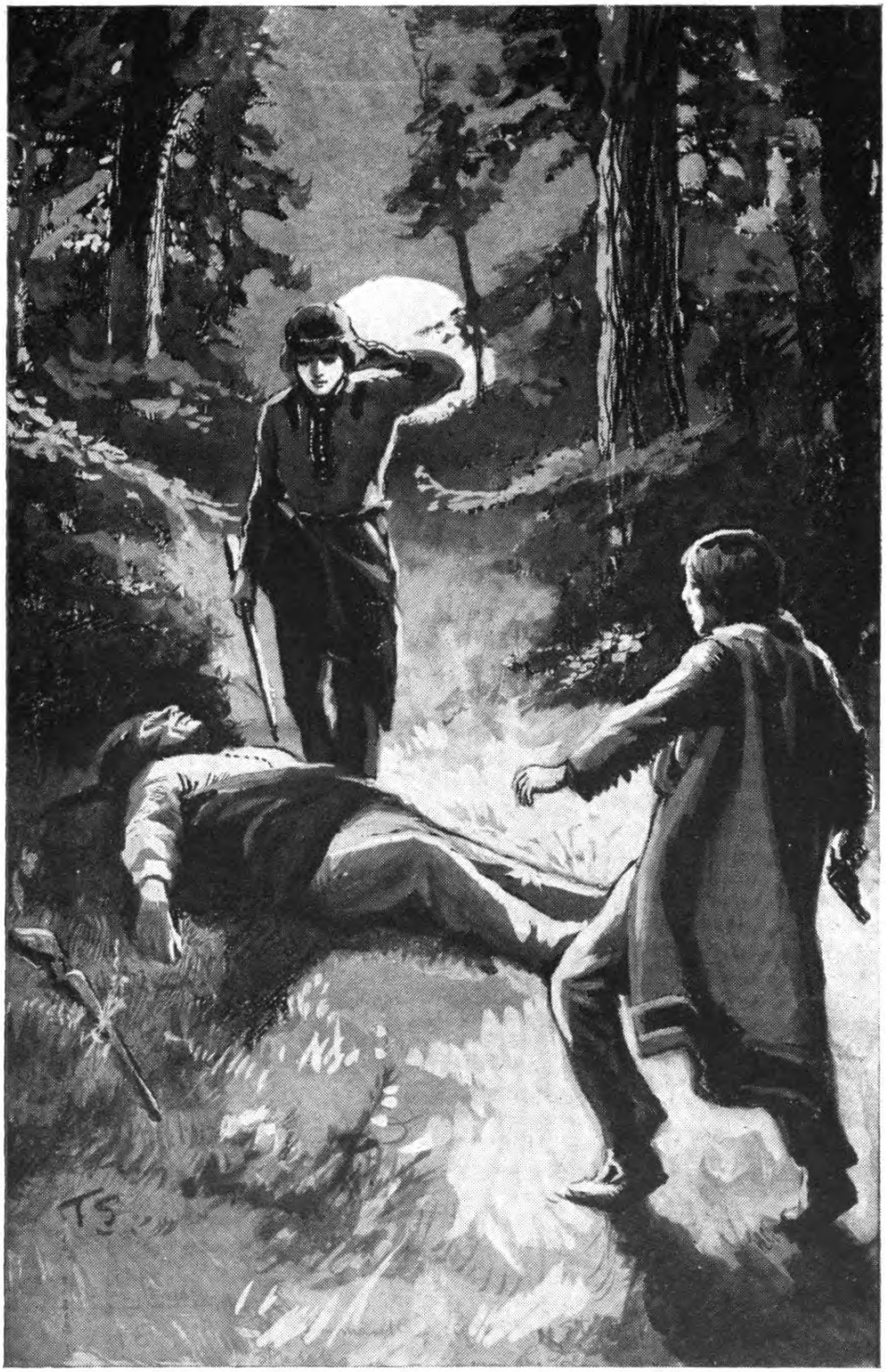
He heard the snapping of a twig, the swish of a footstep in long grass. He saw a balsam branch spring upward, as if some large animal had brushed against it—some animal that was following closely upon the track of White Calf! Star Blanket plunged into the thicker brush, running quickly, caring not at all what dreadful animal or mysterious monster it might prove to be.

White Calf was already far in front. He, too, heard those mysterious sounds of swaying branches and stealthily dogging footsteps, as he had heard them in the forest earlier in the evening; and again he instinctively felt that some wild and dangerous beast of the forest was tracking him. Abruptly he changed his direction, going now to the right and circling round to rejoin his two hunting companions. He came into what he believed to be the well-trodden water-trail of the moose; but Star Blanket was not waiting for him as he expected. Neither was there any sign of Wolverine.

He gave a low, penetrating call, and stood listening for a response. Instead of the expected answer, there came to him from a long distance the sharp unmistakable report of a gun.

Believing that the Chief had cornered the bull moose, he ran in the direction from which the shot had been fired. In an open, moonlit glade he saw Wolverine moving to and fro excitedly with a revolver in his hand. Yet nearer, in the full light of the moon, the red-mantled figure of Star Blanket lay stretched upon the ground, motionless—ominously, appallingly motionless.

White Calf bounded forward and flung himself at the Chief's side, seizing his limp, unresponsive hand.



White Calf saw Wolverine with a revolver in his hand—and stretched upon the ground was the motionless figure of Star Blanket.

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"Star Blanket," he cried agitatedly, "my friend! Speak! Speak! What has happened? Speak to White Calf!"

But there was no answer, no movement; and then White Calf's searching gaze fixed itself on the dark, wet spot where the bullet had entered at the back of the Chief's head, and he knew that Star Blanket's spirit had gone beyond the sandhills—that Star Blanket was dead.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRAGEDY IN WERWOLF FOREST

"HE is no more!" breathed White Calf, bending his head. "Song-of-All-the-Birds is a widow. My heart is heavy. It is very sad. And it is my fault that this terrible thing has happened. If I had not come out on the moose trail, he would still be alive."

He rose to his feet, sobbing; but conquering his emotion, he turned to Wolverine.

"I want to see your gun," he demanded sternly, holding out his hand for the weapon. "It is your own gun," he said accusingly, looking with a frown into Wolverine's face. "You told me that you had lost it." He examined the chambers and saw that all six of the cartridges were spent. He raised the muzzle and sniffed at the faint pungent smell of newly burnt gunpowder. "Why did you say you had lost it?"

Wolverine drew back as if from a physical blow.

"Is it that you think for a moment that I—*I*—did this black thing?" he gasped in amazement.

"You said that he was not pleased with you; that you did not speak with him," pursued White Calf. "I only want you to talk—to tell me how this all happened. You were here alone beside him, with the gun in your hand. And the gun is not yet cold."

"White Calf," said Wolverine, leaning forward

protestingly, "my tongue is not forked. I could not say what is not true. I had lost my gun—before we started in the canoes. I found it here on the ground where we are now standing."

"But he—Star Blanket—did not have it," declared White Calf. "His was not the hand that fired the bullet. He could not possibly fire at the back of his own head. I cannot understand. You can see how I am puzzled, Wolverine. I believe you, yes. You never speak with a crooked tongue. But we must know the truth. Tell me what you saw: what you heard."

"Listen, then," returned Wolverine. "When we went apart on the water-trail after the moose, I had no weapon. If I had had my gun—my big gun—I could have shot the bull moose. I was close on his tracks. I saw him, with his cow and the little one. They were lying all three together. I did not disturb them. I came back, very softly, to tell Star Blanket where they were. But he was not on the trail. I could not find him. I called, and he did not answer. While I stood listening I heard sounds as of some one running away. I saw branches flung aside; a startled bird flew up with a cry of alarm. There came the sound of voices—the voices of two men. One was the voice of Star Blanket; but his words did not come to me. Then there was a gun shot. I knew that it was not the shot of a rifle, but of a pistol. I shouted. I ran forward. For a moment only I saw a man's head and naked shoulders as he flung up a bare arm and threw something away. It was this, my own little gun, that he threw back. It fell at my feet. I picked it up and aimed at where I thought the bullet would find him. But, as you see, the gun

was not loaded. He had used the last shot. He escaped."

White Calf glanced in the direction in which Wolverine pointed.

"Yes?" he said. "Well?"

"Then I turned to Star Blanket," Wolverine continued. "I saw him lying on his face, just as he had fallen. I saw the ugly wound in his head and the red stream that trickled across his bare neck. He spoke your name—White Calf. He spoke it with his last breath. I could do nothing for him. When you came, I was searching for signs of the man who fired the shot. I will go now and follow on his trail."

"No," White Calf objected. "That is no good. It is not safe. You do not know these trails as he does. You could do nothing, going alone. Run back to our lodges. Tell Rising Moon what has happened. Tell him to send out our best scouts into the forest to search for this man. Go! Go now! Go quickly. I will stay here to watch over Star Blanket until you come back with Rising Moon and Long Hair."

Wolverine ran off through the uncertain darkness in the direction of the camp.

Left alone, White Calf drew his revolver to make certain that it was fully loaded. Satisfied, he returned it to its holster. Star Blanket's sporting rifle lay where it had fallen from the chief's hand. White Calf covered it under the chief's red robe and took up his own gun into the crook of his arm, where he held it with a finger on the trigger, while he walked slowly round and round in ever-widening circles, searching the ground for possible signs or clues. He returned from time to time, waiting and listening,

and then again went round in a yet wider circle. He found no sign, heard no suspicious sound.

The light was less strong in the glades now that the moon had risen higher to cast down the deeper shadows of the thickly intervening trees. Every bush and branch seemed to assume a weird and ghostly shape, and all the time he was awesomely conscious that the unknown enemy who had taken the life of Star Blanket was lurking somewhere near. But he was not afraid. The feeling that possessed him was vindictive anger against the man who had robbed him of his friend. Who was he? And why had he done this cruel thing?

Once as he crossed the water-trail of the moose, where a slanting shaft of silvery moonlight pierced the gloom and bathed the branches in vivid green, he saw the same thing which Star Blanket had seen—a tiny spark of glistening light like the gleam of a glow-worm on the ground. It had shone only for a fleeting instant as he passed; but he stopped and went back a few steps until again he saw it and knew that it was not a living thing.

He touched it cautiously with the toe of his moccasin. He picked it up in his fingers, just as Star Blanket had done, and smelt at it, detecting the unmistakable odour of fire-water. But instead of dropping it, he tied it up in a corner of his robe and went forward thinking: thinking very deeply, and piecing together, bit by bit, the slight threads of evidence which led him to an almost certain knowledge of the circumstances of this woodland tragedy.

This time, when he returned to the place where the red-robed form of his dead friend lay still and silent in the moonlight, he discovered that he had been

wise in deciding to remain on watch in the forest. The keen-scented prowlers of the wild had already been attracted to the spot. He saw the sinister dark shape of a timber wolf looming in front of him against the reflected light of the moon, crawling stealthily nearer to the conspicuous patch of red. White Calf stopped, watching the animal creeping yet closer with long, drippping tongue showing between two rows of sharp white teeth. He raised his gun, took aim, and fired. With a fierce howl the wolf made a high forward leap into the air and fell with a heavy thud on the turf, kicking, writhing, yelping. From the shadows of a near bush a lynx broke out and ran noiselessly across the glade, disappearing in the black darkness beyond. Then voices sounded. Wolverine spoke.

"It is White Calf," he said. "See! It is a wolf that he has shot."

Presently Wolverine himself appeared, followed by his father, with Glancing Arrow, Long Hair, and Owns-a-Knife.

By the dim light of the moon Martin Collis knelt and examined the body of Star Blanket, turning it over and peering into the cold, distorted face.

"Yes," he said, "he was shot from behind, at close quarters. But by whom? By whom?"

"By Eagle Claw," White Calf told him.

With a fierce howl the wolf leapt high into the air.

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CHAPTER XVII

A LONE PATROL

THE four men carried Star Blanket, wrapped in his red mantle, back to the camp beside the lake. Wolverine led the way, White Calf walked mournfully behind with his own rifle and the chief's. Scouts had already been sent out in search of the unknown fugitive; but now that White Calf had declared that the enemy was none other than their own missing tribesman, Eagle Claw, there was a clearer purpose in the search. Long Hair, Wolverine, Owns-a-Knife, and Good Striker, all experienced woodsmen and trackers, joined in the pursuit, going in pairs by different ways.

In the meantime White Calf prepared himself for a journey in another direction. He filled his bag with food, took a supply of revolver cartridges, with his flint and steel, covered himself with his blanket, and stood ready to start.

"Where do you go?" Rising Moon wanted to know.

"I go back to Fort Sinclair," White Calf answered resolutely. "It is that the Mounted Police must be told of what has happened; and it is better that they should know soon. Even if our scouts should capture Eagle Claw, he will still have to be given over to the police. But I do not think that they will capture him. He is very cunning. He will leave no tracks; he will

hide himself cleverly. But the police will find him, wherever he goes. I will tell everything to Sergeant Silk. He will understand; he will know better than we what to do."

"Yes," agreed Rising Moon, "I think you are right. The police must be told. You will go to Sergeant Silk. But you cannot go alone. The way is long. To-morrow you will take one of our Piegan scouts with you—one who knows the landmarks and can help you with your canoe."

"I go alone," White Calf determined, "and not by canoe."

"But you have no horse. How else would you go but by the lakes and creeks as we came?"

"I have feet," said White Calf; "I will walk and run. It is not far, and from here to the fort the trail is not so long by land as by water. I will find my way—the stars will guide me. If I start now, I can be at Fort Sinclair before the next setting of the sun. I am going."

He was quite right in his belief that the shorter way was by land, for the chain of lakes and creeks took a wide sweep round, and by crossing the hills and prairie he could shorten the distance considerably, and going by land instead of by canoe, he would also escape the danger of the rapids.

Yet the journey he contemplated, plodding laboriously on foot by trails that were wholly strange to him, was neither simple nor easy, and many were the obstacles and difficulties which might present themselves where pathless forests were to be traversed and thirsty deserts to be crossed.

When Sergeant Silk had discussed the route that Corporal O'Connor was to take on his ride to Atha-

basca Landing, he had warned O'Connor against Back Fat Prairie, where, as he said, " You'll be choked with dust and frizzled as dry as an overcooked kipper, and your plug'll want gallons more water than you can give him." And it was this same prairie which White Calf would have to cross, alone and on foot, in the heat of the next noonday. But he had imposed the duty upon himself of going to the police barracks ; he was going only because he knew that it was right that Sergeant Silk should be informed, and he did not shrink from the undertaking.

His first few miles were northward through the dark, mysterious aisles of Werwolf Forest. He would keep always to the thin fringe of the woodland, where he could get occasional glimpses of the lake, and thus know that he was not wandering astray, although the moon was behind him now and there was no reflected light from the water's surface. Nor could he see the stars through the blackness of the interlacing branches. He could only trust to his scoutcraft and the uncertain guidance of the south-west wind swaying the tree-tops far up above the tall, straight columns of spruce and pine. His senses of sight and hearing, of smell and touch had been well trained by constant exercise, and he had acquired the Indian's instinct of direction. Moreover, he had confidence in himself, and did not for a moment doubt his ability to find his way, even through these seemingly endless glades, where there was no faintest sign that any human being had ever before trodden the soft carpet of moss and pine needles.

The superstitious Indians believed that Werwolf Forest was a place of hidden terrors ; that it was haunted by the spirits of the dead, and that it was not safe for anyone to venture alone into its darkness.

It was said that any Indian daring to break trail in its vast solitudes would be turned into a skeleton if he should so much as speak a word above a whisper. The forest had got its terrifying name from the belief that many winters ago, before the White Man came into the West, a Cree Indian named Bear's Paw had disobeyed all caution and been lost in the forest's heart, that his spirit had entered into the form of a wolf, and that he was still prowling, a menace to all wanderers, in the pathless depths.

White Calf had heard these stories. Red Cherry had told them to him many times and taught him to laugh at them, even though she partly believed in them herself; and he remembered them now as he plodded on, listening to the movements of the marauding beasts of the night. Sounds which he could not always account for came to him out of the mysterious gloom. He wondered if in very truth these sombre solitudes were haunted by the shadows of the dead, and if, indeed, he might soon be confronted by the fabled werwolf.

There was something eerie in the hooting of the owls, in the noiseless flight of the great, black-winged bats—even in the distant howling of the coyote and the sharper bark of the fox. Once a soft-footed puma crept past him, gliding like a ghostly shadow—he saw its glistening green eyes as they glanced towards him. He shivered, but only from cold: he felt no fear. He was glad that he had brought his warm blanket with him, for the wind was rising, moaning weirdly in the creaking branches, in the rustling leaves; and the night air was very chill, even though he was walking quickly.

Sometimes he paused to take his bearings by turning

to look backwards for the sheen of moonlight on the lake. Once, when he stood still, he saw a low hanging bough of a spruce tree trembling, as if it had been pressed down by an unseen hand and suddenly liberated, and beneath it there was a movement among the bushes. The sounds and movements might have been caused by a racoon or a lynx leaping from the tree to the ground and running off in alarm, but White Calf was thinking just then of Eagle Claw. Even while his searching eyes followed the trail of movement in the bushes, he whipped out his revolver and fired a random shot.

Shortly afterwards he made his way down to the lake-side, where there were no trees to interrupt his view of the midnight sky. He searched for the constellation of the Seven Persons and the Polar Star, and so assured himself that he was still travelling in the desired direction. He knew that he must not bear to the northward until he came to the end of Lake Utikuma, and he went on and on, feeling tired and sleepy and very cold, but never wavering in his determination.

The chill, grey light of early morning was filtering through the verdure when at last he came within sight of the open, hilly country beyond the forest. Before quitting the lake, he made himself a fire on a slab of rock overhanging the clear, deep water. Here he stripped and dived into the depths for a refreshing swim, warming himself afterwards by the fire, where he ate his breakfast of fried caribou ham and some of the white crackers which he had bought at Fort Sinclair. He contrived to brew a drink of tea in a can which he had wisely included in his outfit. He was ravenously hungry, and he wanted to lighten his

burden, so he made a big meal and rested until the eastern sky began to take on a rosy hue. Then he filled his can with water, knocked out his fire, and wrapped up his blanket, leaving it under a shelf of rock where he might find it on his return.

Before the sun had risen high he was among the hills. They were strange to him, offering no guiding landmarks, no beaten track for him to follow. He only vaguely knew that his destination lay in a north-easterly direction; but the possibility of losing himself did not occur to him. Not yet did he question if he had better have travelled by canoe. He went at scouts' pace, walking where the ground was rough or steep, breaking into an easy trot where it was level.

At noon he rested on the edge of a buffalo wallow and ate his last crumb of food. He had left the hills behind and was now in the midst of rolling prairie land, where there were no sheltering trees, but only tufts of cactus scrub and long stretches of sage and grama-grass, broken by patches of arid sand that the wind swept up into clouds of stinging, choking dust.

The afternoon sun was scorching hot on his naked back and shoulders as he hastened onward; his wearied eyes nipped painfully with the fierce glare and the swirling alkali dust; his feet began to feel unaccountably heavy, his knees weak, his throat and nostrils dry. He stumbled into a dog-hole and rolled over. He was so tired that he could hardly rise again to his feet. And then, as he sat up, there was a sharp sting of pain in his right eye. A midge or gnat had flown into it. He tried to dislodge the insect with the point of a finger, he rubbed the eyelid, but the irritation was only increased. Even when he bathed the eye with his few last precious drops of drinking water

he found no relief, and the fly was not removed. Very soon the second eye also became inflamed. He could keep neither of them open without acute pain. At first it was the physical pain alone which gave him concern ; then alarm seized him—alarm at the extreme inconvenience of such an accident at such a time. What was he to do ?

His situation was desperate. Here was he, a young boy, out alone in the middle of a parched and pathless prairie, miles and desolate miles away from human help, fatigued and footsore, without water, without food, and suffering unbearable pain. Depending wholly upon himself and upon his unsullied eyesight to find his way, he yet could not use his eyes. Being blind, he was hopelessly lost.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PRAIRIE OUTPOST

SERGEANT SILK buckled his belt and reached to take his Stetson hat from the peg. He did not look round at the man who entered the guardroom. He knew Corporal O'Connor's quick soldierly footsteps.

"Well, Pat," he said, "have you discovered anything about that missing cask of poison?"

"I have, Sergeant," O'Connor answered promptly. "'Tis still missin'. I have searched every wagon and wigwam, and never a sign of it have I found at all. 'Tis nowhere in this camp. By the same token it has been spirited away."

"Exactly," said Silk, meditatively fixing his Stetson into the precise regulation shape before putting it on, with its strap at the back of his head. "I guessed it had been appropriated; that's why I sent you scouting round to make sure. Of course, it must be found, Corporal. A whole six-gallon cask of whisky must not be lost sight of when there are so many Redskins about. We've got to treat that cask of fire-water as if it were a fugitive criminal. We have to run it to earth, even though we search the whole of Canada for it. See?"

"Will you be after askin' myself to take on the job, Sergeant?" questioned O'Connor.

"I did not say so," returned Silk. "I want, first,

to discover the man who smuggled it into Fort Sinclair under our very noses. Who brought it ? Who took it away ? That's what I want to know. Have you interrogated all the teamsters and bull-whackers ? "

" I have not, sir ; it would have been waste of energy. I have interrogated nobody but the spalpeen who smuggled it in, and, to my sorrow, I must tell you that that same is my own countryman, Andy Sullivan. I've got Andy Sullivan under arrest, sir."

" That's right, Pat," nodded Silk ; " and to whom did Andy Sullivan sell the cask of whisky ? Did he tell you ? "

" He did, Sergeant. Under pressure, he owned that it was to old Pushed-Behind-the-Lodge-Pole that he delivered the goods, and for a matter of ten times the money that the stuff was worth—and cheap at the price, says Andy, considerin' the risks."

" I see," said Silk ; " and the deal was concluded secretly just before Lodge-Pole and his Crees quitted Fort Sinclair on their return journey to the Fire Steel Agency ? Quite so. They've got a whole day's start of you ; but I guess you can overtake them on the trail, eh ? "

" Sure," said O'Connor with a rueful twist of the lips.

" I see you don't hanker a whole lot for the duty," observed Silk.

" Deed I do not, Sergeant," the Corporal candidly admitted. " To tell you the truth, sir, I'm still a bit queer in the head by reason of the touch of sunstroke I had on my last patrol. Could you not send Paul Guardipe or Trooper Mullins ? "

" Paul is not a responsible member of the Force," Silk reminded him, " and Mullins must stick to the

job he's on now. No, Pat; if you don't feel like going, you can take charge here and I will go myself. It will be a bit of a picnic for me. I'm only sorry it's not a canoe stunt. A water trip along the lakes in fine weather like this would be more to my fancy just now; but that can't be helped."

Already he was beginning to prepare for his journey by changing his scarlet coat for a service tunic of khaki.

