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Volume 5, by Gilbert Parker**

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PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 5.

**ANTOINE AND ANGELIQUE THE CIPHER A TRAGEDY OF NOBODIES A SANCTUARY OF THE
PLAINS**

ANTOINE AND ANGELIQUE

"The birds are going south, Antoine—see—and it is so early!"

"Yes, Angelique, the winter will be long."

There was a pause, and then: "Antoine, I heard a child cry in the night, and I could not sleep."

"It was a devil-bird, my wife; it flies slowly, and the summer is dead."

"Antoine, there was a rushing of wings by my bed before the morn was breaking."

"The wild-geese know their way in the night, Angelique; but they flew by the house and not near thy bed."

"The two black squirrels have gone from the hickory tree."

"They have hidden away with the bears in the earth; for the frost comes, and it is the time of sleep."

"A cold hand was knocking at my heart when I said my aves last night, my Antoine."

"The heart of a woman feels many strange things: I cannot answer, my wife."

"Let us go also southward, Antoine, before the great winds and the wild frost come."

"I love thee, Angelique, but I cannot go."

"Is not love greater than all?"

"To keep a pledge is greater."

"Yet if evil come?"

"There is the mine."

"None travels hither; who should find it?"

He said to me, my wife: 'Antoine, will you stay and watch the mine until I come with the birds northward, again?' and I said: 'I will stay, and Angelique will stay; I will watch the mine.'"

"This is for his riches, but for our peril, Antoine."

"Who can say whither a woman's fancy goes? It is full of guessing. It is clouds and darkness to-day, and sunshine—so much—to-morrow. I cannot answer."

"I have a fear; if my husband loved me—"

"There is the mine," he interrupted firmly.

"When my heart aches so—"

"Angelique, there is the mine."

"Ah, my Antoine!"

And so these two stayed on the island of St. Jean, in Lake Superior, through the purple haze of autumn, into the white brilliancy of winter, guarding the Rose Tree Mine, which Falding the Englishman and his companions had prospected and declared to be their Ophir.

But St. Jean was far from the ways of settlement, and there was little food and only one hut, and many things must be done for the Rose Tree Mine in the places where men sell their souls for money; and Antoine and Angelique, French peasants from the parish of Ste. Irene in Quebec, were left to guard the place of treasure, until, to the sound of the laughing spring, there should come many men and much machinery, and the sinking of shafts in the earth, and the making, of riches.

But when Antoine and Angelique were left alone in the waste, and God began to draw the pale coverlet of frost slowly across land and water, and to surround St. Jean with a stubborn moat of ice, the heart of the woman felt some coming danger, and at last broke forth in words of timid warning. When she once had spoken she said no more, but stayed and builded the heaps of earth about the house, and filled every crevice against the inhospitable Spirit of Winds, and drew her world closer and closer within those two rooms where they should live through many months.

The winter was harsh, but the hearts of the two were strong. They loved; and Love is the parent of endurance, the begetter of courage. And every day, because it seemed his duty, Antoine inspected the Rose Tree Mine; and every day also, because it seemed her duty, Angelique said many aves. And one prayer was much with her—for spring to come early that the child should not suffer: the child which the good God was to give to her and Antoine.

In the first hours of each evening Antoine smoked, and Angelique sang the old songs which their ancestors learned in Normandy. One night Antoine's face was lighted with a fine fire as he talked of happy days in the parish of Ste. Irene; and with that romantic fervour of his race which the stern

winters of Canada could not kill, he sang, 'A la Claire Fontaine,' the well-beloved song-child of the 'voyageurs' hearts.

And the wife smiled far away into the dancing flames—far away, because the fire retreated, retreated to the little church where they two were wed; and she did as most good women do—though exactly why, man the insufficient cannot declare—she wept a little through her smiles. But when the last verse came, both smiles and tears ceased. Antoine sang it with a fond monotony:

"Would that each rose were growing
Upon the rose-tree gay,
And that the fatal rose-tree
Deep in the ocean lay.
'I ya longtemps que je t'aime
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

Angelique's heart grew suddenly heavy. From the rose-tree of the song her mind fled and shivered before the leafless rose-tree by the mine; and her old dread came back.

Of course this was foolish of Angelique; of course the wise and great throw contumely on all such superstition; and knowing women will smile at each other meaningly, and with pity for a dull man-writer, and will whisper, "Of course, the child." But many things, your majesties, are hidden from your wisdom and your greatness, and are given to the simple—to babes, and the mothers of babes.

It was upon this very night that Falding the Englishman sat with other men in a London tavern, talking joyously. "There's been the luck of Heaven," he said, "in the whole exploit. We'd been prospecting for months. As a sort of try in a back-water we rowed over one night to an island and pitched tents. Not a dozen yards from where we camped was a rose-tree—think of it, Belgard, a rose-tree on a rag-tag island of Lake Superior! 'There's luck in odd numbers, says Rory O'More.' 'There's luck here,' said I; and at it we went just beside the rose-tree. What's the result? Look at that prospectus: a company with a capital of two hundred thousand; the whole island in our hands in a week; and Antoine squatting on it now like Bonaparte on Elbe."

"And what does Antoine get out of this?" said Belgard.

"Forty dollars a month and his keep."

"Why not write him off twenty shares to propitiate the gods—gifts unto the needy, eh!—a thousand-fold—what?"

"Yes; it might be done, Belgard, if—"

But someone just then proposed the toast, "The Rose Tree Mine!" and the souls of these men waxed proud and merry, for they had seen the investor's palm filled with gold, the maker of conquest. While Antoine was singing with his wife, they were holding revel within the sound of Bow Bells. And far into the night, through silent Cheapside, a rolling voice swelled through much laughter thus:

"Gai Ion la, gai le rosier,
Du joli mois de Mai."

The next day there were heavy heads in London; but the next day, also, a man lay ill in the hut on the island of St. Jean.

Antoine had sung his last song. He had waked in the night with a start of pain, and by the time the sun was halting at noon above the Rose Tree Mine, he had begun a journey, the record of which no man has ever truly told, neither its beginning nor its end; because that which is of the spirit refuseth to be interpreted by the flesh. Some signs there be, but they are brief and shadowy; the awe of It is hidden in the mind of him that goeth out lonely unto God.

When the call goes forth, not wife nor child nor any other can hold the wayfarer back, though he may loiter for an instant on the brink. The poor medicaments which Angelique brings avail not; these soothing hands and healing tones, they pass through clouds of the middle place between heaven and earth to Antoine. It is only when the second midnight comes that, with conscious, but pensive and far-off, eyes, he says to her: "Angelique, my wife."

For reply her lips pressed his cheek, and her fingers hungered for his neck. Then: "Is there pain now Antoine?"

"There is no pain, Angelique."

He closed his eyes slowly; her lips framed an ave. "The mine," he said, "the mine—until the spring."

"Yes, Antoine, until the spring."

"Have you candles—many candles, Angelique?"

"There are many, my husband."

"The ground is as iron; one cannot dig, and the water under the ice is cruel—is it not so, Angelique?"

"No axe could break the ground, and the water is cruel," she said.

"You will see my face until the winter is gone, my wife."

She bowed her head, but smoothed his hand meanwhile, and her throat was quivering.

He partly slept—his body slept, though his mind was feeling its way to wonderful things. But near the morning his eyes opened wide, and he said: "Someone calls out of the dark, Angelique."

And she, with her hand on her heart, replied: "It is the cry of a dog, Antoine."

"But there are footsteps at the door, my wife."

"Nay, Antoine; it is the snow beating upon the window."

"There is the sound of wings close by—dost thou not hear them, Angelique?"

"Wings—wings," she falteringly said: "it is the hot blast through the chimney; the night is cold, Antoine."

"The night is very cold," he said; and he trembled. . . "I hear, O my wife, I hear the voice of a little child . . . the voice is like thine, Angelique."

And she, not knowing what to reply, said softly:

"There is hope in the voice of a child;" and the mother stirred within her; and in the moment he knew also that the Spirits would give her the child in safety, that she should not be alone in the long winter.

The sounds of the harsh night had ceased—the snapping of the leafless branches, the cracking of the earth, and the heaving of the rocks: the Spirits of the Frost had finished their work; and just as the grey forehead of dawn appeared beyond the cold hills, Antoine cried out gently: "Angelique . . . Ah, mon Capitaine . . . Jesu" . . . and then, no more.

Night after night Angelique lighted candles in the place where Antoine smiled on in his frozen silence; and masses were said for his soul—the masses Love murmurs for its dead. The earth could not receive him; its bosom was adamant; but no decay could touch him; and she dwelt alone with this, that was her husband, until one beautiful, bitter day, when, with no eye save God's to see her, and no human comfort by her, she gave birth to a man-child. And yet that night she lighted the candles at the dead man's head and feet, dragging herself thither in the cold; and in her heart she said that the smile on Antoine's face was deeper than it had been before.

