

Even in Death

by George Allan England, 1877-1936

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I.

HARSH, clamant, wild, the braying of the long tin horn that hung by a rawhide lashing from the tamarack on the American shore of the Madawaska ferry hurled echoes over the far reaches of the river.

At its second blaring call, imperatively eloquent of deadly haste, the door of the little ferry-shack swung wide and a girl looked out—a girl clad strangely and for rough toil, in faded blue overalls and a checkered mackinaw of felted stuff.

For a moment she stood there in the fading light of that chill October evening, peering out across the waters that slid away, cold, dark, foam-streaked, toward the tumbling whirls of Tobique Rapids, four miles below—the white-lashed,

thundering leap whose sullen roar never by day or night was still from shuddering through that northern air.

As she gazed away over the swift swirl of the current, straining her eyes at the far bank where the road plunged steeply to the water's edge, the winds of the north country fingered the black hair lying over her strong shoulders.

Keen-visioned, this girl; of hardy, vigorous race. One hand held open the cabin door, the other rested on her lithe hip. Behind her, lamp-shine from within silhouetted her sinuous outlines.

And ever the wind, wantoning with her bare, brown throat where the mackinaw gaped wide, flung her hair across her full bosom, modeled like a statue's.

Again the horn brayed its urgent call across the Rivière St. Jean; and now a far voice hailed—"Hal-loo-o-o! Hal-loo-o-o!" with wild insistence.

"Comin'! Comin'!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Seems like you're in a most amazin' hurry!"

Another horn, rust-red, dangled beside the ferry-house door. On this she blew a single, full-lunged blast.

Then, waiting only to pull a coarse-knit lumberman's cap over her shapely head—for the evening chill of the northland had already risen from the flood and breathed down from the spruce-cloaked mountains that raggedly notched the sky—she ran down the steep and curving road to where the cumbersome flat-boat nosed against its moorings on the bank.

Far overhead, striding like a colossus beside the road—the trail, rather, so rutted, stony, and narrow it was—the three huge, rough-hewn firs that formed a tripod for the hempen ferry-cable rose against the darkening sky.

To their iron-banded juncture stretched the manila, taut as a banjo-string, from its anchorage at the large steel ring-bolt let into a granite ledge.

Then, far across the river it sagged away, away, till again it mounted on the other bank to meet the companion tripod there.

The ferry-boat, fastened by two long ropes connecting with pulleys that ran upon this cable, lay in a little cove, safe from the incessant gripping tug of the current whose swift force, spent against rudderlike boards set at proper angles by rude levers, urged the craft ponderously back and forth.

As the girl swiftly cast off the moorings, jumped aboard and, taking a pike-pole from its iron hooks, flung her supple strength against it to shove off, the mellow and flutelike insistence of a whippoorwill's chant drifted from the haunch of Saddleback Mountain.

An eerie sound, that, there at the deserted fringes of the wild with nightfall glooming down; a warning of ill omen and of death in the northern lore; nevertheless, Kate Fergus gave no heed.

Daughter of the grim black forest, the forest resinous and ever murmuring, her blood the blood of pioneering breeds, for her the north woods held no fear nor any mystery.

"But I wish pa was home from Pointe au Bouleau, just the same," she murmured to herself, panting a little as the uncouth craft slowly yielded to the force of her rounded arms. "Seems kind of like I didn't have the strength I used to. Ever since they took 'Polyte and caged him up like a varmint, I ain't had no get-up-an'-get.

“Of course, ’Polyte hadn’t oughta dynamited Long Pool for mascalonge, and he hadn’t oughta shot that there game-warden through the leg. And he used to be mighty rough with me, off an’ on. But no matter! They didn’t have no right to lock him up, that way, and that’s a fact. It’s sure death, I cal’late, puttin’ one of us north people in the pen. And ’Polyte—he loved the woods, you bet. Loved ’em a’most as much as he used to love—me.

“Seems like I couldn’t get over it, nohow. I ain’t half the woman I was afore that!”

Firm breast and muscled shoulder leaned on the long pike-pole as she shoved off.

