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A ROMANY OF THE SNOWS

BEING A CONTINUATION OF THE PERSONAL HISTORIES OF "PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE" AND THE LAST EXISTING RECORDS OF PRETTY PIERRE

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 5.

THE CRUISE OF THE "NINETY-NINE" A ROMANY OF THE SNOWS THE PLUNDERER

THE CRUISE OF THE "NINETY-NINE"

I. THE SEARCH

She was only a big gulf yawl, which a man and a boy could manage at a pinch, with old-fashioned high bulwarks, but lying clean in the water. She had a tolerable record for speed, and for other things so important that they were now and again considered by the Government at Quebec. She was called the Ninety-Nine. With a sense of humour the cure had called her so, after an interview with her owner and captain, Tarboe the smuggler. When he said to Tarboe at Angel Point that he had come to seek the one sheep that was lost, leaving behind him the other ninety-and-nine within the fold at Isle of Days, Tarboe had replied that it was a mistake—he was the ninety-nine, for he needed no repentance, and immediately offered the cure some old brown brandy of fine flavour. They both had a whimsical turn,

and the cure did not ask Tarboe how he came by such perfect liquor. Many high in authority, it was said, had been soothed even to the winking of an eye when they ought to have sent a Nordenfeldt against the Ninety-Nine.

The day after the cure left Angel Point he spoke of Tarboe and his craft as the Ninety-and-Nine; and Tarboe hearing of this—for somehow he heard everything—immediately painted out the old name, and called her the Ninety-Nine, saying that she had been so blessed by the cure. Afterwards the Ninety-Nine had an increasing reputation for exploit and daring. In brief, Tarboe and his craft were smugglers, and to have trusted gossip would have been to say that the boat was as guilty as the man.

Their names were much more notorious than sweet; and yet in Quebec men laughed as they shrugged their shoulders at them; for as many jovial things as evil were told of Tarboe. When it became known that a dignitary of the Church had been given a case of splendid wine, which had come in a roundabout way to him, men waked in the night and laughed, to the annoyance of their wives; for the same dignitary had preached a powerful sermon against smugglers and the receivers of stolen goods. It was a sad thing for monsignor to be called a Ninety-Niner, as were all good friends of Tarboe, high and low. But when he came to know, after the wine had been leisurely drunk and becomingly praised, he brought his influence to bear in civic places, so that there was nothing left to do but to corner Tarboe at last.

It was in the height of summer, when there was little to think of in the old fortressed city, and a dart after a brigand appealed to the romantic natures of the idle French folk, common and gentle.

Through clouds of rank tobacco smoke, and in the wash of their bean soup, the habitants discussed the fate of "Black Tarboe," and officers of the garrison and idle ladies gossiped at the Citadel and at Murray Bay of the freebooting gentlemen, whose Ninety-Nine had furnished forth many a table in the great walled city. But Black Tarboe himself was down at Anticosti, waiting for a certain merchantman. Passing vessels saw the Ninety-Nine anchored in an open bay, flying its flag flippantly before the world—a rag of black sheepskin, with the wool on, in profane keeping with its name.

There was no attempt at hiding, no skulking behind a point, or scurrying from observation, but an indolent and insolent waiting—for something. "Black Tarboe's getting reckless," said one captain coming in, and another, going out, grinned as he remembered the talk at Quebec, and thought of the sport provided for the Ninety-Nine when she should come up stream; as she must in due time, for Tarboe's home was on the Isle of Days, and was he not fond and proud of his daughter Joan to a point of folly? He was not alone in his admiration of Joan, for the cure at Isle of Days said high things of her.

Perhaps this was because she was unlike most other girls, and women too, in that she had a sense of humour, got from having mixed with choice spirits who visited her father and carried out at Angel Point a kind of freemasonry, which had few rites and many charges and countercharges. She had that almost impossible gift in a woman—the power of telling a tale whimsically. It was said that once, when Orvay Lafarge, a new Inspector of Customs, came to spy out the land, she kept him so amused by her quaint wit, that he sat in the doorway gossiping with her, while Tarboe and two others unloaded and safely hid away a cargo of liquors from the Ninety-Nine. And one of the men, as cheerful as Joan herself, undertook to carry a little keg of brandy into the house, under the very nose of the young inspector, who had sought to mark his appointment by the detection and arrest of Tarboe single-handed. He had never met Tarboe or Tarboe's daughter when he made his boast. If his superiors had known that Loco Bissonnette, Tarboe's jovial lieutenant, had carried the keg of brandy into the house in a water-pail, not fifteen feet from where Lafarge sat with Joan, they might have asked for his resignation. True, the thing was cleverly done, for Bissonnette made the water spill quite naturally against his leg, and when he turned to Joan and said in a crusty way that he didn't care if he spilled all the water in the pail, he looked so like an unwilling water-carrier that Joan for one little moment did not guess. When she understood, she laughed till the tears came to her eyes, and presently, because Lafarge seemed hurt, gave him to understand that he was upon his honour if she told him what it was. He consenting, she, still laughing, asked him into the house, and then drew the keg from the pail, before his eyes, and, tapping it, gave him some liquor, which he accepted without churlishness. He found nothing in this to lessen her in his eyes, for he knew that women have no civic virtues. He drank to their better acquaintance with few compunctions; a matter not scandalous, for there is nothing like a witty woman to turn a man's head, and there was not so much at stake after all. Tarboe had gone on for many a year till his trade seemed like the romance of law rather than its breach. It is safe to say that Lafarge was a less sincere if not a less blameless customs officer from this time forth. For humour on a woman's lips is a potent thing, as any man knows that has kissed it off in laughter.

As we said, Tarboe lay rocking in a bight at Anticosti, with an empty hold and a scanty larder. Still, he was in no ill-humour, for he smoked much and talked more than common. Perhaps that was because Joan was with him—an unusual thing. She was as good a sailor as her father, but she did not care, nor

did he, to have her mixed up with him in his smuggling. So far as she knew, she had never been on board the Ninety-Nine when it carried a smuggled cargo. She had not broken the letter of the law. Her father, on asking her to come on this cruise, had said that it was a pleasure trip to meet a vessel in the gulf.

The pleasure had not been remarkable, though there had been no bad weather. The coast of Anticosti is cheerless, and it is possible even to tire of sun and water. True, Bissonnette played the concertina with passing sweetness, and sang as little like a wicked smuggler as one might think. But there were boundaries even to that, as there were to his love-making, which was, however, so interwoven with laughter that it was impossible to think the matter serious. Sometimes of an evening Joan danced on deck to the music of the concertina—dances which had their origin largely with herself fantastic, touched off with some unexpected sleight of foot—almost uncanny at times to Bissonnette, whose temperament could hardly go her distance when her mood was as this.

Tarboe looked on with a keener eye and understanding, for was she not bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh? Who was he that he should fail to know her? He saw the moonlight play on her face and hair, and he waved his head with the swaying of her body, and smacked his lips in thought of the fortune which, smuggling days over, would carry them up to St. Louis Street, Quebec, there to dwell as in a garden of good things.

After many days had passed, Joan tired of the concertina, of her own dancing, of her father's tales, and became inquisitive. So at last she said:

"Father, what's all this for?"

Tarboe did not answer her at once, but, turning to Bissonnette, asked him to play "The Demoiselle with the Scarlet Hose." It was a gay little demoiselle according to Bissonnette, and through the creaking, windy gaiety Tarboe and his daughter could talk without being heard by the musician. Tarboe lit another cigar—that badge of greatness in the eyes of his fellow-habitants, and said:

"What's all this for, Joan? Why, we're here for our health." His teeth bit on the cigar with enjoyable emphasis.

"If you don't tell me what's in the wind, you'll be sorry. Come, where's the good? I've got as much head as you have, father, and—"

"Mon Dieu! Much more. That's not the question. It was to be a surprise to you."

"Pshaw! You can only have one minute of surprise, and you can have months of fun looking out for a thing. I don't want surprises; I want what you've got—the thing that's kept you good-tempered while we lie here like snails on the rocks."

"Well, my cricket, if that's the way you feel, here you are. It is a long story, but I will make it short. Once there was a pirate called Brigond, and he brought into a bay on the coast of Labrador a fortune in some kegs—gold, gold! He hid it in a cave, wrapping around it the dead bodies of two men. It is thought that one can never find it so. He hid it, and sailed away. He was captured, and sent to prison in France for twenty years. Then he come back with a crew and another ship, and sailed into the bay, but his ship went down within sight of the place. And so the end of him and all. But wait. There was one man, the mate on the first voyage. He had been put in prison also. He did not get away as soon as Brigond. When he was free, he come to the captain of a ship that I know, the Free-and-Easy, that sails to Havre, and told him the story, asking for passage to Quebec. The captain—Gobal—did not believe it, but said he would bring him over on the next voyage. Gobal come to me and told me all there was to tell. I said that it was a true story, for Pretty Pierre told me once he saw Brigond's ship go down in the bay; but he would not say how, or why, or where. Pierre would not lie in a thing like that, and—"

"Why didn't he get the gold himself?"

"What is money to him? He is as a gipsy. To him the money is cursed. He said so. Eh bien! some wise men are fools, one way or another. Well, I told Gobal I would give the man the Ninety-Nine for the cruise and search, and that we should divide the gold between us, if it was found, taking out first enough to make a dot for you and a fine handful for Bissonnette. But no, shake not your head like that. It shall be so. Away went Gobal four months ago, and I get a letter from him weeks past, just after Pentecost, to say he would be here some time in the first of July, with the man.