In the early spring, when the earth painfully breathed away the frost that choked it, with her child for mourner, and herself for sexton and priest, she buried Antoine with maimed rites: but hers were the prayers of the poor, and of the pure in heart; and she did not fret because, in the hour that her comrade was put away into the dark, the world was laughing at the thought of coming summer.

Before another sunrise, the owners of the island of St. Jean claimed what was theirs; and because that which had happened worked upon their hearts, they called the child St. Jean, and from that time forth they made him to enjoy the goodly fruits of the Rose Tree Mine.

Hilton was staying his horse by a spring at Guidon Hill when he first saw her. She was gathering may-apples; her apron was full of them. He noticed that she did not stir until he rode almost upon her. Then she started, first without looking round, as does an animal, dropping her head slightly to one side, though not exactly appearing to listen. Suddenly she wheeled on him, and her big eyes captured him. The look bewildered him. She was a creature of singular fascination. Her face was expressive. Her eyes had wonderful light. She looked happy, yet grave withal; it was the gravity of an uncommon earnestness. She gazed through everything, and beyond. She was young—eighteen or so.

Hilton raised his hat, and courteously called a good-morning at her. She did not reply by any word, but nodded quaintly, and blinked seriously and yet blithely on him. He was preparing to dismount. As he did so he paused, astonished that she did not speak at all. Her face did not have a familiar language; its vocabulary was its own. He slid from his horse, and, throwing his arm over its neck as it stooped to the spring, looked at her more intently, but respectfully too. She did not yet stir, but there came into her face a slight inflection of confusion or perplexity. Again he raised his hat to her, and, smiling, wished her a good-morning. Even as he did so a thought sprung in him. Understanding gave place to wonder; he interpreted the unusual look in her face.

Instantly he made a sign to her. To that her face responded with a wonderful speech—of relief and recognition. The corners of her apron dropped from her fingers, and the yellow may-apples fell about her feet. She did not notice this. She answered his sign with another, rapid, graceful, and meaning. He left his horse and advanced to her, holding out his hand simply—for he was a simple and honest man. Her response to this was spontaneous. The warmth of her fingers invaded him. Her eyes were full of questioning. He gave a hearty sign of admiration. She flushed with pleasure, but made a naive, protesting gesture.

She was deaf and dumb.

Hilton had once a sister who was a mute. He knew that amazing primal gesture-language of the silent race, whom God has sent like one-winged birds into the world. He had watched in his sister just such looks of absolute nature as flashed from this girl. They were comrades on the instant; he reverential, gentle, protective; she sanguine, candid, beautifully aboriginal in the freshness of her cipher-thoughts. She saw the world naked, with a naked eye. She was utterly natural. She was the maker of exquisite, vital gesture-speech.

She glided out from among the may-apples and the long, silken grass, to charm his horse with her hand. As she started to do so, he hastened to prevent her, but, utterly surprised, he saw the horse whinny to her cheek, and arch his neck under her white palm—it was very white. Then the animal's chin sought her shoulder and stayed placid. He had never done so to anyone before save Hilton. Once, indeed, he had kicked a stableman to death. He lifted his head and caught with playful shaking lips at her ear. Hilton smiled; and so, as we said, their comradeship began.

He was a new officer of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Guidon. She was the daughter of a ranchman. She had been educated by Father Corrairie, the Jesuit missionary, Protestant though she was. He had learned the sign-language while assistant-priest in a Parisian chapel for mutes. He taught her this gesture-tongue, which she, taking, rendered divine; and, with this, she learned to read and write.

Her name was Ida.

Ida was faultless. Hilton was not; but no man is. To her, however, he was the best that man can be. He was unselfish and altogether honest, and that is much for a man.

When Pierre came to know of their friendship he shook his head doubtfully. One day he was sitting on the hot side of a pine near his mountain hut, soaking in the sun. He saw them passing below him, along the edge of the hill across the ravine. He said to someone behind him in the shade, who was looking also, "What will be the end of that, eh?"

And the someone replied: "Faith, what the Serpent in the Wilderness couldn't cure."

"You think he'll play with her?"

"I think he'll do it without wishin' or willin', maybe. It'll be a case of kiss and ride away."

There was silence. Soon Pierre pointed down again. She stood upon a green mound with a cool hedge of rock behind her, her feet on the margin of solid sunlight, her forehead bared. Her hair sprinkled round her as she gently threw back her head. Her face was full on Hilton. She was telling him something. Her gestures were rhythmical, and admirably balanced. Because they were continuous or only regularly broken, it was clear she was telling him a story. Hilton gravely, delightedly, nodded

response now and then, or raised his eyebrows in fascinated surprise. Pierre, watching, was only aware of vague impressions—not any distinct outline of the tale. At last he guessed it as a perfect pastoral—birds, reaping, deer, winds, sundials, cattle, shepherds, hunting. To Hilton it was a new revelation. She was telling him things she had thought, she was recalling her life.

Towards the last, she said in gesture: "You can forget the winter, but not the spring. You like to remember the spring. It is the beginning. When the daisy first peeps, when the tall young deer first stands upon its feet, when the first egg is seen in the oriole's nest, when the sap first sweats from the tree, when you first look into the eye of your friend—these you want to remember. . . ."

She paused upon this gesture—a light touch upon the forehead, then the hands stretched out, palms upward, with coaxing fingers. She seemed lost in it. Her eyes rippled, her lips pressed slightly, a delicate wine crept through her cheek, and tenderness wimpled all. Her soft breast rose modestly to the cool texture of her dress. Hilton felt his blood bound joyfully; he had the wish of instant possession. But yet he could not stir, she held him so; for a change immediately passed upon her. She glided slowly from that almost statue-like repose into another gesture. Her eyes drew up from his, and looked away to plumbless distance, all glowing and childlike, and the new ciphers slowly said:

"But the spring dies away. We can only see a thing born once. And it may be ours, yet not ours. I have sighted the perfect Sharon-flower, far up on Guidon, yet it was not mine; it was too distant; I could not reach it. I have seen the silver bullfinch floating along the canon. I called to it, and it came singing; and it was mine, yet I could not hear its song, and I let it go; it could not be happy so with me. . . . I stand at the gate of a great city, and see all, and feel the great shuttles of sounds, the roar and clack of wheels, the horses' hoofs striking the ground, the hammer of bells; all: and yet it is not mine; it is far, far away from me. It is one world, mine is another; and sometimes it is lonely, and the best things are not for me. But I have seen them, and it is pleasant to remember, and nothing can take from us the hour when things were born, when we saw the spring—nothing—never!"

Her manner of speech, as this went on, became exquisite in fineness, slower, and more dream-like, until, with downward protesting motions of the hand, she said that "nothing—never!" Then a great sigh surged up her throat, her lips parted slightly, showing the warm moist whiteness of her teeth, her hands falling lightly, drew together and folded in front of her. She stood still.

Pierre had watched this scene intently, his chin in his hands, his elbows on his knees. Presently he drew himself up, ran a finger meditatively along his lip, and said to himself: "It is perfect. She is carved from the core of nature. But this thing has danger for her. . . . 'bien!' . . . ah!"

A change in the scene before him caused this last expression of surprise.

Hilton, rousing from the enchanting pantomime, took a step towards her; but she raised her hand pleadingly, restrainingly, and he paused. With his eyes he asked her mutely why. She did not answer, but, all at once transformed into a thing of abundant sprightliness, ran down the hillside, tossing up her arms gaily. Yet her face was not all brilliance. Tears hung at her eyes. But Hilton did not see these. He did not run, but walked quickly, following her; and his face had a determined look. Immediately, a man rose up from behind a rock on the same side of the ravine, and shook clenched fists after the departing figures; then stood gesticulating angrily to himself, until, chancing to look up, he sighted Pierre, and straightway dived into the underbrush. Pierre rose to his feet, and said slowly: "Hilton, here may be trouble for you also. It is a tangled world."

Towards evening Pierre sauntered to the house of Ida's father. Light of footstep, he came upon the girl suddenly. They had always been friends since the day when, at uncommon risk, he rescued her dog from a feshet on the Wild Moose River. She was sitting utterly still, her hands folded in her lap. He struck his foot smartly on the ground. She felt the vibration, and looked up. He doffed his hat, and she held out her hand. He smiled and took it, and, as it lay in his, looked at it for a moment musingly. She drew it back slowly. He was then thinking that it was the most intelligent hand he had ever seen. . . . He determined to play a bold and surprising game. He had learned from her the alphabet of the fingers—that is, how to spell words. He knew little gesture-language. He, therefore, spelled slowly: "Hawley is angry, because you love Hilton." The statement was so matter-of-fact, so sudden, that the girl had no chance. She flushed and then paled. She shook her head firmly, however, and her fingers slowly framed the reply: "You guess too much. Foolish things come to the idle."

"I saw you this afternoon," he silently urged.

Her fingers trembled slightly. "There was nothing to see." She knew he could not have read her gestures. "I was telling a story."

"You ran from him—why?" His questioning was cruel that he might in the end be kind.

