

TIM CARROLL

THERE stood at the door Perault, Josie, and Marion, waiting for Shock and the Old Prospector to drive up. The contrast between the two men in the buckboard was striking. The one, a young man with muscular frame, a strong, fresh face innocent of worldly wisdom and marked by the frankness of an unspoiled faith in men and things; the other, an old man, tall, slight, with a face worn and weary, delicately featured and kindly enough, but with a mask of inscrutable reserve tinged with that distrust of men and things that comes of a bitter experience of the world's falsities. For fifty years Walter Mowbray had looked out of the piercing black eyes that gleamed like coals of fire through his pallid face upon a world that had continuously allured and mocked him. The piercing eyes were those of an enthusiast, not to say fanatic. The fire in them still burned deep and bright. The indomitable spirit, refusing to accept defeat, still lived and hoped with a persistence at once extraordinary and pathetic.

A gleam of light shot across his pale impassive face as his eyes fell upon his daughter who, in the presence of a stranger, shrank back behind Josie. He beckoned her to him.

"Come, my daughter," he said in a clear, musical voice.

Then she forgot her shyness and threw herself at him.

"Oh, father!" she cried in a low, smothered voice, her whole frame shaking as she clung to him.

For a single instant the old man held her to him, his pale face once more illumined by that momentary gleam, then loosening her arms from his neck, he said in calm tones, in which mingled surprise, raillery, almost rebuke, "Why, my child, this is indeed an extraordinary welcome home."

At the tone the girl shrank back, and with marvellous self-control regained her ordinary quiet manner.

"You are hurt, father," she said so quietly that her father glanced with quick surprise at her. He hardly knew as yet this daughter of his, who had come to him only two months ago, and whom for fifteen years he had not seen.

"A mere touch," he answered carelessly. "A broken collar-bone, inconvenient, but neither painful nor dangerous, and an additional touch of rheumatism, which, though extremely annoying, will prove only temporary. After a few days of your nursing we shall be able to resume our march, eh, Perault?"

"Oui! bon! dat so," said Perault, grinning his eager acquiescence. "De ole boss he stop for noting."

"But now we shall get with all speed between the blankets, my girl. Hot blankets, Josie, eh?"

"Oui, certainement, tout suite!" cried Josie, darting into the house.

The old man began carefully to raise himself off the seat of the buckboard.

"Ha!" catching his breath. "Rather sharp, that, Mr. Macgregor. Oh! I forgot. Pardon me," he continued, with fine, old-time courtesy. "Permit me to introduce you to my daughter. Marion, this is Mr. Macgregor, but for whose timely and heroic assistance I might even now be tumbling about at the fitful fancy of the Black Dog. We both have cause to be grateful to him."

With a surprised cry the girl who, during her father's words, had been looking at him with a white face and staring eyes, sprang towards Shock, who was standing at the pony's head, seized his hand between hers, kissed it passionately, flung it away, and returned hurriedly to her father's side.

"It was nothing at all," said Shock, when he had recovered from his confusion. "Any one would have done it, and besides——"

"Not many men would have had the strength to do it," interrupted the Old Prospector, "and few men the nerve to try. We will not forget it, sir, I trust."

"Besides," continued Shock, addressing the girl, "I owe something to your father, for I was helplessly lost when he found me."

With a wave of his hand the old man brushed aside Shock's statement as of no importance.

"We shall hope for opportunity to show our gratitude, Mr. Macgregor," he said, his clear voice taking

a deeper tone than usual. "Now," he continued briskly, "let us proceed with this somewhat serious business of getting into blankets. Just lift my feet round, my daughter. Ah! The long ride has stiffened the joints. Oh! One moment, my dear." The old man's face was wet and ghastly pale, and his breath came in quick gasps. "A difficult operation, Mr. Macgregor," he said apologetically, "but we shall accomplish it in time. Wait, my dear, I fancy I shall do better without your assistance. At least, I shall be relieved of uncertainty as to responsibility for my pains. An important consideration, Mr. Macgregor. Uncertainty adds much to the sum of human suffering. Now, if I can swing my legs about. Ah-h-h! Most humiliating experience, Mr. Macgregor, the arriving at the limit of one's strength. But one not uncommon in life, and finally inevitable," continued the old philosopher, only the ghastly hue of his mask-like face giving token of the agony he was enduring.

Then Shock came to him.

"Let me carry you," he said. "It will give you less pain, I am sure."

