

Mitford Bertram

Golden Face: A Tale of the Wild West



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Содержание

Preface	5
Chapter One	6
Chapter Two	10
Chapter Three	15
Chapter Four	17
Chapter Five	19
Chapter Six	23
Chapter Seven	27
Chapter Eight	32
Chapter Nine	35
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

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Preface

An impression prevails in this country that for many years past the Red men of the American Continent have represented a subdued and generally deteriorated race. No idea can be more erroneous. Debased, to a certain extent, they may have become, thanks to drink and other “blessings” of civilisation; but that the warrior-spirit, imbuing at any rate the more powerful tribes, is crushed, or that a semi-civilising process has availed to render them other than formidable and dangerous foes, let the stirring annals of Western frontier colonisation for the last half-century in general, and the Sioux rising of barely a year ago in particular, speak for themselves.

This work is a story – not a history. Where matters historical have been handled at all the Author has striven to touch them as lightly as possible, emphatically recognising that when differences arise between a civilised Power and barbarous races dwelling within or beyond its borders, there is invariably much to be said on both sides.

Chapter One

The Winter Cabin

“Snakes! if that ain’t the war-whoop, why then old Smokestack Bill never had to keep a bright lookout after his hair.”

Both inmates of the log cabin exchanged a meaning glance. Other movement made they none, save that each man extended an arm and reached down his Winchester rifle, which lay all ready to his hand on the heap of skins against which they were leaning. Within, the firelight glowed luridly on the burnished barrels of the weapons, hardly penetrating the gloomy corners of the hut. Without, the wild shrieking of the wind and the swish and sough of pine branches furiously tossing to the eddying gusts.

“Surely not,” was the reply, after a moment of attentive listening. “None of the reds would be abroad on such a night as this, let alone a war-party. Why they are no fonder of the cold than we, and to-night we are in for something tall in the way of blizzards.”

“Well, it’s a sight far down that I heard it,” went on the scout, shaking his head. “Whatever the night is up here, it may be as mild as milk-punch down on the plain. There’s scalping going forward somewhere – mind me.”

“If so, it’s far enough away. I must own to having heard nothing at all.”

For all answer the scout rose to his feet, placed a rough screen of antelope hide in front of the fire, and, cautiously opening the door, peered forth into the night. A whirl of keen, biting wind, fraught with particles of frozen snow which stung the face like quail-shot, swept round the hut, filling it with smoke from the smouldering pine-logs; then both men stepped outside, closing the door behind them.

No, assuredly no man, red or white, would willingly be abroad that night. The icy blast, to which exposure – benighted on the open plain – meant, to the inexperienced, certain death, was increasing in violence, and even in the sheltered spot where the two men stood it was hardly bearable for many minutes at a time. The night, though tempestuous, was not blackly dark, and now and again as the snow-scud scattered wildly before the wind, the mountain side opposite would stand unveiled; each tall crag towering up, a threatening fantastic shape, its rocky front dark against the driven whiteness of its base. And mingling with the roaring of the great pines and the occasional thunder of masses of snow dislodged from their boughs would be borne to the listeners’ ears, in eerie chorus, the weird dismal howling of wolves. It was a scene of indescribable wildness and desolation, that upon which these two looked forth from their winter cabin in the lonely heart of the Black Hills.

But, beyond the gruesome cry of ravening beasts and the shriek of the gale, there came no sound, nothing to tell of the presence or movements of man more savage, more merciless than they.

“Snakes! but I can’t be out of it!” muttered the scout, as once more within their warm and cosy shanty they secured the door behind them. “Smokestack Bill ain’t the boy to be out of it over a matter of an Indian yelp. And he can tell a Sioux yelp from a Cheyenne yelp, and a Kiowa yelp from a Rapaho yelp, with a store-full of Government corn-sacks over his head, and the whole lot from a blasted wolfs yelp, he can. And at any distance, too.”

“I think you *are* out of it, Bill, all the same;” answered his companion. “If only that, on the face of things, no consideration of scalps or plunder, or even she-captives, would tempt the reds to face this little blow to-night.”

“Well, well! I don’t say you’re wrong, Vipan. You’ve served your Plainscraft to some purpose, you have. But if what I heard wasn’t the war-whoop somewhere – I don’t care how far – why then I shall begin to believe in what the Sioux say about these here mountains.”

“What do they say?”

“Why, they say these mountains are chock full of ghosts – spirits of their chiefs and warriors who have been scalped after death, and are kept snoopin’ around here because they can’t get into the

Happy Hunting-Grounds. However, we're all right here, and 'live or dead, the Sioux buck 'd have to reckon with a couple of Winchester rifles, who tried to make us otherwise."

He who had been addressed as Vipan laughed good-humouredly, as he tossed an armful of fat pine knots among the glowing logs, whence arose a blaze that lit up the hut as though for some festivity. And its glare affords us an admirable opportunity for a closer inspection of these two. The scout was a specimen of the best type of Western man. His rugged, weather-tanned face was far from unhandsome – frankness, self-reliance, staunchness to his friends, intrepidity toward foes, might all be read there. His thick russet beard was becoming shot with grey, but though considerably on the wrong side of fifty, an observer would have credited him with ten years to the good, for his broad, muscular frame was as upright and elastic as if he were twenty-five. His companion, who might have been fifteen years his junior, was about as fine a type of Anglo-Saxon manhood as could be met with in many a day's journey. Of tall, almost herculean, stature, he was without a suspicion of clumsiness; quick, active, straight as a dart. His features, regular as those of a Greek-sculpture, were not, however, of a confidence-inspiring nature, for their expression was cold and reticent, and the lower half of his face was hidden in a magnificent golden beard, sweeping to his belt. The dress of both men was the regulation tunic and leggings of dressed deerskin, of Indian manufacture, and profusely ornamented with beadwork and fringes; that of Vipan being adorned with scalp-locks in addition.

These two were bound together by the closest friendship, but there was this difference between them. Whereas everyone knew Smokestack Bill, whether as friend or foe, from Monterey to the British line, who he was and all about him, not a soul knew exactly who Rupert Vipan was, nor did Rupert Vipan himself, by word or hint, evince the smallest disposition to enlighten them. That he was an Englishman was clear, his nationality he could not conceal. Not that he ever tried to, but on the other hand, he made no sort of attempt at airing it.

This winter cabin was a substantial log affair, run up by the two men with some degree of trouble and with an eye to comfort. Built in a hollow on the mountain face, it hung perched as an eyrie over a ravine some thousands of feet in depth, in such wise that its occupants could command every approach, and descry the advent of strangers, friendly or equivocal, long before the latter could reach them. Behind rose the jagged, almost precipitous mountain in a serrated ridge, and inaccessible from the other side; so that upon the whole the position was about as safe as any position could be in that insecure region, where every man took his rifle to bed with him, and slept with one eye open even then. The cabin was reared almost against the great trunk of a stately pine, whose spreading boughs contributed in no slight degree to its shelter. Not many yards distant stood another log-hut, similar in design and dimensions; this had been the habitation of a French Canadian and his two Sioux squaws, but now stood deserted by its former owners.

Vipan flung himself on a soft thick bearskin, took a glowing stick from the fire, and pressed it against the bowl of a long Indian pipe.

"By Jove, Bill," he said, blowing out a great cloud. "If this isn't the true philosophy of life it's first cousin to it. A tight, snug shanty, the wind roaring like a legion of devils outside, a blazing fire, abundance of rations and tobacco, any amount of good furs, and – no bother in the world. Nothing to worry our soul-cases about until it becomes time to go in and trade our pelts, which, thank Heaven, won't be for two or three months."

"That's so," was the answer. "But – don't you feel it kinder dull like? A chap like you, who's knocked about the world. Seems to me a few months of a log cabin located away in the mountains, Can't make it out at all." And the scout broke off with a puzzled shake of the head.

"Look here, you unbelieving Jew," said the other, with a laugh. "Even now you can't get rid of the notion that I've left my country for my country's good. Take my word for it, you're wrong. There isn't a corner of the habitable globe I couldn't tumble up in every bit as safely as here."

"I know that, old pard. Not that I'd care the tail of a yaller dog if it was t'other way about. We've hunted, and trapped, and 'stood off' the reds, quite years enough to know each other. And now

I take it, when we've lit upon a barrellful of this gold stuff, you'll be cantering off to Europe again by the first steamboat."

"No, I think not. Except – " and a curious look came into Vipan's face. "Well, I don't know. I've an old score to pay off. I want to be even with a certain person or two."

"You do? Well now don't you undertake anything foolish. You know better than I do that in your country you've got to wait until your throat's already cut before drawing upon a man, and even then like enough you'll be hung if you recover. Say, now, couldn't you get the party or parties out here, and have a fair and square stand up? You'd make undertaker's goods of 'em right enough, never fear."

"No, no, my friend. That sort of reptile doesn't face you in any such simple fashion. It strikes you through the lawyers – those beneficent products of our Christian civilisation," replied the other, with a bitter laugh. "However, time enough to talk about that when we get to our prospecting again."

"If we ever do get to it again. Custer's expedition in the fall of last year didn't go through here for fun, nor yet to look after the Sioux, though that was given as the colour of it. Why, they were prospectin' all the time, and not for nothin' neither. No, 'Uncle Sam' wants to have all the plums himself, and, likely enough, the hills'll be full of cavalrymen soon as the snow melts. Then I reckon we shall have to git."

"Well, the reds'll be hoist with their own petard. It's the old fable again. They call in 'Uncle Sam' to clear out the miners, and 'Uncle Sam' hustles them out as well. But we may not have to clear, after all, for it's my belief that the moment the grass begins to sprout the whole Sioux nation will go upon the war-path."

"Then we'd have to git all the slicker."

"Not necessarily," replied Vipan, coolly. "I've a notion we could stop here more snugly than ever."

"Not unless we helped 'em," said the scout, decidedly. "And that's not to be done."

"I don't know that. Speaking for myself, I get on very well with the reds. They've got their faults, but then so have other people. Wait, I know what you're going to say – they're cruel and treacherous devils, and so forth. Well, cruelty is in their nature, and, by the way, is not unknown in civilisation. As for treachery, it strikes me, old chum, that we've got to keep about as brisk a look-out for a shot in the back in any of our Western townships as we have for our scalps in an Indian village."

The scout nodded assent; puffing away vigorously at his pipe as he stared into the glowing embers.

"For instance," went on the other, "when that chap 'grazed' me in the street at Denver while I wasn't looking, and would have put his next ball clean through me if you hadn't dropped him in his tracks so neatly – that was a nice example for a white man and a Christian to set, say, to our friends Mountain Cat, or Three Bears, or Hole-in-a-Tree, down yonder, wasn't it? But to come to the point – which is this: Supposing some fellow had rushed us while we were prospecting that place down on the Big Cheyenne in the summer and invited us to clear, I guess we should briskly have let him see a brace of muzzles. Eh?"

"Guess we should."

"Well, then, it amounts to the same thing here. We are bound to strike a good vein or two in the summer – in fact, we have as good as struck it. All right. After all the risk and trouble we've stood to find it, Uncle Sam lopes in and serves us with a notice to quit. It isn't in reason that we should stand that."