"The child runs from its shadow, the bird from its nest, the fish jumps from the water—that is nothing." She had recovered somewhat.

But he: "The shadow follows the child, the bird comes back to its nest, the fish cannot live beyond the water. But it is sad when the child, in running, rushes into darkness, and loses its shadow; when the nest falls from the tree; and the hawk catches the happy fish. . . . Hawley saw you also."

Hawley, like Ida, was deaf and dumb. He lived over the mountains, but came often. It had been understood that, one day, she should marry him. It seemed fitting. She had said neither yes nor no. And now?

A quick tremor of trouble trailed over her face, then it became very still. Her eyes were bent upon the ground steadily. Presently a bird hopped near, its head coquetting at her. She ran her hand gently along the grass towards it. The bird tripped on it. She lifted it to her chin, at which it pecked tenderly. Pierre watched her keenly-admiring, pitying. He wished to serve her. At last, with a kiss upon its head, she gave it a light toss into the air, and it soared, lark-like, straight up, and hanging over her head, sang the day into the evening. Her eyes followed it. She could feel that it was singing. She smiled and lifted a finger lightly towards it. Then she spelled to Pierre this: "It is singing to me. We imperfect things love each other."

"And what about loving Hawley, then?" Pierre persisted. She did not reply, but a strange look came upon her, and in the pause Hilton came from the house and stood beside them. At this, Pierre lighted a cigarette, and with a good-natured nod to Hilton, walked away.

Hilton stooped over her, pale and eager. "Ida," he gestured, "will you answer me now? Will you be my wife?"

She drew herself together with a little shiver. "No," was her steady reply. She ruled her face into stillness, so that it showed nothing of what she felt. She came to her feet wearily, and drawing down a cool flowering branch of chestnut, pressed it to her cheek. "You do not love me?" he asked nervously.

"I am going to marry Luke Hawley," was her slow answer. She spelled the words. She used no gesture to that. The fact looked terribly hard and inflexible so. Hilton was not a vain man, and he believed he was not loved. His heart crowded to his throat.

"Please go away, now," she begged with an anxious gesture. While the hand was extended, he reached and brought it to his lips, then quickly kissed her on the forehead, and walked away. She stood trembling, and as the fingers of one hand hung at her side, they spelled mechanically these words: "It would spoil his life. I am only a mute—a dummy!"

As she stood so, she felt the approach of someone. She did not turn instantly, but with the aboriginal instinct, listened, as it were, with her body; but presently faced about—to Hawley. He was red with anger. He had seen Hilton kiss her. He caught her smartly by the arm, but, awed by the great calmness of her face, dropped it, and fell into a fit of sullenness. She spoke to him: he did not reply. She touched his arm: he still was gloomy. All at once the full price of her sacrifice rushed upon her; and overpowered her. She had no help at her critical hour, not even from this man she had intended to bless. There came a swift revulsion, all passions stormed in her at once. Despair was the resultant of these forces. She swerved from him immediately, and ran hard towards the high-banked river!

Hawley did not follow her at once: he did not guess her purpose. She had almost reached the leaping-place, when Pierre shot from the trees, and seized her. The impulse of this was so strong, that they slipped, and quivered on the precipitous edge: but Pierre righted then, and presently they were safe.

Pierre held her hard by both wrists for a moment. Then, drawing her away, he loosed her, and spelled these words slowly: "I understand. But you are wrong. Hawley is not the man. You must come with me. It is foolish to die."

The riot of her feelings, her momentary despair, were gone. It was even pleasant to be mastered by Pierre's firmness. She was passive. Mechanically she went with him. Hawley approached. She looked at Pierre. Then she turned on the other. "Yours is not the best love," she signed to him; "it does not trust; it is selfish." And she moved on.

But, an hour later, Hilton caught her to his bosom, and kissed her full on the lips. . . . And his right to do so continues to this day.

A TRAGEDY OF NOBODIES

At Fort Latrobe sentiment was not of the most refined kind. Local customs were pronounced and crude in outline; language was often highly coloured, and action was occasionally accentuated by a pistol shot. For the first few months of its life the place was honoured by the presence of neither wife, nor sister, nor mother. Yet women lived there.

When some men did bring wives and children, it was noticed that the girl Blanche was seldom seen in the streets. And, however it was, there grew among the men a faint respect for her. They did not talk of it to each other, but it existed. It was known that Blanche resented even the most casual notice from those men who had wives and homes. She gave the impression that she had a remnant of conscience.

"Go home," she said to Harry Delong, who asked her to drink with him on New Year's Day. "Go home, and thank God that you've got a home—and a wife."

After Jacques, the long-time friend of Pretty Pierre, came to Fort Latrobe, with his sulky eye and scrupulously neat attire, Blanche appeared to withdraw still more from public gaze, though no one saw any connection between these events. The girl also became fastidious in her dress, and lost all her former dash and smart aggression of manner. She shrank from the women of her class, for which, as might be expected, she was duly reviled. But the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, nor has it been written that a woman may not close her ears, and bury herself in darkness, and travel alone in the desert with her people—those ghosts of herself, whose name is legion, and whose slow white fingers mock more than the world dare at its worst.

Suddenly, she was found behind the bar of Weir's Tavern at Cedar Point, the resort most frequented by Jacques. Word went about among the men that Blanche was taking a turn at religion, or, otherwise, reformation. Soldier Joe was something sceptical on this point from the fact that she had developed a very uncertain temper. This appeared especially noticeable in her treatment of Jacques. She made him the target for her sharpest sarcasm. Though a peculiar glow came to his eyes at times, he was never roused from his exasperating coolness. When her shafts were unusually direct and biting, and the temptation to resent was keen, he merely shrugged his shoulders, almost gently, and said: "Eh, such women!"

Nevertheless, there were men at Fort Latrobe who prophesied trouble, for they knew there was a deep strain of malice in the French half-breed which could be the more deadly because of its rare use. He was not easily moved, he viewed life from the heights of a philosophy which could separate the petty from the prodigious. His reputation was not wholly disquieting; he was of the goats, he had sometimes been found with the sheep, he preferred to be numbered with the transgressors. Like Pierre, his one passion was gambling. There were legends that once or twice in his life he had had another passion, but that some Gorgon drew out his heartstrings painfully, one by one, and left him inhabited by a pale spirit now called Irony, now Indifference—under either name a fret and an anger to women.

At last Blanche's attacks on Jacques called out anxious protests from men like rollicking Soldier Joe, who said to her one night, "Blanche, there's a devil in Jacques. Some day you'll startle him, and then he'll shoot you as cool as he empties the pockets of Freddy Tarlton over there."

And Blanche replied: "When he does that, what will you do, Joe?"

"Do? Do?" The man stroked his beard softly. "Why, give him ditto— cold."

"Well, then, there's nothing to row about, is there?" And Soldier Joe was not on the instant clever enough to answer her sophistry; but when she left him and he had thought awhile, he said, convincingly:

"But where would you be then, Blanche? . . . That's the point."

One thing was known and certain: Blanche was earning her living by honest, if not high-class, labour. Weir the tavern-keeper said she was "worth hundreds" to him. But she grew pale, her eyes became peculiarly brilliant, her voice took a lower key, and lost a kind of hoarseness it had in the past. Men came in at times merely to have a joke at her expense, having heard of her new life; but they failed to enjoy their own attempts at humour. Women of her class came also, some with half-uncertain jibes, some with a curious wistfulness, and a few with scornful oaths; but the jibes and oaths were only for a time. It became known that she had paid the coach fare of Miss Dido (as she was called) to the hospital at Wapiti, and had raised a subscription for her maintenance there, heading it herself with a liberal sum. Then the atmosphere round her became less trying; yet her temper remained changeable, and had it not been that she was good-looking and witty, her position might have been insecure. As it was, she

ruled in a neutral territory where she was the only woman. One night, after an inclement remark to Jacques, in the card-room, Blanche came back to the bar, and not noticing that, while she was gone, Soldier Joe had entered and laid himself down on a bench in a corner, she threw her head passionately forward on her arms as they rested on the counter, and cried: "O my God! my God!"

Soldier Joe lay still as if sleeping, and when Blanche was called away again he rose, stole out, went down to Freddy Tarlton's office, and offered to bet Freddy two to one that Blanche wouldn't live a year. Joe's experience of women was limited. He had in his mind the case of a girl who had accidentally smothered her child; and so he said:

"Blanche has something on her mind that's killing her, Freddy. When trouble fixes on her sort it kills swift and sure. They've nothing to live for but life, and it isn't good enough, you see, for—for—" Joe paused to find out where his philosophy was taking him.

Freddy Tarlton finished the sentence for him: "For an inner sorrow is a consuming fire."

Fort Latrobe soon had an unexpected opportunity to study Soldier Joe's theory. One night Jacques did not appear at Weir's Tavern as he had engaged to do, and Soldier Joe and another went across the frozen river to his log-hut to seek him. They found him by a handful of fire, breathing heavily and nearly unconscious. One of the sudden and frequently fatal colds of the mountains had fastened on him, and he had begun a war for life. Joe started back at once for liquor and a doctor, leaving his comrade to watch by the sick man.

