"I've been keeping an eye on that Disturbing Element down there," he said. "He's taking a nap himself now. Has been all afternoon. Guess the excitement at Lac L'Outre kept him awake last night."

Joan looked around. "Where's our canoe? And our

outfit?"

"I sneaked 'em out to that torrent and down to the river edge, a while ago. They're hid in some buckbrush up the shore. Figured I ought to do that while this Rip van Winkle yonder was sawing wood. I didn't take the kicker. It's cached right back of you—it and the drums. We won't dare use a motor any more. We'll have to travel silent from now on."

They ate the cold left-overs of their breakfast. Afterward, at Joan's insistence, Alan lay down, thinking to doze a little. . . .

A hand on his arm woke him, hours later.

"Alan," Joan was whispering, "maybe we'd better be starting."

Night had come. It was dark in the little tangle, so dark that Alan could barely see Joan beside him; and the chill damp fog was sifting through the pines.

Down at the river bank the camp fire of the lone watcher burned cheerily, as he cooked supper.

They dared cook none themselves, with him so close. Hungry and shivering, they rolled up their blankets, groped out to the torrent, slipped down the ravine to the landwash, and hurried up the shore to the buckbrush thicket.

A few minutes afterward they had set their canoe to water, stepped in, and were paddling on up the gray ghostly Sulteena, without benefit now of the friendly little kicker.

AT MIDNIGHT, three nights later, they reached Sul-Heena Forks, a hundred miles north of Lac L'Outre.

To their left the Teluwaceet River led westward into the snow-capped Teluwaceet Mountains. To their right the beautiful Lynette stretched eastward into a jumble of lesser ranges. Straight ahead the Sulteena, master river of all that country, led north-northwest toward the Yukon height-of-land.

In midstream just below the Forks, where the clashing currents of the three rivers shifted back and forth, Alan stopped to reconnoiter, suspecting that this strategic

point was tightly guarded and patrolled.

So far, by holing up in the daytime and traveling only

had flung his whole hunt upstream, and it was boiling all around them—a grim and determined man hunt. Twice the Police launch had returned to Lac L'Outre and brought up more men, more canoes. Posses were combing the river at night; lookouts had been posted at every narrows and headland; and canoes on silent patrol passed them in the foggy dark like hostile wraiths.

They knew that they had Norman guessing as to their exact whereabouts and that they must keep him guessing. If they were ever glimpsed, the scattered hunt would draw together, bottle them up, end their flight.

Never knowing when he would run headlong into a rifle battle, Alan had begged Joan repeatedly not to go on with him. It would have been easy enough for her to get off on an island and wait for some canoe to pick her up. But Joan flatly refused to listen. Without telling him why, she took the position that it was her duty to help him escape, and that her duty would end only when he and Luke Kaneewaugh were across the Teluwaceet watershed and well on their way to the Alaska demarcation.

Alan hated to think of her returning to Lac L'Outre and facing the music there. Though there was no legal evidence against her, everyone would know that she had gone with him on this wilderness hegira. The talk about her in that little settlement would be vicious. And Eric Norman, to whom she owed so much—she would have to face Norman too. But he could not deny that from the standpoint of his safety Joan had been dead right in

coming along with him.

Despite their hunted existence and the hardships they endured, those three days and nights had not been unhappy. Theirs was an eager joyous partnership. Being fellow fugitives gave them a sense of closest communion; they had much in common; and they struck it off well together. In the daytime they talked for hours on end, when they should have been sleeping; they quarreled over nothing and laughed over less; and at nightfall they set out on their dangerous travel with light hearts and buoyant confidence.

But to Alan their swiftly unfolding companionship brought uneasy pain-shot thoughts. The very happiness of his hours with Joan Hastings carried a pang. He was dreading the time when he would say Klahowya to his girl partner, somewhere in the Western Teluwaceets.

What Joan felt toward him he did not know. She was so silent, so unfathomable. He knew she liked him, found his company enjoyable; but deeper than that he could not during the dark hours, like two young river phantoms, he read. . . . She had brought him a hundred miles safely; and Joan had escaped detection. But Corporal Norman and in a few miles more they would be through the worst.

If they could get past Sulteena Forks and a little distance up Teluwaceet River, the storm center of the hunt would lie behind them. Most of Norman's men were searching and watching the Sulteena; and his headquarters camp, they felt sure, was located at this strategic Forks just ahead.

There was no moon that night, and the river fog was fairly heavy; but the stars were bright, and against the light background of the water a canoe was distinguishable at a hundred yards.

As they held their craft steady in the shifting currents, Alan caught a whiff of smoke, camp-fire smoke. Noting the direction of the slight wind, he peered at the headland between the Teluwaceet and Sulteena; and through the water-mist he made out a dull reddish glow, well back in the timber. The big glow of a big camp.