"Well, you see, Vipan, we've no sort of title here. This is an Indian reservation, and Uncle Sam's bound by treaty to keep white men out. There are others here besides us, and I reckon in the summer the Hills'll be a bit crowded up with them. So we shall just have to chance it with the rest, and if we're moved, light out somewhere else."

"Well, I don't know that *I* shall. It's no part of good sense to chuck away the wealth lying at our very feet." And the speaker's splendid face wore a strangely reckless and excited look. "The scheme

is for the Government to chouse the Indians out of this section of country by hook or by crook – then mining concessions will be granted to the wire-pullers and their friends. And we shall see a series of miscellaneous frauds blossoming into millionaires on the strength of *our* discoveries.”

“And are you so keen on this gold, Vipán? Ah I reckon you’re hankering after Europe again, but I judge you’ll be no happier when you get there.”

The scout’s tone was quiet, regretful, almost upbraiding. The other’s philosophy was to end in this, then?

“It isn’t exactly that,” was the answer, moodily, and after a pause. “But I don’t see the force of being ‘done.’ I never did see it; perhaps that’s why I’m out here now. However, the Sioux won’t stand any more ‘treaties.’ They’ll fight for certain. Red Cloud isn’t the man to forget the ignominious thrashing he gave Uncle Sam in ’66 and ’67, and, by God, if it comes to ousting us I’ll be shot if I won’t cut in on his side.”

“I reckon that blunder won’t be repeated. If the cavalrymen had been properly armed; armed as they are now, with Spencer’s and Henry’s instead of with the sickest old muzzle-loading fire-sticks and a round and a half of ammunition per man, Red Cloud would have been soundly whipped at Fort Phil Kearney ’stead of t’other way about.”

“Possibly. As things are, however, he carried his point. And there’s Sitting Bull, for instance; he’s been holding the Powder River country these years. Why don’t they interfere with him? No, you may depend upon it, a war with the whole Sioux nation backed by the Indian Department, won’t suit the Govermental book. ‘Uncle Sam’ will cave in – all the other prospectors will be cleared out of the Hills, except – except ourselves.”

“Why except ourselves?” said the scout, quietly, though he was not a little astonished and dismayed at his friend and comrade’s hardly-suppressed excitement.

“We stand well with the chiefs. Look here, old man: I’d wager my scalp against a pipe of Richmond plug – if I wasn’t as bald as a billiard ball, that is – that I make myself so necessary to them that they’ll be only too glad to let us ‘mine’ as long as we choose to stay here. Just think – the stuff is all there and only waiting to be picked up – just think if we were to go in on the quiet, loaded up with solid nuggets and dust instead of a few wretched pelts. Why, man, we are made for life. The reds could put us in the way of becoming millionaires, merely in exchange for our advice – not necessarily our rifles, mind.” And the speaker’s eyes flashed excitedly over the idea.

Chapter Two

A Nocturnal Visitor

No idea is more repellent to the mind of a genuine Western man than that of siding with Indians against his own colour. Contested almost step by step, the opening up of the vast continent supplies one long record of hideous atrocities committed by the savage, regardless of age, sex, or good faith; and stern, and not invariably discriminate, reprisals on the part of the dwellers on the frontier. It follows, therefore, that the race-hatred existing between the white man and his treacherous and crafty red neighbour will hardly bear exaggeration. Thus it is not surprising that Smokestack Bill should receive his reckless companion's daredevil scheme with concern and dismay. Indeed, had any other man mooted such an idea, the honest scout's concern would have found vent in words of indignant horror.

There was silence in the hut for a few minutes. Both men, lounging back on their comfortable furs, were busy with their respective reflections. Now and again a fiercer gust than usual would shake the whole structure, and as the doleful howling of the wolves sounded very near the door, the horses in the other compartment – which was used as a stable – would snort uneasily and paw the ground.

"You don't know Indians even yet, Vipan," said Smokestack Bill at length, speaking gravely, "else you'd never undertake to help them, even by advice, in butchering and outraging helpless women, let alone the men, though they can better look after themselves. No, you don't know the red devils, take my word for it."

"I had a notion I did," was the hard reply. "As for that 'helpless woman' ticket, I won't vote on it, Bill, old man. There's no such thing as a 'helpless' woman; at least, I never met with such an article, and I used to be reckoned a tolerably good judge of that breed of cattle, too –"

His words were cut short. The dog uttered a savage growl, then sprang towards the door, barking. Each man coolly reached for his rifle, but that was all.

"I knew I wasn't out of it," muttered the scout, more to himself than to his hearer. "Smokestack Bill knew the war-whoop when he heard it. He ain't no 'tenderfoot,' he ain't."

Swish – Whirr! The fierce blast shrieked around the lonely cabin. Its inmates having partially quieted the dog, were listening intently. Nothing could they hear beyond the booming of the tempest, which, unheeded in their conversation, had burst upon them with redoubled force.

"Only a grizzly that he hears," said Vipan, in a low tone. "No red would be out to-night."

Scarcely had he spoken than the loud, long-drawn howl of a wolf sounded forth, so near as to seem at their very door. Then the hoof-strokes of an unshod horse, and a light tap against the strong framework.

"It's all straight. I thought I knew the yelp," said the scout. Then he unhesitatingly slid back the strong iron bolts which secured the door, and admitted a single Indian.

The new comer was a tall, martial-looking young warrior, who, as he slid down the snow-besprinkled and gaudy-coloured blanket which had enshrouded his head, stood before them in the ordinary Indian dress. The collar of his tunic was of bears' claws, and among the scalp-locks which fringed his leggings were several of silky fair hair. But for three thin lines of crimson crossing his face, and a vertical one from forehead to throat, he wore no paint, and from his scalp-lock dangled three long eagle-feathers stained black, their ends being gathered into tufts dyed a bright vermilion. For arms he carried a short bow, highly ornamented, and a quiver of wolfskin, the latter adorned with the grinning jaws of its original owner, and in his belt a revolver and bowie knife. This warlike personage advanced to Smokestack Bill, and shook him by the hand effusively. Then, turning to Vipan, he broke into a broad grin and ejaculated —

"Hello, George!"

He thus unceremoniously addressed made no reply, but a cold, contemptuous look came into his eyes. Then he quietly said: —

“Do the Ogallalla dance the Sun-Dance¹ in winter?”

“Ha!” said the Indian, emphatically, grasping at once the other’s meaning.

“When I was lost in the Ogallalla villages, all the *warriors* knew me,” went on Vipan, scathingly. “There may have been *boys* who have become warriors since.”

“Ha!”

The Indian was not a little astonished. This white man spoke the Dahcotah language fluently. He was also not a little angry, and his eyes flashed.

“You are not of the race of those around us,” he said, “not of the race of The Beaver,” turning to the scout. “Your great chief is George.”

“Don’t get mad, Vipan,” said Smokestack Bill, hastening to explain. “He only means that you’re an Englishman. It’ll take generations to get out of these fellers’ heads that Englishmen are still ruled by King George.”

Vipan laughed drily. He had given this cheeky young buck an appropriate setting down. Whether or no it was taken in good part was a matter of indifference to him.

Meanwhile, the scout, having put on a fresh brew of steaming coffee, threw down a fur in front of the fire, and the warrior, taking the pipe which had been prepared for him, sat in silence, puffing out the fragrant smoke in great volumes.

This done, he drew his knife, and proceeded to fall to on some deer ribs provided by his entertainers. The latter, meanwhile, smoked tranquilly on, putting no question, and evincing no curiosity as to the object of his visit. At length, his appetite appeased, the warrior wiped his knife on the sole of his mocassin, returned it to its sheath, and throwing himself back luxuriously, ejaculated —

“Good!”

To the two white men, the visit of one or more of their red brethren was a frequent occurrence; an incident of no moment whatever. They were accustomed to visits from Indians, but somehow both felt that the arrival of this young warrior had a purpose underlying it.

The pipe having been ceremonially lighted and passed round the circle, the guest was the first to break the silence.

“It is long since War Wolf has looked upon the face of The Beaver” (Smokestack Bill’s Indian name), “or listened to the wise words which fall from his lips. As soon as War Wolf heard that The Beaver had built his winter lodge here, he leaped on his pony and wasted not a moment to come and smoke with his white brothers.”

Vipan, listening, could have spluttered with sardonic laughter. Though he had never seen him before, he knew the speaker by name – knew him to be, moreover, one of the most unscrupulous and reckless young desperadoes of the tribe, whose hatred of the whites was only equalled by their detestation of him. But he moved not a muscle.

“It is long, indeed,” answered the scout. “War Wolf must have journeyed far not to know, or not to have heard of Golden Face,” and he turned slightly to his friend as if effecting an introduction.

By this *sobriquet* the latter was known among the different clans of the Dahcotah or Sioux, obviously bestowed upon him by reason of his magnificent golden beard.

“The name of Golden Face is not strange, for it is not seldom on the lips of the chiefs of our nation,” continued the savage with a graceful inclination towards Vipan. “The hearts of the Mehneaska (Americans) are not good towards us, but our hearts are always good towards Golden Face and his friend The Beaver. To visit them, War Wolf has journeyed far.”

¹ Part of the initiatory festival during which, by virtue of undergoing various forms of ghastly self-torture, the growing-up boys are admitted among the ranks of the warriors.

“Do the Ogallalla (a sub-division or clan of the Sioux nation) send out war-parties in winter time?” asked the scout, innocently. But the question, harmless and apparently devoid of point as it was, conveyed to his hearer its full meaning. The eyes of the savage flashed, and his whole countenance seemed to light up with pride.

“Why should I tell lies?” he said. “Yes, I have been upon the war-path, but not here. Yonder,” with a superb sweep of his hand in a westerly direction. “Yonder, far away, I have struck the enemies of my race, who come stealing up with false words and many rifles, to possess the land – our land – the land of the Dahcotah. Why should I tell lies? Am I not a warrior? But my tongue is straight; and my heart is good towards Golden Face and his friend The Beaver.”

Vipan, an attentive observer of every word, every detail, noted two things: one, the boldness of this young warrior in thus avowing, contrary to the caution of his race, that he had actually just returned from one of those merciless forays which the frontier people at that period had every reason to fear and dread; the other, that having twice, so to say, bracketted their names, the Indian had in each instance mentioned his own first. In his then frame of mind the circumstance struck him as significant.

After a good deal more of this kind of talk, safeguarded by the adroit fencing and beating around the bush with which the savage of whatever race approaches a communication of consequence, it transpired that War Wolf was the bearer of a message from the chiefs of his nation. There had been war between them and the whites; now, however, they wished for peace. Red Cloud and some others were desirous of proceeding to Washington in order to effect some friendly arrangement with the Great Father. There were many white men in their country, but their ways were not straight. The chiefs distrusted them. But Golden Face and The Beaver were their brothers. Had they not lived in amity in their midst all the winter? Their hearts were good towards them, and they would fain smoke the pipe once more with their white brothers before leaving home. To that end, therefore, they invited Golden Face and The Beaver to visit them at their village without delay, in fact, to return in company with War Wolf, the bearer of the message.

