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NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

WHEN THE SWALLOWS HOMEWARD FLY GEORGE'S WIFE MARCILE

WHEN THE SWALLOWS HOMEWARD FLY

The arrogant sun had stalked away into the evening, trailing behind him banners of gold and crimson, and a swift twilight was streaming over the land. As the sun passed, the eyes of two men on a high hill followed it, and the look of one was like a light in a window to a lost traveller. It had in it the sense of home and the tale of a journey done. Such a journey this man had made as few have ever attempted, and fewer accomplished. To the farthermost regions of snow and ice, where the shoulder of a continent juts out into the northwestern Arctic seas, he had travelled on foot and alone, save for his dogs, and for Indian guides, who now and then shepherded him from point to point. The vast ice-hummocks had been his housing, pemmican, the raw flesh of fish, and even the fat and oil of seals had been his food. Ever and ever through long months the everlasting white glitter of the snow and ice, ever and ever the cold stars, the cloudless sky, the moon at full, or swung like a white sickle in the sky to warn him that his life must be mown like grass. At night to sleep in a bag of fur and wool, by day the steely wind, or the air shaking with a filmy powder of frost; while the illimitably distant sun made the tiny flakes sparkle like

silver—a poudre day, when the face and hands are most like to be frozen, and all so still and white and passionless, yet aching with energy. Hundreds upon hundreds of miles that endless trail went winding to the farthest North-west. No human being had ever trod its lengths before, though Indians or a stray Hudson's Bay Company man had made journeys over part of it during the years that have passed since Prince Rupert sent his adventurers to dot that northern land with posts and forts, and trace fine arteries of civilisation through the wastes.

Where this man had gone none other had been of white men from the Western lands, though from across the wide Pacific, from the Eastern world, adventurers and exiles had once visited what is now known as the Yukon Valley. So this man, browsing in the library of his grandfather, an Eastern scholar, had come to know; and for love of adventure, and because of the tale of a valley of gold and treasure to be had, and because he had been ruined by bad investments, he had made a journey like none ever essayed before. And on his way up to those regions, where the veil before the face of God is very thin and fine, and men's hearts glow within them, where there was no oasis save the unguessed deposit of a great human dream that his soul could feel, the face of a girl had haunted him. Her voice—so sweet a voice that it rang like muffled silver in his ears, till, in the everlasting theatre of the Pole, the stars seemed to repeat it through millions of echoing hills, growing softer and softer as the frost hushed it to his ears-had said to him late and early, "You must come back with the swallows." Then she had sung a song which had been like a fire in his heart, not alone because of the words of it, but because of the soul in her voice, and it had lain like a coverlet on his heart to keep it warm:

"Adieu! The sun goes awearily down,
The mist creeps up o'er the sleepy town,
The white sail bends to the shuddering mere,
And the reapers have reaped and the night is here.

Adieu! And the years are a broken song,
The right grows weak in the strife with wrong,
The lilies of love have a crimson stain,
And the old days never will come again.

Adieu! Where the mountains afar are dim
'Neath the tremulous tread of the seraphim,
Shall not our querulous hearts prevail,
That have prayed for the peace of the Holy Grail.

Adieu! Sometime shall the veil between
The things that are and that might have been
Be folded back for our eyes to see,
And the meaning of all shall be clear to me."

It had been but an acquaintance of five days while he fitted out for his expedition, but in this brief time it had sunk deep into his mind that life was now a thing to cherish, and that he must indeed come back; though he had left England caring little if, in the peril and danger of his quest, he ever returned. He had been indifferent to his fate till he came to the Valley of the Saskatchewan, to the town lying at the foot of the maple hill beside the great northern stream, and saw the girl whose life was knit with the far north, whose mother's heart was buried in the great wastes where Sir John Franklin's expedition was lost; for her husband had been one of the ill-fated if not unhappy band of lovers of that civilisation for which they had risked all and lost all save immortality. Hither the two had come after he had been cast away on the icy plains, and as the settlement had crept north, had gone north with it, always on the outer edge of house and field, ever stepping northward. Here, with small income but high hearts and quiet souls, they had lived and laboured. And when this newcomer from the old land set his face northward to an unknown destination, the two women had prayed as the mother did in the old days when the daughter was but a babe at her knee, and it was not yet certain that Franklin and his men had been cast away for ever. Something in him, his great height, his strength of body, his clear, meditative eyes, his brave laugh, reminded her of him—her husband—who, like Sir Humphrey Gilbert, had said that it mattered little where men did their duty, since God was always near to take or leave as it was His will. When Bickersteth went, it was as though one they had known all their lives had passed; and the woman knew also that a new thought had been sown in her daughter's mind, a new door opened in her heart.

And he had returned. He was now looking down into the valley where the village lay. Far, far over, two days' march away, he could see the cluster of houses, and the glow of the sun on the tin spire of the little Mission Church where he had heard the girl and her mother sing, till the hearts of all were swept by feeling and ravished by the desire for "the peace of the Holy Grail." The village was, in truth, but a day's march away from him, but he was not alone, and the journey could not be hastened. Beside him,

his eyes also upon the sunset and the village, was a man in a costume half-trapper, half-Indian, with bushy grey beard and massive frame, and a distant, sorrowful look, like that of one whose soul was tuned to past suffering. As he sat, his head sunk on his breast, his elbow resting on a stump of pine—the token of a progressive civilisation—his chin upon his hand, he looked like the figure of Moses made immortal by Michael Angelo. But his strength was not like that of the man beside him, who was thirty years younger. When he walked, it was as one who had no destination, who had no haven towards which to travel, who journeyed as one to whom the world is a wilderness, and one tent or one hut is the same as another, and none is home.

Like two ships meeting hull to hull on the wide seas, where a few miles of water will hide them from each other, whose ports are thousands of miles apart, whose courses are not the same, they two had met, the elder man, sick and worn, and near to death, in the poor hospitality of an Indian's tepee. John Bickersteth had nursed the old man back to strength, and had brought him southward with him—a silent companion, who spoke in monosyllables, who had no conversation at all of the past, and little of the present; but who was a woodsman and an Arctic traveller of the most expert kind; who knew by instinct where the best places for shelter and for sleeping might be found; who never complained, and was wonderful with the dogs. Close as their association was, Bickersteth had felt concerning the other that his real self was in some other sphere or place towards which his mind was always turning, as though to bring it back.

Again and again had Bickersteth tried to get the old man to speak about the past, but he had been met by a dumb sort of look, a straining to understand. Once or twice the old man had taken his hands in both of his own, and gazed with painful eagerness into his face, as though trying to remember or to comprehend something that eluded him. Upon these occasions the old man's eyes dropped tears in an apathetic quiet, which tortured Bickersteth beyond bearing. Just such a look he had seen in the eyes of a favourite dog when he had performed an operation on it to save its life—a reproachful, non-comprehending, loving gaze.

Bickersteth understood a little of the Chinook language, which is familiar to most Indian tribes, and he had learned that the Indians knew nothing exact concerning the old man; but rumours had passed from tribe to tribe that this white man had lived for ever in the farthest north among the Arctic tribes, and that he passed from people to people, disappearing into the untenanted wilderness, but reappearing again among stranger tribes, never resting, and as one always seeking what he could not find.

One thing had helped this old man in all his travels and sojourning. He had, as it seemed to the native people, a gift of the hands; for when they were sick, a few moments' manipulation of his huge, quiet fingers vanquished pain. A few herbs he gave in tincture, and these also were praised; but it was a legend that when he was persuaded to lay on his hands and close his eyes, and with his fingers to "search for the pain and find it, and kill it," he always prevailed. They believed that though his body was on earth his soul was with Manitou, and that it was his soul which came into him again, and gave the Great Spirit's healing to the fingers. This had been the man's safety through how many years— or how many generations—they did not know; for legends regarding the pilgrim had grown and were fostered by the medicine men who, by giving him great age and supernatural power, could, with more self-respect, apologise for their own incapacity.

So the years—how many it was impossible to tell, since he did not know or would not say—had gone on; and now, after ceaseless wandering, his face was turned towards that civilisation out of which he had come so long ago—or was it so long ago—one generation, or two, or ten? It seemed to Bickersteth at times as though it were ten, so strange, so unworldly was his companion. At first he thought that the man remembered more than he would appear to acknowledge, but he found that after a day or two everything that happened as they journeyed was also forgotten.

It was only visible things, or sounds, that appeared to open the doors of memory of the most recent happenings. These happenings, if not varied, were of critical moment, since, passing down from the land of unchanging ice and snow, they had come into March and April storms, and the perils of the rapids and the swollen floods of May. Now, in June, two years and a month since Bickersteth had gone into the wilds, they looked down upon the goal of one at least—of the younger man who had triumphed in his quest up in these wilds abandoned centuries ago.

With the joyous thought in his heart, that he had discovered anew one of the greatest gold-fields of the world, that a journey unparalleled had been accomplished, he turned towards his ancient companion, and a feeling of pity and human love enlarged within him. He, John Bickersteth, was going into a world again, where—as he believed—a happy fate awaited him; but what of this old man? He had brought him out of the wilds, out of the unknown—was he only taking him into the unknown again? Were there friends, any friends anywhere in the world waiting for him? He called himself by no name,

he said he had no name. Whence came he? Of whom? Whither was he wending now? Bickersteth had thought of the problem often, and he had no answer for it save that he must be taken care of, if not by others, then by himself; for the old man had saved him from drowning; had also saved him from an awful death on a March day when he fell into a great hole and was knocked insensible in the drifting snow; had saved him from brooding on himself—the beginning of madness— by compelling him to think for another. And sometimes, as he had looked at the old man, his imagination had caught the spirit of the legend of the Indians, and he had cried out, "O soul, come back and give him memory—give him back his memory, Manitou the mighty!"