"If those Crees have broached the cask and got fuddling with the contents, Pat, there will be mischief," he said. "I may be away longer than I expect to be. Don't worry if I'm not back at breakfast to-morrow. By the way, did you quashee any grub in the lone cabin, back of Caribou Coulée?"

"I did that," O'Connor answered. "If you're droppin' in at the cabin, you'll find a decent meal, with a pinch of tea to boot, which the same is in the corner of the biscuit-tin. Fill your water-bottle at Mosquito Creek, for there's never a drop to be found betwixt there and the cabin. There's chips in plenty, if so be you're wantin' a fire."

"Right," Silk nodded, "though I'm not figuring on going so far. The Crees will not hustle any with their heavy loads under a broiling sun. Pile a few apples in my knapsack, will you? Gertrude is enormously fond of apples."

Gertrude was his chestnut mare. She was already saddled and bridled and waiting at the tie-post in the barrack-yard. Silk gave a few final instructions to his subordinate as he mounted, fully equipped, and rode off at a quiet walking pace along the trail beside the lake.

The errand upon which he was starting may appear

trivial. He was setting out to ride miles across the plains, occupying, perhaps, days of valuable time, in quest of a mere missing cask of whisky, which might never be found; but it was a point of honour with the Mounted Police that no one was to be allowed, on any pretence, to sell alcohol to the Indians. If any secret store of alcohol was discovered, it was at once confiscated without redress, and the person or persons who smuggled and sold it were liable to severe punishment. Silk had stated a common fact when he said that there would be mischief if the Crees had broached the missing cask. It was in the moral effect of fire-water on the Indians that the great danger lay, and the danger could only be averted by the police.

It was not until the trail led him away from the borders of the lake that Silk urged his mount to a trot. His way lay through the valleys of the Pelican Hills, following on the tracks left plainly on the ground by the dragging poles of the loaded travois and the footprints of pack-animals and mounted ponies.

In the forenoon he came upon the level ground beside a creek where the Crees had made camp on the previous night. Coyotes and foxes were still feeding on the refuse left by the wasteful Indians. The trail led thence along the farther side of the creek. The Crees had kept near the water for the sake of their thirsty animals. Silk, however, gained time by making a slant across the plain, hoping to pick up the trail farther on.

In a sheltered dip of the land he passed a small scattered herd of buffaloes which the Indians had missed. It consisted of hardly more than a hundred head, and these, he noticed, were in very poor condition. Here, on the grassland, he broke into an easy canter,

always saving his mount, yet, nevertheless, covering the miles so quickly that, almost before he expected, he came within sight of the trailing Indians, strung out like beads on the line of the blue horizon.

They had left the neighbourhood of the creeks, and were now travelling eastward across the open prairie. The leading portion of their long train had halted for rest during the hot hours of the middle day, and the rear was slowly closing up. Silk now slackened his pace to a walk. There was no need for him to go quickly while the meridian sun shone hot and fierce and the air was thick with choking dust. If he should get through with his work without difficulty he would be back again at Fort Sinclair well before the next dawn. Even while walking, his mare was snorting at the dust and throwing her head to get rid of the cloud of ceaselessly moving flies.

"Hold hard, then, Gertrude," said her rider, at length drawing rein. "I vote we have a drink and a rest."

He dismounted, took off the saddle, gathered a handful of buffalo-grass and wiped the sweat and dust from the mare's coat, stroked her ears free of flies, wiped the corners of her eyes, and then, dropping the reins to her feet, told her to have a roll. She obeyed him at once, rolling on her back from side to side. When she stood up again he replaced the saddle loosely, made a cup of his Stetson, and filled it with water for her to have a drink.

"Now go and get a feed of grass, dear," he ordered, "if you can find any fit to chew, while I have a bite of grub for myself. I think there's an apple in my bag. We'll share it afterwards. Want it now, do you? No; you've got to wait till I've wolfed my sandwiches."

When he tightened the saddle-cinches and remounted, he saw that the Indians were all gathered in a compact crowd. They had lighted cooking-fires. Possibly they were halted on open sandy ground or beside a water-hole, but Sergeant Silk was not pleased to see fire-smoke so near to the parched prairie grass. The nearer he approached, the more he vexed himself over this carelessness on the part of the Crees. He could see sparks flying, and the smoke was drifting towards him across the prairie, smelling of burning grass. He rode forward at a swift gallop, urging his steed to her racing stride, never slackening speed until he dashed up into the midst of the Indians, commanding them to stamp out their fires. Some few of them turned to obey him, but not quickly enough to satisfy him, and he fingered his carbine threateningly, as he rode to and fro repeating his commands.

He noticed then that about a score of the Crees had gathered in a close bunch, and amongst them he recognized their chief. He rode up to them, sniffing the air suspiciously.

"Stand back!" he ordered in the firm strong voice which no Redskin dared to disobey. "I want to see what it is that you are hiding. Stand back! Scatter, right now, and go and stamp out those fires!"

Slowly, sullenly, they separated and moved unsteadily away, leaving behind them the cask of which he was in search. It had been broached, and, as he could plainly see, the chief and many of the warriors had been drinking deeply of the undiluted spirits.

Sergeant Silk leapt to the ground, and pushed the cask with his foot. It was still heavy, but he pushed

it over on its side, allowing the fire-water to flow out by the open bung-hole and disappear in the dry sand, furtively watched by the astonished Indians. When he had assured himself that the cask was empty, and that the last spark of fire was extinguished, he made the Indians walk over the ground, kicking sand on the ashes until no thread of smoke and hardly even the smell of burnt grass remained to taint the air.

Then he swung himself into his saddle and rode onward to Moccasin Creek, where he gave Gertrude a long drink, divided an apple with her, refilled his water-bottle, and lay down to enjoy a pipe.

Returning from the creek, he met the Crees on their continued trail. They had salvaged the empty spirit-cask, perhaps for the sake of the odour of whisky remaining in the wood. The chief saluted him sulkily as he passed.

"That's all right," said Silk, riding on in the face of a swirl of alkali dust. His uniform and accoutrements and his mount were thickly coated with the white powder, and his throat was painfully husky. Many times he was tempted to open his water-bottle; but he remembered Pat O'Connor's reference to a pinch of tea in the corner of the biscuit-box in the cabin, and he decided to make for the cabin and secure a drink of tea.

It was a small log-shack in the middle of the prairie, used by the police on their long patrols as a shelter from snow or rain, as a sleeping-place and as a convenient outpost, where food was stored for emergency. There were many such cabins in the solitudes of the West. They were not locked, and any wayfarer was at liberty to use them and accept their proffered hospitality.

Silk had not to go far out of his direct way. At

first, in the distance, the hut looked like a lone buffalo or an outcropping rock that might easily be passed unobserved. He rode up to it and smiled as he read the notice which Corporal O'Connor had posted beside the door :

"This cabin and what's in it are quasheed by me. Make yourself at home, stranger. Fill your gizzard, but not your pockets, and shut the door when you leeve.

"P. O'Connor, Mounted Police."

The last stranger who had made himself at home had apparently not fulfilled these instructions, for the door was not shut. Silk stooped his head to enter. Then he stopped abruptly, staring down at a human form that lay curled apparently in sleep on the sunlit earthen floor.

"Gee!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "*White Calf!* What in thunder are *you* doing here?"

CHAPTER XIX

A CASE FOR FIRST AID

WHITE CALF lay with his face on his folded, bare arms, his naked sun-scorched back exposed. He moved, drawing up his knees.

"No; it is a dream," he murmured. "No one will come to me. It is that I am lost."

But when he felt the touch of a firm, strong hand on his shoulder and heard his name repeated, he turned and sat up, pressing his palms against his red and swollen eyes.

"Is it that you are Sergeant Silk?" he questioned in amazement.

"That's right," said Silk. "You made a good guess that time. Knew my voice, eh? What's up? Are you ill? You're alone, I see. What brought you here? What's the matter?"

White Calf lowered his hands. His face was grimed with prairie dust and streaked with the channels of tears.

"It is my eyes," he answered plaintively. "There is a fly. I cannot get it out. It has been there many hours."

"A fly?" Silk leaned forward, with his hands on his knees. "Looks as if it might be a buffalo by the swelling. Let's have a proper squint at it. Come out to the light. There, lie on your back with your head on my knee. Keep still while I scout around

after that trespasser. I guess he's been wanting to escape all the time, but you've been rubbing him in, perhaps dislocating his limbs and scattering him about in fragments. Keep still, now."

He took out his handkerchief and twisted a corner of it into a point. Very gently, very tenderly he turned back the inflamed and swollen eyelid and swept the point of the clean cambric beneath it.

"Look down," he ordered, keeping the eyelid open with one hand, while with the other he plucked a blade of grass and bit it double between his teeth. "Don't move if I hurt you. Look down again. Ah! I can see him now, far behind, mixed up in the inflammation. Steady, steady! Keep looking down. I'm on his track. I'm moving him. Ah, got him!"

He brought out the fly on the looped tip of the grass-blade.

"I haven't got a syringe," he continued, "but I'm going to squirt a spray of water into your eye to wash it out."

He took a mouthful from his water-bottle, and, again holding the eyelids open, blew a long, fine spray from his lips into the corners and round the ball of the eye.

"Now lie quiet while I get a bandage," he concluded, rising to his feet. "Keep your eyes shut."

White Calf listened to him moving about, tying up his horse, making a fire, tearing up some cloth, opening a biscuit-tin.

"Feeling any easier?" the Sergeant asked, standing over him.

"Very much," White Calf answered. "I think I could see if I opened my eyes."

"Don't be so rash," said Silk. "Your eyes will be weak for days. I'm going to drop some stuff into them

from a little bottle that I've just found in the locker. I guess it will take down some of that inflammation."

The drops nipped painfully. White Calf writhed with the pain, but he was silent. He did not even moan, and when the bandage was tied and he was led into the hut to lie with his head on the Sergeant's folded blanket, the pain subsided almost miraculously.

"I'm figuring that it was a good thing I happened along," said Silk. "You sure couldn't have gotten that fly out without help, and you'd have had to lie here —Gee! Supposing I hadn't come out on this trip! Those rascally Crees would sure have set the prairie on fire. Wind's blowing this way, too. This cabin, with you in it lying helpless, would have gone up in smoke, and nobody would ever have known what had become of you!"

"I want to know how you came here," said White Calf.

"Not more than I want to know how you tumbled into this outlandish crib," said Silk. "But keep quiet; don't talk. Here, eat!" He thrust a biscuit and half an apple into the boy's hand. "I don't see any food in your outfit. How's that? Why didn't you help yourself to some of ours? But, of course, you didn't read the notice on the door. You couldn't read, even if you'd had your eyesight. Eat anyhow. You shall have a drink of tea presently."

He went outside to attend to his can of water on the fire. When he returned with the tea, stirring it with his knife, White Calf said to him:

"Have you had any food yourself?"

"Oh, yes—heaps," laughed Silk. "Don't mind me. Here, drink this."

"And your horse," said White Calf. "Did you give the horse some water, or have you used it all for this tea?"

"I've just given her the other half of your apple," Silk told him. "Gertrude would rather have apple than water at this time of day. Where were you bound for when you got the fly in your eye?"

"Back to Fort Sinclair, to see you," said White Calf, taking a thirsty drink.

"To see me? But you wouldn't have found me there. As it happens, you've found me sooner by dropping in here. That fly has saved you a heap of time. What did you want to see me for?"

"To tell you something," said White Calf—"something very bad. It is that Star Blanket is dead. He was shot dead last night in Werwolf Forest."

"My!" exclaimed Silk. "That is black news. He was a good friend to you, White Calf. Shot dead—in the forest—last night? Was it an accident?"

"No. I will tell you," resumed White Calf, feeling for something in the bag at his belt. "But first, you will tell me about this that I found on the forest trail."

Sergeant Silk took up the thing that was handed to him.

"It's just the neck of a glass bottle," he said. "The Indian who wanted to open it and get drinking the contents had no corkscrew, and he knocked off the neck. What's your idea? Do you take this bit of glass as a clue to the man who shot Star Blanket? Say, you've got your wits about you, sonny. Naturally, you nosed this and detected the smell of fire-water. But how do you reckon that Eagle Claw got hold of a gun? How did Star Blanket allow himself to be shot? What was he doing wandering alone in the forest, anyhow?"

"You are clever scout," said White Calf. "I did not speak the name of Eagle Claw. I did not say that

Star Blanket was alone when he was shot. But it is so. Eagle Claw stole Wolverine's six-gun. We went on the moose trail—Wolverine, Star Blanket and I. We went different ways. I heard some one following me. I heard the gun shot. I ran back. Star Blanket had left the trail. I found him lying with the bullet wound in the back of his head. Eagle Claw had escaped, throwing away the empty gun."

"Why did Star Blanket—the chief—go with you on the moose trail?" Sergeant Silk asked.

"He did not want me to go alone and get lost in strange places," White Calf explained.

"Exactly," Silk nodded. "Wise man. He wanted to protect you. Did he know that Eagle Claw was skulking around?"

"I think he saw the broken bottle," said White Calf. "By that alone he would know. I think—I think——"

"Yes, I guess you're thinking the same as I am," said Silk. "You are thinking that it was yourself, and not Star Blanket, whom Eagle Claw was tracking. Star Blanket tried to save you from the hidden enemy, and he did not fail. I think he saved your life, White Calf, when he gave up his own."

"That is what I believe," acknowledged White Calf. "It is all my fault. If I had not gambled against him, Eagle Claw would not have been my enemy. If I had not gone on the moose trail, Star Blanket would still be alive. My heart is heavy. I have lost my friend. Song-of-All-the-Birds is a widow, and I—I alone—am to blame. And now that I have told you this, what is to be done?"

"There is only one thing, sonny," Silk decided. "Eagle Claw must be caught. You and I will go off right now on his trail."

CHAPTER XX

RIDERS OF THE PLAINS

WHITE CALF showed surprise at Sergeant Silk's unexpected proposal. He raised himself on his elbows.

"Is it that you mean me to go with you on the track of Eagle Claw ? " he asked. "Like one of the Police ? "

"Why, yes," returned Silk. "Brought up as an Indian—knowing the Indians as you do—you ought to be a good tracker. You will be useful, anyway, and I want you to show me just where this thing happened in Werwolf Forest. Can you ride, son ? "

"I can ride," White Calf assured him. "Star Blanket gave me his best war horse. But my eyes. I cannot see. I should only be in your way."

"Your eyes will be well when you have had a sleep," said Silk. "We must go back to barracks first and get a second mount. Gertrude will carry us both as far as Fort Sinclair. You will ride behind me. I guess you're tired enough to sleep even on the back of a galloping troop-horse. You'll sure be as comfortable as you were that time lying between the horns of the buffalo bull, though it's not likely you slept any on that occasion."

"I do not know," said White Calf. "I do not remember anything about that ride. I am always trying to remember."

"Give up trying." Sergeant Silk took up the can of tea from which the boy had been drinking. There was still a little left, and he was thirsty.

"That is for you," said White Calf.

Silk looked down at him in surprise.

"You didn't see me take up this can," he said. "You could hardly have heard me; you didn't feel or smell me doing it. How did you know I took it in my hand? Say, I believe you are gifted with that strange uncanny instinct of the wild creatures that tells them things beyond themselves."

"It is that my medicine tells me what is happening," White Calf innocently explained. "Many times I know things when I do not see or feel or hear or smell them. My medicine is very powerful."

"Exactly," said Silk, drinking what remained of the tea. "I'm figuring that it was your medicine that led you to this isolated cabin when you had the fly in your eye and couldn't see. Is that so?"

"I did not know that there was a cabin on the prairie," White Calf responded. "I knew nothing until my hand touched the door and pushed it open."

"That's queer," ruminated Silk, shaking his head in perplexity. "Seems to me that civilization has robbed mankind of a whole pile of useful faculties and instincts. We lose them when we learn to read and write. Well, son, if you're ready, we'll make a start."

"I am ready," White Calf announced, rising and turning as by instinct to the door, carrying with him the Sergeant's blanket.

Silk hoisted him up behind him and rode off at a quiet trot across the prairie, always keeping to the one straight course as if he were guided by a mariner's compass.

At sunset he halted beside a creek, and dismounted to give Gertrude a rest and a drink. He readjusted the saddle to afford his companion more room. In ordinary circumstances he would have made camp at dusk and slept until daybreak; but he was anxious now to push on without delay, even at the cost of giving his mare harder work than she was accustomed to on a short patrol.

The duty before him was more important than the mere shepherding of the trading Indians at Fort Sinclair. There had been a serious breach of the white man's law. Eagle Claw had committed a terrible crime, and it was necessary that he should be arrested and brought to just punishment.

During a large part of the further journey White Calf slept, held in his seat by the blanket wrapped round him and secured by the corners to Silk's belt. Even when they were going quickly or climbing the thickly-wooded hill-sides, he was not disturbed. But once they had to cross a wide creek, and Silk awoke him by telling him to hold on tight.

"How are you finding your way?" the boy asked when they were on the farther bank. "It is quite dark, I think."

"Dark as the inside of a buffalo," Silk told him. "But I'm steering by a star that gets twinkling now and again over my left shoulder, and soon we shall have moonlight. Can you find your way by the stars, son?"

"By the Seven Persons, yes."

"Ah," said Silk. "A useful company those seven persons. Without them the good old North Star'd have to take a back seat, and a back seat's liable to be uncomfortable, what?"

"I am not uncomfortable in this back seat," said White Calf.

He continued his sleep until the first grey streaks of dawn were showing above the eastern hills, and they were riding along the trail at the side of the lake. Before sunrise they came to a halt at the gate of the police barracks.

"Tell Trooper Mullins I want him," said Silk to the stable orderly who took charge of his horse. He led White Calf into the barrack-room and advised him to finish his sleep in one of the bunks. He himself needed rest; but before he turned in he gave Trooper Mullins instructions to prepare himself at once for a patrol up the lake.

Mullins was to go by water on the trail of Eagle Claw. Overtaking the Piegans, he would gather information from Rising Moon as to whether the criminal had been caught or not by the scouts sent out in pursuit of him.

"If he is still at liberty he will likely make for the Big Rain Reserve," said Silk when he had told the trooper all he knew of the tragedy in Werwolf Forest. "He has a canoe, but no horse. It is just possible he may cut across the hills on foot. But you will keep to the waterways. He can hardly know that he has been identified as the man who killed Star Blanket, or that we have any clue. He is desperate, however, and you may have to use your gun. If you capture him alive you will bring him to Smoky Creek portage, where I shall be waiting for you."

Mullins in his canoe had become a tiny speck in the violet distance when White Calf ran down to the lake for his morning swim. He had removed the bandage from his eyes, and although they were still

inflamed, he could keep them open without pain and his sight was clear. When he was swimming under water he kept his eyes open, and this perhaps helped further to cleanse them.

His swim gave him a great appetite for breakfast in the barrack mess-room, and when at length he mounted Doughnut, the troop-horse that was waiting for him beside Sergeant Silk's Gertrude, he was a picture of boyish health and vigour.

They took a pack-horse named Snuff with them to carry their provisions and camp outfit, and they followed the trail by which they had come, along the lakeside, over the hills, and across the rolling plains by way of the prairie cabin, where they left some stores.

At noon they reached the rock at the end of Werwolf Lake where White Calf had hidden his blanket. Then they entered the forest, breaking trail among the close-growing trees.

White Calf had passed through these woodland glades on foot at night time, and they looked very different now with their sunlit banks of flowers and gorgeous creepers and majestic pine trees; but he led the way unerringly, always keeping near the shore of the lake. Sergeant Silk had no need to question him or to doubt his skill as a pathfinder.

When they reached the tongue of land where the Piegans had made camp they dismounted, hobbled their horses, and went on foot through the moose trail, examining the ground and bushes for possible signs which might have been overlooked by White Calf on the evening of the crime.

No further clues were found, however, and nothing was added to their knowledge. But going over the

scene and drawing his own conclusions, Sergeant Silk was now more than ever convinced that Star Blanket had given up his life in saving White Calf from the enemy who was tracking him.

As they stood together on the spot where the chief had fallen, White Calf touched his companion's arm and pointed through the thick bushes. Silk had seen nothing, had heard no movement; but now he beheld the giant wide-antlered form of a bull moose standing as still as one of the great pines, and beyond the bull was the cow with their tiny calf.

"Yes, I guess that's the same family you were tracking the other night," said Silk. "I'm not a whole lot sorry your friends had to go without fresh moose meat. It would have been a pity to disturb the contentment of that family."

Returning to their horses they rode on and on through the deep forest glades, following the direction of the lake. At nightfall they were still in the forest, where they made camp, lighting a small fire. Silk was an accomplished woodsman, and he taught White Calf many things in the arts of erecting a tent, making soft beds of balsam twigs, tethering horses among trees, and cooking a meal. He swung a lighted lamp near their horses to scare away wolves and other prowling animals of the dark forest.

While he smoked his pipe over the camp fire he talked to White Calf in his mellow, musical voice; telling him stories, reciting snatches of poetry, telling him wonderful things of the great outer world of the white man, of cities and railways, of the sea and steamships, and of the greatness of the British Empire.

"These things that you tell me make me feel very small," White Calf regretted.

"Exactly. You ain't very big yet," returned Silk. "What d'you reckon you're going to be and do when you grow a man? What's your ambition?"

"It is perhaps that I shall be a Piegan chief and own many horses, like Big Rain and Star Blanket," White Calf answered.

"Huh!" objected Silk. "That's a poor game. The Indian chief business will be played out before you're much older, and you ain't a Redskin, anyway."

"Then I would be one of the Mounted Police, like you."

"Like me?" Silk shook his head deprecatingly. "Say, your outlook's too limited, son. You're like the fledgling that fancied the rim of its nest was the edge of the world. But you'll quit the Reservations some day, and I don't think you'll ever want to go back. You'll be like an eagle flying with wide wings into a life you never even dream of now. But first you've got to learn to read and write. That's all you can do just yet—unless at the same time—— Say! What?"

White Calf had risen to his feet, holding up a warning finger.

"Listen!" he whispered.

Sergeant Silk could hear the slight crackling of the fire, the movements of the horses, the creaking of his belt as he breathed. But beyond these sounds he distinguished also the regular measured swish of a canoe paddle as it dipped and turned in the water of the lake. He seized his carbine and followed White Calf very silently through the bushes and down to the bank above the water's edge. Standing with his back to a stout tree trunk, he watched and listened.

The moon had broken through a rack of heavy clouds

and there was a glistening track of light across the calm surface. Into this silvery path there loomed the black shape of a canoe. There was but one occupant. He was paddling vigorously across the lake.

"It is Eagle Claw!" White Calf whispered. "He has seen our camp fire, heard your voice, smelt your pipe smoke. The lamplight would show him our horses. He knows that none but the police would ride into the forest. He is escaping to the other side. We cannot follow him!"

