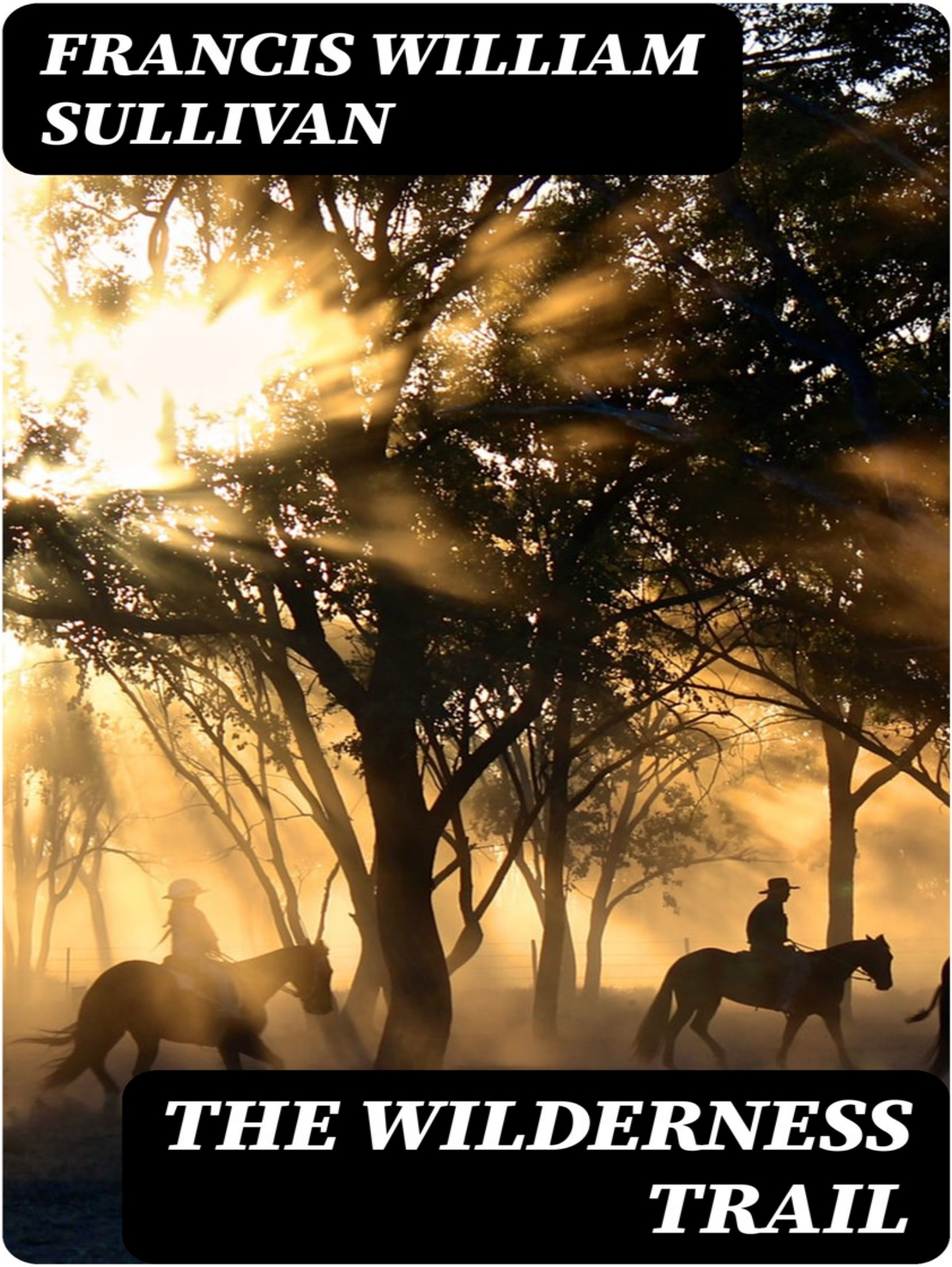
FRANCIS WILLIAM SULLIVAN



THE WILDERNESS TRAIL

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Table of Contents

Chapter I.
Up for Judgment

Table of Contents

“And you accuse me of that?”

Donald McTavish glared down into the heavy, ugly face of his superior—a face that concealed behind its mask of dignity emotions as potent and lasting as the northland that bred them.

