



PHILIP STEELE
of the ROYAL NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE
by JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD
Author of The Danger Trail, The Honor of the Snows, etc.

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—Philip Steele, son of a Chicago millionaire, lives of adventure and outside life, resides at Regina in the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police. In his own opinion he is a man of the north. He is ordered to go to the Hudson Bay Company at Fort Hare, on the Mackenzie, a fellow officer there.

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his load. "My God; do you know I've never felt quite like this—so easy and happy like, since years ago, years? I wonder if it is because I know the end is near?"

"There's still hope," replied Philip. "Hope? cried DeBar. "It's more than hope, man. It's a certainty for me—the end, I mean. Don't you see, Phil?" He came and sat down close to the other on the sledge, and spoke as if he had known him for years. "It's got to be the end for me, and I guess that's what makes me cheerful like. I'm going to tell you about it, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind; I want to hear," said Philip, and he edged a little nearer, until they sat shoulder to shoulder.

"It's got to be the end," repeated DeBar, in a low voice. "If we get out of this, and fight, and you win, it'll be because I'm dead, Phil. I get it, I understand? I'll be dead when the fight ends, if you win. That'll be one —"

"But if you win, Bill?"

"A flash of joy shot into DeBar's eyes.

"Then that'll be the other end," he said more softly still. He pointed to the big Mackenzie mound. "I'll be dead when the fight ends, if you win. That'll be one —"

"God in Heaven be praised, this is the end!"

Five hundred yards down the stream DeBar stopped in his tracks, stared for a moment into the breaking gloom of the shore, and turned to Philip. He spoke in a voice low and trembling, as if overcome for the moment by some strong emotion.

"See—see there!" he whispered. "I've hit it, Philip Steele, and what



"But the blow lacked force."

to let her come to me, wherever I was. But—I guess the devil didn't get quite all of me, for I couldn't, 'n' wouldn't. But I've given in now, and we've fixed it up between us. By this time she's on her way to my brothers in South America, and if I win—when we fight—I'm going where she is. And that's the other end, Phil, so you see why I'm happy. There's a crack in the world, and it means that there's an end of it for me—soon."

He bowed his wild, unshorn hair in his mittened hands, and for a time there was silence between them. Philip broke it, almost in a whisper.

"Why don't you kill me here—now—while I'm sitting helpless beside you, and you've a knife in your belt?"

DeBar lifted his head slowly and looked with astonishment into his companion's face.

"I'm not a murderer," he said. "But you've killed other men."

"Three, besides those we hung," replied DeBar calmly. "One at Moose Factory, when I tried to help John, and the other two up here. They were murdered."

"Was that murder? Should I stand by and be shot like an animal just because it's the law that's doing it? Would you?"

DeBar rose without waiting for an answer and felt of the clothes beside the fire.

"Dry enough," he said. "Put 'em on, and we'll be blizzing."

Philip dressed, and looked at his companion.

"Still north," he asked. "Chilpeywan is south and west."

"North," said DeBar. "I know of a breed who lives out Red Porcupine Creek, which runs into the Slave. If we can find him we'll get grub, and if we don't—"

He laughed openly into the other's face.

"No, we won't fight, but we'll wrap up in the same blankets, and die with Woonga, there, keeping our heads warm until the last. Eh, Woonga, will you do that?"

He turned cheerily to the dog, and Woonga rose slowly and with unmistakable stiffness of limb, and was fastened in the sledge traces.

They went on through the desolate gloom of afternoon, which in late winter is, above the sixtieth, all but night. Ahead of them there seemed to rise billow upon billow of snow-mountain. It was one chaos of white mingling with another chaos of white. They went on, hour after hour, until day gloom thickened into night, and night drifted upward to give place to gray dawn, glodding steadily north, resting now and then, fighting, each mile of the way to the Red Porcupine against the stinging lashes of the Arctic wind.

And it was DeBar who finally leaped his mittened hands to the lead chains of the team as they came to the frozen streak that was the Red Porcupine, and said, in a voice through which there ran a strange thrill of something deep and mighty: "God in Heaven be praised, this is the end!"

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"DeBar, I wish to God it was over!"

"So do I," said DeBar.

He rubbed his hands and twisted them until the shankles cracked.

"I'm not afraid and I know that you're not, Phil," he went on, with eyes on the top of the stove. "I wish it was over, just the same. Somehow I'd rather stay here another year or two than—kill you."

"Kill me!" exclaimed Philip, the old fire leaping back into his veins. DeBar's calm voice, his extraordinary self-confidence, sent a flush of anger into Philip's face.

"You're talking to me again as if I were a child. DeBar, my instructions were to bring you back, dead or alive—and I'm going to!"

"We won't quarrel about it, Phil," replied the outlaw as quietly as before. "Only I wish it wasn't you I'm going to fight. I'd rather kill half-a-dozen like the others than you."

"I see," said Philip, with a perceptible sneer in his voice. "You're trying to work upon my sympathy so that I will follow your suggestion, too. Let's shake hands."

"You'd be a coward if you did that," retorted DeBar quickly. "How are we going to settle it, Phil?"

Philip drew his frozen revolver from his holster and held it over the stove.

"If I wasn't a crack shot, and couldn't center a two-inch bull's-eye three times out of four at thirty paces, I'd say pistols."

"I can't do that," said DeBar unhesitatingly, "but I have hit a wolf twice out of five shots. It'll be a quick, easy way, and we'll settle it with our revolvers. Going to shoot to kill?"

"No, it can help it. In the excitement a shot may kill, but I want to take you back alive, so I'll want you once or twice first."

