

TWO MONTHS  
IN THE  
Camp of Big Bear.

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*THERESA GOWANLOCK.*

*THERESA DELANEY.*

DEDICATED  
TO  
OUR SISTERS  
THE  
LADIES OF CANADA.



THE SCENE OF THE FROG LAKE MASSACRE.

TWO MONTHS  
Living in the

Camp of Big Bear.

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The Life and Adventures

OF

Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney.

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PART I.

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THE SCENE OF THE FROG LAKE MASSACRE.

## INTRODUCTION.

IT is not the desire of the author of this work to publish the incidents which drenched a peaceful and prosperous settlement in blood, and subjected the survivors to untold suffering and privations at the hands of savages, in order to gratify a morbid craving for notoriety. During all my perils and wanderings amid the snow and ice of that trackless prairie, the hope that nerved me to struggle on, was, that if rescued, I might within the sacred precincts of the paternal hearth, seek seclusion, where loving hands would help me to bear the burden of my sorrow, and try to make me forget at times, if they could not completely efface from my memory, the frightful scenes enacted around that prairie hamlet, which bereft me of my loved one, leaving my heart and fireside desolate for ever. Prostrated by fatigue and exposure, distracted by the constant dread of outrage and death, I had well-nigh abandoned all hope of ever escaping from the Indians with my life, but, as the darkness of the night is just before the dawn, so my fears which had increased until I was in despair, God in his inscrutable way speedily calmed, for while I was brooding over and preparing for my impending fate, a sudden commotion attracted my attention and in less time than it takes to write it, I was free. From that moment I received every kindness and attention, and as I approached the confines of civilization, I became aware of how diligently I had been sought after, and that for weeks I had been the object of the tenderest solicitude, not only of my friends and relations, but of the whole continent.

There have appeared so many conflicting statements in the public press regarding my capture and treatment while with the Indians, that it is my bounden duty to give to the public a truthful and accurate description of my capture, detention and misfortunes while captive in the camp of Big Bear. The task may be an irksome one and I might with justice shrink from anything which would recall the past. Still it is a debt of gratitude I owe to the people of this broad dominion. To the brave men who sacrificed their business and comfort and endured the hardships incident to a soldier's life, in order to vindicate the law. And to the noble men and women who planned for the comfort and supplied the wants of the gallant band who had so nobly responded to the call of duty and cry for help. And I gladly embrace this opportunity of showing to the public and especially the ladies, my appreciation of their kindness and sympathy in my bereavement, and their noble and disinterested efforts for my release. In undertaking a task which has no pleasures for me, and has been accomplished under the most trying difficulties and with the greatest physical suffering, I have embodied in the narrative a few of the manners and customs of Indians, the leading features of the country, only sufficient to render it clear and intelligible. I make no apology for issuing this volume to the public as their unabated interest make it manifest that they desire it, and I am only repaying a debt of gratitude by giving a truthful narrative to correct false impressions, for their kindness and sympathy to me.

I trust the public will receive the work in the spirit in which it is given and any literary defects which it may have, and I am sure there are many, may be overlooked, as I am only endeavoring to rectify error, instead of aspiring to literary excellence. I express my sincere and heartfelt thanks to the half-breeds who befriended me during my

captivity, and to the friends and public generally who sheltered and assisted me in many ways and by many acts of kindness and sympathy, and whose attention was unremitting until I had reached my destination.

And now I must bid the public a grateful farewell and seek my wished for seclusion from which I would never have emerged but to perform a public duty.

THERESA GOWANLOCK.







MRS. GOWANLOCK.

# Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear.

MRS. GOWANLOCK

CHAPTER I.

WE LEAVE ONTARIO.

WE left my father's house at Tintern on the 7th of October, 1884, having been married on the 1st, for Parkdale, where we spent a few days with my husband's friends. We started for our home on the 10th by the Canadian Pacific Railway to Owen Sound, thence by boat to Port Arthur, and then on to Winnipeg by rail, where we stopped one night, going on the next day to Regina. We only stopped in that place one day, taking rail again to Swift Current, arriving there the same day. This ended our travel by the locomotion of steam.