“I accuse you of nothing.” Fitzpatrick pawed his white beard. “I only know that a great quantity of valuable furs, trapped in your district, have not been turned in to me here at the factory. It is to explain this discrepancy that I have called you down by dogs in the dead of winter. Where are those furs?” He looked up out of the great chair in which he was sitting, and regarded his inferior with cold insolence. For half an hour now, the interview had been in progress, half an hour of shame and dismay for McTavish, and the same amount of satisfaction for the factor.

“I tell you I have no idea where they are,” returned the post captain. “So far as I know, the usual number of pelts have been traded for at the fort. If any have disappeared, it is a matter of the white trappers and the Indians, not my affair.”

“Yes,” agreed the other suavely; “but who is in charge of Fort Dickey?”

“I am.”

“Then, how can you say it is not your affair when the Company is losing twenty thousand pounds a year from your district?”

The young man ground his teeth helplessly, torn between the desire to throttle ugly old Fitzpatrick where he sat, or to turn on his heel, and walk out without another word. He did

neither. Either would have been disastrous, as he well knew. He had not come up three years with the spring *brigade* from the Dickey and Lake Bolsover without knowing the autocratic, almost royal, rule of old Angus. Fitzpatrick, factor at Fort Severn for these two decades.

So, now, he choked back his wrath, and walked quietly up and down, pondering what to do. The room was square, low, and heavily raftered. Donald had to duck his head for one particular beam at each passage back and forth. Beneath his feet were great bearskins in profusion; a moose's head decorated one end of the place. The furniture was heavy and home-made.

At last, he turned upon the factor.

“Look here!” he said simply. “What have you got against me? You know as well as I do that there isn't another man in your whole district you would call in from a winter post to accuse in this way. What have I done? How have I failed in my duty? Have I taken advantage of my position as the chief commissioner's son?”

Fitzpatrick pawed his beard again, and shot a sharp, inquisitive glance at the young captain. That mention of his father's position was slightly untoward. In turn, he pondered a minute.

“Up to this time,” he said at last, “you have done your work well. You know the business pretty thoroughly, and your Indians seem to be contented. I have nothing against you—”

“No,” burst out McTavish, “you have nothing against me. That's just it. Virtues with you are always negative; never have I heard you grant a positive quality in all the time I have known you. And, to be frank, I think that you have something against me. But what it is I cannot find out.” He paused eloquently before the white-haired figure that seemed as immovable as a block of granite.

“This is hardly the time for personalities, McTavish,” said the other, harshly. “What I want to know is, what steps will

you take to restore the furs that have disappeared from your district?”

“How do you know they have disappeared from my district?” Donald blazed forth.

“I know everything in this country,” replied Fitzpatrick, dryly.

“Then, am I under the surveillance of your spying Indians?”

“Enough!” roared the factor, at last roused from his calm. “I am not here to be questioned. Answer me! What are you going to do?”

McTavish dropped his clenched hands with a gesture of hopeless weariness.

“I'll swallow your insulting innuendoes, and try to dig up some evidence to support your accusation,” he said, quietly. “If I get track of any leakage, I'll do my best to stop it. If not, you shall learn as soon as possible.”

“The leakage exists,” rejoined the factor, doggedly. “Plug the hole, or—” He paused suggestively.

“Or what?” cried the younger man, whirling upon him furiously.

“Plug the hole—that's all.”

Shaking with the fury that possessed him, McTavish turned away from his chief, and walked to a window, lest he should lose all control of himself. But a thought came to him that restored the proud angle of his head, and crushed his anger into nothingness.

What McTavish yet had been the fool of a narrow-minded, disgruntled superior, and showed it by losing his temper? None. The name of McTavish rang down the hall of the Hudson Bay Company's history like a bugle. Three generations of them had served this fearful master—he was the third. His father, now chief commissioner, had served an apprenticeship of twenty years in the wilds, beginning as a mere lad. He himself, when barely fifteen, had felt the call in his blood, and gone out on the trail with Peter Rainy, a

devoted Indian of his father's. Peter was still with him, but now as body-servant, and not as instructor in woodcraft.