He could not understand why Blanche should stagger and grow white when he told her; nor why she insisted on taking the liquor herself. He did not yet guess the truth.

The next day all Fort Latrobe knew that Blanche was nursing Jacques, on what was thought to be his no-return journey. The doctor said it was a dangerous case, and he held out little hope. Nursing might bring him through, but the chance was very slight. Blanche only occasionally left the sick man's bedside to be relieved by Soldier Joe and Freddy Tarlton. It dawned on Joe at last, it had dawned on Freddy before, what Blanche meant by the heart-breaking words uttered that night in Weir's Tavern. Down through the crust of this woman's heart had gone something both joyful and painful. Whatever it was, it made Blanche a saving nurse, a good apothecary; for, one night the doctor pronounced Jacques out of danger, and said that a few days would bring him round if he was careful.

Now, for the first time, Jacques fully comprehended all Blanche had done for him, though he had ceased to wonder at her changed attitude to him. Through his suffering and his delirium had come the understanding of it. When, after the crisis, the doctor turned away from the bed, Jacques looked steadily into Blanche's eyes, and she flushed, and wiped the wet from his brow with her handkerchief. He took the handkerchief from her fingers gently before Soldier Joe came over to the bed.

The doctor had insisted that Blanche should go to Weir's Tavern and get the night's rest, needed so much, and Joe now pressed her to keep her promise. Jacques added an urging word, and after a time she started. Joe had forgotten to tell her that a new road had been made on the ice since she had crossed, and that the old road was dangerous. Wandering with her thoughts she did not notice the spruce bushes set up for signal, until she had stepped on a thin piece of ice. It bent beneath her. She slipped: there was a sudden sinking, a sharp cry, then another, piercing and hopeless—and it was the one word—"Jacques!" Then the night was silent as before. But someone had heard the cry. Freddy Tarlton was crossing the ice also, and that desolating Jacques! had reached his ears. When he found her he saw that she had been taken and the other left. But that other, asleep in his bed at the sacred moment when she parted, suddenly waked, and said to Soldier Joe: "Did you speak, Joe? Did you call me?"

But Joe, who had been playing cards with himself, replied, "I haven't said a word."

And Jacques then added: "Perhaps I dream—perhaps."

On the advice of the doctor and Freddy Tarlton, the bad news was kept from Jacques. When she did not come the next day, Joe told him that she couldn't; that he ought to remember she had had no rest for weeks, and had earned a long rest. And Jacques said that was so.

Weir began preparations for the funeral, but Freddy Tarlton took them out of his hands—Freddy Tarlton, who visited at the homes of Fort Latrobe. But he had the strength of his convictions such as they were. He began by riding thirty miles and back to ask the young clergyman at Purple Hill to come and bury Blanche. She'd reformed and been baptised, Freddy said with a sad sort of humour. And the clergyman, when he knew all, said that he would come. Freddy was hardly prepared for what occurred when he got back. Men were waiting for him, anxious to know if the clergyman was coming. They had raised a subscription to cover the cost of the funeral, and among them were men such as Harry Delong.

"You fellows had better not mix yourselves up in this," said Freddy.

But Harry Delong replied quickly: "I am going to see the thing through." And the others endorsed his words. When the clergyman came, and looked at the face of this Magdalene, he was struck by its comeliness and quiet. All else seemed to have been washed away. On her breast lay a knot of white roses—white roses in this winter desert.

One man present, seeing the look of wonder in the clergyman's eyes, said quietly: "My—my wife sent them. She brought the plant from Quebec. It has just bloomed. She knows all about her."

That man was Harry Delong. The keeper of his home understood the other homeless woman. When she knew of Blanche's death she said: "Poor girl, poor girl!" and then she had gently added, "Poor Jacques!"

And Jacques, as he sat in a chair by the fire four days after the tragedy, did not know that the clergyman was reading over a grave on the hillside, words which are for the hearts of the quick as for the untenanted dead.

To Jacques's inquiries after Blanche, Soldier Joe had made changing and vague replies. At last he said that she was ill; then, that she was very ill, and again, that she was better, almighty better—now. The third day following the funeral, Jacques insisted that he would go and see her. The doctor at length decided he should be taken to Weir's Tavern, where, they declared, they would tell him all. And they took him, and placed him by the fire in the card-room, a wasted figure, but fastidious in manner and scrupulously neat in person as of old. Then he asked for Blanche; but even now they had not the courage for it. The doctor nervously went out, as if to seek her; and Freddy Tarlton said, "Jacques, let us have a little game, just for quarters, you know. Eh?"

The other replied without eagerness: "Voila, one game, then!"

They drew him to the table, but he played listlessly. His eyes shifted ever to the door. Luck was against him. Finally he pushed over a silver piece, and said: "The last. My money is all gone. 'Bien!'" He lost that too.

Just then the door opened, and a ranchman from Purple Hill entered. He looked carelessly round, and then said loudly:

"Say, Joe, so you've buried Blanche, have you? Poor old girl!"

There was a heavy silence. No one replied. Jacques started to his feet, gazed around searchingly, painfully, and presently gave a great gasp. His hands made a chafing motion in the air, and then blood showed on his lips and chin. He drew a handkerchief from his breast.

"Pardon! . . . Pardon!" he faintly cried in apology, and put it to his mouth.

Then he fell backwards in the arms of Soldier Joe, who wiped a moisture from the lifeless cheek as he laid the body on a bed.

In a corner of the stained handkerchief they found the word,

Blanche.

A SANCTUARY OF THE PLAINS

Father Corraine stood with his chin in his hand and one arm supporting the other, thinking deeply. His eyes were fixed on the northern horizon, along which the sun was casting oblique rays; for it was the beginning of the winter season.

Where the prairie touched the sun it was responsive and radiant; but on either side of this red and golden tapestry there was a tawny glow and then a duskiess which, curving round to the north and east, became blue and cold—an impalpable but perceptible barrier rising from the earth, and shutting

in Father Corraine like a prison wall. And this shadow crept stealthily on and invaded the whole circle, until, where the radiance had been, there was one continuous wall of gloom, rising as upon are to invasion of the zenith, and pierced only by some intrusive wandering stars.

And still the priest stood there looking, until the darkness closed down on him with an almost tangible consistency. Then he appeared to remember himself, and turned away with a gentle remonstrance of his head, and entered the hut behind him. He lighted a lamp, looked at it doubtfully, blew it out, set it aside, and lighted a candle. This he set in the one window of the room which faced the north and west.

He went to a door opening into the only other room in the hut, and with his hand on the latch looked thoughtfully and sorrowfully at something in the corner of the room where he stood. He was evidently debating upon some matter,—probably the removal of what was in the corner to the other room. If so, he finally decided to abandon the intention. He sat down in a chair, faced the candle, again dropped his chin upon his hand, and kept his eyes musingly on the light. He was silent and motionless a long time, then his lips moved, and he seemed to repeat something to himself in whispers.

Presently he took a well-worn book from his pocket, and read aloud from it softly what seemed to be an office of his Church. His voice grew slightly louder as he continued, until, suddenly, there ran through the words a deep sigh which did not come from himself. He raised his head quickly, started to his feet, and turning round, looked at that something in the corner. It took the form of a human figure, which raised itself on an elbow and said: "Water—water—for the love of God!"

Father Corraine stood painfully staring at the figure for a moment, and then the words broke from him "Not dead—not dead—wonderful!" Then he stepped quickly to a table, took therefrom a pannikin of water, and kneeling, held it to the lips of the gasping figure of a woman, throwing his arm round the shoulder, and supporting the head on his breast. Again he spoke "Alive—alive! Blessed be Heaven!"

The hands of the woman seized the hand of the priest, which held the pannikin, and kissed it, saying faintly: "You are good to me. . . . But I must sleep—I must sleep—I am so tired; and I've—very far—to go—across the world."

This was said very slowly, then the head thick with brown curls dropped again on the priest's breast, heavy with sleep. Father Corraine, flushing slightly at first, became now slightly pale, and his brow was a place of war between thankfulness and perplexity. But he said something prayerfully, then closed his lips firmly, and gently laid the figure down, where it was immediately clothed about with slumber. Then he rose, and standing with his eyes bent upon the sleeper and his fingers clasping each other tightly before him, said: "Poor girl! So, she is alive. And now what will come of it?"

He shook his grey head in doubt, and immediately began to prepare some simple food and refreshment for the sufferer when she should awake. In the midst of doing so he paused and repeated the words, "And what will come of it?" Then he added: "There was no sign of pulse nor heart-beat when I found her. But life hides itself where man cannot reach it."

Having finished his task, he sat down, drew the book of holy offices again from his bosom, and read it, whisperingly, for a time; then fell to musing, and, after a considerable time, knelt down as if in prayer. While he knelt, the girl, as if startled from her sleep by some inner shock, opened her eyes wide and looked at him, first with bewilderment, then with anxiety, then with wistful thankfulness. "Oh, I thought—I thought when I awoke before that it was a woman. But it is the good Father Corraine—Corraine, yes, that was the name."

