

The Free Traders

By
VICTOR ROUSSEAU
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CHAPTER XXI —16— Saved by Estelle

As the wall of the hut burst into flames Lee struggled with all his might to free himself of his bonds. But in spite of all his efforts he could not loosen them an inch.

He writhed until the cords drew blood from his wrists, and the thought of Joyce, lost to him at the last through Estelle's trick, inspired him to still more frenzied efforts, but equally in vain.

Suddenly a figure darted through the doorway. In his condition of semi-consciousness he was dimly aware that Estelle was crouching at his side, trying to unknot the ropes. It was impossible to see anything through the thick smoke that filled the interior of the hut, and Estelle's fingers, groping for the knots, were not strong enough to loosen them.

Still she fought in a frenzy, maddened by Rathway's desertion of her, his blow, and Shorty's murder, hardly knowing why she was bent upon saving Lee when her whole life had gone down in ruin. Two walls of the hut were now in flames, and the whole roof was smouldering. Estelle screamed wildly into the empty air.

Lee tried to push her away. "Go—never mind me!" he tried to mumble through his gag. And he wondered why she, who had lured him there, was now trying to save him.

She bit at the ropes with her teeth, and even while she did so those screams continued to pour from her lips. At last with a final, despairing cry, she collapsed at Lee's side.

Another figure staggered over the sill. It was Leboeuf. He came on, a moving pillar of mud. The old Indian, attracted by the fire, and hearing Estelle's cries, had at last succeeded in fighting his way out of the muskeg. Seeing the two forms dimly through the smoke, he bent down, felt the cords about Lee's limbs and body and, with his knife, quickly slashed them asunder.

He pulled the gag from Lee's mouth and carried him outside. Estelle staggered after him. In a few moments the fresh air revived them.

But hardly were they outside the hut when the roof collapsed with a great crash, sending up a spout of sparks and brands. A huge banner of fire waved where the hut had been. The glowing brands, descending, set fire to the dead reeds. Lines of fire ran swiftly out into the swamp.

The sound of whinnying and plunging came from the stables, which were now discernible against the brightening sky.

"Monseur!" cried Leboeuf, pointing. Estelle clung to Lee. "Wait! Wait!" she cried. "But even in Lee's misery the instinct to save the animals came first. Leboeuf and he set off toward the building, staggering through the swamp, while the fiery fingers of the conflagration reached out toward them.

"No! This way!" cried Estelle, running toward them.

She guided them along the little trail. In a few moments Lee and Leboeuf had unharmed the animals, and led them to safety, the Indian carrying the saddles and bridles over his arm.

At the neck of the promontory Estelle grasped at Lee again. "He is gone!" she cried. "He has taken her to Lake Misquash in his motor boat. Oh, don't you care, that you stand there like that?"

Lee looked at her, despair heavy in his eyes. "So much," he answered, "that I shall follow him to the Arctic ice if necessary. That is why there is no instant hurry, Estelle."

Estelle could not understand his calmness. "He made me deceive you," she cried. "He swore to me that he would take me away with him, leaving her in the hut with you. He said he would place a knife near you, so that you could see it when it grew light, and would be able to free yourself and her. He only wanted a few minutes' respite. I—I believed him, the perfidious liar. He tricked me, and now he's gone forever!"

She broke down in stormy sobs. Lee said nothing. At that moment, when everything seemed lost, and it was impossible to save Joyce from the worst, he could only build up endless schemes for future retribution. He would pursue Rathway, if necessary, not only to the Arctic ice, but to the ends of the earth. But—it was too late!

That stunning realization kept him as still and silent as if nothing mattered at all.

All the while these thoughts passed through his mind he was walking with the others across the promontory. It was growing light now, but they could see no signs of movement in the huts opposite them. Lee quickened his footsteps, oppressed by a vague fear. Outside the huts he stopped, uttered a cry.

Father McGrath lay in a huddled heap. There was a bloody wound in his head. Lee threw himself upon his knees beside the old priest, sure that he was dead. He took one wrist.

Father McGrath was very far from being dead. He sat up with electricity's suddenness, and dealt Lee a buffet that knocked him backward. And the flow of language that streamed from his lips was, if not actually ob-jurgative, decidedly picturesque.

Then of a sudden he seemed to

realize where he was. He stared at Lee in dismay, looked wildly around him.

"Whaur are they? Ah, the—!" Leboeuf, coming up at this juncture with the two horses, uttered a melancholy grunt at the sight of the old priest, with his bloody head, and the prisoners gone. McGrath was in a raging fury.

It was not difficult to piece the story together. When Lee disappeared into the muskeg, Leboeuf, knowing that it was impenetrable, unless one possessed knowledge of the trails, hastened after him, leaving McGrath in charge of the prisoners. Though McGrath remembered nothing from that moment, it could be gathered that one of them had drawn a concealed pistol and fired, felling McGrath and stunning him.