"Sure it isn't Mullins?" questioned Silk, raising his carbine. But without waiting for White Calf's "Yes," he took aim and fired, not at the man, but at the high prow of the canoe. "If it's Mullins he'll turn back," he added.

"It is Eagle Claw," White Calf repeated.

A second bullet struck the wet blade of the paddle, which was flung upward. Eagle Claw lost his grip on the shaft. The paddle dropped. He grabbed at it; but, leaning over too suddenly, stumbled, capsized the frail canoe, and plunged head foremost into the lake.

CHAPTER XXI

EAGLE CLAW'S RUSE

THE upturned canoe soon drifted into the darkness beyond the bright path of moonlit water. Eagle Claw was behind it, with tense fingers gripping the thin prow. His eyes, on a level with the surface, looked searchingly across to the black forest trees from which the two bullets had come. He could see the flickering reflection of the bivouac fire and the ragged wisps of smoke. He saw the hanging lantern illumining the vivid green creepers and the rounded backs of the three tethered horses; but there were no men in view.

Yet he knew as well as if he saw them that they were a patrol of the Mounted Police. No Indian would venture to ride through that ill-omened forest or make camp in its haunted depths. They were surely the white riders of the plains. And they were close on his track, hunting him like a wild animal, because of what he had done!

But he would not let them catch him. No; he would outwit them. He would outwit the cleverest of them. Even now he was safe from them. They coud not follow him into the lake. They had no canoes, only horses, and they were too wise to follow him by swimming in pursuit. They were watching him now from their ambush. Oh, yes, they were watching

and waiting for a chance to shoot him when he should expose himself by trying to turn his canoe over.

That was what they expected him to do. But he did not want his canoe. It was useless to him now. He had lost his paddle as well as his blanket and his store of food. All his outfit, which had been loosely packed, was now at the bottom of the lake. There was his pipe and his tobacco bag; more precious than all, there was his last remaining bottle of fire-water. Without these treasures, the canoe was of little value, except as a temporary shield.

He moved the frail craft, swaying it from side to side, sending rippling circles outward over the water. He raised his head for an instant above the rounded keel. Instantly from out the darkness of the trees there came a spurt of fire, and then the sharp crack of a bullet on the birch bark casing of the canoe.

Eagle Claw gave a yell as if he had been hit, and threw himself backward with a splash. He swam under the surface for a long distance, came smoothly up again for breath, and again went under, always swimming in a zig-zag course away from the canoe in the direction of the farther shore.

It was a long, long swim, for the lake at this part was wide and the current strong. But Eagle Claw was almost as much at his ease in the water as on land. He reached the opposite bank and rested himself for a while on a boulder in the black shadows of the trees. He was cold; his long hair, his leather leggings and moccasins were clammy wet, and he had now no blanket to cover his naked back from the cutting night wind.

His heart was very heavy at the loss of his precious bottle of fire-water and his tobacco pipe. He still

had his flint and steel and his tomahawk, but he did not dare to light a fire, which would betray him to the watchers on the far side of the lake.

He crawled upward among the sheltering shadows and made his way southward. He realized now that he had made a mistake in lingering in the neighbourhood of Werwolf Forest. Knowing that scouts had been sent out in pursuit of him, he had gone into hiding with his canoe up a narrow creek; but while he was still in this place of concealment the Piegans, continuing their homeward journey, had come into sight.

He had waited, watching them go by. He had looked for White Calf, but had not seen him in any of the canoes. And then, when the last of them had passed, he had doubled into Werwolf Lake, only to discover that the police were already on his tracks!

He wondered how they had got to know of his crime. He had been very careful to leave no sign of his presence in the forest lands. Star Blanket, it was true, had seen him. But Star Blanket was dead. Eagle Claw had not intended to do this harm to Star Blanket. It was for White Calf that he had reserved that last bullet.

"Wough! White Calf is my enemy in this," Eagle Claw told himself as he stole through the trees. "He has talked with the Sun about the death of Star Blanket. And the Sun has told the police. That is why they are tracking me. It is always White Calf. I shall have no peace until I have broken his medicine —until I have killed him as I killed Star Blanket!"

He walked quickly now over a bluff of spruce and willow saplings. At the foot of the slope he caught a glimpse of moonlit water. It was a creek rippling

down to the lake, crossing his trail. He went down to it silently, cautiously, as was his habit even when there was no danger. The creek was now in deep darkness, bordered by heavy trees. He would have to cross and make himself cold and wet again.

Parting the bushes and reeds, he was about to step into the water when his sensitive nostrils inhaled the faint warm odour of tobacco smoke. He sniffed, trying to locate its hidden source. Suddenly a beam of brilliant, dazzling light flashed into his eyes, and a voice called out sharply:

"Who goes?"

Eagle Claw staggered backward, shielding his face with an uplifted arm. In the light of the bull's-eye lantern he saw the shining barrel of a revolver pointed at him menacingly. He saw the strong hand that held the weapon. It was the hand of a white man. Beyond it a bright brass button gleamed from a khaki tunic. Above it was the wide circular rim of a Stetson hat.

It was the police again. Surely the police were everywhere!

Eagle Claw thought quickly. He knew that there was no time for him to retreat, that if he should attempt to run away, a bullet from that white man's gun would stop him.

He decided swiftly to put on a bold front and disguise his fears. But he could not disguise the fact that his hair and garments were wet. They would betray that he had been swimming in the lake, that he was a hunted fugitive. Lowering his hand, he stepped into the creek to wade across.

"How!" he called in Indian greeting.

Trooper Mullins swung his lantern to and fro over

the water, turning his gun aside. The light shone for a moment on his canoe.

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"Um, yes, I alone," Eagle Claw answered with a shiver.

He stumbled and threw himself bodily forward, sinking overhead in the deeper water. Then, having thoroughly wetted his hair, he rose again to his feet, spluttering and panting as he waded across to the farther bank beside the canoe.

"Who are you? Where d'you come from? What brings you here?"

Trooper Mullins rapped out the questions sharply as he watched the Indian shaking himself and ostentatiously wringing the water from his long, black hair.

"Me Piegan scout," Eagle Claw answered, speaking in such English as he had picked up from Mignonette and other half-breeds of the Big Rain Reserve. "Me go scout alonga lake for bad Indian. Him kill medicine chief, Star Blanket. Very bad. Eagle Claw heap bad Indian. Want catch."

"Ah!" nodded Mullins. "You're one of the scouts sent out on the track of Eagle Claw, are you? Gee! I was figuring you were Eagle Claw himself. What's your name?"

"Carries Something," the pretended scout answered without hesitation.

"Say, you're not carrying a whole lot now," smiled the trooper. "No gun, no blanket. You're certainly travelling light. Well, did you drop on your man? Have you seen him?"

Eagle Claw was trembling violently now, partly from cold, but more from cowardly fear.

"Yes," he answered through chattering teeth.

"See him. No catch. Me no have canoe. Ugh! Heap cold. Want eat. Want drink. Want sleep."

Trooper Mullins gave him the remains of his supper—a beef sandwich, a drink of warm tea, and a chunk of cheese—and threw towards him an old mackinaw-blanket.

While he ate, Eagle Claw told a convincing story in explanation of his sudden appearance here at the trooper's lone bivouac.

He made out that he had been sent by Rising Moon on a big scout after Eagle Claw. Eagle Claw had doubled on his back trail and he had followed him down the lake, always keeping his canoe in sight.

This very evening—only an hour or so ago—he had seen the fugitive creeping along in his canoe in the shadows of the forest. While he watched, he had caught sight of a camp fire among the trees. It was the camp of the red-coated police from Fort Sinclair. They had seen Eagle Claw passing.

"Me hear gun fire," Carries Something affirmed, holding up three fingers to intimate how many shots had been fired. "Me see Eagle Claw fall in water. Think kill. Now me go back tell Rising Moon, Eagle Claw him dead."

Trooper Mullins was smoking thoughtfully as he listened. He was not yet quite certain that his visitor was all that he represented himself to be. This plausible Indian answered in some respects to Sergeant Silk's hurried description of Eagle Claw. He had a narrow, hatchet face, close-set, beady eyes, and a hooked nose over thin lips. But many Indians had these features in common, and this man wore no blue blanket such as Silk had mentioned, and it was clear that he had no canoe.

Mullins was inclined to credit the scout's story, because, as it happened, he had himself seen the reflection of a camp fire across the lake; he had himself heard three distinct rifle shots coming faintly from the direction of the forest. He had guessed that Sergeant Silk was in the forest groves and that the shots had been fired at Eagle Claw. It was not likely that Sergeant Silk would shoot to kill. But if he had neither killed nor captured the criminal he was tracking, then Eagle Claw must surely have escaped. Could he have escaped by swimming across to this side of the wide lake? Could this supposed scout be he?

Glancing at Eagle Claw now, Mullins saw that his hair and leggings and moccasins were wet. Then he realized that the scout had just crossed the creek, that he had tripped and fallen overhead in the deep water, and that the wetness of his hair and garments was no evidence that he had been in the lake.

Trooper Mullins remembered a remark of Sergeant Silk's, that "the first law of the Service is to study men and to suspect." He was studying his visitor; he was even suspecting him. But he was so sure that the man was in his power that for the present he did nothing further than keep an eye on him.

He gave the Indian an old pipe and a pinch of tobacco, told him to light a mosquito smudge, and to make a bed for himself under the nearest tree.

Eagle Claw betrayed no anxiety, showed no slightest fear or suspicion. Mullins watched him gathering fuel, lighting the fire, and making a bed of soft balsam boughs, and then curling himself up in the blanket to bury his weary head in his arms.

"Well, he's safe fixed until daylight, anyhow,"

the trooper reflected with satisfaction, listening to the Indian's heavy breathing. And he lay down on his own couch with his carbine beside him, his loaded revolver hidden in the crook of his knees, and his dark lantern within easy reach. He had even taken the precaution of hiding his canoe paddle and of tying the end of the long painter round his body. Very soon he was sound asleep. Even the mosquitoes did not disturb him.

At a little after midnight he awoke, hearing the harsh squawk of a night bird. The moon had now gone down, and all around was dark. He could see nothing but the red embers of his fire. He began to wonder if he ought not to have paddled across the lake to report himself to Sergeant Silk instead of remaining here. If the sergeant had captured Eagle Claw he might want help, and he would certainly alter his arrangement to meet at Smoky Creek.

"Yes," Mullins reflected, "Silk will want to take his prisoner right away to barracks. No use in his riding further through that forest. It will save time if I go across to him, and I'll take that scout along with me."

Throwing off his warm blankets, he stood up.

"Hi, you—Carries Something!" he shouted. "Wake up! Get moving. We're going across the water to the other camp."

There was no answering movement. He picked up his lantern, and, touching its spring, flashed the long beam of light along the ground to the roots of the tree where the Indian had made his bed. The sleeping-place was empty!

"Hullo!" ejaculated Mullins in surprise. "Where's that scout?"

He strode down to his canoe. It had not been disturbed ; but he saw at once that his bag of grub was not there where he had left it ; nor his canister of tobacco, his spirit flask, his canteen, or his stock of tea and sugar. Nothing eatable had been left.

" Well, I'm blistered ! " cried Mullins. " The skunk's gone ! He's done me—done me brown ! Brainless caribou that I am. I ought to have known that he couldn't be anyone else than Eagle Claw himself ! Why in thunder didn't I clap the handcuffs on him ? What'll the Sergeant think of me now, letting the greasy varmint slip through my very fingers ! "

He searched around. But there was no sign to tell him by which way Eagle Claw had escaped.

" And I can't go after him," the disconsolate trooper continued. " I've got to keep to the waterways, and if I quitted my canoe he might sneak back and make off with it. Well, I'm blistered ! "

CHAPTER XXII

TWO SCOUTS AND A CLEVER INDIAN

SERGEANT SILK had been on watch at the lake side while White Calf slept in the tent. Since the overturning of the canoe and the disappearance of Eagle Claw, he had hardly for a moment taken his searching gaze from the water; but at the setting of the moon, when all became black darkness, he decided that it was useless to remain on watch any longer. Eagle Claw was either drowned or else, as White Calf believed, he had succeeded in swimming across to the opposite shore.

He had taken a last look round and was on the point of returning to the tent, when his sharp ears caught the far-off report of a gun shot. Two further shots followed—three in all, fired at equal intervals. The sounds came from across the lake.

"Hullo!" muttered Silk. "Somebody signalling. Mullins? Well, yes; it might be. But what could Mullins be wanting over there?"

Silk climbed higher up the slope of the bank and fixed his gaze upon that part of the opposite shore from which he believed the shots had been fired. He stood for a long time watching.

"Is it that you heard the firing of a gun?" asked White Calf, coming to his side through the dark bushes and touching his hand.

"Yes, son. Did it waken you?"

"Look!" cried White Calf, pointing across the lake. "What is that bright light?"

"Go and fetch the lantern," Silk ordered. "You'll find it beside my spurs. It's lighted. Don't open the shutter, and don't burn your fingers."

While he spoke he was watching the distant light. It was flashing a message to him in the Morse code. Silk read the name "Mullins," repeated time after time. And when White Calf returned to him with the bull's-eye lantern, he flashed back his own name: "Silk."

White Calf watched him, dumbly marvelling, wondering what could be the meaning of this strange interchange of twinkling lights.

At last Sergeant Silk lowered his lantern and led the way back to the tent, where he took off his overcoat and loosened the belt.

"You were right about Eagle Claw," he said. "He landed on the farther side and paid a call on Trooper Mullins at his bivouac on a creek over there. Mullins seems to have treated him as a friendly visitor; gave him supper and a blanket, and saw him go to sleep nice and warm and comfortable. Mullins will never be a good policeman until he ceases to be a fool."

"But he has caught Eagle Claw," said White Calf.

"Caught him? No. That's where the joke comes in. Eagle Claw has given him the slip. He's vamoosed—disappeared—cut his stick, and taken with him every crumb of Mullins' grub. I am only wondering why he didn't also take his canoe, his gun—even his life."

"I am in a dream," said White Calf. "I do not understand how you know these things. Is it that the light across the water told you?"

"Why, certainly. Mullins over there, and I over here, have been talking to each other. It would take too long to tell you just how it is done. And, besides, you've got to know how to read and spell before you can play the game of sending messages like that. Ah, White Calf, you're losing a heap by not being able to read! Learn to read, and you will have a key that can open every door that's locked against ignorance. Finish your sleep, son. Good night!"

On the following afternoon Sergeant Silk and White Calf had left Werwolf Forest many miles behind them, and were riding among the Pelican Mountains. Since breaking camp at earliest dawn they had come upon no sign of Eagle Claw.

"Looks as if we had missed him," said Silk. "What's your idea now, son?"

White Calf rode on in silence for some minutes before answering:

"When I am tracking the wild animals I try always to think that I am myself the animal who is being chased. I have put myself into the mind of Eagle Claw. Before, when he had his canoe, he did not know that he was being hunted. He was careless. But now he knows that the police are trailing him, and he is afraid. He will be as sly as the fox, as cunning as the wolverine. He will say to himself: 'My enemies know that I am on this west side of the lakes. They will follow me. Even the Rocky Mountains will not stop them. But they will not find me. I will blind them. I shall cross over again.'"

"Good!" nodded Silk. "But we are not doing what he expects. We are figuring to stop on this side and follow him up to Sweetgrass. That's your idea?"

"No!" objected White Calf. "The wolverine does

not take shelter in his own den where his enemies will look for him. Eagle Claw will not go to Sweetgrass—not yet; not for many sleeps; not until you have given up the chase."

"I will not give up the chase while Eagle Claw is alive," Silk declared. "But I guess you're right about his being back on this side."

"He may even be following on our own tracks," suggested White Calf. "He cannot miss the tracks of three horses. My medicine tells me that we should separate, making different trails. If you will wait here, I will go round on a lone scout and see if he is following us."

Sergeant Silk shook his head in disagreement with this proposal.

"I don't want you to go fooling around putting yourself in danger," he said. "If Eagle Claw gets sight of you, he won't give you much chance to quit."

"I am not afraid of Eagle Claw," rejoined White Calf. "He is brave when he is with other warriors. When he is alone he is a coward."

"Well, I don't imagine you'll drop on his scent, anyway," returned Silk. "You can take a scout round, if you like. I will wait here with the two horses."

"With the two that are saddled," said White Calf. "Snuff is a prairie pony. He is not shod. I will ride him bare-backed, like an Indian. You will let me?"

"Why, certainly," agreed Silk. "Don't be away long, though, or I shall get anxious."

They removed the pony's pack, bridled him with a halter rope only, and White Calf mounted. He drew his blanket over his shoulders, hunched himself up like a trailing Indian, and rode off.

He was absent about three hours. When he returned it was from the opposite direction. He rode up quickly and came to an abrupt halt.

"Well, any news?" questioned Sergeant Silk.

"It is that I have seen him," White Calf answered. "Please come with me. Bring your gun. Leave Doughnut and the outfit where they are."

The Sergeant tightened the cinches of Gertrude's saddle and mounted.

White Calf led him down the hill-side into a thickly-wooded valley, over the shoulder of another hill, and round by many strange and intricate ways, until he slackened down to a walking pace, and turned very cautiously into a narrow, rocky ravine. Here he drew rein and dismounted. He signed to his companion to dismount also and to tether the two horses among the poplars.

Without questioning him, Silk followed him down the ravine and up its steep rocky side until they came upon a wide flat shelf of open ground.

"Wait!" White Calf whispered. "Do not move until I sign to you."

He crawled on elbows and knees very slowly, very silently to the edge of the shelf. There he lay at full length with a screen of sage brush in front of him, his searching eyes looking down into a deep, gloomy cañon, thickly overgrown with larch and tamarack. Presently he beckoned, and Sergeant Silk crept up to his side.

White Calf pointed into the depths to a faint blue thread of fire smoke and to the figure of a solitary Indian standing in the midst of it watching the newly-lighted fuel rise into tiny flames.

"It is Eagle Claw," he whispered. And Silk nodded.

The Indian stood absolutely motionless for many minutes. Then his attitude relaxed. His blanket slipped to the ground and he sat down upon it, calmly filled his pipe, lighted it with a flaming twig, and began to smoke, with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands.

Silk very slowly reached out for his carbine and drew it nearer to him. In doing this he made no sound; but at the same moment the Indian rose to his feet, thrusting his pipe into his belt as though he thought that the smell of the burning tobacco might betray him. He turned and followed with his glance the drift of the fire smoke. Then again he stood very still. It was as if he were listening for some expected sound. Sergeant Silk's grip tightened on his gun, but he did not move to take aim. He wanted to capture Eagle Claw alive, and he knew that it would not be wise to alarm him.

Eagle Claw went back to his fire, packed the fuel together, and dropped a few more sticks upon it. Then he picked up his blanket, and, carrying it over his arm, strode towards the wall of rock against which he had already made a shelter of poles and branches of dead spruce and boughs of balsam.

Into this shelter he flung his blanket. He stooped, preparing to follow, but instead of creeping in, he straightened himself and swept his glance upward and downward, along and across the cañon, as if to make sure that no watching eye was upon him. For an instant or two his gaze lingered searchingly upon the high ledge whereon Sergeant Silk and White Calf were concealed. Apparently satisfied, he stooped once again and entered his shelter.

"Wait right here, son," Silk whispered. "Take

hold of my gun. If he bolts before you see me down there alongside the fire, shoot him. When you see me, come down to me. It's likely he has gone in there to enjoy an undisturbed snooze. He hadn't much sleep last night, I guess. Say, I think we've got him."

He crept back on hands and knees among the dark trees. For a long, long time he was out of sight. The place was wholly strange to him; he had not even known of the existence of this cañon. Once as he made his way downward one of his spurs clicked against a stone, but otherwise he made no betraying sound, and White Calf could not follow his direction by eye or ear until at last he was seen moving stealthily among the boulders and bushes far down in the gloomy depths.

White Calf watched him passing like a silent shadow from tree to tree until he reached the side of the Indian's fire and looked upward. He waved an arm, then drew his revolver and stood as if on guard waiting until White Calf should join him.

There was no need for White Calf to be so cautious as Silk had been in making the difficult descent, and he had seen an easier, shorter way than Silk had taken, although it afforded him less cover.

When he came beside the fire, Silk made a sign to him to follow, and they both went forward, Silk with a finger on the trigger of his revolver, and White Calf with the carbine ready. Silk was leading. He leaned over and peeped cautiously into the darkness of the shelter, and then lifting his right foot, kicked the supporting poles aside and stooped to seize his man. But instantly he drew back at sight of a dark, cavernous opening in the rock that went far in like a passage tunnelled in the hill-side.

There was no sign of Eagle Claw.

"He has tricked us!" the Sergeant cried.

White Calf followed him into the cave. It led them far through the cliff and out into daylight, and by a narrow goat-track up the bare, open hill. Silk ran along this path and did not pause until he came to the clump of poplars where the two horses had been tethered. His own horse, Gertrude, was still there. But the prairie pony was by this time miles away, galloping at hot haste through hidden valleys and sheltered ways, with Eagle Claw on its back.

"It is that Eagle Claw is a very clever Indian," said White Calf.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOOF-MARKS IN THE SAND

SERGEANT SILK closed his teeth on an end of his moustache as he thrust his gun back into its holster. He did not look at White Calf. He was clearly vexed at having been so cunningly outwitted by an Indian. It had been a test of skill in scout-craft, and he had been out-manœuvred. Who but himself was to blame for the escape of Eagle Claw?

"M'yes," he acknowledged, "he is certainly clever. He has tricked us nicely—just as he tricked Trooper Mullins. His having that back exit was a stroke of genius. I reckoned we'd caught him napping; but you'd need to wear two pairs of moccasins to get level with a fugitive Redskin. Say, son, it looks as if he'd stage-managed this present stunt with the conviction that we should act exactly as we have acted."

"He is like the wolverine," nodded White Calf. "You cannot outwit a wolverine."

"He adopted your own idea," Silk continued. "He put himself into the mind of his pursuers, calculating on our taking his bait, and we gobbled it. And yet I don't just see how he figured that we were liable to track him down to the entrance of that cave—unless he saw you or heard you or dropped on your trail when you were scouting around in the ravine—before you brought me along?"

White Calf shook his head.

"He did not see me," he affirmed positively. "He did not hear me. I have told you many times that he is a very cunning scout."

"Exactly," admitted Silk. "But what made you come to the cañon, anyway? You've never been in it before."

"I found it by chance," White Calf explained. "I saw that it was a good hiding place. Eagle Claw surely knew of it. He knew that a hunted man might live there for many sleeps and not be tracked. He did not expect to be tracked. I did not show myself. I made no sound. I looked down into the cañon from the ledge, hidden by the trees. I watched; I listened. My medicine told me that Eagle Claw would look for such a place. He knows this country very well. I think he knew how to escape through that cave."

