



He swung his whip, the lash cracked as he teaped to the back of the sled, holding on to the gee-pole, waving an arm in farewell. She watched him until he vanished. Reckless and light-hearted, Will had got himself into other troubles before this last, terrible one, but it did not seem possible he could have committed murder. But it was more than possible he might be convicted of that crime.

Back in the house she looked at the unconscious Dick Byrne, tenderly. She was not at all sure she loved him. But she liked him. He had brought through the message. She saw a scrap of folded paper that Will had found when they got his clothes off, and they had forgotten. She read it now: Money in my belt belongs to Alexander MacLeod. Five hundred dollars.

Richard A. Byrne She did not understand it. She got the money belt and put it away. It seemed to back up her feeling that Will judged his uncle to hard. But that did not mend matters.

There was a thousand-dollar reward out for Will. Some one had betrayed them to the Mounted. She must handle the trooper when he came.

She stood there frowning, gazing at Byrne's wan features, filmed with a three-days beard. He stirred a little, murmured something. He was coming back to his senses. She laid a hand on his forehead, spoke to him soothingly.

Inspiration came to her. She would go back to Nipegosis, ask him to help her. There was no need to speak of Peace River Jack, of Kinoceti, as he was called by his Indian name. But—if Nipegosis would give her what she wanted, what she knew he possessed...

She closed the cabin door and ran fast over the slippery crust to the Conjuror's house. Well as Dick Byrne had done, fast as the cunning Kinoceti had

traveled, O'Rourke of the Mounted had bested them. He was still behind, but he caught up many miles. He expected to cross the finish line tomorrow. Early. He suspected some man was ahead, sent by MacLeod, though he did not enter Kinoceti into his calculations. He had beaten his own records.

It was dawn and he was up and ready. He broke off a tip of hemlock and examined it. It would not lie. Spring was on the way. A chinook wind was threatening. It did not matter, once he got his man.

But there were other elements against which he might not fight as he did against the wind and the frost and the thaw.

He barely remembered Will MacLeod. He had his description with him. He had conducted the preliminary examination on the murder of Jacques Regnier. He was out now, as a sergeant of the R. C. M. P. to land the murderer. And, there was Marion MacLeod!

Marion MacLeod, in a white gown as he had danced with her at Spruce City, visioned her a thousand times since, saw her now in the dull smoke of his failing fire. He had dreamed of her, told himself he was foolish. What had a Mountie to do with a sweetheart?

Yet she had gripped his heart—she gripped it now—and he was sworn to take her brother, to deliver him to a stern and unrelenting justice which believed him guilty of murder, according to the explicit evidence.

He sized up the immediate weather and forged on. He did not pass the spot where Dick Byrne had made camp, but slanted on a tangent, humoring the wind but fighting it. He crossed Elk River, saw the abandoned cabins of White Rock. There was smoke coming from the chimneys of two of them. One was that of Nipegosis. It had been described to him. The other...

Sergeant O'Rourke had an idea that Marion MacLeod had been expecting him. There was no friendly greeting in her eyes. But she expressed no surprise at seeing him. He remembered that, later.

"But first the Mounted Man takes MacLeod, the nephew of the man who calls himself The MacLeod, who will be humbled when the nephew hangs. Then I am minded to talk with the sister, if the Mounted Man does not take her along. In that case it is wisest not to interfere. If you kill one of those red-coated devils they send another, and yet another.

"So, although she would amuse me, we will not be foolish about that. In the school they sent me to they had a tale of a dog who crossed a bridge and stopped to look at his reflection. He had a bone in his mouth, a good bone, but he dropped it into the water and tried to get the other one, which, of course, had vanished. He lost the substance for the shadow."

"I, too, have heard that story," said one of the breeds tipsily. "Then you should know what I am talking about."

"What is this affair which will make us all rich?" asked another. "My friends," said Kinoceti, emptying the bottle. "You know that white miners found the gold at White Rock which the Indians knew long ago was there. We did not take it because it would have been taken away again immediately. So the white miners built the camp and got a lot of gold for a time.

"Then there was no more gold. The white rock reef had ended. "No one goes to White Rock for gold any more. No white man. But there is a man named Sigonay—you know him, my friends?"

"An old fool who takes a young squaw," said one of them. "She would not have gone to him if he had not tempted her," Kinoceti returned. "She is very young and looks well to the eye."

He spoke complacently, with a self-conscious smirk. His clothes were worn, but they were those of a dandy.

"He has bought her many things from LaRoche, the trader at Thirty Mile. Dresses, shawls, ribbons, perfume, rings. And, because he was an old fool and she was a young wife, it was not hard for her to wheedle out of him how he paid for these things. With white rock that was heavy and speckled with gold, as a trout is speckled.

"But he would not tell her where he got it until he knew he was dying of lung fever. That was last week. He is dead now. He will buy her no more gifts. But he told her where the white rock came from. And she told me."

"Where? At White Rock Camp? You said it was the same place where this young MacLeod stays."