Whereupon, thinking him dead, the whole crew had rushed for the motor boat, but, frightened back by Estelle's screams and the sight of the two men there, whom they believed to be more of Lee's raiding party, they had swarmed down the landing place into the York boats, and made good their escape.

The whole night's work had gone for nothing.

Lee insisted on examining McGrath's wound, and discovered that it was a mere graze along the temple. The bone had turned the glancing bullet.

"Aye, 'tis the thick head o' the McGraths saved me, and 'tis the thick head o' the McGraths saved them!"

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"Na, na, 'tis a sair end to the night's work," he said, "but let us thank God we've cleaned out this nest o' snakes, anyhow, e'en if the serpent's gone. Aye, but ye'll catch him, lad, and save that pair lassie fra' him," he continued, "tis my purpose to clean out this nest o' snakes completely. I'll e'en empty their barrels o' the feethy stuff that they've been meexin' wi' the guld corn, and burn down these habitations."

Lee looked across the neck, where a dense cloud of smoke from the burning reeds hung over everything. "Good!" he answered. "Make a clean sweep of it, Father, so that there'll be no chance of their coming back here at any future time. I guess you'll find oil in the storehouse. Now, Leboeuf, if you're ready—"

Estelle, who had been standing by, vainly attempting two or three times to intervene, came forward, placing her hand timidly upon Lee's arm. "You—you won't hurt him? You'll promise me to do him no harm, whatever—whatever he may have done?" she pleaded.

"If it is possible, I promise you that I shall take him unharmed back to Manitowish." Lee answered. "That is my duty; and it will also be my duty to require you as a witness."

She burst into tears. "Oh, he isn't altogether bad!" she sobbed. "He's good in his way. Nobody knows the good that is in him."

Perhaps that was the best tribute that could have been paid Estelle.

Lee, struck by a sudden thought, turned to the priest. "Father, you must take her back to the mission with you," he said.

"Aye," said McGrath. "'Twas what I was theenkin' myself."

"You must go with him," said Lee, and put his foot in the stirrup.

Estelle clutched at him, and now the look in her eyes was one of resolution. "Lee—wait! There's something I must say to you! You remember what I was saying, to you two nights ago, about it's not being necessary to—kill him, to get that girl from him?"

Lee only looked at her.

"Lee, I may never see you again. I want you to forgive me for all the wretched, miserable wrongs I did you in the past. Lee, if it's any consolation—I know it can be none—but I did love you once. I knew I was unworthy of you, but it wasn't all fake and sham."

"Never mind, Estelle," said Lee. "All that's long past."

"I should have told you about—about the man, Kean, but I didn't dare to. You—you idealized me. You thought me something that I wasn't and could never have been."

"Estelle!"

"If you hadn't put me upon a pedestal I should have found courage to tell you that Kean had been my lover, that I cared more for you—then. I should have kneeled at your feet and begged you to forgive me. I ran away with him because I was afraid of you, and I have hated you—and hate you still—because of the wrong I had done you."

"Please don't say any more, Estelle—"

"You think that I'm a woman with a score of lovers, and there's only been one man in all my life, Lee. Because—I'll tell you now. Jim Rathway is Kean. And his wife's still alive—at any rate, she was alive when he went through that marriage ceremony with Joyce. Alive and not divorced from him. That makes Joyce yours!"

CHAPTER XXII

Retribution

The cold rage in Lee's heart was like an inexorable demon driving him. Mile after mile they covered, urging their foam-flecked horses along the trail as remorselessly as the resolve in their own hearts drove them.

It was when they topped a bare elevation among the pines that Leboeuf touched his companion's arm and pointed.

In the distance Lee saw the motor boat drawn up on the shore.

And with that, some instinct told him that Rathway could not escape them, that he would never reach Lake Misquash. Lee burned now with the same faith that animated Leboeuf.

They drove their horses on, and saw the motor boat depart, heard the chug of its engine die away in the distance.

It was about the middle of the afternoon that Leboeuf touched Lee's arm and pointed a second time. Again Lee saw the motor boat. Again they heard the rattle of the engine swell up and die away.

But now, by the same faith, Lee knew that Joyce's deliverance was very near, although their horses were wearied almost to death.

Again they rode on through the afternoon. The Indian, who had not spoken a word since their departure, touched Lee's arm a third time.

And now Lee saw the motor boat again, but it was drifting, apparently aimlessly, in the river, and moving slowly toward the rapids. Joyce sat in the middle of it, and Rathway was at the engine. Lee and Leboeuf rode cruelly, drawing out their horses' last reserve of strength.