To this Bill replied, after some moments of solemn silence only broken by the puff-puff of the pipes, that he and his friend desired nothing better. It would give them infinite pleasure to pay a visit to their red brethren, and to the great chiefs of the Dahcotah nation especially. But it was mid-winter. The weather was uncertain. Before undertaking a journey which would entail so long an absence from home, he and his friend must sleep upon the proposal and consult together. In the morning War Wolf should have his answer. Either they would return with him in person, or provide him with a suitable message to carry back to the chiefs.

In social matters, still less in diplomatic, Indians are never in a hurry. Had the two white men agreed there and then upon what their course should be, they would have suffered in War Wolfs estimation. The answer was precisely what he had expected.

“It is well,” he said. “The wisdom of The Beaver will not be overclouded in the morning, nor will the desire of Golden Face to meet his friends be in any way lessened.”

While this talk was progressing, Vipan’s eye had lighted upon an object which set him thinking. It was a small object – a very small object, so minute indeed that nine persons out of ten would never have noticed it at all. But it was an object of ominous moment, for it was nothing less than a spot of fresh blood; and it had fallen on the warrior’s leggings, just below the fringe of his tunic. Putting two and two together, it could mean nothing more nor less than a concealed scalp.

“Bill was right,” he thought. “Bill was right, and I was an ass. He did hear the war-whoop right enough. I wonder what unlucky devil lost in the storm this buck could have overhauled and struck down?”

The discovery rendered him wary, not that a childlike ingenuousness was ever among Vipan’s faults. But he resolved to keep his weather eye open, and if he must sleep, to do so with that reliable orbit ever brought to bear upon their pleasant-speaking guest.

Soon profound silence reigned within the log cabin, broken only by the subdued, regular breathing of the sleepers, or the occasional stir of the glowing embers. The tempest had lulled, but, as hour followed hour, the voices of the weird waste were borne upon the night in varied and startling cadence; the howling of wolves, the cat-like scream of the panther among the overhanging crags, the responsive hooting of owls beneath the thick blackness of the great pine forests, and once, the fierce snorting growl of a grizzly, so near that the formidable monster seemed even to be snuffing under the very door.

The two owners of the cabin are fast asleep; Vipan with his blanket rolled round his head. The scout, however, is lying on his back, and his blanket has partially slipped off, as though he had found its weight too burdensome. The three are lying with their feet to the fire in fan-shaped formation from it: the scout in the centre, their guest on the outside. The latter, too, is fast asleep.

Is? Surely not. Unless a man can be said to sleep with both eyes open.

A half-charred log fell into the embers, raising a small spluttering flame. This flame glowed on the fierce orbs of the red warrior. For a fraction of a second it glowed on something else, before he hid his hand within his blanket. But the still, steady breathing of the savage was that of a sleeping man.

“Tu-whoo-whoo-whoo!”

Nothing is more dismal than the hoot of an owl in the dead silent night. That owl is very near; almost upon the tree overhead. His voice must have had a disturbing effect upon the dreams of the red man, for in some unaccountable fashion the distance between the latter and the sleeping scout has diminished by about half. Yet the white man has not moved.

“Tu-whoo-whoo-whoo!”

That time it is nearer still. Noiseless, and with a serpentine glide, the head of the savage warrior is reared from the ground, in the semi-gloom resembling the hideous head of some striped and crested snake, and in the dilated eyeball there is a fierce scintillation.

The attitude is one of intense, concentrated listening.

Honest Bill slumbers peacefully on. That hideous head raised over him, scarce half a dozen yards distant, is suggestive of nightmare personified. Yet its owner is his guest, who has eaten at his fireside, and now rests beneath his roof. Why should his slumbers be disturbed?

“Tu-whoo-whoo-whoo!”

Again that doleful cry. But – look now! What deed of dark treachery is this stealthy savage about to perpetrate? He is a yard nearer his sleeping host, and his right hand grips a long keen knife. Ah! will nothing warn the sleeper?

The murderous barbarian rises to his knees, and his blanket noiselessly slips off. And at that moment through the intervening space of gloom comes a low distinct whisper:

“Are the dreams of War Wolf bad, that he moves so far in his sleep?”

Vipan has not moved. His blanket is still rolled round his head, but the fierce Indian, darting his keen glance in the direction of the voice, espies an object protruding from the speaker’s blanket that was not there when last he looked. It is about three inches of a revolver barrel, and it is covering him. No fresh scalp or scalps for him to-night.

Let it not be supposed for a moment that the treacherous villain was in any way abashed. It was not in him. He merely replied, pleasantly:

“No – I cannot sleep. I am hungry again, for I have ridden far, and it is now near morning. I would have found the ‘chuck’ (food) without disturbing Golden Face and The Beaver, who are very weary, and sleep well.”

And, knife in hand, he deliberately stepped over to the corner where hung the carcase from which they had feasted the evening before, and cutting off a portion, placed it upon the coals to broil.

Vipan could not but admire the cool readiness of both reply and action. He knew that but for his own wariness, either his friend or himself – possibly both – would by now be entering the Happy Hunting-Grounds, yet from his bloodthirsty and treacherous guest he apprehended no further

aggression – that night at any rate. The surprise had failed abjectly; the enemy was on the alert; it was not in Indian nature to make a second attempt under all the circumstances. Moreover, he recognised in the incident a mere passing impulse of ferocity, moving the savage at the sight of these two victims ready, – as he imagined – for the knife, combined with the overmastering temptation to the young warrior to bear back to his village the scalps of two white men – men of considerable renown, too – taken by himself, alone and singlehanded. So he calmly laid down again as if nothing had happened.

The scout, who had awakened at the first sound of voices, and who took in at a glance the whole situation, fully equalled his friend's coolness.

"Snakes!" he remarked, "I had a pesky bad dream. Dreamt I was just goin' to draw on some feller, when I awoke."

"The Beaver has slain many enemies," rejoined War Wolf, nodding his head approvingly. "When a man has taken scalps, he is prompt to take more, even in his dreams."

"And to lose his own, you pison young skunk!" thought Smokestack Bill, in reply to this. "I'll be even with you one day, see if I don't."

But the "pison young skunk," unenlightened as to this event of the future, merely nodded pleasantly as he sat by the fire, knife in hand, assimilating his juicy venison steak with the utmost complacency.

Chapter Three

A Tragedy of the Wild West

It may seem strange that on the face of so forcible a demonstration of the treacherous disposition of their guest, yet a couple of hours after sunrise should see our friends starting in his company for the Sioux villages. But the incident of the night, which might have had so tragic a termination, impressed these men not one whit. It was “all in the day’s journey,” they said, while admitting that they had been a trifle too confiding. That, however, was a fault easily remedied. But to men who habitually carry their lives in their hands, one peril more or less matters nothing.

As they threaded the mountain defiles nothing could be more good humoured and genial than the young warrior’s manner. He chatted and laughed, sang snatches of songs in a high nasal key, bantered Vipan on the poor condition of his nag, and challenged him to a race as soon as they were domiciled in the village. He wanted to know why Golden Face had not followed the example of other white men in the matter of squaws. Red Cloud’s village could furnish some famous beauties. Golden Face was rich – he could take his choice. There would be great festivities in his honour, and the prettiest girls would be only too glad to be chosen by a man of his prowess. Thus the genial War Wolf – who amid shouts of laughter extended, or, to be more accurate, “broadened” this vein of fun. Now all this was very jolly, very entertaining; but on one point our two friends were of the same mind. Under no circumstances whatever should the sportive young barbarian be suffered to ride behind. When he stopped, they stopped; and one or two crafty attempts which he made to fall back, they, with equal deftness, resolutely defeated.

It was a lovely morning, crisp and clear. A thin layer of snow lay around, diminishing as the altitude decreased. The frosted pines sparkling in the sun, the great crags towering up to the liquid blue; here the ragged edges of a cliff shooting into the heavens, there a long narrow cañon, whose appalling depth might well make the wayfarer’s head swim as his horse slipped and stumbled along the rugged track which skirted its dizzy brink – all this afforded a scene of varied grandeur, which, with the strong spice of danger thrown in, was calculated to set the blood of the adventurously disposed in a tingle.

They struck into a tortuous defile, whose lofty sandstone walls almost shut out the light of day. High above, soaring in circles, a couple of eagles followed the trio, uttering a harsh yell, but otherwise the voices of Nature were still. Vipan found an opportunity of chaffing the Indian, whom he challenged to bring down one or both of the birds with his bow – a proposal which was met by the suggestion that he could do so with a rifle – would Golden Face let him try with his? Then a wide valley, into which boulders and rocks seemed to have been hurled in lavish confusion. Oak and box elder, dark funereal pines and naked spruce, lay dotted in clumps about a level meadow, through which rushed a half-frozen stream. Suddenly a white shape darted through the leafless brake.

Flash – bang! A snap shot though.

“Get to heel, Shanks! Darn yer hide, you’ve become so tarnation fat and skeery you ain’t worth a little cuss, you ain’t,” cried the scout, dropping the smoking muzzle of his piece. The dog thus apostrophised was a mangy and utterly useless Indian cur, which the scout had picked up in the woods, and which Vipan was continually urging upon him to shoot. “Sho! you gavorting jack-rabbit! A white wolf ’ll make a mouthful of you. And he ain’t touched,” went on Shanks’s master, disgustedly, as the dog slunk to heel. Better not to fire at all than to miss in the presence of an Indian. Then something seemed to strike him.

A raven rose from the ground, uttering a plethoric croak, then another, and the pair flopped heavily up to a limb overhead. A plunge or two through the leafless thicket and they were in a small open space. The wolf – the ravens – each had been disturbed in a hideous repast. There, in the midst

of their ravaged camp, the remnants of its fire strewn around them, lay the corpses of two white men, half-charred, frightfully mangled, and – scalped.

Looking upon this doleful spectacle the scout was able to locate the war-whoop he had heard the night before. Vipan, for his own part, cherished a shrewd conviction that he could restore the missing scalps – though too late – merely by the simple process of stretching forth an arm. But the matter was no concern of his. On the other hand, to seize and hold on to the chance of monopolising the search after the precious metal here, pre-eminently was.

The unfortunate men were evidently miners. The implements of their calling lay around, together with their modest baggage; but their weapons had disappeared. Both had been shot to death with arrows, and that at very close quarters, probably while they were asleep. They were rough looking fellows, one red-haired and red-bearded, the other hatchet-faced, but both with skins tanned to parchment colour.

“Reckon we’ll give the poor boys a hoist under the sod,” said the scout, shortly. Then as for a moment his steady gaze met that of War Wolf, the latter said:

“Wagh! Bad Indians are about. The white men were too reckless. When they come to find wealth in the country of the Dahcotah they should sleep warily. The Beaver is going to bury his friends. Good. When the shadow is there” (about half an hour) “War Wolf will return.”

If there was the faintest satirical gleam in the warrior’s eyes as he uttered these words, there would be nothing gained by noticing it. Smokestack Bill, seizing one of the murdered men’s picks, began to dig, lustily and in silence, every now and again shaking his head ominously. Vipan, who thought this voluntary sextonship a bore, lent a hand to oblige his friend. These two unknown miners were no more his kin than the savage Sioux who had slain them. He had no kin. All the world was an enemy, to be turned to advantage when possible, and defeated at any rate when not. Had he been alone he would merely have looked, and passed on his way.