Looking on the old man now, an impulse seized him. "Dear old man," he said, speaking as one speaks to a child that cannot understand, "you shall never want, while I have a penny, or have head or hands to work. But is there no one that you care for or that cares for you, that you remember, or that remembers you?"

The old man shook his head though not with understanding, and he laid a hand on the young man's shoulder, and whispered:

"Once it was always snow, but now it is green, the land. I have seen it
—I have seen it once." His shaggy eyebrows gathered over, his eyes
searched, searched the face of John Bickersteth. "Once, so long ago—
I cannot think," he added helplessly.

"Dear old man," Bickersteth said gently, knowing he would not wholly comprehend, "I am going to ask her—Alice—to marry me, and if she does, she will help look after you, too. Neither of us would have been here without the other, dear old man, and we shall not be separated. Whoever you are, you are a gentleman, and you might have been my father or hers —or hers."

He stopped suddenly. A thought had flashed through his mind, a thought which stunned him, which passed like some powerful current through his veins, shocked him, then gave him a palpitating life. It was a wild thought, but yet why not—why not? There was the chance, the faint, far-off chance. He caught the old man by the shoulders, and looked him in the eyes, scanned his features, pushed back the hair from the rugged forehead.

"Dear old man," he said, his voice shaking, "do you know what I'm thinking? I'm thinking that you may be of those who went out to the Arctic Sea with Sir John Franklin—with Sir John Franklin, you understand. Did you know Sir John Franklin—is it true, dear old boy, is it true? Are you one that has lived to tell the tale? Did you know Sir John Franklin—is it—tell me, is it true?"

He let go the old man's shoulders, for over the face of the other there had passed a change. It was strained and tense. The hands were outstretched, the eyes were staring straight into the west and the coming night.

"It is—it is—that's it!" cried Bickersteth. "That's it—love o' God, that's it! Sir John Franklin—Sir John Franklin, and all the brave lads that died up there! You remember the ship—the Arctic Sea—the ice-fields, and Franklin—you remember him? Dear old man, say you remember Franklin?"

The thing had seized him. Conviction was upon him, and he watched the other's anguished face with anguish and excitement in his own. But—but it might be, it might be her father—the eyes, the forehead are like hers; the hands, the long hands, the pointed fingers. "Come, tell me, did you have a wife and child, and were they both called Alice—do you remember? Franklin—Alice! Do you remember?"

The other got slowly to his feet, his arms outstretched, the look in his face changing, understanding struggling for its place, memory fighting for its own, the soul contending for its mastery.

"Franklin—Alice—the snow," he said confusedly, and sank down.

"God have mercy!" cried Bickersteth, as he caught the swaying body, and laid it upon the ground. "He was there—almost."

He settled the old man against the great pine stump and chafed his hands. "Man, dear man, if you belong to her—if you do, can't you see what it will mean to me? She can't say no to me then. But if it's true, you'll belong to England and to all the world, too, and you'll have fame everlasting. I'll have gold for her and for you, and for your Alice, too, poor old boy. Wake up now and remember if you are Luke Allingham who went with Franklin to the silent seas of the Pole. If it's you, really you, what wonder you lost your memory! You saw them all die, Franklin and all, die there in the snow, with all the white world round them. If you were there, what a travel you have had, what strange things you have seen! Where the world is loneliest, God lives most. If you get close to the heart of things, it's no marvel you forgot what you were, or where you came from; because it didn't matter; you knew that you were only one of

thousands of millions who have come and gone, that make up the soul of things, that make the pulses of the universe beat. That's it, dear old man. The universe would die, if it weren't for the souls that leave this world and fill it with life. Wake up! Wake up, Allingham, and tell us where you've been and what you've seen."

He did not labour in vain. Slowly consciousness came back, and the grey eyes opened wide, the lips smiled faintly under the bushy beard; but Bickersteth saw that the look in the face was much the same as it had been before. The struggle had been too great, the fight for the other lost self had exhausted him, mind and body, and only a deep obliquity and a great weariness filled the countenance. He had come back to the verge, he had almost again discovered himself; but the opening door had shut fast suddenly, and he was back again in the night, the incompanionable night of forgetfulness.

Bickersteth saw that the travail and strife had drained life and energy, and that he must not press the mind and vitality of this exile of time and the unknown too far. He felt that when the next test came the old man would either break completely, and sink down into another and everlasting forgetfulness, or tear away forever the veil between himself and his past, and emerge into a long-lost life. His strength must be shepherded, and he must be kept quiet and undisturbed until they came to the town yonder in the valley, over which the night was slowly settling down. There two women waited, the two Alices, from both of whom had gone lovers into the North. The daughter was living over again in her young love the pangs of suspense through which her mother had passed. Two years since Bickersteth had gone, and not a sign!

Yet, if the girl had looked from her bedroom window, this Friday night, she would have seen on the far hill a sign; for there burned a fire beside which sat two travellers who had come from the uttermost limits of snow. But as the fire burned—a beacon to her heart if she had but known it—she went to her bed, the words of a song she had sung at choir— practice with tears in her voice and in her heart ringing in her ears. A concert was to be held after the service on the coming Sunday night, at which there was to be a collection for funds to build another mission- house a hundred miles farther North, and she had been practising music she was to sing. Her mother had been an amateur singer of great power, and she was renewing her mother's gift in a voice behind which lay a hidden sorrow. As she cried herself to sleep the words of the song which had moved her kept ringing in her ears and echoing in her heart:

"When the swallows homeward fly,
And the roses' bloom is o'er—"

But her mother, looking out into the night, saw on the far hill the fire, burning like a star, where she had never seen a fire set before, and a hope shot into her heart for her daughter—a hope that had flamed up and died down so often during the past year. Yet she had fanned with heartening words every such glimmer of hope when it came, and now she went to bed saying, "Perhaps he will come to-morrow." In her mind, too, rang the words of the song which had ravished her ears that night, the song she had sung the night before her own husband, Luke Allingham, had gone with Franklin to the Polar seas:

"When the swallows homeward fly—"

As she and her daughter entered the little church on the Sunday evening, two men came over the prairie slowly towards the town, and both raised their heads to the sound of the church-bell calling to prayer. In the eyes of the younger man there was a look which has come to many in this world returning from hard enterprise and great dangers, to the familiar streets, the friendly faces of men of their kin and clan-to the lights of home.

The face of the older man, however, had another look.

It was such a look as is seldom seen in the faces of men, for it showed the struggle of a soul to regain its identity. The words which the old man had uttered in response to Bickersteth's appeal before he fainted away, "Franklin—Alice—the snow," had showed that he was on the verge; the bells of the church pealing in the summer air brought him near it once again. How many years had gone since he had heard church-bells? Bickersteth, gazing at him in eager scrutiny, wondered if, after all, he might be mistaken about him. But no, this man had never been born and bred in the far North. His was a type which belonged to the civilisation from which he himself had come. There would soon be the test of it all. Yet he shuddered, too, to think what might happen if it was all true, and discovery or reunion should shake to the centre the very life of the two long-parted ones.

He saw the look of perplexed pain and joy at once in the face of the old man, but he said nothing, and he was almost glad when the bell stopped. The old man turned to him.

"What is it?" he asked. "I remember—" but he stopped suddenly, shaking his head.

An hour later, cleared of the dust of travel, the two walked slowly towards the church from the little tavern where they were lodged. The service was now over, but the concert had begun. The church was full, and there were people in the porch; but these made way for the two strangers; and, as Bickersteth was recognised by two or three present, place was found for them. Inside, the old man stared round him in a confused and troubled way, but his motions were quiet and abstracted and he looked like some old viking, his workaday life done, come to pray ere he went hence forever. They had entered in a pause in the concert, but now two ladies came forward to the chancel steps, and one with her hands clasped before her, began to sing:

"When the swallows homeward fly,
And the roses' bloom is o'er,
And the nightingale's sweet song
In the woods is heard no more—"

It was Alice—Alice the daughter—and presently the mother, the other Alice, joined in the refrain. At sight of them Bickersteth's eyes had filled, not with tears, but with a cloud of feeling, so that he went blind. There she was, the girl he loved. Her voice was ringing in his ears. In his own joy for one instant he had forgotten the old man beside him, and the great test that was now upon him. He turned quickly, however, as the old man got to his feet. For an instant the lost exile of the North stood as though transfixed. The blood slowly drained from his face, and in his eyes was an agony of struggle and desire. For a moment an awful confusion had the mastery, and then suddenly a clear light broke into his eyes, his face flushed healthily and shone, his arms went up, and there rang in his ears the words:

"Then I think with bitter pain,
Shall we ever meet again?
When the swallows homeward fly—"

"Alice—Alice!" he called, and tottered forward up the aisle, followed by John Bickersteth.

"Alice, I have come back!" he cried again.

GEORGE'S WIFE

"She's come, and she can go back. No one asked her, no one wants her, and she's got no rights here. She thinks she'll come it over me, but she'll get nothing, and there's no place for her here."

The old, grey-bearded man, gnarled and angular, with overhanging brows and a harsh face, made this little speech of malice and unfriendliness, looking out on the snow-covered prairie through the window. Far in the distance were a sleigh and horses like a spot in the snow, growing larger from minute to minute.

It was a day of days. Overhead, the sun was pouring out a flood of light and warmth, and though it was bitterly cold, life was beating hard in the bosom of the West. Men walked lightly, breathed quickly, and their eyes were bright with the brightness of vitality and content. Even the old man at the window of this lonely house, in a great lonely stretch of country, with the cedar hills behind it, had a living force which defied his seventy odd years, though the light in his face was hard and his voice was harder still. Under the shelter of the foothills, cold as the day was, his cattle were feeding in the open, scratching away the thin layer of snow, and browsing on the tender grass underneath. An arctic world in appearance, it had an abounding life which made it friendly and generous—the harshness belonged to the surface. So, perhaps, it was with the old man who watched the sleigh in the distance coming nearer, but that in his nature on which any one could feed was not so easily reached as the fresh young grass under the protecting snow.