"Well, it is a great game. The man is a pirate, but it does not matter— he has paid for that. I thought you would be glad of a fine adventure like that, so I said to you, Come."

"But, father—"

"If you do not like you can go on with Gobal in the Free-and-Easy, and you shall be landed at the Isle of Days. That's all. We're waiting here for Gobal. He promised to stop just outside this bay and land our man on us. Then, blood of my heart, away we go after the treasure!"

Joan's eyes flashed. Adventure was in her as deep as life itself. She had been cradled in it, reared in it, lived with it, and here was no law- breaking. Whose money was it? No one's: for who should say what ship it was, or what people were robbed by Brigond and those others? Gold—that was a better game than wine and brandy, and for once her father would be on a cruise which would not be, as it were, sailing in forbidden waters.

"When do you expect Gobal?" she asked eagerly. "He ought to have been here a week ago. Maybe he has had a bad voyage, or something."

"He's sure to come?"

"Of course. I found out about that. She's got a big consignment to people in Quebec. Something has gone wrong, but she'll be here—yes."

"What will you do if you get the money?" she asked. Tarboe laughed heartily. "My faith! Come play up those scarlet hose, Bissonnette! My faith, I'll go into Parliament at Quebec. Thunder! I will have sport with them. I'll reform the customs. There shan't be any more smuggling. The people of Quebec shall drink no more good wine—no one except Black Tarboe, the member for Isle of Days."

Again he laughed, and his eyes spilt fire like revolving wheels. For a moment Joan was quiet; her face was shining like the sun on a river. She saw more than her father, for she saw release. A woman may stand by a man who breaks the law, but in her heart she always has bitterness, for that the world shall speak well of herself and what she loves is the secret desire of every woman. In her heart she never can defy the world as does a man.

She had carried off the situation as became the daughter of a daring adventurer, who in more stirring times might have been a Du Lhut or a Rob Roy, but she was sometimes tired of the fighting, sometimes wishful that she could hold her position easier. Suppose the present good cure should die and another less considerate arrive, how hard might her position become! Then, she had a spirit above her station, as have most people who know the world and have seen something of its forbidden side; for it is notable that wisdom comes not alone from loving good things, but from having seen evil as well as good. Besides Joan was not a woman to go singly to her life's end.

There was scarcely a man on Isle of Days and in the parish of Ste. Eunice, on the mainland, but would gladly have taken to wife the daughter of Tarboe the smuggler, and it is likely that the cure of either parish would not have advised against it.

Joan had had the taste of the lawless, and now she knew, as she sat and listened to Bissonnette's music, that she also could dance for joy, in the hope of a taste of the lawful. With this money, if it were got, there could be another life—in Quebec. She could not forbear laughing now as she remembered that first day she had seen Orvay Lafarge, and she said to Bissonnette: "Loce, do you mind the keg in the water-pail?" Bissonnette paused on an out-pull, and threw back his head with a soundless laugh, then played the concertina into contortions.

"That Lafarge! H'm! He is very polite; but pshaw, it is no use that, in whisky-running! To beat a great man, a man must be great. Tarboe Noir can lead M'sieu' Lafarge all like that!"

It seemed as if he were pulling the nose of the concertina. Tarboe began tracing a kind of maze with his fingers on the deck, his eyes rolling outward like an endless puzzle. But presently he turned sharp on Joan.

"How many times have you met him?" he asked. "Oh, six or seven—eight or nine, perhaps."

Her father stared. "Eight or nine? By the holy! Is it like that?
Where have you seen him?"

"Twice at our home, as you know; two or three times at dances at the Belle Chatelaine, and the rest when we were at Quebec in May. He is amusing, M'sieu' Lafarge."

"Yes, two of a kind," remarked Tarboe drily; and then he told his schemes to Joan, letting Bissonnette hang up the "The Demoiselle with the Scarlet Hose," and begin "The Coming of the Gay Cavalier." She entered into his plans with spirit, and together they speculated what bay it might be, of the many on the coast of Labrador.

They spent two days longer waiting, and then at dawn a merchantman came sauntering up to anchor.

She signalled to the Ninety-Nine. In five minutes Tarboe was climbing up the side of the Free-and-Easy, and presently was in Gobal's cabin, with a glass of wine in his hand.

"What kept you, Gobal?" he asked. "You're ten days late, at least."

"Storm and sickness—broken mainmast and smallpox." Gobal was not cheerful.

Tarboe caught at something. "You've got our man?" Gobal drank off his wine slowly. "Yes," he said. "Well?—Why don't you fetch him?"

"You can see him below."

"The man has legs, let him walk here. Hello, my Gobal, what's the matter? If he's here bring him up. We've no time to lose."

"Tarboe, the fool got smallpox, and died three hours ago—the tenth man since we started. We're going to give him to the fishes. They're putting him in his linen now."

Tarboe's face hardened. Disaster did not dismay him, it either made him ugly or humourous, and one phase was as dangerous as the other.

"D'ye mean to say," he groaned, "that the game is up? Is it all finished? Sweat o' my soul, my skin crawls like hot glass! Is it the end, eh? The beast, to die!"

Gobal's eyes glistened. He had sent up the mercury, he would now bring it down.

"Not such a beast as you think. Alive pirate, a convict, as comrade in adventure, is not sugar in the teeth. This one was no better than the worst. Well, he died. That was awkward. But he gave me the chart of the bay before he died—and that was damn square."

Tarboe held out his hand eagerly, the big fingers bending claw-like.

"Give it me, Gobal," he said.

"Wait. There's no hurry. Come along, there's the bell: they're going to drop him."

He coolly motioned, and passed out from the cabin to the ship's side. Tarboe kept his tongue from blasphemy, and his hand from the captain's shoulder, for he knew only too well that Gobal held the game in his hands. They leaned over and saw two sailors with something on a plank.

"We therefore commit his body to the deep, in the knowledge of the Judgment Day—let her go!" grunted Gobal; and a long straight canvas bundle shot with a swishing sound beneath the water. "It was rough on him too," he continued. "He waited twenty years to have his chance again. Damn me, if I didn't feel as if I'd hit him in the eye, somehow, when he begged me to keep him alive long enough to have a look at the rhino. But it wasn't no use. He had to go, and I told him so.

"Then he did the fine thing: he give me the chart. But he made me swear on a book of the Mass that if we got the gold we'd send one-half his share to a woman in Paris, and the rest to his brother, a priest at Nancy. I'll keep my word—but yes! Eh, Tarboe?"

"You can keep your word for me! What, you think, Gobal, there is no honour in Black Tarboe, and you've known me ten years! Haven't I always kept my word like a clock?"

Gobal stretched out his hand. "Like the sun-sure. That's enough. We'll stand by my oath. You shall see the chart."

Going again inside the cabin, Gobal took out a map grimed with ceaseless fingering, and showed it to Tarboe, putting his finger on the spot where the treasure lay.

"The Bay of Belle Amour!" cried Tarboe, his eyes flashing. "Ah, I know it! That's where Gaspard the pilot lived. It's only forty leagues or so from here." His fingers ran here and there on the map. "Yes, yes," he continued, "it's so, but he hasn't placed the reef right. Ah, here is how Brigond's ship went down! There's a needle of rock in the bay. It isn't here."

Gobal handed the chart over. "I can't go with you, but I take your word;
I can say no more. If you cheat me I'll kill you; that's all."

"Let me give a bond," said Tarboe quickly. "If I saw much gold perhaps I couldn't trust myself, but there's someone to be trusted, who'll swear for me. If my daughter Joan give her word—"

"Is she with you?"

"Yes, in the Ninety-Nine, now. I'll send Bissonnette for her. Yes, yes, I'll send, for gold is worse than bad whisky when it gets into a man's head. Joan will speak for me."

Ten minutes later Joan was in Gobal's cabin, guaranteeing for her father the fulfilment of his bond. An hour afterwards the Free-and-Easy was moving up stream with her splintered mast and ragged sails, and the Ninety-Nine was looking up and over towards the Bay of Belle Amour. She reached it in the late afternoon of the next day. Bissonnette did not know the object of the expedition, but he had caught the spirit of the affair, and his eyes were like spots of steel as he held the sheet or took his turn at the tiller. Joan's eyes were now on the sky, now on the sail, and now on the land, weighing as wisely as her father the advantage of the wind, yet dwelling on that cave where skeletons kept ward over the spoils of a pirate ship.

They arrived, and Tarboe took the Ninety-Nine warily in on a little wind off the land. He came near sharing the fate of Brigond, for the yawl grazed the needle of the rock that, hiding away in the water, with a nose out for destruction, awaits its victims. They reached safe anchorage, but by the time they landed it was night, with, however, a good moon showing.

All night they searched, three silent, eager figures, drawing step by step nearer the place where the ancient enemy of man was barracked about by men's bodies. It was Joan who, at last, as dawn drew up, discovered the hollow between two great rocks where the treasure lay. A few minutes' fierce digging, and the kegs of gold were disclosed, showing through the ribs of two skeletons. Joan shrank back, but the two men tossed aside the rattling bones, and presently the kegs were standing between them on the open shore. Bissonnette's eyes were hungry—he knew now the wherefore of the quest. He laughed outright, a silly, loud, hysterical laugh. Tarboe's eyes shifted from the sky to the river, from the river to the kegs, from the kegs to Bissonnette. On him they stayed a moment. Bissonnette shrank back. Tarboe was feeling for the first time in his life the deadly suspicion which comes with ill-gotten wealth. This passed as his eyes and Joan's met, for she had caught the melodrama, the overstrain; Bissonnette's laugh had pointed the situation; and her sense of humour had prevailed. "La, la," she said, with a whimsical quirk of the head, and no apparent relevancy:

"Lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire, and your children all gone."