"Well, it can hardly give more."

"Put your arms about my neck. There. Now don't try to help yourself."

"Most sound advice. I surrender," said the old man, his philosophic tone in striking contrast to his ghastly face. "But one most difficult to accept."

Gently, easily, as if he had been a child, Shock lifted him from the buckboard, carried him into the

house and laid him upon his bed. The old man was faint with his pain.

"Thank you, sir—that was distinctly easier. You are—a mighty man. Perault! I think—I——"

His voice faded away into silence and his head fell back. The girl sprang forward with a cry of fear, but Shock was before her.

"The brandy, Perault! Quick!" he said. "Don't fear, Miss Mowbray, he will soon be all right."

The girl glanced into Shock's face and at once grew calm again. Soon, under the stimulus of the brandy, the old man revived.

"Ah!" he said, drawing a long breath and looking with a faint apologetic smile at the anxious faces about, "pardon my alarming you. I am getting old. The long drive and the somewhat severe pain weakened me, I fear."

"Indeed, you have no need to apologise. It is more than I could have stood," said Shock in genuine admiration.

"Thank you," said the old man. "Now we shall get into blankets. I have the greatest faith in blankets, sir; the greatest faith. I have rolled myself in wet blankets in mid-winter when suffering from a severe cold, and have come forth perfectly recovered. You remember the Elk Valley, Perault?"

"Oui, for sure. I say dat tam ole boss blam-fool. Hees cough! cough! ver' bad. Nex' mornin', by gar! he's all right."

"And will be again soon, Perault, my boy, by the help of these same blankets," said the old man con-

fidently. "But how to negotiate the business is the question now."

"Let me try, sir. I have had some little experience in helping men with broken bones and the like," said Shock.

"You're at least entitled to confidence, Mr. Macgregor," replied the Old Prospector. "Faith is the reflection of experience. I resign myself into your hands."

In half an hour, with Perault's assistance, Shock had the old man between heated blankets, exhausted with pain, but resting comfortably.

"Mr. Macgregor," said the old man, taking Shock by the hand, "I have found that life sooner or later brings opportunity to discharge every obligation. Such an opportunity I shall eagerly await."

"I have done no more than any man should," replied Shock simply. "And I am only glad to have had the chance."

"Chance!" echoed the Old Prospector. "I have found that we make our chances, sir. But now you will require lodging. I regret I cannot offer you hospitality. Perault, go down to the Stopping Place, present my compliments to Carroll and ask him to give Mr. Macgregor the best accommodation he has. The best is none too good. And, Perault, we shall need another pony and a new outfit. In a few days we must be on the move again. See Carroll about these things and report. Meantime, Mr. Macgregor, you will remain with us to tea."

"Carroll!" exclaimed Perault in a tone of dis-

gust. "Dat man no good 'tall. I get you one pony cheap. Dat Carroll he's one beeg tief."

The little Frenchman's eyes glittered with hate.

"Perault," replied the Old Prospector quietly, "I quite understand you have your own quarrel with Carroll, but these are my affairs. Carroll will not cheat me."

"Ah! Bah!" spat Perault in a vicious undertone of disgust. "De ole boss he blam-fool. He not see noting." And Perault departed, grumbling and swearing, to make his deal with Carroll.

Timothy Carroll was a man altogether remarkable, even in that country of remarkable men. Of his past history little was known. At one time a Hudson Bay trader, then a freighter. At present he "ran" the Loon Lake Stopping Place and a livery stable, took contracts in freight, and conducted a general trading business in horses, cattle—anything, in short, that could be bought and sold in that country. A man of powerful physique and great shrewdness, he easily dominated the community of Loon Lake. He was a curious mixture of incongruous characteristics. At the same time many a poor fellow had found in him a friend in sickness or "in hard luck," and by his wife and family he was adored. His tenderness for little lame Patsy was the marvel of all who knew the terrible Tim Carroll. He had a furious temper, and in wrath was truly terrifying, while in matters of trade he was cool, cunning, and unscrupulous. Few men had ever dared to face his rage, and few had ever worsted him in a "deal." No wonder Perault,