“Huh!” she muttered scornfully. “They had to catch him asleep, anyhow! Couldn’t take him in a fair an’ square fight, an’ they knowed it. ’Polyte could ha’ licked the bunch with one hand if he’d had a chance. I don’t care if he did use to get full sometimes, an’ once give me a black eye. Guess I deserved it that time, tryin’ to knife him ’cause I seen him kissin’ that there Céleste Laplante.

“It don’t matter if he did skip out an’ leave me—and me with nary ring! Don’t matter if I would shoot him down, now, same as pa would, if ever we set eyes on him again! He was a real man, anyhow, and I cal’late in a fair fight he could clean up any six o’ them white-livers that have got him penned. A man, ’Polyte was, and he loved me—once!”

She frowned blackly, there in the gathering dusk, as she poled the craft out into the river. Her crimson mouth grew straight as a knife-blade, when—the current now gripping the boat and tautening the pulley-ropes—she applied herself to the two windlasses that controlled them.

The forward rope she shortened, and let the aft one out. Then she dropped the boards; and now with no more effort on her part the ferry began to crawl across the flood. Unevenly the big wheels jerked along the hempen cable.

Now they lagged and stopped, now spun swiftly forward. The huge rope swayed and gave; but, stayed by the massive tripods, held the craft. And so it crept, slowly, steadily, toward the gloomy further shore.

Kate stood with the pike-pole in her capable hands, and listened to the gurgling swash of the current, which blended overtones with the dull roar of the rapids below.

Suddenly a motor-siren ca-hooted through the chill evening air, far down the river-road that edged the torrent. Wildly it screamed, seeming to shout tidings of strange, unusual speed.

Before its echoes died among the hills, once more the ferry-horn blared furiously. And then the hail rose once again:

“Hal-loo-o! Hal-loo-o-o there! Halloo-o-o-o-o-o-o!”

“I’ll take ’em both over at once,” murmured Kate. “That’ll save one trip, anyhow. Guess he can’t be in such a ’tarnal hurry he can’t wait five minutes. Though he seems to be in an all-fired to-do about somethin’ or other, that fella does!”

A kind of instinctive uneasiness pervaded her.

“What in time can be the matter o’ him, anyhow?” she questioned as she peered anxiously at the approaching shore. “Somebody sick or dyin’? But nobody’d cross over this way, into the big Temiscouata woods, if there was! They’d be goin’ to Fort Kent, more likely.

"I been at this here ferry, with pa, six years, and I don't recollect no such 'tarnation hurryin', to cross. New Brunswick's all right, but most folks can wait a few minutes to get out o' the States. What's up now, I'd like to know?"

Again the siren yelled, startlingly loud as a slatch of wind bore its harsh note to her ears. Kate looked down stream.

For a moment she thought to glimpse a vaguely shining glow, as if high-powered electric lights of a car shooting up a grade had cast some reflection on the low-hung mists that lagged along the valley of the Rivière St. Jean.

But all at once this vanished; and so she stood there wondering, her back against the high board siding of the boat.

Now, already, she had nearly reached the Maine shore. Slowly and still more slowly the complaining wheels lagged along the cable as the speed slackened. Kate strode to the forward end of the boat, pole in hand, to make a proper landing.

"Hello! Who's there?" she called. "Who's wantin' to cross?" For her keen eyes, sweeping the road that plunged to the water, detected no one. "Hello, hello!"

No answer.

Puzzled, she laid hold on the lever to raise the current-board so it should not drag upon the shelving bottom.

"Who blew that there horn?" she demanded. "Anybody here?"

All at once a crouching figure rose from the dense alders fringing the stream. Once more the siren screeched, nearer now by a mile.

"Zat you, Kate?" hoarsely cried the man on the bank, his voice aquiver with feverish haste.

She found no word, but stared blankly in the gathering gloom. This voice from the shadows touched every nerve. Clutching the pole, she peered with wide eyes at the vague form now plashing out into the river toward the drifting boat.

"Set your boards de odder way!" cried the man, already waist-deep. "Let out your forrard rope! Send her back, *vite, vite!*"

The girl's heart lashed wildly. Motionless and mute she stared, her face now tense and pallid in the wan dusk. Then she drew up the steel-shod pole, like a harpoon, as though to stab.