"OUR guess was a bull's-eye, partner," he said, sotto V voce. "Yonder's their main hangout. I can smell'em! What're we going to do? D'you think it's safe to angle on into the mouth of the Teluwaceet? I'll bet a leg, I'll bet both legs, that they're patrolling all three of these river mouths ---"

"Sh-h-h"—a sudden warning from Joan. She turned, seized his hand. "Look!" She pointed through the mist to their left. "Look there! What's that? It's too high out of water for a drift log, and it's moving across the cur-

Alan glanced along her outstretched arm and saw a big shadowy mottle on the water, almost at the limit of vision.

"Canoe!" he breathed. "And headed in our direction!" He dipped paddle and started backing away. "Maybe they haven't seen us."

A cautious voice, a half-breed's voice, came across to them. "Dat you, Battu?"

Alan's heart missed a beat. For a second or two he was stunned. Then:

"Ou' ou'," he replied, muffling his voice and grunting as he imagined the huge Battu would grunt.

"Froid, hein?" the voice came again.

"Ou' ou'."

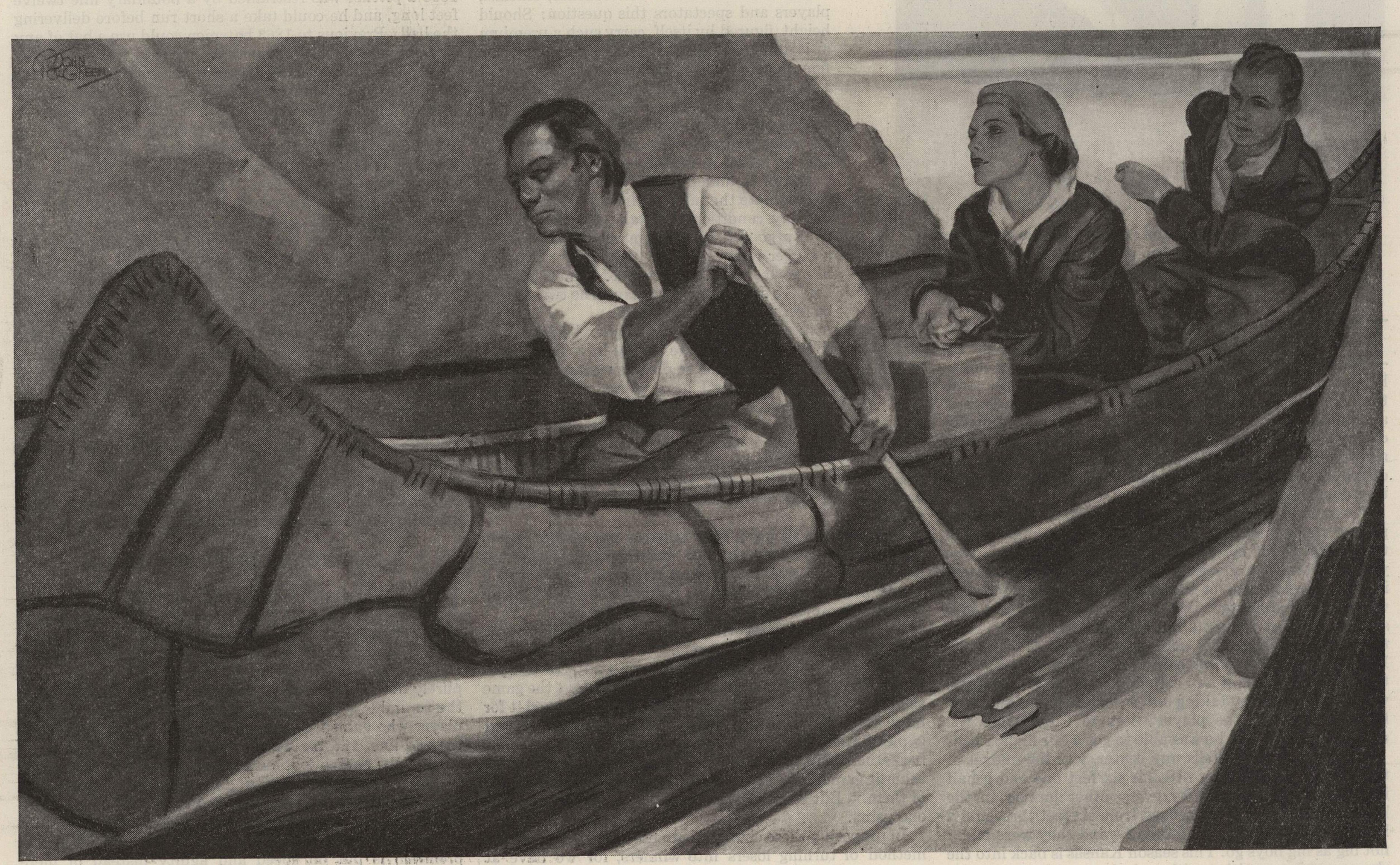
Under his powerful backstroke the canoe shivered. The shadowy mottle was almost lost to sight now.

"Les deux petits, Battu-les avez-vous vus?" the talkative métis inquired.

Alan whispered to Joan: "That's over my head. What does it mean? Quick! What shall I tell him?"

"Say 'Rien du tout.'"

(Continued on Page 26)



Within the hour the three of them shoved off, in Luke's fragile birchbark.