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Author: Gilbert Parker

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NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Gilbert Parker

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This book, Northern Lights, belongs to an epoch which is a generation later than that in which Pierre and His People moved. The conditions under which Pierre and Shon McGann lived practically ended with the advent of the railway. From that time forwards, with the rise of towns and cities accompanied by an amazing growth of emigration, the whole life lost much of that character of isolation and pathetic loneliness which marked the days of Pierre. When, in 1905, I visited the Far West again after many years, and saw the strange new life with its modern episode, energy, and push, and realised that even the characteristics which marked the period just before the advent, and just after the advent, of the railway were disappearing, I determined to write a series of stories which would catch the fleeting characteristics and hold something of the old life, so adventurous, vigorous, and individual, before it passed entirely and was forgotten. Therefore, from 1905 to 1909, I kept drawing upon all those experiences of others, from the true tales that had been told me, upon the reminiscences of Hudson's Bay trappers and hunters, for those incidents natural to the West which imagination could make true. Something of the old atmosphere had gone, and there was a stir and a murmur in all the West which broke that grim yet fascinating loneliness of the time of Pierre.

Thus it is that Northern Lights is written in a wholly different style from that of Pierre and His People, though here and there, as for instance in A Lodge in the Wilderness, Once at Red Man's River, The Stroke of the Hour, Qu'appelle, and Marcile, the old note sounds, and something of the poignant mystery, solitude, and big primitive incident of the earlier stories appears. I believe I did well—at any rate for myself and my purposes—in writing this book, and thus making the human narrative of the Far West and North continuous from the time of the sixties onwards. So have I assured myself of the rightness of my intention, that I shall publish a novel presently which will carry on this human narrative of the West into still another stage-that of the present, when railways are intersecting each other, when mills and factories are being added to the great grain elevators in the West, and when hundreds and thousands of people every year are moving across the plains where, within my own living time, the buffalo ranged in their millions, and the red men, uncontrolled, set up their tepees.

NOTE

The tales in this book belong to two different epochs in the life of the Far West. The first five are reminiscent of "border days and deeds"—of days before the great railway was built which changed a waste into a fertile field of civilisation. The remaining stories cover the period passed since the Royal North-West Mounted Police and the Pullman car first startled the early pioneer, and sent him into the land of the farther North, or drew him into the quiet circle of civic routine and humdrum occupation.

G. P.

A LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS

"Hai—Yai, so bright a day, so clear!" said Mitiahwe as she entered the big lodge and laid upon a wide, low couch, covered with soft skins, the fur of a grizzly which had fallen to her man's rifle. "Hai-yai, I wish it would last for ever—so sweet!" she added, smoothing the fur lingeringly, and showing her teeth in a smile.

"There will come a great storm, Mitiahwe. See, the birds go south so soon," responded a deep voice from a corner by the doorway.

The young Indian wife turned quickly, and, in a defiant fantastic mood—or was it the inward cry against an impending fate, the tragic future of those who will not see, because to see is to suffer?—she made some quaint, odd motions of the body which belonged to a mysterious dance of her tribe, and, with flashing eyes, challenged the comely old woman seated on a pile of deer-skins.

"It is morning, and the day will last for ever," she said nonchalantly, but her eyes suddenly took on a faraway look, half apprehensive, half wondering. The birds were indeed going south very soon, yet had there ever been so exquisite an autumn as this, had her man ever had so wonderful a trade—her man with the brown hair, blue eyes, and fair, strong face?

"The birds go south, but the hunters and buffalo still go north," Mitiahwe urged searchingly, looking hard at her mother—Oanita, the Swift Wing.

"My dream said that the winter will be dark and lonely, that the ice will be thick, the snow deep, and that

many hearts will be sick because of the black days and the hunger that sickens the heart," answered Swift Wing.

Mitiahwe looked into Swift Wing's dark eyes, and an anger came upon her. "The hearts of cowards will freeze," she rejoined, "and to those that will not see the sun the world will be dark," she added. Then suddenly she remembered to whom she was speaking, and a flood of feeling ran through her; for Swift Wing had cherished her like a fledgeling in the nest till her young white man came from "down East." Her heart had leapt up at sight of him, and she had turned to him from all the young men of her tribe, waiting in a kind of mist till he, at last, had spoken to her mother, and then one evening, her shawl over her head, she had come along to his lodge.

A thousand times as the four years passed by she had thought how good it was that she had become his wife—the young white man's wife, rather than the wife of Breaking Rock, son of White Buffalo, the chief, who had four hundred horses, and a face that would have made winter and sour days for her. Now and then Breaking Rock came and stood before the lodge, a distance off, and stayed there hour after hour, and once or twice he came when her man was with her; but nothing could be done, for earth and air and space were common to them all, and there was no offence in Breaking Rock gazing at the lodge where Mitiahwe lived. Yet it seemed as though Breaking Rock was waiting—waiting and hoping. That was the impression made upon all who saw him, and even old White Buffalo, the chief, shook his head gloomily when he saw Breaking Rock, his son, staring at the big lodge which was so full of happiness, and so full also of many luxuries never before seen at a trading post on the Koonce River. The father of Mitiahwe had been chief, but because his three sons had been killed in battle the chieftainship had come to White Buffalo, who was of the same blood and family. There were those who said that Mitiahwe should have been chieftainess; but neither she nor her mother would ever listen to this, and so White Buffalo, and the tribe loved Mitiahwe because of her modesty and goodness. She was even more to White Buffalo than Breaking Rock, and he had been glad that Dingan the white man—Long Hand he was called—had taken Mitiahwe for his woman. Yet behind this gladness of White Buffalo, and that of Swift Wing, and behind the silent watchfulness of Breaking Rock, there was a thought which must ever come when a white man mates with an Indian maid, without priest or preacher, or writing, or book, or bond.

Yet four years had gone; and all the tribe, and all who came and went, half-breeds, traders, and other tribes, remarked how happy was the white man with his Indian wife. They never saw anything but light in the eyes of Mitiahwe, nor did the old women of the tribe who scanned her face as she came and went, and watched and waited too for what never came—not even after four years.

Mitiahwe had been so happy that she had not really missed what never came; though the desire to have something in her arms which was part of them both had flushed up in her veins at times, and made her restless till her man had come home again. Then she had forgotten the unseen for the seen, and was happy that they two were alone together—that was the joy of it all, so much alone together; for Swift Wing did not live with them, and, like Breaking Rock, she watched her daughter's life, standing afar off, since it was the unwritten law of the tribe that the wife's mother must not cross the path or enter the home of her daughter's husband. But at last Dingan had broken through this custom, and insisted that Swift Wing should be with her daughter when he was away from home, as now on this wonderful autumn morning, when Mitiahwe had been singing to the Sun, to which she prayed for her man and for everlasting days with him.

She had spoken angrily but now, because her soul sharply resented the challenge to her happiness which her mother had been making. It was her own eyes that refused to see the cloud, which the sage and bereaved woman had seen and conveyed in images and figures of speech natural to the Indian mind.

"Hai-yai," she said now, with a strange touching sigh breathing in the words, "you are right, my mother, and a dream is a dream; also, if it be dreamt three times, then is it to be followed, and it is true. You have lived long, and your dreams are of the Sun and the Spirit." She shook a little as she laid her hand on a buckskin coat of her man hanging by the lodge-door; then she steadied herself again, and gazed earnestly into her mother's eyes. "Have all your dreams come true, my mother?" she asked with a hungering heart. "There was the dream that came out of the dark five times, when your father went against the Crees, and was wounded, and crawled away into the hills, and all our warriors fled—they were but a handful, and the Crees like a young forest in number! I went with my dream, and found him after many days, and it was after that you were born, my youngest and my last. There was also"—her eyes almost closed, and the needle and thread she held lay still in her lap—"when two of your brothers were killed in the drive of the buffalo. Did I not see it all in my dream, and follow after them to take them to my heart? And when your sister was carried off, was it not my dream which saw the trail, so that we brought her back again to die in peace, her eyes seeing the Lodge whither she was going, open to her, and the Sun, the Father, giving her light and promise—for she had wounded herself to die that the thief who stole her should leave her to herself. Behold, my daughter, these dreams have I had, and others; and I have lived long and have seen the bright day break into storm, and the herds flee into the far hills where none could follow, and hunger come, and—"

"Hai-yo, see, the birds flying south," said the girl with a gesture towards the cloudless sky. "Never since I lived have they gone south so soon." Again she shuddered slightly, then she spoke slowly: "I also have dreamed, and I will follow my dream. I dreamed"—she knelt down beside her mother, and rested her hands in her mother's lap—"I dreamed that there was a wall of hills dark and heavy and far away, and that whenever my eyes looked at them they burned with tears; and yet I looked and looked, till my heart was like lead in my breast; and I turned from them to the rivers and the plains that I loved. But a voice kept calling to me, 'Come, come! Beyond the hills is a happy land. The trail is hard, and your feet will bleed, but beyond is the happy land.' And I would not go for the voice that spoke, and at last there came an old man in my dream and spoke to me kindly, and said, 'Come with me, and I will show thee the way over the hills to the Lodge where thou shalt find what thou hast lost.' And I said to him, 'I have lost nothing;' and I would not go. Twice I dreamed this dream, and twice the old man came, and three times I dreamed it; and then I spoke angrily to him, as but now I did to thee; and behold he changed before my eyes, and I saw that he was now become—" she stopped short, and buried her face in her hands for a moment, then recovered herself—"Breaking Rock it was, I saw before me, and I cried out and fled. Then I waked with a cry, but my man was beside me, and his arm was

round my neck; and this dream, is it not a foolish dream, my mother?”

The old woman sat silent, clasping the hands of her daughter firmly, and looking out of the wide doorway towards the trees that fringed the river; and presently, as she looked, her face changed and grew pinched all at once, and Mitiahwe, looking at her, turned a startled face towards the river also.

“Breaking Rock!” she said in alarm, and got to her feet quickly.

Breaking Rock stood for a moment looking towards the lodge, then came slowly forward to them. Never in all the four years had he approached this lodge of Mitiahwe, who, the daughter of a chief, should have married himself, the son of a chief! Slowly but with long slouching stride Breaking Rock came nearer. The two women watched him without speaking. Instinctively they knew that he brought news, that something had happened; yet Mitiahwe felt at her belt for what no Indian girl would be without; and this one was a gift from her man, on the anniversary of the day she first came to his lodge.

Breaking Rock was at the door now, his beady eyes fixed on Mitiahwe’s, his figure jerked to its full height, which made him, even then, two inches less than Long Hand. He spoke in a loud voice:

“The last boat this year goes down the river tomorrow. Long Hand, your man, is going to his people. He will not come back. He has had enough of the Blackfoot woman. You will see him no more.” He waved a hand to the sky. “The birds are going south. A hard winter is coming quick. You will be alone. Breaking Rock is rich. He has five hundred horses. Your man is going to his own people. Let him go. He is no man. It is four years, and still there are but two in your lodge. How!”

He swung on his heel with a chuckle in his throat, for he thought he had said a good thing, and that in truth he was worth twenty white men. His quick ear caught a movement behind him, however, and he saw the girl spring from the lodge door, something flashing from her belt. But now the mother’s arms were round her, with cries of protest, and Breaking Rock, with another laugh, slipped away swiftly toward the river.

“That is good,” he muttered. “She will kill him perhaps, when she goes to him. She will go, but he will not stay. I have heard.”

As he disappeared among the trees Mitiahwe disengaged herself from her mother’s arms, went slowly back into the lodge, and sat down on the great couch where, for so many moons, she had lain with her man beside her.

Her mother watched her closely, though she moved about doing little things. She was trying to think what she would have done if such a thing had happened to her, if her man had been going to leave her. She assumed that Dingan would leave Mitiahwe, for he would hear the voices of his people calling far away, even as the red man who went East into the great cities heard the prairies and the mountains and the rivers and his own people calling, and came back, and put off the clothes of civilisation, and donned his buckskins again, and sat in the Medicine Man’s tent, and heard the spirits speak to him through the mist and smoke of the sacred fire. When Swift Wing first gave her daughter to the white man she foresaw the danger now at hand, but this was the tribute of the lower race to the higher, and—who could tell! White men had left their Indian wives, but had come back again, and for ever renounced the life of their own nations, and become great chiefs, teaching useful things to their adopted people, bringing up their children as tribesmen—bringing up their children! There it was, the thing which called them back, the bright-eyed children with the colour of the brown prairie in their faces, and their brains so sharp and strong. But here was no child to call Dingan back, only the eloquent, brave, sweet face of Mitiahwe.... If he went! Would he go? Was he going? And now that Mitiahwe had been told that he would go, what would she do? In her belt was—but, no, that would be worse than all, and she would lose Mitiahwe, her last child, as she had lost so many others. What would she herself do if she were in Mitiahwe’s place? Ah, she would make him stay somehow—by truth or by falsehood; by the whispered story in the long night, by her head upon his knee before the lodge-fire, and her eyes fixed on his, luring him, as the Dream lures the dreamer into the far trail, to find the Sun’s hunting-ground where the plains are filled with the deer and the buffalo and the wild horse; by the smell of the cooking-pot and the favourite spiced drink in the morning; by the child that ran to him with his bow and arrows and the cry of the hunter—but there was no child; she had forgotten. She was always recalling her own happy early life with her man, and the clean-faced papooses that crowded round his knee—one wife and many children, and the old Harvester of the Years reaping them so fast, till the children stood up as tall as their father and chief. That was long ago, and she had had her share—twenty-five years of happiness; but Mitiahwe had had only four. She looked at Mitiahwe, standing still for a moment like one rapt, then suddenly she gave a little cry. Something had come into her mind, some solution of the problem, and she ran and stooped over the girl and put both hands on her head.

“Mitiahwe, heart’s blood of mine,” she said, “the birds go south, but they return. What matter if they go so soon, if they return soon. If the Sun wills that the winter be dark, and he sends the Coldmaker to close the rivers and drive the wild ones far from the arrow and the gun, yet he may be sorry, and send a second summer—has it not been so, and Coldmaker has hurried away—away! The birds go south, but they will return, Mitiahwe.”

“I heard a cry in the night while my man slept,” Mitiahwe answered, looking straight before her, “and it was like the cry of a bird-calling, calling, calling.”

“But he did not hear—he was asleep beside Mitiahwe. If he did not wake, surely it was good luck. Thy breath upon his face kept him sleeping. Surely it was good luck to Mitiahwe that he did not hear.”

She was smiling a little now, for she had thought of a thing which would, perhaps, keep the man here in this lodge in the wilderness; but the time to speak of it was not yet. She must wait and see.

Suddenly Mitiahwe got to her feet with a spring, and a light in her eyes. “Hai-yai!” she said with plaintive smiling, ran to a corner of the lodge, and from a leather bag drew forth a horse-shoe and looked at it, murmuring to herself.

The old woman gazed at her wonderingly. “What is it, Mitiahwe?” she asked.

“It is good-luck. So my man has said. It is the way of his people. It is put over the door, and if a dream come it is a good dream; and if a bad thing come, it will not enter; and if the heart prays for a thing hid from all the

world, then it brings good-luck. Hai-yai! I will put it over the door, and then—" All at once her hand dropped to her side, as though some terrible thought had come to her, and, sinking to the floor, she rocked her body backward and forward for a time, sobbing. But presently she got to her feet again, and, going to the door of the lodge, fastened the horseshoe above it with a great needle and a string of buckskin.

"Oh great Sun," she prayed, "have pity on me and save me! I cannot live alone. I am only a Blackfoot wife; I am not blood of his blood. Give, O great one, blood of his blood, bone of his bone, soul of his soul, that he will say, This is mine, body of my body, and he will hear the cry and will stay. O great Sun, pity me!" The old woman's heart beat faster as she listened. The same thought was in the mind of both. If there were but a child, bone of his bone, then perhaps he would not go; or, if he went, then surely he would return, when he heard his papoose calling in the lodge in the wilderness.

As Mitiahwe turned to her, a strange burning light in her eyes, Swift Wing said: "It is good. The white man's Medicine for a white man's wife. But if there were the red man's Medicine too—"

"What is the red man's Medicine?" asked the young wife, as she smoothed her hair, put a string of bright beads around her neck, and wound a red sash round her waist.

The old woman shook her head, a curious half-mystic light in her eyes, her body drawn up to its full height, as though waiting for something. "It is an old Medicine. It is of winters ago as many as the hairs of the head. I have forgotten almost, but it was a great Medicine when there were no white men in the land. And so it was that to every woman's breast there hung a papoose, and every woman had her man, and the red men were like leaves in the forest—but it was a winter of winters ago, and the Medicine Men have forgotten; and thou hast no child! When Long Hand comes, what will Mitiahwe say to him?"

Mitiahwe's eyes were determined, her face was set, she flushed deeply, then the colour fled. "What my mother would say, I will say. Shall the white man's Medicine fail? If I wish it, then it will be so: and I will say so."