After taking in a supply of provisions we made a start for Battleford, distant 195 miles, by buckboard over the prairie, which stretches out about 130 miles in length, and for the remaining 55 miles there are clumps of trees or bluffs as they are called, scattered here and there. Our journey over this part was very pleasant, the weather was fine and the mode of travelling, which was new to me, delightful. Our company, consisted in addition to ourselves, of only one person, Mr. Levalley, a gentleman from Ottawa. We passed four nights under canvas. The journey was not a lonely one, the ships of the prairie were continually on the go, we passed several companies of freighters with harnessed oxen, half-breeds and Indians. It was also full of incident and adventure ; on one occasion, when cooking our tea, we

set fire to the prairie, although we worked hard to put it out, it in a very few minutes spread in a most alarming manner, and entirely beyond our control, and we let it go looking on enjoying the scene. Upon nearing Battleford a number of half-famished squaws came to us begging for something to eat, but we were not in a position, unfortunately, to supply their wants, on account of our larder having run dry. We entered Battleford on the 19th of October.

The town of Battleford is situated on the Battle river. The old on one side, the new on the other, in the direction of the fort. When the Indians plundered that place it was the town on the south bank. The houses on the opposite bank were protected by the guns at the fort. My husband had a store on the north bank in the direction of the fort.

The town is very scattered, covering a large area of ground, it is verily a place of distances and quite in keeping with the north-west generally. There are a few fine houses in the place, notably, the industrial home for Indian children and the residence of Judge Rolleau.



## CHAPTER II.

## INCIDENTS AT BATTLEFORD

I REMAINED at Battleford six weeks, while my husband went to Frog Creek, (where he had thirteen men working on the house and mills,) and while there I became initiated into the manners and customs of the inhabitants. A few incidents which happened during my stay might be interesting to the reader, therefore, I will jot them down as they come to mind.

After our arrival the Indians and squaws came to see me and would go and tell some of the others to come and see the monias, (squaw) and when they saw my husband they asked him why he did not live with her, and if she was well; and one day I walked with him over to where he was keeping store before he went west and the Indians came in and shook hands, and laughed, and the squaws thought my costume was rather odd and not in keeping with that of the fashionable north-western belle. The squaws cut off about three yards of print and make the skirt; while others take flour sacks and cut holes through for the waist and have leggings and moccasins; they would disdain to wear such an article as hose.

They are quite adepts in the art of tanning. I saw them tanning leather; they took the skin and put something on it, I do not know what it was, and put it in the sun for a few days, then with a small sharp iron fastened on a long handle, they scraped the skin with this until very smooth, and greased it over and put it in the sun again for some time, afterwards two squaws pulled it until nice and soft, and then it was ready for use.

One afternoon I was out shopping and on my way home

I saw some little Indian children coasting down hill on an earthen plate, but before getting to the end of the hill, to their evident surprise the plate broke and they commenced crying because it was broken and went back and got another one, and so on until they thought they would try tin plates, and the little friend that was with me, Effie Laurie, took the tin plate from them and sat down on it herself and went down the hill, and they looked so astonished to think that a white woman would do such a thing.

Another time on going out while two men were crossing the bridge over Battle river; a horse broke through and was killed and the squaws gathered around it taking the skin off, while others carried some of the carcass away, and I asked what they were going to do with it, and my husband said "they will take it home and have a big feast and if the meat has been poisoned they will boil it for a long time, changing the water, and in this way anything that was poisonous would not affect them."

The way the Indians get their wood, they send their squaws to the bush to cut the wood and they take a rope and tie around as much as they can carry, and hang it on their backs. Those who have dogs to carry the wood for them tie two long sticks together, fastening them on the dog's back, then tying a large bundle of wood on the back part of the cross sticks by that means the squaw is relieved from the task. The squaws perform all manual labor, while the big, lazy, good-for-nothing Indian lolls about in idleness.





BEASTS OF BURDEN.

## CHAPTER III.

## ON TO OUR HOME.

AT the end of six weeks my husband returned from the west, and with many pleasant recollections of Battleford, we left for our own home, which I had pictured in my mind with joyous anticipation, as the place of our continued happiness; a beautiful oasis, in that land of prairie and sparse settlement, and with a buoyancy of spirit which true happiness alone can bring, I looked forward with anticipated pleasure, which made that little log house appear to me, a palace, and we its king and queen.