"Sure," agreed Silk. "I guess this isn't the first time he has taken refuge in it. And he was cute enough to cover the entrance. But you told me you had seen him. How do you make out that he in his turn didn't see you?"

"It was that I saw a flock of birds rising in alarm far down the cañon. And then after a long time of watching, I saw a man, and I knew by his walk that it was Eagle Claw. Then I crept back to the pony and rode off to tell you."

"That's all right," nodded Silk. "But he sure got the better of us. And his cunning is even shown in his making off with Snuff when he might as easily have taken Gertrude."

"But yes," reflected White Calf. "He thought deeply then; he was wise. He knew that Gertrude would leave the tracks of her shoes, but that Snuff

was not shod. Gertrude is branded with her troop number; she wears saddle and bridle and she would be known anywhere in Canada as a stolen troop-horse. Eagle Claw can ride where he likes on a prairie pony, and never be suspected. But it is a pity we have lost our pack horse. And I was very fond of Snuff."

"She's not to be sneezed at as a mount," laughed Silk. "Fortunately Gertrude can carry us both back to where we left Doughnut and our outfit."

He mounted and hoisted White Calf to a seat behind him and they rode away on their back trail to the place from which they had started. Silk decided to make camp near by. Eagle Claw now knew beyond a doubt that his enemies were close upon his heels, and he was not likely to give them another chance of capturing him.

At daybreak on the following morning Sergeant Silk left White Calf to prepare their breakfast and rode out to see if he might find any trace of the fugitive which would indicate in what direction he had fled. But he returned disappointed.

"I came upon hoof marks at the side of a creek over there," he explained. "But of course when he had taken to water there wasn't any use in trying to follow him up. I guess he'll wade along that creek for miles and not quit it while there's water deep enough to cover the pony's hoofs."

"Wherever he goes he will wipe out his tracks," said White Calf. "But will you keep up the chase?"

"Why certainly," Silk assured him. "I will keep it up until I run him to earth, if it takes me a twelvemonth. We shall soon need more grub, son; but we can get some when we overtake the canoes, and that will probably be to-night."

"Then you expect Eagle Claw to be among the Piegans?" conjectured White Calf.

"I did not say so," returned Silk, "but I figure he's plumb sure to sneak back to his own people sooner or later."

These days of scouting in company with Sergeant Silk were very precious to White Calf. In every waking hour he was learning something new, something memorable and unexpected of the ways and the speech and mind of white men.

The experience was to him a valuable education, giving him a fresh outlook upon life and filling him with ambitions of which he had never before dreamed. And every day Silk was treating him more and more as a companion of his own race rather than as a narrow-minded Indian whose thoughts were limited to the doings of his own tribe.

On the second evening after the adventure in the cañon, they overtook the slowly travelling Piegans in their encampment beside Singing Water Creek. Here they heard no news of Eagle Claw, excepting a vague statement from Wolverine, who reported that on the previous day he had seen a solitary rider in the far distance going westward across a stretch of prairie.

Wolverine's idea was that Eagle Claw might have taken refuge in the camp of some other friendly band of Indians. White Calf agreed with him, and added that it was not improbable that Eagle Claw had joined the Crees. Eagle Claw and Pushed-Behind-the-Lodge-Pole had made up a fire-water friendship together at Fort Sinclair. But Sergeant Silk held to his own belief that Eagle Claw would be found somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Big Rain Reserve. He was remembering Star Blanket's fear that Eagle Claw

coveted Song-of-All-the-Birds and wanted to make her his squaw.

There were so many possible trails and hiding-places, and Eagle Claw was so desperately cunning, that Silk began to despair of finding his man without help from other members of the force, and he determined to ride over the mountains as far as Sandy Lake, where there was a police post and telegraph communication. He estimated that he could still reach Sweetgrass Lake in advance of the Piegans, and he asked White Calf if he cared to accompany him.

White Calf might have remained with his friends and the canoes, but the chance of continuing the journey on horseback with Sergeant Silk was too good for him to miss, so after a night's rest in the camp at Singing Water, the two set off again across the prairie trails.

Three days later they were riding over the ground where the buffalo hunt had taken place long ago on the occasion of the killing of the white bull. They had passed Warm Spring Creek and were within sight of the forest and lake of Sweetgrass. The lake was speckled over with the canoes returning from Fort Sinclair.

Sergeant Silk suddenly drew rein and looked down on the sandy ground on either side of him, where there were the hoof-marks of many horses.

"It is the trail of a big village," conjectured White Calf.

"A party of your Piegan friends out on the buffalo hunt, eh?" Silk suggested.

"It is not the buffalo hunting season," White Calf reminded him. "And it is not a party of fur traders, either, or we should see the marks of their travois poles.

There are no marks on the ground but the hoof-prints of many Indian ponies going in single file. What are your thoughts, Sergeant Silk ? "

" I was thinking," Silk answered, " that seeing that Big Rain's village has been defended only by old men and women and children during the past few weeks, there has been quite a good opportunity open to any hostile tribe—the Crees, for example—to make a horse raid."

" But our horses are running wild on the ranges," White Calf objected. " There would be no use in making a raid before they are rounded up in the corrals."

" Exactly," said Silk, following on the line of tracks. " That is what puzzles me. But a band of mounted Indians has passed along here within half a dozen hours. They were not Piegans. Most of the Piegan warriors and braves are out there in those canoes. Then what is the meaning of this big trail ? "

" Look ! " exclaimed White Calf, pointing to the ground where the track of one horse branched off from the main line of the march and took a new direction apart. " One of them has gone alone to Big Rain's village."

" That's so, sure," agreed Silk. " But there's something more. Have a good look at those hoof-marks, son. The pony's left hind hoof turns outward, as if the animal was cow-hocked, and the toe drags along the ground."

White Calf nodded wisely.

" Yes," he said. " It is the track of our lost pack-horse, Snuff, and I think we are again on the trail of Eagle Claw."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HELP THAT WAS NEAR

"STAR BLANKET he very proud when he see you presently," said Red Cherry admiringly. "You very beautiful. I like very much your hair, your pretty face, your big, soft eyes, your lovely dress. Oh, I have never seen you so beautiful, you sweet Song-of-All-the-Birds!"

They were together in the large and splendid lodge of Song-of-All-the-Birds. Each was dressed in her best robe of scarlet cloth and white doe-skin, gorgeously decorated with many-coloured beads, feathers, porcupine quills, and threads of silk. For the heavily laden canoes from Fort Sinclair were in sight down the lake, and Star Blanket and White Calf, Rising Moon and Wolverine, and all the others of the trading Piegans, were expected very soon to step ashore to the welcome that awaited their return.

Red Cherry had fretted over the long absence of White Calf more than over her separation from her father and brother; but the day had come at last, and now she was feverishly excited and eager to run down to the landing-place. She waited only for Song-of-All-the-Birds to be ready to accompany her, although she well knew that the heavy canoes would take an hour or two yet to travel the whole length of the lake.

Song-of-All-the-Birds was tying the last thong of her

dainty red leather leggings when a moving shadow crossed the sunlit threshold of the lodge. She glanced up and saw the half-breed woman Mignonette standing looking at her.

"Ho, la!" Mignonette laughed gaily. "What a pair of pretty birds we are then, with all our fine feathers! But *pourquoi* you linger, you two? You 'ave not per'aps see that the first canoe 'ave already arrive? Oh, but yes. I assure you it is so. It is that Star Blanket and the little White Calf will at this moment step ashore. Quick, then; you go meet them, both of you, right now beside the horse corral."

She ran off. But beyond the doorway she turned sharply to the rear of the lodge and waited there, furtively watching until the two should come out. Very well did Mignonette know that her news was not true, that no canoe was as yet within a mile of the landing place. But she had her reasons for inducing the two girls to go to the horse corral just at this moment when the trap was ready set for them.

"Listen," said Red Cherry. "I do not trust that woman, that Mignonette. She very bad. Her tongue very crooked. It is not possible, what she say."

Song-of-All-the-Birds laughed at her friend's fears.

"My medicine tells me that Star Blanket is waiting for me, down there at the horse corral," she protested. "I go to him. Come!"

"Yes, I come," agreed Red Cherry. "I not afraid. But you will take this little gun with you."

She had turned aside to take up a small ivory-handled revolver and see that it was fully loaded. She pressed the weapon into the hand of Song-of-All-the-Birds, who laughed again, but obediently thrust the gun into the pocket hanging from her belt.

At sight of them as they crossed the open grassy space to the farther rim of the wide circle of teepees, Mignonette slipped out of her hiding-place and ran swiftly round by the back of the village to the trail along which she knew that they must pass.

This trail was hidden from the encampment by the high palisade of Star Blanket's horse corral. From the rising ground beside the corral the two girls as they approached looked down over the whole length of Sweetgrass Lake. They saw the long straggling procession of canoes and scows with their heavy cargoes of trade goods.

"It is my father's canoe that is leading," announced Red Cherry, coming to a halt and shading her eyes from the light of the afternoon sun. "I can see him. But I cannot see our little White Calf."

"And I cannot see my Star Blanket," added her companion.

Red Cherry went a few steps in advance. She had passed the corral gates when she suddenly drew back.

"Come away! Come away!" she cried in consternation.

But her warning was too late. Even as she spoke she saw Mignonette come forth from behind a tree and point to her. Two strange Indians leapt out at her. One threw a strip of cloth over her head to stifle her cries, the other seized her in his arms, lifted her and flung her upon the back of a horse and rode off with her, followed by a second rider.

Song-of-All-the-Birds, unable to help her, turned to escape, but found herself confronted by a tall, hatchet-faced Indian, who leered at her maliciously, with his arms outstretched to seize her.

"You!" she exclaimed. "You—Eagle Claw! Ah, you dog-face! What do you want here?"

Eagle Claw laughed and made a step towards her.

"It is you that I want," he answered. "I have waited for you long enough. But now you are mine—*mine!* I won you from Star Blanket in the bone game. I should have had you then if White Calf and his medicine had not been against me. But Star Blanket cannot claim you now. He will never come back to you, for his shadow has gone beyond the sandhills. He is dead."

She shrank away from him, pressing against the side of a waiting pony. It was Silk's pack-horse, Snuff. She raised a hand to the animal's mane, intending to mount, but the pony swerved, threw up its head, and strode away.

"What?" cried Song-of-All-the-Birds. "You tell me that my man is dead!"

Eagle Claw leapt at her, caught her left wrist in the grip of one of his strong hands, and tried to drag her after the escaping pony. But she struggled and fought with all her savage strength and skill, and lifting her clenched fist, she struck him in the face. He loosened his hold and staggered back. Then again he rushed at her. But this time he was stopped by the unexpected sight of a revolver levelled at him in her steady hand.

"You move, you try to touch me again, and I will shoot you dead," she threatened proudly.

Eagle Claw was looking beyond her. His glance had followed the escaping pony, but now it swiftly changed into a startled look of cowardly terror. He had seen two figures approaching him. One was the figure of Sergeant Silk, the other was White Calf. Each had covered him with a gun. In that instant three separate

revolvers were levelled at Eagle Claw; but only one was fired. Silk was anxious to arrest a living criminal; White Calf would not shoot an unarmed man, but Song-of-All-the-Birds had no such scruples, and she did not know that help was so near. She wanted only to escape, to rid herself of a lifelong enemy and tyrant.

As Eagle Claw threw up his hands in surrender, she took quick aim at a point between his beady black eyes. She pressed the trigger once, then once again, and saw him stagger forward. Sergeant Silk, brushing past her, caught him as he fell and lowered him to the ground.

"I think we have got him this time, son," he said, looking up at White Calf.

CHAPTER XXV

RED CHERRY'S ADVENTURE

WHEN Song-of-All-the-Birds saw and realized what she had done, she was aghast at the enormity of her own act. Never before in her life had she done wilful harm to a living creature; but now she had killed a man! She knew that she had killed him, just as Sergeant Silk knew.

Eagle Claw had been her hated enemy, it was true; he had meant for a long time past to do harm to her, to steal her from her husband and her home, and it had been in self-defence that she had fired those two fatal bullets between his wicked eyes. But she had taken a human life!

"Oh, what have I done?" she cried in her distress, appealing to White Calf and Sergeant Silk in turn.

White Calf went near to her, taking her free left hand in his own.

"You have only done what the White Man's law would have done," he told her. "You have taken the life of a bad Indian—a murderer. For many days Sergeant Silk and I have been following on the trail of Eagle Claw. He has escaped us until now. But we tracked him to this place. Sergeant Silk would have done what you have done."

"Murderer?" she repeated in amazement. "Eagle Claw?"

"Yes," continued White Calf, "the murderer of your husband and my friend—Star Blanket. It was in Werwolf Forest."

"Then I am glad that I have done this thing," she declared. "I am not sorry."

She gripped her revolver and would have fired yet another bullet at Eagle Claw as he lay motionless on the ground at her feet. But White Calf caught at her uplifted arm.

"No, no!" he protested, taking possession of her gun. "You have done enough. You cannot kill him more than once. Though I think he deserved many deaths."

Sergeant Silk stood up in front of her as she leaned on White Calf's shoulder.

"There were others here," he said. "Eagle Claw was not alone with you when you called for help."

She turned excitedly, pushing White Calf from her.

"Go! Go!" she exclaimed, pointing along the trail. "They have taken Red Cherry! They have stolen her from us—two strange Indians—Crees! I could not stop them. They carried her off. Ride after them, White Calf—quick! There are horses here. Your own war horse is in the corral."

She hastened to open the gate. But Sergeant Silk and White Calf ran to the back of the corral, where they had left their troop horses. There they found also their lost pack-pony. In a few moments they returned, both mounted ready for the pursuit, leading Snuff by his trail rope.

"You will now ride back on our spare pony to your lodge," White Calf instructed Song-of-all-the-Birds.

She quickly vaulted astride of Snuff and shortened the halter. Then she hesitated.

"No!" she shook her head. "I go not back to my empty lodge until we have saved Red Cherry. I go with you!"

Sergeant Silk looked down at the body of Eagle Claw. His duty concerning the criminal he had chased and run to earth was now at an end; but it was not in his nature to leave his captive lying dead and uncared for.

"Leave him where he is," urged Song-of-All-the-Birds. "Mignonette will come to him very soon. He was her man."

Mignonette, indeed, was still near enough to have heard the two pistol shots, although she did not know who had fired them; and now she appeared in sight among the trees, hanging back only because she saw Sergeant Silk and White Calf, and was afraid of them.

Particularly was she afraid of the tall man in the uniform of the Mounted Police—the representative of the White Man's law; for she reasoned with hatred in her heart that he was the same who had been here years before, when Eagle Claw's brother, Black Weasel, was taken from her.

"Come, then!" shouted White Calf, leading off along the level trail and down into the hollow of Sweetgrass Coulée. He believed that by this way they would be able to head off the two Crees escaping with their girl captive. Song-of-All-the-Birds kept pace with the two troop horses, riding like a man on the bare-backed prairie pony. She was the Chief's daughter, and a most daring horsewoman.

Beyond the coulée, where the high ground opened into flat prairie, they came in sight of the two Crees, who had halted to secure Red Cherry with ropes. They were tying the girl's feet one to the other under

the girth of the broncho. Hearing the beating of hoofs, they hastily finished their work and remounted, one of them with Red Cherry writhing and struggling helplessly in front of him on a piebald broncho, the other unencumbered on a grey. They thrashed their ponies with their short-handed quirts and went off at desperate speed, kicking up clouds of prairie dust.

Sergeant Silk, however, was not only a more skilful rider, but was also mounted on a better horse than either of the Indians, and he steadily gained upon them. White Calf had never before seen such wonderful riding. But what most amazed him was the later spectacle of Sergeant Silk, when galloping at fullest speed, dropping the reins over the horn of his saddle and deliberately taking out his carbine and firing a forward shot between Gertrude's ears.

This shot was fired not so much with the intention of wounding either of the Indian ponies or their riders, as of letting Red Cherry understand that help was near. Nevertheless, one of the animals, the grey, stumbled, went down on its knees, and flung its rider to the ground.

The second Indian—the one who carried Red Cherry in front of him—pulled his broncho violently round and made off in a new direction. Silk galloped on to the farther side of him, thus adroitly placing him between himself and White Calf, who now rode down upon the Cree, followed closely by Song-of-All-the-Birds.

It seemed to White Calf that Sergeant Silk had abandoned the chase in order that he, White Calf, should have the honour of rescuing Red Cherry; for Silk was riding now at an easy canter, and he had returned his carbine to its bucket.

Urging his horse to a full racing stride, White Calf bore down upon the Indian, gaining upon him hand over hand. But suddenly the Cree checked his broncho, snatched at his bow, and, turning in his seat, began shooting arrow after arrow backward at White Calf. So quickly did he shoot that often there were two arrows in the air at once. But none touched its mark. White Calf, who had drawn his revolver, fired one or two aimless shots, and the Cree, evidently frightened, and seeing that there was no other escape for him, stopped the piebald, slipped to the ground, and ran off on foot to join his companion, who still clung desperately to his dragging trail rope.

Red Cherry was now alone on the piebald broncho, bound to it by ropes, and unable to guide it. But she had managed to remove the cloth which had been bandaged over her eyes and mouth, and she was struggling to set free her hands and get at her knife.

The first thing that she saw was White Calf galloping towards her across a narrow space of prairie grass. She was amazed. She had believed him to be with the canoes; but she recognized him quickly, in spite of his strange horse, in spite of the brown sunburn in his flushed face and his travel-stained clothing.

"It is White Calf himself!" she exclaimed in joyous surprise as he reached her side. "The good Sun sent you to save me from those men!"

White Calf had caught at the loose trail rope hanging from the pony's muzzle. He pulled the animal to a halt beside his own troop horse, dismounted, and was unfastening Red Cherry's bonds and helping her to alight, when Song-of-All-the-Birds rode up. Sergeant Silk joined them a few moments afterwards.

"Is Red Cherry hurt?" Silk asked of White Calf.

Red Cherry stared at him strangely, wondering how one of the Mounted Police should happen to be here.

"No, I not hurt," she answered for herself. "I only frightened. But I do not understand things—how White Calf came so quick from the canoes. And you—I do not know you. But you speak my name."

"He is Sergeant Silk." White Calf hastened to explain. And then he told her what had happened. She was greatly distressed at hearing of the death of Star Blanket. Her friend, Song-of-All-the-Birds, was now a widow, and would have to blacken her face and in other ways go into mourning. But she had taken swift vengeance. Red Cherry was well satisfied in having urged Song-of-All-the-Birds to take her loaded revolver with her.

"My medicine told me that Mignonette was deceiving you," she declared. "Mignonette she very wicked woman."

Sergeant Silk, always practical, prepared for the return to the Piegan encampment. He saw that the two Crees had mounted together on the grey broncho, and were riding away, abandoning their piebald pony. This was convenient, as it would enable Red Cherry to ride home in comfort.

They all four rode in close company towards the lake, so that they might see if the canoes had yet reached the landing-place; but they had not gone very far when White Calf drew rein and looked sharply at Sergeant Silk.

"Listen!" he said. "Do you hear something—the firing of guns—the yelling of war-cries? It is that the Crees are attacking the Piegans!"

Silk heard the unmistakable sounds coming from afar.

"You're right," he agreed. "The same lot whose trail we found. Yes, you're sure right. I'm figuring that this is some more of Eagle Claw's work. I make out that when he gave us the slip, he went straight away and joined the Crees. Looks as if he'd put them up to coming here on a raiding stunt while Big Rain's village was unprotected. That was his idea. I don't doubt that he led them. And he calculated on making sure of Star Blanket's pretty widow as his own particular share of the loot."

"There is fighting going on, I am sure," White Calf insisted.

"Exactly," acknowledged Silk. "But just where? Can you locate it by the sound?"

"It is not among the lodges, or at the horse corrals," White Calf decided after a moment's attentive listening. "No. I think it is down by the lake side. The Crees are attacking the loaded canoes. Come, Sergeant; come with me to the help of our people!"

"Yes, go, White Calf," Red Cherry urged him. "It is better I take Song-of-All-the-Birds home to her lodge. We ride quite safely through the coulée. Go! Go quick!"

CHAPTER XXVI

POWERFUL MEDICINE

WHITE CALF and Sergeant Silk rode together over the rolling grass land, through a narrow belt of timber, and down to the trail beside the lake. Beyond a wooded promontory they came in sight of the Piegan canoes strung out in a line parallel with the shore.

Between the water's edge and the high bank that sloped down to it a large war party of Cree Indians rode to and fro, wildly yelling and screeching while they fired their rifles and shot their arrows upon the canoes, whose defenders were weakly returning the fire. It was clearly a very unequal fight.

The Piegans, who had been away on a peaceful trading trip, were not equipped for battle, and they had been taken at a disadvantage from ambush just as they were approaching their landing-place. But the Crees had evidently come out on the war-path. They wore their feathered war-bonnets, their faces were painted, and they were all well armed. Mounted on their trained war-horses, they could move about from point to point, whereas the heavy canoes were difficult to handle, and could neither advance nor be withdrawn.

"Hold hard!" commanded Silk, as White Calf dashed forward. "Let's fix up a plan before rushing into that wild shindy." He led the way aside into

the cover of the birches. "I don't see that we can do much, son," he reflected, peering out along the shore. "Say, why in thunder doesn't Rising Moon draw his canoes out of range into the middle of the lake? And where are the rest of your Piegans—Big Rain himself and the braves who were left at home?"

White Calf pointed to a low wooden promontory beyond the landing-place.

"Big Rain is over there, I think," he said. "I can see horses among the poplars. Yes, he is surely there. But he has a very small company."

"Certainly not enough to tackle that big squad of Crees," said Silk, "unless he makes a sudden attack on their rear. That's his best chance. Ah! Rising Moon is sheering off, now, see? and some of the Crees have dismounted and are swimming out to board the canoes. See that one climbing over and slashing about with his tomahawk!"

"It is Rising Moon's canoe!" cried White Calf. "Oh, well done, Wolverine! That was a very good shot! Come, Sergeant, come!"

"Wait a bit," said Silk. "I'm trying to get a sight of the Cree chief—him wearing the fancy war-bonnet. Yes, I thought so. That's sure Eagle Claw's fire-water friend, old Pushed-Behind-the-Lodge-Pole. Come along!"

Silk dashed out from among the birch trees to the more level ground, spurring his horse to a gallop, White Calf racing after him.

The Crees, led by their chief, were charging along the beach, firing with bullet and arrows at the canoes as they passed. And now the mounted Piegans in their rear broke cover and dashed after them, firing into their midst. Many turned in confusion to encoun-

ter this unexpected attack upon their rear, and there followed a desperate hand-to-hand fight, in which both sides suffered severely. But the main column of the Crees had continued to advance under the leadership of their chief.

Sergeant Silk, riding as if to meet them, came to an abrupt halt and levelled his carbine at the advancing mass of yelling savages. On and on they came like an impetuous avalanche to overwhelm the solitary, motionless figure on the unflinching chestnut troop horse.