The remedy was good. Tarboe's eyes came again to their natural liveliness, and Bissonnette said:

"My throat's like a piece of sand-paper."

Tarboe handed over a brandy flask, after taking a pull himself, and then sitting down on one of the kegs, he said: "It is as you see, and now Angel Point very quick. To get it there safe, that's the thing!" Then, scanning the sky closely: "It's for a handsome day, and the wind goes to bear us up fine. Good! Well, for you, Bissonnette, there shall be a thousand dollars, you shall have the Belle Chatelaine Inn and the little lady at Point Pierrot. For the rest, you shall keep a quiet tongue, eh? If not, my Bissonnette, we shall be the best of strangers, and you shall not be happy. Hein?"

Bissonnette's eyes flashed. "The Belle Chatelaine? Good! That is enough. My tongue is tied; I cannot speak; it is fastened with a thousand pegs."

"Very good, a thousand gold pegs, and you shall never pull them. The little lady will have you with them, not without; and unless you stand by me, no one shall have you at any price—by God!"

He stood up, but Joan put out her hand. "You have been speaking, now it is my turn. Don't cry cook till you have the venison home. What is more, I gave my word to Gobal, and I will keep it. I will be captain. No talking! When you've got the kegs in the cellar at Angel Point, good! But now—come, my comrades, I am your captain!"

She was making the thing a cheerful adventure, and the men now swung the kegs on their shoulders and carried them to the boat. In another half- hour they were under way in the gaudy light of an orange sunrise, a simmering wind from the sea lifting them up the river, and the grey-red coast of Labrador shrinking sullenly back.

About this time, also, a Government cutter was putting out from under the mountain-wall at Quebec, its officer in command having got renewed orders from the Minister to bring in Tarboe the smuggler. And when Mr. Martin, the inspector in command of the expedition, was ordered to take with him Mr. Orvay Lafarge and five men, "effectively armed," it was supposed by the romantic Minister that the matter was as good as done.

What Mr. Orvay Lafarge did when he got the word, was to go straight to his hat-peg, then leave the office, walk to the little club where he spent leisure hours, called office hours by people who wished to

be precise as well as suggestive,—sit down, and raise a glass to his lips. After which he threw himself back in his chair and said: "Well, I'm particularly damned!" A few hours later they were away on their doubtful exploit.

II. THE DEFENCE

On the afternoon of the second day after she left Labrador, the Ninety- Nine came rippling near Isle of Fires, not sixty miles from her destination, catching a fair wind on her quarter off the land. Tarboe was in fine spirits, Joan was as full of songs as a canary, and Bissonnette was as busy watching her as in keeping the nose of the Ninety-Nine pointing for Cap de Gloire. Tarboe was giving the sail full to the wind, and thinking how he would just be able to reach Angel Point and get his treasure housed before mass in the morning.

Mass! How many times had he laughed as he sat in church and heard the cure have his gentle fling at smuggling! To think that the hiding-place for his liquor was the unused, almost unknown, cellar of that very church, built a hundred years before as a refuge from the Indians, which he had reached by digging a tunnel from the shore to its secret passage! That was why the customs officers never found anything at Angel Point, and that was why Tarboe much loved going to mass. He sometimes thought he could catch the flavour of the brands as he leaned his forehead on the seat before him. But this time he would go to mass with a fine handful of those gold pieces in his pocket, just to keep him in a commendable mood. He laughed out loud at the thought of doing so within a stone's throw of a fortune and nose-shot of fifty kegs of brandy.

As he did so, Bissonnette gave a little cry. They were coming on to Cap de Gloire at the moment, and Tarboe and Joan, looking, saw a boat standing off towards the mainland, as if waiting for them. Tarboe gave a roar, and called to Joan to take the tiller. He snatched a glass and levelled it.

"A Government tug!" he said, "and tete de Diable! there's your tall
Lafarge among 'em, Joan! I'd know him by his height miles off."

Joan lost colour a trifle and then got courage. "Pshaw," she said, "what does he want?"

"Want? Want? He wants the Ninety-Nine and her cargo; but by the sun of my soul, he'll get her across the devil's gridiron! See here, my girl, this ain't any sport with you aboard. Bissonnette and I could make a stand for it alone, but what's to become of you? I don't want you mixed up in the mess."

The girl was eyeing the Government boat. "But I'm in it, and I can't be out of it, and I don't want to be out now that I am in. Let me see the glass." She took it in one hand. "Yes, it must be M'sieu' Lafarge," she said, frowning. "He might have stayed out of this."

"When he's got orders, he has to go," answered her father; "but he must look out, for a gun is a gun, and I don't pick and choose. Besides, I've no contraband this cruise, and I'll let no one stick me up."

"There are six or seven of them," said Joan debatingly.

"Bring her up to the wind," shouted Tarboe to Bissonnette. The mainsail closed up several points, the Ninety-Nine slackened her pace and edged in closer to the land. "Now, my girl," said Tarboe, "this is how it stands. If we fight, there's someone sure to be hurt, and if I'm hurt, where'll you be?"

Bissonnette interposed. "We've got nothing contraband. The gold is ours."

"Trust that crew—but no!" cried Tarboe, with an oath. "The Government would hold the rhino for possible owners, and then give it to a convent or something. They shan't put foot here. They've said war, and they'll get it. They're signalling us to stop, and they're bearing down. There goes a shot!"

The girl had been watching the Government boat coolly. Now that it began to bear on, she answered her father's question.

"Captain," she said, like a trusted mate, "we'll bluff them." Her eyes flashed with the intelligence of war. "Here, quick, I'll take the tiller. They haven't seen Bissonnette yet; he sits low. Call all hands on deck—shout! Then, see: Loce will go down the middle hatch, get a gun, come up with it on his shoulder, and move on to the fo'castle. Then he'll drop down the fo'castle hatch, get along to the middle hatch, and come up again with the gun, now with his cap, now without it, now with his coat, now without it.

He'll do that till we've got twenty or thirty men on deck! They'll think we've been laying for them, and they'll not come on—you see!"

Tarboe ripped out an oath. "It's a great game," he said, and a moment afterwards, in response to his roars, Bissonnette came up the hatch with his gun showing bravely; then again and again, now with his cap, now without, now with his coat, now with none, anon with a tarpaulin over his shoulders grotesquely. Meanwhile Tarboe trained his one solitary little cannon on the enemy, roaring his men into place.

From the tug it seemed that a large and well-armed crew were ranging behind the bulwarks of the Ninety-Nine. Mr. Martin, the inspector, saw with alarm Bissonnette's constantly appearing rifle.

"They've arranged a plant for us, Mr. Lafarge. What do you think we'd better do?" he asked.

"Fight!" answered Lafarge laconically. He wished to put himself on record, for he was the only one on board who saw through the ruse.

"But I've counted at least twenty men, all armed, and we've only five."

"As you please, sir," said Lafarge bluntly, angry at being tricked, but inwardly glad to be free of the business, for he pictured to himself that girl at the tiller—he had seen her as she went aft—in a police court at Quebec. Yet his instinct for war and his sense of duty impelled him to say: "Still, sir, fight!"

"No, no, Mr. Lafarge," excitedly rejoined his chief. "I cannot risk it. We must go back for more men and bring along a Gatling. Slow down!" he called. Lafarge turned on his heel with an oath, and stood watching the Ninety-Nine.

"She'll laugh at me till I die!" he said to himself presently, as the tug turned up stream and pointed for Quebec. "Well, I'm jiggered!" he added, as a cannon shot came ringing over the water after them. He was certain also that he heard loud laughter. No doubt he was right; for as the tug hurried on, Tarboe ran to Joan, hugged her like a bear, and roared till he ached. Then she paid out the sheet, they clapped on all sail, and travelled in the track of the enemy.

Tarboe's spirit was roused. He was not disposed to let his enemy off on even such terms, so he now turned to Joan and said: "What say you to a chase of the gentleman?"

Joan was in a mood for such a dare-devil adventure. For three people, one of whom was a girl, to give chase to a well-manned, well-armed Government boat was too good a relish to be missed. Then, too, it had just occurred to her that a parley would be amusing, particularly if she and Lafarge were the truce-bearers. So she said: "That is very good."

"Suppose they should turn and fight?" suggested Bissonnette.

"That's true—here's m'am'selle," agreed Tarboe. "But, see," said Joan. "If we chase them and call upon them to surrender—and after all, we can prove that we had nothing contraband—what a splendid game it'll be!" Mischief flicked in her eyes.

"Good!" said Tarboe. "To-morrow I shall be a rich man, and then they'll not dare to come again."

So saying, he gave the sail to the wind, and away the Ninety-Nine went after the one ewe lamb of the Government.