"I always shoot to kill," replied DeBar, without lifting his head. "Any word you'd like to have sent home, Phil?"

In the other's silence DeBar looked up.

"I mean it," he said, in a low earnest voice. "Even from your point of view it might happen, Phil, and you've got friends somewhere. If anything should happen to me you'd find a letter in my pocket. I want you to write to my brother—and tell her I died in an accident. Will you?"

"Yes," replied Philip. "As for me, you'll find addresses in my pocket, too. Let's shake hands."

Over the stove they gripped hands.

"My eyes hurt," said DeBar. "It's the snow and wind, I guess. Do you mind a little sleep—after we eat? I haven't slept a wink in three days."

"Sleep until you're ready," urged Philip. "I don't want to fight bad eyes."

They ate, mostly in silence, and when the meal was done Philip carefully cleaned his revolver and oiled it with bear grease, which he found in a bottle on the shelf.

DeBar watched him as he wiped his weapon and saw that Philip lubricated each of the fire cartridges which he put in the chamber. Afterward they smoked.

Then DeBar stretched himself out in one of the two bunks, and his heavy breathing soon gave evidence that he was sleeping.

For a time Philip sat beside the stove, his eyes upon the inanimate form of the outlaw. Drowsiness overcame him then, and he rolled into the other bunk. He was awakened several hours later by DeBar, who was filling the stove with wood.

"How's the eyes?" he asked, sitting up.

"God," said the other. "Glad you're awake. The light will be bad inside of an hour."

He was rubbing and warming his hands, and Philip came to the opposite side of the stove and rubbed and warmed his hands. For some reason he found it difficult to look at DeBar, and he knew that DeBar was not looking at him.

"It was the outlaw who broke the suspense."

"I've been outside," he said in a low voice. "There's an open in front of the cabin. Just a hundred paces across. It wouldn't be a bad idea for us to stand at opposite sides of the open and at a given signal approach, firing as we want to."

"Couldn't be better," exclaimed Philip briskly, turning to pull his respirator from its holster.

DeBar watched him with tensely anxious eyes as he broke the breach, looked at the shining circle of cartridges, and closed it again.

Without a word he went to the door, opened it, and with his pistol arm trailing at his side, strode off to the right. For a moment Philip stood looking after him, a queer lump in his throat. He would have liked to shake hands, and yet at the same time he was glad that DeBar had gone in this way. He turned to the left—and saw at a glance that the outlaw had taken him the best light DeBar was facing him when he reached his ground.

"Are you ready?" he shouted.

"Ready!" cried Philip.

DeBar ran forward, shoulders hunched low, his pistol arm held extended, and Philip advanced to meet him. At seventy paces, with outstopping in his half foot, the outlaw fired, and his bullet passed in hissing, tearing three feet over Philip's head. The latter had planned to hold his fire until he was sure of hitting the outlaw in the arm or shoulder, but a second shot from him, which seemed to Philip stopped him short in the face, stopped him hip and at fifty paces he returned the fire.

DeBar ducked low and Philip thought he would be hit.

Then with a fierce yell he darted forward, faster as he came.

Again, and still a third time Philip fired, and as DeBar advanced, unhurt, after each shot, a cry of amazement rose to his lips. At forty paces he could hit a four-inch bull's-eye three times out of five, and here he missed a man! At thirty he held an unbroken record—and at twenty he missed his broad open, he still missed his man!

He had felt the breath of DeBar's fourth shot, and now with one cart-ridge each the men advanced foot by foot, until DeBar stopped and peacefully aimed at DeBar's chest. Their pistols rang out in the one report, and standing unhurt, a feeling of horror swept over Philip as he looked at the other. The outlaw's arms fell to his side. His empty pistol dropped to the snow, and for a moment he stood rigid, with his face half turned to the gloomy sky, while a low cry of grief burst from Philip's lips.

In that momentary posture of DeBar he saw, not the effect of a wound only, but the grim, terrible rigidity of death. He dropped his own weapon and ran forward, and in that instant DeBar began to meet him with the fierceness of a beast!

It was a terrible bit of play on DeBar's part, and for a moment look Philip off his guard. He had stepped aside, and with the cleanness of a trained boxer, he sent a straight cut to the outlaw's face as he closed in. But the blow lacked force, and he staggered backward, under the other's weight, with his arms outstretched, and his head back, as if he had taken a blow. DeBar had taken care of him.

The outlaw's hands gripped at his throat and his fingers sank into his neck, his cords of steel, and with a choking gasp he clutched at DeBar's wrists, knowing that another minute—a half-minute of that death clutch would throttle him. He saw the triumph in DeBar's eyes, and with a last supreme effort drew back his arm and sent a terrific short-arm punch into the other's stomach.

The grip at his throat relaxed. A second, a third, and a fourth time his arm rattled swiftly in and out, like a piston-rod, and the triumph in DeBar's eyes was replaced by a look of agony. The fingers at his throat loosened still more, and with a sudden movement Philip threw himself as a spring back a step to gather force for the final blow.

The move was fatal. Behind him his heel caught a snow-mothered rock, and he pitched backward with DeBar on top of him.

Again the iron fingers burned at his throat. But this time he made no resistance, and after a moment the outlaw rose to his feet and stared down into the white, still face half buried in the snow. Then he gently lifted Philip's head in his arms. There was a crimson blotch in the snow and close to it the black side of a hidden rock on which his head had struck.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The fact that beauty is only skin deep shouldn't influence a woman to be shallow.

If lions knew what many lion-tamers' wives know, there'd be less lion-tamers.