"She'll get nothing out of me," he repeated, as the others in the room behind him made no remark, and his eyes ranged gloatingly over the cattle under the foothills and the buildings which he had gathered together to proclaim his substantial greatness in the West. "Not a sous markee," he added,

clinking some coins in his pocket. "She's got no rights."

"Cassy's got as much right here as any of us, Abel, and she's coming to say it, I guess."

The voice which spoke was unlike a Western voice. It was deep and full and slow, with an organ-like quality. It was in good keeping with the tall, spare body and large, fine rugged face of the woman to whom it belonged. She sat in a rocking-chair, but did not rock, her fingers busy with the knitting-needles, her feet planted squarely on the home-made hassock at her feet.

The old man waited for a minute in a painful silence, then he turned slowly round, and, with tight-pressed lips, looked at the woman in the rocking-chair. If it had been anyone else who had "talked back" at him, he would have made quick work of them, for he was of that class of tyrant who pride themselves on being self-made, and have an undue respect for their own judgment and importance. But the woman who had ventured to challenge his cold-blooded remarks about his dead son's wife, now hastening over the snow to the house her husband had left under a cloud eight years before, had no fear of him, and, maybe, no deep regard for him. He respected her, as did all who knew her—a very reticent, thoughtful, busy being, who had been like a well of comfort to so many that had drunk and passed on out of her life, out of time and time's experiences. Seventy-nine years saw her still upstanding, strong, full of work, and fuller of life's knowledge. It was she who had sent the horses and sleigh for "Gassy," when the old man, having read the letter that Cassy had written him, said that she could "freeze at the station" for all of him. Aunt Kate had said nothing then, but, when the time came, by her orders the sleigh and horses were at the station; and the old man had made no direct protest, for she was the one person he had never dominated nor bullied. If she had only talked, he would have worn her down, for he was fond of talking, and it was said by those who were cynical and incredulous about him that he had gone to prayer-meetings, had been a local preacher, only to hear his own voice. Probably if there had been any politics in the West in his day, he would have been a politician, though it would have been too costly for his taste, and religion was very cheap; it enabled him to refuse to join in many forms of expenditure, on the ground that he "did not hold by such things."

In Aunt Kate, the sister of his wife, dead so many years ago, he had found a spirit stronger than his own. He valued her; he had said more than once, to those who he thought would never repeat it to her, that she was a "great woman"; but self-interest was the mainspring of his appreciation. Since she had come again to his house—she had lived with him once before for two years when his wife was slowly dying—it had been a different place. Housekeeping had cost less than before, yet the cooking was better, the place was beautifully clean, and discipline without rigidity reigned everywhere. One by one the old woman's boys and girls had died—four of them—and she was now alone, with not a single grandchild left to cheer her; and the life out here with Abel Baragar had been unrelieved by much that was heartening to a woman; for Black Andy, Abel's son, was not an inspiring figure, though even his moroseness gave way under her influence. So it was that when Cassy's letter came, her breast seemed to grow warmer, and swell with longing to see the wife of her nephew, who had such a bad reputation in Abel's eyes, and to see George's little boy, who was coming too. After all, whatever Cassy was, she was the mother of Abel's son's son; and Aunt Kate was too old and wise to be frightened by tales told of Cassy or any one else. So, having had her own way so far regarding Cassy's coming, she looked Abel calmly in the eyes, over the gold-rimmed spectacles which were her dearest possession—almost the only thing of value she had. She was not afraid of Abel's anger, and he knew it; but his eldest son, Black Andy, was present, and he must make a show of being master of the situation.

"Aunt Kate," he said, "I didn't make a fuss about you sending the horses and sleigh for her, because women do fool things sometimes. I suppose curiosity got the best of you. Anyhow, mebbe it's right Cassy should find out, once for all, how things stand, and that they haven't altered since she took George away, and ruined his life, and sent him to his grave. That's why I didn't order Mick back when I saw him going out with the team."

"Cassy Mavor," interjected a third voice from a corner behind the great stove—"Cassy Mavor, of the variety-dance-and-song, and a talk with the gallery between!"

Aunt Kate looked over at Black Andy, and stopped knitting, for there was that in the tone of the sullen ranchman which stirred in her a sudden anger, and anger was a rare and uncomfortable sensation to her. A flush crept slowly over her face, then it died away, and she said quietly to Black Andy—for she had ever prayed to be master of the demon of temper down deep in her, and she was praying now:

"She earnt her living by singing and dancing, and she's brought up George's boy by it, and singing and dancing isn't a crime. David danced before the Lord. I danced myself when I was a young girl, and before I joined the church. 'Twas about the only pleasure I ever had; 'bout the only one I like to remember. There's no difference to me 'twixt making your feet handy and clever and full of music, and playing with your fingers on the piano or on a melodeon at a meeting. As for singing, it's God's gift; and many a time I wisht I had it. I'd have sung the blackness out of your face and heart, Andy." She leaned

back again and began to knit very fast. "I'd like to hear Cassy sing, and see her dance too."

Black Andy chuckled coarsely, "I often heard her sing and saw her dance down at Lumley's before she took George away East. You wouldn't have guessed she had consumption. She knocked the boys over down to Lumley's. The first night at Lumley's done for George."

Black Andy's face showed no lightening of its gloom as he spoke, but there was a firing up of the black eyes, and the woman with the knitting felt that—for whatever reason—he was purposely irritating his father.

"The devil was in her heels and in her tongue," Andy continued. "With her big mouth, red hair, and little eyes, she'd have made anybody laugh. I laughed."

"You laughed!" snapped out his father with a sneer.

Black Andy's eyes half closed with a morose look, then he went on. "Yes, I laughed at Cassy. While she was out here at Lumley's getting cured, accordin' to the doctor's orders, things seemed to get a move on in the West. But it didn't suit professing Christians like you, dad." He jerked his head towards the old man and drew the spittoon near with his feet.

"The West hasn't been any worse off since she left," snarled the old man.

"Well, she took George with her," grimly retorted Black Andy.

Abel Baragar's heart had been warmer towards his dead son George than to any one else in the world. George had been as fair of face and hair as Andrew was dark; as cheerful and amusing as Andrew was gloomy and dispiriting; as agile and dexterous of mind and body as his brother was slow and angular; as emotional and warm-hearted as the other was phlegmatic and sour—or so it seemed to the father and to nearly all others.

In those old days they had not been very well off. The railway was not completed, and the West had not begun "to move." The old man had bought and sold land and cattle and horses, always living on a narrow margin of safety, but in the hope that one day the choice bits of land he was shepherding here and there would take a leap up in value; and his judgment had been right. His prosperity had all come since George went away with Cassy Mavor. His anger at George had been the more acute, because the thing happened at a time when his affairs were on the edge of a precipice. He had won through it, but only by the merest shave, and it had all left him with a bad spot in his heart, in spite of his "having religion." Whenever he remembered George, he instinctively thought of those black days when a Land and Cattle Syndicate was crowding him over the edge into the chasm of failure, and came so near doing it. A few thousand dollars less to put up here and there, and he would have been ruined; his blood became hotter whenever he thought of it. He had had to fight the worst of it through alone, for George, who had been useful as a kind of buyer and seller, who was ever all things to all men, and ready with quip and jest, and not a little uncertain as to truth—to which the old man shut his eyes when there was a "deal" on—had, in the end, been of no use at all, and had seemed to go to pieces just when he was most needed. His father had put it all down to Cassy Mavor, who had unsettled things since she had come to Lumley's, and being a man of very few ideas, he cherished those he had with an exaggerated care. Prosperity had not softened him; it had given him an arrogance unduly emphasised by a reputation for rigid virtue and honesty. The indirect attack which Andrew now made on George's memory roused him to anger, as much because it seemed to challenge his own judgment as cast a slight on the name of the boy whom he had cast off, yet who had a firmer hold on his heart than any human being ever had. It had only been pride which had prevented him from making it up with George before it was too late; but, all the more, he was set against the woman who "kicked up her heels for a living"; and, all the more, he resented Black Andy, who, in his own grim way, had managed to remain a partner with him in their present prosperity, and had done so little for it.

"George helped to make what you've got, Andy," he said darkly now. "The West missed George. The West said, 'There was a good man ruined by a woman.' The West'd never think anything or anybody missed you, 'cept yourself. When you went North, it never missed you; when you come back, its jaw fell. You wasn't fit to black George's boots."

Black Andy's mouth took on a bitter sort of smile, and his eyes drooped furtively, as he struck the damper of the stove heavily with his foot, then he replied slowly:

"Well, that's all right; but if I wasn't fit to black his boots, it ain't my fault. I git my nature honest, as he did. We wasn't any cross- breeds, I s'pose. We got the strain direct, and we was all right on her side." He jerked his head towards Aunt Kate, whose face was growing pale. She interposed now.

"Can't you leave the dead alone?" she asked in a voice ringing a little. "Can't you let them rest? Ain't

it enough to quarrel about the living? Cassy'll be here soon," she added, peering out of the window, "and if I was you, I'd try and not make her sorry she ever married a Baragar. It ain't a feeling that'd make a sick woman live long."

Aunt Kate did not strike often, but when she did, she struck hard. Abel Baragar staggered a little under this blow, for, at the moment, it seemed to him that he saw his dead wife's face looking at him from the chair where her sister now sat. Down in his ill-furnished heart, where there had been little which was companionable, there was a shadowed corner. Sophy Baragar had been such a true-hearted, brave-souled woman, and he had been so impatient and exacting with her, till the beautiful face, which had been reproduced in George, had lost its colour and its fire, had become careworn and sweet with that sweetness which goes early out of the world. In all her days the vanished wife had never hinted at as much as Aunt Kate suggested now, and Abel Baragar shut his eyes against the thing which he was seeing. He was not all hard, after all.