"But if the white man's Medicine fail?"—Swift Wing made a gesture toward the door where the horse-shoe hung. "It is Medicine for a white man, will it be Medicine for an Indian?"

"Am I not a white man's wife?"

"But if there were the Sun Medicine also, the Medicine of the days long ago?"

"Tell me. If you remember—Kai! but you do remember—I see it in your face. Tell me, and I will make that Medicine also, my mother."

"To-morrow, if I remember it—I will think, and if I remember it, to-morrow I will tell you, my heart's blood. Maybe my dream will come to me and tell me. Then, even after all these years, a papoose—"

"But the boat will go at dawn to-morrow, and if he go also—"

"Mitiahwe is young, her body is warm, her eyes are bright, the songs she sings, her tongue—if these keep him not, and the Voice calls him still to go, then still Mitiahwe shall whisper, and tell him—"

"Hai-yo-hush," said the girl, and trembled a little, and put both hands on her mother's mouth.

For a moment she stood so, then with an exclamation suddenly turned and ran through the doorway, and sped toward the river, and into the path which would take her to the post, where her man traded with the Indians and had made much money during the past six years, so that he could have had a thousand horses and ten lodges like that she had just left. The distance between the lodge and the post was no more than a mile, but Mitiahwe made a detour, and approached it from behind, where she could not be seen. Darkness was gathering now, and she could see the glimmer of the light of lamps through the windows, and as the doors opened and shut. No one had seen her approach, and she stole through a door which was open at the rear of the warehousing room, and went quickly to another door leading into the shop. There was a crack through which she could see, and she could hear all that was said. As she came she had seen Indians gliding through the woods with their purchases, and now the shop was clearing fast, in response to the urging of Dingan and his partner, a Scotch half-breed. It was evident that Dingan was at once abstracted and excited.

Presently only two visitors were left, a French halfbreed call Lablache, a swaggering, vicious fellow, and the captain of the steamer, Ste. Anne, which was to make its last trip south in the morning—even now it would have to break its way through the young ice. Dingan's partner dropped a bar across the door of the shop, and the four men gathered about the fire. For a time no one spoke. At last the captain of the Ste. Anne said: "It's a great chance, Dingan. You'll be in civilisation again, and in a rising town of white people—Groise 'll be a city in five years, and you can grow up and grow rich with the place. The Company asked me to lay it all before you, and Lablache here will buy out your share of the business, at whatever your partner and you prove its worth. You're young; you've got everything before you. You've made a name out here for being the best trader west of the Great Lakes, and now's your time. It's none of my affair, of course, but I like to carry through what I'm set to do, and the Company said, 'You bring Dingan back with you. The place is waiting for him, and it can't wait longer than the last boat down.' You're ready to step in when he steps out, ain't you, Lablache?"

Lablache shook back his long hair, and rolled about in his pride. "I give him cash for his share to-night someone is behin' me, share, yes! It is worth so much, I pay and step in—I take the place over. I take half the business here, and I work with Dingan's partner. I take your horses, Dingan, I take you lodge, I take all in your lodge—everyt'ing."

His eyes glistened, and a red spot came to each cheek as he leaned forward. At his last word Dingan, who had been standing abstractedly listening, as it were, swung round on him with a muttered oath, and the skin of his face appeared to tighten. Watching through the crack of the door, Mitiahwe saw the look she knew well, though it had never been turned on her, and her heart beat faster. It was a look that came into Dingan's face whenever Breaking Rock crossed his path, or when one or two other names were mentioned in his presence, for they were names of men who had spoken of Mitiahwe lightly, and had attempted to be jocular about her.

As Mitiahwe looked at him, now unknown to himself, she was conscious of what that last word of Lablache's meant. Everyt'ing meant herself. Lablache—who had neither the good qualities of the white man nor the

Indian, but who had the brains of the one and the subtilty of the other, and whose only virtue was that he was a successful trader, though he looked like a mere woodsman, with rings in his ears, gaily decorated buckskin coat and moccasins, and a furtive smile always on his lips! Everyt'ing!—Her blood ran cold at the thought of dropping the lodge-curtain upon this man and herself alone. For no other man than Dingan had her blood run faster, and he had made her life blossom. She had seen in many a half-breed's and in many an Indian's face the look which was now in that of Lablache, and her fingers gripped softly the thing in her belt that had flashed out on Breaking Rock such a short while ago. As she looked, it seemed for a moment as though Dingan would open the door and throw Lablache out, for in quick reflection his eyes ran from the man to the wooden bar across the door.

"You'll talk of the shop, and the shop only, Lablache," Dingan said grimly. "I'm not huckstering my home, and I'd choose the buyer if I was selling. My lodge ain't to be bought, nor anything in it—not even the broom to keep it clean of any half-breeds that'd enter it without leave."

There was malice in the words, but there was greater malice in the tone, and Lablache, who was bent on getting the business, swallowed his ugly wrath, and determined that, if he got the business, he would get the lodge also in due time; for Dingan, if he went, would not take the lodge-or the woman with him; and Dingan was not fool enough to stay when he could go to Groise to a sure fortune.

The captain of the Ste. Anne again spoke. "There's another thing the Company said, Dingan. You needn't go to Groise, not at once. You can take a month and visit your folks down East, and lay in a stock of home-feelings before you settle down at Groise for good. They was fair when I put it to them that you'd mebbe want to do that. 'You tell Dingan,' they said, 'that he can have the month glad and grateful, and a free ticket on the railway back and forth. He can have it at once,' they said."

Watching, Mitiahwe could see her man's face brighten, and take on a look of longing at this suggestion; and it seemed to her that the bird she heard in the night was calling in his ears now. Her eyes went blind a moment.

"The game is with you, Dingan. All the cards are in your hands; you'll never get such another chance again; and you're only thirty," said the captain.

"I wish they'd ask me," said Dingan's partner with a sigh, as he looked at Lablache. "I want my chance bad, though we've done well here—good gosh, yes, all through Dingan."

"The winters, they go queeck in Groise," said Lablache. "It is life all the time, trade all the time, plenty to do and see—and a bon fortune to make, bagosh!"

"Your old home was in Nove Scotia, wasn't it, Dingan?" asked the captain in a low voice. "I kem from Connecticut, and I was East to my village las' year. It was good seein' all my old friends again; but I kem back content, I kem back full of home-feelin's and content. You'll like the trip, Dingan. It'll do you good." Dingan drew himself up with a start. "All right. I guess I'll do it. Let's figure up again," he said to his partner with a reckless air.

With a smothered cry Mitiahwe turned and fled into the darkness, and back to the lodge. The lodge was empty. She threw herself upon the great couch in an agony of despair.

A half-hour went by. Then she rose, and began to prepare supper. Her face was aflame, her manner was determined, and once or twice her hand went to her belt, as though to assure herself of something.

Never had the lodge looked so bright and cheerful; never had she prepared so appetising a supper; never had the great couch seemed so soft and rich with furs, so homelike and so inviting after a long day's work. Never had Mitiahwe seemed so good to look at, so graceful and alert and refined—suffering does its work even in the wild woods, with "wild people." Never had the lodge such an air of welcome and peace and home as to-night; and so Dingan thought as he drew aside the wide curtains of deerskin and entered.

Mitiahwe was bending over the fire and appeared not to hear him. "Mitiahwe," he said gently.

She was singing to herself to an Indian air the words of a song Dingan had taught her:

"Open the door: cold is the night, and my feet are heavy,
Heap up the fire, scatter upon it the cones and the scented leaves;
Spread the soft robe on the couch for the chief that returns,
Bring forth the cup of remembrance—"

It was like a low recitative, and it had a plaintive cadence, as of a dove that mourned.

"Mitiahwe," he said in a louder voice, but with a break in it too; for it all rushed upon him, all that she had been to him—all that had made the great West glow with life, made the air sweeter, the grass greener, the trees more companionable and human: who it was that had given the waste places a voice. Yet—yet, there were his own people in the East, there was another life waiting for him, there was the life of ambition and wealth, and, and home—and children.

His eyes were misty as she turned to him with a little cry of surprise, how much natural and how much assumed—for she had heard him enter—it would have been hard to say. She was a woman, and therefore the daughter of pretence even when most real. He caught her by both arms as she shyly but eagerly came to him. "Good girl, good little girl," he said. He looked round him. "Well, I've never seen our lodge look nicer than it does to-night; and the fire, and the pot on the fire, and the smell of the pine-cones, and the cedar-boughs, and the skins, and—"

"And everything," she said, with a queer little laugh, as she moved away again to turn the steaks on the fire. Everything! He started at the word. It was so strange that she should use it by accident, when but a little while ago he had been ready to choke the wind out of a man's body for using it concerning herself.

It stunned him for a moment, for the West, and the life apart from the world of cities, had given him superstition, like that of the Indians, whose life he had made his own.

Herself—to leave her here, who had been so much to him? As true as the sun she worshipped, her eyes had never lingered on another man since she came to his lodge; and, to her mind, she was as truly sacredly married to him as though a thousand priests had spoken, or a thousand Medicine Men had made their

incantations. She was his woman and he was her man. As he chatted to her, telling her of much that he had done that day, and wondering how he could tell her of all he had done, he kept looking round the lodge, his eye resting on this or that; and everything had its own personal history, had become part of their lodge-life, because it had a use as between him and her, and not a conventional domestic place. Every skin, every utensil, every pitcher and bowl and pot and curtain, had been with them at one time or another, when it became of importance and renowned in the story of their days and deeds.

How could he break it to her—that he was going to visit his own people, and that she must be alone with her mother all winter, to await his return in the spring? His return? As he watched her sitting beside him, helping him to his favourite dish, the close, companionable trust and gentleness of her, her exquisite cleanness and grace in his eyes, he asked himself if, after all, it was not true that he would return in the spring. The years had passed without his seriously thinking of this inevitable day. He had put it off and off, content to live each hour as it came and take no real thought for the future; and yet, behind all was the warning fact that he must go one day, and that Mitiahwe could not go with him. Her mother must have known that when she let Mitiahwe come to him. Of course; and, after all, she would find another mate, a better mate, one of her own people.

But her hand was in his now, and it was small and very warm, and suddenly he shook with anger at the thought of one like Breaking Rock taking her to his wigwam; or Lablache—this roused him to an inward fury; and Mitiahwe saw and guessed the struggle that was going on in him, and she leaned her head against his shoulder, and once she raised his hand to her lips, and said, “My chief!”

Then his face cleared again, and she got him his pipe and filled it, and held a coal to light it; and, as the smoke curled up, and he leaned back contentedly for the moment, she went to the door, drew open the curtains, and, stepping outside, raised her eyes to the horseshoe. Then she said softly to the sky: “O Sun, great Father, have pity on me, for I love him, and would keep him. And give me bone of his bone, and one to nurse at my breast that is of him. O Sun, pity me this night, and be near me when I speak to him, and hear what I say!”

“What are you doing out there, Mitiahwe?” Dingan cried; and when she entered again he beckoned her to him. “What was it you were saying? Who were you speaking to?” he asked. “I heard your voice.”

“I was thanking the Sun for his goodness to me. I was speaking for the thing that is in my heart, that is life of my life,” she added vaguely.

“Well, I have something to say to you, little girl,” he said, with an effort.

She remained erect before him waiting for the blow—outwardly calm, inwardly crying out in pain. “Do you think you could stand a little parting?” he asked, reaching out and touching her shoulder.

“I have been alone before—for five days,” she answered quietly.

“But it must be longer this time.”

“How long?” she asked, with eyes fixed on his. “If it is more than a week I will go too.”

“It is longer than a month,” he said. “Then I will go.”

“I am going to see my people,” he faltered.

“By the Ste. Anne?”

He nodded. “It is the last chance this year; but I will come back—in the spring.”

As he said it he saw her shrink, and his heart smote him. Four years such as few men ever spent, and all the luck had been with him, and the West had got into his bones! The quiet, starry nights, the wonderful days, the hunt, the long journeys, the life free of care, and the warm lodge; and, here, the great couch—ah, the cheek pressed to his, the lips that whispered at his ear, the smooth arm round his neck. It all rushed upon him now. His people? His people in the East, who had thwarted his youth, vexed and cramped him, saw only evil in his widening desires, and threw him over when he came out West—the scallywag, they called him, who had never wronged a man or-or a woman! Never—wronged-a-woman? The question sprang to his lips now. Suddenly he saw it all in a new light. White or brown or red, this heart and soul and body before him were all his, sacred to him; he was in very truth her “Chief.”

Untutored as she was, she read him, felt what was going on in him. She saw the tears spring to his eyes. Then, coming close to him she said softly, slowly: “I must go with you if you go, because you must be with me when—oh, hai-yai, my chief, shall we go from here? Here in this lodge wilt thou be with thine own people—thine own, thou and I—and thine to come.” The great passion in her heart made the lie seem very truth.

With a cry he got to his feet, and stood staring at her for a moment, scarcely comprehending; then suddenly he clasped her in his arms.

“Mitiahwe—Mitiahwe, oh, my little girl!” he cried. “You and me—and our own—our own people!” Kissing her, he drew her down beside him on the couch. “Tell me again—it is so at last?” he said, and she whispered in his ear once more.

In the middle of the night he said to her, “Some day, perhaps, we will go East—some day, perhaps.”

“But now?” she asked softly.

“Not now—not if I know it,” he answered. “I’ve got my heart nailed to the door of this lodge.”

As he slept she got quietly out, and, going to the door of the lodge, reached up a hand and touched the horse-shoe.

“Be good Medicine to me,” she said. Then she prayed. “O Sun, pity me that it may be as I have said to him. O pity me, great Father!”

In the days to come Swift Wing said that it was her Medicine; when her hand was burned to the wrist in the dark ritual she had performed with the Medicine Man the night that Mitiahwe fought for her man—but Mitiahwe said it was her Medicine, the horse-shoe, which brought one of Dingan’s own people to the lodge, a little girl with Mitiahwe’s eyes and form and her father’s face. Truth has many mysteries, and the faith of the woman was great; and so it was that, to the long end, Mitiahwe kept her man. But truly she was altogether a woman, and had good fortune.

ONCE AT RED MAN'S RIVER

"It's got to be settled to-night, Nance. This game is up here, up for ever. The redcoat police from Ottawa are coming, and they'll soon be roostin' in this post; the Injuns are goin', the buffaloes are most gone, and the fur trade's dead in these parts. D'ye see?"

The woman did not answer the big, broad-shouldered man bending over her, but remained looking into the fire with wide, abstracted eyes and a face somewhat set.

"You and your brother Bantry's got to go. This store ain't worth a cent now. The Hudson's Bay Company'll come along with the redcoats, and they'll set up a nice little Sunday-school business here for what they call 'agricultural settlers.' There'll be a railway, and the Yankees'll send up their marshals to work with the redcoats on the border, and—"

"And the days of smuggling will be over," put in the girl in a low voice. "No more bull-wackers and muleskinners 'whooping it up'; no more Blackfeet and Piegans drinking alcohol and water, and cutting each others' throats. A nice quiet time coming on the border, Abe, eh?"

The man looked at her queerly. She was not prone to sarcasm, she had not been given to sentimentalism in the past; she had taken the border-life as it was, had looked it straight between the eyes. She had lived up to it, or down to it, without any fuss, as good as any man in any phase of the life, and the only white woman in this whole West country. It was not in the words, but in the tone, that Abe Hawley found something unusual and defamatory.

"Why, gol darn it, Nance, what's got into you? You bin a man out West, as good a pioneer as ever was on the border. But now you don't sound friendly to what's been the game out here, and to all of us that've been risking our lives to get a livin'."

"What did I say?" asked the girl, unmoved.

"It ain't what you said, it's the sound o' your voice."

"You don't know my voice, Abe. It ain't always the same. You ain't always about; you don't always hear it."

He caught her arm suddenly. "No, but I want to hear it always. I want to be always where you are, Nance. That's what's got to be settled to-day—to-night."

"Oh, it's got to be settled to-night!" said the girl meditatively, kicking nervously at a log on the fire. "It takes two to settle a thing like that, and there's only one says it's got to be settled. Maybe it takes more than two—or three—to settle a thing like that." Now she laughed mirthlessly.

The man started, and his face flushed with anger; then he put a hand on himself, drew a step back, and watched her.

"One can settle a thing, if there's a dozen in it. You see, Nance, you and Bantry's got to close out. He's fixing it up to-night over at Dingan's Drive, and you can't go it alone when you quit this place. Now, it's this way: you can go West with Bantry, or you can go North with me. Away North there's buffalo and deer, and game aplenty, up along the Saskatchewan, and farther up on the Peace River. It's going to be all right up there for half a lifetime, and we can have it in our own way yet. There'll be no smuggling, but there'll be trading, and land to get; and, mebbe, there'd be no need of smuggling, for we can make it, I know how—good white whiskey—and we'll still have this free life for our own. I can't make up my mind to settle down to a clean collar and going to church on Sundays, and all that. And the West's in your bones too. You look like the West—"

The girl's face brightened with pleasure, and she gazed at him steadily.