Donald thought of these things as he looked out of the chunky, square window into the snow-muffled courtyard. So engrossed was he that he failed to hear the door of the room open, and the light footfalls of Tee-ka-mee, Fitzpatrick's bowman and body-servant. The Indian, sensing some unpleasantness in the air, went directly to the factor, and handed him a message, explaining that Pierre Cardepie, one of McTavish's companions at the Dickey River post, had sent it by Indian runner.

Through the window the post-captain saw opposite him a corner made by two walls meeting at right angles. Even in summer, they were stout, heavy walls; but, now, with twenty feet of snow muffling and locking them in an unshakable grip, they were monstrous. Above the walls, a bastion of squared logs, looped-holed for four- and six-pounders, rose. There was another one at the opposite corner of the square, and together they commanded all approaches.

Angus Fitzpatrick opened the message Tee-ka-mee handed to him, and read it. His only sign of emotion was the lifting of an eyebrow. Then, he waved the Indian out.

“McTavish!” he called sharply, and the younger man turned wearily from the window to face his superior.

“I suppose you know that half-breed, Charley Seguis, in your district? He comes up with the *brigade* every spring, I believe.”

“Yes, I know him. He is a skilful trapper and a half-breed of remarkable intelligence.”

“Huh! That's the trouble; he's got too much intelligence to make him safe as a half-breed. What do you know about him? Is he a bad one?”

“Quite the contrary, so far as I have observed.”

“Well, he's been bad this time. Read that.” Fitzpatrick handed Cardepie's scrawl to McTavish, and watched keenly

as the latter read:

SIR:

Yesterday Charley Seguis murder Cree Johnny. No reason I can find. I send this by runner so Mr. McTavish get it before he starts back.

CARDEPIE.

“That's most remarkable, sir,” said Donald, genuinely puzzled. “I never would have suspected Charley of that. He has brains enough to know the consequences of murder. I can't understand it.”

“Neither can Cardepie, evidently. He says he knows no reason for the deed.” Fitzpatrick heaved himself up, and leaned forward interestedly. “You know,” he went on, “that this thing cannot go unpunished. Charley Seguis must be captured, and brought to the fort here.”

“Will the mounted police get here before—?” began McTavish.

“The mounted police be hanged! There are only seven hundred of them, and they have to cover a country as big as Siberia. You don't suppose I'm going to wait for them, do you? Nominally, they're the law here, but literally I and the men under me are. Retribution in this case must be swift and sure, as it always has been from Fort Severn.” Fitzpatrick paused to breathe.

“Then, you mean that I must go out and get him,” Donald interpreted, calmly.

“You spare me the trouble of saying it,” replied the other. “When can you start?”

“In three hours.”

Fitzpatrick glanced at the clock on the wall.

“Too late now,” he said. “Better wait until to-morrow. The feed and the night's rest will do you good. Whatever

happens, you've got to be faster than that half-breed.” He paused a minute. “If you go at dawn, I probably won't see you again. In that case, let me remind you, McTavish, of the matter of which we were speaking before this murder came up. I—”

“You don't need to remind me. I remember it perfectly.” Donald moved toward the door.

Fitzpatrick leaned still farther forward in his great chair, his eyes glinting, his lips curved in a snarl.

“And don't forget,” he rasped at the other's back, “that I want that half-breed, dead or alive—and that he's a mighty fast man with a gun!”

The young man vouchsafed no reply, but passed out of the door that Tee-ka-mee opened from the other side. For fully a minute after the door had closed, Fitzpatrick continued to lean forward, the snarl on his lips, the evil light in his eyes. Then he fell back heavily, with a harsh, mirthless cackle.

“If he only knew—if he only knew!” he muttered to himself. “He must know soon, or there won't be half the pleasure in it for me.”

Then, thirst being upon him, he clanged the bell for Tee-ka-mee, and that faithful servitor, divining the order, brought the aged factor wherewithal to warm himself.

Chapter II.
Ill Report

Table of Contents

Donald found Peter Rainy gossiping with a couple of the Indian servants in the barracks, and informed his attendant of the intended departure next morning. Then, he returned to the factor's house, unexpected and unaccompanied, and was admitted silently by an Indian woman, into whose hand he slipped a tiny mirror by way of recompense.

“Will you tell Miss Jean that I'm here?” he said, in the soft native Ojibway of the woman.