Their eyes had been directed upon the canoes, at which they were aiming their bullets and arrows, but as they passed beyond the floating targets the chief raised his feathered head and saw in front of him the challenging form in the familiar khaki tunic and wide Stetson hat.

He flung himself back with such a violent jerk on the halter that he pulled his mustang to its haunches. The warriors behind him wheeled towards the slope of the bank.

It was at this moment that White Calf galloped up to Silk's side, ready to join him in the expected conflict, although he was armed only with a revolver.

"Steady, son," Silk coolly ordered. "Look out for mischief; but don't cause any."

He lowered his rifle, drew his revolver in its stead, and rode boldly forward, covering the Cree chief.

"Call off your warriors, chief," he commanded in his deep, compelling voice. "Call them off. Stop this fight. Tell your braves to put their weapons away —quick!"

"Wough!" The Chief scowled at him sullenly, but dared not disobey. He knew too well the power

of the Mounted Police. He hesitated only a moment to realize the terrible consequences of disobedience. Then he raised his open hand to the side of his mouth and gave forth a loud, penetrating cry that was like the shrill call of a bugle sounding the "Cease fire!" He repeated the cry again and again. The warriors riding near him lowered their various weapons and brought their horses round him in a close group.

Sergeant Silk pointed along the strand.

"Go and stop that fighting," he again commanded. "Draw your Crees off from the canoes. You have broken the White Man's law by coming out on the war-trail. The Piegans are not your enemies; their canoes are not war-canoes. The Crees will be punished for leaving their own Reserve. They must all clear out of this."

The Chief defended his conduct by explaining that it was a Piegan who had enticed him upon this raid, with promises of rich reward. "And now Eagle Claw has deserted us," he complained. "His medicine was bad. I am sorry I listened to the sound of his crooked tongue."

Sergeant Silk, attended by White Calf and followed by a company of the Cree warriors, rode at the chief's side towards the point where the fighting had not yet ceased. Here and there the tomahawks and clubs were still at their desperate work, but the gun firing was subdued and there were no more arrows to be seen in flight.

Many riderless horses were escaping up the slopes. The ground was strewn with dead and wounded Indians, and amongst them both Piegans and Crees were busy with their scalping knives.

The chief repeated his thrilling rally cry as he gal-

loped near. Then Silk took him down to the water-side to deal with the Crees who had been attacking the canoes. White Calf did not follow them. He had seen three of the mounted Piegans gathered round a young Cree who was standing at bay with his back against a tree bravely defending himself while they tried to reach him with thrusting spear and slashing battle-axe. White Calf dashed up between them and their victim.

"Cowards!" he cried, raising his pistol menacingly. "Three of you against one, and him unarmed! Get back! The battle is at an end."

At sight of him they drew away, and he signed to the Cree to escape.

He turned then to rejoin Sergeant Silk; but he saw something which changed his purpose. Right in front of him a Cree was crouching over the body of a Piegan. He had dragged off the dead man's splendid war-bonnet. The fingers of his left hand were entwined in a lock of long black hair; his scalping knife was drawn. White Calf took quick aim at the Cree's right arm and fired. The bullet went through the Indian's wrist and the knife dropped.

White Calf fixed a long gaze upon the dead Piegan. He recognized every plume in the war-bonnet now sullied with drops of blood from the Cree's wounded arm; he recognized the decorations of ermine and coloured bead work on coat and leggings and moccasins, and he felt sad.

"Big Rain is dead," he murmured sorrowfully as he dismounted.

Now that the fighting was over, Sergeant Silk gave his attention first to the wounded and to the work of rounding up the scattered Crees. He afterwards dis-

missed them with the threat that he would soon follow them up to their encampment. They took with them their dead and wounded.

To the Piegans no less than to the Crees, the raid had been disastrous. Two of their scows and one canoe had been sunk with all their contents. Many of the best buffalo-runners, braves, and woodsmen were among the casualties. Rising Moon was stunned by the blow of a tomahawk in the back of the head. Wolverine had received an arrow wound in the chest.

"It is all the work of Eagle Claw," deplored White Calf late in the evening as he sat with Sergeant Silk. "I think it is a pity that you did not shoot to kill, that time long ago when he followed on the track of your dog-train. But you only wounded him in his hand—the hand that has since done all this mischief. You could have killed him then, as he intended to kill you."

"Why, certainly," Silk acknowledged. "But you see it isn't just my duty to take life when life can be preserved. To-day, when I might without blame have killed many of your enemies, I have not once fired a shot—barring the harmless one that tripped up the grey broncho on the prairie."

"And yet," reflected White Calf, "by stopping the battle you preserved many lives. That is what I cannot understand. It is that your medicine is very powerful, Sergeant."

"Son," said Silk, "don't make a mistake. The battle was sure stopped when I rode along. But it wasn't I as an individual who stopped it. All the medicine I employed was just my uniform of the Mounted Police—my authority as a representative of the White Man's law."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SACRED BUNDLE

NEVER before in her existence had Red Cherry experienced so many anxious hours, never had so many new and unexpected duties crowded upon her, as on the morning following the battle of Sweetgrass Lake.

The Piegan chief had been killed, and the whole camp was in mourning. Her father and Wolverine were among the wounded, needing her attention; she had the duty of comforting Song-of-All-the-Birds in her grief over the death of Big Rain and of Star Blanket; the trading canoes had returned from Fort Sinclair and all the stores which Rising Moon and White Calf had purchased had to be collected and examined.

White Calf himself had come back after his first long absence, and with him had come Sergeant Silk, whose visit in itself would have been excitement enough. These happenings were almost too much for Red Cherry. She hardly knew which duty to attend to first.

The most urgent, of course, was the nursing of her father and brother. In this matter, however, she quickly discovered that Sergeant Silk was far more capable than herself. He dressed the wounds of most of the braves who had been injured in the fight, and she marvelled at the skill and tenderness with which he extracted a bullet, cleansed and patched a tomahawk cut, mended a limb and applied a bandage. It

seemed to her that he had a special method of treating every wound, with a special instrument for every kind of operation.

Many of the Indians refused to have their injuries dressed. They were proud of them. Knowing nothing of microbes, they chose to let their wounds heal themselves, even when they were poisonously dirty. It was not till weeks afterwards that they realized the value of the white man's surgery.

"Sergeant Silk, you very wonderful man," declared Red Cherry. "You make me feel very stupid. You quite sure you go away to-day?"

"Why, certainly," he answered her, "I must get back to my duty. There is only one thing more I want before I quit, and that is to have a look at those baby clothes of White Calf's."

"And I, too, want to see them," added White Calf.

Red Cherry disappeared into a remote part of the lodge and returned with a parcel enclosed in white fox-skins bound round with ropes of coloured beads, like an Indian's sacred bundle which is opened only on ceremonial occasions. She carefully removed the articles which had no value as evidence, and displayed on the table those which were intimately connected with White Calf.

Sergeant Silk examined the things one by one.

"What I am looking for, son," said he, holding in his hand a garment of fine linen edged with lace, "is some sign or clue that may tell us what sort of people you lived with before you got alongside of that white buffalo bull. I can see straight away that they were no Red Indians. This dinky lace trimming is sure French, and I never knew an Indian woman do smocking and herring-bone stitching the same as this. And

look at that pair of moccasins! Whoever your parents were, they could afford to give you bed-socks lined with expensive ermine skin. If the socks were bought ready-made in some city emporium, they'd cost a heap of money. If they were home-made, then the person who worked them—your mother, I guess—hadn't roughened her hands with coarse household chores."

"No, that is not Indian woman's stitching," decided White Calf. "Even Song-of-All-the-Birds could not do pretty sewing like that. But if she was not a poor Indian squaw, then why did my mother allow me to be carried away by the buffalo? I do not understand."

"Nor do I," admitted Silk. "But for one thing, we do not know that your mother was with you at that time on Golden Rod Prairie. You may have been stolen from her by wandering Indians. In that case we've got to credit those Indians with having looked after your comfort as well as your mother could have done. It was a winter's night, and you were put to sleep wearing those fur socks, two nightgowns—one flannel and the other linen—and that beaver skin coat, with blankets on top. You were sure well protected from the cold."

He was examining the flannel nightgown as he spoke, holding it in the sunlight.

"I'm figuring that this garment was worn next your skin," he said, while with a finger and thumb he picked at it. "Say, Red Cherry, I guess you never noticed this that I've got between my fingers. It's a hair—a woman's long hair!"

He drew the single thread of hair out to its fullest length. It was very long, fine in texture, and light in colour.

"Where you find it?" cried Red Cherry excitedly. "It is perhaps mine."

"Oh, it's not one of yours," Silk assured her. "It's longer than yours and not the same colour—not so red. I've a notion it belonged to White Calf's mother."

"White Calf he never had a mother," Red Cherry insisted. "He came from the Sun. You do not understand."

Sergeant Silk smiled and shook his head, while he slowly twisted the hair round one of his fingers.

"That is all pagan nonsense, my girl," he told her. "You must get quit of that idea. White Calf did not come from the sun. He is human, the same as you and I are. And these clothes that he wore when he was found were made by human fingers. Did you suppose that the sun made them?"

Red Cherry shrugged her shoulders.

"Tell me why White Calf was riding on the buffalo," she retorted. "Tell me who put him there, and why, and then I will believe you. But you cannot tell me. You know nothing. That hair that you are winding round your finger—that tells you nothing."

Silk had opened his wallet, and now he placed the ring of hair very carefully between the leaves of a pocket book.

"It is very strange," reflected White Calf. "I cannot think why a white woman should be out on the prairie trails in winter time. Why was she there? Who was she? Was she alone, or were there men with her? Were they Indians and she their captive, or were they white men taking care of her? Why did she let me be taken from her? And, after that, where did she go? What did she do?"

"Son," said Sergeant Silk, "those are questions

which may never be answered. These baby clothes do not answer them, and even the woman's hair is no proof that your mother was with you. We know nothing. We can do nothing."

White Calf had laid his hands on the piece of blanket on the table. He was examining it curiously.

"Well?" said Silk, watching him. "See anything in that?"

White Calf looked puzzled. He pointed to the jagged edge of the material.

"Something was pulling at it, and then it broke," he said. "I think if a horse had stood his foot just here and held the other edge in his mouth to drag it away from the foot that held it, the blanket would be torn like that."

"Exactly," agreed Silk. "You've hit an idea. But what do you say if it wasn't a horse, but a buffalo —a white buffalo bull?"

"Yes," nodded White Calf. "I can see the dirty mark of the buffalo's hoof. And here is the hole made by the buffalo's horn."

"You're plumb right," signified Sergeant Silk. "I'm sorry that Rising Moon is ill in his head. He might have explained just how that blanket was caught on the bull's horn and in what position you were lying across the animal's head. What I want to get at is whether you were fixed up there by human hands, with a human purpose, or whether you got perched there by some strange and unaccountable accident. In either case that buffalo sure wanted to get quit of you."

"It is so stupid you say these things," broke in Red Cherry, gathering the garments together into a bundle. "There is no mystery. It is all quite plain

when you believe that it was the Sun who put White Calf in that place. But I very glad you have found nothing more than a hair from some strange woman's head. It will always be so much better that the Piegans should know that White Calf got his medicine straight from the Sun. When they make him their chief they will listen to him ; they will obey him, they will follow him everywhere. He will be a very powerful chief."

"Stop talking!" commanded White Calf as Red Cherry turned to go away. "You have no right to say a thing like that. You know that the Piegans will never ask me to be their chief."

"Son," said Sergeant Silk, tapping him on the shoulder. "I am not so sure of that. It is my impression that the Piegans will very soon be asking you to be their medicine chief. When the time comes you will likely consider it a high honour to be an Indian chief, to administer the laws, to lead your people on the warpath and the buffalo trail, and to wear a gay feathered head-dress. I am not denying that you'd make a wise and powerful ruler. But listen here, White Calf. Remember that you are not yourself an Indian. You have no more Indian blood in your veins than I have in mine. You are white through and through. You are born of respectable white parents. Keep yourself worthy of them. You may get to know them some day."

He paused.

"Well?" asked White Calf. "And what then?"

"Why," continued Silk, "you wouldn't like them to be ashamed of you, I guess. If you remain with the Piegans you will never rise above them ; you will always be a savage. You are fitted to be something

more important in the world, something far better, than being the boss over a crowd of greasy Redskins. Don't mistake me. I am talking to you as your friend. As your friend I advise you not to take on the job. The Indian chief business is played out. The future of the Dominion of Canada doesn't depend upon the Indian population. Take my advice, son, and when you've taught yourself to read and write like a civilized Canadian, you will quit the Piegan lodges and make a bee-line along the White Man's Trail. Good-bye, and good luck to you."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TWO VOICES

"WAIT, Mignonette," said Long Hair, standing in front of the half-breed woman at the lake side. "You will not touch that canoe, or the things that are in it. Go!"

Mignonette flung back her head, frowning at the Indian who thus dared to interfere.

"*Pourquoi?* Why shall I not touch?" she protested indignantly, pushing him aside. "It is the canoe of Eagle Claw. The pretty things which he bought for me they now belong to me. Is it not so?"

"No," Long Hair answered her. "They belong to White Calf, who won them from your man in the bone game. You must not touch them, or you will make White Calf very angry. You must not vex White Calf."

"Bah! What you think I care for White Calf?" cried Mignonette, wrinkling her nose in scorn. "I crush him like a worm under my moccasin!"

White Calf himself at that moment stood near to her. She had not known that he was among the canoes.

"What does Mignonette want?" he asked quietly.

She turned and started back in alarm at sight of him. This was the first time that she had been so close to him since the attempt to kidnap Red Cherry

and Song-of-All-the-Birds. Conscious of her own guilty share in that attempt, Mignonette was afraid of White Calf—afraid that he meant to denounce her publicly and bring her to punishment. She had known —Eagle Claw had told her—that White Calf had been on a big scout with the mounted policeman on the trail of Eagle Claw, that together they had tracked him here to Sweetgrass. She was not sure, but she believed that it was White Calf himself who had fired the fatal bullet into Eagle Claw's head. White Calf's medicine had always been powerful. She was afraid of him for many reasons.

"It is that I want to take the things which belong to me," she now pleaded—"the things that were bought with the furs which I trapped and dressed. Are they not mine?"

She had raised her injured hand to her breast. The fingers which had been smashed in the wolf-trap were stiff, crooked, and unsightly. Beneath them something sparkled in the sunlight—something which she seemed anxious to hide from White Calf's observant eyes. He glanced aside at the loaded canoe and said:

"Yours? No, they are not yours. And I do not think you deserve to have them after the evil thing you did in setting a snare for Song-of-All-the-Birds when Eagle Claw wanted to steal her. If Eagle Claw himself were alive he could not claim this canoe or anything that is in it. He gambled. He laid the canoe and its load as a stake in a game of chance, and he lost them. He had no right to gamble with what did not belong to him, it is true. The things that were bought for you at the trading post ought still to be yours. My medicine tells me that it would be

In reaching for the roll of cloth Mignonette disclosed the trinket which had been hidden by her hand.

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just that you should have them. I will give them to you."

He leaned over the side of the canoe and took up a roll of red cloth, which he held out to her. In reaching for it she disclosed the trinket which had been hidden by her hand. White Calf saw now that it was a curious piece of jewellery made of gold and set with precious stones. He wondered how she had come by such an ornament.

"Bring your pack pony nearer," he said. "The canoe is mine. You may take what is in it; but not that gun. I give the gun to Long Hair. And not those four bottles of fire-water that I see."

He seized the bottles ingeniously hidden between two sacks of flour, knocked off their necks, and deliberately emptied their contents on the strand. Mignonette frowned viciously at such waste. She had wanted those bottles of fire-water more than all else.

"That's all right," he nodded, repeating one of Sergeant Silk's familiar phrases. And then as he turned away he breathed deeply, thinking of Sergeant Silk.

During these days which followed upon Silk's departure, White Calf was very thoughtful, very sad; his heart was heavy. He had not before realized what his close association with the red-coated soldier-policeman meant to him.

Since their first meeting in the compound at Fort Sinclair, Silk and he had been as brothers, riding along the same trail, sleeping under the same blanket, drinking from the same cup, thinking the same thoughts, sharing pleasures and dangers alike. Silk's coming into his life had opened to White Calf a new world. And now it seemed that the door of that wonderful

world had been suddenly shut against him. He was thrown back upon himself to discover that he had lost something of which he had not before known the value. Everything was different. His life was empty.

There was no one to take Silk's place, no one who understood him as Silk did, no one with whom he could talk as he had talked with the light-hearted rider of the plains.

Rising Moon, who was the only white person apart from himself in the lodges of the Piegans, was now a hopeless, incapable invalid. The tomahawk blow on the back of his head had injured his brain, made him stupid; he remembered nothing, knew nothing; he was like a helpless child. Wolverine also was ill. The arrow shot at him while he was defending the canoes against the enemy Crees had pierced his left lung. He could not move or even talk without pain, and many new moons might come and go before he would be able to rise and go out into the woodland.

Red Cherry, it is true, was still a sisterly companion to White Calf; but as she became more of a woman, doing woman's work in the camp, she took less active interest in the life beyond the circle of wigwams. And so White Calf was lonely.

It was his feeling of loneliness which induced him to turn eagerly to the books and writing materials that he had brought home from Fort Sinclair. He set himself to the task of learning to read and write. At first this was very difficult, because there was no one who could teach him. Fortunately, Sergeant Silk had given him a few simple lessons in reading, and from this beginning he made quick progress. In writing, he could only imitate the Roman letters on the printed page.

It was not until years later that he was able to form words in running longhand writing. He never attempted arithmetic. He could count up to twenty, and that was more than any Piegan could do. In drawing he was more successful. He acquired the useful habit of making picture records in his drawing-book of unfamiliar animals, birds, and flowers, using his paint brushes to give them their natural colours.

One of White Calf's earliest animal pictures was a painting of his war-horse Berry. He had tethered the great stallion to the tie-post at the corral gate. Many squaws and children stood round him, watching him at the surprising work.

"White Calf's hand is cunning," whispered one of the boys to a companion. "His medicine is great. It is the Sun who tells him how to put Berry's shadow there with those little sticks and scalp-locks and those coloured stones. Soon he will make Berry live; and then he will have two horses to ride on the warpath."

The-Elk-that-Calls, a tall, grey-haired warrior, approached with silent tread and stood at White Calf's side, touching him on the shoulder.

"You will come with me," said The-Elk-that-Calls.

"When I have made my horse," returned White Calf, continuing his work.

"You will come now," pursued the veteran. "The wise men are making a big talk in the medicine lodge. They want you."

"I will come," said White Calf, putting aside his brushes and paints and wondering why the wise men should want him. He supposed that they wished him to explain the killing of Eagle Claw. Mignonette had maliciously whispered that it was White Calf who

killed him. She had demanded that White Calf should be punished for taking the life of a Piegan.

White Calf was prepared to defend himself. Not for anything would he speak the name of Song-of-All-the-Birds in connexion with the death of Eagle Claw. He would plead simply that Eagle Claw had been justly punished as a criminal who had broken the laws of the white man and the red man alike. He was not aware that Sergeant Silk had already made all things clear to the wise men.

When he entered the great medicine lodge he was astonished to find it thronged with the important mystery men, warriors, and counsellors of the tribe, all dressed in their robes of ceremony, and gathered in a circle round the council fire. He did not understand. He came to an abrupt stand within the threshold. The wise men turned at his entrance as if they expected him. Then, while he stood hesitating, he became conscious of a woman's mellow voice. He looked inward.

At the far extremity of the circle, under the canopy of the sacred white buffalo robe, he saw that the high seat of the chief was vacant. Beside it stood Song-of-All-the-Birds, tall and majestic in her rich crimson cloak and feathered head-dress, wearing her most precious ornaments of coloured beads and trinkets of gold. Her beautiful face was no longer blackened in token of her mourning. In her outstretched right hand she held the mystery staff of authority.

"My father, Big Rain, was a great chief," she was saying. "My husband, Star Blanket, was a great warrior. If he had lived he would have taken the place of Big Rain. They are both gone to the happy hunting grounds, and I, Song-of-All-the-Birds, the

daughter of the one, the widow of the other, am called upon to succeed them as your chief. Counsellors, warriors, my medicine tells me that it is my rightful duty to take their place. But——"

She paused and looked round the circle of attentive faces.

"But I am a woman," she proceeded. "A woman has not the strength to lead the Piegans into battle, the skill to take them on the buffalo trail, the wisdom to carry out their laws. My medicine is weak, and all my wealth in horses will not help me to be a great chief, a victorious warrior, a just ruler of men. I am a weak woman. The Piegans must have a man for their chief. Their chief must be one whose medicine is strong, whose skill on the trails is true, whose wisdom is great, and whose justice and power come like the daylight straight from the Sun. Need I speak his name?"

She made a step forward and held forth her inviting left hand towards White Calf.

"Come, Little White Buffalo Calf," she called to him.

The-Elk-that-Calls then led him to her. In his amazement White Calf closed his fingers upon the mystery staff which she thrust into his hand.

"Wait," said Song-of-All-the-Birds, facing the Piegans. "If there is one of you whose heart tells him that White Calf was not sent by the Sun to be the chief and guardian of our tribe, let his tongue speak. We will listen."

On the instant the whole assembly broke out into a loud Indian cheer of unmistakable acclamation.

White Calf turned like a startled animal. His face had grown pale, his lips trembled. Song-of-All-the-

Birds was gently urging him towards the vacant seat of honour, encouraging him with soft, enticing words and smiles. His body stiffened, his clenched fingers tightened. In his excited brain the actual voice of Song-of-All-the-Birds sounded far away, while the remembered words of Sergeant Silk were repeating themselves disjointedly like the insistent ringing of an alarm bell :

" Remember that you are not yourself an Indian. You are fit for something better than boss over a crowd of greasy Redskins. The Indian chief business is played out. As your friend, I advise you not to take on the job."

The two voices appealed to him as from two different worlds. Which of them was he to obey ?

CHAPTER XXIX

STRANGLE WOLF'S CRUCIAL TEST

WHITE CALF had trained himself to think quickly; he seldom hesitated in making a decision. But when he was so suddenly summoned into the mystery lodge and asked to become the responsible chief of the Piegan nation, quickness of thought did not greatly help him. If it had not been for Sergeant Silk's advice that he should quit the Piegan lodges and go off right away on the White Man's Trail, he would not have demurred; he would have accepted the office without question.

He had lived all his life among the red men; he understood them as he could not yet understand the unknown Paleface. His skin was white, and he had always had an instinctive yearning for association with his own kind and race; nevertheless he regarded himself as an Indian.