"You—who—what's the matter? she stammered. "What is it?"

With a tremendous splash the man plunged, swam a few powerful strokes and reached the boat. He gripped the hinged end-board and drew himself up, streaming like a water-rat.

"Quick!" he panted. "Dey're after me! *Vite!*"

She seized him by the dripping arm, wrenched him around, and peered into his face. As in a daze she saw his close-cropped, bullet-shaped head, his wild eyes, his sodden stripes of black and gray.

"Dey're after me!" he chattered between dancing teeth. He wrenched her hand away. "*Sacré bleu!* Let go my arm, you! After me, an' I ain't got no gun, *moé!* Dem boards; dat rope—For God's sake, quick!"

"Polyte!" she choked, and staggered backward, clutching at her heart.

II.

OF a sudden, a lull in the wind made audible the ripping exhaust of the onrushing car. And, as it swept around a bend in the road half a mile to westward, the glare of the search-light shot the thin mist with white and ghostly radiance.

The siren, wailing now in long, continuous dissonance, racketed across the river, summoning the ferry.

Cursing in bitter "habitant" French, he snatched the pike-pole from Kate's hand, and with a maniac's strength plunged it into the muddy bottom. The boat's drift checked, it hung a moment motionless, hauling against its taut pulley-ropes.

And in that moment the girl, voiceless still, lived, as it seemed to her, a lifetime. She comprehended nothing. How this miracle had come to pass she knew not.

All she knew was that this furtive, fleeing man; this man gaunt, gray-faced, gray-striped with the shameful garb of the felon; this cowering man, a million miles removed from the bronze-cheeked and quick-eyed 'Polyte Garneau of other days, lay in her power now.

Though he had fled to her in his last and bitter extremity, she gloried that she held him in the hollow of her hand. And, with her face ablaze, she sprang at him and snatched him from the windlass, whither he had run.

"No, you don't!" she gasped. "What d' you mean, comin' to me now, after I been through hell? An' you—you got the nerve to come to me?"

Eh? Quoi? " he stammered, trying in vain to shake her off. "You ain't—ain't goin' for geeve me up? You, Kate—you ain't goin' for—"

A sudden brightening of the glow, then a dazzling glare as the pursuing motor swung steeply down the last hill to the river, struck her speechless. The wailing of the siren seemed the screeching of a million fiends, tearing her heart-strings, numbing all her wrath and bitter hate.

"Va donc!" he cried savagely, facing her. "Go on, kill me!" And now by the waxen light she saw his eyes—those eyes which, waking or in sleep, had never ceased to haunt her. "Kill me, if you want to. But I tell you, I ain't goin' back! Never, so help me God! I'm out t'ree day, Kate, starvin'. Kill one man for get away. If dey take me now, I go up for life. But dey ain't goin' for take me! Bon Dieu, never! Never!"

He flung a hand at the blazing cone of light, now sweeping with wild lurches down the rocky and precipitous road to the ferry.

"Not dat, Kate; not dat. One bullet—all right. Down in de rivièrè—all right. But not dat, not dat!"

A wild hail shivered down the dusk. And vicious in its anger, a sudden, silvery spurt of water leaped to spray beside the flat-boat. Then the smack of a rifle cracked from hill to wooded hill.

The girl's fingers, gripping like steel, ridged the flesh on his wrist.

"Lemme go!" snarled the habitant, hurling her away. "Dem boards—time enough yet! Dey can't hit nothin' till dey stop de machine. Quick!"

The barriers of her hate swept downward in shattered fragments as the flood-tides of memory—of all that had been—surged over her.

Another water-jet, flicked upward by a second bullet, leaped into the air. Another crackling shot startled the gloom.

Kate sprang to the lever.

"Out with the rope, 'Polyte!" she cried. "I'll drop the boards!"

As she slid them, splashing, into the black waters that foamed and quarreled around them 'Polyte struck up the ratchet. The windlass-wheel spun madly. Out whirled the rope, letting the aft end of the boat sag down-stream.

Creaking, the pulley-wheels began to turn again dragged unwillingly along the cable as the heavy boat, caught by the current, once more trolled back toward the Canadian shore.