She nodded assent, and disappeared, only the sharp creaking of the stairs under her tread betraying her movements. For some time, then, Donald sat alone in the low-ceiled parlor. At one end of the room a roaring fire burned in the rough stone fireplace; there were a couple of tables along either wall, with mid-Victorian novels scattered over them; Oriental rugs and great furs smothered the floor, and there was even a new mahogany davenport in one corner, which the yearly ship from England had brought the summer before. While the room of the other interview was palpably that of the factor, there was something about this one, a certain pervasive touch of femininity, that marked it as that of the daughters of the house.

After a few minutes, there sounded a second creaking of the stairs accompanied by a soft rustling that was not of Indian garments. Donald rose to his feet expectantly, his finely molded head inclined in an attitude of listening, and a flickering light in his dark-blue eyes. There was a moment's pause, and then a girl entered the narrow doorway.

She was tall, slender, and dressed in gray wool, warmed by touches of red velvet at waist and throat and cuffs. Her

skin was clear and soft, toned to the rich hues of perfect health by the whipping winds of the North. Her eyes, too, were blue, but of a lighter color than were the man's, while her hair, against the firelight, was a flaming aureole of bronze.

Donald caught a quick breath of admiration, as he took the hand she held out to him. Each time, it came involuntarily—this breath of admiration. Last spring, when the *brigade* had come to the fort after the winter's trapping; last fall, when he had gone away from the fort, after a few weeks' hazardous attentions under the malicious eyes of old Fitzpatrick; and here, again, this winter... And, as he saw her now, after their long separation, there arose in him a need as imperative as hunger, and as fierce. Years in the solitudes had instilled into Donald something of the habits and instincts of the animals he trapped, and now, as he approached thirty, this longing that was of both soul and body, laid hold of him with an unreasoning, compelling grip which could not be ignored.

“They told me you were here,” said Jean Fitzpatrick, “and I think it nice of you to give one of your precious hours for a call on me.”

“You know I would give them all if I could,” returned McTavish, simply. “I would sledge the width of Keewatin for half a day with you.”

“Donald, you mustn't say those things; I don't understand them quite, and, besides, father made himself clear about your privileges last summer, didn't he?”

McTavish looked at the girl, and told himself that he must remember her limitations before he lost his patience. For he knew that, despite her pure Scotch descent, she had never been more than two days' journey from Fort Severn in all her life. The only men she had ever known were Indians, half-breeds, French-Canadians, and a few pure-white fort captains like himself. And of these last, perhaps three in all her experience had been worthy an hour's chat. And, as to

these three, orders emanating from the secret councils in Winnipeg had moved them out of her sphere before she had more than merely met them.

Innocent, but not ignorant (for her eyes could see the life about her), she was the product of an unnatural environment, the foster-child of hardship, grim determination, and abrupt destiny. Donald remembered these things, as, with less patience, he recalled the fact that old Fitzpatrick was opposed to Jean's marrying until Laura, the elder sister, had been taken off his hands. This had been intimated from various sources during the turbulent weeks of the summer, and Jean was now referring to it again.

Had old Fitzpatrick possessed the eyes of Jean's few admirers, he would have laid the blame for his predicament on his angular first-born, where it belonged, and not on the perversity of young men in general.

“Look here, Jean,” said Donald, after grave consideration. “You are old enough to think for yourself—twenty-four, aren't you?” The girl nodded assent.

“Well, then,” he continued, “please don't remind me of what your father said last summer, if it is in opposition to our wishes and desires.”

“I wouldn't if it was in opposition to them,” she retorted, calmly. He looked at her with startled eyes, a sudden, breathless pain stabbing him.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean, Donald,” she replied, looking at him squarely with her fearless, truthful eyes, “that last summer was a mistake, as far as I am concerned.”

“Jean!” McTavish rose to his feet unsteadily, his face white with pain. “Jean! What has happened? What have I done? What lies has anyone been telling you?” He spoke in a sharp voice; yet, even in the midst of his bewilderment, he could not but admire her straightforward cutting to the heart of the matter. There was no coquetry or false

gentleness about her. That was the pattern of his own nature and he loved her the more for it.

She shrugged her shoulders in the way he adored, and smiled wanly.

“There's an Indian proverb that says, 'When the wind dies, there is no more music in the corn,'” she replied. “There is no more music in my heart, that is all.”