On this last part of our journey we were favored with the company of Mr. Ballentyne of Battleford who went with us, and after the first day's travelling, we stopped all night at a half-breed's house, where they had a large fire-place made of mud, which was just like a solid piece of stone; they had a bright fire, and everything appeared nice and tidy within; a woman was making bannock, and when she had the dough prepared, she took a frying pan and put the cake in and stood it up before the fire. This is the way they do all their baking, and then she fried some nice white fish and hung a little kettle on a long iron hook over the fire, put in potatoes, and boiled the tea-kettle, making the tea in it too. She then spread a white cloth over the table and we all enjoyed our supper together after the long ride. The squaw gave us a nice clean bed to sleep in, making theirs on the floor and in the morning I saw four little children crawling out from under the bed where we slept, and my husband looked up at me and laughed, and said, "that is where children sleep up in *this country*." Their ways appeared very strange to me, and in the morning before going away, they gave us a warm breakfast. \*

We travelled all the next day and camped that night. We had a small tin stove which is part of a camping outfit, and which smoked very much while cooking. We had great trouble to know how we would obtain a light, but we had a candle and we lighted that, and then we had nothing to hold it in, but as necessity is the mother of invention, we found a way out of the difficulty; we took a pocket knife that had two blades, and stuck one blade in the tent pole and opened the other half way, fastening the candle into the blade, which answered the purpose and enabled us to see while we ate our supper. We then turned down our beds, and in a few minutes were fast asleep. When morning came we had breakfast, and travelled on again. Mr. Ballentyne shot some prairie chickens and we had them for our dinner, which was a great treat to me. We arrived at Fort Pitt on the tenth, bidding Mr. Ballentyne good-bye, stopped at Mr. McLean's all night, where we enjoyed a very pleasant evening.

The next morning we left for Onion Lake, where we were welcomed by Mr. Mann and family, and after a night's rest proceeded on our journey to Frog Lake, reaching there on the 12th. We went to Mr. and Mrs. Delaney's, who kindly allowed me to stop there until my husband fixed up some articles of furniture at our own house two miles further on and south-west of the Lake.

After arriving at Mrs. Delaney's, my husband left me and went down to the house to work; on Saturday evening he came back. On Sunday morning Mr. Quinn came over and asked us to go for a drive, we accepted the invitation. It was a bright frosty morning; he took us to our little home that I had not yet seen. On hearing the men singing who were employed at the mill, we drove down to their cooking tent, where we found Mr. Gilchrist cooking breakfast for fourteen men. They had a large cooking stove in-



side, with a long board table; the table was covered with tin plates and cups. They had rabbit soup, and bread and coffee for breakfast; after getting ourselves warm we drove back to Mr. Delaney's. On the following Thursday my husband drove up and took me to our home, where all was in beautiful order, and Mr. Gilchrist waiting for our arrival.



## CHAPTER IV.

## AT HOME.

**N**OW we are at home and I am thankful. There they nestle in a pretty valley, the simple house, the store, and beside the brook, the mill. The music of the workman's hammer alone breaks the stillness that pervades the scene, and the hills send back the echo without a discordant note. The hills were covered with trees, principally poplar and spruce, interspersed with berry-bearing shrubs. A most beautiful and enchanting location.

That little settlement of our own was situated upon Frog Creek, about three miles west of the lake of the same name, and distant from the Frog Lake Settlement, our nearest white neighbours, about two miles. But we had neighbours close by, who came in to see us the next day, shaking hands and chatting to us in Cree, of which language we knew but little. The Indians appeared to be very kind and supplied us with white fish twice a week which they procured from the river for which in return we gave sugar, tea, prints, &c., from the store. Christmas and New Year's were celebrated in about the same manner that they are amongst us civilized people. Both Indians and squaws put on their good clothes, which at the best of times is very scant, and do their calling. They salute the inmates of each house they enter with a congratulatory shake, expecting to be kissed in return. Just think of having to kiss a whole tribe of Indians in one day, that part we would rather do by proxy. We would not countenance it in any way.