'Polyte, his white face blazing with rage and hate, snatched up the pike-pole again and drove it to the river-bottom, pushing till the veins swelled in his powerful neck.

"Peste!"

The steel point no longer found a hold. With a blasphemy he flung it down, then shook his fist at the receding bank. Yells answered him from shore, and shots began to crackle viciously.

"Lay down, 'Polyte!" the girl entreated, plucking at his sleeve. "Look — see there!"

She pointed where dark shadows, leaping from the car which now had stopped close by the water's edge not two hundred yards distant, moved on the muddy bank with angry, impotent shouts.

He only laughed like a madman, and thrust her away.

Stabs of fire pierced the evening. Splinters flicked up from the rail; steel-jacketed bullets slapped into the black waters and skittered swiftly away. Others zoomed past—wasps of death, potent of sting.

Blinking, with the woman fearless beside him, 'Polyte stared back full in the eye of that pitiless search-light.

"Rotten, you are!" jeered the convict through hollowed palms. "You pas capab' hit de balloons! Nom de Dieu! If I have a gun now, me—"

"First thing," cried Kate, "we'd bust that light! Then—them skunks! Lay down, I tell you. Idiot! Lay down!"

She dragged him to the floor of the slow-moving scow; her strength surpassed his now, as they struggled together.

"Ouay—you been right," he admitted, panting. "Only I like better to face 'em, *moé!*"

Beside him she crouched—beside him—between him and the sheriffs. Her arm circled his shoulder; her breast was shield for his.

"Polyte! You come back to me, anyhow! We're together again, an'—"

"Shut up, you!" he growled with an oath. "Lemme 'lone! All I want is get across de rivière, an' den—"

"I'll get you over, 'Polyte. We'll be there in a couple o' minutes now. You can shift into some of pa's duds. Afore they can get a bateau an' cross—with this here current and all—you can be over t'other side of Saddleback and away, away!"

"An' then?"

"Break for the shack up beyond Restigouche, the huntin' camp where you an' I—you know—you remember! I'll stake you, 'Polyte. I'll get grub to you some way. Take pa's rifle an' belt an' knife. Head for the Saguenay! They'll never get you there! An' sometime maybe I—we—"

With a sudden lurch, a sickening quiver of abandonment, the great cable fell slack. Into the tumbling waters it splashed. Both pulleys dropped.

The boat, yawing violently around, began to drift down-stream. Through the useless wheels the cable swiftly ran as it lay writhing in the sluicing river.

"They've cut—they've cut the cable!"

Shuddering with horror, the girl's wail rose on the murk.

"The cable, 'Polyte—an' Tobique Rapids only four miles below!"

III.

THE outlaw burst into a laugh as the boat slewed down-current; laughed like a maniac and staggered to his feet.

"Eh, *canaille!*" he howled, shaking his fist with frightful imprecations in his patois French, while Kate stared, dumb with horror. "Let her go! We mak' good finish, anyhow. No more de cell for mine. No more rottin' in de cell!"

"Listen, 'Polyte! Listen!"

The girl beside him clutched him desperately, her eyes aflame, her mackinaw flapping in the wind that swept the turbulent floods. Out of the search-light now, safe from the rifle-fire, they stood there peering.

Her breath was hot on his wasted and unshaven face, so wanly pale and haggard. His fevered eyes dimly saw hers, dark, big and eager in the gloom.

Suddenly she took his prison-ravaged head in both her hands, and pressed a burning kiss upon his mouth.

"Here, you!" he growled. "Stop dat dam' nonsense!"

He pushed her roughly back and wiped his lips savagely on his dripping sleeve of gray and black.

"Listen to me, 'Polyte!"

"Eh, *quoi?* W'at?"

"I'm still a lovin' you, 'Polyte—lovin' you, even after all you done."

"Shut up, shut up, you!"

"No, I won't shut up! I'm goin' to tell you; I want you to know it. If—if, we don't get through this here, why—afore we go, kiss me, 'Polyte. Just once. Once more again, the way you used to!"

"Hell, no! Stop dat, can't you?"

He would have struck her down, but her circling arms impeded him.