Aunt Kate turned to Black Andy now.

"Mebbe Cassy ain't for long," she said. "Mebbe she's come out for what she came out for before. It seems to me it's that, or she wouldn't have come; because she's young yet, and she's fond of her boy, and she'd not want to bury herself alive out here with us. Mebbe her lungs is bad again."

"Then she's sure to get another husband out here," said the old man, recovering himself. "She got one before easy, on the same ticket." With something of malice he looked over at Black Andy.

"If she can sing and dance as she done nine years ago, I shouldn't wonder," answered Black Andy smoothly. These two men knew each other; they had said hard things to each other for many a year, yet they lived on together unshaken by each other's moods and bitternesses.

"I'm getting old,—I'm seventy-nine,—and I ain't for long," urged Aunt Kate, looking Abel in the eyes. "Some day soon I'll be stepping out and away. Then things'll go to sixes and sevens, as they did after Sophy died. Some one ought to be here that's got a right to be here, not a hired woman."

Suddenly the old man raged out.

"Her—off the stage, to look after this! Her, that's kicked up her heels for a living! It's—no, she's no good. She's common. She's come, and she can go. I ain't having sweepings from the streets living here as if they had rights."

Aunt Kate set her lips.

"Sweepings! You've got to take that back, Abel. It's not Christian.
You've got to take that back."

"He'll take it back all right before we've done, I guess," remarked Black
Andy. "He'll take a lot back."

"Truth's truth, and I'll stand by it, and—"

The old man stopped, for there came to them now, clearly, the sound of sleigh bells. They all stood still for an instant, silent and attentive, then Aunt Kate moved towards the door.

"Cassy's come," she said. "Cassy and George's boy've come."

Another instant and the door was opened on the beautiful, white, sparkling world, and the low sleigh, with its great warm buffalo robes, in which the small figures of a woman and a child were almost lost, stopped at the door. Two whimsical but tired eyes looked over a rim of fur at the old woman in the doorway, then Cassy's voice rang out.

"Hello, that's Aunt Kate, I know! Well, here we are, and here's my boy.
Jump, George!"

A moment later, and the gaunt old woman folded both mother and son in her arms and drew them into the room. The door was shut, and they all faced each other.

The old man and Black Andy did not move, but stood staring at the trim figure in black, with the plain face, large mouth, and tousled red hair, and the dreamy-eyed, handsome little boy beside her.

Black Andy stood behind the stove, looking over at the new-comers with quizzical, almost furtive eyes, and his father remained for a moment with mouth open, gazing at his dead son's wife and child, as though not quite comprehending the scene. The sight of the boy had brought back, in some strange, embarrassing way, a vision of thirty years before, when George was a little boy in buckskin pants and

jacket, and was beginning to ride the prairie with him. This boy was like George, yet not like him. The face was George's, the sensuous, luxurious mouth; but the eyes were not those of a Baragar, nor yet those of Aunt Kate's family; and they were not wholly like the mother's. They were full and brimming, while hers were small and whimsical; yet they had her quick, humourous flashes and her quaintness.

"Have I changed so much? Have you forgotten me?" Cassy asked, looking the old man in the eyes. "You look as strong as a bull." She held out her hand to him and laughed.

"Hope I see you well," said Abel Baragar mechanically, as he took the hand and shook it awkwardly.

"Oh, I'm all right," answered the nonchalant little woman, undoing her jacket. "Shake hands with your grandfather, George. That's right—don't talk too much," she added, with a half-nervous little laugh, as the old man, with a kind of fixed smile, and the child shook hands in silence.

Presently she saw Black Andy behind the stove. "Well, Andy, have you been here ever since?" she asked, and, as he came forward, she suddenly caught him by both arms, stood on tiptoe, and kissed him. "Last time I saw you, you were behind the stove at Lumley's. Nothing's ever too warm for you," she added. "You'd be shivering on the Equator. You were always hugging the stove at Lumley's."

"Things was pretty warm there, too, Cassy," he said, with a sidelong look at his father.

She saw the look, her face flashed with sudden temper, then her eyes fell on her boy, now lost in the arms of Aunt Kate, and she curbed herself.

"There were plenty of things doing at Lumley's in those days," she said brusquely. "We were all young and fresh then," she added, and then something seemed to catch her voice, and she coughed a little—a hard, dry, feverish cough. "Are the Lumleys all right? Are they still there, at the Forks?" she asked, after the little paroxysm of coughing.

"Cleaned out—all scattered. We own the Lumleys' place now," replied Black Andy, with another sidelong glance at his father, who, as he put some more wood on the fire and opened the damper of the stove wider, grimly watched and listened.

"Jim, and Lance, and Jerry, and Abner?" she asked almost abstractedly.

"Jim's dead-shot by a U. S. marshal by mistake for a smuggler," answered Black Andy suggestively. "Lance is up on the Yukon, busted; Jerry is one of our, hands on the place; and Abner is in jail."

"Abner-in jail!" she exclaimed in a dazed way. "What did he do? Abner always seemed so straight."

"Oh, he sloped with a thousand dollars of the railway people's money.
They caught him, and he got seven years."

"He was married, wasn't he?" she asked in a low voice. "Yes, to Phenie Tyson. There's no children, so she's all right, and divorce is cheap over in the States, where she is now."

"Phenie Tyson didn't marry Abner because he was a saint, but because he was a man, I suppose," she replied gravely. "And the old folks?"

"Both dead. What Abner done sent the old man to his grave. But Abner's mother died a year before."

"What Abner done killed his father," said Abel Baragar with dry emphasis. "Phenie Tyson was extravagant-wanted this and that, and nothin' was too good for her. Abner spoilt his life gettin' her what she wanted; and it broke old Ezra Lumley's heart."

George's wife looked at him for a moment with her eyes screwed up, and then she laughed softly. "My, it's curious how some folks go up and some go down! It must be lonely for Phenie waiting all these years for Abner to get free. . . . I had the happiest time in my life at Lumley's. I was getting better of my-cold. While I was there I got lots of strength stored up, to last me many a year when I needed it; and, then, George and I were married at Lumley's. . . ."

Aunt Kate came slowly over with the boy, and laid a hand on Cassy's shoulder, for there was an undercurrent to the conversation which boded no good. The very first words uttered had plunged Abel Baragar and his son's wife into the midst of the difficulty which she had hoped might, after all, be avoided.

"Come, and I'll show you your room, Cassy," she said. "It faces south, and you'll get the sun all day. It's like a sun-parlour. We're going to have supper in a couple of hours, and you must rest some first. Is the house warm enough for you?"

The little, garish woman did not reply directly, but shook back her red hair and caught her boy to her breast and kissed him; then she said in that staccato manner which had given her words on the stage such point and emphasis, "Oh, this house is a'most too warm for me, Aunt Kate!"

Then she moved towards the door with the grave, kindly old woman, her son's hand in her own.

"You can see the Lumleys' place from your window, Cassy," said Black Andy grimly. "We got a mortgage on it, and foreclosed it, and it's ours now; and Jerry Lumley's stock-riding for us. Anyhow, he's better off than Abner, or Abner's wife."

Cassy turned at the door and faced him. Instinctively she caught at some latent conflict with old Abel Baragar in what Black Andy had said, and her face softened, for it suddenly flashed into her mind that he was not against her.

"I'm glad to be back West," she said. "It meant a lot to me when I was at Lumley's." She coughed a little again, but turned to the door with a laugh.

"How long have you come to stay here—out West?" asked the old man furtively.

"Why, there's plenty of time to think of that!" she answered brusquely, and she heard Black Andy laugh derisively as the door closed behind her.

In a blaze of joy the sun swept down behind the southern hills, and the windows of Lumley's house at the Forks, catching the oblique rays, glittered and shone like flaming silver. Nothing of life showed, save the cattle here and there, creeping away to the shelter of the foothills for the night. The white, placid snow made a coverlet as wide as the vision of the eye, save where spruce and cedar trees gave a touch of warmth and refuge here and there. A wonderful, buoyant peace seemed to rest upon the wide, silent expanse. The birds of song were gone South over the hills, and the living wild things of the prairies had stolen into winter quarters. Yet, as Cassy Mavor looked out upon the exquisite beauty of the scene, upon the splendid outspanning of the sun along the hills, the deep plangent blue of the sky and the thrilling light, she saw a world in agony and she heard the moans of the afflicted. The sun shone bright on the windows of Lumley's house, but she could hear the crying of Abner's wife, and of old Ezra and Eliza Lumley, when their children were stricken or shamed; when Abel Baragar drew tighter and tighter the chains of the mortgage, which at last made them tenants in the house once their own. Only eight years ago, and all this had happened. And what had not happened to her, too, in those eight years!

With George—reckless, useless, loving, lying George—she had left Lumley's with her sickness cured, as it seemed, after a long year in the West, and had begun life again. What sort of life had it been? "Kicking up her heels on the stage," as Abel Baragar had said; but, somehow, not as it was before she went West to give her perforated lung to the healing air of the plains, and to live outdoors with the men—a man's life. Then she had never put a curb on her tongue, or greatly on her actions, except that, though a hundred men quarrelled openly, or in their own minds, about her, no one had ever had any right to quarrel about her. With a tongue which made men gasp with laughter, with as comic a gift as ever woman had, and as equally comic a face, she had been a good-natured little tyrant in her way. She had given a kiss here and there, and had taken one, but always there had been before her mind the picture of a careworn woman who struggled to bring up her three children honestly, and without the help of charity, and, with a sigh of content and weariness, had died as Cassy made her first hit on the stage and her name became a household word. And Cassy, garish, gay, freckled, witty and whimsical, had never forgotten those days when her mother prayed and worked her heart out to do her duty by her children. Cassy Mavor had made her following, had won her place, was the idol of "the gallery"; and yet she was "of the people," as she had always been, until her first sickness came, and she had gone out to Lumley's, out along the foothills of the Rockies.