"You got its beauty and its freshness, and you got its heat and cold—"

She saw the tobacco-juice stain at the corners of his mouth, she became conscious of the slight odour of spirits in the air, and the light in her face lowered in intensity.

"You got the ways of the deer in your walk, the song o' the birds in your voice; and you're going North with me, Nance, for I bin talkin' to you stiddy four years. It's a long time to wait on the chance, for there's always women to be got, same as others have done—men like Dingan with Injun girls, and men like Tobey with half-breeds. But I ain't bin lookin' that way. I bin lookin' only towards you." He laughed eagerly, and lifted a tin cup of whiskey standing on a table near. "I'm lookin' towards you now, Nance. Your health and mine together. It's got to be settled now. You got to go to the 'Cific Coast with Bantry, or North with me."

The girl jerked a shoulder and frowned a little. He seemed so sure of himself.

"Or South with Nick Pringle, or East with someone else," she said quizzically. "There's always four quarters to the compass, even when Abe Hawley thinks he owns the world and has a mortgage on eternity. I'm not going West with Bantry, but there's three other points that's open."

With an oath the man caught her by the shoulders, and swung her round to face him. He was swelling with anger. "You—Nick Pringle, that trading cheat, that gambler! After four years, I—"

"Let go my shoulders," she said quietly. "I'm not your property. Go and get some Piegan girl to bully. Keep your hands off. I'm not a bronco for you to bit and bridle. You've got no rights. You—" Suddenly she relented, seeing the look in his face, and realising that, after all, it was a tribute to herself that she could keep him for four years and rouse him to such fury—"but yes, Abe," she added, "you have some rights. We've been good friends all these years, and you've been all right out here. You said some nice things about me just now, and I liked it, even if it was as if you learned it out of a book. I've got no po'try in me; I'm plain homespun. I'm a sapling, I'm not any prairie-flower, but I like when I like, and I like a lot when I like. I'm a bit of hickory, I'm not a prairie-flower—"

“Who said you was a prairie-flower? Did I? Who’s talking about prairie-flowers—”

He stopped suddenly, turned round at the sound of a footstep behind him, and saw, standing in a doorway leading to another room, a man who was digging his knuckles into his eyes and stifling a yawn. He was a refined-looking stripling of not more than twenty-four, not tall, but well made, and with an air of breeding, intensified rather than hidden by his rough clothes.

“Je-rick-ety! How long have I slept?” he said, blinking at the two beside the fire. “How long?” he added, with a flutter of anxiety in his tone.

“I said I’d wake you,” said the girl, coming forwards. “You needn’t have worried.”

“I don’t worry,” answered the young man. “I dreamed myself awake, I suppose. I got dreaming of redcoats and U. S. marshals, and an ambush in the Barfleur Coulee, and—” He saw a secret, warning gesture from the girl, and laughed, then turned to Abe and looked him in the face. “Oh, I know him! Abe Hawley’s all O. K.—I’ve seen him over at Dingan’s Drive. Honour among rogues. We’re all in it. How goes it—all right?” he added carelessly to Hawley, and took a step forwards, as though to shake hands. Seeing the forbidding look by which he was met, however, he turned to the girl again, as Hawley muttered something they could not hear.

“What time is it?” he asked.

“It’s nine o’clock,” answered the girl, her eyes watching his every movement, her face alive.

“Then the moon’s up almost?”

“It’ll be up in an hour.”

“Jerickety! Then I’ve got to get ready.” He turned to the other room again and entered.

“College pup!” said Hawley under his breath savagely. “Why didn’t you tell me he was here?”

“Was it any of your business, Abe?” she rejoined quietly.

“Hiding him away here—”

“Hiding? Who’s been hiding him? He’s doing what you’ve done. He’s smuggling—the last lot for the traders over by Dingan’s Drive. He’ll get it there by morning. He has as much right here as you. What’s got into you, Abe?”

“What does he know about the business? Why, he’s a college man from the East. I’ve heard o’ him. Ain’t got no more sense for this life than a dicky-bird. White-faced college pup! What’s he doing out here? If you’re a friend o’ his, you’d better look after him. He’s green.”

“He’s going East again,” she said, “and if I don’t go West with Bantry, or South over to Montana with Nick Pringle, or North—”

“Nancy—” His eyes burned, his lips quivered.

She looked at him and wondered at the power she had over this bully of the border, who had his own way with most people, and was one of the most daring fighters, hunters, and smugglers in the country. He was cool, hard, and well-in-hand in his daily life, and yet, where she was concerned, “went all to pieces,” as someone else had said about himself to her.

She was not without the wiles and tact of her sex. “You go now, and come back, Abe,” she said in a soft voice. “Come back in an hour. Come back then, and I’ll tell you which way I’m going from here.”

He was all right again. “It’s with you, Nancy,” he said eagerly. “I bin waiting four years.”

As he closed the door behind him the “college pup” entered the room again. “Oh, Abe’s gone!” he said excitedly. “I hoped you’d get rid of the old rip-roarer. I wanted to be alone with you for a while. I don’t really need to start yet. With the full moon I can do it before daylight.” Then, with quick warmth, “Ah, Nancy, Nancy, you’re a flower—the flower of all the prairies,” he added, catching her hand and laughing into her eyes.

She flushed, and for a moment seemed almost bewildered. His boldness, joined to an air of insinuation and understanding, had influenced her greatly from the first moment they had met two months ago, as he was going South on his smuggling enterprise. The easy way in which he had talked to her, the extraordinary sense he seemed to have of what was going on in her mind, the confidential meaning in voice and tone and words had, somehow, opened up a side of her nature hitherto unexplored. She had talked with him freely then, for it was only when he left her that he said what he instinctively knew she would remember till they met again. His quick comments, his indirect but acute questions, his exciting and alluring reminiscences of the East, his subtle yet seemingly frank compliments, had only stimulated a new capacity in her, evoked comparisons of this delicate-looking, fine-faced gentleman with the men of the West by whom she was surrounded. But later he appeared to stumble into expressions of admiration for her, as though he was carried off his feet and had been stunned by her charm. He had done it all like a master. He had not said that she was beautiful—she knew she was not—but that she was wonderful, and fascinating, and with “something about her” he had never seen in all his life, like her own prairies, thrilling, inspiring, and adorable. His first look at her had seemed full of amazement. She had noticed that, and thought it meant only that he was surprised to find a white girl out here among smugglers, hunters, squaw-men, and Indians. But he said that the first look at her had made him feel things-feel life and women different from ever before; and he had never seen anyone like her, nor a face with so much in it. It was all very brilliantly done.

“You make me want to live,” he had said, and she, with no knowledge of the nuances of language, had taken it literally, and had asked him if it had been his wish to die; and he had responded to her mistaken interpretation of his meaning, saying that he had had such sorrow he had not wanted to live. As he said it his face looked, in truth, overcome by some deep inward care; so that there came a sort of feeling she had never had so far for any man—that he ought to have someone to look after him. This was the first real stirring of the maternal and protective spirit in her towards men, though it had shown itself amply enough regarding animals and birds. He had said he had not wanted to live, and yet he had come out West in order to try and live, to cure the trouble that had started in his lungs. The Eastern doctors had told him that the rough outdoor life would cure him, or nothing would, and he had vanished from the college walls and the pleasant purlieus of learning and fashion into the wilds. He had not lied directly to her when he said that he had had

deep trouble; but he had given the impression that he was suffering from wrongs which had broken his spirit and ruined his health. Wrongs there certainly had been in his life, by whomever committed.

Two months ago he had left this girl with her mind full of memories of what he had said to her, and there was something in the sound of the slight cough following his farewell words which had haunted her ever since. Her tremendous health and energy, the fire of life burning so brightly in her, reached out towards this man living on so narrow a margin of force, with no reserve for any extra strain, with just enough for each day's use and no more. Four hours before he had come again with his team of four mules and an Indian youth, having covered forty miles since his last stage. She was at the door and saw him coming while he was yet along distance off. Some instinct had told her to watch that afternoon, for she knew of his intended return and of his dangerous enterprise. The Indians had trailed south and east, the traders had disappeared with them, her brother Bantry had gone up and over to Dingan's Drive, and, save for a few loiterers and last hangers-on, she was alone with what must soon be a deserted post; its walls, its great enclosed yard, and its gun-platforms (for it had been fortified) left for law and order to enter upon, in the persons of the red-coated watchmen of the law.

Out of the South, from over the border, bringing the last great smuggled load of whiskey which was to be handed over at Dingan's Drive, and then floated on Red Man's River to settlements up North, came the "college pup," Kelly Lambton, worn out, dazed with fatigue, but smiling too, for a woman's face was ever a tonic to his blood since he was big enough to move in life for himself. It needed courage—or recklessness—to run the border now; for, as Abe Hawley had said, the American marshals were on the pounce, the red-coated mounted police were coming west from Ottawa, and word had winged its way along the prairie that these redcoats were only a few score miles away, and might be at Fort Fair Desire at any moment. The trail to Dingan's Drive lay past it. Through Barfleur Coulee, athwart a great open stretch of country, along a wooded belt, and then, suddenly, over a ridge, Dingan's Drive and Red Man's River would be reached.

The Government had a mind to make an example, if necessary, by killing some smugglers in conflict, and the United States marshals had been goaded by vanity and anger at one or two escapes "to have something for their money," as they said. That, in their language, meant, "to let the red run," and Kelly Lambton had none too much blood to lose.

He looked very pale and beaten as he held Nance Machell's hands now, and called her a prairie-flower, as he had done when he left her two months before. On his arrival but now he had said little, for he saw that she was glad to see him, and he was dead for sleep, after thirty-six hours of ceaseless travel and watching and danger. Now, with the most perilous part of his journey still before him, and worn physically as he was, his blood was running faster as he looked into the girl's face, and something in her abundant force and bounding life drew him to her. Such vitality in a man like Abe Hawley would have angered him almost, as it did a little time ago, when Abe was there; but possessed by the girl, it roused in him a hunger to draw from the well of her perfect health, from the unused vigour of her being, something for himself. The touch of her hands warmed him, in the fulness of her life, in the strong eloquence of face and form, he forgot she was not beautiful. The lightness passed from his words, and his face became eager.

"Flower, yes, the flower of the life of the West—that's what I mean," he said. "You are like an army marching. When I look at you, my blood runs faster. I want to march too. When I hold your hand I feel that life's worth living—I want to do things."

She drew her hand away rather awkwardly. She had not now that command of herself which had ever been easy with the men of the West, except, perhaps, with Abe Hawley when—

But with an attempt, only half-meant, to turn the topic, she said: "You must be starting if you want to get through to-night. If the redcoats catch you this side of Barfleur Coulee, or in the Coulee itself, you'll stand no chance. I heard they was only thirty miles north this afternoon. Maybe they'll come straight on here to-night, instead of camping. If they have news of your coming, they might. You can't tell."

"You're right." He caught her hand again. "I've got to be going now. But Nance—Nance—Nancy, I want to stay here, here with you; or to take you with me."

She drew back. "What do you mean?" she asked. "Take me with you—me—where?"

"East—away down East."

Her brain throbbed, her pulses beat so hard. She scarcely knew what to say, did not know what she said. "Why do you do this kind of thing? Why do you smuggle?" she asked. "You wasn't brought up to this."

"To get this load of stuff through is life and death to me," he answered. "I've made six thousand dollars out here. That's enough to start me again in the East, where I lost everything. But I've got to have six hundred dollars clear for the travel—railways and things; and I'm having this last run to get it. Then I've finished with the West, I guess. My health's better; the lung is closed up, I've only got a little cough now and again; and I'm off East. I don't want to go alone." He suddenly caught her in his arms. "I want you—you, to go with me, Nancy—Nance!"

Her brain swam. To leave the West behind, to go East to a new life full of pleasant things, as this man's wife! Her great heart rose, and suddenly the mother in her as well as the woman in her was captured by his wooing. She had never known what it was to be wooed like this.

She was about to answer, when there came a sharp knock at the door leading from the backyard, and Lambton's Indian lad entered. "The soldier—he come—many. I go over the ridge; I see. They come quick here," he said.

Nance gave a startled cry, and Lambton turned to the other room for his pistols, overcoat, and cap, when there was the sound of horses' hoofs, the door suddenly opened, and an officer stepped inside.

"You're wanted for smuggling, Lambton," he said brusquely. "Don't stir!" In his hand was a revolver.

"Oh, bosh! Prove it," answered the young man, pale and startled, but cool in speech and action. "We'll prove it all right. The stuff is hereabouts." The girl said something to the officer in the Chinook language. She saw he did not understand. Then she spoke quickly to Lambton in the same tongue.

"Keep him here a bit," she said. "His men haven't come yet. Your outfit is well hid. I'll see if I can get away

with it before they find it. They'll follow, and bring you with them, that's sure. So if I have luck and get through, we'll meet at Dingan's Drive."

Lambton's face brightened. He quickly gave her a few directions in Chinook, and told her what to do at Dingan's if she got there first. Then she was gone. The officer did not understand what Nance had said, but he realised that, whatever she intended to do, she had an advantage over him. With an unnecessary courage he had ridden on alone to make his capture, and, as it proved, without prudence. He had got his man, but he had not got the smuggled whiskey and alcohol he had come to seize. There was no time to be lost. The girl had gone before he realised it. What had she said to the prisoner? He was foolish enough to ask Lambton, and Lambton replied coolly: "She said she'd get you some supper, but she guessed it would have to be cold—What's your name? Are you a colonel, or a captain, or only a principal private?"

"I am Captain MacFee, Lambton. And you'll now bring me where your outfit is. March!"

The pistol was still in his hand, and he had a determined look in his eye. Lambton saw it. He was aware of how much power lay in the threatening face before him, and how eager that power was to make itself felt, and provide "Examples"; but he took his chances.

"I'll march all right," he answered, "but I'll march to where you tell me. You can't have it both ways. You can take me, because you've found me, and you can take my outfit too when you've found it; but I'm not doing your work, not if I know it."

There was a blaze of anger in the eyes of the officer, and it looked for an instant as though something of the lawlessness of the border was going to mark the first step of the Law in the Wilderness, but he bethought himself in time, and said quietly, yet in a voice which Lambton knew he must heed:

"Put on your things-quick."

When this was accomplished, and MacFee had secured the smuggler's pistols, he said again, "March, Lambton."

Lambton marched through the moonlit night towards the troop of men who had come to set up the flag of order in the plains and hills, and as he went his keen ear heard his own mules galloping away down towards the Barfleur Coulee. His heart thumped in his breast. This girl, this prairie-flower, was doing this for him, was risking her life, was breaking the law for him. If she got through, and handed over the whiskey to those who were waiting for it, and it got bundled into the boats going North before the redcoats reached Dingan's Drive, it would be as fine a performance as the West had ever seen; and he would be six hundred dollars to the good. He listened to the mules galloping, till the sounds had died into the distance, but he saw now that his captor had heard too, and that the pursuit would be desperate.

A half-hour later it began, with MacFee at the head, and a dozen troopers pounding behind, weary, hungry, bad-tempered, ready to exact payment for their hardships and discouragement.

They had not gone a dozen miles when a shouting horseman rode furiously on them from behind. They turned with carbines cocked, but it was Abe Hawley who cursed them, flung his fingers in their faces, and rode on harder and harder. Abe had got the news from one of Nancy's half-breeds, and, with the devil raging in his heart, had entered on the chase. His spirit was up against them all; against the Law represented by the troopers camped at Fort Fair Desire, against the troopers and their captain speeding after Nancy Machell—his Nonce, who was risking her life and freedom for the hated, pale-faced smuggler riding between the troopers; and his spirit was up against Nance herself.

Nance had said to him, "Come back in an hour," and he had come back to find her gone. She had broken her word. She had deceived him. She had thrown the four years of his waiting to the winds, and a savage lust was in his heart, which would not be appeased till he had done some evil thing to someone.

The girl and the Indian lad were pounding through the night with ears strained to listen for hoof-beats coming after, with eyes searching forward into the trail for swollen creeks and direful obstructions. Through Barfleur Coulee it was a terrible march, for there was no road, and again and again they were nearly overturned, while wolves hovered in their path, ready to reap a midnight harvest. But once in the open again, with the full moonlight on their trail, the girl's spirits rose. If she could do this thing for the man who had looked into her eyes as no one had ever done, what a finish to her days in the West! For they were finished, finished for ever, and she was going—she was going East; not West with Bantry, nor South with Nick Pringle, nor North with Abe Hawley, ah, Abe Hawley, he had been a good friend, he had a great heart, he was the best man of all the western men she had known; but another man had come from the East, a man who had roused something in her never felt before, a man who had said she was wonderful; and he needed someone to take good care of him, to make him love life again. Abe would have been all right if Lambton had never come, and she had meant to marry Abe in the end; but it was different now, and Abe must get over it. Yet she had told Abe to come back in an hour. He was sure to do it; and, when he had done it, and found her gone on this errand, what would he do? She knew what he would do. He would hurt someone. He would follow too. But at Dingan's Drive, if she reached it before the troopers and before Abe, and did the thing she had set out to do; and, because no whiskey could be found, Lambton must go free; and they all stood there together, what would be the end? Abe would be terrible; but she was going East, not North, and when the time came she would face it and put things right somehow.