"Polyte, I forgive you. No matter what you done, it's all right. All right every way. I'm goin' to stick. Nothin' can take me away. I was with you an' belonged to you, livin'—only to you, nobody else! I'll go with you, dyin'. All the way, 'Polyte—all the way, to the end!"

Stupid and brutalized, he peered at her in silence. Then he stared about him—at the swift, dun water and the sliding shore, now barely silhouetted against the darker hills that rimmed the sullen sky.

Suddenly he passed a hand over his eyes and blinked. He seemed to be taking fresh thought and new decision. The exultation of having cheated the sheriffs had died in his veins. And now the distant threnody of the rapids, borne to his ears on the wind, stirred him to new endeavor.

"*Tais-toi!* Shut up dat nonsense!" he growled with an oath. "You ain't got no sweeps aboard here, *hein?*"

"Nary sweep, and I'm glad of it! It's good that I ain't. Now you an' me can finish together. *I ain't scared to! Are you?*"

"Huh! W'at you mean now?"

Her eyes were filled with infinite yearning.

"Leggo my arm! You're crazy! W'at for you hang to me dat way?"

She looked at him there in the dusk, silent a moment, while the great waters leaped and laughed in their wild strength.

"We'll go together!" she cried suddenly, her voice quivering with terrible eagerness.

"*Dieu!* No! Go not'in! I'm goin' swim!"

"Polyte!"

"Eh?"

"I've gave you everything I ever had to give—gave you my own self, 'Polyte, and my love. And you never give me even a ring! Now do this for me, to pay for it—kiss me, just once, and let's see if we cant scare up a prayer, somehow or 'nother."

"*Va chez l'diab'!* I'm goin' to get t'rough this, *moé!* Get to land, I tell you, if you don' butt in. Crazy, you! Shut up now, an' lemme t'ink!"

He shook himself free from the girl with a curse; and now, clinging to the rail, peered at the Canadian shore, drifting back and away with terrifying speed. Louder now and ever more ominous the thunders of the long rapids rose to his ears.

"You can't make it, nohow, 'Polyte," the girl urged again close beside him, luring him eagerly to non-resistance and to the death she burned to share with him. "Nobody could live in this here current, and—"

"*Ferme ta gueule!*" he howled, raising his fist in menace, while the boat reeled drunkenly down-stream.

"No, I won't keep still!" she retorted. "Looka here, 'Polyte! Even if you did make the shore in them striped clothes, what chance would you have? First woodsman you met he'd nail you. An' without me—me to get grub to you up in our shack on Restigouche —"

He menaced her so savagely with upraised fist that she held a moment's silence.

"Shut up an' lemme t'ink, *nom de Dieu!*" he screamed at her with furious imprecations.

But she would not be denied her plea. She seized his hand.

"Polyte," she said, "you'll go with me?"

"No, by God!"

"Then listen!"

"Huh?"

"See here! Give me them striped clothes. If you're bound to try for it, give 'em to me, and take these here clothes o' mine!"

"W'at?"

"Give me the stripes. Take the mackinaw an' overalls. Maybe we can both make it. I'm with you, anyhow, to the finish. If we don't get through, no matter. If we do, maybe if I'm in them stripes I can fool 'em for a while—help throw 'em off the

track, so you can get clean away. If they shoot me, all right. Take my duds, anyhow take 'em, quick!"

Stupefied, with still uncomprehending eyes, he stared. With ratlike suspicion he snarled at her, his teeth bare.

"Huh! You tryin' for play some trick on me now, *sacré tonnerre?*"

"Polyte! Me—play a trick on you?"

"If I t'ink you try, I choke you wit' dese two hands an' t'row you in de rivière myself!"

Her arms went round his neck, and in a sudden abandon she kissed the pale, unshaven lips.

"Trust me, 'Polyte! Take my clothes—give me yourn! There may be some show yet, even now!"

He thrust her away, and for a moment stood considering, while the boat, with ever-accelerating speed, swung down the last long reach of the smooth and crawling swirl where the waters paused a moment, hesitant, before the last mad plunge.

Gnawing his nails, his face a terrible gray, eyes bestial, shoulders heavy and hulking, he stood there silent.