The priest's clean-shaven face, long hair, and black cassock had, in her first moments of consciousness, deceived her. Now a sharp pain brought a moan to her lips; and this drew the priest's attention. He rose, and brought her some food and drink. "My daughter," he said, "you must take these." Something in her face touched his sensitive mind, and he said, solemnly: "You are alone with me and God, this hour. Be at peace. Eat."

Her eyes swam with instant tears. "I know—I am alone—with God," she said. Again he gently urged the food upon her, and she took a little; but now and then she put her hand to her side as if in pain. And once, as she did so, she said: "I've far to go and the pain is bad. Did they take him away?"

Father Corraine shook his head. "I do not know of whom you speak," he replied. "When I went to my door this morning I found you lying there. I brought you in, and, finding no sign of life in you, sent Featherfoot, my Indian, to Fort Cypress for a trooper to come; for I feared that there had been ill done to you, somehow. This border-side is but a rough country. It is not always safe for a woman to travel alone."

The girl shuddered. "Father," she said "Father Corraine, I believe you are?" (Here the priest bowed

his head.) "I wish to tell you all, so that if ever any evil did come to me, if I should die without doin' what's in my heart to do, you would know, and would tell him if you ever saw him, how I remembered, and kept rememberin' him always, till my heart got sick with waitin', and I came to find him far across the seas."

"Tell me your tale, my child," he patiently said. Her eyes were on the candle in the window questioningly. "It is for the trooper—to guide him," the other remarked. "'Tis past time that he should be here. When you are able you can go with him to the Fort. You will be better cared for there, and will be among women."

"The man—the man who was kind to me—I wish I knew of him," she said.

"I am waiting for your story, my child. Speak of your trouble, whether it be of the mind and body, or of the soul."

"You shall judge if it be of the soul," she answered.

"I come from far away. I lived in old Donegal since the day that I was born there, and I had a lover, as brave and true a lad as ever trod the world. But sorrow came. One night at Farcalladen Rise there was a crack of arms and a clatter of fleeing hoofs, and he that I loved came to me and said a quick word of partin', and with a kiss—it's burnin' on my lips yet—askin' pardon, father, for speech of this to you—and he was gone, an outlaw, to Australia. For a time word came from him. Then I was taken ill and couldn't answer his letters, and a cousin of my own, who had tried to win my love, did a wicked thing. He wrote a letter to him and told him I was dyin', and that there was no use of farther words from him. And never again did word come to me from him. But I waited, my heart sick with longin' and full of hate for the memory of the man who, when struck with death, told me of the cruel deed he had done between us two."

She paused, as she had to do several times during the recital, through weariness or pain; but, after a moment, proceeded. "One day, one beautiful day, when the flowers were like love to the eye, and the larks singin' overhead, and my thoughts goin' with them as they swam until they were lost in the sky, and every one of them a prayer for the lad livin' yet, as I hoped, somewhere in God's universe—there rode a gentleman down Farcalladen Rise. He stopped me as I walked, and said a kind good-day to me; and I knew when I looked into his face that he had word for me—the whisperin' of some angel, I suppose, and I said to him as though he had asked me for it, 'My name is Mary Callen, sir.'

"At that he started, and the colour came quick to his face; and he said: 'I am Sir Duke Lawless. I come to look for Mary Callen's grave. Is there a Mary Callen dead, and a Mary Callen livin'? and did both of them love a man that went from Farcalladen Rise one wild night long ago?'

"'There's but one Mary Callen,' said I, 'but the heart of me is dead, until I hear news that brings it to life again?'

"'And no man calls you wife?' he asked.

"'No man, Sir Duke Lawless,' answered I. 'And no man ever could, save him that used to write me of you from the heart of Australia; only there was no Sir to your name then.'

"'I've come to that since,' said he.

"'Oh, tell me,' I cried, with a quiverin' at my heart, 'tell me, is he livin'?'

"And he replied: 'I left him in the Pipi Valley of the Rocky Mountains a year ago.'

"'A year ago!' said I, sadly.

"'I'm ashamed that I've been so long in comin' here,' replied he; 'but, of course, he didn't know that you were alive, and I had been parted from a lady for years—a lover's quarrel—and I had to choose between courtin' her again and marryin' her, or comin' to Farcalladen Rise at once. Well, I went to the altar first.'

"'Oh, sir, you've come with the speed of the wind, for now that I've news of him, it is only yesterday that he went away, not years ago. But tell me, does he ever think of me?' I questioned.

"'He thinks of you,' he said, 'as one for whom the masses for the dead are spoken; but while I knew him, first and last, the memory of you was with him.'

"'With that he got off his horse, and said: 'I'll walk with you to his father's home.'

"'You'll not do that,' I replied; 'for it's level with the ground. God punish them that did it! And they're

lyin' in the glen by the stream that he loved and galloped over many a time.'

"They are dead—they are dead, then,' said he, with his bridle swung loose on his arm and his hat off reverently.

"Gone home to Heaven together,' said I, 'one day and one hour, and a prayer on their lips for the lad; and I closin' their eyes at the last. And before they went they made me sit by them and sing a song that's common here with us; for manny and manny of the strength and pride of Farcalladen Rise have sailed the wide seas north and south, and otherwhere, and comin' back maybe and maybe not.'

"Hark,' he said, very gravely, 'and I'll tell you what it is, for I've heard him sing it, I know, in the worst days and the best days that ever we had, when luck was wicked and big against us and we starvin' on the wallaby track; or when we found the turn in the lane to brighter days.'

"And then with me lookin' at him full in the eyes, gentleman though he was,—for comrade he had been with the man I loved,—he said to me there, so finely and kindly, it ought to have brought the dead back from their graves to hear, these words:

"You'll travel far and wide, dear, but you'll come back again,
You'll come back to your father and your mother in the glen,
Although we should be lyin' 'neath the heather grasses then
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'!"

"You'll see the icebergs sailin' along the wintry foam,
The white hair of the breakers, and the wild swans as they roam;
But you'll not forget the rowan beside your father's home—
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'."

Here the girl paused longer than usual, and the priest dropped his forehead in his hand sadly.

"I've brought grief to your kind heart, father," she said.

"No, no," he replied, "not sorrow at all; but I was born on the Liffey side, though it's forty years and more since I left it, and I'm an old man now. That song I knew well, and the truth and the heart of it too. . . . I am listening."

"Well, together we went to the grave of the father and mother, and the place where the home had been, and for a long time he was silent, as though they who slept beneath the sod were his, and not another's; but at last he said:

"And what will you do? I don't quite know where he is, though; when last I heard from him and his comrades, they were in the Pipi Valley.'

"My heart was full of joy; for though I saw how touched he was because of what he saw, it was all common to my sight, and I had grieved much, but had had little delight; and I said:

"There's only one thing to be done. He cannot come back here, and I must go to him—that is,' said I, 'if you think he cares for me still, —for my heart quakes at the thought that he might have changed.'

"I know his heart,' said he, 'and you'll find him, I doubt not, the same, though he buried you long ago in a lonely tomb,—the tomb of a sweet remembrance, where the flowers are everlastin'.' Then after more words he offered me money with which to go; but I said to him that the love that couldn't carry itself across the sea by the strength of the hands and the sweat of the brow was no love at all; and that the harder was the road to him the gladder I'd be, so that it didn't keep me too long, and brought me to him at last.

"He looked me up and down very earnestly for a minute, and then he said:
'What is there under the roof of heaven like the love of an honest woman!
It makes the world worth livin' in.'

"Yes,' said I, 'when love has hope, and a place to lay its head.'

"Take this,' said he—and he drew from his pocket his watch—and carry it to him with the regard of Duke Lawless, and this for yourself— fetching from his pocket a revolver and putting it into my hands; 'for the prairies are but rough places after all, and it's better to be safe than—worried. . . . Never fear though but the prairies will bring back the finest of blooms to your cheek, if fair enough it is now, and flush his eye with pride of you; and God be with you both, if a sinner may say that, and breakin' no saint's prerogative.' And he mounted to ride away, havin' shaken my hand like a brother; but he turned again before he went, and said: 'Tell him and his comrades that I'll shoulder my gun and join them

before the world is a year older, if I can. For that land is God's land, and its people are my people, and I care not who knows it, whatever here I be.'