By half an hour a hole of adequate dimensions received the two mangled and mutilated corpses. Then, having trodden down the last spadeful of earth, the scout, with a knife, marked a couple of rude crosses upon the trunk of the nearest tree. His companion, consistently callous, said nothing.

As they turned to leave this lonely grave in the wilderness, they were rejoined by the young warrior. He had not been idle. A brace of ruff-grouse, shot by arrows, dangled from his saddle, and the three moved forward in silence, seeking a suitable midday camp.

Chapter Four

The “Squarson” of Lant-Hanger

The Rev. Dudley Vallance was “squarson” of Lant with Lant-Hanger, in the county of Brackenshire, England.

Know, O reader, unversed in the compound mysteries of Mr Lewis Carroll, that the above is a contraction of the words squire-parson.

On the face of this assertion it is perhaps superfluous to state that the Rev. Dudley was a manifest failure in both capacities – superfluous because if this is not invariably the rule under similar circumstances, the exceptions are so rare as to be well-nigh phenomenal.

As squire he was a failure, for he had a pettifogging mind. He was not averse to an occasional bit of sharp practice in his dealings, which would have been creditable to an attorney after the order of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. Moreover, he was lacking in geniality, and for field sports he cared not a rush.

As parson he was a failure; for so intent was he upon the things of this world that he had neither time nor inclination to inspire his parishioners with any particular hankering after the things of the next. Now this need not seem strange, or even severe, since the fiat has gone forth from the lips of the highest of authorities – “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.”

In aspect the Rev. Dudley was tall and lank. He had a very long nose and a very long beard. Furthermore, he had rather shifty eyes and a normally absent manner. When not absent-minded, the latter was suave and purring. His age was about fifty.

In the matter of progeny he was blessed with a fair quiverful – eight to wit – of whom seven were daughters. His spouse was nothing if not fully alive to a sense of her position. This she imagined to consist mainly in a passion for precedence, gossip, cliquerie, and deft mischief-making at secondhand. If she fell short in one thing it was in that aggressive and domineering fussiness habitually inseparable from the type, but this was only because she lacked the requisite energy. Howbeit, she never forgot that she was “Squarsina” of Lant with Lant-Hanger – if we may be allowed to coin a word. This was not wholly unnecessary, for others were wont to lose sight of the fact.

Lant Hall – commonly abbreviated to Lant – the abode of the Vallances, was rather an ugly house; squat, staringly modern, and hideously embattled in sham castellated style. But it was charmingly situated – dropped, as it were, upon the side of a hill, whose vivid green slope, falling to a large sheet of ornamental water, was alive with the branching antlers of many deer. Overshadowing the house lay a steep wooded acclivity – or hanger – at one end of which lay the village, whence the name of the latter. “A sweetly pretty, peaceful spot,” gushed the visitor, or the tourist driving through it; “a nook to end one’s days in!”

Scenically, the prospect was enchanting. On the one hand, line upon line of wooded hills fed the eye as far as that organ cared to roam, on the other, softly undulating pastures, with snug farmhouses and peeping cottages here and there. Skirting the village on one side, the limpid waters of the Lant sparkled and swirled beneath the old grey bridge – which bore the Vallance arms – and then plunged on, to lose themselves in a mile of dark fir wood, where the big trout lay and fattened. A lovely champaign, in sooth; small wonder that the aesthetic stranger should be smitten with a desire to end his days in so sweet a spot.

But this sweet spot had its disadvantages. It was frightfully out of the way, being five miles from the nearest railway station, and that on a branch line. The necessities of life were only to be obtained with difficulty, and farm and dairy produce was expensive, and in supply, precarious. There was one butcher, and no baker, and a post-office chiefly noteworthy for the blundering wherewith Her Majesty’s mails were received and dispensed. Moreover, the Brackenshire folk were not of a

particularly pleasant rustic type. They were very “independent,” which is to say they did what seemed right in their own eyes, irrespective of such little matters as honesty or square dealing. They were, as a rule, incapable of speaking the truth, except accidentally, and they had very long tongues. Suffice it briefly to say, they excelled in the low and sordid cunning which usually characterises the simple-hearted rustic of whatever county.

The Rev. Dudley Vallance had a shibboleth which he never wearied of pronouncing. This was it: – County Society.

Now, at Lant-Hanger this article, within anything like the accepted meaning of the term, did not exist.

It was a crying want, and like all such so capable, it must be supplied. Our “squarson” set to work to supply it by a simple device. He went into bricks and mortar.

His jerry-built “bijou residences,” and tinkered-up rustic cottages soon let, and let comfortably – for him. Not so for the tenants, however, for the honest Brackenshire craftsmen “did” their employer most thoroughly, and the luckless householders found themselves let in for all sorts of horrors they had never bargained for. Thus the Rev. Dudley “did” as he was “done.” But he got his “County Society.”

This, at the period with which we have to deal, in the year of grace 1875, consisted of a sprinkling of maiden ladies and clergymen’s relicts, who leased the delectable dwellings aforesaid; a retired jerry-builder, who knew better than to do anything of the kind; the village doctor; a few neighbouring vicars of infinitesimal intellect; a couple of squireens evolved from three generations of farmers, and, lastly, Mr Santorex of Elmcote; all of whom, with the notable exception of the last-named, constituted an array of satellites revolving round the centre planet, the Rev. Dudley himself.

The Lant property, though comparatively small, was a snug possession. Aesthetically a fair domain, it was all of it good land, and the five to six thousand acres composing it all let well. Wholly unencumbered by mortgages or annuity charges, it was estimated to bring in about 7,000 pounds a year, so that in reckoning the present incumbent a fortunate man, the neighbourhood was not far wrong. There were, however, half-forgotten hints, which the said neighbourhood would now and again let drop – hints not exactly to the credit of the present squire. For it was well known that the Rev. Dudley had inherited Lant from his uncle, not his father, and that this uncle’s son was still living.

Chapter Five

The Santorexes of Elmcote

“Now, Chickie, hurry up with the oats, and we’ll go and try for a brace of trout before the sun blazes out.”

“Mercy on us, do let the child finish her breakfast! It’s bad enough being obliged to have it twice laid, without being hurried to death, one would think.”

But the “child” stands in no need of the maternal – and querulous – championship.

“I’m ready, father,” she cries, pushing her chair back.

“Right. Get on a hat then,” is the reply, in a prompt and decisive, but not ungenial tone, and the head which had been thrust through the partially opened door disappears.

“That’s your father all over,” continued the maternal and querulous voice. “How does he know I don’t want you at home this morning? But no, that doesn’t matter a pin. I may be left to toil and slave, cooped up in the house, while everybody else is frisking about the fields all day long, fishing and what not – ”

“But, mother, you don’t really want me, do you?”

” – And then your father must needs come down so early, and, of course, wants his breakfast at once, and then it has to be brought on twice; and he must flurry and fidget everyone else into the bargain. Want you? No, child, I don’t want you. Go away and catch some fish. If I did want you, that wouldn’t count while your father did – oh, no.”

Yseulte Santorex made no reply. She did the best thing possible – however, she kissed and coaxed the discontented matron, and took a prompt opportunity of escaping.

One might search far and wide before meeting with a more beautiful girl. Rather above the medium height, and of finely formed frame, it needed not the smallness of her perfectly shaped hands and the artistic regularity of her features to stamp her as thoroughbred. It was sufficient to note the upright poise of her head, and the straight glance of her grand blue eyes, but surer hall-mark still, she was blessed with a beautifully modulated voice. When we add that she possessed a generous allowance of dark brown hair, rippling into gold, we claim to have justified our opening statement concerning her. Her age at this time was twenty; as for her disposition, well, reader, you must find that out for yourself in the due development of this narrative.

Losing no more time than was necessary to fling on a wide straw hat, the girl joined her father in the hall, where he was waiting a little impatiently – rod, basket, landing-net, all ready.

“You shall land the first fish, Chickie,” he said, as they started. “It isn’t worth while taking a rod apiece, we shall have too little time,” with a glance upward at the clouded sky which seemed disposed to clear every moment.

“I oughtn’t to tax your self-denial so severely, dear,” answered the girl, “when I know you’re dying to get at the river yourself.”

“Self-denial, eh? Thing the preachers strongly recommend, and – always practise. Beginning here,” with a slight indicating nod.

Yseulte laughed. She knew her father’s opinion of his spiritual pastor – in point of fact, shared it.

“I knew a man once who used to say that self-abnegation was a thing not far removed from the philosopher’s stone. Its indulgence inspired him with absolute indifference to life and the ills thereof, and at the same time with a magnificent contempt for the poor creatures for whose benefit he practised it.”

“Very good philosophy, father. But the compensation for foregoing the delights of having one’s own way is not great.”

“My dear girl, that depends. The key to the above exposition lies in the fact that that individual never had a chance of getting his own way. So he made a virtue of necessity – an art which, though much talked about, is seldom cultivated.”

“Your friend was a humbug, father,” was the laughing reply. “A doleful humbug, and no philosopher at all.”

“Eh? The effrontery of the rising generation – commonly called in the vulgar tongue – nerve! A humbug! So that’s your opinion, is it, young woman?”

“Yes, it is,” she answered decisively, her blue eyes dancing.

“Phew-w! Nothing like having your own opinion, and sticking to it,” was all he said, with a dry chuckle. Then he subsided into silence, whistling meditatively, as if pondering over the whimsicality he had just propounded, or contemplating a fresh one. These same whimsicalities, by the way, were continually cropping up in Mr Santorex’ conversation, to the no small confusion of his acquaintance, who never could quite make out whether he was in jest or earnest, to the delight of his satirical soul. To the infinitesimal intellects of his neighbours – the surrounding vicars, for instance – he was a conversational nightmare. They voted him dangerous, even as their kind so votes everything which happens to be incomprehensible to its own subtle ken. What sort of training could it be for a young girl just growing to womanhood to have such a man for a father – to take in his pernicious views and ideas as part of her education, as it were? And herein the surrounding vicaresses were at one with their lords. Stop! Their what? We mean their – chattels.

But Yseulte herself laughed their horror to scorn. Her keen perceptions detected it in a moment, and she would occasionally visit its expression with a strong spice of hereditary satire. She could not remember the time when her father had treated her otherwise than as a rational and accountable being, and the time when he should cease to do so would never come – of that she was persuaded. Nor need it be inferred that she was “strong-minded,” “advanced,” or aspiring in any way to the “blue.” Far from it. She had plenty of character, but withal she was a very sweet, lovable, even-tempered, and thoroughly sensible girl.

There were two other children besides herself – had been, rather, for one had lain in Lant churchyard this last ten years. The other, and eldest, was cattle-ranching in the Far West, and doing fairly well.

Mr Santorex was unquestionably a fine-looking man. A broad, lofty brow, straight features, and firm, clear eyes, imparted to his face a very decided expression, which his method of speech confirmed. He was of Spanish origin, a fact of which he was secretly proud; for although Anglicised, even to his name, for several generations, yet in direct lineage he could trace back to one of the very oldest and noblest families of Spain.