"I cal'late we won't get through, 'Polyte," said the girl calmly, as though she had been at home and had spoken of the weather. A serene joy vibrated in her deepening voice. "It don't matter either way. We'll be together, whether we do or don't. Both of us together, 'Polyte—together at last an' always!"

He did not even reply. Clutched on the rail of the lurching scow, he stared at the shore, gaging his chances.

As the boat was driving now he knew it promised to slide over to the northern side of the long reach that ended at Crag Point. If so, it might go down the Canadian rapids, where some few craft had been known to live. It might conceivably reach Kamouraska Whirlpool, where it would be either grounded or swung close to shore. There might still be hope—perhaps—who could say?

Savagely he whirled on the girl, and ripped his stripes, away with eager haste.

"Quick, damn you!" he shouted. "Your clo'es ! *Vite! Vite!*"

IV.

As the scow slued into the oily pause above the rapids, into the black and bubbling smoothness, overhung by drifting vapors, through which the soul-shaking reverberation bellowed, 'Polyte clad now in overalls and mackinaw—cursed the big boat with exceeding bitterness.

"If I had a canoe, me—if I had a lumber-jack's bateau—I make it, sure! But wit dis—"

The girl, in convict garb, broke his thought.

"Remember, I'm goin' with you to the end! To the very end, no matter what happens!"

He deigned no answer save a growl, and turned from her to stare at the sickening downward slide of foam ahead, dim in the murk. Came a moment's

silence while the scow, drifting, turning, neared the slant where the dark waters, seeming to stretch out as though elastic, ran forward to the final plunge.

“One kiss, 'Polyte, an' then—”

“*Va chez l' diab'!* We're goin' now!”

Despite his rage, he could not shake her loose. She clung to him—not at all in fear, but in a kind of wondrous exaltation. Her breast was warm against him. Her white face burned with inward fire; and, though she made no sound, her lips were moving as the flat boat plunged.

And now he fought her off; he beat her down, away from him.

“Eh, quoi? You want to drown me?” he spat at her. “*Va!* Drown, you, if you lak'! I—I goin' for live, me!”

A moment the outlaw thought perhaps the clumsy scow might breast the fury of the rapids and sluice down to safety in the whirlpool below. A moment, though it slung, reeling, over the steps and ledges of the roaring steep, it lived. Across it cold and creaming purges of water burst.

It staggered, half capsized, righted again as it leaped swiftly down.

Through the gloom shrilled the convict's snarling cry:

“Drown, you, if you want! *I goin' for live!*”

“Polyte! For God's sake, look—”

Transfixed on a fang of granite, the old hulk burst to fragments. Over it a sudden wall of water stormed—loud, icy, black. Only a second the shattered planks still swayed upon that rocky tooth. Then, all dissolving in a mad, wild flux, they slued away and vanished in the inky cataract.

Tumbled, tossed, battered, now submerged and strangling, now flung up to air again, now battling with foam that mocked him, with splintered planks that whirled, eluding him; now once more plunged among chill, swift deeps, 'Polyte lashed out against the flood.

Down, down he weltered—deaf, dumb, furious.

“I live! I live!” he realized; and that alone. “*I live!*”

A sudden spew of waters flung him round, behind a cragged spur of rock. And all at once, as he lurched onto the stone that tore his palms, up from the tumbling foam a white hand rose beside him—rose and clutched him—clutched and held.

“Her? Again?” he panted. “*Bon Dieu!* I cannot get away?”

Savagely he struck. But the hand-grip would not break.

“Let go! You drown me!” he howled, while over him a chilling tumble of wild waters broke to spray.

He struck again—struck a white, dumb face that for an instant yearned beside him. By the last gleam of light that wanly pierced a cloud-rift at the sky-line he saw the eyelids flutter.

One second the girl's eyes looked at him. Then the bruised lips moved faintly, as though they would have smiled. The eyes closed. Back fell the head. The hand released its hold.

And the great rapids, clamoring with delight, swept the rock bare; while over it the chill, exultant torrent burst in thunderous jubilation.

V.

AT flaming break of day—day that blazed red across the mottled evergreen, the October chrome and crimson of the great North Woods—a man, naked and bruised, yet whole, sat on a gray, moss-bearded boulder in a sheltered cove by Kamouraska Whirlpool.