"I worked my way across the sea, and stayed awhile in the East earning money to carry me over the land and into the Pipi Valley. I joined a party of emigrants that were goin' westward, and travelled far with them. But they quarrelled and separated, I goin' with these that I liked best. One night though, I took my horse and left; for I knew there was evil in the heart of a man who sought me continually, and the thing drove me mad. I rode until my horse could stumble no farther, and then I took the saddle for a pillow and slept on the bare ground. And in the morning I got up and rode on, seein' no house nor human being for manny and manny a mile. When everything seemed hopeless I came suddenly upon a camp. But I saw that there was only one man there, and I should have turned back, but that I was worn and ill, and, moreover, I had ridden almost upon him. But he was kind. He shared his food with me, and asked me where I was goin'. I told him, and also that I had quarrelled with those of my party and had left them nothing more. He seemed to wonder that I was goin' to Pipi Valley; and when I had finished my tale he said: 'Well, I must tell you that I am not good company for you. I have a name that doesn't pass at par up here. To speak plain truth, troopers are looking for me, and —strange as it may be—for a crime which I didn't commit. That is the foolishness of the law. But for this I'm making for the American border, beyond which, treaty or no treaty, a man gets refuge.'

"He was silent after that, lookin' at me thoughtfully the while, but in a way that told me I might trust him, evil though he called himself. At length he said: 'I know a good priest, Father Corraine, who has a cabin sixty miles or more from here, and I'll guide you to him, if so be you can trust a half-breed and a gambler, and one men call an outlaw. If not, I'm feared it'll go hard with you; for the Cypress Hills are not easy travel, as I've known this many a year. And should you want a name to call me, Pretty Pierre will do, though my godfathers and godmothers did different for me before they went to Heaven.' And nothing said he irreverently, father."

Here the priest looked up and answered: "Yes, yes, I know him well—an evil man, and yet he has suffered too . . . Well, well, my daughter?"

"At that he took his pistol from his pocket and handed it. 'Take that,' he said. 'It will make you safer with me, and I'll ride ahead of you, and we shall reach there by sundown, I hope.'

"And I would not take his pistol, but, shamed a little, showed him the one Sir Duke Lawless gave me. 'That's right,' he said, 'and, maybe, it's better that I should carry mine, for, as I said, there are anxious gentlemen lookin' for me, who wish to give me a quiet but dreary home. And see,' he added, 'if they should come you will be safe, for they sit in the judgment seat, and the statutes hang at their saddles, and I'll say this for them, that a woman to them is as a saint of God out here where women and saints are few.'

"I do not speak as he spoke, for his words had a turn of French; but I knew that, whatever he was, I should travel peaceably with him. Yet I saw that he would be runnin' the risk of his own safety for me, and I told him that I could not have him do it; but he talked me lightly down, and we started. We had gone but a little distance, when there galloped over a ridge upon us, two men of the party I had left, and one, I saw, was the man I hated; and I cried out and told Pretty Pierre. He wheeled his horse, and held his pistol by him. They said that I should come with them, and they told a dreadful lie—that I was a runaway wife; but Pierre answered them they lied. At this, one rode forward suddenly, and clutched me at my waist to drag me from my horse. At this, Pierre's pistol was thrust in his face, and Pierre bade him cease, which he did; but the other came down with a pistol showin', and Pierre, seein' they were determined, fired; and the man that clutched at me fell from his horse. Then the other drew off; and Pierre got down, and stooped, and felt the man's heart, and said to the other: 'Take your friend away, for he is dead; but drop that pistol of yours on the ground first.' And the man did so; and Pierre, as he looked at the dead man, added: 'Why did he make me kill him?'

"Then the two tied the body to the horse, and the man rode away with it. We travelled on without speakin' for a long time, and then I heard him say absently: 'I am sick of that. When once you have played shuttlecock with human life, you have to play it to the end—that is the penalty. But a woman is a woman, and she must be protected.' Then afterward he turned and asked me if I had friends in Pipi Valley; and because what he had done for me had worked upon me, I told him of the man I was goin' to find. And he started in his saddle, and I could see by the way he twisted the mouth of his horse that I had stirred him."

Here the priest interposed: "What is the name of the man in Pipi Valley to whom you are going?"

And the girl replied: "Ah, father, have I not told you? It is Shon McGann—of Farcalladen Rise."

At this, Father Corraire seemed suddenly troubled, and he looked strangely and sadly at her. But the girl's eyes were fastened on the candle in the window, as if she saw her story in it; and she continued: "A colour spread upon him, and then left him pale; and he said: 'To Shon McGann—you are going to him? Think of that—that!' For an instant I thought a horrible smile played upon his face, and I grew frightened, and said to him: 'You know him. You are not sorry that you are helping me? You and Shon McGann are not enemies?'"

"After a moment the smile that struck me with dread passed, and he said, as he drew himself up with a shake: 'Shon McGann and I were good friends- as good as ever shared a blanket or split a loaf, though he was free of any evil, and I failed of any good.... Well, there came a change. We parted. We could meet no more; but who could have guessed this thing? Yet, hear me—I am no enemy of Shon McGann, as let my deeds to you prove.' And he paused again, but added presently: 'It's better you should have come now than two years ago.'

"And I had a fear in my heart, and to this asked him why. 'Because then he was a friend of mine,' he said, 'and ill always comes to those who are such.' I was troubled at this, and asked him if Shon was in Pipi Valley yet. 'I do not know,' said he, 'for I've travelled long and far from there; still, while I do not wish to put doubt into your mind, I have a thought he may be gone. . . . He had a gay heart,' he continued, 'and we saw brave days together.'

"And though I questioned him, he told me little more, but became silent, scannin' the plains as we rode; but once or twice he looked at me in a strange fashion, and passed his hand across his forehead, and a grey look came upon his face. I asked him if he was not well. 'Only a kind of fightin' within,' he said; 'such things soon pass, and it is well they do, or we should break to pieces.'

"And I said again that I wished not to bring him into danger. And he replied that these matters were accordin' to Fate; that men like him must go on when once the die is cast, for they cannot turn back. It seemed to me a bitter creed, and I was sorry for him. Then for hours we kept an almost steady silence, and comin' at last to the top of a rise of land he pointed to a spot far off on the plains, and said that you, father, lived there; and that he would go with me still a little way, and then leave me. I urged him to go at once, but he would not, and we came down into the plains. He had not ridden far when he said sharply:

"The Riders of the Plains, those gentlemen who seek me, are there—see! Ride on or stay, which you please. If you go you will reach the priest, if you stay here where I shall leave you, you will see me taken perhaps, and it may be fightin' or death; but you will be safe with them. On the whole, it is best, perhaps, that you should ride away to the priest. They might not believe all that you told them, ridin' with me as you are.'

"But I think a sudden madness again came upon me. Rememberin' what things were done by women for refugees in old Donegal, and that this man had risked his life for me, I swung my horse round nose and nose with his, and drew my revolver, and said that I should see whatever came to him. He prayed me not to do so wild a thing; but when I refused, and pushed on along with him, makin' at an angle for some wooded hills, I saw that a smile played upon his face. We had almost reached the edge of the wood when a bullet whistled by us. At that the smile passed and a strange look came upon him, and he said to me:

"This must end here. I think you guess I have no coward's blood; but I am sick to the teeth of fightin'. I do not wish to shock you, but I swear, unless you turn and ride away to the left towards the priest's house, I shall save those fellows further trouble by killin' myself here; and there,' said he, 'would be a pleasant place to die—at the feet of a woman who trusted you.'

"I knew by the look in his eye he would keep his word. "'Oh, is this so?' I said.

"It is so,' he replied, 'and it shall be done quickly, for the courage to death is on me.'

"But if I go, you will still try to escape?' I said. And he answered that he would. Then I spoke a God-bless-you, at which he smiled and shook his head, and leanin' over, touched my hand, and spoke low: 'When you see Shon McGann, tell him what I did, and say that we are even now. Say also that you called Heaven to bless me.' Then we swung away from each other, and the troopers followed after him, but let me go my way; from which, I guessed, they saw I was a woman. And as I rode I heard shots, and turned to see; but my horse stumbled on a hole and we fell together, and when I waked, I saw that the poor beast's legs were broken. So I ended its misery, and made my way as best I could by the stars to your house; but I turned sick and fainted at the door, and knew no more until this hour. . . . You thought me dead, father?"

The priest bowed his head, and said: "These are strange, sad things, my child; and they shall seem

stranger to you when you hear all."

"When I hear all! Ah, tell me, father, do you know Shon McGann? Can you take me to him?"

"I know him, but I do not know where he is. He left the Pipi Valley eighteen months ago, and I never saw him afterwards; still I doubt not he is somewhere on the plains, and we shall find him—we shall find him, please Heaven."

"Is he a good lad, father?"

"He is brave, and he was always kind. He came to me before he left the valley—for he had trouble—and said to me: 'Father, I am going away, and to what place is far from me to know, but wherever it is, I'll live a life that's fit for men, and not like a loafer on God's world;' and he gave me money for masses to be said—for the dead."

The girl put out her hand. "Hush! hush!" she said. "Let me think. Masses for the dead.... What dead? Not for me; he thought me dead long, long ago."

"No; not for you," was the slow reply.

She noticed his hesitation, and said: "Speak. I know that there is sorrow on him. Someone—someone—he loved?"

"Someone he loved," was the reply.

"And she died?" The priest bowed his head.

"She was his wife—Shon's wife?" and Mary Callen could not hide from her words the hurt she felt.