Though now in easy circumstances, not to say wealthy, he had not always been so. During the score of years he had lived at Lant-Hanger, about half of that period had been spent in dire poverty – a period fraught with experiences which had left a more than bitter taste in his mouth as regarded his neighbours and surroundings generally, and the Rev. Dudley Vallance in particular. Then the tide had turned – had turned just in the nick of time. A small property which he held in the north of Spain, and which had hitherto furnished him with the scantiest means of subsistence, suddenly became enormously valuable as a field of mineral wealth.

With his changed circumstances Mr Santorex did not shake off the dust of Lant-Hanger from his shoes. He had become in a way accustomed to the place, and was fond of the country, if not of the people. So he promptly leased Elmcote, a snug country box picturesquely perched on the hillside overlooking the valley of the Lant, and having moved in, sat down grimly to enjoy the impending joke.

He had not long to wait. Lant-Hanger opened wide its arms, and fairly trod on its own heels in its eagerness to make much of the new “millionaire,” whom, in his indigent days, it had so consistently cold-shouldered as a disagreeable and highly undesirable sort of neighbour. Next to Lant Hall itself, Elmcote was the most important house in the parish, and its tenant had always been the

most important personage. So “County Society,” following the example of its head and cornerstone, the Rev. Dudley Vallance, metaphorically chucked up its hat and hoorayed over its acquisition.

Down by the river-side this warm spring morning, Yseulte, never so happy as when engaged in this, her favourite sport, was wielding her fly-rod with skill and efficiency, as many a gleaming and speckled trophy lying in her creel served to show.

The movement became her well. Every curve of her symmetrical form was brought out by the graceful exercise. Her father, standing well back from the bank, watched her with critical approval. True to his character as a man of ideas, he almost forgot the object of the present undertaking in his admiration for his beautiful daughter, and his thoughts, thus started, went off at express speed. What a lovely girl she was growing – had grown, indeed. What was to be her destiny in life? She must make a good match of course, not throw herself away upon any clodhopper in this wretched hole. That young lout, Geoffrey Vallance, was always mooning in calf-like fashion about her. Not good enough. Oh, no; nothing like. Seven thousand a year unencumbered was hardly to be sneezed at; still, she must not throw herself away on any such unlicked cub. He fancied he could do better for her in putting her through a London season – much better. And then came an uneasy and desolating stirring of even his philosophical pulses at the thought of parting with her. He was an undemonstrative man – undemonstrative even to coldness. He made at no time any great show of affection. He had long since learned that affection, like cash, was an article far too easily thrown away. But there was one living thing for which, deep down in his heart of hearts, he cherished a vivid and warm love, and that was this beautiful and companionable daughter of his.

“Never mind about me, dear. I think I won’t throw a fly this morning,” he said, as the girl began insisting that he should take a turn, there being only one rod between them. “Besides, it’s about time to knock off altogether. The sun is coming out far too brightly for many more rises.”

“Father,” said the girl, as she took her fishing-rod to pieces, “I can’t let you shirk that question any longer. Am I to pay that visit to George’s ranche this summer or not?”

“Why, you adventurous Chickie, you will be scalped by Indians, tossed by mad buffaloes, bolted with by wild horses. Heaven knows what. Hallo! Enter Geoffry Plantagenet. He seems in a hurry.”

“No! Where? Oh, what a nuisance!”

Following her father’s glance, Yseulte descried a male figure crossing the stile which led into the field where they were sitting, and recognised young Vallance, who between themselves was known by the above nickname. He seemed, indeed, in a desperate hurry, judging from the alacrity wherewith he skipped over the said stile and hastened to put a goodly space of ground between it and himself before looking back. A low, rumbling noise, something between a growl and a moan, reached their ears, and thrust against the barrier was discernible from where they sat the author of it – a red, massive bovine head to wit. Struggling to repress a shout of laughter, they continued to observe the new arrival, who had not yet discovered them, and who kept turning back to make sure his enemy was not following, in a state of trepidation that was intensely diverting to the onlookers.

“Hallo, Geoffry!” shouted Mr Santorex. “Had old Muggins’ bull after you?”

He addressed started as if a shot had been fired in his ear. It was bad enough to have been considerably frightened, but to awake to the fact that Yseulte Santorex had witnessed him in the said demoralised state was discouraging, to say the least of it.

“That’s worse than the last infliction of Muggins you underwent, isn’t it, Mr Vallance?” said the latter mischievously, referring to the idiotic game of cards of that name.

“Did he chevy you far, Geoffry?” went on Mr Santorex, in the same bantering tone.

“Er – ah – no; not very,” said the victim, who was somewhat perturbed and out of breath. “He’s an abominably vicious brute, and ought to be shot. He’ll certainly kill somebody one of these days. I must – er – really mention the matter to the governor.”

But there was consolation in store for the ill-used Geoffry. Having thus fallen in with the Santorex’s it was the most natural thing in the world that he should accompany them the greater

part of the way home. Consolation? Well, have we not sufficiently emphasised the fact that Yseulte Santorex was a very beautiful girl?

It must be admitted that the future Squire of Lant did not, either in personal appearance or mental endowment, attain any higher standard than commonplace mediocrity. He was very much a reproduction of his father, though without his father's calculating and avaricious temperament, for he was a good-natured fellow enough in his way. "No harm in him, and too big a fool ever to be a knave," had been Mr Santorex' verdict on this fortunate youth as he watched him grow up. Had he been aware of it, this summing-up would sorely have distressed the young Squire, for of late during the Oxford vacation Geoffry Vallance had eagerly seized or manufactured opportunities for being a good deal at Elmcote.

Chapter Six

The Indian Village

A long, open valley, bounded on either side by flat, table-topped hills, and threaded by a broad but shallow stream, whose banks are fringed by a straggling belt of timber. Sheltered by this last stand tall conical lodges, some in irregular groups, some dotted down in twos and threes, others in an attempt at regularity and the formation of a square, but the whole extending for upwards of a mile. In the far distance, at the open end of the valley, the eye is arrested by turret-shaped buttes, showing the *bizarre* formation and variegated strata characteristic of the “Bad Lands.” The stream is known as Dog Creek, and along its banks lie the winter villages of a considerable section of the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes.

The westering sun, declining in the blue frosty sky, lights up the river like a silver band, and glows upon the white picturesque lodges, throwing into prominence the quaint and savage devices emblazoned upon their skin walls. Within the straggling encampment many dark forms are moving, and the clear air rings ever and anon with the whoop of a gang of boys, already playing at warlike games; the shrill laughter of young squaws, and the cackle of old ones; an occasional neigh from the several herds of ponies feeding out around the villages and the tramp of their hoofs; or vibrates to the nasal song of a circle of jovial merry-makers. Here and there, squatted around a fire in the open, huddled up in their blankets, may be descried a group of warriors, solemnly whiffing at their long pipes, the while keeping up a drowsy hum of conversation in a guttural undertone, and from the apex of each pyramidal “*teepe*” a column of blue smoke rises in rings upon the windless atmosphere. It is a lovely day, and although the surrounding hills are powdered with snow, down here in the valley the hardened ground sparkles with merely a crisp touch of frost.

Then as the gloaming deepens the fires glow more redly, and the life and animation of the great encampment increases. Young bucks, bedaubed with paint, and arrayed in beadwork and other articles of savage finery, swagger and lounge about; the nodding eagle quill cresting their scalp-locks giving them a rakish, and at the same time martial, aspect, as they wander from tent to tent, indulging in guffaws amongst themselves, or exchanging broad “chaff” with a brace or so of coppery damsels here and there, who, for their part, can give as readily and as freely as they can take. Or a group is engaged in an impromptu dance, both sexes taking part, to a running accompaniment of combined guttural and nasal drone, varied now and again by a whoop. Wolfish curs skulk around, on the lookout to steal if allowed the chance, snarling over any stray offal that may be thrown them, or uttering a shrill yelp on receipt of an arrow or two from some mischievous urchin’s toy bow; and, altogether, with the fall of night, the hum and chatter pervading this wild community seems but to increase.

Great stars blaze forth in the frosty sky, not one by one, but with a rush, for now darkness has settled upon the scene, though penetrated and scattered here and there by the red glare of some convivial or household fire. And now it becomes apparent that some event of moment is to take place shortly, for a huge fire is kindled in front of the large council-lodge, which stands in the centre of the village, and, mingling with the monotonous “tom-tom” of drums, the voices of heralds are raised, convening chiefs and warriors to debate in solemn conclave.

No second summons is needed. The unearthly howling of the dancers is hushed as if by magic, the horseplay and boisterous humour of youthful bucks is laid aside, and from far and near all who can lay claim to the rank of warrior – even the youngest aspirants to the same hanging on the outskirts of the crowd – come trooping towards the common centre.

Within the council-lodge burns a second fire, the one outside being for the accommodation of the crowd, and it is round this that the real debate will take place. As the flames shoot up crisply, the interior is vividly illumined, displaying the trophies with which the walls are decked – trophies

of the chase and trophies of war, horns and rare skins, scalps and weapons; and, disposed in regular order, the mysterious “medicine bags” and “totems” of the tribal magnates, grotesque affairs mostly, birds’ heads and claws, bones or grinning jaws of some animal, the whole plentifully set off with beadwork and paint and feathers.

Then the crowd outside parts decorously, giving passage to those whose weight and standing entitle them to a seat within the sacred lodge, and a voice in the council. Stately chieftains arrayed in their most brilliant war-costumes – the magnificent war-bonnets of eagles’ plumes cresting their heads and flowing almost to the ground behind, adding an indescribably martial and dignified air to their splendid stature and erect carriage – advance with grave and solemn step to the council fire and take their seats, speaking not a word, and looking neither to the right nor to the left. Partisans, or warriors of tried skill and daring, who, without the rank and following of chiefs, are frequently elected to lead an expedition on the war-path, these, too, in equally splendid array, have a place in the assembly; after them, lesser braves, until the lodge can hold no more. The crowd must listen to what it can of the debates from without.

From the standpoint of their compatriots, some of these warriors are very distinguished men indeed. There is Long Bull, and Mountain Cat, and Crow-Scalper, all implacable and redoubted foes of the whites. There is Burnt Wrist, and Spotted Tail, and Lone Panther, and a dozen other notable chiefs. Last, but not least, there is Red Cloud, orator, statesman, and seer, the war-chief of the Ogallalla clan, and medicine chief virtually of the whole Sioux nation.

The flames of the council fire leap and crackle, casting a lurid glow on the stern visages of the assembled warriors. Many of these wear brilliantly-coloured tunics of cloth or dressed buckskin, more or less tastefully adorned with beadwork or shining silver plates. Over this, carelessly thrown, or gracefully dangling from its wearer’s shoulder, is the outer “robe” of soft buffalo hide, blazoned all over with hieroglyphics and pictures setting forth the owner’s feats of arms or prowess in the chase, and among the scalp-locks fringeing tunics and leggings may be descried not a few that originally grew upon Anglo-Saxon heads. But all is in harmony, tasteful, barbarically picturesque; and the air of self-possessed dignity stamped upon the countenances of these plumed and stately warriors could not be surpassed by the most august assembly that ever swayed the affairs of old civilisation.