To right of him, a fern-spattered cliff. To left, a point densely shagged with spruce and tamarack. Gazing about him, the man smiled.

“Safe, moé!” he muttered. “Dey ain’t nevair find me here. I rest up one day. Hedgehog I catch easy, an’ eat. To-night, away for Saddleback! One day, two day t’rough Temiscouata woods—den let dem look! I laugh, me! I give dem all ha! ha!”

Beside him on the rock, where the first rays of the rising sun struck them, lay sodden clothes—faded blue overalls and a rough mackinaw.

“Dey dry soon,” said the man. “Now I swim. It will mak’ me strong again. If I only had *tabac*, one good smoke should fix me. But I have none. Bah! What matter? I live, I live!”

“I said she was no good to me no more; but I was mistake, *moé*. *Zut!* Never can tell. She *was* some use, after all, *hein?* Her overall an’ mackinaw will help. Best of all, she is gone. Ah! It is all right. *Bon Dieu*, w’at fortunel!”

He spoke in a bastard mixture of bad English and worse French, murmuring to himself as he sat there naked in the comforting sunshine on the big rock by the backwater of the mighty whirlpool that circled endlessly beyond the point.

“Some cut, some bruise; it is not’ing,” said he, feeling of his body, looking himself over for damage. “My heel cut, my shoulder black an’ blue; one finger broke, I guess maybe. Eh, not’ing? *Quelle chance!* W’at luck!”

Suddenly he got to his feet, poised there on the rock a moment—a lithe, splendid figure of a man, fine drawn with fasting and labor so that every steel-band muscle ridged the smooth brown skin—and dived head first into the clear, green water.

Up in a burst of foam he rose. He struck out strongly and easily, his body sliding through the cove with supple grace. Into the air he blew spray, rolled over, dived again, lay on his back and floated; then wallowed lazily along, drawing life and strength again from the cold waters that had all his life been home to him.

Now resting, now snatching at a chance scarlet leaf that floated on the surface, he gradually worked down along the wooded point toward the billowing current of the great whirlpool itself. Refreshed, soothed by the invigorating exercise, he laughed aloud in very wantonness.

“Safe me!” he cried, and laughed again, and splashed the waters in an abandon of joy. No more the cell, the silence, the dark, the long torment of confinement, bitterer than death to his free spirit. No more that living hell—no more the terror of captivity!

Life now, and the green woods—the camp-fire and the trail; the big, cold stars, unwinking in the frost-black sky; the blazing sunrise and the purple night; the waters and the wilderness; the blessed haven of the north!

“*Quelle chance! Quelle chance!*”

And so he neared the point. Then, of a sudden, he stopped swimming. A moment he stared at something, drifting there in the big vortex. A moment, wide-eyed and fearful, he peered. And his lax limbs, refusing their office, lay inert in the translucent flood.

Toward him the drifting object eddied, steadily, surely, with a kind of calm assurance. Fascinated, he could not retreat; but stared with terror-stricken eyes.

And so the thing won close to him; and now he saw it clearly—saw gray stripes and black, wide-floating hair that spread upon the waters—saw a white face, unseeing, calm, dead—

Inexorably the body floated toward him. He could not move, nor could he cry his terror. Then all at once, as it came close, his lips parted in a bubbling gasp of fear.

Choking, he thrust it from him, out into the current again. And with swift strokes, frantic and lashing, daring never look behind, he swam for the big rock again.

“Ah! Ah, mother of God! Have mercy!”

Just as the outlaw turned to flee this weltering terror something stirred in the thick and close-knit undergrowth of tamarack and moosewood. Off from the northward trail that skirted the Rivière St. Jean, from Pointe au Bouleau to the ferry, a man came pushing toward the river. An old man of the forest breed, with coonskin cap, high moccasins, and—in the crook of his right arm—a long squirrel-rifle.

“Huh? What now?” he muttered, listening acutely. “All-fired sing’lar, I must say!”

Through the thicket he broke, just below the big rock, and for a moment stood peering about him. Then all at once his plinking eye caught sight of the clothes laid there to dry.