On Christmas day we went out for a walk along Frog Creek; on our way we came to where two little Indian children were catching rabbits with a snare, they stepped to

one side and let us pass, and were delighted to have us watching them while catching their game ; and further on some of the squaws had holes cut in the ice, and having a sharp hook were catching fish. In this way they get fish all winter, and to look at these "shrimpy-looking" women trotting along with their brown babies slung in a sort of loose pocket dangling away behind their backs, it was comical in the extreme, they would stop and look and laugh at us, our appearance being so very different to their own dark skin and sharp eyes. They wear their hair hanging, strung with brass beads, and have small pieces of rabbit fur tied in; and the men wear theirs cut very short in front, hanging over their brows, and ornaments of every description. These people don't set at table on chairs, rich or poor; they squat down on their feet in a fashion that would soon tire us exceedingly. Then at night they wrap themselves up in a blanket, lie down and sleep as soundly as we would in our warm feather bed and blankets.

My husband and the men worked hard during the next two months on the mill in order to get it finished before the spring set in. As far as the weather was concerned it was very favourable for working. The men lost no time from the cold. During that period the thermometer ranged from zero to 60° below but the air was so clear and bracing that the cold was never felt. I have experienced more severe weather in Ontario than I ever did in this part. I have heard of north-west blizzards, but they are confined to the prairie and did not reach us. It is the most beautiful country I ever saw with its towering hills, majestic rivers, beautiful flowers and rolling land. I had made up my mind to see nothing but frost, ice and snow, but was agreeably disappointed.

Nothing of an eventful nature transpired, during those two months, the mill was about completed and Williscraft and the

other men were discharged with the exception of Mr. Gilchrist, who assisted my husband. The machinery was all in position and everything done but finishing up, when on the 17th of March, two men, strangers, made their appearance at the mill and asked for employment. They said they were weary and worn and had left Duck Lake in order to avoid the trouble that was brewing there. One was Gregory Donaire and the other Peter Blondin, my husband took pity on them and gave them employment. They worked for us until the massacre. They were continually going too and fro among the Indians, and I cannot but believe, that they were cognizant of everything that was going on, if not responsible in a great degree for the murders which were afterwards committed.



## CHAPTER V.

## WOOD AND PLAIN INDIANS.

THE Indians are in their habits very unclean and filthy. They will not in the least impress anyone to such an extent that they would be willing to forego the restrictions of civilized life, and enter upon the free life of the red man.

The Indians living on the reserve in the neighbourhood of Frog Creek are known as the Wood Crees, they were all peaceable and industrious, and were becoming proficient in the art of husbandry. They lived in the log cabins in the winter, but in the summer they took to their tents. They numbered about 200 persons. They appeared satisfied with their position which was much better than what falls to the lot of other Indians. They did not take part in the massacre, nor were they responsible for it in any way.

The Plain Crees are composed of the worst characters from all the tribes of that name. They were dissatisfied, revengeful, and cruel, they could not be persuaded to select their reserve until lately, and then they would not settle upon it. Their tastes lay in a direction the opposite to domestic; they were idle and worthless, and were the Indians who killed our dear ones on that ever to be remembered 2nd of April. Those same Indians were constantly fed by Mr. Delaney and my husband. The following correspondence will show how he treated those ungrateful characters:—Big Bear's Indians were sent up to Frog Lake, it is said, by Governor Dewdney who told them, if they would go there, they would never be hungry, but last winter their rations were stopped, and they had to work to get provisions, or starve. They would go around to the settlers' houses and ask for something to eat, and Mr. Delaney would give those Indians rations, paying for them out of his

own salary. Gov. Dewdney wrote a letter stating that he must stop it at once ; but he did not listen to him and kept on giving to them until the outbreak. And the very men he befriended were the ones who hurled him into sudden death.

Big Bear was only nominally the chief of this tribe, the ruling power being in the hands of Wandering Spirit, a bad and vicious man, who exercised it with all the craft and cunning of an accomplished freebooter.



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE MASSACRE.