“What made it die?”

“I can't tell you.” bash: /p: No such file or directory “Evil reports about me?” he snarled suddenly, drawing down his dark brows, and fixing her with piercing eyes that had gone almost black.

“Not evil reports; merely half-baked rumors that, really, had very little to do with you, after all. Yet, they changed me.” She was still wholly frank.

“Who carried them to you?” he demanded tensely, the muscles of his firm jaws tightening as his teeth clenched. “Tell me who spread them, and I'll run him to earth, if he leads me through the heart of Labrador.”

“I don't know,” she returned earnestly, rising in her turn. “That's the trouble with rumors. They're like a summer wind; they go everywhere unseen, but everyone hears them, and none can say out of which direction they first came or when they will cease blowing. I don't know.”

Baffled, shocked, embittered, Donald turned passionately upon her.

“You don't know what was in my heart when I came here to-day,” he cried. “You don't know what has been in it ever since the fall when the *brigade* went south. I need you. I want you. This winter, everything has gone against me, but the thought of your sympathy and affection made those troubles easy to bear. I stand now under the shadow of such a despicable thievery as the lowest half-breed rarely commits. They say I cache and dispose of furs for my own profit—I, in whom honor and loyalty to the Company have been bred for a hundred years. Tomorrow I start out on the

almost hopeless task of proving myself innocent. And not only that! A half-breed in my district, Charley Seguis, has murdered an Indian, and I, as captain of Fort Dickey, must run him to earth, and bring him back here, if I can get the drop on him first. If I can't—but never mind that part of it. My honor and even my life are at stake, but those are little things, if I know you love me. I wanted to go away to-morrow with the knowledge of your faith in me, and the promise that, when I came back, we might be married. Oh, Jean, I need you, I need you, and now—" He broke off abruptly.

The girl had paled beneath her tan. She stood looking at him, her hands gripped tightly together in front of her, her eyes wide with wonder and perplexity.

"I can't help it, Donald," she said, in a low voice. "I'm sorry, truly I am sorry. I—I didn't know these things. And, perhaps, you'll be shot, you say? No, that must not be. You must come back, even if things aren't what they were."

"You do care for me!" cried McTavish eagerly, Stepping toward her.

"Yes, yes, I do; but not the way you mean," she stammered, a sudden instinctive fear of his masculine domination rising in her. "I can't marry you now, or when you come back, or—ever!"

The fire in the man's eyes died out; his frame relaxed hopelessly, and he fumbled for his fur cap.

"I'm sorry I spoke, Jean," he said, stretching out his hand. "Good-by."

Suddenly, the door leading into the rear room opened, and in the frame stood the heavy figure of Angus Fitzpatrick, his eyes glittering under the beetling white brows. For a silent moment, he took in the scene before him.

"Jean," he said harshly, "what does this mean? You know my orders. Do you disobey me?" The girl flushed painfully.

"Mr. McTavish is going now, father," she said, quietly. "I'm sending him away."

“I'll look to that Indian woman,” muttered Fitzpatrick. “She had orders not to admit him.” Then, aloud:

“Mr. McTavish, in the future, kindly do not confuse your business at this factory with your personal desires. I do not wish it.”

“Very well,” replied the captain impersonally, without looking at the factor.

His eyes were fixed hungrily upon the face of the girl, searching for a sign of tender emotion. But there was none. Only confusion, fear, and surprise struggled for mastery there. Hopelessly, he bowed stiffly to her, and went out of the door.

Crossing the courtyard by a path that was a veritable canyon of snow, he gained his quarters in the barracks. There, he found Peter Rainy, gaunt and with a wrinkled, leathern face, starting to gather the packs for the early start next morning. Donald filled and lit his pipe solemnly, and then sat down to ponder.

Something intangible and ill-favored had been streaked across the clean page of his life. Angus Fitzpatrick's increasing malice toward him was not the sudden whim of an irascible old man. He knew that, all other things being equal, the factor was really just, in a rough and ungracious way. Any other man in the service would have hesitated long before accusing him, with his father's and grandfather's records, glorious as they were, and his own unimpeachable, as far as he knew. Some event or circumstances over which he had no control had raised itself, and defamed him to these persons who held his honor and his happiness in their hands. This much he sensed; else why had the factor taken such half-hidden, but malicious, joy in sending him forth on these two Herculean tasks; else, why had the rumor poisoned the mind of Jean against him, and held her aloof and unapproachable?