The night seemed endless to her fixed and anxious eyes and mind, yet dawn came, and there had fallen no sound of hoof-beats on her ear. The ridge above Dingan's Drive was reached and covered, but yet there was no sign of her pursuers. At Red Man's River she delivered her load of contraband to the traders waiting for it, and saw it loaded into the boats and disappear beyond the wooded bend above Dingan's.

Then she collapsed into the arms of her brother Bantry, and was carried, fainting, into Dingan's Lodge. A half-hour later MacFee and his troopers and Lambton came. MacFee grimly searched the post and the shore, but he saw by the looks of all that he had been foiled. He had no proof of anything, and Lambton must go free.

"You've fooled us," he said to Nance sourly, yet with a kind of admiration too. "Through you they got away with it. But I wouldn't try it again, if I were you."

“Once is enough,” answered the girl laconically, as Lambton, set free, caught both her hands in his and whispered in her ear.

MacFee turned to the others. “You’d better drop this kind of thing,” he said. “I mean business.” They saw the troopers by the horses, and nodded.

“Well, we was about quit of it anyhow,” said Bantry. “We’ve had all we want out here.”

A loud laugh went up, and it was still ringing when there burst into the group, out of the trail, Abe Hawley, on foot.

He looked round the group savagely till his eyes rested on Nance and Lambton. “I’m last in,” he said in a hoarse voice. “My horse broke its leg cutting across to get here before her—” He waved a hand towards Nance. “It’s best stickin’ to old trails, not tryin’ new ones.” His eyes were full of hate as he looked at Lambton. “I’m keeping to old trails. I’m for goin’ North, far up, where these two-dollar-a-day and hash-and-clothes people ain’t come yet.” He made a contemptuous gesture toward MacFee and his troopers. “I’m goin’ North—” He took a step forward and fixed his bloodshot eyes on Nance. “I say I’m goin’ North. You comin’ with me, Nance?” He took off his cap to her.

He was haggard, his buckskins were torn, his hair was dishevelled, and he limped a little; but he was a massive and striking figure, and MacFee watched him closely, for there was that in his eyes which meant trouble. “You said, ‘Come back in an hour,’ Nance, and I come back, as I said I would,” he went on. “You didn’t stand to your word. I’ve come to git it. I’m goin’ North, Nance, and I bin waitin’ for four years for you to go with me. Are you comin’?”

His voice was quiet, but it had a choking kind of sound, and it struck strangely in the ears of all. MacFee came nearer.

“Are you comin’ with me, Nance, dear?”

She reached a hand towards Lambton, and he took it, but she did not speak. Something in Abe’s eyes overwhelmed her—something she had never seen before, and it seemed to stifle speech in her. Lambton spoke instead.

“She’s going East with me,” he said. “That’s settled.”

MacFee started. Then he caught Abe’s arm. “Wait!” he said peremptorily. “Wait one minute.” There was something in his voice which held Abe back for the instant.

“You say she is going East with you,” MacFee said sharply to Lambton. “What for?” He fastened Lambton with his eyes, and Lambton quailed. “Have you told her you’ve got a wife—down East? I’ve got your history, Lambton. Have you told her that you’ve got a wife you married when you were at college—and as good a girl as ever lived?”

It had come with terrible suddenness even to Lambton, and he was too dazed to make any reply. With a cry of shame and anger Nancy started back. Growling with rage and hate, Abe Hawley sprang toward Lambton, but the master of the troopers stepped between.

No one could tell who moved first, or who first made the suggestion, for the minds of all were the same, and the general purpose was instantaneous; but in the fraction of a minute Lambton, under menace, was on his hands and knees crawling to the riverside. Watchful, but not interfering, the master of the troopers saw him set adrift in a canoe without a paddle, while he was pelted with mud from the shore.

The next morning at sunrise Abe Hawley and the girl he had waited for so long started on the North trail together, MacFee, master of the troopers and justice of the peace, handing over the marriage lines.

THE STROBE OF THE HOUR

“They won’t come to-night—sure.”

The girl looked again towards the west, where, here and there, bare poles, or branches of trees, or slips of underbrush marked a road made across the plains through the snow. The sun was going down golden red, folding up the sky a wide soft curtain of pink and mauve and deep purple merging into the fathomless blue, where already the stars were beginning to quiver. The house stood on the edge of a little forest, which had boldly asserted itself in the wide flatness. At this point in the west the prairie merged into an undulating territory, where hill and wood rolled away from the banks of the Saskatchewan, making another England in beauty. The forest was a sort of advance-post of that land of beauty.

Yet there was beauty too on this prairie, though there was nothing to the east but snow and the forest so far as eye could see. Nobility and peace and power brooded over the white world.

As the girl looked, it seemed as though the bosom of the land rose and fell. She had felt this vibrating life beat beneath the frozen surface. Now, as she gazed, she smiled sadly to herself, with drooping eyelids looking out from beneath strong brows.

“I know you—I know you,” she said aloud. “You’ve got to take your toll. And when you’re lying asleep like that, or pretending to, you reach up-and kill. And yet you can be kind-ah, but you can be kind and beautiful! But you must have your toll one way or t’other.” She sighed and paused; then, after a moment, looking along the trail—“I don’t expect they’ll come to-night, and mebbe not to-morrow, if—if they stay for THAT.”

Her eyes closed, she shivered a little. Her lips drew tight, and her face seemed suddenly to get thinner. “But dad wouldn’t—no, he couldn’t, not considerin’—” Again she shut her eyes in pain.

Her face was now turned from the western road by which she had expected her travellers, and towards the east, where already the snow was taking on a faint bluish tint, a reflection of the sky deepening nightwards in

that half-circle of the horizon. Distant and a little bleak and cheerless the half-circle was looking now.

"No one—not for two weeks," she said, in comment on the eastern trail, which was so little frequented in winter, and this year had been less travelled than ever. "It would be nice to have a neighbour," she added, as she faced the west and the sinking sun again. "I get so lonely—just minutes I get lonely. But it's them minutes that seem to count more than all the rest when they come. I expect that's it—we don't live in months and years, but just in minutes. It doesn't take long for an earthquake to do its work—it's seconds then.... P'r'aps dad won't even come to-morrow," she added, as she laid her hand on the latch. "It never seemed so long before, not even when he's been away a week." She laughed bitterly. "Even bad company's better than no company at all. Sure. And Mickey has been here always when dad's been away past times. Mickey was a fool, but he was company; and mebbe he'd have been better company if he'd been more of a scamp and less a fool. I dunno, but I really think he would. Bad company doesn't put you off so."

There was a scratching at the inside of the door. "My, if I didn't forget Shako," she said, "and he dying for a run!"

She opened the door quickly, and out jumped a Russian dog of almost full breed, with big, soft eyes like those of his mistress, and with the air of the north in every motion—like his mistress also.

"Come, Shako, a run—a run!"

An instant after she was flying off on a path towards the woods, her short skirts flying and showing limbs as graceful and shapely as those of any woman of that world of social grace which she had never seen; for she was a prairie girl through and through, born on the plains and fed on its scanty fare—scanty as to variety, at least. Backwards and forwards they ran, the girl shouting like a child of ten,—she was twenty-three, her eyes flashing, her fine white teeth showing, her hands thrown up in sheer excess of animal life, her hair blowing about her face-brown, strong hair, wavy and plentiful.

Fine creature as she was, her finest features were her eyes and her hands. The eyes might have been found in the most savage places; the hands, however, only could have come through breeding. She had got them honestly; for her mother was descended from an old family of the French province. That was why she had the name of Loisette—and had a touch of distinction. It was the strain of the patrician in the full blood of the peasant; but it gave her something which made her what she was—what she had been since a child, noticeable and besought, sometimes beloved. It was too strong a nature to compel love often, but it never failed to compel admiration. Not greatly a creature of words, she had become moody of late; and even now, alive with light and feeling and animal life, she suddenly stopped her romp and run, and called the dog to her.

"Heel, Shako!" she said, and made for the door of the little house, which looked so snug and home-like. She paused before she came to the door, to watch the smoke curling up from the chimney straight as a column, for there was not a breath of air stirring. The sun was almost gone and the strong bluish light was settling on everything, giving even the green spruce trees a curious burnished tone.

Swish! Thud! She faced the woods quickly. It was only a sound that she had heard how many hundreds of times! It was the snow slipping from some broad branch of the fir trees to the ground. Yet she started now. Something was on her mind, agitating her senses, affecting her self-control.

"I'll be jumping out of my boots when the fire snaps, or the frost cracks the ice, next," she said aloud contemptuously. "I dunno what's the matter with me. I feel as if someone was hiding somewhere ready to pop out on me. I haven't never felt like that before."

She had formed the habit of talking to herself, for it had seemed at first, as she was left alone when her father went trapping or upon journeys for the Government, that by and by she would start at the sound of her own voice, if she didn't think aloud. So she was given to soliloquy, defying the old belief that people who talked to themselves were going mad. She laughed at that. She said that birds sang to themselves and didn't go mad, and crickets chirruped, and frogs croaked, and owls hooted, and she would talk and not go crazy either. So she talked to herself and to Shako when she was alone.

How quiet it was inside when her light supper was eaten, bread and beans and pea-soup—she had got this from her French mother. Now she sat, her elbows on her knees, her chin on her hands, looking into the fire. Shako was at her feet upon the great musk-ox rug, which her father had got on one of his hunting trips in the Athabasca country years ago. It belonged as she belonged. It breathed of the life of the north-land, for the timbers of the hut were hewn cedar; the rough chimney, the seats, and the shelves on which a few books made a fair show beside the bright tins and the scanty crockery, were of pine; and the horned heads of deer and wapiti made pegs for coats and caps, and rests for guns and rifles. It was a place of comfort; it had an air of well-to-do thrift, even as the girl's dress, though plain, was made of good sound stuff, grey, with a touch of dark red to match the auburn of her hair.

A book lay open in her lap, but she had scarcely tried to read it. She had put it down after a few moments fixed upon it. It had sent her thoughts off into a world where her life had played a part too big for books, too deep for the plummet of any save those who had lived through the storm of life's trials; and life when it is bitter to the young is bitter with an agony the old never know. At last she spoke to herself.

"She knows now. Now she knows what it is, how it feels—your heart like red-hot coals, and something in your head that's like a turnscrew, and you want to die and can't, for you've got to live and suffer."

Again she was quiet, and only the dog's heavy breathing, the snap of the fire, or the crack of a timber in the deadly frost broke the silence. Inside it was warm and bright and home-like; outside it was twenty degrees below zero, and like some vast tomb where life itself was congealed, and only the white stars, low, twinkling, and quizzical, lived-a life of sharp corrosion, not of fire.

Suddenly she raised her head and listened. The dog did the same. None but those whose lives are lived in lonely places can be so acute, so sensitive to sound. It was a feeling delicate and intense, the whole nature getting the vibration. You could have heard nothing had you been there; none but one who was of the wide spaces could have done so. But the dog and the woman felt, and both strained towards the window. Again they heard, and started to their feet. It was far, far away, and still you could not have heard; but now they heard clearly—a cry in the night, a cry of pain and despair. The girl ran to the window and pulled aside the

bearskin curtain which had completely shut out the light. Then she stirred the fire, threw a log upon it, snuffed the candles, hastily put on her moccasins, fur coat, wool cap, and gloves, and went to the door quickly, the dog at her heels. Opening it, she stepped out into the night.

"Qui va la? Who is it? Where?" she called, and strained towards the west. She thought it might be her father or Mickey the hired man, or both.

The answer came from the east, out of the homeless, neighbourless, empty east—a cry, louder now. There were only stars, and the night was dark, though not deep dark. She sped along the prairie road as fast as she could, once or twice stopping to call aloud. In answer to her calls the voice sounded nearer and nearer. Now suddenly she left the trail and bore away northward. At last the voice was very near. Presently a figure appeared ahead, staggering towards her.

"Qui va la? Who is it?" she asked.

"Ba'tiste Caron," was the reply in English, in a faint voice. She was beside him in an instant.

"What has happened? Why are you off the trail?" she said, and supported him.

"My Injun stoled my dogs and run off," he replied. "I run after. Then, when I am to come to the trail"—he paused to find the English word, and could not—"encore to this trail I no can. So. Ah, bon Dieu, it has so awful!" He swayed and would have fallen, but she caught him, bore him up. She was so strong, and he was as slight as a girl, though tall.

"When was that?" she asked.

"Two nights ago," he answered, and swayed. "Wait," she said, and pulled a flask from her pocket. "Drink this-quick."

He raised it to his lips, but her hand was still on it, and she only let him take a little. Then she drew it away, though she had almost to use force, he was so eager for it. Now she took a biscuit from her pocket.

"Eat; then some more brandy after," she urged. "Come on; it's not far. See, there's the light," she added cheerily, raising her head towards the hut.

"I saw it just when I have fall down—it safe me. I sit down to die—like that! But it safe me, that light—so. Ah, bon Dieu, it was so far, and I want eat so!" Already he had swallowed the biscuit.

"When did you eat last?" she asked, as she urged him on.

"Two nights—except for one leetla piece of bread—O—O—I fin' it in my pocket. Grace! I have travel so far. Jesu, I think it ees ten thousan' miles I go. But I mus' go on, I mus' go—O—certainement."

The light came nearer and nearer. His footsteps quickened, though he staggered now and then, and went like a horse that has run its race, but is driven upon its course again, going heavily with mouth open and head thrown forwards and down.

"But I mus' to get there, an' you-you will to help me, eh?"

Again he swayed, but her strong arm held him up. As they ran on, in a kind of dog-trot, her hand firm upon his arm—he seemed not to notice it—she became conscious, though it was half dark, of what sort of man she had saved. He was about her own age, perhaps a year or two older, with little, if any, hair upon his face, save a slight moustache. His eyes, deep sunken as they were, she made out were black, and the face, though drawn and famished, had a handsome look. Presently she gave him another sip of brandy, and he quickened his steps, speaking to himself the while.

"I haf to do it—if I lif. It is to go, go, go, till I get."

Now they came to the hut where the firelight flickered on the window-pane; the door was flung open, and, as he stumbled on the threshold, she helped him into the warm room. She almost pushed him over to the fire.

Divested of his outer coat, muffler, cap, and leggings, he sat on a bench before the fire, his eyes wandering from the girl to the flames, and his hands clasping and unclasping between his knees. His eyes dilating with hunger, he watched her preparations for his supper; and when at last—and she had been but a moment—it was placed before him, his head swam, and he turned faint with the stress of his longing. He would have swallowed a basin of pea-soup at a draught, but she stopped him, holding the basin till she thought he might venture again. Then came cold beans, and some meat which she toasted at the fire and laid upon his plate. They had not spoken since first entering the house, when tears had shone in his eyes, and he had said:

"You have safe—ah, you have safe me, and so I will do it yet by help bon Dieu—yes."

The meat was done at last, and he sat with a great dish of tea beside him, and his pipe alight.

"What time, if please?" he asked. "I t'ink nine hour, but no sure."

"It is near nine," she said. She hastily tidied up the table after his meal, and then came and sat in her chair over against the wall of the rude fireplace. "Nine—dat is good. The moon rise at 'leven; den I go. I go on," he said, "if you show me de queeck way."

"You go on—how can you go on?" she asked, almost sharply.

"Will you not to show me?" he asked. "Show you what?" she asked abruptly.

"The queeck way to Askatoon," he said, as though surprised that she should ask. "They say me if I get here you will tell me queeck way to Askatoon. Time, he go so fas', an' I have loose a day an' a night, an' I mus' get Askatoon if I lif—I mus' get dere in time. It is all safe to de stroke of de hour, mais, after, it is—bon Dieu—it is hell then. Who shall forgif me—no!"

"The stroke of the hour—the stroke of the hour!" It beat into her brain. Were they both thinking of the same thing now?

"You will show me queeck way. I mus' be Askatoon in two days, or it is all over," he almost moaned. "Is no man here—I forget dat name, my head go round like a wheel; but I know dis place, an' de good God He help me fin' my way to where I call out, bien sur. Dat man's name I have forget."

"My father's name is John Alroyd," she answered absently, for there were hammering at her brain the words, "The stroke of the hour."

“Ah, now I get—yes. An’ your name, it is Loisette Alroy’—ah, I have it in my mind now—Loisette. I not forget dat name, I not forget you—no.”

“Why do you want to go the ‘quick’ way to Askatoon?” she asked.

He puffed a moment at his pipe before he answered her. Presently he said, holding out his pipe, “You not like smoke, mebbe?”