Mr. Martin saw her coming, and gave word for all steam. It would be a pretty game, for the wind was in Tarboe's favour, and the general advantage was not greatly with the tug. Mr. Martin was now anxious indeed to get out of the way of the smuggler. Lafarge made one restraining effort, then settled into an ironical mood. Yet a half-dozen times he was inclined to blurt out to Martin what he believed was the truth. A man, a boy, and a girl to bluff them that way! In his bones he felt that it was the girl who was behind this thing. Of one matter he was sure—they had no contraband stuff on board, or Tarboe would not have brought his daughter along. He could not understand the attitude, for Tarboe would scarcely have risked the thing out of mere bravado. Why not call a truce? Perhaps he could solve the problem. They were keeping a tolerably safe distance apart, and there was no great danger of the Ninety-Nine overhauling them even if it so willed; but Mr. Martin did not know that.

What he said to his chief had its effect, and soon there was a white flag flying on the tug. It was at once answered with a white handkerchief of Joan's. Then the tug slowed up, the Ninety-Nine came on gaily, and at a good distance came up to the wind, and stood off.

"What do you want?" asked Tarboe through his speaking-tube.

"A parley," called Mr. Martin.

"Good; send an officer," answered Tarboe.

A moment after, Lafarge was in a boat rowing over to meet another boat rowed by Joan alone, who, dressed in a suit of Bissonnette's, had prevailed on her father to let her go.

The two boats nearing each other, Joan stood up, saluting, and Lafarge did the same.

"Good-day, m'sieu'," said Joan, with assumed brusqueness, mischief lurking about her mouth. "What do you want?"

"Good-day, monsieur; I did not expect to confer with you."

"M'sieu'," said Joan, with well-acted dignity, "if you prefer to confer with the captain or Mr. Bissonnette, whom I believe you know in the matter of a pail, and—"

"No, no; pardon me, monsieur," said Lafarge more eagerly than was good for the play, "I am glad to confer with you, you will understand—you will understand—" He paused.

"What will I understand?"

"You will understand that I understand!" Lafarge waved meaningly towards the Ninety-Nine, but it had no effect at all. Joan would not give the game over into his hands.

"That sounds like a charade or a puzzle game. We are gentlemen on a serious errand, aren't we?"

"Yes," answered Lafarge, "perfect gentlemen on a perfectly serious errand!"

"Very well, m'sieu'. Have you come to surrender?" The splendid impudence of the thing stunned Lafarge, but he said: "I suppose one or the other ought to surrender; and naturally," he added with slow point, "it should be the weaker."

"Very well. Our captain is willing to consider conditions. You came down on us to take us—a quiet craft sailing in free waters. You attack us without cause. We summon all hands, and you run. We follow, you ask for truce. It is granted. We are not hard—no. We only want our rights. Admit them; we'll make surrender easy, and the matter is over."

Lafarge gasped. She was forcing his hand. She would not understand his oblique suggestions. He saw only one way now, and that was to meet her, boast for boast.

"I haven't come to surrender," he said, "but to demand."

"M'sieu'," Joan said grandly, "there's nothing more to say. Carry word to your captain that we'll overhaul him by sundown, and sink him before supper."

Lafarge burst out laughing.

"Well, by the Lord, but you're a swashbuckler, Joan—"

"M'sieu'—"

"Oh, nonsense! I tell you, nonsense! Let's have over with this, my girl. You're the cleverest woman on the continent, but there's a limit to everything. Here, tell me now, and if you answer me straight I'll say no more."

"M'sieu', I am here to consider conditions, not to—" "Oh, for God's sake, Joan! Tell me now, have you got anything contraband on board? There'll be a nasty mess about the thing, for me and all of us, and why can't we compromise? I tell you honestly we'd have come on, if I hadn't seen you aboard."

Joan turned her head back with a laugh. "My poor m'sieu'! You have such bad luck. Contraband? Let me see? Liquors and wines and tobacco are contraband. Is it not so?" Lafarge nodded.

"Is money—gold—contraband?"

"Money? No; of course not, and you know it. Why won't you be sensible?
You're getting me into a bad hole, and—"

"I want to see how you'll come out. If you come out well—" She paused quaintly.

"Yes, if I come out well—"

"If you come out very well, and we do not sink you before supper, I may ask you to come and see me."

"H'm! Is that all? After spoiling my reputation, I'm to be let come and see you."

"Isn't that enough to start with? What has spoiled your reputation?"

"A man, a boy, and a slip of a girl." He looked meaningly enough at her now. She laughed. "See," he added; "give me a chance. Let me search the Ninety-Nine for contraband,—that's all I've got to do with,—and then I can keep quiet about the rest. If there's no contraband, whatever else there is, I'll hold my tongue."

"I've told you what there is."

He did not understand. "Will you let me search?" Joan's eyes flashed. "Once and for all, no, Orvay Lafarge. I am the daughter of a man whom you and your men would have killed or put in the dock. He's been a smuggler, and I know it. Who has he robbed? Not the poor, not the needy; but a rich Government that robs also. Well, in the hour when he ceases to be a smuggler for ever, armed men come to take him. Why didn't they do so before? Why so pious all at once? No; I am first the daughter of my father, and afterwards—"

"And afterwards?"

"What to-morrow may bring forth."

Lafarge became very serious. "I must go back. Mr. Martin is signalling, and your father is calling. I do not understand, but you're the one woman in the world for my money, and I'm ready to stand by that and leave the customs to-morrow if need be."

Joan's eyes blazed, her cheek was afire. "Leave it to-day. Leave it now. Yes; that's my one condition. If you want me, and you say you do, come aboard the Ninety-Nine, and for to-day be one of us-to-morrow what you will."

"What I will? What I will, Joan? Do you mean it?"

"Yes. Pshaw! Your duty? Don't I know how the Ministers and the officers have done their duty at Quebec? It's all nonsense. You must make your choice once for all now."

Lafarge stood a moment thinking. "Joan, I'll do it. I'd go hunting in hell at your bidding. But see. Everything's changed. I couldn't fight against you, but I can fight for you. All must be open now. You've said there's no contraband. Well, I'll tell Mr. Martin so, but I'll tell him also that you've only a crew of two—"

"Of three, now!"

"Of three! I will do my duty in that, then resign and come over to you, if I can."

If you can? You mean that they may fire on you?"

"I can't tell what they may do. But I must deal fair."

Joan's face was grave. "Very well, I will wait for you here."

"They might hit you."

"But no. They can't hit a wall. Go on, my dear." They saluted, and, as Lafarge turned away, Joan said, with a little mocking laugh, "Tell him that he must surrender, or we'll sink him before supper."

Lafarge nodded, and drew away quickly towards the tug. His interview with Mr. Martin was brief, and he had tendered his resignation, though it was disgracefully informal, and was over the side of the boat again and rowing quickly away before his chief recovered his breath. Then Mr. Martin got a large courage. He called on his men to fire when Lafarge was about two hundred and fifty feet from the tug. The shots rattled about him. He turned round coolly and called out, "Coward-we'll sink you before supper!"

A minute afterwards there came another shot, and an oar dropped from his hand. But now Joan was rowing rapidly towards him, and presently was alongside.

"Quick, jump inhere," she said. He did so, and she rowed on quickly. Tarboe did not understand, but now his blood was up, and as another volley sent bullets dropping around the two he gave the Ninety-

Nine to the wind, and she came bearing down smartly to them. In a few moments they were safely on board, and Joan explained. Tarboe grasped Lafarge's unmaimed hand,—the other Joan was caring for,—and swore that fighting was the only thing left now.

Mr. Martin had said the same, but when he saw the Ninety-Nine determined, menacing, and coming on, he became again uncertain, and presently gave orders to make for the lighthouse on the opposite side of the river. He could get over first, for the Ninety-Nine would not have the wind so much in her favour, and there entrench himself; for even yet Bissonnette amply multiplied was in his mind—Lafarge had not explained that away. He was in the neighbourhood of some sunken rocks of which he and his man at the wheel did not know accurately, and in making what he thought was a clear channel he took a rock with great force, for they were going full steam ahead. Then came confusion, and in getting out the one boat it was swamped and a man nearly drowned. Meanwhile the tug was fast sinking.

While they were throwing off their clothes, the Ninety-Nine came down, and stood off. On one hand was the enemy, on the other the water, with the shore half a mile distant.

"Do you surrender?" called out Tarboe.

"Can't we come aboard without that?" feebly urged Mr. Martin.

"I'll see you damned first, Mr. Martin. Come quick, or I'll give you what for."

"We surrender," answered the officer gently.

A few minutes later he and his men were on board, with their rifles stacked in a corner at Bissonnette's hand.

Then Tarboe brought the Ninety-Nine close to the wreck, and with his little cannon put a ball into her. This was the finish. She shook her nose, shivered, shot down like a duck, and was gone.

Mr. Martin was sad even to tears.

"Now, my beauties," said Tarboe, "now that I've got you safe, I'll show you the kind of cargo I've got." A moment afterwards he hoisted a keg on deck. "Think that's whisky?" he asked. "Lift it, Mr. Martin." Mr. Martin obeyed. "Shake it," he added.

Mr. Martin did so. "Open it, Mr. Martin." He held out a hatchet-hammer. The next moment a mass of gold pieces yellowed to their eyes. Mr. Martin fell back, breathing hard.

"Is that contraband, Mr. Martin?"

"Treasure-trove," humbly answered the stricken officer.

"That's it, and in a month, Mr. Martin, I'll be asking the chief of your department to dinner."