Why, he asked himself, should the colour of his skin make any difference? His up-bringing surely counted for more than his complexion! What right had Sergeant Silk, anyhow, to dictate to him and urge him to desert his friends, who, as they now declared, trusted him to be their leader and ruler? Why should he abandon them and go out alone upon an unknown trail—a stranger among strangers?

"No," he decided, "I will not listen to the voice

of Sergeant Silk. I will shut my ears to his words. The Piegans want me ; they have confidence in me, or they would not ask me to be their chief."

" Well ? " pursued Song-of-All-the-Birds, laying her hand alluringly upon his shoulder. " Why does White Calf stand waiting ? Does he want to be lifted like a child to the high seat that is offered to him ? "

" I am ready," White Calf answered, seating himself obediently.

Song-of-All-the-Birds then placed a great war-bonnet on his head of long brown hair, and a rich robe over his bare, strong shoulders. He looked very magnificent all at once, very different from the wondering boy who had hurriedly entered the lodge only a few minutes earlier.

Conscious of the honour thrust upon him, he held himself with a new dignity. And at that moment, as he raised his head to glance round at the sober old men who were now his subjects, a bright shaft of sunlight slanted down upon him through a gap in the lodge cover, shining upon his white face and into his large blue eyes.

The Piegans were quick to observe this timely occurrence ; they hailed the sunbeam as a good omen. It seemed to them that the Sun god had entered to take a conspicuous part in the ceremony, that the approving Sun was saluting their new chief.

It so happened that White Calf had his burning-glass with him. He lighted the calumet with its help, made ceremonious signs to the four points of the compass, and the pipe was passed round the circle of medicine-men. Oaths were administered, promises were made, and Standing Alone, the oldest of the

mystery chiefs, made a long and eloquent oration in praise of White Calf.

He reminded his fellow-counsellors of how White Calf had come to them as a sacred gift from the Sun, riding on the mystic white buffalo bull whose robe they still preserved as a trophy in their medicine lodge. Standing Alone recounted many instances to prove that White Calf was gifted with powerful medicine.

"He will be a great chief," he said, "for he is wise in council, he is just, he is brave, he is skilled in many useful arts. As a scout, as a trapper, as a tracker in the woods and on the prairie trails, none can excel him. He is a great horseman. He will make our nation rich in horses, rich in buffalo robes, victorious in battle. The Sun has been good to the Piegans in giving them such a chief."

This speech was listened to with close attention to the end. The wise men were still murmuring their approval when a very young Piegan named Strangle Wolf pushed his way forward.

Strangle Wolf was little older than White Calf himself. He had not yet been initiated as a brave or trusted with the warpath secret. He had no right to be present in this solemn council of the elders of the tribe. But he was ambitious. Some said that he was jealous of White Calf—jealous of his greater skill in games and woodcraft, jealous of his influence in the tribe, and more than all jealous of his being chosen as chief. Not content with forcing his way into the lodge as a silent inactive witness of the proceedings, he was now even presuming to make a speech.

The-Elk-that-Calls waved him away.

"Strangle Wolf has no right to be here," he said. "Let him go out and attend to his beaver traps."

But White Calf objected to the youth's dismissal.

"Let Strangle Wolf speak his thoughts," he ruled. And Strangle Wolf advanced into the circle, not at all abashed, but as if he were a highly privileged person.

"Our braves and our women have had no voice in this choosing of a new chief," he began. "Perhaps they would not have chosen White Buffalo Calf. He is not the son of a Piegan. He is a Paleface. Why should the Piegans be ruled by a Paleface? They are told that White Calf is brave; but he has not gone through the trial of the sun-dance; he has never been out on the buffalo hunt; he has never been wounded in battle nor taken an enemy's scalp; he has never led our people on the war-trail. We have no proof that he is a skilful buffalo runner or a good warrior. Let him give proof of these things. Let him bring back the buffalo herds to our prairies, that we may have meat and robes in plenty, as our fathers had before the white man came and robbed us. Let him lead the Piegans on the war-path against the Crees who took from us Big Rain and many of our warriors and braves. We will follow White Calf if he will lead us into the buffalo hunt, into battle against the Crees. But we do not want to be ruled by a shadow."

White Calf recognized the daring challenge in Strangle Wolf's tone. He stood up, holding his staff in the crook of his right arm.

"Strangle Wolf has spoken," he said. "I will answer him. He has said that I, White Calf, have not been through the trial of the sun-dance to prove that I can endure pain and cruel torture and the needless loss of blood. That is true. But he forgets that the barbarous custom of the sun-dance has been

prohibited by the wise law of the Paleface, who is our master, our protector, and our friend. The Indian entered into a big Treaty with the white man, and that Treaty must be obeyed. We should not be obeying it if we continued with the sun-dance, or if we were to go out on the buffalo trail beyond our own hunting grounds. We should be breaking the Treaty if we were to leave our Reservation to make war against the Crees. The Crees themselves broke the Treaty when they came here to make a raid upon our trading canoes, and the white man's punishment is now falling heavily upon the Crees.

"But the Crees would never have come on the war-path against us if there had not been a traitor in our camp. That traitor was Eagle Claw, who had led them here with promises of great plunder. Eagle Claw was a bad Indian; he committed many crimes against his own people. He has paid the penalty of his crimes. Justice has been done, and justice is greater than vengeance, as peace is greater than war. I am not afraid to go on the war-path; but I am a lover of peace, and before I lead the Piegans into battle I must be sure that the quarrel is a just one. That is my answer to Strangle Wolf."

The medicine men were well satisfied with White Calf's policy of holding strictly to the terms of their Treaty with the Canadian Government, and throughout the further ceremonies of his installation as their chief they never wavered in their loyalty to him.

But Strangle Wolf was of the younger generation, who did not understand the advantages of civilization and peace, but wanted to return to the old barbaric customs, to be always on the war-path taking scalps, stealing horses, seeking plunder wherever it might be

found, and thirsting for the glory of battle and the dangers of the buffalo surround.

" Wough ! " grunted Strangle Wolf when he rejoined his companions. " White Calf is a woman, the words from his lips are like the juice of the maple tree. He is not a war chief. He refuses to lead us out against the Crees ; he does not covet their scalps. We are to be a nation of children, not men. Who said that White Calf's medicine is strong ? He is a Paleface ; he is not an Indian. We have had enough of the Paleface. Our chief should be of ourselves. Were I made their chief the Piegans would see a difference ; our lodge poles would be heavy with scalps, our faces and shoulders would be thickly painted with the scars of battle, our village would be red with buffalo meat. If White Calf's medicine is so strong, let him bring back the buffalo ! "

Curiously enough, the condition which Strangle Wolf would have imposed as a test of White Calf's medicine was very soon fulfilled.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TEST FULFILLED

THERE were two tributary bands of Piegans in White Calf's Reservation, in addition to the village encamped beside Sweetgrass Lake. One of these was located beyond the Bird Tail Divide, the other at the far extremity of Sweetgrass Forest. There were some five hundred lodges in all, representing a population of six thousand Indians and half-breeds.

White Calf now remembered how Sergeant Silk had once suggested that the three separate villages would be more prosperous if they were amalgamated in one community engaged in agriculture and trapping; and it was with this idea in his mind that he rode out on a certain morning towards the end of the lake to select a suitable pitch for the lodges.

He was mounted on his great war horse, and attended by two scouts, Long Hair and Glancing Arrow.

At the end of the lake he made a survey of a wide expanse of fertile prairie sloping down to the water's edge from a range of foothills and sheltered by a belt of timber, through which ran a clear creek, crowded with beaver.

White Calf decided that the prospect was wholly suitable and convenient. The water supply was perfect, there was abundance of fuel in the woodland, where game and fur-bearing animals were plentiful.

The land seemed to him good for agriculture; but what pleased him most was a large wooded island, a mile out from the shore, upon which he proposed to establish a breeding-farm for black foxes and ermine.

"That's all right," he said to himself with satisfaction as he turned away.

He was riding in advance of his two scouts to the rear of the belt of timber when, on reaching the high ground and looking far out across the rolling prairie beyond, he espied a vast mass of huge, slowly-moving animals of unmistakable shape.

"Ho!" he cried excitedly to his two companions. "The buffalo! the buffalo! See! The prairie is dark with them!"

Long Hair and Glancing Arrow were even more excited than their boy chief when they saw the grazing herd, and guessed that there were many hidden from sight in the folds of the plain and perhaps in the valleys of the far-off range.

The near leaders of the herd were moving upwind towards the lake. Lest the animals should take alarm. White Calf drew the two scouts back into cover and down to the level ground beyond the trees. Then he urged his stallion to a racing gallop and sped mile after mile along the side of the lake, never pausing for a moment, until, long in advance of his attendants, he dashed into the midst of the lodges crying aloud the glad announcement:

"The buffalo—the buffalo have come back! Make ready for a big hunt!"

He knew that the herd would not have time to escape beyond the distant frontier of the Piegan Reserve, and he had no need to advise his buffalo runners to hasten their preparations for the hunt. Every able

man and boy in the camp ran off to bring out his pony and see to his weapons of the chase, while the squaws and the children got ready their pack animals, their flaying knives, and their ropes of shaganape. Even Wolverine got up from his sick bed to join in the excitement, and Red Cherry mounted her father's pony and borrowed his gun.

The Piegans had looked in vain during many past seasons for a return of the big buffalo herd. Stragglers in small bunches had indeed been found and killed; these, however, afforded none of the adventurous sport which the older hunters had known in the earlier days, when the plains swarmed with countless thousands of the shaggy monsters.

"Ah, it is true, then," said Strangle Wolf when he heard the amazing news. "It is true that White Calf has been able to bring back the buffalo! For many moons our scouts have searched, but the prairies were empty, there was not a buffalo to be seen; and now White Calf has asked the Sun to call the herd out of its secret hiding place, and the call has been answered! It is very strange that the Sun should listen to a Pale-face! But will the Sun show him how to kill the buffalo? I tell you now that with my arrows I will kill twice as many as he will kill with his pop-gun!"

Strangle Wolf had no gun, but he excelled as a marksman with the arrow. He owned a splendid bow, and had provided himself with a large quiver full of straight, strong arrows, carefully feathered and sharp pointed. He intended that every one of these should bring down a buffalo. His pony was a tall black mustang, which his father, Good Striker, had trained especially for the buffalo hunt.

Everything was ready for the trail before sunset,

and the long train of mounted hunters, followed by the pack animals with their heavy equipment, travelled laboriously throughout the clear moonlight night.

They halted at midnight to make camp and rest themselves before they reached the actual hunting grounds. They would have marched contentedly for many days and nights on such an errand; but a long journey was not necessary, for the buffalo were believed to be close at hand, and there was time now for a cooked meal and a restful sleep.

At earliest dawn, White Calf dispatched scouts in various directions to locate the herd. He himself rode out with Glancing Arrow to the place from which he had discovered the buffalo, prepared to follow on their tracks. Sooner than he expected, he found them. First it was his sense of smell which told him that the animals were still in the near neighbourhood to the windward of him.

He dismounted and walked cautiously onward in the moonlight, scouting for signs. From the dark shadows of the trees he looked towards the glistening lake. He heard movements as of the stamping of restless hoofs; there came the sound of a hoarse cough. He crept forward, and through the mist that lay over the low ground he made out the ponderous shapes of many sleeping buffaloes gathered in widely scattered groups over the plain, stretching far away to the dim horizon. He estimated that there were many thousands.

Returning to his horse he rode back to rally his hunters and explain to them his plans for the attack. He ordered his horsemen to go out in two sections, right and left, riding in single file to make a widely sweeping circle round the prairie. Thus encompassing

the herd in a complete loop, they were to wait for the signal to charge and then gallop towards the centre from all points and begin the work of destruction.

From a prominent position on the high ground he watched the extending wings moving warily outward, east and west, and circling round the unsuspecting herd. He waited until they united in a complete ring some three miles in diameter. He saw the Indians wheel with their faces looking inward and then slowly advance to close their ranks more tightly so that no gaps should remain by which even a calf could break through.

By this time the red sun was above the hill-tops; the buffaloes were awake; some were wallowing, some were on their feet shaking the dew from their heavy manes. The bulls bellowed, swishing their tails to and fro and sniffing the cold air suspiciously; the cows lowed and began to feed on the luscious grass.

White Calf could see even from a distance that the animals were not in prime condition. The season was too early. The bulls were ragged, with heavy tufts of brown matted hair hanging from their humps and manes. He noticed that very few of the cows had calves. An old stub-horn bull which wandered past him had sore eyes and broken knees, as if it were diseased. Its sides were thickly coated with mud.

When all seemed ready, White Calf galloped down the slope to where his principal huntsmen were waiting eager for the start, each with his shot-gun ready or holding his long bow in hand with an arrow at the taut string. Strangle Wolf was in their midst, fretting to dash into the fray. Red Cherry and Song-of-All-the-Birds were in the rear.

Already the herd had taken alarm. The bulls were

bellowing loudly, flinging up their tails and moving to and fro with heads lowered and wild eyes staring with curious suspicion at the surrounding horses, while the younger bulls and cows pressed closer together in compact companies.

White Calf gave the order to charge. It was communicated with lightning speed round the vast circle of eager Redskins. Every man lashed at his pony and raced forward to get within range. And at the thunder of pounding hoofs the buffaloes took fright, butting and shouldering each other in their mad efforts to escape.

It was White Calf who fired the first shot. As he dashed forward he selected one of the leading bulls, raised his repeating rifle and took aim behind the giant's exposed shoulder. The stricken bull leapt out from the crowd and charged across the intervening space towards the advancing horsemen, but stumbled, rolled over with a heavy thud, and lay there hidden by the black swarm of roaring, bellowing brutes that plunged past him and clambered over him in a wild determined stampede. Bullets and arrows met them as they ran. None got past the inexorable cordon of skilled marksmen.

The whole prairie became one huge arena of commotion and deafening clamour. Dense clouds of dust and vapour rose into the sunlit air, the ground trembled with the heavy beating of hoofs, the bellowing and moaning of the wounded monsters mingled with the clashing of horns, the rattle of gun-fire and the shrill screeching cries of the excited Indians.

Round and round and back and forth the Redskins rode. Their trained buffalo ponies needed no guiding reins ; they worked like sheepdogs round a flock, and

their riders' hands were free for the quick snatching of a new arrow from over the shoulder and the quick and certain aim at a chosen bull or an escaping cow.

The prairie soon became thickly scattered over with shaggy inert shapes. In the general confusion of the killing there yet was a direct movement in the mass. The herd was heading for the lake, and the Indians yelled and followed in the same direction, so that the whole area of the conflict was drifting like a glacier, and the carcases were left in the rear to be flayed and cut up by the squaws.

Again and again the leaders of the stampede broke through, but these were always pursued and headed off by the more expert of the hunters who were stationed at this vulnerable point of the great surround.

It was here that the young chief was most often to be seen at work with his rifle. He had emptied his bandolier; every bullet had meant the death of a buffalo, and now the cartridges in his belt were almost exhausted. Reserving his fire, he exchanged his rifle for the more handy revolver for use at close quarters.

Strangle Wolf, who had always been near him, had but one arrow left, and was keeping it for a splendid bull which was leading the stampede. White Calf had his eye upon the same gigantic animal now heading towards him, followed by the mighty herd. Strangle Wolf, determined to get the better of the chief, did not wait for the great bull to come level with them, but rode down to meet it, with his arrow fixed ready on the string. He gave no thought to the danger of being caught in the tremendous avalanche of impetuous close-packed monsters sweeping towards him. Neither did he realize that the sandy earth was perforated with the burrows of prairie dogs.

He galloped forward at racing speed. Suddenly his mount caught its forefoot in a gaping gopher hole and crashed to the ground, flinging Strangle Wolf high over its head full in the track of the oncoming buffalo bull.

Instantly White Calf bore down to him. There was no time to pick him up. Instead of attempting this he went a few paces beyond him, and, wheeling round, fired three quick revolver shots between the bull's eyes. Then, having turned sharply, he halted just beyond where Strangle Wolf lay writhing in pain. The bull plunged onward, staggering drunkenly, and fell so close to Strangle Wolf that it was only by a few inches that the youth missed a fatal crushing under the enormous weight. But he was now protected by the buffalo's huge bulk, for the oncoming herd divided, swerving to right and left, while White Calf, sitting easily in his saddle, shouldered his rifle and fired shot after shot over the fallen bull into the swiftly rushing crowd.

In a few moments he was surrounded by a high barrier of dead buffaloes, and the remaining herd swept on in a divided stream until the throng lessened to a thin broken line of stragglers and the danger was at an end. Then White Calf dismounted, lifted Strangle Wolf across his saddle, and rode away with him. Strangle Wolf's own horse had been trampled into an unrecognizable mass of tattered flesh and broken bones, as he himself must have been but for White Calf.

" White Calf's medicine is stronger than I believed," murmured Strangle Wolf. " White Calf is very brave. He is a great buffalo hunter. The Piegans will be proud of him."

CHAPTER XXXI

WOLF CUB'S PREDICAMENT

It had been a great, a successful hunt, well organized and well carried out. Not many of the buffaloes had escaped. Some few had been able to evade their busy pursuers and take refuge in the woods, some had got down as far as the lake and plunged into the water in the attempt to swim across to the farther shores; but their number was hardly to be reckoned against the great crowd of carcases that lay like black blotches on the far-stretching prairie. No Piegan was capable of counting them. White Calf himself had not sufficient skill in arithmetic to calculate their huge total.

He himself had expended every rifle cartridge in his belt and bandolier, and he had also killed many a shaggy monster at close quarters with bullets from his revolver. The Indians recognized that their boy chief had done more than any other hunter, and his daring act in rescuing Strangle Wolf from certain terrible death at the risk of his own life was ever afterwards remembered in his honour.

As for Strangle Wolf, he, too, had done amazingly well. When his marked arrows were collected, each one of them was drawn from the side of a dead buffalo; never once had he missed his aim at a vital part.

Strangle Wolf was the only Piegan who had been

seriously hurt. Many had broken a leg, put an arm out of joint, or fractured a collar-bone ; but Strangle Wolf had suffered all of these injuries together, and many besides, while his great mustang had been trampled to death and his treasured long-bow smashed to splinters.

When White Calf rode over the hunting ground to superintend the removal of the spoils of the chase, he was appalled at the task which his people had in front of them in flaying the ponderous carcases, cutting up the meat, and then conveying the heavy loads of hides and flesh across the miles of prairie to Sweetgrass.

There would be less labour, he thought, in transferring their home lodges to the hunting ground than in dragging so many tons of meat and robes to the distant village. And as it happened, the buffalo hunt had taken place upon the very site which he had selected for his new camping pitch.

He called his medicine-men together and suggested this plan of an immediate removal. They regarded it as a brilliant inspiration, as one more proof of White Calf's foresight and practical wisdom.

It followed accordingly that during the next few weeks, while the women were engaged in cutting and drying the meat, making pemmican and dressing the robes, the men were employed in removing the lodges from the old camp and setting them up in the new.

At the same time it was found expedient that the two neighbouring villages on the Reserve should also move in to the main encampment. Before the autumn was well advanced, Chief White Calf was surrounded by a population of some five thousand Indians and half-breeds.

The lodges and shacks were ranged in an irregular

circle on the plain where the pure, cool waters of Butterfly Creek flowed into Sweetgrass Lake. White Calf's medicine lodge was a specially large and beautiful one, covered with picked buffalo skins, decorated outside with picture writing and a frieze of rampant white buffaloes. The interior was hung round with many trophies and weapons of the chase, and the sacred white robe was a prominent decoration. Many of the furnishings of the living-room were supplied by Song-of-All-the-Birds, and they included a large table, some chairs and his camp bed. His horse and cattle corrals were built on the high ground at the rear.

As head chief of the Piegans, White Calf found himself burdened with many unforeseen duties and responsibilities; but having undertaken the position of overlord and ruler, he resolved to give his whole mind to the work of maintaining his people in peace, good health, and material prosperity. His past conversations with Sergeant Silk helped him very much at this time. Silk had told him of how the white people were governed, how their commerce was carried on, and how in civilized countries every one in his particular way contributed to the general good and well-being of the community.

It was not easy for White Calf to apply these methods of civilization to the Piegans, and he knew by instinct that it would be a mistake to make any sudden reforms, or to interfere with the customs and ceremonies of the tribe. But he felt that it was safe to give each of his counsellors and medicine men a special responsibility.

He did not realize it, but in doing this he was actually forming a Cabinet and appointing Cabinet Ministers to control the various departments. He appointed a war chief to attend to munitions and to drill the young

braves for the war-path ; a peace chief to check quarrelling and settle disputes, to prevent or punish crime ; a trading chief to regulate the transport and bartering of peltry ; one was made umpire of games, with the duty of arranging fixtures for horse-racing and all competitions in running, wrestling, jumping, swimming, canoe-racing, and other exercises. There were masters of the chase and captains of the buffalo hunt, chiefs of scouting, woodcraft and trapping. One medicine man was given the duty of attending to the general food supply and public health. White Calf knew the need of keeping the drinking water pure and the lodges clean and free from vermin and garbage. An important officer was he who had the duty of inspecting the domestic animals—the horses, cattle and dogs—and seeing that they were well fed and kept clean and free from disease.

Every one in the encampment was expected to do something to contribute to the welfare of the commonwealth. Idleness was an offence, with its appropriate punishment. Very wisely White Calf did not spring these reforms upon his people by sudden enactments and prohibitions. He improved the existing conditions gradually, and often cunningly.

Thus he knew that he could not abolish the evil of betting and gambling ; but he reduced its recklessness by the strict regulation that while a gambler might lay stakes in the form of any property which he could hold in his hand, such as a knife or a gun, he was not allowed to wager his horse, his canoe, or his lodge, or anything else that he could not carry in the palm of his hand. Similarly he made no penal law against the drinking of fire-water ; but he saw to it that no fire-water could by any chance be smuggled into the camp.

White Calf was especially successful in his methods of training the young boys. He formed them into companies or patrols, under appointed Pathfinders, and sent them out on the forest trails or by canoe along the lakes. They took nothing with them but their fire-sticks and home-made weapons of the chase. They were expected to hunt or fish for their own food, fashioning their night shelters of what material they could find in the wilds. The patrols were thus wholly dependent upon their own exertions and skill in scout-craft, and of necessity they became well practised in breaking new trails and finding their way through unknown forest depths.

Living the life of primitive savages they were clever in tracking and woodcraft, wise in their knowledge of wild nature. By observing the habits and studying the tracks of the animals, they learned many facts which were afterwards valuable to them as trappers and fur-traders.

Wolverine, who was the appointed captain of trappers, often went out with one or other of these wandering patrols. Sometimes White Calf himself would go, and for the time being forget that he was an Indian chief. It was said by the Piegan boys that whenever White Calf accompanied them into the forest they were sure to meet with unusual adventure with the larger animals; they believed that the big game always came to White Calf; but it was only that White Calf had especial skill in discovering the tracks of a moose, or a grizzly bear, or a mountain lion, and in following them up to the animal's lair.