What was the man doing? They saw him rise and hurl something into the water. He stood up in the boat, he shook his fist at them, and his yells of defiance reached their ears above the roar of the stream.

Then, seizing an oar, Rathway began paddling frantically. In the endeavor to get the boat bow on preparatory to guiding her down the narrow course among the rocks.

Lee and Leboeuf were nearly abreast of the boat now—and of a

sudden Lee knew that Joyce was his. His, in life and death, for evermore! She saw, she knew him, and their spirits seemed to rush together across the waters.

Without hesitation Lee and the Indian put their horses into the river. They drove the frightened beasts through the ice-cold water, making a course immediately toward the boat, which was now being swirled by the torrent toward that black chain of projecting rocks.

The horses yielded to the force of the stream. They were being carried away. Lee felt the swift rush of the water past him as he rode, submerged to the waist. He saw Leboeuf a little in front of him. And a wild exhilaration filled his heart, and his whole personality seemed to rush out before him, anticipating his vengeance and his love.

The frightened, snorting beasts were now helpless in the rush of the river, which gathered force momentarily as it drove them toward the rocks. They were hardly a boat's length from where Rathway was striving desperately to right the motor craft.

He was too late. He had not calculated on the force of the current, which slewed the heavy boat around, in spite of Rathway's strongest efforts. One moment of suspense and terror—and the motor boat wedged itself fairly between two upstanding rocks beside the channel's mouth.

Such was the velocity of the stream that it drove into its place with a force that fixed it as firmly as if it were a part of the rocks themselves, and clung there, with a swirl of white water around it, reaching almost to the gunwales.

In those last moments Lee saw Rathway, standing in the boat, drag Joyce to her feet and clutch her to him, as if resolved to be united with her at the last. His free hand he extended menacingly toward Lee as he approached, himself spinning upon his whirling mount like a straw in the torrent.

Then Leboeuf had struggled from his horse's back, poised himself upon the gunwale of the motor boat, and, with a bellow of rage, seized Rathway by the throat.

To and fro they rocked, the boat, despite their struggles, remaining firm as a wedge. And now the great shoulders of the old Indian were dragging his enemy from his place.

What Leboeuf said to Rathway in those last moments no one ever knew, for the roar of the rapids drowned all other sound. But of a sudden Rathway's resistance seemed to cease. Perhaps in Leboeuf he recognized the advent of that Nemesis he had defied; he collapsed, and Leboeuf, holding him in his arms, poised himself one instant on the gunwale.

The next both men had disappeared forever in the surge of the rapids that swept them through the falls, grinding them into unrecognizable pulp among the rocks.

Lee grasped at the boat as his horse swept by to its destruction. He clung there, clambered in. His arms were about Joyce. She lay there, and they forgot everything in the pence that had descended under the veil of the smoking spray.

It was long before they awakened to realities. They looked about them smiling at their position. Death seemed so small a thing to them now. And yet, the boon of life... how much it meant!

Lee crept to the bow. The boat, wedged firmly between the rocks, was nevertheless being constantly swept sidewise by the swirl of the current. He came back to Joyce.

"If I could dislodge her, I believe she'd go through that channel in the rapids, Joyce. I—I'll have to try."

Joyce sighed. They would have liked to prolong that happiness of theirs for all eternity. They were unconscious of all but each other.

But they must put their love to the last test of life. Lee's clothes were freezing on him; in the boat were packs, supplies—life, life for both of them if she could take the rapids.

"I'll try, Joyce."

They held each other for a moment longer. Then, taking the oar, Lee drove the handle into the gap between the rocks and levered with all his strength. The boat began to give.

One instant it hung giddily on the abyss; the next it was back in position.

"Lie down, Joyce!"

And he flung all his strength into that attempt, conscious that life and death trembled in the balance.

The boat gave, clung to the rock, was swept sidewise, righted herself and plunged down the channel to safety in the calm waters below.

"Lee, dearest, it's from Father McGrath. He wants us to come up to the settlement this summer. He's got five new Indian babies and he's as proud as Punch over them. And Estelle—"

She hesitated and looked at Lee.

"Go on!"

"Estelle's simply devoted to the children and she's taken up my work with so much pleasure. He says she seems quite happy and he believes in time that she'll forget—him."

"I might get leave of absence," Lee mused. "But with that promise of my commission and our transfer—I think perhaps our visit will have to wait."

"Some day—"

They wondered if that day would ever come. At times a longing for the range came over them for those scenes where they had met and loved. But mingled with it were those memories that they had put out of their lives because that shadow must never darken their happiness.

"Some day," said Lee, "perhaps—"

[THE END.]

Printed Fabrics for Summer Wear

Designs Range From Small Figures to Huge Dots and Flowers.