She shook her head in negation, making an impatient gesture.

“I forget ask you,” he said. “Dat journee make me forget. When Injun Jo, he leave me with the dogs, an’ I wake up all alone, an’ not know my way—not like Jo, I think I die, it is so bad, so terrible in my head. Not’ing but snow, not’ing. But dere is de sun; it shine. It say to me, ‘Wake up, Ba’tiste; it will be all right bime-bye.’ But all time I t’ink I go mad, for I mus’ get Askatoon before—dat.”

She started. Had she not used the same word in thinking of Askatoon. “That,” she had said.

“Why do you want to go the ‘quick’ way to Askatoon?” she asked again, her face pale, her foot beating the floor impatiently.

“To save him before dat!” he answered, as though she knew of what he was speaking and thinking. “What is that?” she asked. She knew now, surely, but she must ask it nevertheless.

“Dat hanging—of Haman,” he answered. He nodded to himself. Then he took to gazing into the fire. His lips moved as though talking to himself, and the hand that held the pipe lay forgotten on his knee. “What have you to do with Haman?” she asked slowly, her eyes burning.

“I want safe him—I mus’ give him free.” He tapped his breast. “It is hereto mak’ him free.” He still tapped his breast.

For a moment she stood frozen still, her face thin and drawn and white; then suddenly the blood rushed back into her face, and a red storm raged in her eyes.

She thought of the sister, younger than herself, whom Rube Haman had married and driven to her grave within a year—the sweet Lucy, with the name of her father’s mother. Lucy had been all English in face and tongue, a flower of the west, driven to darkness by this horse-dealing brute, who, before he was arrested and tried for murder, was about to marry Kate Wimper. Kate Wimper had stolen him from Lucy before Lucy’s first and only child was born, the child that could not survive the warm mother-life withdrawn, and so had gone down the valley whither the broken-hearted mother had fled. It was Kate Wimper, who, before that, had waylaid the one man for whom she herself had ever cared, and drawn him from her side by such attractions as she herself would keep for an honest wife, if such she ever chanced to be. An honest wife she would have been had Kate Wimper not crossed the straight path of her life. The man she had loved was gone to his end also, reckless and hopeless, after he had thrown away his chance of a lifetime with Loisette Alroyd. There had been left behind this girl, to whom tragedy had come too young, who drank humiliation with a heart as proud as ever straightly set its course through crooked ways.

It had hurt her, twisted her nature a little, given a fountain of bitterness to her soul, which welled up and flooded her life sometimes. It had given her face no sourness, but it put a shadow into her eyes.

She had been glad when Haman was condemned for murder, for she believed he had committed it, and ten times hanging could not compensate for that dear life gone from their sight—Lucy, the pride of her father’s heart. She was glad when Haman was condemned, because of the woman who had stolen him from Lucy, because of that other man, her lover, gone out of her own life. The new hardness in her rejoiced that now the woman, if she had any heart at all, must have it bowed down by this supreme humiliation and wrung by the ugly tragedy of the hempen rope.

And now this man before her, this man with a boy’s face, with the dark luminous eyes, whom she had saved from the frozen plains, he had that in his breast which would free Haman, so he had said. A fury had its birth in her at that moment. Something seemed to seize her brain and master it, something so big that it held all her faculties in perfect control, and she felt herself in an atmosphere where all life moved round her mechanically, she herself the only sentient thing, so much greater than all she saw, or all that she realised by her subconscious self. Everything in the world seemed small. How calm it was even with the fury within!

“Tell me,” she said quietly—“tell me how you are able to save Haman?”

“He not kill Wakely. It is my brudder Fadette dat kill and get away. Haman he is drunk, and everyt’ing seem to say Haman he did it, an’ everyone know Haman is not friend to Wakely. So the juree say he must be hanging. But my brudder he go to die with hawful bad cold queeck, an’ he send for the priest an’ for me, an’ tell all. I go to Governor with the priest, an’ Governor gif me dat writing here.” He tapped his breast, then took out a wallet and showed the paper to her. “It is life of dat Haman, voici! And so I safe him for my brudder. Dat was a bad boy, Fadette. He was bad all time since he was a baby, an’ I t’ink him pretty lucky to die on his bed, an’ get absolve, and go to purgatore. If he not have luck like dat he go to hell, an’ stay there.”

He sighed, and put the wallet back in his breast carefully, his eyes half-shut with weariness, his handsome face drawn and thin, his limbs lax with fatigue.

“If I get Askatoon before de time for dat, I be happy in my heart, for dat brudder off mine he get out of purgatore bime-bye, I t’ink.”

His eyes were almost shut, but he drew himself together with a great effort, and added desperately, “No sleep. If I sleep it is all smash. Man say me I can get Askatoon by dat time from here, if I go queeck way across lak’—it is all froze now, dat lak’—an’ down dat Foxtail Hills. Is it so, ma’m’selle?”

“By the ‘quick’ way if you can make it in time,” she said; “but it is no way for the stranger to go. There are always bad spots on the ice—it is not safe. You could not find your way.”

“I mus’ get dere in time,” he said desperately. “You can’t do it—alone,” she said. “Do you want to risk all and lose?”

He frowned in self-suppression. “Long way, I no can get dere in time?” he asked.

She thought a moment. “No; it can’t be done by the long way. But there is another way—a third trail, the trail the Gover’ment men made a year ago when they came to survey. It is a good trail. It is blazed in the

woods and staked on the plains. You cannot miss. But—but there is so little time." She looked at the clock on the wall. "You cannot leave here much before sunrise, and—"

"I will leef when de moon rise, at eleven," he interjected.

"You have had no sleep for two nights, and no food. You can't last it out," she said calmly.

The deliberate look on his face deepened to stubbornness.

"It is my vow to my brudder—he is in purgatore. An' I mus' do it," he rejoined, with an emphasis there was no mistaking. "You can show me dat way?"

She went to a drawer and took out a piece of paper. Then, with a point of blackened stick, as he watched her and listened, she swiftly drew his route for him.

"Yes, I get it in my head," he said. "I go dat way, but I wish—I wish it was dat queeck way. I have no fear, not'ing. I go w'en dat moon rise—I go, bien sur."

"You must sleep, then, while I get some food for you." She pointed to a couch in a corner. "I will wake you when the moon rises."

For the first time he seemed to realise her, for a moment to leave the thing which consumed him, and put his mind upon her.

"You not happy—you not like me here?" he asked simply; then added quickly, "I am not bad man like me brudder—no."

Her eyes rested on him for a moment as though realising him, while some thought was working in her mind behind.

"No, you are not a bad man," she said. "Men and women are equal on the plains. You have no fear—I have no fear."

He glanced at the rifles on the walls, then back at her. "My mudder, she was good woman. I am glad she did not lif to know what Fadette do." His eyes drank her in for a minute, then he said: "I go sleep now, t'ank you—till moontime."

In a moment his deep breathing filled the room, the only sound save for the fire within and the frost outside.

Time went on. The night deepened.

. . . . . .

Loisette sat beside the fire, but her body was half-turned from it towards the man on the sofa. She was not agitated outwardly, but within there was that fire which burns up life and hope and all the things that come between us and great issues. It had burned up everything in her except one thought, one powerful motive. She had been deeply wronged, and justice had been about to give "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But the man lying there had come to sweep away the scaffolding of justice—he had come for that.

Perhaps he might arrive at Askatoon before the stroke of the hour, but still he would be too late, for in her pocket now was the Governor's reprieve. The man had slept soundly. His wallet was still in his breast; but the reprieve was with her.

If he left without discovering his loss, and got well on his way, and discovered it then, it would be too late. If he returned—she only saw one step before her, she would wait for that, and deal with it when it came. She was thinking of Lucy, of her own lover ruined and gone. She was calm in her madness.

At the first light of the moon she roused him. She had put food into his fur-coat pocket, and after he had drunk a bowl of hot pea-soup, while she told him his course again, she opened the door, and he passed out into the night. He started forward without a word, but came back again and caught her hand.

"Pardon," he said; "I go forget everyt'ing except dat. But I t'ink what you do for me, it is better than all my life. Bien sur, I will come again, when I get my mind to myself. Ah, but you are beautibul," he said, "an' you not happy. Well, I come again—yes, a Dieu."

He was gone into the night, with the moon silvering the sky, and the steely frost eating into the sentient life of this northern world. Inside the house, with the bearskin blind dropped at the window again, and the fire blazing high, Loisette sat with the Governor's reprieve in her hand. Looking at it, she wondered why it had been given to Ba'tiste Caron, and not to a police-officer. Ah yes, it was plain—Ba'tiste was a woodsman and plainsman, and could go far more safely than a constable, and faster. Ba'tiste had reason for going fast, and he would travel night and day—he was travelling night and day indeed. And now Ba'tiste might get there, but the reprieve would not. He would not be able to stop the hanging of Haman—the hanging of Rube Haman.

A change came over her. Her eyes blazed, her breast heaved now. She had been so quiet, so cold and still. But life seemed moving in her once again. The woman, Kate Wimper, who had helped to send two people to their graves, would now drink the dregs of shame, if she was capable of shame—would be robbed of her happiness, if so be she loved Rube Haman.

She stood up, as though to put the paper in the fire, but paused suddenly at one thought—Rube Haman was innocent of murder.

Even so, he was not innocent of Lucy's misery and death, of the death of the little one who only opened its eyes to the light for an instant, and then went into the dark again. But truly she was justified! When Haman was gone things would go on just the same—and she had been so bitter, her heart had been pierced as with a knife these past three years. Again she held out her hand to the fire, but suddenly she gave a little cry and put her hand to her head. There was Ba'tiste!

What was Ba'tiste to her? Nothing-nothing at all. She had saved his life—even if she wronged Ba'tiste, her debt would be paid. No, she would not think of Ba'tiste. Yet she did not put the paper in the fire, but in the pocket of her dress. Then she went to her room, leaving the door open. The bed was opposite the fire, and, as she lay there—she did not take off her clothes, she knew not why-she could see the flames. She closed her eyes, but could not sleep, and more than once when she opened them she thought she saw Ba'tiste sitting there as he had sat hours before. Why did Ba'tiste haunt her so? What was it he had said in his broken

English as he went away?—that he would come back; that she was “beautibul.”

All at once as she lay still, her head throbbing, her feet and hands icy cold, she sat up listening. “Ah-again!” she cried. She sprang from her bed, rushed to the door, and strained her eyes into the silver night. She called into the icy void, “Qui va la? Who goes?”

She leaned forwards, her hand at her ear, but no sound came in reply. Once more she called, but nothing answered. The night was all light and frost and silence.

She had only heard, in her own brain, the iteration of Ba’tiste’s calling. Would he reach Askatoon in time, she wondered, as she shut the door? Why had she not gone with him and attempted the shorter way the quick way, he had called it? All at once the truth came back upon her, stirring her now. It would do no good for Ba’tiste to arrive in time. He might plead to them all and tell the truth about the reprieve, but it would not avail—Rube Haman would hang. That did not matter—even though he was innocent; but Ba’tiste’s brother would be so long in purgatory. And even that would not matter; but she would hurt Ba’tiste—Ba’tiste—Ba’tiste. And Ba’tiste he would know that she—and he had called her “beautibul,” that she had—

With a cry she suddenly clothed herself for travel. She put some food and drink in a leather bag and slung them over her shoulder. Then she dropped on a knee and wrote a note to her father, tears falling from her eyes. She heaped wood on the fire and moved towards the door. All at once she turned to the crucifix on the wall which had belonged to her mother, and, though she had followed her father’s Protestant religion, she kissed the feet of the sacred figure.

“Oh, Christ, have mercy on me, and bring me safe to my journey’s end-in time,” she said breathlessly; then she went softly to the door, leaving the dog behind.

It opened, closed, and the night swallowed her. Like a ghost she sped the quick way to Askatoon. She was six hours behind Ba’tiste, and, going hard all the time, it was doubtful if she could get there before the fatal hour.

On the trail Ba’tiste had taken there were two huts where he could rest, and he had carried his blanket slung on his shoulder. The way she went gave no shelter save the trees and caves which had been used to cache buffalo meat and hides in old days. But beyond this there was danger in travelling by night, for the springs beneath the ice of the three lakes she must, cross made it weak and rotten even in the fiercest weather, and what would no doubt have been death to Ba’tiste would be peril at least to her. Why had she not gone with him?

“He had in his face what was in Lucy’s,” she said to herself, as she sped on. “She was fine like him, ready to break her heart for those she cared for. My, if she had seen him first instead of—”

She stopped short, for the ice gave way to her foot, and she only sprang back in time to save herself. But she trotted on, mile after mile, the dog-trot of the Indian, head bent forwards, toeing in, breathing steadily but sharply.

The morning came, noon, then a fall of snow and a keen wind, and despair in her heart; but she had passed the danger-spots, and now, if the storm did not overwhelm her, she might get to Askatoon in time. In the midst of the storm she came to one of the caves of which she had known. Here was wood for a fire, and here she ate, and in weariness unspeakable fell asleep. When she waked it was near sun-down, the storm had ceased, and, as on the night before, the sky was stained with colour and drowned in splendour.

“I will do it—I will do it, Ba’tiste!” she called, and laughed aloud into the sunset. She had battled with herself all the way, and she had conquered. Right was right, and Rube Haman must not be hung for what he did not do. Her heart hardened whenever she thought of the woman, but softened again when she thought of Ba’tiste, who had to suffer for the deed of a brother in “purgatore.” Once again the night and its silence and loneliness followed her, the only living thing near the trail till long after midnight. After that, as she knew, there were houses here and there where she might have rested, but she pushed on unceasing.

At daybreak she fell in with a settler going to Askatoon with his dogs. Seeing how exhausted she was, he made her ride a few miles upon his sledge; then she sped on ahead again till she came to the borders of Askatoon.

People were already in the streets, and all were tending one way. She stopped and asked the time. It was within a quarter of an hour of the time when Haman was to pay another’s penalty. She spurred herself on, and came to the jail blind with fatigue. As she neared the jail she saw her father and Mickey. In amazement her father hailed her, but she would not stop. She was admitted to the prison on explaining that she had a reprieve. Entering a room filled with excited people, she heard a cry.

It came from Ba’tiste. He had arrived but ten minutes before, and, in the Sheriff’s presence had discovered his loss. He had appealed in vain.

But now, as he saw the girl, he gave a shout of joy which pierced the hearts of all.

“Ah, you haf it! Say you haf it, or it is no use—he mus’ hang. Spik-spik! Ah, my brudder—it is to do him right! Ah, Loisette—bon Dieu, merci!”

For answer she placed the reprieve in the hands of the Sheriff. Then she swayed and fell fainting at the feet of Ba’tiste.

She had come at the stroke of the hour.

When she left for her home again the Sheriff kissed her.

And that was not the only time he kissed her. He did it again six months later, at the beginning of the harvest, when she and Ba’tiste Caron started off on the long trail of life together. None but Ba’tiste knew the truth about the loss of the reprieve, and to him she was “beautibul” just the same, and greatly to be desired.

BUCKMASTER'S BOY

"I bin waitin' for him, an' I'll git him of it takes all winter. I'll git him—plumb."

The speaker smoothed the barrel of his rifle with mittened hand, which had, however, a trigger-finger free. With black eyebrows twitching over sunken grey eyes, he looked doggedly down the frosty valley from the ledge of high rock where he sat. The face was rough and weather-beaten, with the deep tan got in the open life of a land of much sun and little cloud, and he had a beard which, untrimmed and growing wild, made him look ten years older than he was.

"I bin waitin' a durn while," the mountain-man added, and got to his feet slowly, drawing himself out to six and a half feet of burly manhood. The shoulders were, however, a little stooped, and the head was thrust forwards with an eager, watchful look—a habit become a physical characteristic.

Presently he caught sight of a hawk sailing southward along the peaks of the white icebound mountains above, on which the sun shone with such sharp insistence, making sky and mountain of a piece in deep purity and serene stillness.

"That hawk's seen him, mebbe," he said, after a moment. "I bet it went up higher when it got him in its eye. Ef it'd only speak and tell me where he is—ef he's a day, or two days, or ten days north."

Suddenly his eyes blazed and his mouth opened in superstitious amazement, for the hawk stopped almost directly overhead at a great height, and swept round in a circle many times, waveringly, uncertainly. At last it resumed its flight southward, sliding down the mountains like a winged star.

The mountaineer watched it with a dazed expression for a moment longer, then both hands clutched the rifle and half swung it to position involuntarily.

"It's seen him, and it stopped to say so. It's seen him, I tell you, an' I'll git him. Ef it's an hour, or a day, or a week, it's all the same. I'm here watchin', waitin' dead on to him, the poison skunk!"