**N**OW come the dreadful scenes of blood and cruel death. The happy life is changed to one of suffering and sorrow. The few months of happiness I enjoyed with the one I loved above all others was abruptly closed—taken from me for ever—it was cruel, it was dreadful. When I look back to it all, I often wonder, is it all a dream, and has it really taken place. Yes, the dream is too true; it is a terrible reality, and as such will never leave my heart, or be effaced from off my mind.

The first news we heard of the Duck Lake affair was on the 30th of March. Mr. Quinn, the Indian Agent, at Frog Lake, wrote a letter to us and sent it down to our house about twelve o'clock at night with John Pritchard, telling my husband and I to go up to Mr. Delaney's on Tuesday morning, and with his wife go on to Fort Pitt, and, if they saw any excitement they would follow. We did not expect anything to occur. When we got up to Mr. Delaney's we found the police had left for Fort Pitt. Big Bear's Indians were in the house talking to Mr. Quinn about the trouble at Duck Lake, and saying that Poundmaker the chief at Battleford wanted Big Bear to join him but he would not, as he intended remaining where he was and live peaceably. They considered Big Bear to be a better man than he was given credit for.

On the 1st of April they were in, making April fools of the white people and shaking hands, and they thought I was frightened and told me not to be afraid, because they would not hurt us. My husband left me at Mr. Delaney's and went back to his work at the mill, returning in the evening with Mr. Gilchrist. We all sat talking for some

time along with Mr. Dill, who had a store at Frog Lake and Mr. Cameron, clerk for the Hudson Bay Company. We all felt perfectly safe where we were, saying that as we were so far away from the trouble at Duck Lake, the Government would likely come to some terms with them and the affair be settled at once. The young Chief and another Indian by the name of Isador said if anything was wrong among Big Bear's band they would come and tell us; and that night Big Bear's braves heard about it and watched them all night to keep them from telling us. We all went to bed not feeling in any way alarmed. About five o'clock in the morning a rap came to the door and Mr. Delaney went down stairs and opened it, and John Pritchard and one of Big Bear's sons by the name of Ibesies were there.

Pritchard said "There trouble."

Mr. Delaney said "Where?"

Pritchard "*Here!* Our horses are all gone, the Indians deceived us, and said that some half-breeds from Edmonton had come in the night and had taken them to Duck Lake, but Big Bear's band has taken them and hid them, I am afraid it is all up."

My husband and I got up, and Mrs. Delaney came down stairs with a frightened look. In a few minutes Big Bear's Indians were all in the house, and had taken all the arms from the men saying they were going to protect us from the half-breeds, and then we felt we were being deceived. They took all the men over to Mr. Quinn's, and my husband and I were sitting on the lounge, and an Indian came in and took him by the arm saying he wanted him to go too; and he said to Mrs. Delaney and I "do not to be afraid, while I go with this Indian." We stopped in the house, and while they were gone some of the Indians came in and went through the cupboard to find something to eat. They opened the trap door to go down cellar, but it was very dark, and



they were afraid to venture down. Then the men came back and Mrs. Delaney got breakfast. We all sat down, but I could not eat, and an Indian asked Mr. Gowanlock to tell me not to be afraid, they would not hurt us, and I should eat plenty. After breakfast they took us out of the house and escorted us over to the church; my husband taking my arm, Mr. and Mrs. Delaney were walking beside us. When we got to the church the priests were holding mass; it was Holy Thursday, and as we entered the door, Wandering Spirit sat on his knees with his gun; he was painted, and had on such a wicked look. The priests did not finish the service on account of the menacing manner of the Indians; they were both around and inside the church. We were all very much frightened by their behaviour. They then told us to go out of the church, and took us back to Mr. Delaney's, all the Indians going in too. We stopped there for awhile and an Indian came and told us to come out again, and my husband came to me and said "you had better put your shawl around you, for its very cold, perhaps we will not be gone long." We all went out with the Indians. They were going through all the stores. Everything was given to them, and they got everything they could wish for and took us up the hill towards their camp. We had only gone but a short distance from the house when we heard the reports of guns, but thought they were firing in the air to frighten us; but they had shot Quinn, Dill and Gilchrist, whom I did not see fall. Mr. and Mrs. Delaney were a short distance ahead of my husband, I having my husband's arm. Mr. Williscraft, an old grey-headed man about seventy-five years of age came running by us, and an Indian shot at him and knocked his hat off, and he turned around and said, "*Oh! don't shoot! don't shoot!*" But they fired again, and he ran screaming and fell in some bushes. On seeing this I began crying, and my husband tried to