What had made her fall in love with George Baragar?

She could not have told, if she had been asked. He was wayward, given to drink at times, given also to card-playing and racing; but he had a way with him which few women could resist and which made men his friends; and he had a sense of humour akin to her own. In any case, one day she let him catch her up in his arms, and there was the end of it. But no, not the end, after all. It was only the beginning of real life for her. All that had gone before seemed but playing on the threshold, though it had meant hard, bitter hard work, and temptation, and patience, and endurance of many kinds. And now George was gone for ever. But George's little boy lay there on the bed in a soft sleep, with all his life before him.

She turned from the warm window and the buoyant, inspiring scene to the bed. Stooping over, she kissed the sleeping boy with an abrupt eagerness, and made a little awkward, hungry gesture of love

over him, and her face flushed hot with the passion of motherhood in her.

"All I've got now," she murmured. "Nothing else left—nothing else at all."

She heard the door open behind her, and she turned round. Aunt Kate was entering with a bowl in her hands.

"I heard you moving about, and I've brought you something hot to drink," she said.

"That's real good of you, Aunt Kate," was the cheerful reply. "But it's near supper-time, and I don't need it."

"It's boneset tea—for your cold," answered Aunt Kate gently, and put it on the high dressing-table made of a wooden box and covered with muslin. "For your cold, Cassy," she repeated.

The little woman stood still a moment gazing at the steaming bowl, lines growing suddenly around her mouth, then she looked at Aunt Kate quizzically. "Is my cold bad—so bad that I need boneset?" she asked in a queer, constrained voice.

"It's comforting, is boneset tea, even when there's no cold, 'specially when the whiskey's good, and the boneset and camomile has steeped some days."

"Have you been steeping them some days?" Cassy asked softly, eagerly.

Aunt Kate nodded, then tried to explain.

"It's always good to be prepared, and I didn't know but what the cold you used to have might be come back," she said. "But I'm glad if it ain't, if that cough of yours is only one of the measly little hacks people get in the East, where it's so damp."

Cassy was at the window again, looking out at the dying radiance of the sun. Her voice seemed hollow and strange and rather rough, as she said in reply:

"It's a real cold, deep down, the same as I had nine years ago, Aunt Kate; and it's come to stay, I guess. That's why I came back West. But I couldn't have gone to Lumley's again, even if they were at the Forks now, for I'm too poor. I'm a back-number now. I had to give up singing and dancing a year ago, after George died. So I don't earn my living any more, and I had to come to George's father with George's boy."

Aunt Kate had a shrewd mind, and it was tactful, too. She did not understand why Cassy, who had earned so much money all these years, should be so poor now, unless it was that she hadn't saved—that she and George hadn't saved. But, looking at the face before her, and the child on the bed, she was convinced that the woman was a good woman, that, singer and dancer as she was, there was no reason why any home should be closed to her, or any heart should shut its doors before her. She guessed a reason for this poverty of Cassy Mavor, but it only made her lay a hand on the little woman's shoulders and look into her eyes.

"Cassy," she said gently, "you was right to come here. There's trials before you, but for the boy's sake you must bear them. Sophy, George's mother, had to bear them, and Abel was fond of her, too, in his way. He's stored up a lot of things to say, and he'll say them; but you'll keep the boy in your mind, and be patient, won't you, Cassy? You got rights here, and it's comfortable, and there's plenty, and the air will cure your lung as it did before. It did all right before, didn't it?" She handed the bowl of boneset tea. "Take it; it'll do you good, Cassy," she added.

Cassy said nothing in reply. She looked at the bed where her boy lay, she looked at the angular face of the woman, with its brooding motherliness, at the soft, grey hair, and, with a little gasp of feeling, she raised the bowl to her lips and drank freely. Then, putting it down, she said:

"He doesn't mean to have us, Aunt Kate, but I'll try and keep my temper down. Did he ever laugh in his life?"

"He laughs sometimes—kind o' laughs."

"I'll make him laugh real, if I can," Cassy rejoined. "I've made a lot of people laugh in my time."

The old woman leaned suddenly over, and drew the red, ridiculous head to her shoulder with a gasp of affection, and her eyes were full of tears.

"Cassy," she exclaimed, "Cassy, you make me cry." Then she turned and hurried from the room.

Three hours later the problem was solved in the big sitting-room where Cassy had first been received with her boy. Aunt Kate sat with her feet on a hassock, rocking gently and watching and listening. Black Andy was behind the great stove with his chair tilted back, carving the bowl of a pipe; the old man sat rigid by the table, looking straight before him and smacking his lips now and then as he was won't to do at meeting; while Cassy, with her chin in her hands and elbows on her knees, gazed into the fire and waited for the storm to break.

Her little flashes of humour at dinner had not brightened things, and she had had an insane desire to turn cart-wheels round the room, so implacable and highly strained was the attitude of the master of the house, so unctuous was the grace and the thanksgiving before and after the meal. Abel Baragar had stored up his anger and his righteous antipathy for years, and this was the first chance he had had of visiting his displeasure on the woman who had "ruined" George, and who had now come to get "rights," which he was determined she should not have. He had steeled himself against seeing any good in her whatever. Self-will, self-pride, and self-righteousness were big in him, and so the supper had ended in silence, and with a little attack of coughing on the part of Cassy, which made her angry at herself. Then the boy had been put to bed, and she had come back to await the expected outburst. She could feel it in the air, and while her blood tingled in a desire to fight this tyrant to the bitter end, she thought of her boy and his future, and she calmed the tumult in her veins.

She did not have to wait very long. The querulous voice of the old man broke the silence.

"When be you goin' back East? What time did you fix for goin'?" he asked.

She raised her head and looked at him squarely. "I didn't fix any time for going East again," she replied. "I came out West this time to stay."

"I thought you was on the stage," was the rejoinder.

"I've left the stage. My voice went when I got a bad cold again, and I couldn't stand the draughts of the theatre, and so I couldn't dance, either. I'm finished with the stage. I've come out here for good and all.

"Where did you think of livin' out here?"

"I'd like to have gone to Lumley's, but that's not possible, is it? Anyway, I couldn't afford it now. So I thought I'd stay here, if there was room for me."

"You want to board here?"

"I didn't put it to myself that way. I thought perhaps you'd be glad to have me. I'm handy. I can cook, I can sew, and I'm quite cheerful and kind. Then there's George—little George. I thought you'd like to have your grandson here with you."

"I've lived without him—or his father—for eight years, an' I could bear it a while yet, mebbe."

There was a half-choking sound from the old woman in the rocking-chair, but she did not speak, though her knitting dropped into her lap.

"But if you knew us better, perhaps you'd like us better," rejoined Cassy gently. "We're both pretty easy to get on with, and we see the bright side of things. He has a wonderful disposition, has George."

"I ain't goin' to like you any better," said the old man, getting to his feet. "I ain't goin' to give you any rights here. I've thought it out, and my mind's made up. You can't come it over me. You ruined my boy's life and sent him to his grave. He'd have lived to be an old man out here; but you spoiled him. You trapped him into marrying you, with your kicking and your comic songs, and your tricks of the stage, and you parted us—parted him and me for ever."

"That was your fault. George wanted to make it up."

"With you!" The old man's voice rose shrilly, the bitterness and passion of years was shooting high in the narrow confines of his mind. The geyser of his prejudice and antipathy was furiously alive. "To come back with you that ruined him and broke up my family, and made my life like bitter aloes! No! And if I wouldn't have him with you, do you think I'll have you without him? By the God of Israel, no!"

Black Andy was now standing up behind the stove intently watching, his face grim and sombre; Aunt Kate sat with both hands gripping the arms of the rocker.

Cassy got slowly to her feet. "I've been as straight a woman as your mother or your wife ever was," she said, "and all the world knows it. I'm poor—and I might have been rich. I was true to myself before I

married George, and I was true to George after, and all I earned he shared; and I've got little left. The mining stock I bought with what I saved went smash, and I'm poor as I was when I started to work for myself. I can work awhile yet, but I wanted to see if I could fit in out here, and get well again, and have my boy fixed in the house of his grandfather. That's the way I'm placed, and that's how I came. But give a dog a bad name—ah, you shame your dead boy in thinking bad of me! I didn't ruin him. I didn't kill him. He never came to any bad through me. I helped him; he was happy. Why, I—" She stopped suddenly, putting a hand to her mouth. "Go on, say what you want to say, and let's understand once for all," she added with a sudden sharpness.

Abel Baragar drew himself up. "Well, I say this. I'll give you three thousand dollars, and you can go somewhere else to live. I'll keep the boy here. That's what I've fixed in my mind to do. You can go, and the boy stays. I ain't goin' to live with you that spoiled George's life."

The eyes of the woman dilated, she trembled with a sudden rush of anger, then stood still, staring in front of her without a word. Black Andy stepped from behind the stove.

"You are going to stay here, Cassy," he said; "here where you have rights as good as any, and better than any, if it comes to that." He turned to his father. "You thought a lot of George," he added. "He was the apple of your eye. He had a soft tongue, and most people liked him; but George was foolish—I've known it all these years. George was pretty foolish. He gambled, he bet at races, he speculated—wild. You didn't know it. He took ten thousand dollars of your money, got from the Wonegosh farm he sold for you. He—"

Cassy Mavor started forwards with a cry, but Black Andy waved her down.

"No, I'm going to tell it. George lost your ten thousand dollars, dad, gambling, racing, speculating. He told her—Cassy-two days after they was married, and she took the money she earned on the stage, and give it to him to pay you back on the quiet through the bank. You never knew, but that's the kind of boy your son George was, and that's the kind of wife he had. George told me all about it when I was East six years ago."