The person to whom he had been speaking now rose from the pile of cedar boughs where he had been sitting, stretched his arms up, then shook himself into place, as does a dog after sleep. He stood for a minute looking at the mountaineer with a reflective, yet a furtively sardonic, look. He was not above five feet nine inches in height, and he was slim and neat; and though his buckskin coat and breeches were worn and even frayed in spots, he had an air of some distinction and of concentrated force. It was a face that men turned to look at twice and shook their heads in doubt afterwards—a handsome, worn, secretive face, in as perfect control as the strings of an instrument under the bow of a great artist. It was the face of a man without purpose in life beyond the moment—watchful, careful, remorselessly determined, an adventurer's asset, the dial-plate of a hidden machinery.

Now he took the handsome meerschaum pipe from his mouth, from which he had been puffing smoke slowly, and said in a cold, yet quiet voice, "How long you been waitin', Buck?"

"A month. He's overdue near that. He always comes down to winter at Fort o' Comfort, with his string of half-breeds, an' Injuns, an' the dogs."

"No chance to get him at the Fort?"

"It ain't so certain. They'd guess what I was doin' there. It's surer here. He's got to come down the trail, an' when I spot him by the Juniper clump"—he jerked an arm towards a spot almost a mile farther up the valley—"I kin scoot up the underbrush a bit and git him—plumb. I could do it from here, sure, but I don't want no mistake. Once only, jest one shot, that's all I want, Sinnet."

He bit off a small piece of tobacco from a black plug Sinnet offered him, and chewed it with nervous fierceness, his eyebrows working, as he looked at the other eagerly. Deadly as his purpose was, and grim and unvarying as his vigil had been, the loneliness had told on him, and he had grown hungry for a human face and human companionship. Why Sinnet had come he had not thought to inquire. Why Sinnet should be going north instead of south had not occurred to him. He only realised that Sinnet was not the man he was waiting for with murder in his heart; and all that mattered to him in life was the coming of his victim down the trail. He had welcomed Sinnet with a sullen eagerness, and had told him in short, detached sentences the dark story of a wrong and a waiting revenge, which brought a slight flush to Sinnet's pale face and awakened a curious light in his eyes.

"Is that your shack—that where you shake down?" Sinnet said, pointing towards a lean-to in the fir trees to the right.

"That's it. I sleep there. It's straight on to the Juniper clump, the front door is." He laughed viciously, grimly. "Outside or inside, I'm on to the Juniper clump. Walk into the parlour?" he added, and drew open a rough-made door, so covered with green cedar boughs that it seemed of a piece with the surrounding underbrush and trees. Indeed, the little but was so constructed that it could not be distinguished from the woods even a short distance away.

"Can't have a fire, I suppose?" Sinnet asked.

"Not daytimes. Smoke 'd give me away if he suspicioned me," answered the mountaineer. "I don't take no chances. Never can tell."

"Water?" asked Sinnet, as though interested in the surroundings, while all the time he was eyeing the mountaineer furtively—as it were, prying to the inner man, or measuring the strength of the outer man. He lighted a fresh pipe and seated himself on a rough bench beside the table in the middle of the room, and leaned on his elbows, watching.

The mountaineer laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh to hear. "Listen," he said. "You bin a long time out West. You bin in the mountains a good while. Listen."

There was silence. Sinnet listened intently. He heard the faint drip, drip, drip of water, and looked steadily at the back wall of the room.

"There—rock?" he said, and jerked his head towards the sound.

“You got good ears,” answered the other, and drew aside a blanket which hung on the back wall of the room. A wooden trough was disclosed hanging under a ledge of rock, and water dripped into it softly, slowly.

“Almost providential, that rock,” remarked Sinnet. “You’ve got your well at your back door. Food—but you can’t go far, and keep your eye on the Bend too,” he nodded towards the door, beyond which lay the frost-touched valley in the early morning light of autumn.

“Plenty of black squirrels and pigeons come here on account of the springs like this one, and I get ‘em with a bow and arrow. I didn’t call myself Robin Hood and Daniel Boone not for nothin’ when I was knee-high to a grasshopper.” He drew from a rough cupboard some cold game, and put it on the table, with some scones and a pannikin of water. Then he brought out a small jug of whiskey and placed it beside his visitor. They began to eat.

“How d’ye cook without fire?” asked Sinnet. “Fire’s all right at nights. He’d never camp ‘twixt here an’ Juniper Bend at night. The next camp’s six miles north from here. He’d only come down the valley daytimes. I studied it ‘all out, and it’s a dead sure thing. From daylight till dusk I’m on to him. I got the trail in my eye.”

He showed his teeth like a wild dog, as his look swept the valley. There was something almost revolting in his concentrated ferocity.

Sinnet’s eyes half closed as he watched the mountaineer, and the long, scraggy hands and whipcord neck seemed to interest him greatly. He looked at his own slim brown hands with a half smile, and it was almost as cruel as the laugh of the other. Yet it had, too, a knowledge and an understanding which gave it humanity.

“You’re sure he did it?” Sinnet asked presently, after drinking a very small portion of liquor, and tossing some water from the pannikin after it. “You’re sure Greevy killed your boy, Buck?”

“My name’s Buckmaster, ain’t it—Jim Buckmaster? Don’t I know my own name? It’s as sure as that. My boy said it was Greevy when he was dying. He told Bill Ricketts so, and Bill told me afore he went East. Bill didn’t want to tell, but he said it was fair I should know, for my boy never did nobody any harm—an’ Greevy’s livin’ on. But I’ll git him. Right’s right.”

“Wouldn’t it be better for the law to hang him, if you’ve got the proof, Buck? A year or so in jail, an’ a long time to think over what’s going round his neck on the scaffold—wouldn’t that suit you, if you’ve got the proof?”

A rigid, savage look came into Buckmaster’s face.

“I ain’t lettin’ no judge and jury do my business. I’m for certain sure, not for p’r’aps! An’ I want to do it myself. Clint was only twenty. Like boys we was together. I was eighteen when I married, an’ he come when she went—jest a year—jest a year. An’ ever since then we lived together, him an’ me, an’ shot together, an’ trapped together, an’ went gold-washin’ together on the Cariboo, an’ eat out of the same dish, an’ slept under the same blanket, and jawed together nights—ever since he was five, when old Mother Lablache had got him into pants, an’ he was fit to take the trail.”

The old man stopped a minute, his whipcord neck swelling, his lips twitching. He brought a fist down on the table with a bang. “The biggest little rip he was, as full of fun as a squirrel, an’ never a smile-o-jest his eyes dancin’, an’ more sense than a judge. He laid hold o’ me, that cub did—it was like his mother and himself together; an’ the years flowin’ in an’ peterin’ out, an’ him gettin’ older, an’ always jest the same. Always on rock-bottom, always bright as a dollar, an’ we livin’ at Black Nose Lake, layin’ up cash agin’ the time we was to go South, an’ set up a house along the railway, an’ him to git married. I was for his gittin’ married same as me, when we had enough cash. I use to think of that when he was ten, and when he was eighteen I spoke to him about it; but he wouldn’t listen—jest laughed at me. You remember how Clint used to laugh sort of low and teasin’ like—you remember that laugh o’ Clint’s, don’t you?”

Sinnet’s face was towards the valley and Juniper Bend, but he slowly turned his head and looked at Buckmaster strangely out of his half-shut eyes. He took the pipe from his mouth slowly.

“I can hear it now,” he answered slowly. “I hear it often, Buck.”

The old man gripped his arm so suddenly that Sinnet was startled,—in so far as anything could startle anyone who had lived a life of chance and danger and accident, and his face grew a shade paler; but he did not move, and Buckmaster’s hand tightened convulsively.

“You liked him, an’ he liked you; he first learnt poker off you, Sinnet. He thought you was a tough, but he didn’t mind that no more than I did. It ain’t for us to say what we’re goin’ to be, not always. Things in life git stronger than we are. You was a tough, but who’s goin’ to judge you! I ain’t; for Clint took to you, Sinnet, an’ he never went wrong in his thinkin’. God! he was wife an’ child to me—an’ he’s dead—dead—dead.”

The man’s grief was a painful thing to see. His hands gripped the table, while his body shook with sobs, though his eyes gave forth no tears. It was an inward convulsion, which gave his face the look of unrelieved tragedy and suffering—Laocoon struggling with the serpents of sorrow and hatred which were strangling him.

“Dead an’ gone,” he repeated, as he swayed to and fro, and the table quivered in his grasp. Presently, however, as though arrested by a thought, he peered out of the doorway towards Juniper Bend. “That hawk seen him—it seen him. He’s comin’, I know it, an’ I’ll git him—plumb.” He had the mystery and imagination of the mountain-dweller.

The rifle lay against the wall behind him, and he turned and touched it almost caressingly. “I ain’t let go like this since he was killed, Sinnet. It don’t do. I got to keep myself stiddy to do the trick when the minute comes. At first I usen’t to sleep at nights, thinkin’ of Clint, an’ missin’ him, an’ I got shaky and no good. So I put a cinch on myself, an’ got to sleepin’ again—from the full dusk to dawn, for Greevy wouldn’t take the trail at night. I’ve kept stiddy.” He held out his hand as though to show that it was firm and steady, but it trembled with the emotion which had conquered him. He saw it, and shook his head angrily.

“It was seein’ you, Sinnet. It burst me. I ain’t seen no one to speak to in a month, an’ with you sittin’ there, it was like Clint an’ me cuttin’ and comin’ again off the loaf an’ the knuckle-bone of ven’son.”

Sinnet ran a long finger slowly across his lips, and seemed meditating what he should say to the

mountaineer. At length he spoke, looking into Buckmaster's face. "What was the story Ricketts told you? What did your boy tell Ricketts? I've heard, too, about it, and that's why I asked you if you had proofs that Greevy killed Clint. Of course, Clint should know, and if he told Ricketts, that's pretty straight; but I'd like to know if what I heard tallies with what Ricketts heard from Clint. P'r'aps it'd ease your mind a bit to tell it. I'll watch the Bend—don't you trouble about that. You can't do these two things at one time. I'll watch for Greevy; you give me Clint's story to Ricketts. I guess you know I'm feelin' for you, an' if I was in your place I'd shoot the man that killed Clint, if it took ten years. I'd have his heart's blood—all of it. Whether Greevy was in the right or in the wrong, I'd have him—plumb."

Buckmaster was moved. He gave a fierce exclamation and made a gesture of cruelty. "Clint right or wrong? There ain't no question of that. My boy wasn't the kind to be in the wrong. What did he ever do but what was right? If Clint was in the wrong I'd kill Greevy jest the same, for Greevy robbed him of all the years that was before him—only a sapling he was, an' all his growin' to do, all his branches to widen an' his roots to spread. But that don't enter in it, his bein' in the wrong. It was a quarrel, and Clint never did Greevy any harm. It was a quarrel over cards, an' Greevy was drunk, an' followed Clint out into the prairie in the night and shot him like a coyote. Clint hadn't no chance, an' he jest lay there on the ground till morning, when Ricketts and Steve Joicey found him. An' Clint told Ricketts who it was."

"Why didn't Ricketts tell it right out at once?" asked Sinnet.

"Greevy was his own cousin—it was in the family, an' he kept thinkin' of Greevy's gal, Em'ly. Her—what'll it matter to her! She'll get married, an she'll forgit. I know her, a gal that's got no deep feelin' like Clint had for me. But because of her Ricketts didn't speak for a year. Then he couldn't stand it any longer, an' he told me—seein' how I suffered, an' everybody hidin' their suspicions from me, an' me up here out o' the way, an' no account. That was the feelin' among 'em—what was the good of making things worse! They wasn't thinkin' of the boy or of Jim Buckmaster, his father. They was thinkin' of Greevy's gal—to save her trouble."

Sinnet's face was turned towards Juniper Bend, and the eyes were fixed, as it were, on a still more distant object—a dark, brooding, inscrutable look.

"Was that all Ricketts told you, Buck?" The voice was very quiet, but it had a suggestive note.

"That's all Clint told Bill before he died. That was enough."

There was a moment's pause, and then, puffing out long clouds of smoke, and in a tone of curious detachment, as though he were telling of something that he saw now in the far distance, or as a spectator of a battle from a far vantage-point might report to a blind man standing near, Sinnet said:

"P'r'aps Ricketts didn't know the whole story; p'r'aps Clint didn't know it all to tell him; p'r'aps Clint didn't remember it all. P'r'aps he didn't remember anything except that he and Greevy quarrelled, and that Greevy and he shot at each other in the prairie. He'd only be thinking of the thing that mattered most to him—that his life was over, an' that a man had put a bullet in him, an'—"

Buckmaster tried to interrupt him, but he waved a hand impatiently, and continued: "As I say, maybe he didn't remember everything; he had been drinkin' a bit himself, Clint had. He wasn't used to liquor, and couldn't stand much. Greevy was drunk, too, and gone off his head with rage. He always gets drunk when he first comes South to spend the winter with his girl Em'ly." He paused a moment, then went on a little more quickly. "Greevy was proud of her—couldn't even bear her being crossed in any way; and she has a quick temper, and if she quarrelled with anybody Greevy quarrelled too."

"I don't want to know anything about her," broke in Buckmaster roughly. "She isn't in this thing. I'm goin' to git Greevy. I bin waitin' for him, an' I'll git him."

"You're going to kill the man that killed your boy, if you can, Buck; but I'm telling my story in my own way. You told Ricketts's story; I'll tell what I've heard. And before you kill Greevy you ought to know all there is that anybody else knows—or suspicions about it."

"I know enough. Greevy done it, an' I'm here." With no apparent coherence and relevancy Sinnet continued, but his voice was not so even as before. "Em'ly was a girl that wasn't twice alike. She was changeable. First it was one, then it was another, and she didn't seem to be able to fix her mind. But that didn't prevent her leadin' men on. She wasn't changeable, though, about her father. She was to him what your boy was to you. There she was like you, ready to give everything up for her father."

"I tell y' I don't want to hear about her," said Buckmaster, getting to his feet and setting his jaws. "You needn't talk to me about her. She'll git over it. I'll never git over what Greevy done to me or to Clint—jest twenty, jest twenty! I got my work to do."

He took his gun from the wall, slung it into the hollow of his arm, and turned to look up the valley through the open doorway.

The morning was sparkling with life—the life and vigour which a touch of frost gives to the autumn world in a country where the blood tingles to the dry, sweet sting of the air. Beautiful, and spacious, and buoyant, and lonely, the valley and the mountains seemed waiting, like a new-born world, to be peopled by man. It was as though all had been made ready for him—the birds whistling and singing in the trees, the whisk of the squirrels leaping from bough to bough, the peremptory sound of the woodpecker's beak against the bole of a tree, the rustle of the leaves as a wood-hen ran past—a waiting, virgin world.

Its beauty and its wonderful dignity had no appeal to Buckmaster. His eyes and mind were fixed on a deed which would stain the virgin wild with the ancient crime that sent the first marauder on human life into the wilderness.

As Buckmaster's figure darkened the doorway Sinnet seemed to waken as from a dream, and he got swiftly to his feet.

"Wait—you wait, Buck. You've got to hear all. You haven't heard my story yet. Wait, I tell you." His voice was so sharp and insistent, so changed, that Buckmaster turned from the doorway and came back into the room.

"What's the use of my hearin'? You want me not to kill Greevy, because of that gal. What's she to me?"

“Nothing to you, Buck, but Clint was everything to her.”

The mountaineer stood like one petrified.

“What’s that—what’s that you say? It’s a damn lie!”

“It wasn’t cards—the quarrel, not the real quarrel. Greevy found Clint kissing her. Greevy wanted her to marry Gatineau, the lumber-king. That was the quarrel.”

A snarl was on the face of Buckmaster. “Then she’ll not be sorry when I git him. It took Clint from her as well as from me.” He turned to the door again. “But, wait, Buck, wait one minute and hear—” He was interrupted by a low, exultant growl, and he saw Buckmaster’s rifle clutched as a hunter, stooping, clutches his gun to fire on his prey.

“Quick, the spy-glass!” he flung back at Sinnet. “It’s him—but I’ll make sure.”

Sinnet caught the telescope from the nails where it hung, and looked out towards Juniper Bend. “It’s Greevy—and his girl, and the half-breeds,” he said, with a note in his voice that almost seemed agitation, and yet few had ever seen Sinnet agitated. “Em’ly must have gone up the trail in the night.”

“It’s my turn now,” the mountaineer said hoarsely, and, stooping, slid away quickly into the undergrowth. Sinnet followed, keeping near him, neither speaking. For a half mile they hastened on, and now and then Buckmaster drew aside the bushes, and looked up the valley, to keep Greevy and his bois brulees in his eye. Just so had he and his son and Sinnet stalked the wapiti and the red deer along these mountains; but this was a man that Buckmaster was stalking now, with none of the joy of the sport which had been his since a lad; only the malice of the avenger. The lust of a mountain feud was on him; he was pursuing the price of blood.