who had experienced both the fury of his rage and the unscrupulousness of his trading methods, approached him with reluctance. But, though Perault had suffered at the hands of the big Irishman, the chief cause of his hatred was not personal. He knew, what many others in the community suspected, that for years Carroll had systematically robbed and had contributed largely to the ruin of his "old boss." Walter Mowbray was haunted by one enslaving vice. He was by temperament and by habit a gambler. It was this vice that had been his ruin. In the madness of his passion he had risked and lost, one fatal night in the old land, the funds of the financial institution of which he was the trusted and honoured head. In the agony of his shame he had fled from his home, leaving in her grave his broken-hearted wife, and abandoning to the care of his maiden sister his little girl of a year old, and had sought, in the feverish search for gold, relief from haunting memory, redemption for himself, and provision for his child. In his prospecting experiments success had attended him. He developed in a marvellous degree the prospector's instinct, for instinct it appeared to be; and many of the important prospects, and some of the most valuable mines in Southern British Columbia, had been discovered by him.

It was at this point that Carroll took a hand. Acting in collusion with the expert agent for the British American Gold and Silver Mining Company, he had bought for hundreds of dollars and sold for thousands the Old Prospector's claims. Not that the old man

had lost that financial ability or that knowledge of human nature that had given him his high place in former days, but he was possessed of a dream of wealth so vast that ordinary fortunes shrank into insignificance in comparison. He had fallen under the spell of an Indian tale of a lost river of fabulous wealth in gold that disturbed all his sense of value. In one of his prospecting tours he had come upon an old Indian hunter, torn by a grizzly and dying. For weeks he nursed the old Indian in his camp with tender but unavailing care. In gratitude, the dying man had told of the lost river that flowed over rocks and sands sown with gold. In his young days the Indian had seen the river and had gathered its "yellow sand and stones"; in later years, however, when he had come to know something of the value of this "yellow sand and stones" he had sought the river, but in vain. A mountain peak in one vast slide had filled up the valley, diverted the course of the river, and changed the whole face of the country. For many summers the Indian had sought with the unfaltering patience of his race the bed of the lost river, and at length, that very summer, he had discovered it. Deep down in a side canyon in the bed of a trickling brook he had found "yellow sand and stones" similar to those of the lost river of his youth. As the dying Indian poured out from his buckskin bag the glittering sand and rusty bits of rock, there entered into the Old Prospector the terrible gold-lust that for thirteen years burned as a fever in his bones and lured him on

through perils and privations, over mountains and along canyons, making him insensible to storms and frosts and burning suns, and that even now, old man as he was, worn and broken, still burned with unquenchable flame.

Under the spell of that dream of wealth he found it easy to pay his "debts of honour" to Carroll with mining claims, which, however valuable in themselves, were to him paltry in comparison with the wealth of the Lost River, to which every year brought him nearer, and which one day he was sure he would possess. That Carroll and his confederate robbed him he knew well enough, but finding Carroll useful to him, both in the way of outfitting his annual expeditions and in providing means for the gratifying of his life-long gambling passion, by which the deadly monotony of the long winter days and nights was relieved, he tolerated while he scorned him and his villainy.

Not so Perault, whose devotion to his "ole boss" was equalled only by his hate of those who robbed while they derided him, and he set himself to the task of thwarting their nefarious schemes. For this Perault had incurred the savage wrath of Carroll, and more than once had suffered bodily injury at his hands.

The Stopping Place was filled with men from the ranges, freighters from the trail, and the nondescript driftwood that the waves of civilisation cast up upon those far-away shores of human society. With all of them Perault was a favourite. Carroll was out

when he entered. On all sides he was greeted with exclamations of surprise, pleasure, and curiosity, for all knew that he had set out upon another "annual fool hunt," as the Prospector's yearly expedition was called. "Hello, Rainy, what's happened?" "Got yer gold dust?" "Goin' to retire, Rainy?" "The Old Prospector struck his river yit?" greeted him on every side.

"Oui, by gar! He struck heem, for sure," grinned Perault.

"What? The Lost River?" "What? His mine?" chorused the crowd, awakened to more than ordinary interest.

"Non, not Los' River, but los' man, blank near." And Perault went on to describe, with dramatic fervour and appropriate gesticulation, the scene at the Black Dog, bringing out into strong relief his own helplessness and stupidity, and the cool daring of the stranger who had snatched his "ole boss" out of the jaws of the Black Dog.

"By Jove!" exclaimed a rancher when the narrative was finished, "not bad, that. Who was the chap, Rainy?"

"Do' no me. Tink he's one what you call pries'. Your Protestan' pries'."