comfort me, saying, "my *dear* wife be *brave* to the end," and immediately an Indian behind us fired, and my husband fell beside me his arm pulling from mine. I tried to assist him from falling. He put out his arms for me and fell, and I fell down beside him and buried my face on his, while his life was ebbing away so quickly, and was prepared for the next shot myself, thinking I was going with him too. But death just then was not ordained for me. I had yet to live. An Indian came and took me away from my dying husband side, and I refused to leave. Oh! to think of leaving my *dear* husband lying there for those cruel Indians to dance around. I begged of the Indian to let me stay with him, but he took my arm and pulled me away. Just before this, I saw Mr. Delaney and a priest fall, and Mrs. Delaney was taken away in the same manner that I was. I still looking back to where my poor husband was lying dead; the Indian motioned to where he was going to take me, and on we went. I thought my heart would break; I would rather have died with my husband and been at rest.

"A rest that is sure for us all,  
But sweeter to some."



## CHAPTER VII.

## WITH THE INDIANS.

**H**ARDLY knowing how I went or what I did, I trudged along in a half conscious condition. Led a captive into the camp of Big Bear by one of his vile band. Taken through brush and briar, a large pond came to view, we did not pass it by, he made me go through the water on that cold 2nd of April nearly to my waist. I got so very weak that I could not walk and the Indian pulled me along, in this way he managed to get me to his tepee. On seeing Mrs. Delaney taken away so far from me, I asked the Indian to take me to her; and he said "*No, No,*" and opening the tent shoved me in. A friendly squaw put down a rabbit robe for me to sit on; I was shivering with the cold; this squaw took my shoes and stockings off and partly dried them for me. Their tepees consisted of long poles covered with smoke-stained canvas with two openings, one at the top for a smoke hole and the other at the bottom for a door through which I had to crawl in order to enter. In the centre they have their fire; this squaw took a long stick and took out a large piece of beef from the kettle and offered it to me, which I refused, as I could not eat anything after what I had gone through.

Just then Big Bear's braves came into the tent; there were nearly thirty of them, covered with war paint, some having on my husband's clothes, and all giving vent to those terrible yells, and holding most murderous looking instruments. They were long wooden clubs. At one end were set three sharp shining knife blades. They all looked at me as I eyed those weapons (and they well matched the expression of their cruel mouths and develish eyes) thinking my troubles would soon be over I calmly awaited the result.

But they sat down around me with a bottle full of something that looked like water, passing it from one Indian to the other, so I put on a brave look as if I was not afraid of them. After this they all went out and the most blood-curdling yells that ever pierced my ears was their war-whoop, mingled with dancing and yelling and cutting most foolish antics.

I saw a little baby that I thought must be dead, lying in one part of the tent, they had it done up in a moss bag. I will try and give an idea of what it was like: they take a piece of cloth having it large at the top, and cut it around where the feet should be, and on both sides of this little bag they have loops of very fine leather, then they have a small thin cushion laid on this, the length of the child, and three or four pieces of different colored flannels, then they dress the baby in a thin print gown and put it in this bag, and its little legs are put down just as straight as a needle, covered over with moss, which they first heat very hot; then the arms are put down in the same way and the flannels are wrapped around very tight and then they lace the bag up, and all that can be seen is the little brown face peeping out.

Just then Pritchard's little girl came in where I was; she could talk a few words of English. I asked her where her pa was, and she said that he was putting up a tent not far away, and then I had some hope of getting from the Indians.

After I had been there for four hours, Louis Goulet and Andre Nault came in, and Goulet said to me "Mrs. Gowanlock if you will give yourself over to the half-breeds, they will not hurt you; Peter Blondin has gone down to where the mill is, and when he comes back he will give his horse for you." I asked them to interpret it to the Indians in order to let me go to Pritchard's tent for awhile, and the Indians said that she could go with this squaw. I went and was overjoyed to see Mrs. Delaney there also. After getting in there