He came over to Cassy and stood beside her. "I'm standing by George's wife," he said, taking her hand, while she shut her eyes in her misery— had she not hid her husband's wrong-doing all these years? "I'm standing by her. If it hadn't been for that ten thousand dollars she paid back for George, you'd have been swamped when the Syndicate got after you, and we wouldn't have had Lumley's place, nor this, nor anything. I guess she's got rights here, dad, as good as any."

The old man sank slowly into a chair. "George—George stole from me— stole money from me!" he whispered. His face was white. His pride and vainglory were broken. He was a haggard, shaken figure. His self- righteousness was levelled in the dust.

With sudden impulse, Cassy stole over to him, and took his hand and held it tight.

"Don't! Don't feel so bad!" she said. "He was weak and wild then.
But he was all right afterwards. He was happy with me."

"I've owed Cassy this for a good many years, dad," said Black Andy, "and it had to be paid. She's got better stuff in her than any Baragar."

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An hour later, the old man said to Cassy at the door of her room: "You got to stay here and git well. It's yours, the same as the rest of us —what's here."

Then he went downstairs and sat with Aunt Kate by the fire.

"I guess she's a good woman," he said at last. "I didn't use her right."

"You've been lucky with your women-folk," Aunt Kate answered quietly.

"Yes, I've been lucky," he answered. "I dunno if I deserve it. Mebbe not. Do you think she'll git well?"

"It's a healing air out here," Aunt Kate answered, and listened to the wood of the house snapping in the sharp frost.

MARCILE

That the day was beautiful, that the harvest of the West had been a great one, that the salmon-fishing had been larger than ever before, that gold had been found in the Yukon, made no difference to Jacques Grassette, for he was in the condemned cell of Bindon Jail, living out those days which pass so swiftly between the verdict of the jury and the last slow walk with the Sheriff.

He sat with his back to the stone wall, his hands on his knees, looking straight before him. All that met his physical gaze was another stone wall, but with his mind's eye he was looking beyond it into spaces far away. His mind was seeing a little house with dormer windows, and a steep roof on which the snow could not lodge in winter-time; with a narrow stoop in front where one could rest of an evening, the day's work done; the stone-and-earth oven near by in the open, where the bread for a family of twenty was baked; the wooden plough tipped against the fence, to wait the "fall" cultivation; the big iron cooler in which the sap from the maple trees was boiled, in the days when the snow thawed and spring opened the heart of the wood; the flash of the sickle and the scythe hard by; the fields of the little narrow farm running back from the St. Lawrence like a riband; and, out on the wide stream, the great rafts with their riverine population floating down to Michelin's mill-yards.

For hours he had sat like this, unmoving, his gnarled red hands clamping each leg as though to hold him steady while he gazed; and he saw himself as a little lad, barefooted, doing chores, running after the shaggy, troublesome pony which would let him catch it when no one else could, and, with only a halter on, galloping wildly back to the farmyard, to be hitched up in the carriole which had once belonged to the old Seigneur. He saw himself as a young man, back from "the States" where he had been working in the mills, regarded austerely by little Father Roche, who had given him his first Communion—for, down in Massachusetts he had learned to wear his curly hair plastered down on his forehead, smoke bad cigars, and drink "old Bourbon," to bet and to gamble, and be a figure at horse-races.

Then he saw himself, his money all gone, but the luck still with him, at Mass on the Sunday before going to the backwoods lumber-camp for the winter, as boss of a hundred men. He had a way with him, and he had brains, had Jacques Grassette, and he could manage men, as Michelin the lumber-king himself had found in a great river-row and strike, when bloodshed seemed certain. Even now the ghost of a smile played at his lips, as he recalled the surprise of the old habitants and of Father Roche when he was chosen for this responsible post; for to run a great lumber-camp well, hundreds of miles from civilisation, where there is no visible law, no restraints of ordinary organised life, and where men, for seven months together, never saw a woman or a child, and ate pork and beans, and drank white whisky, was a task of administration as difficult as managing a small republic new-created out of violent elements of society. But Michelin was right, and the old Seigneur, Sir Henri Robitaille, who was a judge of men, knew he was right, as did also Hennepin the schoolmaster, whose despair Jacques had been, for he never worked at his lessons as a boy, and yet he absorbed Latin and mathematics by some sure but unexplainable process. "Ah! if you would but work, Jacques, you vaurien, I would make a great man of you," Hennepin had said to him more than once; but this had made no impression on Jacques. It was more to the point that the ground-hogs and black squirrels and pigeons were plentiful in Casanac Woods.

And so he thought as he stood at the door of the Church of St. Francis on that day before going "out back" to the lumber-camp. He had reached the summit of greatness—to command men. That was more than wealth or learning, and as he spoke to the old Seigneur going in to Mass, he still thought so, for the Seigneur's big house and the servants and the great gardens had no charm for him. The horses—that was another thing; but there would be plenty of horses in the lumber-camp; and, on the whole, he felt himself rather superior to the old Seigneur, who now was Lieutenant- Governor of the province in which lay Bindon Jail.

At the door of the Church of St. Francis he had stretched himself up with good-natured pride, for he was by nature gregarious and friendly, but with a temper quick and strong, and even savage when roused; though Michelin the lumber-king did not know that when he engaged him as boss, having seen him only at the one critical time, when his superior brain and will saw its chance to command, and had no personal interest in the strife. He had been a miracle of coolness then, and his six-foot-two of pride and muscle was taking natural tribute at the door of the Church of St. Francis, where he waited till nearly everyone had entered, and Father Roche's voice could be heard in the Mass.

Then had happened the real event of his life: a blackeyed, rose-checked girl went by with her mother, hurrying in to Mass. As she passed him their eyes met, and his blood leapt in his veins. He had never seen her before, and, in a sense, he had never seen any woman before. He had danced with many a one, and kissed a few in the old days among the flax- beaters, at the harvesting, in the gaieties of a

wedding, and also down in Massachusetts. That, however, was a different thing, which he forgot an hour after; but this was the beginning of the world for him; for he knew now, of a sudden, what life was, what home meant, why "old folks" slaved for their children, and mothers wept when girls married or sons went away from home to bigger things; why in there, in at Mass, so many were praying for all the people, and thinking only of one. All in a moment it came—and stayed; and he spoke to her, to Marcile, that very night, and he spoke also to her father, Valloir the farrier, the next morning by lamplight, before he started for the woods. He would not be gainsaid, nor take no for an answer, nor accept, as a reason for refusal, that she was only sixteen, and that he did not know her, for she had been away with a childless aunt since she was three. That she had fourteen brothers and sisters who had to be fed and cared for did not seem to weigh with the farrier. That was an affair of le bon Dieu, and enough would be provided for them all as heretofore—one could make little difference; and though Jacques was a very good match, considering his prospects and his favour with the lumber-king, Valloir had a kind of fear of him, and could not easily promise his beloved Marcile, the flower of his flock, to a man of whom the priest so strongly disapproved. But it was a new sort of Jacques Grassette who, that morning, spoke to him with the simplicity and eagerness of a child; and the suddenly conceived gift of a pony stallion, which every man in the parish envied Jacques, won Valloir over; and Jacques went "away back" with the first timid kiss of Marcile Valloir burning on his cheek.

"Well, bagosh, you are a wonder!" said Jacques' father, when he told him the news, and saw Jacques jump into the carriole and drive away.

Here in prison, this, too, Jacques saw—this scene; and then the wedding in the spring, and the tour through the parishes for days together, lads and lasses journeying with them; and afterwards the new home with a bigger stoop than any other in the village, with some old gnarled crab- apple trees and lilac bushes, and four years of happiness, and a little child that died; and all the time Jacques rising in the esteem of Michelin the lumber-king, and sent on inspections, and to organise camps; for weeks, sometimes for months, away from the house behind the lilac bushes—and then the end of it all, sudden and crushing and unredeemable.

Jacques came back one night and found the house empty. Marcile had gone to try her luck with another man.

That was the end of the upward career of Jacques Grassette. He went out upon a savage hunt which brought him no quarry, for the man and the woman had disappeared as completely as though they had been swallowed by the sea. And here, at last, he was waiting for the day when he must settle a bill for a human life taken in passion and rage.

His big frame seemed out of place in the small cell, and the watcher sitting near him, to whom he had not addressed a word nor replied to a question since the watching began, seemed an insignificant factor in the scene. Never had a prisoner been more self-contained, or rejected more completely all those ministrations of humanity which relieve the horrible isolation of the condemned cell. Grassette's isolation was complete. He lived in a dream, did what little there was to do in a dark abstraction, and sat hour after hour, as he was sitting now, piercing, with a brain at once benumbed to all outer things and afire with inward things, those realms of memory which are infinite in a life of forty years.

"Sacre!" he muttered at last, and a shiver seemed to pass through him from head to foot; then an ugly and evil oath fell from his lips, which made his watcher shrink back appalled, for he also was a Catholic, and had been chosen of purpose, in the hope that he might have an influence on this revolted soul. It had, however, been of no use, and Grassette had refused the advances and ministrations of the little good priest, Father Laflamme, who had come from the coast of purpose to give him the offices of the Church. Silent, obdurate, sullen, he had looked the priest straight in the face and had said in broken English, "Non, I pay my bill. Nom de diable, I will say my own Mass, light my own candle, go my own way. I have too much."

Now, as he sat glooming, after his outbreak of oaths, there came a rattling noise at the door, the grinding of a key in the lock, the shooting of bolts, and a face appeared at the little wicket in the door. Then the door opened and the Sheriff stepped inside, accompanied by a white-haired, stately old man. At sight of this second figure—the Sheriff had come often before, and would come for one more doleful walk with him—Grassette started. His face, which had never whitened in all the dismal and terrorising doings of the capture and the trial and sentence, though it had flushed with rage more than once, now turned a little pale, for it seemed as if this old man had stepped out of the visions which had just passed before his eyes.