Meanwhile Lafarge saw how near he had been to losing a wife and a fortune. Arrived off Isle of Day; Tarboe told Mr. Martin and his men that if they said "treasure-trove" till they left the island their live would not be worth "a tinker's damn." When the had sworn, he took them to Angel Point, fed then royally, gave them excellent liquor to drink, and sent them in a fishing-smack with Bissonnette to Quebec where, arriving, they told strange tales.

Bissonnette bore a letter to a certain banker in Quebec, who already had done business with Tarboe, and next midnight Tarboe himself, with Gobal, Lafarge, Bissonnette, and another, came knocking at the banker's door, each carrying a keg on his shoulder and armed to the teeth. And, what was singular two stalwart police-officers walked behind with comfortable and approving looks.

A month afterwards Lafarge and Joan were married in the parish church at Isle of Days, and it was said that Mr. Martin, who, for some strange reason, was allowed to retain his position in the customs, sent a present. The wedding ended with a sensation, for just as the benediction was pronounced a loud report was heard beneath the floor of the church. There was great commotion, but Tarboe whispered in the curb's ear, and he blushing, announced that it was the bursting of a barrel. A few minutes afterwards the people of the parish knew the old hiding-place of Tarboe's contraband, and, though the cure rebuked them, they roared with laughter at the knowledge.

"So droll, so droll, our Tarboe there!" they shouted, for already they began to look upon him as their Seigneur.

In time the cure forgave him also.

Tarboe seldom left Isle of Days, save when he went to visit his daughter, in St. Louis Street, Quebec,

not far from the Parliament House, where Orvay Lafarge is a member of the Ministry. The ex-smuggler was a member of the Assembly for three months, but after defeating his own party on a question of tariff, he gave a portrait of himself to the Chamber, and threw his seat into the hands of his son-in-law. At the Belle Chatelaine, where he often goes, he sometimes asks Bissonnette to play "The Demoiselle with the Scarlet Hose."

ROMANY OF THE SNOWS

I

When old Throng the trader, trembling with sickness and misery, got on his knees to Captain Halby and groaned, "She didn't want to go; they dragged her off; you'll fetch her back, won't ye?—she always had a fancy for you, cap'n," Pierre shrugged a shoulder and said:

"But you stole her when she was in her rock-a-by, my Throng—you and your Manette."

"Like a match she was—no bigger," continued the old man. "Lord, how that stepmother bully-ragged her, and her father didn't care a darn. He'd half a dozen others—Manette and me hadn't none. We took her and used her like as if she was an angel, and we brought her off up here. Haven't we set store by her? Wasn't it 'cause we was lonely an' loved her we took her? Hasn't everybody stood up and said there wasn't anyone like her in the North? Ain't I done fair by her always—ain't I? An' now, when this cough 's eatin' my life out, and Manette 's gone, and there ain't a soul but Duc the trapper to put a blister on to me, them brutes ride up from over the border, call theirselves her brothers, an' drag her off!"

He was still on his knees. Pierre reached over and lightly kicked a moccasined foot.

"Get up, Jim Throng," he said. "Holy! do you think the law moves because an old man cries? Is it in the statutes?—that's what the law says. Does it come within the act? Is it a trespass—an assault and battery? —a breach of the peace?—a misdemeanour? Victoria—So and So: that's how the law talks. Get on your knees to Father Corraine, not to Captain Halby, Jimmy Throng."

Pierre spoke in a half-sinister, ironical way, for between him and Captain Halby's Riders of the Plains there was no good feeling. More than once he had come into conflict with them, more than once had they laid their hands on him—and taken them off again in due time. He had foiled them as to men they wanted; he had defied them—but he had helped them too, when it seemed right to him; he had sided with them once or twice when to do so was perilous to himself. He had sneered at them, he did not like them, nor they him. The sum of it was, he thought them brave—and stupid; and he knew that the law erred as often as it set things right.

The Trader got up and stood between the two men, coughing much, his face straining, his eyes bloodshot, as he looked anxiously from Pierre to Halby. He was the sad wreck of a strong man. Nothing looked strong about him now save his head, which, with its long grey hair, seemed badly balanced by the thin neck, through which the terrible cough was hacking.

"Only half a lung left," he stammered, as soon as he could speak, "an' Duc can't fix the boneset, camomile, and whisky, as she could. An' he waters the whisky—curse-his-soul!" The last three words were spoken through another spasm of coughing. "An' the blister—how he mucks the blister!"

Pierre sat back on the table, laughing noiselessly, his white teeth shining. Halby, with one foot on a bench, was picking at the fur on his sleeve thoughtfully. His face was a little drawn, his lips were tight-pressed, and his eyes had a light of excitement. Presently he straightened himself, and, after a half-malicious look at Pierre, he said to Throng:

"Where are they, do you say?"

"They're at"—the old man coughed hard—"at Fort O'Battle."

"What are they doing there?"

"Waitin' till spring, when they'll fetch their cattle up an' settle there."

"They want—Lydia—to keep house for them?" The old man writhed.

"Yes, God's sake, that's it! An' they want Liddy to marry a devil called Borotte, with a thousand cattle or so—Pito the courier told me yesterday. Pito saw her, an' he said she was white like a sheet, an' called out to him as he went by. Only half a lung I got, an' her boneset and camomile 'd save it for a bit, mebbe—mebbe!"

"It's clear," said Halby, "that they trespassed, and they haven't proved their right to her."

"Tonnerre, what a thinker!" said Pierre, mocking. Halby did not notice.
His was a solid sense of responsibility.

"She is of age?" he half asked, half mused.

"She's twenty-one," answered the old man, with difficulty.

"Old enough to set the world right," suggested Pierre, still mocking.

"She was forced away, she regarded you as her natural protector, she believed you her father: they broke the law," said the soldier.

"There was Moses, and Solomon, and Caesar, and Socrates, and now....!" murmured Pierre in assumed abstraction.

A red spot burned on Halby's high cheekbone for a minute, but he persistently kept his temper.

"I'm expected elsewhere," he said at last. "I'm only one man, yet I wish
I could go to-day—even alone. But—"

"But you have a heart," said Pierre. "How wonderful—a heart! And there's the half a lung, and the boneset and camomile tea, and the blister, and the girl with an eye like a spot of rainbow, and the sacred law in a Remington rifle! Well, well! And to do it in the early morning—to wait in the shelter of the trees till some go to look after the horses, then enter the house, arrest those inside, and lay low for the rest."

Halby looked over at Pierre astonished. Here was raillery and good advice all in a piece.

"It isn't wise to go alone, for if there's trouble and I should go down, who's to tell the truth? Two could do it; but one—no, it isn't wise, though it would look smart enough."

"Who said to go alone?" asked Pierre, scrawling on the table with a burnt match.

"I have no men."

Pierre looked up at the wall.

"Throng has a good Snider there," he said. "Bosh! Throng can't go."

The old man coughed and strained.

"If it wasn't—only-half a lung, and I could carry the boneset 'long with us."

Pierre slid off the table, came to the old man, and, taking him by the arms, pushed him gently into a chair. "Sit down; don't be a fool, Throng," he said. Then he turned to Halby: "You're a magistrate—make me a special constable; I'll go, monsieur le capitaine—of no company."

Halby stared. He knew Pierre's bravery, his ingenuity and daring. But this was the last thing he expected: that the malicious, railing little half-breed would work with him and the law. Pierre seemed to understand his thoughts, for he said: "It is not for you. I am sick for adventure, and then there is mademoiselle—such a finger she has for a ven'son pudding."

Without a word Halby wrote on a leaf in his notebook, and presently handed the slip to Pierre. "That's your commission as a special constable," he said, "and here's the seal on it." He handed over a pistol.

Pierre raised his eyebrows at it, but Halby continued: "It has the
Government mark. But you'd better bring Throng's rifle too."

Throng sat staring at the two men, his hands nervously shifting on his knees. "Tell Liddy," he said, "that the last batch of bread was sour— Duc ain't no good-an' that I ain't had no relish sence she left. Tell her the cough gits lower down all the time. 'Member when she tended that felon o' yourn, Pierre?"

Pierre looked at a sear on his finger and nodded. "She cut it too young; but she had the nerve! When do you start, captain? It's an eighty-mile ride."

"At once," was the reply. "We can sleep to-night in the Jim-a-long-Jo" (a hut which the Company had built between two distant posts), "and get there at dawn day after to-morrow. The snow is light and we can travel quick. I have a good horse, and you—"

"I have my black Tophet. He'll travel with your roan as on one snaffle- bar. That roan—you know where he come from?"

"From the Dolright stud, over the Border."

"That's wrong. He come from Greystop's paddock, where my Tophet was foaled; they are brothers. Yours was stole and sold to the Gover'ment; mine was bought by good hard money. The law the keeper of stolen goods, eh? But these two will go cinch to cinch all the way, like two brothers —like you and me."

He could not help the touch of irony in his last words: he saw the amusing side of things, and all humour in him had a strain of the sardonic.

"Brothers-in-law for a day or two," answered Halby drily.