One more personage is there whom we have omitted to mention. Leaning against a lodge pole, as thoroughly unconcerned and at his ease among the red chieftains as ever he was in Belgravian boudoir, his splendid face as impassive as their own, sits Rupert Vipan, and if ever man lived who was thoroughly calculated to inspire respect in the breasts of these warlike savages, assuredly he was that man. That he is here at all is sufficient to show in what honour he is held among his barbarian entertainers.

And now in order to render more clearly the drift of the subsequent debate, some slight digression may here be necessary.

The Sioux, or Dahcotah, as they prefer to be called, are about the only aboriginal race in North America whose numbers and prowess entitle them to rank as a nation. They are sub-divided into clans or tribes: Ogallalla, Minneconjou, Uncpapa, Brulé, and many more, with the specification of which we need not weary the reader, but all more or less independent of each other, and acting under their own chiefs or not, as they choose. At the time of our story the whole of these, numbering about 60,000 souls, occupied a large tract comprising the south-western half of the territory of Dakota, together with the adjacent extensive range in eastern Montana and Wyoming, watered by the Yellowstone and Powder Rivers and their tributaries, and commonly called after the last-named stream. On the border-line of Dakota and Wyoming, and therefore within the Indian reservation, stand the Black Hills, a rugged mountain group rising nearly 8,000 feet above the sea level, an insight into whose wild and romantic fastnesses we have already given.

At that period popular rumour credited the Black Hills with concealed wealth to a fabulous extent. Gold had already been found there, not in any great quantities, but still it had been found,

and the nature and formation of the soil pointed to its existence in vast veins, at least so said popular rumour. That was enough. Men began to flock to this new Eldorado. Parties of prospectors and miners found their way to its sequestered valleys, and soon the rocks rang to the sound of the pick, and the mountain streams which gurgled through its savage solitudes were fouled with the washing of panned dirt.

But the miners had two factors to reckon with – the Government and the Indians. The former was bound by treaty to keep white men, particularly miners, out of the Indian reservation; the latter became more and more discontented over the non-fulfilment of the agreement. The shrewd tribesmen knew that gold was even a greater enemy to their race than rum. The discovery of gold meant an incursion of whites; first a few, then thousands; cities, towns, machinery. Then good-bye to the game, whereby they largely subsisted; good-bye, indeed, to the country itself, as far as they were concerned. They threatened war.

It became necessary for something to be done. Troops were sent to patrol the Black Hills, with strict injunctions to arrest all white men and send them under guard to the settlements. This was extensively done. But the expelled miners, watching their chance, lost no time in slipping back again, and their numbers, so far from decreasing, had just the opposite tendency, arrests notwithstanding.

Then the United States Government resolved to purchase the Black Hills, and made overtures to the Sioux accordingly. The latter were divided in opinion. Some were for terms, the only question being as to their liberality; others were for rejecting the proposal at any price, and if the Government still persisted in its neglect to keep out the white intruders, why then they must take the defence of their rights into their own hands.

Pause, O philanthropic reader, ere running away with the idea that these poor savages' rights were being ruthlessly trampled on; and remember the old legal maxim about coming into court with clean hands. The Government tried to do its best, but in a vast, rugged, and lawless country the inhabitants are not to be policed as in a well-ordered city of the Old World. Men could not be hung merely for encroaching on the reservation, and the state of popular feeling precluded any sort of deterrent punishment. And then, were the Indians themselves strictly observing their side of the treaty? Let us see.

For several summers the bands roaming in the Powder River country had perpetrated not a few murders of whites, had run off stock and destroyed property to a considerable extent, in short, had taken the war-path, and this although nominally at peace. Now it was by virtue of keeping the peace that their exclusive rights over the encroached-upon territory had been conceded.

We have said that the Sioux were made up of various sub-divisions or clans. Now at that time there was not one of these which did not furnish a quota of warriors to swell the ranks of the hostiles. Nominally at peace, and drawing rations from the Government, the turbulent spirits of these tribes would slip away quietly in small parties, to join the hostile chiefs for a summer raid, returning to the agencies when they had had enough fighting and plunder, and becoming – in popular parlance – “good Indians” again. These escapades were either winked at by the tribal chiefs, who remained quietly at the agencies, “keeping in” with the Government, or were simply beyond their power to prevent. Probably both attitudes held good, for the control exercised by an Indian chief over his band or tribe seldom amounts to more than moral suasion.

Briefly, then, the Sioux and their allies, the Northern Cheyennes, might be thus classified: —

1. The hostiles, *i. e.*, the bold and lawless faction who hardly made any secret of being on the war-path. These held the broken and rugged fastnesses of the Powder River country already referred to.

2. The Agency Indians who, sitting still on their reserves, helped their hostile brethren with information and supplies.

3. The turbulent youths on the reservation, always ready to slip away on their own account, or to join the hostiles, in search of scalps, plunder, and fun in general.

4. The whole lot, ripe for any devilment, provided it offered a safe chance of success.

Such was the state of affairs in 1873-4-5, and now apologising to the reader for this digression, let us get back to our council.

Chapter Seven

The Council

In silence the “medicine-man” prepared the great pipe, his lips moving in a magical incantation as he solemnly filled it. Then handing the stem to Vipan, who was seated on the right of Red Cloud, he applied a light to the bowl. This “medicine” or council pipe was a magnificent affair, as suited its solemn and ceremonial character. The large and massive bowl was of porous red stone, the stem, upwards of a yard in length, being profusely ornamented with beadwork and quills, and at intervals of a few inches flowed three long and carefully-dressed scalp-locks. Vipan, fully alive to the position of honour he occupied, gravely inhaled the aromatic mixture with the utmost deliberation, expelling the smoke in clouds from his mouth and nostrils. Then he passed it on to Red Cloud, who, after the same ceremony, in similar fashion passed it to the chief next him on his left, and so in dead silence it went round the circle, each warrior taking a series of long draws, and then, having handed the pipe to his neighbour, emitting a vast volume of smoke by a slow process which seemed to last several minutes, and the effect of which was not a little curious.

No word had been uttered since they entered the lodge, and not until the pipe had made the complete round of the circle was the silence broken. Then a sort of professional orator, whose mission was something similar to that of counsel for the plaintiff – viz., to “open the case” – arose and proceeded to set forth the grounds of debate. The Dahcotah, he said, were a great nation, and so were their brethren the Cheyennes, who also had an interest in the matter which had brought them together. Both were represented here by many of their most illustrious chiefs and their bravest warriors, several of whom, in passing, the orator proceeded to name, together with the boldest feat of arms of each, and at each of these panegyrics a guttural “How-how!” went forth from his listeners. The Dahcotah were not only a great people and a brave people, but they were also a long-suffering people. Who among all the red races had such good hearts as the Dahcotah? Who among them would have remained at peace under such provocation as they had received and continued to receive?

The debate was getting lively now. An emphatic exclamation of assent greeted the orator, whose tone, hitherto even, began to wax forcible.

When the Dahcotah agreed to bury the hatchet with the Mehneaska (Americans) – went on the speaker – a treaty was entered into, and under this the Great Father (the President of the United States) promised that the reservations they now occupied should be secured to them for ever – that no white men should be allowed within them, either to hunt or to settle or to search for gold, and on these conditions the Dahcotah agreed to abandon the war-path. That was seven years ago. They had abandoned it. They had “travelled on the white man’s road,” had sat within their reservations, molesting no one. They had made expeditions to their hunting-grounds to find food for their families and skins to build their lodges, but they had sent forth no war-parties. They had always treated the whites well. And now, how had the Great Father kept his promises? White men were swarming into the Dahcotah country. First they came by twos and threes, quietly, and begging to be admitted as friends. Then they came by twenties, armed with rifles and many cartridges, and began to lay out towns. Soon the Dahcotah country would be black with the smoke of their chimneys, and the deer and the buffalo, already scarce, would be a thing of the past. Look at Pahsapa (the Black Hills). Every valley was full of white men digging for gold. What was this gold, and whose was it? Was it not the property of the Dahcotah nation, on whose ground it lay hidden? If it was valuable, then the Great Father should make the Dahcotah nation rich with valuable things in exchange for it. But these intruding whites took the gold and gave nothing to its owners – threatened them with bullets instead. It had been suggested that they should sell Pahsapa. But these Hills were “great medicine” – sacred ground entrusted to the Dahcotah by the Good Spirit of Life. How could they sell them? What price

would be equivalent to such a precious possession? There was a chief here of mighty renown – the war-chief of the Ogallalla – who had led the nation again and again to victory, whose war-whoop had scattered the whites like buffalo before the hunters, the “medicine chief” of the Dahcotah race. When the council should hear his words on this matter their path would be plain before them.

As the orator ceased an emphatic grunt went round the circle with a unanimity that spoke volumes. Red Cloud², thus directly referred to, made, however, no sign. Motionless as a statue, there was a thoughtful, abstracted look upon his massive countenance, as though he had not heard a word of the harangue.

A few moments of silence, then another chief arose – a man of lofty stature and of grim and scowling aspect, his eyes scintillating with a cruel glitter from beneath his towering war-bonnet. After less than usual of the conventional brag as to the greatness of his nation and so forth, speaking fiercely and eagerly, as if anxious to come to the point, he went on: —

“What enemy has not felt the spring of Mountain Cat? From the far hunting-grounds of the Kiowas and the Apaches to the boundary line of the English in the North, there is not a spot of ground that Mountain Cat has not swept with his war-parties; not a village of the crawling Shoshones or skulking Pawnees that he has not taken scalps from; not a waggon train of these invading whites that he has not struck. When in the South the destroying locusts sweep down upon the land, they come not in one mighty cloud. No. They come one at a time at first, then a few more, fluttering quietly, far apart. It is nothing. But lo! in a moment there is a cloud in the air – a rush of wings, and the land is black with them – everything is devoured. So it is with these whites. One comes to trade, another comes to hunt, a third comes to visit us, two more come to search for this gold, and lo! the land is hidden beneath their devastating bands. Their stinking chimneys blacken the air, their poisonous firewater kills our young men or reduces them to the level of the whites themselves, who drink until they wallow like hogs upon the earth, and brother kills brother because he has drunk away his mind and has become a brute beast. Who would have dealings with such dogs as these?

“There was a time when our hunting-grounds shook beneath the tread of countless buffalo. Then we were great because free and feared – for who in those days dared incur the enmity of the Dahcotah? What happened? The whites built their accursed roads and the steam-horse came puffing over the plains, and where are the buffalo to-day? The land is white with their skeletons, but will skeletons feed the Dahcotah and supply skins for their winter lodges? The Great Father” (and the savage uttered the words with a contemptuous sneer) “then said, ‘Let us send and kill all the buffalo, and the red races will starve.’ So the white hunters came from the east and destroyed our food for ever. And where are we to-day? Are we not living like beggars? Are we not dependent on the Agencies for our daily food and clothing, instead of upon our own arrows and lances as of yore? First came the settlers, whom we treated as friends, then the steam-horse and the iron road, then the finding of the gold. Where this gold is, there the whites swarm. What do we gain, I say, by treating with these lying Mehneaska? What have we ever gained? When they sought to throw open our territory by cutting it with a broad road, did we treat? No, we fought. Where is that road to-day? Where are the forts built along it to keep it open? Gone – all gone. But the buffalo – what few are left – are there. How many would be left now had we traded away our rights? Not one. The whole Dahcotah nation went out upon the war-path.