"At White Rock, yes. Just where, I do not know. Sigonay told his squaw to ask Nipegosis. So maybe Nipegosis will tell his squaw, when she asks him, after she is through her month of mourning. In the meantime we will ask Nipegosis. I think it is likely that Nipegosis told Sigonay where to look for it, where to find the lode the white men lost. Such things happen in rock. They call them faults."

"I know that, broke in the previous interrupter. "I know

what faults are in rock, and I know also it is foolish to ask Nipegosis where it is. He might have told the son of his niece because of the blood between them but he will not tell us."

"He'll tell me," said Kinoceti. "I am not afraid of Nipegosis. He does not care for gold. He is too old. He has not long to live, yet, like all men, he treasures what he has left of life. He will barter that, with us, for the white rock. He can still suffer."

"Nipegosis is a wizard. You are crazy. He will cast a spell on us," said Suni, the full-blood, energetically. "They say he can change a man to stone, turn him into a beast, kill him with cramps. Make him blind."

"They say?" laughed Kinoceti. "I have learned about wizards, they play tricks. But they feel pain like another man. I tell you," he boasted, "Nipegosis will tell—and gladly, if you are not cowards. If you are, I will do this thing alone."

They did not like it. And Kinoceti did not want to handle it alone. He would have to be drunk when he did it and he had more bottles of caribou stowed away for such an occasion.

The full-blood had walked to the mouth of the cave. Now he called to them, pointing across the river.

They crouched, their sight like eagles, watching the progress of a sled on the far side of the river, beneath them, evidently making for the caves. They speculated on it, a little drunk, but sharp enough for observation, comparing notes and comments.

"It is Will MacLeod," said Kinoceti, finally. "I do not know what has happened, but his sister is not with him. He travels alone—and he travels fast."

"He saw the mounted man coming," said one of them. "He had time to harness his dogs. The Mounted Man would be on snowshoes, no horse."

Kinoceti did not agree. "The police are too smart," he said. "They lost sight of him after the killing. Now they will have sent out one of their best. He would not be such a fool as to let young MacLeod see him first. No, something has frightened him. He may have been warned."

"I saw Red Deer trail to White Rock two days ago," a breed suggested.

"That is not news," snarled Kinoceti. "Red Deer came from the north and west. He took moose meat to Nipegosis it is that old fox, Alec MacLeod."

Three men, now, had styled The MacLeod a fox. Two white men and a breed. Their agreement was likely to be correct. None of them were fools. Kinoceti's judgement was almost as swift as that of O'Rourke. Almost as true. But he did not stay to analyze it very far.

"He leave his sister behind," he repeated. Perhaps to throw dust in the eyes of the Mounted Man, I am going to White Rock. You—three of you—may come with me. One stays to watch young MacLeod. He come to hole-in—here at the caves. Rub out those ashes, get rid of the bones and meat. He knows the trail. He must not be made suspicious. He's worth a thousand dollars. You, Suni," he went on to the full-blood, remain behind. Watch him. Trail him if he leaves. Do not let him go too far. The reward says 'Alive or dead,' but they would rather have him alive. And it is only I, Kinoceti, who may collect that reward."

"Does not the Mounted Man get some of it?"

"They are not permitted. They work for the wage of a clerk, for glory and a medal," scoffed Kinoceti. "Clean up the cave. Young MacLeod will be here inside of

half an hour. We will not lose sight of him, but now we go to White Rock. Perhaps we may clear up the matter of the gold before the Mounted Man arrives."

"Then we can tell him where to find young MacLeod, and, once on that scent, he will think of no other. They are good hounds, these Mounties; they stay on the trail they are started on."

He was idle while the others worked. He had in him the qualities of a leader, though his causes were evil. He hunkered down in the mouth of the cave, watching Will MacLeod's dogs, tiring now, laboring through slushy snow toward the river.

He thought of Alexander MacLeod, who would have employed him to string snowshoes at a fifth of what MacLeod would sell them for. Of the knowledge of the lost gold reef he would win from Nipegosis. Of the fools working back in the cave who thought he would share it with them. But, most of all, he thought of Marion MacLeod.

He remembered the time when she had looked at him as if he were dirt—through him, as if he had been glass. Once in the store at Bison Crossing. He had swaggered in, resplendent, barbaric. It had been the day before a Saint's Day, and the place was packed. He had gone deliberately to the counter where Marion was helping and bought thing after thing he did not need. He had gathered the articles together at the last, paid for them.

"Do not wrap them," he had said in his best school English. "They are for you."

If she had hit him across the face with a whip, if she had been the one who made the scar he bore, he could not have felt it more plainly. He felt it now. He had been drinking a little.

"Do you think I am a squaw?" she had asked him, and turned away. She had not told her brother, her uncle, nor any of the white trappers, who would have thrashed Kinoceti for his presumption, thrust him out of Bison Crossing forever. But her look raveled like a festering wound.

Now, he was going to play even. He had waited a long time for the chance, played desperately to get it. He was going to make the most of it, glut his Indian nature, warped by crossbreeding, with revenge.