"I married her to him, but yet she was not his wife." There was a keen distress in the girl's voice. "Father, tell me, tell me what you mean."

"Hush, and I will tell you all. He married her, thinking, and she thinking, that she was a widowed woman. But her husband came back. A terrible thing happened. The woman believing, at a painful time, that he who came back was about to take Shon's life, fired at him, and wounded him, and then killed herself."

Mary Callen raised herself upon her elbow, and looked at the priest in piteous bewilderment. "It is dreadful," she said. . . . "Poor woman! . . . And he had forgotten—forgotten me. I was dead to him, and am dead to him now. There's nothing left but to draw the cold sheet of the grave over me. Better for me if I had never come—if I had never come, and instead were lyin' by his father and mother beneath the rowan."

The priest took her wrist firmly in his. "These are not brave nor Christian words, from a brave and Christian girl. But I know that grief makes one's words wild. Shon McGann shall be found. In the days when I saw him most and best, he talked of you as an angel gone, and he had never sought another woman had he known that you lived. The Mounted Police, the Riders of the Plains, travel far and wide. But now, there has come from the farther West a new detachment to Fort Cypress, and they may be able to help us. But listen. There is something more. The man Pretty Pierre, did he not speak puzzling words concerning himself and Shon McGann? And did he not say to you at the last that they were even now? Well, can you not guess?"

Mary Callen's bosom heaved painfully and her eyes stared so at the candle in the window that they seemed to grow one with the flame. At last a new look crept into them; a thought made the lids close quickly as though it burned them. When they opened again they were full of tears that shone in the shadow and dropped slowly on her cheeks and flowed on and on, quivering too in her throat.

The priest said: "You understand, my child?"

And she answered: "I understand. Pierre, the outlaw, was her husband."

Father Corraine rose and sat beside the table, his book of offices open before him. At length he said: "There is much that might be spoken; for the Church has words for every hour of man's life, whatever it be; but there comes to me now a word to say, neither from prayer nor psalm, but from the songs of a country where good women are; where however poor the fireside, the loves beside it are born of the love of God, though the tongue be angry now and then, the foot stumble, and the hand quick at a blow." Then, with a soft, ringing voice, he repeated:

"New friends will clasp your hand, dear, new faces on you smile—
You'll bide with them and love them, but you'll long for us the while;

For the word across the water, and the farewell by the stile—
For the true heart's here, my darlin'."

Mary Callen's tears flowed afresh at first; but soon after the voice ceased she closed her eyes and her sobs stopped, and Father Corraine sat down and became lost in thought as he watched the candle. Then there went a word among the spirits watching that he was not thinking of the candle, or of them that the candle was to light on the way, nor even of this girl near him, but of a summer forty years gone when he was a goodly youth, with the red on his lip and the light in his eye, and before him, leaning on a stile, was a lass with—

". . . cheeks like the dawn of day."

And all the good world swam in circles, eddying ever inward until it streamed intensely and joyously through her eyes "blue as the fairy flax." And he had carried the remembrance of this away into the world with him, but had never gone back again. He had travelled beyond the seas to live among savages and wear out his life in self-denial; and now he had come to the evening of his life, a benignant figure in a lonely land. And as he sat here murmuring mechanically bits of an office, his heart and mind were with a sacred and distant past. Yet the spirits recorded both these things on their tablets, as though both were worthy of their remembrance.

He did not know that he kept repeating two sentences over and over to himself:

"Quoniam ipse liberavit me de laqueo venantium et a verbo aspero. Quoniam angelis suis mandavit de te: ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis."

These he said at first softly to himself, but unconsciously his voice became louder, so that the girl heard, and she said:

"Father Corraine, what are those words? I do not understand them, but they sound comforting."

And he, waking from his dream, changed the Latin into English, and said:

"For he hath delivered me from the snare of the hunter, and from the sharp sword.

For he hath given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

"The words are good," she said. He then told her he was going out, but that he should be within call, saying, at the same time, that someone would no doubt arrive from Fort Cypress soon: and he went from the house. Then the girl rose slowly, crept lamely to a chair and sat down. Outside, the priest paced up and down, stopping now and then, and listening as if for horses' hoofs. At last he walked some distance away from the house, deeply lost in thought, and he did not notice that a man came slowly, heavily, to the door of the hut, and opening it, entered.

Mary Callen rose from her seat with a cry in which was timidity, pity, and something of horror; for it was Pretty Pierre. She recoiled, but seeing how he swayed with weakness, and that his clothes had blood upon them, she helped him to a chair. He looked up at her with an enigmatical smile, but he did not speak. "Oh," she whispered, "you are wounded!"

He nodded; but still he did not speak. Then his lips moved dryly. She brought him water. He drank deeply, and a sigh of relief escaped him. "You got here safely," he now said. "I am glad of that—though you, too, are hurt."

She briefly told him how, and then he said: "Well, I suppose you know all of me now?"

"I know what happened in Pipi Valley," she said, timidly and wearily. "Father Corraine told me."

"Where is he?"

When she had answered him, he said: "And you are willing to speak with me still?"

"You saved me," was her brief, convincing reply. "How did you escape? Did you fight?"

"No," he said. "It is strange. I did not fight at all. As I said to you, I was sick of blood. These men were only doing their duty. I might have killed two or three of them, and have escaped, but to what good? When they shot my horse, my good Sacrament,—and put a bullet into this shoulder, I crawled away still, and led them a dance, and doubled on them; and here I am."

"It is wonderful that they have not been here," she said.

"Yes, it is wonderful; but be very sure they will be with that candle in the window. Why is it there?"

She told him. He lifted his brows in stoic irony, and said: "Well, we shall have an army of them soon." He rose again to his feet. "I do not wish to die, and I always said that I would never go to prison. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she replied. She went immediately to the window, took the candle from it, and put it behind an improvised shade. No sooner was this done than Father Corraine entered the room, and seeing the outlaw, said "You have come here, Pierre?" And his face showed wonder and anxiety.

"I have come, mon pere, for sanctuary."

"For sanctuary! But, my son, if I vex not Heaven by calling you so, why"—he saw Pierre stagger slightly. "But you are wounded." He put his arm round the other's shoulder, and supported him till he recovered himself. Then he set to work to bandage anew the wound, from which Pierre himself had not unskilfully extracted the bullet. While doing so, the outlaw said to him:

"Father Corraine, I am hunted like a coyote for a crime I did not commit. But if I am arrested they will no doubt charge me with other things— ancient things. Well, I have said that I should never be sent to gaol, and I never shall; but I do not wish to die at this moment, and I do not wish to fight. What is there left?"

"How do you come here, Pierre?"

He lifted his eyes heavily to Mary Callen, and she told Father Corraine what had been told her. When she had finished, Pierre added:

"I am no coward, as you will witness; but as I said, neither gaol nor death do I wish. Well, if they should come here, and you said, Pierre is not here, even though I was in the next room, they would believe you, and they would not search. Well, I ask such sanctuary."

The priest recoiled and raised his hand in protest. Then, after a moment, he said:

"How do you deserve this? Do you know what you ask?"

"Ah, oui, I know it is immense, and I deserve nothing: and in return I can offer nothing, not even that I will repent. And I have done no good in the world; but still perhaps I am worth the saving, as may be seen in the end. As for you, well, you will do a little wrong so that the end will be right. So?"

The priest's eyes looked out long and sadly at the man from under his venerable brows, as though he would see through him and beyond him to that end; and at last he spoke in a low, firm voice:

"Pierre, you have been a bad man; but sometimes you have been generous, and of a few good acts I know—"

"No, not good," the other interrupted. "I ask this of your charity."

"There is the law, and my conscience."

"The law! the law!" and there was sharp satire in the half-breed's voice. "What has it done in the West? Think, 'mon pere!' Do you not know a hundred cases where the law has dealt foully? There was more justice before we had law. Law—" And he named over swiftly, scornfully, a score of names and incidents, to which Father Corraine listened intently. "But," said Pierre, gently, at last, "but for your conscience, m'sieu', that is greater than law. For you are a good man and a wise man; and you know that I shall pay my debts of every kind some sure day. That should satisfy your justice, but you are merciful for the moment, and you will spare until the time be come, until the corn is ripe in the ear. Why should I plead? It is foolish. Still, it is my whim, of which, perhaps, I shall be sorry tomorrow . . . Hark!" he added, and then shrugged his shoulders and smiled. There were sounds of hoof beats coming faintly to them. Father Corraine threw open the door of the other room of the hut, and said "Go in there—Pierre. We shall see . . . we shall see."

The outlaw looked at the priest, as if hesitating; but, after, nodded meaningly to himself, and entered the room and shut the door. The priest stood listening. When the hoof-beats stopped, he opened the door, and went out. In the dark he could see that men were dismounting from their horses. He stood still and waited. Presently a trooper stepped forward and said warmly, yet brusquely, as became his office: "Father Corraine, we meet again!"

The priest's face was overswept by many expressions, in which marvel and trouble were uppermost, while joy was in less distinctness.