That Jean should not love him under the circumstances did not surprise him, but he groped in vain for an

explanation of old Fitzpatrick's evident hatred. The old factor and the elder McTavish, now commissioner, had known each other for years, the latter's incumbency of the York factory having kept them in fairly close touch. This in itself, thought Donald, should be a matter in his favor, and not an obstacle, as it appeared to be. Pondering, searching, he racked his weary brain feverishly until Peter Rainy unobtrusively announced that dinner was ready. Then, occupied with other things, he put the matter from his mind.

The sluggish dawn had barely cast its first glow across the measureless snows when Rainy roused him from heavy sleep. After a breakfast of boiled fat, meat, tea and hard bread, they gathered the four dogs together, and with much difficulty got them into traces. Mistisi, the leader, a bad dog when not working, strained impatiently in the moose-hide harness. Donald, when the packs had been strapped securely on, gave a quick final inspection, and then a word that sent the train moving toward the gate in the wall.

But few men were about, and an indifferent wave of the hand from these sped the party on its way. Outside the gate, Peter Rainy took the lead, breaking a path for the dogs with his snowshoes, while McTavish walked beside the loaded sled. Their course ran westward up the frozen Dickey River, which now lay adamant beneath the iron cold and drifting snow. Forty miles they would follow it, to the fork that led on the north to Beaver Lake, and on the south to Bolsover. Taking the south branch, they would then struggle across the wind-swept body of water, and follow the river ten miles farther, to a headland upon which stood the snow-muffled block-house of Fort Dickey.

If you draw a straight line north from Ashland, Wisconsin, and follow it for six hundred and fifty miles, you will find yourself in the vicinity of Fort Dickey, in the midst of the most appalling wilderness on the face of the globe. In that journey, you will have crossed Lake Superior and the great tangle of spruce that extends for two hundred miles north of

it. North of Lake St. Joseph, which is the head of the great Albany River, whence the waters drain to Hudson Bay, you will strike north across the Keewatin barrens: Bald, fruitless rocks, piled as by an indifferent hand; great stretches of almost impenetrable forest, ravines, lakes, rivers, and rapids; all these will hinder and baffle your progress. Add to such conditions snow, ice, and eighty degrees of frost, and you have the situation that Donald McTavish faced the day he left Fort Severn.

Chapter III.
A Mysterious Message

Table of Contents

“What do you know about this murder?”

Donald sat at the dinner table in Fort Dickey with John Buller and Pierre Cardepie, his two assistants. A roaring log fire barely fought off the cold as they ate their caribou steak, beans, bread, and tea.

“Not much,” replied Buller. “The day after you left, one of the Indians tore in at midnight with the news. He said that he and his partner, the murdered man, had been met by Charley Seguis while running their trap-line, and that Charley had drawn the other aside in private conversation. Half an hour later, there had been sudden words, followed by blows, and, before Johnny could defend himself, Seguis had stabbed him. What they had been talking about the Indian didn't know, for Charley had hurried off immediately after the murder.”

“What direction did he take?” asked McTavish.

“The rumor declared that he went north, toward Beaver Lake.”

“Could he give any motive for the deed?”

“No. So far as he knew, Johnny had never seen Charley Seguis before.”

“Well, boys, I'm off in the morning after him. The factor is particularly keen for having him brought in right away. He also wants to know what I have done with all the furs that he claims have disappeared from this district during the last year.” Donald's tone was contemptuous.

“I didn't know any had disappeared,” said Buller, in amazement.

“Nor me! I tink dat Feetzpatreeck ees gone crazy in hees old age,” added Cardepie, with a snort.

“Well, whatever it is, he claims the Company has lost twenty thousand pounds, and that I'm to blame for it,” said Donald.

“There's something wrong here, Mac,” remarked Duller, decisively. “This isn't all accident, and, if you say so, I'll go with you to-morrow.”

“It's awfully good of you, John, but I think I'll tackle it alone.” And McTavish wearily rose from the table.