“The whites begged for peace, and we granted it them. They agreed to respect our country, which was all we asked. Seven years have gone by, and how is that agreement kept? Go, count the white men digging in Pahsapa. Ha! There are many scalps to be had in Pahsapa.”

His tone, which had hitherto been one of quick, fierce emphasis, here assumed a slow and deadly meaning. The young warriors, listening without, gripped their weapons with a murmur of

² This chief, over and above his skill and intrepidity as a warrior, enjoyed a high reputation among the Indians of the Northern Plains as a magician and a seer – a reputation really due to his astuteness, keen foresight, and extraordinary luck.

delighted applause. Mountain Cat was a chieftain after their own heart. Let him but set up the war-post that very night. All the young men in the village would strike it.

“We are strong,” he continued, “strong and united. Our bands are defending our hunting-grounds between this and the Yellowstone, but what shall be thought of us if we allow the whites to invade us here, to deprive us of the medicine hills without a struggle? Are we men, or have we become squaws since we began to receive doles of Government beef?”

Then the fierce savage, raising his voice, his eyes blazing like lightning, stretched forth his arm in denunciatory gesture over the assembly, and continued:

“Mountain Cat will never trust the promises of these Mehneaska. If they want Pahsapa, let them take it by right of conquest – by seizing it from the unconquerable Dahcotah. There are scalps to be taken in Pahsapa. Let the whole Dahcotah nation once more go out upon the war-path. I have said.”

Vipan, listening impassively, though with keen attention, to every word that was uttered, here caught the eye of War Wolf. The young warrior’s face was a study in sardonic ferocity at the words, “There are scalps to be taken in Pahsapa,” and he grinned with delight over the fiendish joke shared between himself and Golden Face.

The young bucks in the background were in ecstasies of glee. They anticipated no end of fun in the near future.

Several other speakers followed, and opinions on the advisability of war varied considerably. Most of them advocated the sale, but for an enormous price. There was a white man among them to-night, they said, of a different race to these other whites, and towards him their hearts were good. He loved his red brethren; he was their brother. He had told them about other lands than that of the Mehneaska – lands as large and as rich beyond the great Salt Lake. They must listen to him, for he was wise. He understood the ways of the whites, and would teach the Dahcotah how to deal with them – so that if Pahsapa should be sold they should receive full price; and not, as in other transactions, receive payment in promises.

This, more or less plainly put, was the burden of their speeches. Vipan, listening with more than Indian composure, felt that things were tending all as he would have them. It may here be stated that he was alone among his red entertainers; Smokestack Bill, foreseeing how affairs were likely to drift, having returned to the log cabin among the mountains. For once the adventurer was glad of his comrade’s absence. He could play his cards more freely; besides, the Indians trusted him as belonging to another race. Had the scout been still in the village, the two white men would not have been admitted to this council.

Then arose Spotted Tail, the head chief of the Brulé bands, and after Red Cloud, perhaps one of the most influential chiefs of the nation. He made a long oration, of considerable eloquence, but it was all in favour of peace. There was no need, he said, to reiterate that they were a great nation. Everybody knew it. As many speakers had asserted, the Dahcotah had never been conquered. Why was this? Because they were not only a brave but a prudent people. A brave man without prudence was like a grizzly bear – he might slay so many enemies more or less, but he invited his own destruction by rushing upon their rifles. As with a man, so it was with a nation. Prudence was everything. This gold which white men were now finding among the Hills – did not all experience show that wherever it was discovered, there the whites would soon appear in countless swarms? Gold was the “medicine” of the whites – they could not resist it. Not even all the warriors the Dahcotah could muster could in the long run stand between the whites and gold – no, nor all the warriors of every tribe from the Apaches in the south to the Blackfeet on the English boundary line. The last time they went upon the war-path it was to prevent the whites from making a broad road through their country – and they succeeded. If they went upon it this time it would be to keep the whites away from this gold. That was a thing which no tribe or nation had ever succeeded in doing yet, or ever would. Let the Dahcotah be prudent.

As for these Hills, it was true they were “great medicine,” but the people seldom hunted in them. They were not of much use. The Mehneaska were very anxious to possess them, and the Great

Father was so rich he could afford to give such a price as would make the Dahcotah rich too. Besides, it was evident that he wished to treat them fairly this time, for had he not sent troops to drive away the intruding gold-seekers? They had come back, it was true; but this only proved the difficulties besetting the whole question. Let the Dahcotah nation be prudent – prudence was the keystone to every matter of international difficulty. His counsel was for entering into negotiations at once about the purchase. He was also emphatically on the side of peace.

Very faint were the murmurs of applause from the young men outside as Spotted Tail resumed his seat. The war spirit was in the air, and the burden of his speech was unpalatable to them. Then Red Cloud said:

“Golden Face sits in an honoured place at the council fire of the Dahcotah people. They will listen to his words as to the voice of a brother.”

With a slight bend of the head in acknowledgment of this graceful invitation, Vipian arose. As he stood for a few moments silently contemplating the circle of stately chiefs, the firelight glinting on the flowing masses of his beard and bringing into strong relief the herculean proportions of his towering stature, there was not an eye among the crowd of fierce and excitable savages but dilated with admiration. Here was indeed a man.

“Who am I that stand to address you to-night?” he began, speaking in their own tongue with ease and fluency. “Who knows? I will not boast. Suffice it to say that I have led men to war, in other lands beyond the great salt seas. I have struck the enemy, and that not once only. I have seen his back, but he has never seen mine. Enough. Who am I? It has been said that I am not of the race around us. That is so. There are many white races; that to which I have belonged matters nothing, for I own no race, I am akin to all the world,” with a sweep of the arm that would have done credit to one of their own most finished orators.

“The people whose hearts are straight towards me, whether light or dark, white or red, that is my people. Those who deal fairly with me, I deal fairly with; those who do not, let them beware. You in council have asked my advice. I cannot give advice, but my *opinion* the chiefs before me can value or not.

“I have listened to the speeches of many valiant men. Some have advocated peace, others have been for war. It is a simple thing to go to war. Is it? When the red men strike the war-post, they muster their warriors, and go forth to battle. When the whites decide on war, they collect their dollars, and pay soldiers to go and fight for them. The red men fight with weapons, the whites with dollars. The red men would rather forego their chance of booty than lose one warrior. The whites would rather lose a thousand soldiers than five thousand dollars. But, you will say: If the whites have the dollars, and value not the lives of other people, what chance have we, for they are rich, and can pay? Wait a moment. Men are wonderfully alike, whether red or white. Is it your experience that the richest man is the man who cares least for his possessions? It is not mine.

“Now let your ears be open, for this is the point. The fear of losing men will not deter the whites from going to war; no, not for a moment, but the fear of losing dollars will. It is not the soldiers who make the war, it is the people who pay for it. These will not allow war to be made by their rulers for fun.

“Were I a councillor of the Dahcotah nation, this is what I should say: First, let the Great Father prove that he is in earnest by turning all the whites out of Pahsapa, or allowing us to do so. When this is done – but not until then – we will enter into negotiations for the purchase. Then I should ask eighty million dollars in cash. It is a large sum, but nothing compared with the value of the ground itself. The Mehneaska will gladly pay this, rather than embark in a war which they know will cost them twenty times as much, for they know the prowess of the Dahcotah nation, and respect the name of Red Cloud,” turning with a graceful inclination towards the chief at his side.

“And there are many whites who will refuse to pay for a war with the red men. They love their red brethren, they say. It is no trouble to love people you have never seen. They do not really love

you, but pretend to, which is more to your interest still; so that others shall say: – ‘What good people, to take such care of the poor red man.’ They will take your part and see that you are not wronged, because sympathy gives no trouble, and is cheap, and they think it a sure and easy way to the white man’s Happy Hunting-grounds.

“In short, then, were I one of themselves, these would be my words to the chiefs and warriors of the Dahcotah nation: – Be firm; fix your price, and in any attempt to beat you down, stand as immovable as the towering Inyan Kara. Having fixed it, get someone whom you can trust to see that you obtain it; and, above all, write in your hearts the warning of the great chief who has just sat down, for it contains the words of golden wisdom: ‘A brave man without *prudence* is like the grizzly bear – he invites his own destruction.’

“There is one more thing to talk about. I and the warriors of the Dahcotah nation are brothers, and our hearts are the same. I who speak with you am of no race. I am akin to all the world, to all men whose hearts are good towards me. But although I am of no race I have friends of every race. When the war-parties of the Dahcotah are abroad, it may be that they will find me. Who would strike the friends of his brother? Such of the Mehneaska as may be with me are my friends, and the Dahcotah warriors will pass on, saying: – ‘We do not strike the friends of our brother, lest we turn him into an enemy.’ Yet why should I talk of this? Only that in the days of youth the blood is hot, and young men upon the war-path strike first, and think afterwards. Enough, my words are for the ears of chiefs. My heart and the hearts of the great chiefs to whom I speak, are the same. I have spoken.”

The clear ringing voice, the fluent language, the determination, even the veiled menace in the last words of the speaker, appealed straight to the most susceptible side of his savage hearers. One white man alone in their midst, and he did not shrink from threatening them with his hostility in the event of certain contingencies – threatening *them*, in their own estimation the most redoubtable warriors in the world! Assuredly he knew the way to their respect.

There were some there, however, in whom these last words aroused a feeling of rankling hostility, among them that fierce, that uncompromising abhorrer of the whole white race, Mountain Cat. This grim chieftain smiled sardonically to himself, as he inwardly promised what sort of treatment should be meted out to anyone whom his war-party should surprise, be they the friends of whom they might. Then ensued a period of silence, and every eye was turned with expectation upon Red Cloud.

But that crafty chief was not yet prepared to commit himself to a definite policy either way. Sitting motionless, he had weighed every word which had fallen from the speakers, and notably from the last. He was too far-sighted to plunge his nation into open war before the time was ripe: and his thinking out of the situation had convinced him that it was not. There were still cards to be played. So when he spoke it was briefly. Cautiously touching on the *pros* and *cons* of the speeches they had listened to, he announced that the situation must further be delayed, hinting that meanwhile such of his countrymen as felt aggressively disposed towards the common enemy had better exercise great prudence.

The council was at an end.

Chapter Eight

The Scalp-Dance

Uncas and Wingenund are very pretty creations, but they represent the savage as he really is about as accurately as the Founder of Christianity represents the average Christian of the current century. Which may be taken to mean that all preconceived and popular ideas of the “noble red man” can safely be relegated to the clouds.