He started forward, lips parted under the sweep of his grizzled mustache, eyes narrowed amid a pucker of myriad wrinkles. In a moment he had reached the clothes. His hand advanced to take them up — but touched them not. Instead, with a grunt of astonishment, the old man froze to motionless attention.

“Huh? What’s this? *Hers?*”

Dazed for a moment, he stared about him. He blinked, trying to understand.

“Her duds? My gal’s duds *here?*”

A splash, as of rapid swimming, struck his ear. With the instinct of the woodsman, he dropped silently to his knees, peered over the rough shoulder of the rock—and saw the head of a man in the pool—a close-shaven, bullet-shaped head, cutting a rapid V as it drew near the bank.

“Cuss me if I understand!” muttered the old ferryman, recoiling. “But it’s mighty cur’us. It’s wrong, some’res; all wrong. I—I gotta see what this here means, I cal’late!”

More silently than he had come, he slid back through the undergrowth and knelt there, watching. On a high branch above a chipmunk made oration as it threw down bits of bark, but the old man’s eyes held steady. And the long rifle, laid through a moose-wood crotch, “covered” the rock with grim and deadly menace.

On, on swam the outlaw, his body gleaming with ivory flashes through the waters of the pool. Now he had reached the shelving bottom; now, clambering ashore, he was crawling up the boulder.

He gained its crest, and turned and stood there, wet and glistening in the first rays of the sun. A moment he peered, as though to see some object floating on the bosom of the whirlpool. Then all at once he laughed.

"Ha, ha! Fool me!" he exclaimed. "What for I be afraid of dat? It is gone—gone down de riviêre, forever! And I live. I live an' I am free!"

On his splendid body, tall, lithe, muscular, the sun struck out prismatic color-glints from the crystal drops that trickled slowly down.

And as he stood there, he raised both sinewy arms on high, and laughed again—laughed toward the sky, the river and the forest, laughed toward the wilderness, laughed in the very joy of life untrammelled.

"Bon Dieu! he cried. "Free, free! Dey pas capab' for keep me. She—she could not hold me! She say, in life I belong to dem, in eternity I belong to her. Ha, a lie! I have escape dem all. Dey have lose me—and she, she is gone. Liberté, libérté!"

Back in the thicket the old father cuddled the rifle to his leathery cheek, unshaven, wrinkled, wan. Lovingly he patted its stock; and as he sighted down the barrel he smiled.

"The heart," he muttered. "Nothin' but the heart will do for *me!*" Then he cried: "*Polyte!*"

Round swung the naked brute, magnificent in his virility, a sudden terror on his face. The rifle spat.

Blotched on the left breast, vivid on that gleaming skin, the wound blossomed.

No outcry made the felon, but crumpled silently forward, fell like an empty sack and slid down the grim flank of the rock. On his supple body, the ridges of the granite creased long lines. The old man, still kneeling in the thicket, heard the slither of the body as it vanished—then a sullen splash.

He stood up, as though arising from prayer, his face beatified; and once more thrust his way through to the boulder.

Already the undercurrent in the cove had borne the body off and away toward the larger swirling of the pools outside. It wallowed onward, onward, sank, rose, turned, and ever drifted toward the river.

The father, standing motionless on the rock beside the garments of his daughter, leaned crossed arms on the muzzle of the long rifle, and watched in perfect silence. Silence held the whole wood. Even the chipmunk, far aloft, was still.

Two minutes he looked, then three, and neither moved nor spoke.

All at once, as the body swung out, out by the wooded point where rippled the strong current of the whirlpool, he saw another form—a white, dead face—and black hair that weltered wide upon the foam.

A little eddy sucked the outlaw under for a moment. When he reappeared, he was close beside the body of the girl who had so loved him that life and death and the dark gates themselves had not prevailed against that love.

A minute, the two seemed hesitant. Then the whirlpool took them—took them, together; and, hidden by the wooded point, they vanished from the old man's peering eyes.

He stood there yet a little space, his lips curved by a strange and silent smile. Then, kneeling by the clothes, he kissed the rifle with deep reverence.

And with his old, old face hidden in both hands that trembled only now when all their work was done, he knelt there on the rock in the fresh October sunlight of the coming day.