At last Buckmaster stopped at a ledge of rock just above the trail. Greevy would pass below, within three hundred yards of his rifle. He turned to Sinnet with cold and savage eyes. “You go back,” he said. “It’s my business. I don’t want you to see. You don’t want to see, then you won’t know, and you won’t need to lie. You said that the man that killed Clint ought to die. He’s going to die, but it’s none o’ your business. I want to be alone. In a minute he’ll be where I kin git him—plumb. You go, Sinnet-right off. It’s my business.”

There was a strange, desperate look in Sinnet’s face; it was as hard as stone, but his eyes had a light of battle in them.

“It’s my business right enough, Buck,” he said, “and you’re not going to kill Greevy. That girl of his has lost her lover, your boy. It’s broke her heart almost, and there’s no use making her an orphan too. She can’t stand it. She’s had enough. You leave her father alone—you hear me, let up!” He stepped between Buckmaster and the ledge of rock from which the mountaineer was to take aim.

There was a terrible look in Buckmaster’s face. He raised his single-barrelled rifle, as though he would shoot Sinnet; but, at the moment, he remembered that a shot would warn Greevy, and that he might not have time to reload. He laid his rifle against a tree swiftly.

“Git away from here,” he said, with a strange rattle in his throat. “Git away quick; he’ll be down past here in a minute.”

Sinnet pulled himself together as he saw Buckmaster snatch at a great clasp-knife in his belt. He jumped and caught Buckmaster’s wrist in a grip like a vice.

“Greevy didn’t kill him, Buck,” he said. But the mountaineer was gone mad, and did not grasp the meaning of the words. He twined his left arm round the neck of Sinnet, and the struggle began, he fighting to free Sinnet’s hand from his wrist, to break Sinnet’s neck. He did not realise what he was doing. He only knew that this man stood between him and the murderer of his boy, and all the ancient forces of barbarism were alive in him. Little by little they drew to the edge of the rock, from which there was a sheer drop of two hundred feet. Sinnet fought like a panther for safety, but no sane man’s strength could withstand the demoniacal energy that bent and crushed him. Sinnet felt his strength giving. Then he said in a hoarse whisper, “Greevy didn’t kill him. I killed him, and—”

At that moment he was borne to the ground with a hand on his throat, and an instant after the knife went home.

Buckmaster got to his feet and looked at his victim for an instant, dazed and wild; then he sprang for his gun. As he did so the words that Sinnet had said as they struggled rang in his ears, “Greevy didn’t kill him; I killed him!”

He gave a low cry and turned back towards Sinnet, who lay in a pool of blood.

Sinnet was speaking. He went and stooped over him. “Em’ly threw me over for Clint,” the voice said huskily, “and I followed to have it out with Clint. So did Greevy, but Greevy was drunk. I saw them meet. I was hid. I saw that Clint would kill Greevy, and I fired. I was off my head—I’d never cared for any woman before, and Greevy was her father. Clint was off his head too. He had called me names that day—a cardsharp, and a liar, and a thief, and a skunk, he called me, and I hated him just then. Greevy fired twice wide. He didn’t know but what he killed Clint, but he didn’t. I did. So I tried to stop you, Buck—”

Life was going fast, and speech failed him; but he opened his eyes again and whispered, “I didn’t want to die, Buck. I am only thirty-five, and it’s too soon; but it had to be. Don’t look that way, Buck. You got the man that killed him—plumb. But Em’ly didn’t play fair with me—made a fool of me, the only time in my life I ever cared for a woman. You leave Greevy alone, Buck, and tell Em’ly for me I wouldn’t let you kill her father.”

“You—Sinnet—you, you done it! Why, he’d have fought for you. You—done it—to him—to Clint!” Now that the blood-feud had been satisfied, a great change came over the mountaineer. He had done his work, and the thirst for vengeance was gone. Greevy he had hated, but this man had been with him in many a winter’s hunt. His brain could hardly grasp the tragedy—it had all been too sudden.

Suddenly he stooped down. “Sinnet,” he said, “ef there was a woman in it, that makes all the difference. Sinnet, of—”

But Sinnet was gone upon a long trail that led into an illimitable wilderness. With a moan the old man ran to the ledge of rock. Greevy and his girl were below.

“When there’s a woman in it—!” he said, in a voice of helplessness and misery, and watched Em’ly till she

disappeared from view. Then he turned, and, lifting up in his arms the man he had killed, carried him into the deeper woods.

TO-MORROW

"My, nothing's the matter with the world to-day! It's so good it almost hurts."

She raised her head from the white petticoat she was ironing, and gazed out of the doorway and down the valley with a warm light in her eyes and a glowing face. The snow-tipped mountains far above and away, the fir-covered, cedar-ranged foothills, and, lower down, the wonderful maple and ash woods, with their hundred autumn tints, all merging to one soft, red tone, the roar of the stream tumbling down the ravine from the heights, the air that braced the nerves—it all seemed to be part of her, the passion of life corresponding to the passion of living in her.

After watching the scene dreamily for a moment, she turned and laid the iron she had been using upon the hot stove near. Taking up another, she touched it with a moistened finger to test the heat, and, leaning above the table again, passed it over the linen for a few moments, smiling at something that was in her mind. Presently she held the petticoat up, turned it round, then hung it in front of her, eyeing it with critical pleasure.

"To-morrow!" she said, nodding at it. "You won't be seen, I suppose, but I'll know you're nice enough for a queen—and that's enough to know."

She blushed a little, as though someone had heard her words and was looking at her, then she carefully laid the petticoat over the back of a chair. "No queen's got one whiter, if I do say it," she continued, tossing her head.

In that, at any rate, she was right, for the water of the mountain springs was pure, the air was clear, and the sun was clarifying; and little ornamented or frilled as it was, the petticoat was exquisitely soft and delicate. It would have appealed to more eyes than a woman's.

"To-morrow!" She nodded at it again and turned again to the bright world outside. With arms raised and hands resting against the timbers of the doorway, she stood dreaming. A flock of pigeons passed with a whir not far away, and skirted the woods making down the valley. She watched their flight abstractedly, yet with a subconscious sense of pleasure. Life—they were Life, eager, buoyant, belonging to this wild region, where still the heart could feel so much at home, where the great world was missed so little.

Suddenly, as she gazed, a shot rang out down the valley, and two of the pigeons came tumbling to the ground, a stray feather floating after. With a startled exclamation she took a step forward. Her brain became confused and disturbed. She had looked out on Eden, and it had been ravaged before her eyes. She had been thinking of to-morrow, and this vast prospect of beauty and serenity had been part of the pageant in which it moved. Not the valley alone had been marauded, but that "To-morrow," and all it meant to her.

Instantly the valley had become clouded over for her, its glory and its grace despoiled. She turned back to the room where the white petticoat lay upon the chair, but stopped with a little cry of alarm.

A man was standing in the centre of the room. He had entered stealthily by the back door, and had waited for her to turn round. He was haggard and travel stained, and there was a feverish light in his eyes. His fingers trembled as they adjusted his belt, which seemed too large for him. Mechanically he buckled it tighter.

"You're Jenny Long, ain't you?" he asked. "I beg pardon for sneakin' in like this, but they're after me, some ranchers and a constable—one o' the Riders of the Plains. I've been tryin' to make this house all day. You're Jenny Long, ain't you?"

She had plenty of courage, and, after the first instant of shock, she had herself in hand. She had quickly observed his condition, had marked the candour of the eye and the decision and character of the face, and doubt of him found no place in her mind. She had the keen observation of the dweller in lonely places, where every traveller has the potentialities of a foe, while the door of hospitality is opened to him after the custom of the wilds. Year in, year out, since she was a little girl and came to live here with her Uncle Sanger when her father died—her mother had gone before she could speak—travellers had halted at this door, going North or coming South, had had bite and sup, and bed, may be, and had passed on, most of them never to be seen again. More than that, too, there had been moments of peril, such as when, alone, she had faced two wood-thieves with a revolver, as they were taking her mountain-pony with them, and herself had made them "hands-up," and had marched them into a prospector's camp five miles away.

She had no doubt about the man before her. Whatever he had done, it was nothing dirty or mean—of that she was sure.

"Yes, I'm Jenny Long," she answered. "What have you done? What are they after you for?"

"Oh! to-morrow," he answered, "to-morrow I got to git to Bindon. It's life or death. I come from prospecting two hundred miles up North. I done it in two days and a half. My horse dropped dead—I'm near dead myself. I tried to borrow another horse up at Clancey's, and at Scotton's Drive, but they didn't know me, and they bounced me. So I borrowed a horse off Weigall's paddock, to make for here—to you. I didn't mean to keep that horse. Hell, I'm no horse-stealer! But I couldn't explain to them, except that I had to git to Bindon to save a man's life. If people laugh in your face, it's no use explainin'. I took a roan from Weigall's, and they got after me. 'Bout six miles up they shot at me an' hurt me."

She saw that one arm hung limp at his side and that his wrist was wound with a red bandana.

She started forward. "Are you hurt bad? Can I bind it up or wash it for you? I've got plenty of hot water here, and it's bad letting a wound get stale."

He shook his head. “I washed the hole clean in the creek below. I doubled on them. I had to go down past your place here, and then work back to be rid of them. But there’s no telling when they’ll drop on to the game, and come back for me. My only chance was to git to you. Even if I had a horse, I couldn’t make Bindon in time. It’s two days round the gorge by trail. A horse is no use now—I lost too much time since last night. I can’t git to Bindon to-morrow in time, if I ride the trail.”

“The river?” she asked abruptly.

“It’s the only way. It cuts off fifty mile. That’s why I come to you.”

She frowned a little, her face became troubled, and her glance fell on his arm nervously. “What’ve I got to do with it?” she asked almost sharply.

“Even if this was all right,”—he touched the wounded arm—“I couldn’t take the rapids in a canoe. I don’t know them, an’ it would be sure death. That’s not the worst, for there’s a man at Bindon would lose his life—p’r’aps twenty men—I dunno; but one man sure. To-morrow, it’s go or stay with him. He was good—Lord, but he was good!—to my little gal years back. She’d only been married to me a year when he saved her, riskin’ his own life. No one else had the pluck. My little gal, only twenty she was, an’ pretty as a picture, an’ me fifty miles away when the fire broke out in the hotel where she was. He’d have gone down to hell for a friend, an’ he saved my little gal. I had her for five years after that. That’s why I got to git to Bindon to-morrow. If I don’t, I don’t want to see to-morrow. I got to go down the river to-night.”

She knew what he was going to ask her. She knew he was thinking what all the North knew, that she was the first person to take the Dog Nose Rapids in a canoe, down the great river scarce a stone’s-throw from her door; and that she had done it in safety many times. Not in all the West and North were there a half-dozen people who could take a canoe to Bindon, and they were not here. She knew that he meant to ask her to paddle him down the swift stream with its murderous rocks, to Bindon. She glanced at the white petticoat on the chair, and her lips tightened. To-morrow-tomorrow was as much to her here as it would be to this man before her, or the man he would save at Bindon. “What do you want?” she asked, hardening her heart. “Can’t you see? I want you to hide me here till tonight. There’s a full moon, an’ it would be as plain goin’ as by day. They told me about you up North, and I said to myself, ‘If I git to Jenny Long, an’ tell her about my friend at Bindon, an’ my little gal, she’ll take me down to Bindon in time.’ My little gal would have paid her own debt if she’d ever had the chance. She didn’t—she’s lying up on Mazy Mountain. But one woman’ll do a lot for the sake of another woman. Say, you’ll do it, won’t you? If I don’t git there by to-morrow noon, it’s no good.”

She would not answer. He was asking more than he knew. Why should she be sacrificed? Was it her duty to pay the “little gal’s debt,” to save the man at Bindon? To-morrow was to be the great day in her own life. The one man in all the world was coming to marry her to-morrow. After four years’ waiting, after a bitter quarrel in which both had been to blame, he was coming from the mining town of Selby to marry her to-morrow.

“What will happen? Why will your friend lose his life if you don’t get to Bindon?”

“By noon to-morrow, by twelve o’clock noon; that’s the plot; that’s what they’ve schemed. Three days ago, I heard. I got a man free from trouble North—he was no good, but I thought he ought to have another chance, and I got him free. He told me of what was to be done at Bindon. There’d been a strike in the mine, an’ my friend had took it in hand with knuckle-dusters on. He isn’t the kind to fell a tree with a jack-knife. Then three of the strikers that had been turned away—they was the ringleaders—they laid a plan that’d make the devil sick. They’ve put a machine in the mine, an’ timed it, an’ it’ll go off when my friend comes out of the mine at noon to-morrow.”

Her face was pale now, and her eyes had a look of pain and horror. Her man—him that she was to marry—was the head of a mine also at Selby, forty miles beyond Bindon, and the horrible plot came home to her with piercing significance.

“Without a second’s warning,” he urged, “to go like that, the man that was so good to my little gal, an’ me with a chance to save him, an’ others too, p’r’aps. You won’t let it be. Say, I’m pinnin’ my faith to you. I’m—”

Suddenly he swayed. She caught him, held him, and lowered him gently in a chair. Presently he opened his eyes. “It’s want o’ food, I suppose,” he said. “If you’ve got a bit of bread and meat—I must keep up.”

She went to a cupboard, but suddenly turned towards him again. Her ears had caught a sound outside in the underbush. He had heard also, and he half staggered to his feet.

“Quick-in here!” she said, and, opening a door, pushed him inside. “Lie down on my bed, and I’ll bring you vittles as quick as I can,” she added. Then she shut the door, turned to the ironing-board, and took up the iron, as the figure of a man darkened the doorway.

“Hello, Jinny, fixin’ up for to-morrow?” the man said, stepping inside, with a rifle under his arm and some pigeons in his hand.

She nodded and gave him an impatient, scrutinising glance. His face had a fatuous kind of smile.

“Been celebrating the pigeons?” she asked drily, jerking her head towards the two birds, which she had seen drop from her Eden skies a short time before.

“I only had one swig of whiskey, honest Injun!” he answered. “I s’pose I might have waited till to-morrow, but I was dead-beat. I got a bear over by the Tenmile Reach, and I was tired. I ain’t so young as I used to be, and, anyhow, what’s the good! What’s ahead of me? You’re going to git married to-morrow after all these years we bin together, and you’re going down to Selby from the mountains, where I won’t see you, not once in a blue moon. Only that old trollop, Mother Massy, to look after me.”

“Come down to Selby and live there. You’ll be welcome by Jake and me.”

He stood his gun in the corner and, swinging the pigeons in his hand, said: “Me live out of the mountains? Don’t you know better than that? I couldn’t breathe; and I wouldn’t want to breathe. I’ve got my shack here, I got my fur business, and they’re still fond of whiskey up North!” He chuckled to himself, as he thought of the illicit still farther up the mountain behind them. “I make enough to live on, and I’ve put a few dollars by, though I won’t have so many after to-morrow, after I’ve given you a little pile, Jinny.”

“P’r’aps there won’t be any to-morrow, as you expect,” she said slowly.

The old man started. “What, you and Jake ain’t quarrelled again? You ain’t broke it off at the last moment, same as before? You ain’t had a letter from Jake?” He looked at the white petticoat on the chairback, and shook his head in bewilderment.

“I’ve had no letter,” she answered. “I’ve had no letter from Selby for a month. It was all settled then, and there was no good writing, when he was coming to-morrow with the minister and the licence. Who do you think’d be postman from Selby here? It must have cost him ten dollars to send the last letter.”

“Then what’s the matter? I don’t understand,” the old man urged querulously. He did not want her to marry and leave him, but he wanted no more troubles; he did not relish being asked awkward questions by every mountaineer he met, as to why Jenny Long didn’t marry Jake Lawson.

“There’s only one way that I can be married tomorrow,” she said at last, “and that’s by you taking a man down the Dog Nose Rapids to Bindon to-night.”

He dropped the pigeons on the floor, dumbfounded. “What in—”

He stopped short, in sheer incapacity, to go further. Jenny had not always been easy to understand, but she was wholly incomprehensible now.

She picked up the pigeons and was about to speak, but she glanced at the bedroom door, where her exhausted visitor had stretched himself on her bed, and beckoned her uncle to another room.

“There’s a plate of vittles ready for you in there,” she said. “I’ll tell you as you eat.”

He followed her into the little living-room adorned by the trophies of his earlier achievements with gun and rifle, and sat down at the table, where some food lay covered by a clean white cloth.

“No one’ll ever look after me as you’ve done, Jinny,” he said, as he lifted the cloth and saw the palatable dish ready for him. Then he remembered again about to-morrow and the Dog Nose Rapids.

“What’s it all about, Jinny? What’s that about my canoeing a man down to Bindon?”

“Eat, uncle,” she said more softly than she had yet spoken, for his words about her care of him had brought a moisture to her eyes. “I’ll be back in a minute and tell you all about it.”

“Well, it’s about took away my appetite,” he said. “I feel a kind of sinking.” He took from his pocket a bottle, poured some of its contents into a tin cup, and drank it off.