"What, a preacher?" cried the rancher. "Not he. They're not made that way."

"I don't know about that, Sinclair," said another rancher. "There's Father Mike, you know."

"That's so," said Sinclair. "But there are hardly two of that kind on the same range."

"Fadder Mike!" sniffed Perault contemptuously. "Dat beeg feller hees roll Fadder Mike up in one beeg bunch an' stick heem in hees pocket. Dat feller he's not 'fraid noting. Beeg blam-fool, jus' lak ole boss, for sure."

"I guess he must be good stuff, Rainy, if you put him in that class."

"Dat's hees place," averred Rainy with emphasis. "Jus' lak ole boss."

At this point Carroll came in.

"Hello, Perault!" he said. "What the blank, blank are ye doin' here?"

Perault spat deliberately into the ash-pan, tipped back his chair without looking at the big Irishman, and answered coolly:

"Me? After one pack pony an' some outfit for de ole boss."

"Pony an' outfit, is it?" shouted Carroll. "What the blank, blank d'ye mane? What 'av ye done wid that pack pony av moine, an' where's yer blank ould fool av a boss?"

Carroll was working himself up into a fine rage.

"De boss, he's in bed," replied Perault coolly.

"De pony, he's in de Black Dog Reeve, guess."

"The Black Dog? What the blank, blank d'ye mane, anyway? Why don't ye answer? Blank ye f'r a cursed crapeau of a Frenchman? Is that pony of moine drowned?"

"Mebbe," said Perault, shrugging his shoulders, "unless he leev under de water lak one mush-rat."

"Blank yer impudence," roared Carroll, "to be

sittin' there laughin' in me face at the loss av me property. It's no better than a pack of thieves ye are."

"Tieves!" answered Perault, in quick anger. "Dere's one beeg, black, hairy tief not far 'way dat's got hees money for dat pony two—three tam overe."

Choking with rage, Carroll took one step toward him, kicked his chair clean from under him, and deposited the Frenchman on the floor amid a shout of laughter from the crowd. In blazing wrath Perault was on his feet with a bound, and, swinging his chair around his head, hurled it full in the face of his enemy. Carroll caught it on his arm and came rushing at the Frenchman.

"You one beeg black tief," shrieked Perault, drawing a knife and striking savagely at the big Irishman.

As he delivered his blow Carroll caught him by the wrist, wrenched the knife from his grasp, seizing him by the throat proceeded to choke him. The crowd stood looking on, hesitating to interfere. A fight was understood in that country to be the business of no man save those immediately concerned. Besides this, Carroll was dreaded for his great strength and his furious temper, and no man cared to imperil his life by attacking him.

"Blank yer cursed soul!" cried Carroll through his clenched teeth. "It's this Oi've been waintin' f'r many a day, an' now by the powers Oi'll be takin' the life of yez, so Oi will."

His threat would undoubtedly have been carried out, for Perault was bent far back, his face was black,

and his tongue protruded from his wide open mouth. But at this moment the door opened and Shock quietly stepped in. For a single instant he stood gazing in amazement upon the strange scene, then stepping quickly behind Carroll, whose back was toward the door, he caught his wrist.

"You are killing the man," he said quietly.

"Oi am that same!" hissed Carroll, his eyes blood-shot with the light of murder in them. "An' by all the powers of hell Oi'll be havin' yer heart's blood if ye don't kape aff."

"Indeed, then, he's too small a man for you, and as to myself, we can see about that later," said Shock quietly.

He closed his fingers on the wrist he held. The hand gripping Perault's throat opened quickly, allowing the Frenchman to fall to the floor. Swinging round with a hoarse cry, the big Irishman aimed a terrific blow at Shock's head. But Shock, catching the blow on his arm, drew Carroll sharply toward him, at the same time giving a quick downward twist to the wrist he held, a trick of the Japanese wrestlers the 'Varsity men had been wont to practise. There was a slight crack, a howl of pain, and Carroll sank writhing on the floor, with Shock's grip still on his wrist.

"Let me up," he roared.

"Will you let the little man alone?" asked Shock quietly.

"Let me up, blank ye! It's yer heart's blood will pay for this."

"Will you leave the little man alone?" asked Shock in a relentlessly even tone.

"Yis, yis," groaned Carroll. "Me wrist's bruk, so it is. But Oi'll be afther doin' f'r yez, ye blank, blank——"

Carroll's profanity flowed in a copious stream.