"His Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Henri Robitaille, has come to speak with you. . . . Stand up," the Sheriff added sharply, as Grassette kept his seat.

Grassette's face flushed with anger, for the prison had not broken his spirits; then he got up slowly. "I

not stand up for you," he growled at the Sheriff; "I stand up for him." He jerked his head towards Sir Henri Robitaille. This grand Seigneur, with Michelin, had believed in him in those far-off days which he had just been seeing over again, and all his boyhood and young manhood was rushing back on him. But now it was the Governor who turned pale, seeing who the criminal was.

"Jacques Grassette!" he cried in consternation and emotion, for under another name the murderer had been tried and sentenced, nor had his identity been established—the case was so clear, the defence had been perfunctory, and Quebec was very far away.

"M'sieu'!" was the respectful response, and Grassette's fingers twitched.

"It was my sister's son you killed, Grassette," said the Governor in a low, strained voice.

"Nom de Dieu!" said Grassette hoarsely.

"I did not know, Grassette," the Governor went on "I did not know it was you."

"Why did you come, m'sieu'?"

"Call him 'your Honour,"' said the Sheriff sharply. Grassette's face hardened, and his look turned upon the Sheriff was savage and forbidding. "I will speak as it please me. Who are you? What do I care? To hang me—that is your business; but, for the rest, you spik to me differen'. Who are you? Your father kep' a tavern for thieves, vous savez bien!" It was true that the Sheriff's father had had no savoury reputation in the West.

The Governor turned his head away in pain and trouble, for the man's rage was not a thing to see—and they both came from the little parish of St. Francis, and had passed many an hour together.

"Never mind, Grassette," he said gently. "Call me what you will. You've got no feeling against me; and I can say with truth that I don't want your life for the life you took."

Grassette's breast heaved. "He put me out of my work, the man I kill. He pass the word against me, he hunt me out of the mountains, he call— tete de diable! he call me a name so bad. Everything swim in my head, and I kill him."

The Governor made a protesting gesture. "I understand. I am glad his mother was dead. But do you not think how sudden it was? Now here, in the thick of life, then, out there, beyond this world in the darkin purgatory."

The brave old man had accomplished what everyone else, priest, lawyer, Sheriff and watcher, had failed to do: he had shaken Grassette out of his blank isolation and obdurate unrepentance, had touched some chord of recognisable humanity.

"It is done—well, I pay for it," responded Grassette, setting his jaw.
"It is two deaths for me. Waiting and remembering, and then with the
Sheriff there the other—so quick, and all."

The Governor looked at him for some moments without speaking. The
Sheriff intervened again officiously.

"His Honour has come to say something important to you," he remarked oracularly.

"Hold you—does he need a Sheriff to tell him when to spik?" was Grassette's surly comment. Then he turned to the Governor. "Let us speak in French," he said in patois. "This rope-twister will not understan'. He is no good—I spit at him."

The Governor nodded, and, despite the Sheriff's protest, they spoke in French, Grassette with his eyes intently fixed on the other, eagerly listening.

"I have come," said the Governor, "to say to you, Grassette, that you have still a chance of life."

He paused, and Grassette's face took on a look of bewilderment and vague anxiety. A chance of life—what did it mean?

"Reprieve?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

The Governor shook his head. "Not yet; but there is a chance. Something has happened. A man's life is in danger, or it may be he is dead; but more likely he is alive. You took a life; perhaps you can save one now. Keeley's Gulch—the mine there."

"They have found it—gold?" asked Grassette, his eyes staring. He was forgetting for a moment where and what he was.

"He went to find it, the man whose life is in danger. He had heard from a trapper who had been a miner once. While he was there, a landslip came, and the opening to the mine was closed up—"

"There were two ways in. Which one did he take?" cried Grassette.

"The only one he could take, the only one he or anyone else knew. You know the other way in—you only, they say."

"I found it—the easier, quick way in; a year ago I found it."

"Was it near the other entrance?" Grassette shook his head. "A mile away."

"If the man is alive—and we think he is—you are the only person that can save him. I have telegraphed the Government. They do not promise, but they will reprieve, and save your life, if you find the man."

"Alive or dead?"

"Alive or dead, for the act would be the same. I have an order to take you to the Gulch, if you will go; and I am sure that you will have your life, if you do it. I will promise—ah yes, Grassette, but it shall be so! Public opinion will demand it. You will do it?"

"To go free—altogether?"

"Well, but if your life is saved, Grassette?"

The dark face flushed, then grew almost repulsive again in its sullenness.

"Life—and this, in prison, shut in year after year. To do always what some one else wills, to be a slave to a warder. To have men like that over me that have been a boss of men—wasn't it that drove me to kill?— to be treated like dirt. And to go on with this, while outside there is free life, and to go where you will at your own price-no! What do I care for life! What is it to me! To live like this—ah, I would break my head against these stone walls, I would choke myself with my own hands! If I stayed here, I would kill again, I would kill—kill."

"Then to go free altogether—that would be the wish of all the world, if you save this man's life, if it can be saved. Will you not take the chance? We all have to die some time or other, Grassette, some sooner, some later; and when you go, will you not want to take to God in your hands a life saved for a life taken? Have you forgotten God, Grassette? We used to remember Him in the Church of St. Francis down there at home."

There was a moment's silence, in which Grassette's head was thrust forwards, his eyes staring into space. The old Seigneur had touched a vulnerable corner in his nature.

Presently he said in a low voice: "To be free altogether. . . . What is his name? Who is he?"

"His name is Bignold," the Governor answered. He turned to the Sheriff inquiringly. "That is it, is it not?" he asked in English again.

"James Tarran Bignold," answered the Sheriff.

The effect of these words upon Grassette was remarkable. His body appeared to stiffen, his face became rigid, he stared at the Governor blankly, appalled, the colour left his face, and his mouth opened with a curious and revolting grimace. The others drew back, startled, and watched him.

"Sang de Dieu!" he murmured at last, with a sudden gesture of misery and rage.

Then the Governor understood: he remembered that the name just given by the Sheriff and himself was the name of the Englishman who had carried off Grassette's wife years ago. He stepped forwards and was about to speak, but changed his mind. He would leave it all to Grassette; he would not let the Sheriff know the truth, unless Grassette himself disclosed the situation. He looked at Grassette with a look of poignant pity and interest combined. In his own placid life he had never had any tragic happening, his blood had run coolly, his days had been blessed by an urbane fate; such scenes as this were but a spectacle to him; there was no answering chord of human suffering in his own breast, to make him realise what Grassette was undergoing now; but he had read widely, he had been an acute observer of the world and its happenings, and he had a natural human sympathy which had made many a man and woman eternally grateful to him.

What would Grassette do? It was a problem which had no precedent, and the solution would be a revelation of the human mind and heart. What would the man do?

"Well, what is all this, Grassette?" asked the Sheriff brusquely. His official and officious intervention, behind which was the tyranny of the little man, given a power which he was incapable of wielding wisely, would have roused Grassette to a savage reply a half-hour before, but now it was met by a contemptuous wave of the hand, and Grassette kept his eyes fixed on the Governor.

"James Tarran Bignold!" Grassette said harshly, with eyes that searched the Governor's face; but they found no answering look there. The Governor, then, did not remember that tragedy of his home and hearth, and the man who had made of him an Ishmael. Still, Bignold had been almost a stranger in the parish, and it was not curious if the Governor had forgotten.

"Bignold!" he repeated, but the Governor gave no response.

"Yes, Bignold is his name, Grassette," said the Sheriff. "You took a life, and now, if you save one, that'll balance things. As the Governor says, there'll be a reprieve anyhow. It's pretty near the day, and this isn't a bad world to kick in, so long as you kick with one leg on the ground, and—"

The Governor hastily intervened upon the Sheriff's brutal remarks. "There is no time to be lost, Grassette. He has been ten days in the mine."

Grassette's was not a slow brain. For a man of such physical and bodily bulk, he had more talents than are generally given. If his brain had been slower, his hand also would have been slower to strike. But his intelligence had been surcharged with hate these many years, and since the day he had been deserted, it had ceased to control his actions—a passionate and reckless wilfulness had governed it. But now, after the first shock and stupefaction, it seemed to go back to where it was before Marcile went from him, gather up the force and intelligence it had then, and come forwards again to this supreme moment, with all that life's harsh experiences had done for it, with the education that misery and misdoing give. Revolutions are often the work of instants, not years, and the crucial test and problem by which Grassette was now faced had lifted him into a new atmosphere, with a new capacity alive in him. A moment ago his eyes had been bloodshot and swimming with hatred and passion; now they grew, almost suddenly, hard and lurking and quiet, with a strange, penetrating force and inquiry in them.

"Bignold—where does he come from? What is he?" he asked the Sheriff.

"He is an Englishman; he's only been out here a few months. He's been shooting and prospecting; but he's a better shooter than prospector. He's a stranger; that's why all the folks out here want to save him if it's possible. It's pretty hard dying in a strange land far away from all that's yours. Maybe he's got a wife waiting for him over there."

"Nom de Dieu!" said Grassette with suppressed malice, under his breath.

"Maybe there's a wife waiting for him, and there's her to think of. The West's hospitable, and this thing has taken hold of it; the West wants to save this stranger, and it's waiting for you, Grassette, to do its work for it, you being the only man that can do it, the only one that knows the other secret way into Keeley's Gulch. Speak right out, Grassette. It's your chance for life. Speak out quick."

The last three words were uttered in the old slave-driving tone, though the earlier part of the speech had been delivered oracularly, and had brought again to Grassette's eyes the reddish, sullen look which had made them, a little while before, like those of some wounded, angered animal at bay; but it vanished slowly, and there was silence for a moment. The Sheriff's words had left no vestige of doubt in Grassette's mind. This Bignold was the man who had taken Marcile away, first to the English province, then into the States, where he had lost track of them, then over to England. Marcile—where was Marcile now?