On one such occasion a very young boy named Wolf Cub failed to appear when expected at the bivouac in the heart of the woodland. White Calf went out

alone in search of him, taking the direction in which the boy had gone. He had not searched very far when he came upon a red maple leaf lying on the bare ground where no maple tree grew. Wolf Cub had blazed his trail. The stalk of the leaf had been nipped off and the middle point gave his direction.

White Calf went on until he found a second and a third maple leaf, and then a twig of balsam, and afterwards a handful of loose grass: always it was something which had been left as an intentional sign by which Wolf Cub could find his back trail. The last sign was the boy's bow and quiver lying abandoned as if Wolf Cub had hastily dropped them in alarm. Close beside them the soft turf was scored by the long claws of a bear that had been running.

White Calf went scouting around in widening circles until through the closely-growing tree trunks he presently discovered an immense grizzly bear seated on its haunches with its forepaws scratching against the bole of a cotton-wood tree. The great brute's snout was turned upward to the overhanging boughs. Amid the verdure, lying along the branch above the bear's uplifted head, was little Wolf Cub, clinging desperately with his legs and his left arm, while in his right hand he held his knife, dagger-wise, under his chin.

It was not at the grizzly that the boy was looking. The bear was not his most immediate danger. Facing him, crouched along the same bough and between him and the main trunk, was a large puma. The animal's muzzle was wrinkled in a threatening snarl, its long tail was swinging to and fro; its whole lithe body was quivering ready to crawl cautiously forward along the perilous branch.

Crouched along the same bough and between Wolf Cub and the main trunk was a large puma.

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Little Wolf Cub was clearly in a predicament. If he should drop to the ground, the bear would get him. The puma blocked his only way to safety. If the puma should come forward to the attack, the knife was ready ; but before the knife could be used, the branch would probably break under the added weight, and it was questionable which of them, the puma or he, would be the quicker to escape the bear.

" Hold tight ! " shouted White Calf, as the puma moved stealthily forward with cautious foothold. Wolf Cub raised his knife to strike. The sharp crack of the rifle sounded. The boy and the puma fell together to the ground and the lightened branch swayed upward.

White Calf ran in with a finger still on the trigger of his smoking gun. The puma kicked and yowled, and then lay still, with the young chief's bullet deep in its brain. Wolf Cub, paralysed with fear, was imprisoned between the grizzly's arms.

" Don't move," cried White Calf. He aimed obliquely behind the bear's shoulder and fired two shots. The bear sat back on its haunches, and its huge body writhed, doubled up, and rolled over. Wolf Cub stood up and stared in satisfied astonishment at the two dead beasts.

" We will come back and take the skins," said White Calf.

CHAPTER XXXII

TRESPASSERS

WHAT troubled White Calf more than all else in his first years as chief was the question of the food supply. The Piegans were wasteful and improvident. When their larders were full they were extravagant, feasting ravenously as if when their store of meat was exhausted they were certain of a new supply. They could not believe in a scarcity of buffalo. If their scouts reported that there were none to be found, they blamed the scouts for not searching properly; they declared that the herds were only hiding in secret caves and unknown cañons, and they urged their chief to exercise his medicine and go and call them out to be killed.

White Calf could do nothing. How could he call the buffalo back when there were none to be called? He was in despair. He sent his hunters out in all directions to hunt for deer, moose, elk, and antelope; but all the meat that was brought in counted for very little in so large a population of hungry Indians.

It was clear to him that there was something economically wrong. Without the buffalo, without agriculture or manufactures, the Piegans were not self-supporting, and, restricted to their own Reserve and what it could produce, they could not hope for help from the outside.

Two successful seasons of trapping helped him over as many winters, but the approach of a third winter

filled him with dismay. There were no buffalo robes to sell, there was no overplus of pemmican to barter, but only a few bales of furs to be sent to Fort Sinclair in exchange for whatever food and cloth they would buy. Wolverine was to act as trader, and White Calf resolved at the same time to appeal to Sergeant Silk for advice. He would write a letter to Sergeant Silk making an exact statement of the condition of things.

He had never written or received a letter in his life, and he was occupied three whole days in the endeavour to write the message intelligently. At last he decided not to send it, but to instruct Wolverine what to say. He knew in advance that Sergeant Silk would advise him to plough the land and grow crops, to keep cattle and sheep, and to start industries ; but already the winter was near at hand, and nothing could be done while the hard ground was under snow. In any case, where was he to get the ploughs and other implements ? Where was the seed to come from, and who was to teach the Piegans how to till the soil ? What he especially wanted Sergeant Silk to tell him, through Wolverine, was how to meet the privations of the coming winter.

Wolverine's expedition to Fort Sinclair was not wholly successful. With the exception of a canoe load of bacon and another of cheese, the provisions he brought back were mostly in the form of groceries, which would soon be consumed. There were no potatoes and no sacks of flour. And he had not seen Sergeant Silk. It appeared that Silk had been transferred to another station.

In the midst of his anxieties, White Calf was confronted by new and unexpected difficulties. There

came into the encampment two trailing half-breeds, claiming a few days' hospitality. White Calf did not speak with them. It was not until they had gone away that he discovered that they had been inciting the Piegans to rebellion against the whites. They had said that all the half-breeds and most of the Indians of Western Canada were going out on the war-path against the Paleface.

One day soon afterwards, while White Calf sat reading a book containing some information on agriculture, Strangle Wolf entered his lodge as the chosen spokesman of discontent. He made a long talk, in which he attributed all the Indian's hardships to the coming of the White Man.

"They have robbed us of the buffalo," he complained. "They have taken from us the land that belonged to our forefathers. They have stopped our hunting and our warfare; broken our old laws and customs, and given us others which we do not like. Everything that made us happy and content, they have destroyed. And in return they have made us poor and miserable. We will bear it no longer. We will fight the White Man. All the other nations of Red Men will fight them. We are ready for the war trail. We are going now to make war against these Paleface tyrants. And you, our chief, will lead us."

White Calf shook his head.

"No," he said, "I will not be the leader in any war against the Whites. Nor shall the Piegans go upon the war trail. They must obey the Treaty."

Strangle Wolf laughed scornfully.

"But it is all settled," he said. "The Piegans have talked. And they do not want a chief who is afraid of war. If you, White Calf, will not lead them,

then I, Strangle Wolf, will do so. I will be their war chief and we will clear the land of these interfering white men."

"You will not," cried White Calf, laying his hand on his revolver and springing to his feet. "If you attempt to do this thing I will shoot you dead." He pointed the weapon warningly between Strangle Wolf's eyes. "Do you understand? I will have no rebel traitors in this camp. Go from me! Go and tell your friends that this thing is not to be. Go now, or I will shoot you."

He followed Strangle Wolf out of the lodge and called a great meeting of his medicine men. He spoke to them about this spreading spirit of revolt and proved to them how disastrous, how impossible it would be for the Red Men to take up arms against the Whites. The wise men listened. They knew that what he said was true.

It was, however, a fact that a widespread rebellion was at that time in active movement in Canada, instigated and led by a hot-headed half-breed named Louis Riel. Many of the Indian tribes were involved in the bloodshed; but owing to the firmness of their young chief the Piegans held themselves aloof and did not go upon the war-path.

Nevertheless, their discontent was not quelled. Lack of food was having its disastrous effects upon them, and in spite of all White Calf's efforts to preserve his people from want, the grim ghosts of hunger and sickness began to stalk through the camp. Even the horses, the domestic cattle and dogs suffered from want of food.

The chief ordered that most of his own cattle should be killed and the meat distributed. Song-of-All-the-

Birds imitated his example in charity and further offered to sell all her war horses, if a purchaser could be found. She was very rich; but she would give up all her wealth to help the Piegans.

At the beginning of winter a patrol of White Calf's scouts returned from a long trail to report that buffaloes had been seen to the southward, and they appealed to the chief to make a big hunt. White Calf doubted the truth of the report, but he was desperate, and he led out a very large party of hunters, each man taking an extra horse to carry home the expected load of meat.

They travelled for three days and found no trace of game. On the fourth day, during a heavy fall of snow, one solitary buffalo was seen and chased. Strangle Wolf killed it—a thin, emaciated old cow, spotted with mange. The Indians feasted greedily until the meat was finished. Then they went on for two more days.

By this time they had wandered quite a hundred miles beyond the Piegan Reserve. But White Calf was in no mood to turn back. He was reckless, obstinately desperate.

At dusk on the eighth evening they had made camp at the edge of a wood and lighted their fires. Wolverine and Strangle Wolf were at the entrance of the chief's teepee chopping firewood. White Calf was within the doorflap cutting up an antelope which he had killed. His hands and face were smeared with blood and dirty with fire smoke; his buckskin clothing was old and tattered. No stranger would have taken him for an Indian chief.

"See!" cried Strangle Wolf. "Who are those people?"

White Calf started to his feet and drew the door-flap aside. About a mile away he saw a long train of mule-wagons and armed horsemen. Some of the men had white bandages about their heads; some had their arms in slings. At the rear of the wagons there was a howitzer gun.

"They are a war-party of the Mounted Police!" White Calf announced. "They have been on the war-path."

"One of them is riding towards us," said Wolverine. "What does he want?"

The swiftly approaching rider wore the winter uniform of the Mounted Police—a bearskin busby and a fur-lined capote and high-reaching moccasins. White Calf knew him by his easy seat in the saddle, the way he held his bridle, and by the proud poise of his head.

"It is Sergeant Silk!" he exclaimed in consternation.

Before White Calf had time to cover his raggedness with his blanket, Sergeant Silk was among the teepees. He drew rein as he came abreast of Strangle Wolf.

"Where is your chief?" he demanded.

White Calf emerged from his teepee. If Silk recognized him he did not betray the recognition. Speaking in Blackfoot, he said:

"You must clear out of this, chief. You have no right to be here. You are trespassing. What do you mean by it?"

"We are hunting for buffalo," White Calf explained.

"Then you won't find any," Silk told him. "You and your kind have killed them all off. Go back right away to your own Reservation."

White Calf looked up at him in wonder.

"Is it that you do not know me, Sergeant Silk?" he asked in English.

"Know you?" echoed Silk. "Why, certainly I know you. But that makes no difference. I've got to do my duty and turn you on your back trail."

"But the Piegans are starving," pleaded the chief. "They are in need of food."

"Starving?" repeated Silk. "Exactly! But whose fault is that?"

White Calf felt the stab of this sharp question, and he answered more hotly than he intended:

"It is the fault of the white man, who has robbed us of the buffalo and of our wide hunting grounds. It is the white man's fault that we are hungry."

"No, chief," retorted Sergeant Silk, leaning over in his seat. "You are wrong there, and you know you are wrong. It is the fault of the lazy, improvident Red-man himself. And it's your own fault, too, White Calf, for trying to do the impossible. I warned you long ago that the Indian chief business was played out. I advised you not to take on the job. But you didn't heed me. You went cavorting off on your own trail, and now you're beginning to realize that you've made a mess of yourself. I can see with half an eye that you've degenerated down to the level of your savage subjects. Very well. Go your own way. I am quit of you. Go back to your greasy Indians. And go right now. If you have not cleared out of this by sunrise, you will be moved by force. That's all I've got to say."

White Calf watched him riding off across the snow. Then with a shiver he crept into the cold darkness of his tent.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE WINTER OF DEATH

In the middle of the frosty night White Calf sat up on his rough uncomfortable couch of balsam branches, and reached over to throw a handful of fuel on his fire. The teepee was less dark now than when he had entered to fling himself down in the hope of forgetting his miseries in sleep. Through the smoke vent above him and the gaps in the skin-cover, the rosy streamers of the aurora borealis shed their radiance like the chill light of early dawn. He wished that it was really the dawn. He was very cold, in spite of the thick fur robe that he wore over his shoulders, and he was hungry ; but the cold and hunger did not distress him. What troubled him was his remembrance of the unfriendly attitude of Sergeant Silk.

White Calf felt that he would never forget those scornful words—"Go back to your greasy Indians." They were like the thrust of a knife in his heart, and the pain was all the more acute because he knew that Silk's accusations of failure were justified.

"It is that I have made a big mistake in being a chief," he sighed, looking into the burning wood of his fire. "When he told me to go off on the White Man's Trail, I ought to have gone."

Suddenly he started, hearing the crunch of a horse's feet in the snow outside. He sat upright, listening.

The sound came nearer. They were not the uncertain footsteps of one of his own Indian ponies which might have strayed, but of a heavy horse which was ridden. He could distinguish the champing of a bit, the faint squeaking of a leather saddle. The movement stopped close beside his teepee, and then he heard a man's footsteps approaching. The flap of the teepee was drawn open, letting in the rosy radiance of the aurora.

"What do you want?" questioned White Calf as Sergeant Silk stooped his head to enter. "You gave me until sunrise. When the sun has risen I shall be gone."

"Exactly," returned Silk, drawing off a mitten and extending his right hand. "That's what was troubling me, sonny. That is why I came along right now, while I'm off duty, to see you. Shake!"

White Calf instinctively took the proffered hand.

"You are trembling," observed Silk. "Why?"

"It is that I am cold and hungry, and very unhappy," White Calf answered—"unhappy because of the words that Sergeant Silk spoke."

"Sergeant Silk deserves to be kicked," returned his visitor, closing the door-flap; "but I guess he was on duty when he said those cruel things. Maybe he was just obeying his superior officer, who ordered him to get quit of a band of trespassing Indians. And when Silk is on duty like that, his heart is buttoned up under his tunic. Cold and hungry, are you, sonny? Say, it's lucky I brought along this canteen of hot chicken broth for you, eh? Here, have a go at it. You'll find it real nice."

He opened and handed the canteen of savoury food to White Calf.

"We are in bivouac about a mile from here," he

explained. "You see, we've been out on the war-path, fighting an army of Breeds and Indians who had the insane idea that they were strong enough to pull down the whole British Empire. No, the Piegans were not in the mix-up. I'm figuring that their chief was sensible and loyal."

"Yes," responded White Calf, sipping at the delicious soup. "He was loyal. He would always be loyal."

"That's all right," said Silk, squatting himself and beginning to mend the fire. "And now tell me about your people—Rising Moon and Red Cherry."

"Rising Moon is no more," White Calf told him. "He died two winters ago. Wolverine is with me here. Red Cherry is well; she is now the squaw of Long Hair, a good medicine man."

"She might have done better than marry an Indian," commented Silk. "What about yourself? Have you learned to read and write?"

"I am always learning," White Calf answered. "I have read many books. They are making me rich in wisdom; but there are many things which the books do not tell me. They do not tell me what to do—how to feed the Piegans, now that the buffalo has forsaken us. We are like the people in the land of Canaan; but for us there is no Egypt where we can buy food."

Silk was silent for some moments. He knew by these last words what Book White Calf had been reading.

"I'd an idea that you were up against difficulties, son," he said presently. "But for you, as for the people of Canaan, there is an Egypt and a Pharaoh if you go on the right trail to find them. You took on this Indian chief job at the very worst period you

could hit. The years of dearth had already started, the buffalo was already doomed, and the Indians had not filled their storehouses as Joseph did. You might have saved the situation if, when you became a chief, you had set about cutting and exporting timber, raising cattle, growing corn and fruit and vegetables. Right there in your own Reservation, you have over a hundred square miles of the most fertile land in all Canada. It only needs scratching over and it will grow anything. What have you done with it ? "

He paused while White Calf drank from the canteen.

" You have been letting the grass grow under your moccasins," continued Silk. " You have done nothing —nothing but trapping for pelts. All your medicine won't bring manna from the skies or buffalo to the plains. You've got to work, son—and work hard, before you can make good."

" That is all true," acknowledged White Calf. " But is it too late ? "

" Too late ? Not if you start tilling in the early spring. It is, of course, too late for this present winter. That is your difficulty, I guess. You are in immediate need of food. Well, there was corn in Egypt, wasn't there ? "

" Yes," sighed White Calf ; " and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year."

" Exactly," nodded Sergeant Silk. " But your Piegans have no cattle."

" We have many horses that we could sell," rejoined White Calf.

" Ah ! " exclaimed Silk. " I wish I had known

that a bit earlier. Still, the Mounted Police are always in need of horses. Suppose, now, you send your bunch along to the barracks at Athabasca Landing, or better still, bring them yourself. You can see the Government agent, and he will give you bread in exchange for horses. More than that, he will supply you freely with all the agricultural implements you need, as well as seed corn and seed potatoes. He will even send trained husbandmen to you to show you how to go about the business. Will that suit you?"

White Calf finished the soup. He was neither cold nor hungry now.

"You have lifted a heavy load from my back," he said. "I will do what you say."

"I am only sorry," added Silk as he took the empty canteen and stood up, "that we cannot spare you any of our stores from the wagons. They are needed for our sick and wounded. But I notice that you have a big crowd of horses with you, and no fodder to speak of. We could relieve you of some of those horses and save you their feeding."

"Every hunter has two ponies," said White Calf. "I had hoped we should need them to carry home the buffalo meat. I will turn over half of them to you. They will be ready at daybreak."

"Right," agreed Silk, turning to leave. "And now finish your sleep. I will see you again at dawn. Good night."

Well before sunrise White Calf had broken camp and was ready to start on his home trail. He had picked out the best of his buffalo ponies. For these he got a receipt entitling him to claim their value in provisions at any Hudson Bay post. On this occasion of their meeting Sergeant Silk was again the precise officer of

police; but he shook hands warmly with White Calf at parting.

"So long, then, sonny," he said. "Good luck to you. And maybe we shall meet again at Athabasca."

Notwithstanding that he was relieved of half of his horses, White Calf and his Indians found the back trail extremely arduous. Snow covered the grass, the creeks were frozen; there was very little food to be found for man or beast.

In the evenings the hunters set traps, snares, and dead falls, and always when the main body was travelling in single file some of the younger men rode apart searching for game. They were all expert hunters, and although they indeed killed enough meat to keep themselves alive, yet they got nothing but empty pelts to carry home with them. And when at last they arrived at their destination among the lodges, they were a miserable, weary, and sorely-disappointed band.

Equally disappointed were the Piegans who had been left at home expecting them to bring back heavy loads of buffalo meat to carry them over the winter. And they had brought nothing! For once White Calf's medicine had failed him.

During his absence from the encampment, the conditions of life had not improved. On the contrary, the people were in a woeful state of sickness, semi-starvation, and despair. Song-of-All-the-Birds, who acted as doctor and nurse, had more patients than she could cope with.

Nor were the animals in better case. Among the camp dogs distemper and mange were rampant; a mysterious skin disease had attacked the milch cows

and the horses, leaving them naked of hair and exposed to the cold winds, which killed them off. These diseases were spreading alarmingly.

White Calf's own horses and cattle, which were not corralled, but allowed to range at large on the prairies or in the woods, had not been attacked; neither had those belonging to Song-of-All-the-Birds. White Calf argued from this circumstance that it was better to let the animals run free on the ranges and fend for themselves, even in snow time, rather than to keep them in compounds where there was scarcity of fodder.

There was risk in leaving the cattle unguarded. Some of them were taken by the prowling wolves, but the main danger lay in the temptation presented to the Piegans themselves. When other meat became perilously scarce, hunters occasionally went out secretly at night and killed a cow or a young bull, so thoroughly covering up or removing all traces of blood and offal and so cunningly smuggling the beef away to their teepees that they were never detected. Hunger and hardship led to many crimes.

White Calf found it necessary to make a strict law that all wild animals trapped or killed for food should be delivered into a common store, to be doled out in rations with other provisions; and in the distribution of food it was ruled that he himself and the medicine chiefs should be apportioned the same measured share as the humblest and poorest.

If there was any unfairness, it was on the part of the improvident ones, who would devour a week's rations in a day and return asking for more. It was hard to deny them, and all knew that White Calf was tender of heart and easily moved. Women crowded round his lodge, held up their skinny children to his

gaze, and asked for a cup of flour or rice or beans or corn—anything that would appease their hunger. Beef and flour were what they demanded most, and he could give them none beyond their rightful share.

In their despair many scraped the inner bark of pine and cottonwood and dug roots for food. Some, in spite of official warning, would even feed on the carrion flesh of a horse, a cow, or a dog that had died of disease.

In these circumstances illness increased, and day after day, by ones and twos and threes the deaths were checked off. And all the time White Calf was waiting until the trails should be clear of snow, so that he might take his herds of horses to Athabasca. He would have made up dog trains and gone by sled across the prairie snow, but the camp dogs were diseased, and would spread infection if taken into other camps. So he waited.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN THE LAND OF EGYPT

SONG-OF-ALL-THE-BIRDS had made herself poor by her charities. She had given up all her cattle for meat for the starving Piegans, reserving only a few milch cows for the supply of milk for the children and the sick. She had distributed her store of blankets and cloth, her dressed bear skins and buffalo robes, and had added her private stock of groceries to the reserves which White Calf held for the relief of urgent cases of poverty and illness. All that remained of her former wealth was her carefully kept herd of war-horses, which were to be taken to Athabasca to be bartered for food.

One day, Song-of-All-the-Birds was busy in her lodge brewing herbs to be made into physic for the invalids, when Mignonette, the half-breed woman who had been her bitter enemy, appeared in the doorway, beseeching her charity. Mignonette was very thin and sallow, with hollow cheeks and weary eyes. Her blanket was ragged and her moccasins had great holes in them.

"Song-of-All-the-Birds is rich," she faltered weakly. "She has food and warm clothes. She will spare some of these things to a poor sister who is famished."

"You have had your share of the food, like every one else," said Song-of-All-the-Birds. "I have none to give you. I, too, know what it means to be hungry."

"But only a little," pleaded Mignonette—"some food and, perhaps, a warm blanket. See, I will give you these. They are all that I have in the world. I will give you them all just for one tiny bite of moose meat, for one cup of flour, a handful of pemmican."

She opened her cold, lame hand and displayed a few trinkets, the remnants of her former finery. But Song-of-All-the-Birds did not look at them.

"No," she said, "I have no use for such things, and I can give you no food. Go to White Buffalo Calf." She glanced down at Mignonette's feet, and then drew off her own pair of beaded moccasins and gave them to her. "Go to White Calf," she repeated; "he can, perhaps, help you. I do not know."

Mignonette carried the dainty moccasins under her arm. They were too good to be worn in the snow. She made her way to White Calf's lodge and waited until he could see her. He remembered many things against this woman, who was now reduced to abject beggary, but he took pity on her, and gave her his own ration of pemmican and a handful of dry berries. As she took them, one of the trinkets fell from her hand. He picked it up.

"Where did Mignonette get this?" he asked, examining it curiously. It was a small ornament of gold and precious stones—the same that he had seen her wearing when she claimed Eagle Claw's canoe.

"It is nothing," she answered. "Eagle Claw gave it to me many winters ago. I do not want it. It will not keep me warm; it will not stop my hunger."