"As to that," said Shock, quietly stepping back from him, "we can discuss that later; but it is a shame for a man like you to be choking a little chap like that."

The old football scrimmage smile was on Shock's face as he stood waiting for Carroll to rise. The whole incident had occurred so unexpectedly and so suddenly that the crowd about stood amazed, quite unable to realise just what had happened.

After a time the big Irishman slowly rose, holding his wounded wrist and grinding out curses. Then suddenly seizing with his uninjured hand the chair which Perault had thrown at him, he raised it aloft and with a wild yell brought it down upon Shock's head. With his yell mingled a shrill cry. It was little Patsy. He had stolen in behind his father, and with eyes growing wider and wider had stood listening to his father's groans and curses.

Gradually the meaning of the scene dawned upon little Patsy's mind. His father had been hurt, and there stood the man who had hurt him. In a fury the little lad hurtled across the room, and just as his father delivered his terrific blow he threw himself, with crutch uplifted, at the astonished Shock and right in the way of the descending chair.

Instead of starting back to avoid the blow, as he might easily have done, Shock without a moment's hesitation sprang towards the child, taking the full weight of the blow upon his arm and head, but without entirely saving Patsy. Together they fell, Shock bleeding profusely from a deep cut on the head.

Two men sprang to his aid, while Carroll stood stupidly gazing down upon the white face of the little boy.

"Never mind me," said Shock, recovering consciousness quickly, "look to the child. Is he hurt?"

"He's dead, I guess," said Sinclair.

"It's a lie!" cried Carroll, in a hoarse voice. "It's a blank lie, I tell you!"

His face was white and his terrible eyes, so lately suffused with the light of murder, were filled with startled terror. He dropped beside his child and lifted him in his arms, crying softly, "Patsy, boy! Aw, now Patsy, darlin'. Spake to me, Patsy."

But the long lashes lay quietly upon the white cheeks, and the little form remained limp and still. Carroll lifted an amazed and terror-stricken face to the company.

"What have I done? Sure he's not dead!" he said in an awed whisper.

"No, no," said Shock, wiping the blood out of his eyes and leaning over the little white face. "Water, Perault, and brandy," he cried. "Quick!"

The men who had stood aghast at the tragic ending of what had been simply a row of more than ordinary

interest now hastened to give help. Water and brandy were immediately at hand. Ignoring his own wound, Shock bathed the face and hands of the unconscious child, but there was no sign of life.

"Guess he's gone out, right enough," said a cowboy.

"Liar! Liar! Blank your cursed soul for a liar!" cried Carroll, in a tone of agony.

"Man, man!" said Shock, in a stern, solemn voice, "would you provoke the Almighty to anger with your oaths? You ought rather to beseech His mercy for your own soul. Why should He give your child to the care of such a man as you? Give me the lad."

Without a word of remonstrance Carroll allowed Shock to lift the lifeless child and carry him into the open air, where, laying him on the ground, he began to vigorously chafe his hands and feet. After some minutes of bathing and rubbing the eyelids began to flutter and the breath to come in gentle sighs.

"Brandy now, Perault," said Shock. "There now, laddie. Thank God, he is coming to!"

"Dad, dad, where's dad?" said little Patsy faintly, opening his eyes. "I want dad."

"Here! Here! Patsy mannie," cried his father quickly, coming from behind the crowd where he had been standing dazed and stupid. "Stand back there! Let me have my boy," he added savagely.

He swept both Perault and Shock angrily aside, gathered the little lad tenderly in his arms and strode off into the house, the white face of the child resting

on his father's shoulder and his golden curls mingling with the black, coarse masses of his father's hair and beard.

"Well, I'll be blanked!" said one of the men. "Wouldn't that pall you!"

"Blank cantankerous cuss!" said the cowboy. "Never a 'thank you' for gittin' half killed in place of his kid."

Perault walked up to Shock, and offering his hand, said in a voice husky and broken, "Dat's two for you dis evenin'—me an' dat leele feller. For me—I can't spik my heart," smiting himself on the breast, "but my heart—dat's your own now, by gar!" He wrung Shock's hand in both of his and turned quickly away. But before he had taken many steps he returned, saying, "Come on wit me! I feex up your head." And without further words Shock and Perault passed into the Stopping Place.

The men looked at each other in silence for a time, then the cowboy said with unusual emphasis, "Boys, he's white! He's blanked white!"