"Surely," he said, "it is Shon McGann."

"Shon McGann, and no other.—I that laughed at the law for many a year, though never breaking it beyond repair,—took your advice, Father Corraine, and here I am, holding that law now as my bosom friend at the saddle's pommel. Corporal Shon McGann, at your service."

They clasped hands, and the priest said: "You have come at my call from Fort Cypress?"

"Yes. But not these others. They are after a man that's played ducks and drakes with the statutes—Heaven be merciful to him, I say. For there's naught I treasure against him; the will of God bein' in it all, with some doin' of the Devil, too, maybe."

Pretty Pierre, standing with ear to the window of the dark room, heard all this, and he pressed his upper lip hard with his forefinger, as if something disturbed him.

Shon continued. "I'm glad I wasn't sent after him as all these here know; for it's little I'd like to clap irons on his wrists, or whistle him to come to me with a Winchester or a Navy. So I'm here on my business, and they're here on theirs. Though we come together it's because we met each other hereaway. They've a thought that, maybe, Pretty Pierre has taken refuge with you. They'll little like to disturb you, I know. But with dead in your house, and you givin' the word of truth, which none other could fall from your lips, they'll go on their way to look elsewhere."

The priest's face was pinched, and there was a wrench at his heart. He turned to the others. A trooper stepped forward.

"Father Corraine," he said, "it is my duty to search your house; but not a foot will I stretch across your threshold if you say no, and give the word that the man is not with you."

"Corporal McGann," said the priest, "the woman whom I thought was dead did not die, as you shall see. There is no need for inquiry. But she will go with you to Fort Cypress. As for the other, you say that Father Corraine's threshold is his own, and at his own command. His home is now a sanctuary—for the afflicted." He went towards the door. As he did so, Mary Callen, who had been listening inside the room with shaking frame and bursting heart, dropped on her knees beside the table, her head in her arms. The door opened. "See," said the priest, "a woman who is injured and suffering."

"Ah," rejoined the trooper, "perhaps it is the woman who was riding with the half-breed. We found her dead horse."

The priest nodded. Shon McGann looked at the crouching figure by the table pityingly. As he looked he was stirred, he knew not why. And she, though she did not look, knew that his gaze was on her; and all her will was spent in holding her eyes from his face, and from crying out to him.

"And Pretty Pierre," said the trooper, "is not here with her?"

There was an unfathomable sadness in the priest's eyes, as, with a slight motion of the hand towards the room, he said: "You see—he is not here."

The trooper and his men immediately mounted; but one of them, young Tim Kearney, slid from his horse, and came and dropped on his knee in front of the priest.

"It's many a day," he said, "since before God or man I bent a knee—more shame to me for that, and for mad days gone; but I care not who knows it, I want a word of blessin' from the man that's been out here like a saint in the wilderness, with a heart like the Son o' God."

The priest looked at the man at first as if scarce comprehending this act so familiar to him, then he slowly stretched out his hand, said some words in benediction, and made the sacred gesture. But his face had a strange and absent look, and he held the hand poised, even when the man had risen and mounted his horse. One by one the troopers rode through the faint belt of light that stretched from the door, and were lost in the darkness, the thud of their horses' hoofs echoing behind them. But a change had come over Corporal Shon McGann. He looked at Father Corraine with concern and perplexity. He alone of those who were there had caught the unreal note in the proceedings. His eyes were bent on the darkness into which the men had gone, and his fingers toyed for an instant with his whistle; but he said a hard word of himself under his breath, and turned to meet Father Corraine's hand upon his arm.

"Shon McGann," the priest said, "I have words to say to you concerning this poor girl,"

"You wish to have her taken to the Fort, I suppose? What was she doing with Pretty Pierre?"

"I wish her taken to her home."

"Where is her home, father?" And his eyes were cast with trouble on the girl, though he could assign no cause for that.

"Her home, Shon,"—the priest's voice was very gentle—"her home was where they sing such words as these of a wanderer:

"'You'll hear the wild birds singin' beneath a brighter sky,
The roof-tree of your home, dear, it will be grand and high;
But you'll hunger for the hearthstone where a child you used to lie,
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'.'"

During these words Shon's face ran white, then red; and now he stepped inside the door like one in a dream, and the girl's face was lifted to his as though he had called her. "Mary—Mary Callen!" he cried. His arms spread out, then dropped to his side, and he fell on his knees by the table facing her, and looked at her with love and horror warring in his face; for the remembrance that she had been with Pierre was like the hand of the grave upon him. Moving not at all, she looked at him, a numb despondency in her face. Suddenly Shon's look grew stern, and he was about to rise; but Father Corraine put a hand on his shoulder, and said: "Stay where you are, man—on your knees. There is your place just now. Be not so quick to judge, and remember your own sins before you charge others without knowledge. Listen now to me."

And he spoke Mary Callen's tale as he knew it, and as she had given it to him, not forgetting to mention that she had been told the thing which had occurred in Pipi Valley.

The heroic devotion of this woman, and Pretty Pierre's act of friendship to her, together with the swift panorama of his past across the seas, awoke the whole man in Shon, as the staunch life that he had lately led rendered it possible. There was a grave, kind look upon his face when he rose at the ending of the tale, and came to her, saying:

"Mary, it is I who need forgiveness. Will you come now to the home you wanted?" and he stretched his arms to her. . . .

An hour after, as the three sat there, the door of the other room opened, and Pretty Pierre came out silently, and was about to pass from the hut; but the priest put a hand on his arm, and said:

"Where do you go, Pierre?"

Pierre shrugged his shoulder slightly:

"I do not know. 'Mon Dieu!'—that I have put this upon you!—you that never spoke but the truth."

"You have made my sin of no avail," the priest replied; and he motioned towards Shon McGann, who was now risen to his feet, Mary clinging to his arm. "Father Corraine," said Shon, "it is my duty to arrest this man; but I cannot do it, would not do it, if he came and offered his arms for the steel. I'll take the wrong of this now, sir, and such shame as there is in that falsehood on my shoulders. And she here and I, and this man too, I doubt not, will carry your sin—as you call it—to our graves, without shame."

Father Corraine shook his head sadly, and made no reply, for his soul was heavy. He motioned them all to sit down. And they sat there by the light of a flickering candle, with the door bolted and a cassock hung across the window, lest by any chance this uncommon thing should be seen. But the priest remained in a shadowed corner, with a little book in his hand, and he was long on his knees. And when morning came they had neither slept nor changed the fashion of their watch, save for a moment now and then, when Pierre suffered from the pain of his wound, and silently passed up and down the little room.

The morning was half gone when Shon McGann and Mary Callen stood beside their horses, ready to mount and go; for Mary had persisted that she could travel—joy makes such marvellous healing. When the moment of parting came, Pierre was not there. Mary whispered to her lover concerning this. The priest went to the door of the but and called him. He came out slowly.

"Pierre," said Shon, "there's a word to be said between us that had best be spoken now, though it's not aisy. It's little you or I will care to meet again in this world. There's been credit given and debts paid by both of us since the hour when we first met; and it needs thinking to tell which is the debtor now, for deeds are hard to reckon; but, before God, I believe it's meself;" and he turned and looked

fondly at Mary Callen.

And Pierre replied: "Shon McGann, I make no reckoning close; but we will square all accounts here, as you say, and for the last time; for never again shall we meet, if it's within my will or doing. But I say I am the debtor; and if I pay not here, there will come a time!" and he caught his shoulder as it shrunk in pain of his wound. He tapped the wound lightly, and said with irony: "This is my note of hand for my debt, Shon McGann. Eh, bien!"

Then he tossed his fingers indolently towards Shon, and turning his eyes slowly to Mary Callen, raised his hat in good-bye. She put out her hand impulsively to him, but Pierre, shaking his head, looked away. Shon put his hand gently on her arm. "No, no," he said in a whisper, "there can be no touch of hands between us."

And Pierre, looking up, added: "C'est vrai. That is the truth. You go— home. I got to hide. So—so." And he turned and went into the hut.

The others set their faces northward, and Father Corraine walked beside Mary Callen's horse, talking quietly of their future life, and speaking, as he would never speak again, of days in that green land of their birth. At length, upon a dividing swell of the prairie, he paused to say farewell.

Many times the two turned to see, and he was there, looking after them; his forehead bared to the clear inspiring wind, his grey hair blown back, his hands clasped. Before descending the trough of a great landwave, they turned for the last time, and saw him standing motionless, the one solitary being in all their wide horizon.

But outside the line of vision there sat a man in a prairie hut, whose eyes travelled over the valley of blue sky stretching away beyond the morning, whose face was pale and cold. For hours he sat unmoving, and when, at last, someone gently touched him on the shoulder, he only shook his head, and went on thinking. He was busy with the grim ledger of his life.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

An inner sorrow is a consuming fire
Philosophy which could separate the petty from the prodigious
Remember your own sins before you charge others

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR
NORTH. VOLUME 5 ***

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