"And where did Eagle Claw get it?" White Calf inquired. He was naturally curious, because he saw that the ornament was not Indian; he had never seen anything like it before.

At his question Mignonette shut her teeth on her lips, and her sallow face flushed red in confusion. She turned abruptly from him, leaving the thing in his hand.

On the following day Mignonette died. On that same day there arrived from Athabasca a long train of dog-sleds heavily laden with provisions, sent to the White Calf Reserve by Sergeant Silk in payment for the bunch of horses which White Calf handed over to him at the prairie bivouac. White Calf would not allow the police dogs to come into the infected village, and the sled-drivers were glad enough to dump their loads at the side of the lake, where they pitched their rest-camp for a night.

These extra provisions enabled White Calf to feed his people during the winter months until the coming of the warm chinook wind melted the snow from the trails and the ice from the creeks and lakes ; and then he rounded up his horses from the ranges and prepared for his journey.

The herd numbered a hundred head of picked prairie ponies, all of them in good condition and most of them broken in. Many Indians, with their own mounts, were required to look after them on the trail.

Realizing that he was going among white men and that he might possibly meet Sergeant Silk, White Calf took with him his war-bonnet and his finest robes and personal ornaments. He wanted to make a good impression upon Sergeant Silk, to show that he was not ashamed of being an Indian chief. He did not wear these things on the trail. There would be time enough for that when he should come to his last camping-place before entering Athabasca.

The journey occupied many days, for he had to

travel the whole length of the Lesser Slave Lake and the Pelican Range and make a long detour to find a fording place on the great Athabasca River. But at last he arrived and made camp on a grassy plain within sight of many buildings.

His guide pointed out the police barracks, the Hudson Bay Fort, the church, and the landing-place by the river which gave the settlement its name. White Calf was greatly impressed. It was at that time only a small, unimportant trading station, but to him it appeared as a city.

After his evening meal he discarded his rough, travel-stained buckskins, washed himself, combed out his hair, and dressed himself with great care in his chief's costume of ceremony. As an extra decoration, he had fastened Mignonette's sparkling trinket in the front of his war-bonnet. Never before had he been dressed out in such splendour; and he was now grown very tall and dignified. He was far more handsome than he knew. He was not even aware of how the blue gem on his forehead exactly matched the colour of his beautiful eyes.

Mounting his best horse and calling to Strangle Wolf to accompany him, he rode across the plain, illumined by the setting sun. At the gates of the police barracks he alighted and gave his horse into the charge of his attendent brave. Passing the sentry, he was entering the barrack-yard when Sergeant Silk came out to him, wearing his scarlet tunic.

"I guessed it was you, son, when I saw your outfit trailing over the hill," said Silk as they shook hands. "So you have come into the land of Egypt, eh? Well, you've brought along a decent herd of horses, I notice. We will overhaul them in the morning. I am sorry

I can't ask you to spend the evening here; but I'm fixed for an interview with an important visitor at the Fort."

"Is he, perhaps, the Government agent whom I was to see about the ploughs?" White Calf innocently asked.

"Well, no," smiled Silk; "he is the Governor himself. He is a great chief, come all the way from Ottawa to fix up a new railroad across the prairies. He's about the biggest chief in all Canada. Maybe you've never heard of Lord Allardyce. That's his name. When I met him first—it was at Sinclair—he was Sir Hector Allardyce; but now he sits in the House of Lords, wears an earl's gold war-bonnet, and a robe trimmed round with ermine same as the one you're wearing right now. Say, son, you're looking quite a picture in that elegant costume!"

"If he is a Government chief—if he is like Joseph in Egypt—then I will see him," pursued White Calf. "He will give me the seeds."

Sergeant Silk again smiled.

"It is not for me to stand in your way," he said seriously. "If you like to venture, you can go and ask for him across at the Hudson Bay House; but I don't figure that he will see you without an appointment."

"My medicine tells me that he will see me," returned White Calf with proud confidence.

But Silk shook his head in doubt; and later, watching White Calf from the distance, he saw him turned from the door.

"His lordship does not know you," the servant had said. "He does not wish to be disturbed. He is busy. You must go away."

CHAPTER XXXV

A STRANGER WITHIN THE GATES

"You must go away."

White Calf was staggered by this unexpected dismissal. He could not understand how he, the chief of the Piegans, should be refused admission into the presence of any man, however important, however busy he might be.

Surely there was some mistake. The man at the door had not said that the Government chief was ill or asleep, but that he was busy and must not be disturbed. How could he be too busy to see a visitor who had been travelling for days and days across the prairie trails on purpose to talk with him? White Calf thought such an excuse very weak. No Piegan would have refused to see a stranger.

He turned away from the door, troubled and hurt by the repulse. Then he stopped and looked round. The door was still open. From within his sharp ears caught the spoken words.

"A chief, is he? Well, I will see him and hear what he wants. Go and call him back."

The servant reappeared on the doorstep just as White Calf glanced round, and signed to him to return. White Calf followed the man into the lodge and was ushered into a large room, larger and more splendid than his own medicine tent, but dark. The only

light came from the burning logs in an open stove and from a heavily-curtained window.

The air was thick with the warm aroma of a cigar. No one came forward to welcome him. He stood very still and silent on the threshold. His moccasins had made no sound on the carpet of the passage. He saw, seated in an arm-chair, a middle-aged, good-looking man, whom he surmised to be Lord Allardyce; it was he who was smoking; he sat with his feet stretched towards the stove. He certainly did not appear to be busy.

Beyond him at the farther side of the stove sat a woman dressed in black velvet, with her head bent over her knitting. White Calf could see her active hands as they plied the long steel needles. They were the hands of a white woman—the first white woman he had ever seen. Neither appeared to be aware of his presence as he stood silently regarding them.

"Ok-yi!" he said, raising his right hand in Indian salutation.

"How!" returned the man in the arm-chair, glancing round. "You want to talk to me, chief?"

He spoke in the Blackfoot tongue. But White Calf responded in musical clear-cut English:

"Yes. Chief White Buffalo Calf has many things to say to the great Government chief Lord Allardyce. He is here to speak for his people, the Piegans. They are very poor, for the buffalo herds are no more, and the famine is sore in the land. The Piegans cannot live without food. Many of them have passed across the sandhills in this dark winter of death. Their little children are crying. White Calf's heart is heavy. He would help them. But he is not asking for charity.

He has brought his great herd of horses to offer in exchange for food."

"I have seen your horses," remarked the Governor. "They are scattered like ants over our meadowland, eating our grass."

"Does the white man grudge a few blades of grass for the horses of the poor Indian?"

The woman seated near the stove, hearing the chief's words spoken so clearly, glanced round as if to assure herself that the visitor was indeed an Indian. He was in deep shadow; but the sight of his feathered head-dress seemed to satisfy her, and she turned again to her knitting.

"No, he is not asking for charity," White Calf went on. "He asks but for seed-corn and the tools of husbandry, that the Piegans may make their land fruitful and have bread."

"Why have not the Piegans done this before?" questioned the Governor, sending a long jet of cigar smoke into the air. "They surely knew that the buffalo could not last. They ought to have been growing corn and fruit and raising cattle for many seasons past."

White Calf hesitated to reply. He was nervously conscious of the white lady's presence. But presently he leaned forward with a hand on the table and said, to the obvious surprise of his two listeners:

"Why was it so in the land of Canaan? Why had the sons of Jacob to go on the long trail into Egypt to buy corn from Pharaoh and from Joseph, who was his steward?"

Lady Allardyce looked round once more. Her husband coughed, as if his cigar smoke had gone the wrong way. At this moment the servant entered, carrying a

lighted lamp, which he placed upon the table in the middle of the room. The light shone upward into White Calf's face.

"But you are white!" cried Lord Allardyce in astonishment. "You are not an Indian!"

"My skin is white," returned his visitor, raising his head proudly and folding his hands in front of him across his belt. He looked wonderfully picturesque and dignified at that moment. The eyes of the woman were bent upon him with intent scrutiny.

"Then why are you living the life of a savage away from your own world?" asked the Governor. "Have you something to be ashamed of that you have quitted your own kind to hide yourself among a tribe of ignorant Redskins, sinking to their level? Have you lost all the white man's pride of race, all his loyalty and honour?"

White Calf drew himself upright, expanding his chest and regarding his questioner with eyes that sparkled as brightly as did the jewel in front of his feathered head-dress.

"Sir," he said proudly, "I have nothing to be ashamed of. My life is clean as the newly-fallen snow; my heart is pure as the waters of the lake. I am white; and if I am a savage I am at least an honourable one. I did not quit my own kind—my own kind quitted me. If my parents, who were white, had not abandoned me, I should not be here making this talk. I was cast away among the Redskins. I became as one of them. The Piegans are my friends, my brothers. I am loyal to my friends. I have done my duty to them, and they have made me their chief. It was not my fault that the buffalo deserted our hunting

grounds, that the years of dearth have followed on the years of plenty."

Lady Allardyce touched her husband's arm.

"The chief evidently knows the story of Joseph and his brethren," she said in a cautious whisper of amazement.

"I have read it," said White Calf, overhearing the whisper. "I have read it in the big Book which Sergeant Silk gave to me at Fort Sinclair."

"Sergeant Silk!" repeated Lord Allardyce. "Then you are acquainted with Sergeant Silk?"

"He is my best friend—my only friend among the white people," the chief answered. "He told me to come to you, to ask you for the seed-corn and the implements to till our soil. My Piegans are not idle. They are skilful as hunters, they set their traps with cunning, they are great warriors; but White Calf would have them plough the land so that their storehouses may never again be empty."

While he spoke, Lady Allardyce rose from her chair. She was tall and stately, looking strangely white in her black velvet gown that was open at the neck. She moved slowly nearer to him and took hold of the table-lamp, lifting it, and at the same time staring perplexedly at the conspicuous jewel in his war-bonnet.

The lamp shook in her trembling grasp; she swayed unsteadily. White Calf put out his strong right hand and caught at the lamp. He returned it to the table and looked round at the door. He had heard footsteps and the clink of spurs approaching along the outer passage.

"It is that you have followed along my trail," he smiled as Sergeant Silk entered with his Stetson under his elbow.

"Exactly, son," nodded Silk with a familiar smile. "But don't let me send you away before you're through with your business."

He advanced to Lady Allardyce and shook hands with her.

"You and the chief know each other, it seems," she said.

"Why, certainly," acknowledged Silk. "White Buffalo Calf and I are old chums. We've scouted together on the same trail, ridden the same horse, slept under the same blanket, drank from the same cup; we are as brothers, ain't we, chief?"

"I should be proud to be a real brother of yours," returned White Calf, moving aside as a servant passed between them carrying a silver tray of steaming coffee cups. Sergeant Silk was swift to notice that there were but three cups on the tray. He took one that was offered to him, stirred it, sipped from it, and then passed it to White Calf.

"You and I will drink together, son," he said.

But White Calf shook his head as he took the cup from its saucer.

"It was not meant that this should be for me," he observed, hesitating to drink. "I am not the friend of these people. I am a stranger. Among the Piegans, when a stranger comes, it is our first thought to offer him food. But it is perhaps different with white people. They have no welcome for the stranger within their gates."

Sergeant Silk frowned at this impolite remark.

"Drink," he urged. "Drink with me. I am your friend."

White Calf drank, emptying the cup and returning it to the saucer.

Lord Allardyce approached with an open box of cigars, which he offered first to Silk and then to the chief. Silk took one, but White Calf drew back.

"If it is the same as the pipe of peace," he said, "then why do you not offer me the one that you are smoking? I do not smoke tobacco unless it is in the peace-pipe ceremony. No."

The Governor carried the box away. Silk moved aside to speak with Lady Allardyce, but presently both returned, and Silk said:

"Son, Lady Allardyce would like you to take off your war-bonnet and allow her to look at it. Will you oblige her?"

White Calf smiled, revealing his clean, even teeth. He raised his two hands, took off his head-dress, passed it to Silk, and then very carefully smoothed his long, flowing hair, bringing it into two thick coils, one at either side of his full white throat, to hang down his chest.

"Your hair is extraordinarily long and fine," remarked Sergeant Silk. "I don't figure that you have ever had it cut."

"I am very proud of it," returned White Calf. Very delicately he picked a single hair of it, plucked it by the root, and held it up to the light of the lamp. "Look, Sergeant," he said, "it is like the one that you found."

"Exactly," acknowledged Silk. "It might be the same. I guess that other one was your mother's. Say, I still have it in my pocket-book at the barracks."

"It is wonderful hair!" remarked Lord Allardyce admiringly. "It reminds me——" But he did not say of what it reminded him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE WHITE OR THE RED ?

LADY ALLARDYCE approached at this moment, bearing the feathered war-bonnet like a shawl over her bare arm. She pointed to the gold ornament.

"Look at this, Hector," she said to her husband; "look at this pendant! Surely it is the same—the one that you gave me in Paris. There cannot be two alike!" She turned to White Calf. "Where did you get it, chief?" she asked—"this pretty ornament with the blue diamond?"

White Calf was surprised at her interest. He had not known that the big stone was a diamond. Did Lady Allardyce covet it? He dared to look at her more boldly, more directly now. He thought that she was the most beautiful human being he had ever seen—far more beautiful than Song-of-All-the-Birds, and even taller. He wondered how she had happened by the wound that had left a scar across the fairness of her right cheek and temple.

"How did it come into your possession, chief?" she requested.

"It is of no value to me," he told her. "It is yours if you will take it. It has been mine only a few short days. Mignonette gave it to me—Mignonette, a poor half-breed squaw, who went away in this

winter of death. She had no food. She was very ill when she gave me this thing."

"Say where Mignonette got it," urged Silk, recognizing that there was some hidden history in the jewel. "Do you know?"

"Eagle Claw gave it to her many winters ago," White Calf explained—"Eagle Claw, the bad Indian who killed Star Blanket in Werwolf Forest. You do not forget him—no?"

"Of course, I remember him," said Silk. "I am not liable to forget the long trail he led us. Did Mignonette tell you where he got hold of the jewel?"

"No. She did not say. I asked her; but she would not tell. She shut her lips very tightly, and the next day she was no more; but my medicine told me that Eagle Claw found it on the prairie."

"Which prairie?" demanded Lord Allardyce, trying to detach the pendant from the head-dress. "Which prairie—and when?"

White Calf put out his hand and adroitly removed the trinket and politely handed it to Lady Allardyce. Then he turned to Sergeant Silk.

"I think," he said, "it was the winter when you first came to Sweetgrass and spoke to Red Cherry—the winter of the white buffalo."

"Likely," agreed Silk. "That was the time when Eagle Claw tracked me across High Rock Prairie and tried to release my prisoner. But Eagle Claw said no word about finding anything when I questioned him long afterwards."

"Eagle Claw's tongue was crooked," said White Calf. "Did not Wolverine warn you that you would not hear the truth?"

"Why, certainly," nodded Silk; "and I'd a notion

that he was holding something back—that he had seen something more than the ashes of an old camp fire."

"The winter of the white buffalo!" Lady Allardyce was repeating amazedly. "The winter of the white buffalo! What does the chief mean, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Silk strode to the stove to knock the ash from his cigar.

"It is a curious story," he said, turning and facing the room. "Will you not be seated? Son, fetch that chair forward and correct me if I do not tell the yarn right."

White Calf placed the chair between Lord and Lady Allardyce, who signed him to be seated upon it. Silk remained standing, with his back to the stove.

"You will have gathered," he began, "that I had occasion to go to the Piegan Reserve, back of Sweetgrass Lake, to arrest a criminal. That was some sixteen or seventeen winters ago. We trailed by dog sleds. I remember it was on a Tuesday afternoon that we arrived in Sweetgrass Coulée. I arrested my man, and at dawn we took him off. Two of his brothers followed on our tracks and attacked us from ambush. But they failed to rescue the criminal.

"Just before I arrested Black Weasel in Big Rain's medicine lodge, I had a talk with a certain white man named Rising Moon, and his little daughter Red Cherry. I told them that on that same Tuesday morning we had seen a big herd of buffalo on the prairie, and that the leading bull of the herd was a white one. I said that it was the only white buffalo I had ever seen. After I had quitted the camp the Piegans went out on the buffalo trail. They had a big hunt in the midst of a snow-storm. Rising Moon and his

son Wolverine spotted the white bull. They gave chase and killed him."

"It was Wolverine who killed him," corrected White Calf.

"Well, the white buffalo was killed, anyhow," nodded Silk; "and here comes the curious part of the story. You will hardly believe it."

He paused. Lady Allardyce moved from her chair to a low hassock at her husband's feet, where her eyes were shielded from the light of the table-lamp.

"When the two hunters rode up to the dead bull," continued Silk, "they were astonished to discover that the great animal was burdened by a quantity of cloth that was tangled about its head—blanket, flannel, and fine linen; and in the midst of this clothing, held in place by it, lying upon the cushion of the animal's woolly mane, between its horns, they found a living white child—a healthy, wholesome baby boy."

"Silk!" cried Lord Allardyce, "stop! Stop this incredible story! It is painful to me—more painful still to my poor wife. You do not know what it means to us. Stop!"

"No, no!" urged his wife, strangely agitated, "let him go on. A child—lying on the buffalo's head! A living, white child! And the buffalo, too, was white! Oh, merciful heaven! What does it mean?"

White Calf sat silent and motionless, hands on knees. He wondered at the woman's excitement, so different from the quiet self-control of the Indian women.

"Tell me this," insisted Lord Allardyce in a hoarse, unsteady voice. "Before you go on, tell me this: *Is that child still alive?*"

Sergeant Silk's alert eyes were taking in the scene of suppressed emotion going on in front of him. He

knew that something extraordinary was about to be revealed.

"Is the child still alive?" he repeated. "Sir, he is sitting at your side."

As the words came from him, Lady Allardyce flung herself forward on her knees, and fell with her forehead on White Calf's hand, her fingers clinging to his arm, twining themselves in his long hair.

There was a tense, dramatic interval. White Calf felt the woman's hot tears rolling across his hand. He lifted his free hand and rested it softly upon her bent head.

"My medicine has spoken," he said, looking up at Sergeant Silk. "Red Cherry was wrong when she said that I had come as a sacred gift from the Sun. I am human. There is no longer any mystery. I, White Calf, am this woman's child. She is my mother —my *mother*. And you"—he turned his glance upon Lord Allardyce—"you are my father."

"Your concern in this story, sir," said Silk, breaking the spell of silence, "suggests that you can throw light upon the problem of how White Calf came into so extraordinary a situation—a helpless baby perched on the head of a buffalo on the trackless prairie in the middle of winter."

Lord Allardyce stood up and put a hand on White Calf's shoulder.

"My son," he faltered; "for I have no slightest doubt that you are indeed our dear and long-lost child—our only child. I have only to look into your eyes, and they give me proof. You said a little while ago that your parents had abandoned you—that it was they who cast you among the Redskins. Listen."

He stood back. His wife rose from her knees, threw

her arms about White Calf's neck, and looked yearningly into his eyes.

"My son, my son, my son!" she murmured fondly.

"My mother!" whispered White Calf.

For many minutes Lord Allardyce did not speak, but at last he began abruptly:

"It was on the Wednesday that I saw the buffalo herd. I was at that time a factor in the Hudson Bay Company, on my way to Fort McPherson, on the Peace River. We travelled by mule wagon—four wagons—with an escort of mounted frontiersmen. My wife and our baby son, then ten months old, were with me. On the Tuesday night, when you, Silk, were among the Piegan lodges, we were in bivouac on Golden Rod Prairie. We had pitched a canvas sleeping-tent close to the warmth of the fire.

"Shortly after daybreak, leaving the mother and child asleep in the tent, I was preparing breakfast when I was alarmed by the approach of a great herd of buffalo drifting across the prairie in our direction. I saw that the leader was a magnificent white bull. I am an old buffalo hunter, Silk. I saw that our camp was in danger from that vast avalanche of stampeding monsters. Calling our men to follow me, I mounted a good pony and led the men out to head-off the herd. By shouting and firing our guns we succeeded in turning them. We split the herd.

"As soon as I got free from the buffaloes, I rode back to camp. Our wagons had escaped injury, the fire was still burning, but of our sleeping-tent nothing remained excepting only a few fragments of canvas, a tangle of rope, and the broken tent-pole. Under the tent-pole lay my poor, unconscious wife. She appeared to be dead. There was a gaping wound across her face."

Lady Allardyce raised her head and touched the scar which White Calf had noticed.

"And the baby?" questioned Sergeant Silk.

"The baby had wholly disappeared," Lord Allardyce resumed. "While nursing my wife I sent the men out to look for him. They found nothing—nothing, not even the trinket which Eagle Claw found. And soon the snow made further search impossible, and we believed that the little one was lost beyond recovery."

"It is to me very clear how the thing happened," interposed White Calf. "The white bull ran at the tent. He tore his way through it; he knocked down the tent-pole. Still with his head lowered, he caught up the sleeping baby on his horns—the baby with its ermine moccasins, its pretty nightdress and fur jacket, and the blanket. The baby was not hurt. The white bull ran on and on. He could not see with the torn blanket hanging over his eyes, and he was no longer the leader of the herd."

"That is sure how it happened, son," agreed Sergeant Silk.

"I have always said that the buffalo was a white one," added Lady Allardyce. "But how does White Calf know about the ermine sleeping socks and the nightdress?"

"They are still in my medicine lodge," White Calf told her. "Sergeant Silk has seen them. It was in the nightdress that he found the woman's hair—a long hair, the same as yours—and mine."

He stood up, taking hold of his war-bonnet.

"Strangle Wolf is waiting," he said. "I must go back to my lodge. To-morrow I will bring in the horses. I will take the seed-corn and the ploughs."

Lord Allardyce shook his head.

"You are not going away from here, my son," he declared. "Your Piegans shall have all that they want—and more—much more. But you will remain with us now and always."

"I cannot desert my people," White Calf objected. "Remember that I am their chief, They need me."

"Not more than we do—not nearly so much," pleaded his mother, holding out imploring arms.

"Sonny," smiled Silk, "you have gotten yourself up against a mighty big proposition. Your trail is divided; you cannot go both ways. You've got to choose, right or left."

"You mean," said the chief, "that I must decide now whether to stay here in this land of Egypt, as you said, or go back to my greasy Indians?"

"Exactly," nodded Silk. "It must be either the white bone or the red, as in the gambling game. And you know, son, the red was always the loser."

White Calf dangled his war-bonnet at his side like a sling.

"That is true," he acknowledged, "the poor red bone was always the loser, and I have guessed in which hand the white one is held. Look!"

He swung the war-bonnet away from him and seized his mother's two outstretched hands, drawing her to him in an embrace.

"I have chosen," he went on. "I will not abandon my Indians; I will still help them all I can. But from this happy moment onwards I turn my eyes along the White Man's Trail."

"That's all right," said Sergeant Silk.

THE END.

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