In Keeley's Gulch was the man who could tell him, the man who had ruined his home and his life. Dead or alive, he was in Keeley's Gulch, the man who knew where Marcile was; and if he knew where Marcile was, and if she was alive, and he was outside these prison walls, what would he do to her? And if he was outside these prison walls, and in the Gulch, and the man was there alive before him, what would he do?

Outside these prison walls-to be out there in the sun, where life would be easier to give up, if it had to be given up! An hour ago he had been drifting on a sea of apathy, and had had his fill of life. An hour ago he had had but one desire, and that was to die fighting, and he had even pictured to himself a struggle in this narrow cell where he would compel them to kill him, and so in any case let him escape the rope. Now he was suddenly brought face to face with the great central issue of his life, and the end,

whatever that end might be, could not be the same in meaning, though it might be the same concretely. If he elected to let things be, then Bignold would die out there in the Gulch, starved, anguished, and alone. If he went, he could save his own life by saving Bignold, if Bignold was alive; or he could go—and not save Bignold's life or his own! What would he do?

The Governor watched him with a face controlled to quietness, but with an anxiety which made him pale in spite of himself.

"What will you do, Grassette?" he said at last in a low voice, and with a step forwards to him. "Will you not help to clear your conscience by doing this thing? You don't want to try and spite the world by not doing it. You can make a lot of your life yet, if you are set free. Give yourself, and give the world a chance. You haven't used it right. Try again."

Grassette imagined that the Governor did not remember who Bignold was, and that this was an appeal against his despair, and against revenging himself on the community which had applauded his sentence. If he went to the Gulch, no one would know or could suspect the true situation, everyone would be unprepared for that moment when Bignold and he would face each other—and all that would happen then.

Where was Marcile? Only Bignold knew. Alive or dead? Only Bignold knew.

"Bien, I will do it, m'sieu'," he said to the Governor. "I am to go alone—eh?"

The Sheriff shook his head. "No, two warders will go with you—and myself."

A strange look passed over Grassette's face. He seemed to hesitate for a moment, then he said again: "Bon, I will go."

"Then there is, of course, the doctor," said the Sheriff.

"Bon," said Grassette. "What time is it?" "Twelve o'clock," answered the Sheriff, and made a motion to the warder to open the door of the cell.

"By sundown!" Grassette said, and he turned with a determined gesture to leave the cell.

At the gate of the prison, a fresh, sweet air caught his face. Involuntarily he drew in a great draught of it, and his eyes seemed to gaze out, almost wonderingly, over the grass and the trees to the boundless horizon. Then he became aware of the shouts of the crowd— shouts of welcome. This same crowd had greeted him with shouts of execration when he had left the Court House after his sentence. He stood still for a moment and looked at them, as it were only half comprehending that they were cheering him now, and that voices were saying, "Bravo, Grassette! Save him, and we'll save you."

Cheer upon cheer, but he took no notice. He walked like one in a dream, a long, strong step. He turned neither to left nor right, not even when the friendly voice of one who had worked with him bade him: "Cheer up, and do the trick." He was busy working out a problem which no one but himself could solve. He was only half conscious of his surroundings; he was moving in a kind of detached world of his own, where the warders and the Sheriff and those who followed were almost abstract and unreal figures. He was living with a past which had been everlasting distant, and had now become a vivid and buffeting present. He returned no answers to the questions addressed to him, and would not talk, save when for a little while they dismounted from their horses, and sat under the shade of a great ash-tree for a few moments, and snatched a mouthful of luncheon. Then he spoke a little and asked some questions, but lapsed into a moody silence afterwards. His life and nature were being passed through a fiery crucible. In all the years that had gone, he had had an ungovernable desire to kill both Bignold and Marcile if he ever met them, a primitive, savage desire to blot them out of life and being. His fingers had ached for Marcile's neck, that neck in which he had lain his face so often in the transient, unforgettable days of their happiness. If she was alive now—if she was still alive! Her story was hidden there in Keeley's Gulch with Bignold, and he was galloping hard to reach his foe. As he went, by some strange alchemy of human experience, by that new birth of his brain, the world seemed different from what it had ever been before, at least since the day when he had found an empty home and a shamed hearthstone. He got a new feeling toward it, and life appealed to him as a thing that might have been so well worth living. But since that was not to be, then he would see what he could do to get compensation for all that he had lost, to take toll for the thing that had spoiled him, and given him a savage nature and a raging temper, which had driven him at last to kill a man who, in no real sense, had injured him.

Mile after mile they journeyed, a troop of interested people coming after, the sun and the clear sweet air, the waving grass, the occasional clearings where settlers had driven in the tent-pegs of home, the forest now and then swallowing them, the mountains rising above them like a blank wall, and then

suddenly opening out before them; and the rustle and scamper of squirrels and coyotes; and over their heads the whistle of birds, the slow beat of wings of great wild-fowl. The tender sap of youth was in this glowing and alert new world, and, by sudden contrast with the prison walls which he had just left behind, the earth seemed recreated, unfamiliar, compelling and companionable. Strange that in all the years that had been since he had gone back to his abandoned home to find Marcile gone, the world had had no beauty, no lure for him. In the splendour of it all, he had only raged and stormed, hating his fellowman, waiting, however hopelessly, for the day when he should see Marcile and the man who had taken her from him. And yet now, under the degradation of his crime and its penalty, and the unmanning influence of being the helpless victim of the iron power of the law, rigid, ugly and demoralising—now with the solution of his life's great problem here before him in the hills, with the man for whom he had waited so long caverned in the earth, but a hand-reach away, as it were, his wrongs had taken a new manifestation in him, and the thing that kept crying out in him every moment was, Where is Marcile?

It was four o'clock when they reached the pass which only Grassette knew, the secret way into the Gulch. There was two hours' walking through the thick, primeval woods, where few had ever been, except the ancient tribes which had once lorded it here; then came a sudden drop into the earth, a short travel through a dim cave, and afterward a sheer wall of stone enclosing a ravine where the rocks on either side nearly met overhead.

Here Grassette gave the signal to shout aloud, and the voice of the Sheriff called out: "Hello, Bignold!

"Hello! Hello, Bignold! Are you there?—Hello!" His voice rang out clear and piercing, and then came a silence-a long, anxious silence. Again the voice rang out: "Hello! Hello-o-o! Bignold! Bigno-o-ld!"

They strained their ears. Grassette was flat on the ground, his ear to the earth. Suddenly he got to his feet, his face set, his eyes glittering.

"He is there beyon'—I hear him," he said, pointing farther down the Gulch. "Water—he is near it."

"We heard nothing," said the Sheriff, "not a sound." "I hear ver' good. He is alive. I hear him—so," responded Grassette; and his face had a strange, fixed look which the others interpreted to be agitation at the thought that he had saved his own life by finding Bignold—and alive; which would put his own salvation beyond doubt.

He broke away from them and hurried down the Gulch. The others followed hard after, the Sheriff and the warders close behind; but he outstripped them.

Suddenly he stopped and stood still, looking at something on the ground. They saw him lean forwards and his hands stretch out with a fierce gesture. It was the attitude of a wild animal ready to spring.

They were beside him in an instant, and saw at his feet Bignold worn to a skeleton, with eyes starting from his head, and fixed on Grassette in agony and stark fear.

The Sheriff stooped to lift Bignold up, but Grassette waved them back with a fierce gesture, standing over the dying man.

"He spoil my home. He break me—I have my bill to settle here," he said in a voice hoarse and harsh. "It is so? It is so—eh? Spik!" he said to Bignold.

"Yes," came feebly from the shrivelled lips. "Water! Water!" the wretched man gasped. "I'm dying!"

A sudden change came over Grassette. "Water—queeck!" he said.

The Sheriff stooped and held a hatful of water to Bignold's lips, while another poured brandy from a flask into the water.

Grassette watched them eagerly. When the dying man had swallowed a little of the spirit and water, Grassette leaned over him again, and the others drew away. They realised that these two men had an account to settle, and there was no need for Grassette to take revenge, for Bignold was going fast.

"You stan' far back," said Grassette, and they fell away.

Then he stooped down to the sunken, ashen face, over which death was fast drawing its veil. "Marcile—where is Marcile?" he asked.

The dying man's lips opened. "God forgive me—God save my soul!" he whispered. He was not

concerned for Grassette now.

"Queeck-queeck, where is Marcile?" Grassette said sharply. "Come back,
Bignold. Listen—where is Marcile?"

He strained to hear the answer. Bignold was going, but his eyes opened again, however, for this call seemed to pierce to his soul as it struggled to be free.

"Ten years—since—I saw her," he whispered. "Good girl—Marcile. She loves you, but she—is afraid." He tried to say something more, but his tongue refused its office.

"Where is she-spik!" commanded Grassette in a tone of pleading and agony now.

Once more the flying spirit came back. A hand made a motion towards his pocket, then lay still.

Grassette felt hastily in the dead man's pocket, drew forth a letter, and with half-blinded eyes read the few lines it contained. It was dated from a hospital in New York, and was signed: "Nurse Marcile."

With a moan of relief Grassette stood staring at the dead man. When the others came to him again, his lips were moving, but they did not hear what he was saying. They took up the body and moved away with it up the ravine.

"It's all right, Grassette. You'll be a freeman," said the Sheriff.

Grassette did not answer. He was thinking how long it would take him to get to Marcile, when he was free.

He had a true vision of beginning life again with Marcile.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Being a man of very few ideas, he cherished those he had
Self-will, self-pride, and self-righteousness were big in him
Tyranny of the little man, given a power

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NORTHERN LIGHTS, VOLUME 3 ***

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