Nobody was more aware of this than Vipan, consequently he knew exactly at what valuation to take all these overwhelmingly fraternal speeches of his red brethren. He knew – none better – that the wily chiefs intended to make use of him; he knew, moreover, that he could be of use to them; equally was he determined to receive a full equivalent for his services, and this equivalent he intended should be nothing less than the exclusive right of mining in the Black Hills.

His shrewd mind had grasped the sense of the council, and he realised that a sort of desultory warfare, for which no one was responsible, would be undertaken against the white men already there. These, isolated by twos and threes at their scattered mining camps, could not hope to make a successful stand against bands of savages raiding upon them incessantly. They would be driven out, and then he, Vipan, the friend and “brother” of the red possessors, would pick out all the best claims, work them with a will, and quickly make his fortune.

A daring and unscrupulous plan? Yes; but Nature had endowed the man with indomitable daring, and circumstances had combined to render him utterly unscrupulous. In advising the chiefs to ask the enormous sum named above, and to abide by their demand, he was perfectly well aware that the United States Government would not agree to it, but the larger the demand the more protracted would be the haggle, and the more protracted the haggle the more time would be his wherein to enrich himself.

There was one factor which he overlooked – or if it occurred to him he preferred to put it aside – the possibility that the yield of gold would not come up to anything like his expectations. But he was sanguine. Adventurers of his type invariably are. Give him a fair chance and his fortune was made.

Vipan was very popular in the Indian village. Apart from the consequence attaching to him as the friend and guest of the great chief – for he had taken up his quarters in Red Cloud’s own lodge – he mixed freely with all the warriors, chatting with them, and treating them as friends and equals. Indians in private life are arrant gossips, and the adventurer being one of those adaptable persons at home in any society was in great request, for he was essentially “good company,” and two-thirds of the night would be spent in this or that warrior’s *teepe*, the structure crowded to suffocation, listening to his droll, or tragical, or romantic stories of all parts of the world. Then, too, he would accompany the young bucks on their hunting trips, in no case allowing their success to excel his; or would organise shooting matches among them. There were instances even wherein he was not above cutting out one or two of them in some – what we will call – boudoir intrigue, purely for the devilment of the thing, and if only to show them that there was nothing in which he could not surpass them – whether in love, war, or the chase. All this told. Their respect and admiration for him were unbounded, yet had they by chance the good fortune to surprise him alone on the prairie, and get him into their power, it is doubtful whether any consideration of friendship would suffice to restrain some of the young bucks from taking his scalp. And of this he himself was well aware.

It was the evening of the day after the council. Vipan, returning from a solitary hunt, to the success of which an antelope strapped behind his saddle, and several brace of sand-grouse dangling from the same, bore silent testimony, found his thoughts fully occupied weighing the position of affairs, and the more he looked at it the less he liked it. There was a hitch somewhere, and on this he had no difficulty in putting his finger. A powerful faction in the village was hostile to him altogether,

and this was the uncompromising war-faction – Grey Wolf, the chief of the Cheyenne band; Mountain Cat, the Ogallalla; also War Wolf, who, although not a chief, yet aspired to this dignity, and who, his youth notwithstanding, was a warrior of such prestige among his fellows as to be no mean adversary. These especially – and there were others – he knew distrusted him and his plans. They were inveterate haters of all whites indiscriminately, and while they had hitherto treated him with grim courtesy, yet the covert hostility of their manner and words was not lost upon so shrewd an observer as himself. But it was certain that although the distrust or antipathy of these men might place obstacles in his path, yet no sort of alarm did it inspire him with. He was the proper stuff out of which adventurers are made – utterly reckless.

The crisp, frosty ground crackled beneath the hoofs of his powerful black horse; the sun had gone down, and the white conical lodges of the Sioux village stood spectral in the grey twilight. There was a stillness and peace pervading the scene, which was very unusual in such close proximity to the savage encampment. Suddenly, shrilling forth loud and clear upon the evening air, rang out the terrible war-whoop.

To say that Vipan saw that his weapons were ready to hand would be superfluous, for they were always in a state of readiness. But he did not quite like the look of things, and more than one keen, anxious glance did he cast, without seeming to do so, into the belt of timber which he was skirting. Suddenly the semi-gloom seemed alive with dusky shapes flitting among the tree stems, and then all around him arose once more the war-whoop, which was taken up and echoed back from the village amid the frantic hammering of many drums.

“What’s it all about, Three Elks?” he asked tranquilly, as a tall warrior glided past him in the twilight.

“How! Scalp!” replied the savage laconically, and then opening his mouth he once more set up the hideous shout as he rushed on.

The aspect of the Sioux village was that of the nethermost shades with all the fiends holding high revel. For the open space in front of the council-lodge was alive with excited Indians, those coming in from without whooping or shrilling their war-whistles as they rushed into the thick of the surging throng. Gangs of squaws squatted around, keeping up a wild, nasal, yelling chant, to the monotonous “tom-tom” of drums. Red fires glared upon the night; while hundreds of excited warriors, plumed and hideously painted, falling into something like a circular formation, revolved around several poles, from which dangled and flapped scalps in various stages of preservation – some dry and parchment-like, others fresh and only half cured.

Round and round circled the wild dance, the hoarse howling of the warriors, varied occasionally by a deafening war-whoop; the nasal yelling of the squaws; the hammering of drums and the screech of whistles; the lurid glare of the fires upon the fierce bounding shapes and the hideously streaked bodies and plumed heads; the gleam of weapons and the disgusting trophies flapping up aloft; all went to make up a weird and appalling pandemonium which baffles description. And yet so contagious, so insidious in its effect was this barbarous saturnalia that Vipan could with difficulty restrain himself from rushing into the maddened throng, and, brandishing his weapons, whoop and howl with the wildest of them.

One thing he observed which, in any other man as well acquainted with the Indian character as himself, would have been productive of uneasiness. The dancers consisted almost entirely of young bucks, every chief or partisan of any note being conspicuous by his absence. But although he knew that his position was precarious in the extreme there in the midst of that crowd of savages, quickly working themselves into a state of uncontrollable excitement, yet there was such an irresistible fascination about the whole thing that he felt rooted to the spot.

Suddenly War Wolf, bounding up to one of the poles, detached a couple of scalps, and, waving them aloft, uttered an ear-splitting yell. The savage, bedaubed from head to foot with yellow paint spotted all over with blotches of vermilion, brandishing a tomahawk in one hand and the ghastly

trophies in the other, while with blazing eyes he yelled forth the history of his bloody exploit, looked a very fiend. Then as his eyes met those of Vipan, standing on the outside of the circle, he gave vent to a devilish laugh, flourishing the scalps ironically towards the latter.

The war-whoop pealed forth again, shriller, fiercer, and many a bloodthirsty glare was turned upon Vipan from a hundred pairs of eyes, as the maddened barbarians revolved in their frenzied rout. But he never quailed. The fascination was complete. And through it he noted two things. Both scalps were fresh. Hardly a week had passed since they grew upon the heads of their owners – and one of them was plentifully covered with a thick crop of red hair.

A voice at his side, speaking in quiet tones, broke the spell.

“Golden Face should be hungry and tired. Will he not come in, and rest and eat?”

Turning, he beheld Red Cloud. The latter’s eyes wandered from his to the crowd of furious dancers with a meaning there was no mistaking. Without a word he turned and strolled away with the chief.

Chapter Nine

Some Old Correspondence

Mr Santorex and his daughter were seated in the former's own especial sanctum, busily engaged in sorting and destroying old letters and papers.

The room was a pleasant one, somewhat sombre perhaps – thanks to its panelling of dark oak – but the window commanded a lovely view of the Lant valley. Round the room stood cabinet cupboards, enclosing collections of insects, birds' eggs, plants, etc., and surmounted by a number of glass cases containing stuffed birds and animals. Fishing-rods on a rack, a few curiosities of savage weapons, and a portrait or two adorned the walls.

"Had enough of it, Chickie? Rather a sin to keep you boxed up here this lovely morning, isn't it?"

"No, father, of course it isn't. Besides, we are nearly at the end of these 'haunting memories of bygone days,' aren't we? or we shall be by lunch-time, anyhow."

It was indeed a lovely morning. The sweet spring air, wafting in at the window, floated with it the clear song of larks poised aloft in the blue ether, the bleating of young lambs disporting amid the buttercups on the upland pastures, and many another note of the pleasant country blending together in harmonious proportion.

"'Haunting memories,' eh?" replied Mr Santorex, seeming to dwell somewhat over the sheaf of yellow and timeworn papers he held in his hand. "Instructive – yes. A record of the average crop of idiocies a man sows in earlier life under the impression that he is doing the right thing. Acting under a generous impulse, I believe it is called."

Thus with that cynical half-smile of his did Mr Santorex keep up a running comment on each separate episode chronicled among the papers and letters filed away in his despatch-box. Some he merely looked at and put aside without a word; others he descanted upon in his peculiar dry and caustic fashion which always inspired the listeners with something bordering on repulsion. Yseulte herself could not but realise that there was a something rather cold-blooded, not to say ruthless, about her tranquil and philosophical parent that would have awed – almost repelled – her but that she loved him very dearly. Her nature was a concentrative one, and unsusceptible withal. She had hardly made any friends, because she had seen no one worth entertaining real friendship for, and she was a girl who would not fall in love readily.

"I wish I hadn't seen this just now, father," she said, handing him back a sheaf of letters. It was a correspondence of a lively nature, and many years back, between himself and Mr Vallance. "You see, the Vallances are all coming up here this afternoon, and I don't feel like being civil to them immediately upon it."

"Pooh! civility means nothing, not in this location at least. Why, when we first came here we were overwhelmed with it. It didn't last many months certainly, but it broke out afresh when rumour made me a millionaire. Why, what have you got there?"

For she was now scrutinising, somewhat intently, a photograph which had fallen out of a bundle of papers among the piles they had been sorting. It represented a youngish man, strikingly handsome, and with a strong, reckless stamp of countenance; and though the original must have been prematurely bald, the mouth was almost hidden by a long heavy moustache. A queer smile came into Mr Santorex's face.

"Think that's the type you could fall in love with, eh, Chickie? Well, I advise you not to, for I can't bring you face to face with the original."

"Why? Who is it?"

"Who is it? No less a personage than the disinherited heir, Ralph Vallance. The plot thickens, eh?"

“I didn’t know. I thought he was dead, if I ever knew there was such a person, that is. Why was he disinherited?”

“Ah, that’s something of a story. Poor Ralph! I think he was most unfairly treated, always did think so; especially when that hum – er, I mean, our spiritual guide, jumped into his shoes. No, I daresay you never heard much about it, but you are a woman now, my dear, and a deuced sensible one too, as women go, and I always hold that it is simply nonsensical and deleterious to their moral fibre to let women – sensible ones, that is – go about the world with their eyes shut. To come back to our romance. The old squire of Lant was a straight-laced, puritanical fossil, and Master Ralph was just the reverse, an extravagant, roystering young dog who chucked away ten pounds for every one that he was worth, in fact the ideal ‘Plunger’ as you girls estimate that article. Naturally, there were occasional breezes down at the Hall, nor were these effectually tempered by the crafty intervention of cousin Dudley, who ran the vicarage in those days. The old man used to get very mad, especially when Ralph began dabbling in *post obits*

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