The next morning, he again took the trail, but this time alone. On his feet were the light moose-webbed snowshoes; from head to heel, he was clad in white caribou such as the Indian hunters affect, and on his *capote* he bore the branching antlers that were left there as a decoy for the wary animals. With a long whip in one hand and his rifle held easily in the other, he strode beside the straining dog-train. In the east, the frost-mist hung low like a fog. In the south, the sun, which barely showed itself above the horizon each day, was commencing to engrave faint tree shadows on the snow. The west was purplish gray, but the north was unrelenting iron. There was no beaten path to guide him now, and sometimes the trees were so closely set as barely to permit the passage of the sledge. On the new snow could be seen the dainty tracks of ermine, and beside them the cleanly indented marks of a fox. There were triplicate clusters of impressions, showing where the hare had passed, and occasionally the huge, splayed imprints of a caribou. But, though the life of the wild creatures was teeming at this season, there was no sound in all the leagues of forest, except the sharp crack of some freezing tree-trunk and the noise of Donald's own passage.

Late in the afternoon the traveler found the cabin of a white trapper for which he had started that morning.

“Can you tell me where Charley Seguis is?” he asked.

“Went north, toward Beaver Lake, three days ago,” replied the other, shortly. “He stopped here on his way up, and said he was looking for better grounds.”

“Going to set out a new line of traps then, was he?”

“Yes, Mr. McTavish,” assented the trapper.

“Thanks,” said McTavish, gathering up the whip. “I must be going.”

“What! Going to travel all night? Better stay and bunk with me.”

“Can't do it, friend.” And a few minutes later, the captain of Fort Dickey was on his way again.

He knew that Charley Seguis had three days' start of him. He knew also that Charley was an exceptionally intelligent half-breed, and would travel well out of the district before allowing himself breathing space. McTavish intended surprising him by the swiftness of pursuit. So, lighted on his way by the brilliant stars and the silent, flaunting banners of the northern lights, he plodded doggedly on until midnight. Then he built a fire, thawed fish for the dogs, and prepared food for himself, finally lying down on his bed of spruce boughs, his feet to the flames.

Two hours before dawn found him shivering with bitter cold, and heaping logs upon the fire for the morning tea; and, while the stars were fading, Mistisi, his leader, plunged into the traces for the long day's march. It was grilling work. The cold seemed something vital, sentient, alive, which opposed him with all its might. The wind and snow appeared cunning allies of the one great enemy; and, to make matters worse, the very underbrush and trees themselves apparently conspired against this one microscopic human who dared invade the regions of death.

But Donald McTavish was not thinking of these things as he toiled north. His mind was centered on Charley Seguis, the Indian, the man who must be conquered. There lay his duty; hazardous, fatal, perhaps; but still his duty. It was the

first law of the company that justice should be infallible among its servants, and right triumphant.

Donald crossed the tracks of two hunters that morning, but saw no one. By this time, he was well into the Beaver Lake district. Seventy-five miles north were the low, desolate shores of Hudson Bay, and as many miles directly east lay Fort Severn. At the thought, a short spasm of pain clutched his heart, for he could not forget that the lonely post contained the world for him.

The splendors and luxuries of civilization in great cities were as nothing to him now. Only the vast wild, and this one wonderful creature of the wild, Jean Fitzpatrick, spoke to him in a language that he understood. He had vague recollections of operas and theaters and dances, and all the colorful life of Montreal and Winnipeg; but they only stirred within him a sense of imprisonment and unrest.

“Better to fight and die alone in the deep woods than to live all one's life as a jellyfish,” was the concise fashion in which he summed the matter up.

At two o'clock that afternoon McTavish consulted a map he had made of the district near Fort Dickey, and laid his course for the trapping shanty of an Indian called Whiskey Bill. It was on the bank of a little beaver stream that debouched into Beaver River. The stream was frozen to a thickness of three feet, and Donald drove his dog team smartly down the snow-covered ice, riding on the sledge for the first time in many hours. But he finally arrived at Whiskey Bill's shanty only to find the place deserted, and the little building slowly disintegrating under the investigations of animals.

“That's funny,” thought Donald uncertainly. “I can't understand it at all. He said he was coming in to his old shanty on this fork of the Beaver when the fall trapping began.”

He closely examined the rickety structure. It showed signs of having been inhabited up to a month previous. The