

tered the canoe. The deep slide of a moccasined foot in the mud seemed to tell of the effort it required to get the girl embarked.

"They took her out on the lake and murdered her!" groaned Planx. "Dragging? There's no use dragging; that water goes plumb down to the root of the world. It was surveyed last year by Wilshere's people, and they could get no soundings."

After that, we went round to the other side of the lake, and saw the beached canoe. The two sets of moccasined tracks showed clearly on the strip of mud by the water; but they were soon lost in the tumbled debris of a two-year-old stony landslip, over which trailing appeared quite impossible. November was busy about this landing place for a longer time than I expected; then, he crossed the landslide at right angles and disappeared from our view.

"There's a stream over there comes in a little waterfall from the cliffs," said Planx, pointing after Joe. "You can hear it."

And that was all the conversation that passed between us until Joe returned. He came hurrying toward us.

"Say, Mr. Planx," he began.

"What is it?"

"She is n't dead."

"What?"

"Anyways, she was n't when she passed here."

"Then, where are her tracks?" demanded Planx, pointing to the footprints on the mud. "Those were made by two full-sized men."

"Ay," said Joe, "may be I can tell you more about that later. But I have a proof here that you will think mighty good," he drew out a little leather case I had given him and extracted from it a long hair of a beautiful red-gold color. "Look at that! I found it in the spruces above there."

Planx took it gently in his great fingers. He was visibly much moved. For a few seconds, he held it without speaking; then: "That grew on Virginia's head sure enough... Joe, is it possible my girl is alive?"

"She is, sure! Don't be afeard, you'll soon have news of her. I can promise you that, Mr. Planx. This was n't no case of murder. It's just an abduction. They'd never be such fools as to kill her! They're cuter than that. Isn't she your daughter? They'll hold her to big ransom. That's their game."

An ugly look came into Planx's eyes. "That's their game, is it? I'm not a man that it is easy to milk dollars from," said he.

By this time it was growing too dark for Joe to work any longer. We crossed the lake with Planx, and that night Joe and I camped near the end of Moosesbank Lake, where a stream flowed from it.

At dawn, while we were having breakfast, Joe stood up and stared into the trees that grew thick behind us. As he called out, I looked back and saw the indistinct figure of a man in their shadow, watching us. He beckoned and, as we approached him, I saw that he was young, with a pale face and rather shabby town-made clothes.

"Don't you remember Walter Calvey, November?" he said, holding out his hand. "I was with you and Mr. Planx and ... and ... her, last year in the woods."

"Huh! yes, and what are you doing here, Mr. Calvey?" asked Joe, shaking hands.

"I heard about Virginia ... how could I keep away after that?" exclaimed Calvey.

"You've no cause to fret yet," said Joe.

"What? When they've killed her! I'll go with you, and if we find those ..."

"Huh! She's

not dead! Take my word for it!" Joe's gray eyes gave me a roguish look. "Why, I've got a thing here in my pocket book, you'd give me a hundred dollars for!" He held the red-gold hair up to the light of the rising sun.

Calvey shook from head to foot. I thought he could be no paler than when we first saw him; but now, he proved it was possible.

"Virginia's! You could n't find its match in Canada!" he gasped. "Tell me ..."

"I can't wait to tell you, and you can't wait to hear. Light out, now. Old Man Planx could make it unhealthy for you."

"You're right! He hates me because Virginia won't marry Schelberg of the Combine. He has n't let us meet for months. And, more than that, he's ruined me and my partner in business. It was easy for a rich man to do that," ended Calvey bitterly.

"You go and start into business again," advised Joe. "I'll send you word first thing I know for certain."

But it was some time before we could induce Calvey to leave us. After he was gone, I wondered whether Joe suspected him of having a hand in spiriting away Virginia.

Joe shook his head. "He could n't have done it if he'd wanted to! He's a good young chap; but look at his boots and his clothes ... he was bred on a pavement; but he's Miss Virgimny's choice for all that. We'll start now, Mr. Quaritch, just where I found that bit of gold caught in a branch that hangs over the little stream up above there."

But we had hardly started when we heard the voice of Planx roaring in the wood below us. He was coming along at an extraordinary pace, in spite of his ungainly rolling strides. These were his words:

"You were right, Joe; Virginia is alive! It is a case of abduction. See what I have here."

He held a long stick, or wand, in his hand; the top of the wand was roughly split, and a scrap of paper stuck in the cleft.

"Ed's just found this in the canoe on the lake," he went on. "Those blackguards must have come back in the night and put it there."

"What have they said in the paper?" asked November.

"You must pay to get your daughter back. If you want our terms, come to the old log-camp on Black Lake tomorrow night. No tricks. We have you rounded up, sure. Don't try to track us, or we will make it bad for her."

Joe took the stick and examined it with much care. "They meant to leave it stuck in the ground Indian fashion," said I; for I had seen letters of Indians made conspicuous in this way, by lonely banks of rivers and other places where wandering hunters pass.

"They meant to do that, but found the canoe handy," said Joe. "Well, we'd best do no more tracking till we see the chaps that has Miss Virgimny. It's Black Lake tonight, then?"

"Yes, meet me by the alder swamp that's west of Wilshere's place," said Planx.

He stayed talking for a while; after he was gone, we shifted our camp to a more convenient spot and waited for the evening.

Black Lake lies at a distance of some five miles from Wilshere's, and as it abounded in gray front a log hut had been built for the convenience of the occasional fishermen who visited it. Starting early, we came in sight of the Lake while the glow was still in the western sky.

On the way, Planx made known to us his plan of campaign. It was a simple one. He would get the men

into the hut and speak them fair till a favorable moment presented itself; then, he would demand the surrender of his daughter under threat of shooting the kidnapers if they refused or demurred.

"There are three of us and we can fix them easy," said Planx.

November Joe shook his head. "They're not near such big fools as you think them," he remarked.

We had stopped on some high ground in the shelter of the woods, from which we could see the fishing hut. Planx took a look round with his field glass. The place seemed deserted. Nevertheless, Joe signed to us to wait while he went on to reconnoiter. In about five minutes, a light suddenly sprang up in the hut and his voice called us.

As we entered the door, I saw that Joe had kindled a lantern and was pointing to a piece of paper that lay on the rough-hewn table.

Planx seized up on it. "The same writing as before. Listen to this: 'If you will swear to give us safe conduct, we will come to talk it out. If you agree to this, wave the lantern three times on the lake shore, and that will mean you give your oath to let us come and go freely.'"

"I told you they were not fools," said Joe. "What's the orders now, Mr. Planx?"

Planx handed Joe the lantern. "Go wave the lantern ..."

From the door of the hut, we watched November as he walked down to the lake. At the third swing of the light a voice hailed him.

"You hear? They were waiting in a canoe," said Planx to me. "That's cute."

Then followed the splash of paddles and the rasp of the frosted rushes as the canoe took the shore. Joe had returned by this time and hung up the lantern so that it lit the whole of the hut. Then, the three of us stood together at one side of the table.

Our visitors hesitated outside the door.

"There are only two of them," whispered Planx. As he spoke, a short bearded man in a thick overcoat stepped into the light, followed by a tall and strongly built companion. Both wore black visor masks, with fringes covering the mouth. I noticed they were shod in moccasins.

"Evenin'," said the tall man, who was, throughout, the spokesman.

To this, no one made any reply; so, after a second or two, he went on:

(Continued on Page 17)



Planx was a thick-shouldered, stout man



P.E. (over)

Joe struck the revolver from the millionaire's grasp