Within two hours they were ready to start. Pierre had charged Duc the incompetent upon matters for the old man's comfort, and had himself, with a curious sort of kindness, steeped the boneset and camomile in whisky, and set a cup of it near his chair. Then he had gone up to Throng's bedroom and straightened out and shook and "made" the corn-husk bed, which had gathered into lumps and rolls. Before he came down he opened a door near by and entered another room, shutting the door, and sitting down on a chair. A stovepipe ran through the room, and it was warm, though the window was frosted and the world seemed shut out. He looked round slowly, keenly interested. There was a dressing-table made of an old box; it was covered with pink calico, with muslin over this. A cheap looking-glass on it was draped with muslin and tied at the top with a bit of pink ribbon. A common bone comb lay near the glass, and beside it a beautiful brush with an ivory back and handle. This was the only expensive thing in the room. He wondered, but did not go near it yet. There was a little eight-day clock on a bracket which had been made by hand—pasteboard darkened with umber and varnished; a tiny little set of shelves made of the wood of cigar-boxes; and—alas, the shifts of poverty to be gay!—an easy-chair made of the staves of a barrel and covered with poor chintz. Then there was a photograph or two, in little frames made from the red cedar of cigar-boxes, with decorations of putty, varnished, and a long panel screen of birch-bark of Indian workmanship. Some dresses hung behind the door. The bedstead was small, the frame was of hickory, with no footboard, ropes making the support for the husk tick. Across the foot lay a bedgown and a pair of stockings.

Pierre looked long, at first curiously; but after a little his forehead gathered and his lips drew in a little, as if he had a twinge of pain. He got up, went over near the bed, and picked up a hairpin. Then he came back to the chair and sat down, turning it about in his fingers, still looking abstractedly at the floor.

"Poor Lucy!" he said presently; "the poor child! Ah, what a devil I was then—so long ago!"

This solitary room—Lydia's—had brought back the time he went to the room of his own wife, dead by her own hand after an attempt to readjust the broken pieces of life, and sat and looked at the place which had been hers, remembering how he had left her with her wet face turned to the wall, and never saw her again till she was set free for ever. Since that time he had never sat in a room sacred to a woman alone.

"What a fool, what a fool, to think!" he said at last, standing up; "but this girl must be saved. She must have her home here again."

Unconsciously he put the hairpin in his pocket, walked over to the dressing-table and picked up the hair-brush. On its back was the legend, "L. T. from C. H." He gave a whistle.

"So-so?" he said, "'C. H.' M'sieu' le capitaine, is it like that?"

A year before, Lydia had given Captain Halby a dollar to buy her a hair- brush at Winnipeg, and he had brought her one worth ten dollars. She had beautiful hair, and what pride she had in using this

brush! Every Sunday morning she spent a long time in washing, curling, and brushing her hair, and every night she tended it lovingly, so that it was a splendid rich brown like her eye, coiling nobly above her plain, strong face with its good colour.

Pierre, glancing in the glass, saw Captain Halby's face looking over his shoulder. It startled him, and he turned round. There was the face looking out from a photograph that hung on the wall in the recess where the bed was. He noted now that the likeness hung where the girl could see it the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning.

"So far as that, eh!" he said. "And m'sieu' is a gentleman, too. We shall see what he will do: he has his chance now, once for all."

He turned, came to the door, softly opened it, passed out, and shut it, then descended the stairs, and in half an hour was at the door with Captain Halby, ready to start. It was an exquisite winter day, even in its bitter coldness. The sun was shining clear and strong, all the plains glistened and shook like quicksilver, and the vast blue cup of sky seemed deeper than it had ever been. But the frost ate the skin like an acid, and when Throng came to the door Pierre drove him back instantly from the air.

"I only-wanted—to say—to Liddy," hacked the old man, "that I'm thinkin'—a little m'lasses 'd kinder help—the boneset an' camomile. Tell her that the cattle 'll all be hers—an'—the house, an' I ain't got no one but—"

But Pierre pushed him back and shut the door, saying: "I'll tell her what a fool you are, Jimmy Throng." The old man, as he sat down awkwardly in his chair, with Duc stolidly lighting his pipe and watching him, said to himself: "Yes, I be a durn fool; I be, I be!" over and over again. And when the dog got up from near the stove and came near to him, he added: "I be, Touser; I be a durn fool, for I ought to ha' stole two or three, an' then I'd not be alone, an' nothin' but sour bread an' pork to eat. I ought to ha' stole three."

"Ah, Manette ought to have given you some of your own, it's true, that!" said Duc stolidly. "You never was a real father, Jim."

"Liddy got to look like me; she got to look like Manette and me, I tell ye!" said the old man hoarsely. Duc laughed in his stupid way. "Look like you? Look like you, Jim, with a face to turn milk sour? Ho, ho!"

Throng rose, his face purple with anger, and made as if to catch Duc by the throat, but a fit of coughing seized him, and presently blood showed on his lips. Duc, with a rough gentleness, wiped off the blood and put the whisky-and-herbs to the sick man's lips, saying, in a fatherly way:

"For why you do like that? You're a fool, Jimmy!"

"I be, I be," said the old man in a whisper, and let his hand rest on
Duc's shoulder.

"I'll fix the bread sweet next time, Jimmy."

"No, no," said the husky voice peevishly. "She'll do it—Liddy'll do it.
Liddy's comin'."

"All right, Jimmy. All right."

After a moment Throng shook his head feebly and said, scarcely above a whisper:

"But I be a durn fool—when she's not here."

Duc nodded and gave him more whisky and herbs. "My feet's cold," said the old man, and Duc wrapped a bearskin round his legs.

II

For miles Pierre and Halby rode without a word. Then they got down and walked for a couple of miles, to bring the blood into their legs again.

"The old man goes to By-by bientot," said Pierre at last.

"You don't think he'll last long?"

"Maybe ten days; maybe one. If we don't get the girl, out goes his torchlight straight."

"She's been very good to him."

"He's been on his knees to her all her life."

"There'll be trouble out of this, though."

"Pshaw! The girl is her own master."

"I mean, someone will probably get hurt over there." He nodded in the direction of Fort O'Battle.

"That's in the game. The girl is worth fighting for, hein?"

"Of course, and the law must protect her. It's a free country."

"So true, my captain," murmured Pierre drily. "It is wonderful what a man will do for the law."

The tone struck Halby. Pierre was scanning the horizon abstractedly.

"You are always hitting at the law," he said. "Why do you stand by it now?"

"For the same reason as yourself."

"What is that?"

"She has your picture in her room, she has my lucky dollar in her pocket."

Halby's face flushed, and then he turned and looked steadily into Pierre's eyes.

"We'd better settle this thing at once. If you're going to Fort O'Battle because you've set your fancy there, you'd better go back now. That's straight. You and I can't sail in the same boat. I'll go alone, so give me the pistol."

Pierre laughed softly, and waved the hand back. "T'sh! What a high- cock-a-lorum! You want to do it all yourself—to fill the eye of the girl alone, and be tucked away to By-by for your pains—mais, quelle folie! See: you go for law and love; I go for fun and Jimmy Throng. The girl? Pshaw! she would come out right in the end, without you or me. But the old man with half a lung—that's different. He must have sweet bread in his belly when he dies, and the girl must make it for him. She shall brush her hair with the ivory brush by Sunday morning."

Halby turned sharply.

"You've been spying," he said. "You've been in her room—you—"

Pierre put out his hand and stopped the word on Halby's lips.

"Slow, slow," he said; "we are both—police to-day. Voila! we must not fight. There is Throng and the girl to think of." Suddenly, with a soft fierceness, he added: "If I looked in her room, what of that? In all the North is there a woman to say I wrong her? No. Well, what if I carry her room in my eye; does that hurt her or you?"

Perhaps something of the loneliness of the outlaw crept into Pierre's voice for an instant, for Halby suddenly put a hand on his shoulder and said: "Let's drop the thing, Pierre."

Pierre looked at him musingly.

"When Throng is put to By-by what will you do?" he asked.

"I will marry her, if she'll have me."

"But she is prairie-born, and you!"

"I'm a prairie-rider."

After a moment Pierre said, as if to himself: "So quiet and clean, and the print calico and muslin, and the ivory brush!"

It is hard to say whether he was merely working on Halby that he be true to the girl, or was himself softhearted for the moment. He had a curious store of legend and chanson, and he had the Frenchman's power of applying them, though he did it seldom. But now he said in a half monotone:

"Have you seen the way I have built my nest?
(O brave and tall is the Grand Seigneur!)
I have trailed the East, I have searched the West,
(O clear of eye is the Grand Seigneur!)
From South and North I have brought the best:
The feathers fine from an eagle's crest,
The silken threads from a prince's vest,
The warm rose-leaf from a maiden's breast
(O long he bideth, the Grand Seigneur!)."

They had gone scarce a mile farther when Pierre, chancing to turn round, saw a horseman riding hard after them. They drew up, and soon the man— a Rider of the Plains—was beside them. He had stopped at Throng's to find Halby, and had followed them. Murder had been committed near the border, and Halby was needed at once. Halby stood still, numb with distress, for there was Lydia. He turned to Pierre in dismay. Pierre's face lighted up with the spirit of fresh adventure. Desperate enterprises roused him; the impossible had a charm for him.

"I will go to Fort O'Battle," he said. "Give me another pistol."

"You cannot do it alone," said Halby, hope, however, in his voice.

"I will do it, or it will do me, voila!" Pierre replied. Halby passed over a pistol.

"I'll never forget it, on my honour, if you do it," he said.

Pierre mounted his horse and said, as if a thought had struck him: "If I stand for the law in this, will you stand against it some time for me?"

Halby hesitated, then said, holding out his hand, "Yes, if it's nothing dirty."