Printed fabrics of every description continue to make their presence felt. In the modes of summer their position is even more prominent than it was earlier in the season.

In contrast to the versatility of the designs, which range from small conventional and geometric patterns to huge exotic designs, striking in their startling color effects, are the simple lines of the frocks.

Jabots have been described as fluttering into the mode, and the jabot frock is undoubtedly one of the successes of the season, judging from the number to be seen.

For bathing suits and beach costumes, which in the latest version reflect the influence of the ensemble, the most stunning cretonnes and hand-blocked linens are used. These are made with tunics and scant knickers of cretonne bound with white or colored linen tape. To wear over bathing suits of this type there are straight coats made exactly like a tailored top-coat, of the same material.

The frock of printed silk appears in both one and two-piece models and is a pronounced vogue.

Once more the feminine type of afternoon gown is back in fashion and is particularly engaging when fash-

Costume Apron Is Liked by Young Housekeepers



A costume apron is this beflowered garment. It is made of cretonne, of course, and the binding is black satine.

Buckles and Ornaments for Low-Cut Footwear

The popularity of the colonial and other styles of low-cut shoe has suggested to designers new and beautiful buckles and ornaments. Cut steel is still much worn, and many novelties are shown in bronze and gilt, made in shades to match shoes and stockings. Others of bright colors form a sharp contrast. A center of scarlet glass kid framed in cut steel is designed for a pump of black leather. One, large and square, for a shoe of pale yellow doeskin, is of yellow enamel with rim of silver.

An oval buckle of artistically fashioned dull gilt has an outer line of vermillion. The center is of gold-colored silk finely plaited. Another, a circle of bronze-colored metal, has a center of gilt kid, and this unique and altogether ornamental buckle is made in several attractive variants.

Enamel buckles are new and exceedingly stylish. Some of these are of shiny gold or silver kid, and in the newest models the buckle, ornament or button is added at one side of the shoe.

Fine Wool Scarfs Used for Various Occasions

One of the many types of scarf in use is of shetland or mohair lace. These two varieties are very similar, there being a very slight difference in texture between them. Both of these easily pass the old-fashioned test of slipping through a ring, in spite of their deceptive wide spread. Their fine texture makes them very desirable for many occasions, whether for wearing with a coat or over a light summer dress, which can find its matching color note or contrast in one of the many lovely pastel shades in which these shawls are developed.

Size Is What Counts

The question uppermost in the minds of silk designers just now is not how sweet is a rose but how big. One of the tallest creations of the weaver's art which has been turned into a frock is of black crepe with roses from 12 to 14 inches in diameter, imprinted on it. There is only room for two on the bodice but the skirt is plaited and accommodates more.



Jabot is one of the features of dress of print.

lined of printed chiffon in subdued pastel shades or more vivid tones. An unlined coat of the same material frequently accompanies the chiffon frock.

Very new are the long-sleeved dresses of printed chiffon which are made on straight lines of decided tailored aspect, with only a concession to feminine softness in the flounces or godets inserted at the bottom of the skirt.

New Coats

Long coats of white flannel are lined with gray-printed silks.

Jumper Grows Longer and May Reach Knees

And still they come, these little three-piece frocks, each more delightful than the one before and each revealing some new and tricky detail that lends it distinction and unmistakable cachet.

In the later versions of this most popular mode the jumper is noticeably longer. In some instances reaching well to the knees. Below this the skirt is plaited or cut to flare in a circular fashion. Frequently the skirt is in contrast to the upper part and models which feature a jumper of plain flat crepe and a skirt of printed crepe de chine are unusually smart and attractive.

For midsummer country wear there are fascinating frocks made of wash silk in plaided or striped designs. In these the long jumper shows the stripes running crosswise, while on the skirt they are up and down. Others reveal a vertical arrangement of stripes on both jumper and skirts.

Chiffon and Lace Are Used Together or Alone

Chiffon and lace used together or alone; lace posed over chiffon and chiffon mounted on a foundation of cobwebby lace; triangular sections of lace forming godets and circular draperies of chiffon achieving the graceful flare—these are details which indicate an important development in the fashions of summer.

From Paris comes word that the combination of black lace and pink chiffon in a faint delicate shade is one of the smartest modes and that practically every designer of note included

Draped Sash Is Used at Milady's Waistline

Slowly but very surely the waistline has been creeping back, but its exact position has been the cause of much conjecture. Some have placed it far below the natural line, others have attempted tentatively to review the raised line; but from present indications the line sponsored by the well-known houses of Paris is a compromise between the two extremes. An interesting waistline is often achieved by the use of a wide sash draped closely about the hips with the top on a line with the natural waistline or by a narrow sash wound several times about the figure, frequently interlaced.