As Will MacLeod crossed Stony River, its ice already treacherous under the chinook, three men with Kinoceti, slid through the leafless brush like lizards, took the trail for White Rock.

The blood remained behind. It suited him well enough. To keep an eye on his fugitive from white man's justice was one thing, to beard Nipegosis in the Conjuror's own house was quite another. He erased himself from the landscape. He had meat. It was getting warm. He would watch this thousand dollar refugee. And if Nipegosis destroyed the rest, as he thought surely would happen, he, Suni, whom many of his tribe thought foolish, would collect the reward and live happily ever afterward—at least, as long as the thousand dollars held out.

He might even aspire to the late bride of Sigonay, might get from

Conservation Practiced By FHA Families

By THOMAS H. SEARS
LENNA F. GAMBILL

When the New River Soil Conservation District was organized, families participating in the FHA Program were among the first to make application for assistance. In Alleghany county, C. E. Brown, Farm Ownership borrower of the Piney Creek community, was the first or among the first to sign an agreement with the district. Mr. Brown had just purchased a farm. It needed building up, so he was ready to take advantage of any assistance offered. Many other families have since signed agreements and are doing a good job of conservation. A check sometime ago revealed that about 85 families in Ashe county, who were or had been on the FHA Program, had signed conservation agreements with the New River Soil Conservation District.

We have found that in many cases the farm had to be improved before the income of the family could be improved. It has been our policy to call in the other agricultural agencies when their Nipegosis, the secret of the lost lode.

Kinoceti led his three henchmen into White Rock in late afternoon. He had been strongly tempted to steal Will MacLeod's sled and dogs, but he fought off the impulse he requoted Aesop's fable to himself. "Do not trade the shadow for the substance."

So the white men had taught him, and it was sage advice.

On the way they stopped at one of his caches of caribou. Kinoceti liked it, but it was his "medicine." He knew how to use it. His three helpers were befuddled when they got to White Rock. He himself was merely charged with deviltry.

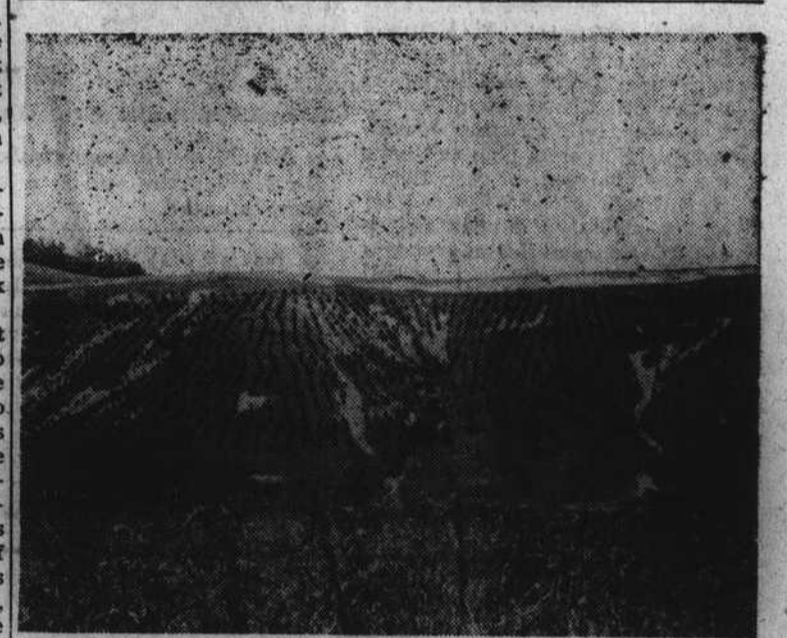
(To be Continued)

services were needed toward helping a family do a better job of making a living. The families who have made the most improvement in their farms are the ones who have been carrying out good conservation practices. The general yields on some TP farms have been more than doubled in the last five years.

The Farmers' Home Administration is not only interested in the rehabilitation of the farm, but of the entire family. The old adage that people are very much like the soil on which they live, is exemplified over and over in Ashe and Alleghany counties.

The Farm and Home Supervisors who have worked with these families realize that good soil produces good food and that in turn good food produces strong healthy bodies. This being true, the first aim of any farm program should be building up good soil on which families are to live. On good soil, good food can be produced to feed the family livestock. With good nutrition a family's health problems become a minimum. Recently the wife of one of the Farm Ownership borrowers in Ashe county well expressed what is meant by human conservation in relation to soil conservation. In discussing the improvement in the health condition of her seven children, she said, "Since we bought this farm, we have better land on which to produce plenty of milk, butter and eggs and vegetables. Last year, with the aid of my pressure cooker, I canned over one thousand quarts of food. We killed six hogs and a beef part of which I canned. My children did not miss a day from school because of sickness. They all passed their grades and my greatest desire is for them to have at least a high school education."

The Nation's arm flock averaged 358,882,000 layers in April—6 percent less than in April last year, but 8 percent above the 10-year average.



Re-Forestation Is A Good Investment

The above picture shows re-forestation on the farm of J. F. Busic, Piney Creek, where young white pines have been planted under the supervision of the soil conservation service.

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