Pierre smiled. "Clean tit for clean tat," he said, touching Halby's fingers, and then, with a gesture and an au revoir, put his horse to the canter, and soon a surf of snow was rising at two points on the prairie, as the Law trailed south and east.

That night Pierre camped in the Jim-a-long-Jo, finding there firewood in plenty, and Tophet was made comfortable in the lean-to. Within another thirty hours he was hid in the woods behind Fort O'Battle, having travelled nearly all night. He saw the dawn break and the beginning of sunrise as he watched the Fort, growing every moment colder, while his horse trembled and whinnied softly, suffering also. At last he gave a little grunt of satisfaction, for he saw two men come out of the Fort and go to the corral. He hesitated a minute longer, then said: "I'll not wait," patted his horse's neck, pulled the blanket closer round him, and started for the Fort. He entered the yard—it was empty. He went to the door of the Fort, opened it, entered, shut it, locked it softly, and put the key in his pocket. Then he passed through into a room at the end of the small hallway. Three men rose from seats by the fire as he did so, and one said: "Hullo, who're you?" Another added: "It's Pretty Pierre."

Pierre looked at the table laid for breakfast, and said: "Where's Lydia
Throng?"

The elder of the three brothers replied: "There's no Lydia Throng here. There's Lydia Bontoff, though, and in another week she'll be Lydia something else."

"What does she say about it herself?" "You've no call to know."

"You stole her, forced her from Throng's-her father's house."

"She wasn't Throng's; she was a Bontoff—sister of us.

"Well, she says Throng, and Throng it's got to be."

"What have you got to say about it?"

At that moment Lydia appeared at the door leading from the kitchen.

"Whatever she has to say," answered Pierre.

"Who're you talking for?"

"For her, for Throng, for the law."

"The law—by gosh, that's good! You, you darned gambler; you scum!" said Caleb, the brother who

knew him.

Pierre showed all the intelligent, resolute coolness of a trained officer of the law. He heard a little cry behind him, and stepping sideways, and yet not turning his back on the men, he saw Lydia.

"Pierre! Pierre!" she said in a half-frightened way, yet with a sort of pleasure lighting up her face; and she stepped forward to him. One of the brothers was about to pull her away, but Pierre whipped out his commission. "Wait," he said. "That's enough. I'm for the law; I belong to the mounted police. I have come for the girl you stole."

The elder brother snatched the paper and read. Then he laughed loud and long. "So you've come to fetch her away," he said, "and this is how you do it!"—he shook the paper. "Well, by—" Suddenly he stopped. "Come," he said, "have a drink, and don't be a dam' fool. She's our sister,—old Throng stole her, and she's goin' to marry our partner. Here, Caleb, fish out the brandy-wine," he added to his younger brother, who went to a cupboard and brought the bottle.

Pierre, waving the liquor away, said quietly to the girl: "You wish to go back to your father, to Jimmy Throng?" He then gave her Throng's message, and added: "He sits there rocking in the big chair and coughing —coughing! And then there's the picture on the wall upstairs and the little ivory brush—"

She put out her hands towards him. "I hate them all here," she said. "I never knew them. They forced me away. I have no father but Jimmy Throng. I will not stay," she flashed out in sudden anger to the others; "I'll kill myself and all of you before I marry that Borotte."

Pierre could hear a man tramping about upstairs. Caleb knocked on the stove-pipe, and called to him to come down. Pierre guessed it was Borotte. This would add one more factor to the game. He must move at once. He suddenly slipped a pistol into the girl's hand, and with a quick word to her, stepped towards the door. The elder brother sprang between—which was what he looked for. By this time every man had a weapon showing, snatched from wall and shelf.

Pierre was cool. He said: "Remember, I am for the law. I am not one man. You are thieves now; if you fight and kill, you will get the rope, every one. Move from the door, or I'll fire. The girl comes with me." He had heard a door open behind him, now there was an oath and a report, and a bullet grazed his cheek and lodged in the wall beyond. He dared not turn round, for the other men were facing him. He did not move, but the girl did. "Coward!" she said, and raised her pistol at Borotte, standing with her back against Pierre's.

There was a pause, in which no one stirred, and then the girl, slowly walking up to Borotte, her pistol levelled, said: "You low coward—to shoot a man from behind; and you want to be a decent girl's husband! These men that say they're my brothers are brutes, but you're a sneak. If you stir a step I'll fire."

The cowardice of Borotte was almost ridiculous. He dared not harm the girl, and her brothers could not prevent her harming him. Here there came a knocking at the front door. The other brothers had come, and found it locked. Pierre saw the crisis, and acted instantly. "The girl and I—we will fight you to the end," he said, "and then what's left of you the law will fight to the end. Come," he added, "the old man can't live a week. When he's gone then you can try again. She will have what he owns. Quick, or I arrest you all, and then—"

"Let her go," said Borotte; "it ain't no use." Presently the elder brother broke out laughing. "Damned if I thought the girl had the pluck, an' damned if I thought Borotte was a crawler. Put an eye out of him, Liddy, an' come to your brother's arms. Here," he added to the others, "up with your popguns; this shindy's off; and the girl goes back till the old man tucks up. Have a drink," he added to Pierre, as he stood his rifle in a corner and came to the table.

In half an hour Pierre and the girl were on their way, leaving Borotte quarrelling with the brothers, and all drinking heavily. The two arrived at Throng's late the next afternoon. There had been a slight thaw during the day, and the air was almost soft, water dripping from the eaves down the long icicles.

When Lydia entered, the old man was dozing in his chair. The sound of an axe out behind the house told where Duc was. The whisky-and-herbs was beside the sick man's chair, and his feet were wrapped about with bearskins. The girl made a little gesture of pain, and then stepped softly over and, kneeling, looked into Throng's face. The lips were moving.

"Dad," she said, "are you asleep?"

"I be a durn fool, I be," he said in a whisper, and then he began to cough. She took his' hands. They

were cold, and she rubbed them softly. "I feel so a'mighty holler," he said, gasping, "an' that bread's sour agin." He shook his head pitifully.

His eyes at last settled on her, and he recognised her. He broke into a giggling laugh; the surprise was almost too much for his feeble mind and body. His hands reached and clutched hers. "Liddy! Liddy!" he whispered, then added peevishly, "the bread's sour, an' the boneset and camomile's no good. . . . Ain't tomorrow bakin'-day?" he added.

"Yes, dad," she said, smoothing his hands.

"What damned—liars—they be—Liddy! You're my gel, ain't ye?"

"Yes, dad. I'll make some boneset liquor now."

"Yes, yes," he said, with childish eagerness and a weak, wild smile.

"That's it—that's it."

She was about to rise, but he caught her shoulder. "I bin a good dad to ye, hain't I, Liddy?" he whispered.

"Always."

"Never had no ma but Manette, did ye?"

"Never, dad."

"What danged liars they be!" he said, chuckling. She kissed him, and moved away to the fire to pour hot water and whisky on the herbs.

His eyes followed her proudly, shining like wet glass in the sun. He laughed—such a wheezing, soundless laugh!

"He! he! he! I ain't no—durn—fool—bless—the Lord!" he said.

Then the shining look in his eyes became a grey film, and the girl turned round suddenly, for the long, wheezy breathing had stopped. She ran to him, and, lifting up his head, saw the look that makes even the fool seem wise in his cold stillness. Then she sat down on the floor, laid her head against the arm of his chair, and wept.

It was very quiet inside. From without there came the twang of an axe, and a man's voice talking to his horse. When the man came in, he lifted the girl up, and, to comfort her, bade her go look at a picture hanging in her little room. After she was gone he lifted the body, put it on a couch, and cared for it.

THE PLUNDERER

It was no use: men might come and go before her, but Kitty Cline had eyes for only one man. Pierre made no show of liking her, and thought, at first, that hers was a passing fancy. He soon saw differently. There was that look in her eyes which burns conviction as deep as the furnace from which it comes: the hot, shy, hungering look of desire; most childlike, painfully infinite. He would rather have faced the cold mouth of a pistol; for he felt how it would end. He might be beyond wish to play the lover, but he knew that every man can endure being loved. He also knew that some are possessed—a dream, a spell, what you will—for their life long. Kitty Cline was one of these.

He thought he must go away, but he did not. From the hour he decided to stay misfortune began. Willie Haslam, the clerk at the Company's Post, had learned a trick or two at cards in the east, and imagined that he could, as he said himself, "roast the cock o' the roost"—meaning Pierre. He did so for one or two evenings, and then Pierre had a sudden increase of luck (or design), and the lad, seeing no chance of redeeming the I O U, representing two years' salary, went down to the house where Kitty

Cline lived, and shot himself on the door-step.

He had had the misfortune to prefer Kitty to the other girls at Guidon Hill—though Nellie Sanger would have been as much to him, if Kitty had been easier to win. The two things together told hard against Pierre. Before, he might have gone; in the face of difficulty he certainly would not go. Willie Haslam's funeral was a public function: he was young, innocent-looking, handsome, and the people did not know what Pierre would not tell now—that he had cheated grossly at cards. Pierre was sure, before Liddall, the surveyor, told him, that a movement was apace to give him trouble—possibly fatal.

"You had better go," said Liddall. "There's no use tempting Providence."

"They are tempting the devil," was the cool reply; "and that is not all joy, as you shall see."

He stayed. For a time there was no demonstration on either side. He came and went through the streets, and was found at his usual haunts, to observers as cool and nonchalant as ever. He was a changed man, however. He never got away from the look in Kitty Cline's eyes. He felt the thing wearing on him, and he hesitated to speculate on the result; but he knew vaguely that it would end in disaster. There is a kind of corrosion which eats the granite out of the blood, and leaves fever.

"What is the worst thing that can happen a man, eh?" he said to Liddall one day, after having spent a few minutes with Kitty Cline.

Liddall was an honest man. He knew the world tolerably well. In writing once to his partner in Montreal he had spoken of Pierre as "an admirable, interesting scoundrel." Once when Pierre called him "mon ami," and asked him to come and spend an evening in his cottage, he said:

"Yes, I will go. But—pardon me—not as your friend. Let us be plain with each other. I never met a man of your stamp before—"

"A professional gambler—yes? Bien?"

"You interest me; I like you; you have great cleverness—"

"A priest once told me I had a great brain-there is a difference. Well?"

"You are like no man I ever met before. Yours is a life like none I ever knew. I would rather talk with you than with any other man in the country, and yet—"

"And yet you would not take me to your home? That is all right. I expect nothing. I accept the terms. I know what I am and what you are. I like men who are square. You would go out of your way to do me a good turn."

It was on his tongue to speak of Katy Cline, but he hesitated: it was not fair to the girl, he thought, though what he had intended was for her good. He felt he had no right to assume that Liddall knew how things were. The occasion slipped by.

But the same matter had been in his mind when, later, he asked, "What is the worst thing that can happen to a man?"

Liddall looked at him long, and then said: "To stand between two fires."

Pierre smiled: it was an answer after his own heart. Liddall remembered it very well in the future.

"What is the thing to do in such a case?" Pierre asked.

"It is not good to stand still."

"But what if you are stunned, or do not care?"

"You should care. It is not wise to strain a situation."

Pierre rose, walked up and down the room once or twice, then stood still, his arms folded, and spoke in a low tone. "Once in the Rockies I was lost. I crept into a cave at night. I knew it was the nest of some wild animal; but I was nearly dead with hunger and fatigue. I fell asleep. When I woke—it was towards morning—I saw two yellow stars glaring where the mouth of the cave had been. They were all hate: like nothing you could imagine: passion as it is first made—yes. There was also a rumbling sound. It was terrible, and yet I was not scared. Hate need not disturb you.—I am a quick shot. I killed that mountain lion, and I ate the haunch of deer I dragged from under her . . . "

He turned now, and, facing the doorway, looked out upon the village, to the roof of a house which

they both knew. "Hate," he said, "is not the most wonderful thing. I saw a woman look once as though she could lose the whole world—and her own soul. She was a good woman. The man was bad—most: he never could be anything else. A look like that breaks the nerve. It is not amusing. In time the man goes to pieces. But before that comes he is apt to do strange things. Eh-so!"

He sat down, and, with his finger, wrote musingly in the dust upon the table.

Liddall looked keenly at him, and replied more brusquely than he felt:
"Do you think it fair to stay—fair to her?"

"What if I should take her with me?" Pierre flashed a keen, searching look after the words.

"It would be useless devilry."

"Let us drink," said Pierre, as he came to his feet quickly: "then for the House of Lords" (the new and fashionable tavern).

They separated in the street, and Pierre went to the House of Lords alone. He found a number of men gathered before a paper pasted on a pillar of the veranda. Hearing his own name, he came nearer. A ranch man was reading aloud an article from a newspaper printed two hundred miles away. The article was headed, "A Villainous Plunderer." It had been written by someone at Guidon Hill. All that was discreditable in Pierre's life it set forth with rude clearness; he was credited with nothing pardonable. In the crowd there were mutterings unmistakable to Pierre. He suddenly came among them, caught a revolver from his pocket, and shot over the reader's shoulder six times into the pasted strip of newspaper.

The men dropped back. They were not prepared for warlike measures at the moment. Pierre leaned his back against the pillar and waited. His silence and coolness, together with an iron fierceness in his face, held them from instant demonstration against him; but he knew that he must face active peril soon. He pocketed his revolver and went up the hill to the house of Kitty Cline's mother. It was the first time he had ever been there. At the door he hesitated, but knocked presently, and was admitted by Kitty, who, at sight of him, turned faint with sudden joy, and grasped the lintel to steady herself.

Pierre quietly caught her about the waist, and shut the door. She recovered, and gently disengaged herself. He made no further advance, and they stood looking at each other for a minute: he, as one who had come to look at something good he was never to see again; she, as at something she hoped to see for ever. They had never before been where no eyes could observe them. He ruled his voice to calmness.

"I am going away," he said, "and I have come to say good-bye."

Her eyes never wavered from his. Her voice was scarce above a whisper.

"Why do you go? Where are you going?"

"I have been here too long. I am what they call a villain and a plunderer. I am going to-mon Dieu, I do not know!" He shrugged his shoulders, and smiled with a sort of helpless disdain.

She leaned her hands on the table before her. Her voice was still that low, clear murmur.

"What people say doesn't matter." She staked her all upon her words. She must speak them, though she might hate herself afterwards. "Are you going—alone?"

"Where I may have to go I must travel alone."

He could not meet her eyes now; he turned his head away. He almost hoped she would not understand. "Sit down," he added; "I want to tell you of my life."

He believed that telling it as he should, she would be horror-stricken, and that the deep flame would die out of her eyes. Neither he nor she knew how long they sat there, he telling with grim precision of the life he had led. Her hands were clasped before her, and she shuddered once or twice, so that he paused; but she asked him firmly to go on.

When all was told he stood up. He could not see her face, but he heard her say:

"You have forgotten many things that were not bad. Let me say them." She named things that would have done honour to a better man. He was standing in the moonlight that came through the window. She stepped forward, her hands quivering out to him. "Oh, Pierre," she said, "I know why you tell me this: but it makes no difference-none! I will go with you wherever you go."

He caught her hands in his. She was stronger than he was now. Her eyes mastered him. A low cry broke from him, and he drew her almost fiercely into his arms.

"Pierre! Pierre!" was all she could say.

He kissed her again and again upon the mouth. As he did so, he heard footsteps and muffled voices without. Putting her quickly from him, he sprang towards the door, threw it open, closed it behind him, and drew his revolvers. A half-dozen men faced him. Two bullets whistled by his head, and lodged in the door. Then he fired swiftly, shot after shot, and three men fell. His revolvers were empty. There were three men left. The case seemed all against him now, but just here a shot, and then another, came from the window, and a fourth man fell. Pierre sprang upon one, the other turned and ran. There was a short sharp struggle: then Pierre rose up—alone.

The girl stood in the doorway. "Come, my dear," he said, you must go with me now."

"Yes, Pierre," she cried, a mad light in her face, "I have killed men too—for you."

Together they ran down the hillside, and made for the stables of the Fort. People were hurrying through the long street of the town, and torches were burning, but they came by a roundabout to the stables safely. Pierre was about to enter, when a man came out. It was Liddall. He kept his horses there, and he had saddled one, thinking that Pierre might need it.

There were quick words of explanation, and then, "Must the girl go too?" he asked. "It will increase the danger—besides—"

"I am going wherever he goes," she interrupted hoarsely. "I have killed men; he and I are the same now."

Without a word Liddall turned back, threw a saddle on another horse, and led it out quickly. "Which way?" he asked; "and where shall I find the horses?"

"West to the mountains. The horses you will find at Tete Blanche Hill, if we get there. If not, there is money under the white pine at my cottage. Goodbye!"

They galloped away. But there were mounted men in the main street, and one, well ahead of the others, was making towards the bridge over which they must pass. He reached it before they did, and set his horse crosswise in its narrow entrance. Pierre urged his mare in front of the girl's, and drove straight at the head and shoulders of the obstructing horse. His was the heavier animal, and it bore the other down. The rider fired as he fell, but missed, and, in an instant, Pierre and the girl were over. The fallen man fired the second time, but again missed. They had a fair start, but the open prairie was ahead of them, and there was no chance to hide. Riding must do all, for their pursuers were in full cry. For an hour they rode hard. They could see their hunters not very far in the rear. Suddenly Pierre started and sniffed the air.

"The prairie's on fire," he said exultingly, defiantly. Almost as he spoke, clouds ran down the horizon, and then the sky lighted up. The fire travelled with incredible swiftness: they were hastening to meet it. It came on wave-like, hurrying down at the right and the left as if to close in on them. The girl spoke no word; she had no fear: what Pierre did she would do. He turned round to see his pursuers: they had wheeled and were galloping back the way they came. His horse and hers were travelling neck and neck. He looked at her with an intense, eager gaze.

"Will you ride on?" he asked eagerly. "We are between two fires." He smiled, remembering his words to Liddall.

"Ride on," she urged in a strong, clear voice, a kind of wild triumph in it. "You shall not go alone."

There ran into his eyes now the same infinite look that had been in hers —that had conquered him. The flame rolling towards them was not brighter or hotter.

"For heaven or hell, my girl!" he cried, and they drove their horses on —on.

Far behind upon a Divide the flying hunters from Guidon Hill paused for a moment. They saw with hushed wonder and awe a man and woman, dark and weird against the red light, ride madly into the flickering surf of fire.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

All humour in him had a strain of the sardonic
In her heart she never can defy the world as does a man
Some wise men are fools, one way or another

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