“No, I suppose you couldn’t take a man down to Bindon,” she said, as she saw his hand trembling on the cup. Then she turned and entered the other room again. Going to the cupboard, she hastily heaped a plate with food, and, taking a dipper of water from a pail near by, she entered her bedroom hastily and placed what she had brought on a small table, as her visitor rose slowly from the bed.

He was about to speak, but she made a protesting gesture.

“I can’t tell you anything yet,” she said. “Who was it come?” he asked.

“My uncle—I’m going to tell him.”

“The men after me may git here any minute,” he urged anxiously.

“They’d not be coming into my room,” she answered, flushing slightly.

“Can’t you hide me down by the river till we start?” he asked, his eyes eagerly searching her face. He was assuming that she would take him down the river: but she gave no sign.

“I’ve got to see if he’ll take you first,” she answered.

“He—your uncle, Tom Sanger? He drinks, I’ve heard. He’d never git to Bindon.”

She did not reply directly to his words. “I’ll come back and tell you. There’s a place you could hide by the river where no one could ever find you,” she said, and left the room.

As she stepped out, she saw the old man standing in the doorway of the other room. His face was petrified with amazement.

“Who you got in that room, Jinny? What man you got in that room? I heard a man’s voice. Is it because o’ him that you bin talkin’ about no weddin’ to-morrow? Is it one o’ the others come back, puttin’ you off Jake again?”

Her eyes flashed fire at his first words, and her breast heaved with anger, but suddenly she became composed again and motioned him to a chair.

“You eat, and I’ll tell you all about it, Uncle Tom,” she said, and, seating herself at the table also, she told him the story of the man who must go to Bindon.

When she had finished, the old man blinked at her for a minute without speaking, then he said slowly: “I heard something ‘bout trouble down at Bindon yisterday from a Hudson’s Bay man goin’ North, but I didn’t take it in. You’ve got a lot o’ sense, Jinny, an’ if you think he’s tellin’ the truth, why, it goes; but it’s as big a mixup as a lariat in a steer’s horns. You’ve got to hide him sure, whoever he is, for I wouldn’t hand an Eskimo over, if I’d taken him in my home once; we’re mountain people. A man ought to be hung for horse-stealin’, but this was different. He was doing it to save a man’s life, an’ that man at Bindon was good to his little gal, an’ she’s dead.”

He moved his head from side to side with the air of a sentimental philosopher. He had all the vanity of a man who had been a success in a small, shrewd, culpable way—had he not evaded the law for thirty years with his whiskey-still?

“I know how he felt,” he continued. “When Betsy died—we was only four years married—I could have crawled into a knot-hole an’ died there. You got to save him, Jinny, but”—he came suddenly to his feet—“he ain’t safe here. They might come any minute, if they’ve got back on his trail. I’ll take him up the gorge. You know where.”

“You sit still, Uncle Tom,” she rejoined. “Leave him where he is a minute. There’s things must be settled first. They ain’t going to look for him in my bedroom, be they?”

The old man chuckled. “I’d like to see ‘em at it. You got a temper, Jinny; and you got a pistol too, eh?” He chuckled again. “As good a shot as any in the mountains. I can see you darin’ ‘em to come on. But what if Jake

come, and he found a man in your bedroom”—he wiped the tears of laughter from his eyes—“why, Jinny—!”

He stopped short, for there was anger in her face. “I don’t want to hear any more of that. I do what I want to do,” she snapped out.

“Well, well, you always done what you wanted; but we got to git him up the hills, till it’s sure they’re out o’ the mountains and gone back. It’ll be days, mebbe.”

“Uncle Tom, you’ve took too much to drink,” she answered. “You don’t remember he’s got to be at Bindon by to-morrow noon. He’s got to save his friend by then.”

“Pshaw! Who’s going to take him down the river to-night? You’re goin’ to be married to-morrow. If you like, you can give him the canoe. It’ll never come back, nor him neither!”

“You’ve been down with me,” she responded suggestively. “And you went down once by yourself.”

He shook his head. “I ain’t been so well this summer. My sight ain’t what it was. I can’t stand the racket as I once could. ‘Pears to me I’m gettin’ old. No, I couldn’t take them rapids, Jinny, not for one frozen minute.”

She looked at him with trouble in her eyes, and her face lost some of its colour. She was fighting back the inevitable, even as its shadow fell upon her. “You wouldn’t want a man to die, if you could save him, Uncle Tom—blown up, sent to Kingdom Come without any warning at all; and perhaps he’s got them that love him—and the world so beautiful.”

“Well, it ain’t nice dyin’ in the summer, when it’s all sun, and there’s plenty everywhere; but there’s no one to go down the river with him. What’s his name?”

Her struggle was over. She had urged him, but in very truth she was urging herself all the time, bringing herself to the axe of sacrifice.

“His name’s Dingley. I’m going down the river with him—down to Bindon.”

The old man’s mouth opened in blank amazement. His eyes blinked helplessly.

“What you talkin’ about, Jinny! Jake’s comin’ up with the minister, an’ you’re goin’ to be married at noon to-morrow.”

“I’m takin’ him”—she jerked her head towards the room where Dingley was—“down Dog Nose Rapids to-night. He’s risked his life for his friend, thinkin’ of her that’s dead an’ gone, and a man’s life is a man’s life. If it was Jake’s life in danger, what’d I think of a woman that could save him, and didn’t?”

“Onct you broke off with Jake Lawson—the day before you was to be married; an’ it’s took years to make up an’ agree again to be spliced. If Jake comes here to-morrow, and you ain’t here, what do you think he’ll do? The neighbours are comin’ for fifty miles round, two is comin’ up a hundred miles, an’ you can’t—Jinny, you can’t do it. I bin sick of answerin’ questions all these years ‘bout you and Jake, an’ I ain’t goin’ through it again. I’ve told more lies than there’s straws in a tick.”

She flamed out. “Then take him down the river yourself—a man to do a man’s work. Are you afeard to take the risk?”

He held out his hands slowly and looked at them. They shook a little. “Yes, Jinny,” he said sadly, “I’m afeard. I ain’t what I was. I made a mistake, Jinny. I’ve took too much whiskey. I’m older than I ought to be. I oughtn’t never to have had a whiskey-still, an’ I wouldn’t have drunk so much. I got money—money for you, Jinny, for you an’ Jake, but I’ve lost what I’ll never git back. I’m afeard to go down the river with him. I’d go smash in the Dog Nose Rapids. I got no nerve. I can’t hunt the grizzly any more, nor the puma, Jinny. I got to keep to common shootin’, now and henceforth, amen! No, I’d go smash in Dog Nose Rapids.”

She caught his hands impulsively. “Don’t you fret, Uncle Tom. You’ve bin a good uncle to me, and you’ve bin a good friend, and you ain’t the first that’s found whiskey too much for him. You ain’t got an enemy in the mountains. Why, I’ve got two or three—”

“Shucks! Women—only women whose beaux left ‘em to follow after you. That’s nothing, an’ they’ll be your friends fast enough after you’re married tomorrow.”

“I ain’t going to be married to-morrow. I’m going down to Bindon to-night. If Jake’s mad, then it’s all over, and there’ll be more trouble among the women up here.”

By this time they had entered the other room. The old man saw the white petticoat on the chair. “No woman in the mountains ever had a petticoat like that, Jinny. It’d make a dress, it’s that pretty an’ neat. Golly, I’d like to see it on you, with the blue skirt over, and just hitched up a little.”

“Oh, shut up—shut up!” she said in sudden anger, and caught up the petticoat as though she would put it away; but presently she laid it down again and smoothed it with quick, nervous fingers. “Can’t you talk sense and leave my clothes alone? If Jake comes, and I’m not here, and he wants to make a fuss, and spoil everything, and won’t wait, you give him this petticoat. You put it in his arms. I bet you’ll have the laugh on him. He’s got a temper.”

“So’ve you, Jinny, dear, so’ve you,” said the old man, laughing. “You’re goin’ to have your own way, same as ever—same as ever.”

II

A moon of exquisite whiteness silvering the world, making shadows on the water as though it were sunlight and the daytime, giving a spectral look to the endless array of poplar trees on the banks, glittering on the foam of the rapids. The spangling stars made the arch of the sky like some gorgeous chancel in a cathedral as vast as life and time. Like the day which was ended, in which the mountain-girl had found a taste of Eden, it seemed too sacred for mortal strife. Now and again there came the note of a night-bird, the croak of a frog from the shore; but the serene stillness and beauty of the primeval North was over all.

For two hours after sunset it had all been silent and brooding, and then two figures appeared on the bank of the great river. A canoe was softly and hastily pushed out from its hidden shelter under the overhanging bank, and was noiselessly paddled out to midstream, dropping down the current meanwhile.

It was Jenny Long and the man who must get to Bindon. They had waited till nine o’clock, when the moon was high and full, to venture forth. Then Dingley had dropped from her bedroom window, had joined her

under the trees, and they had sped away, while the man's hunters, who had come suddenly, and before Jenny could get him away into the woods, were carousing inside. These had tracked their man back to Tom Sanger's house, and at first they were incredulous that Jenny and her uncle had not seen him. They had prepared to search the house, and one had laid his finger on the latch of her bedroom door; but she had flared out with such anger that, mindful of the supper she had already begun to prepare for them, they had desisted, and the whiskey-jug which the old man brought out distracted their attention.

One of their number, known as the Man from Clancey's, had, however, been outside when Dingley had dropped from the window, and had seen him from a distance. He had not given the alarm, but had followed, to make the capture by himself. But Jenny had heard the stir of life behind them, and had made a sharp detour, so that they had reached the shore and were out in mid-stream before their tracker got to the river. Then he called to them to return, but Jenny only bent a little lower and paddled on, guiding the canoe towards the safe channel through the first small rapids leading to the great Dog Nose Rapids.

A rifle-shot rang out, and a bullet "pinged" over the water and splintered the side of the canoe where Dingley sat. He looked calmly back, and saw the rifle raised again, but did not stir, in spite of Jenny's warning to lie down.

"He'll not fire on you so long as he can draw a bead on me," he said quietly.

Again a shot rang out, and the bullet sang past his head.

"If he hits me, you go straight on to Bindon," he continued. "Never mind about me. Go to the Snowdrop Mine. Get there by twelve o'clock, and warn them. Don't stop a second for me—"

Suddenly three shots rang out in succession—Tom Sanger's house had emptied itself on the bank of the river—and Dingley gave a sharp exclamation.

"They've hit me, but it's the same arm as before," he growled. "They got no right to fire at me. It's not the law. Don't stop," he added quickly, as he saw her half turn round.

Now there were loud voices on the shore. Old Tom Sanger was threatening to shoot the first man that fired again, and he would have kept his word.

"Who you firin' at?" he shouted. "That's my niece, Jinny Long, an' you let that boat alone. This ain't the land o' lynch law. Dingley ain't escaped from gaol. You got no right to fire at him."

"No one ever went down Dog Nose Rapids at night," said the Man from Clancey's, whose shot had got Dingley's arm. "There ain't a chance of them doing it. No one's ever done it."

The two were in the roaring rapids now, and the canoe was jumping through the foam like a racehorse. The keen eyes on the bank watched the canoe till it was lost in the half-gloom below the first rapids, and then they went slowly back to Tom Sanger's house.

"So there'll be no wedding to-morrow," said the Man from Clancey's.

"Funerals, more likely," drawled another.

"Jinny Long's in that canoe, an' she ginerally does what she wants to," said Tom Sanger sagely.

"Well, we done our best, and now I hope they'll get to Bindon," said another.

Sanger passed the jug to him freely. Then they sat down and talked of the people who had been drowned in Dog Nose Rapids and of the last wedding in the mountains.

III

It was as the Man from Clancey's had said, no one had ever gone down Dog Nose Rapids in the nighttime, and probably no one but Jenny Long would have ventured it. Dingley had had no idea what a perilous task had been set his rescuer. It was only when the angry roar of the great rapids floated up-stream to them, increasing in volume till they could see the terror of tumbling waters just below, and the canoe shot forward like a snake through the swift, smooth current which would sweep them into the vast caldron, that he realised the terrible hazard of the enterprise.

The moon was directly overhead when they drew upon the race of rocks and fighting water and foam. On either side only the shadowed shore, forsaken by the races which had hunted and roamed and ravaged here—not a light, nor any sign of life, or the friendliness of human presence to make their isolation less complete, their danger, as it were, shared by fellow-mortals. Bright as the moon was, it was not bright enough for perfect pilotage. Never in the history of white men had these rapids been ridden at nighttime. As they sped down the flume of the deep, irresistible current, and were launched into the trouble of rocks and water, Jenny realised how great their peril was, and how different the track of the waters looked at nighttime from daytime. Outlines seemed merged, rocks did not look the same, whirlpools had a different vortex, islands of stone had a new configuration. As they sped on, lurching, jumping, piercing a broken wall of wave and spray like a torpedo, shooting an almost sheer fall, she came to rely on a sense of intuition rather than memory, for night had transformed the waters.

Not a sound escaped either. The man kept his eyes fixed on the woman; the woman scanned the dreadful pathway with eyes deep-set and burning, resolute, vigilant, and yet defiant too, as though she had been trapped into this track of danger, and was fighting without great hope, but with the temerity and nonchalance of despair. Her arms were bare to the shoulder almost, and her face was again and again drenched; but second succeeded second, minute followed minute in a struggle which might well turn a man's hair grey, and now, at last-how many hours was it since they had been cast into this den of roaring waters!—at last, suddenly, over a large fall, and here smooth waters again, smooth and untroubled, and strong and deep. Then, and only then, did a word escape either; but the man had passed through torture and unavailing regret, for he realised that he had had no right to bring this girl into such a fight. It was not her friend who was in danger at Bindon. Her life had been risked without due warrant. "I didn't know, or I wouldn't have asked it," he said in a low voice. "Lord, but you are a wonder—to take that hurdle for no one that belonged to you, and to do it as you've done it. This country will rise to you." He looked back on the raging rapids far behind, and he shuddered. "It was a close call, and no mistake. We must have been within a foot of down-you-go fifty times. But it's all right now, if we can last it out and git there." Again he glanced back, then turned to the girl.

“It makes me pretty sick to look at it,” he continued. “I bin through a lot, but that’s as sharp practice as I want.”

“Come here and let me bind up your arm,” she answered. “They hit you—the sneaks! Are you bleeding much?”

He came near her carefully, as she got the big canoe out of the current into quieter water. She whipped the scarf from about her neck, and with his knife ripped up the seam of his sleeve. Her face was alive with the joy of conflict and elated with triumph. Her eyes were shining. She bathed the wound—the bullet had passed clean through the fleshy part of the arm—and then carefully tied the scarf round it over her handkerchief.

“I guess it’s as good as a man could do it,” she said at last.

“As good as any doctor,” he rejoined.

“I wasn’t talking of your arm,” she said.

“‘Course not. Excuse me. You was talkin’ of them rapids, and I’ve got to say there ain’t a man that could have done it and come through like you. I guess the man that marries you’ll get more than his share of luck.”

“I want none of that,” she said sharply, and picked up her paddle again, her eyes flashing anger.

He took a pistol from his pocket and offered it to her. “I didn’t mean any harm by what I said. Take this if you think I won’t know how to behave myself,” he urged.

She flung up her head a little. “I knew what I was doing before I started,” she said. “Put it away. How far is it, and can we do it in time?”

“If you can hold out, we can do it; but it means going all night and all morning; and it ain’t dawn yet, by a long shot.”

Dawn came at last, and the mist of early morning, and the imperious and dispelling sun; and with mouthfuls of food as they drifted on, the two fixed their eyes on the horizon beyond which lay Bindon. And now it seemed to the girl as though this race to save a life or many lives was the one thing in existence. To-morrow was to-day, and the white petticoat was lying in the little house in the mountains, and her wedding was an interminable distance off, so had this adventure drawn her into its risks and toils and haggard exhaustion.

Eight, nine, ten, eleven o’clock came, and then they saw signs of settlement. Houses appeared here and there upon the banks, and now and then a horseman watched them from the shore, but they could not pause. Bindon—Bindon—Bindon—the Snowdrop Mine at Bindon, and a death-dealing machine timed to do its deadly work, were before the eyes of the two voyageurs.

Half-past eleven, and the town of Bindon was just beyond them. A quarter to twelve, and they had run their canoe into the bank beyond which were the smokestacks and chimneys of the mine. Bindon was peacefully pursuing its way, though here and there were little groups of strikers who had not resumed work.

Dingley and the girl scrambled up the bank. Trembling with fatigue, they hastened on. The man drew ahead of her, for she had paddled for fifteen hours, practically without ceasing, and the ground seemed to rise up at her. But she would not let him stop.

He hurried on, reached the mine, and entered, shouting the name of his friend. It was seven minutes to twelve.

A moment later, a half-dozen men came rushing from that portion of the mine where Dingley had been told the machine was placed, and at their head was Lawson, the man he had come to save.

The girl hastened on to meet them, but she grew faint and leaned against a tree, scarce conscious. She was roused by voices.

“No, it wasn’t me, it wasn’t me that done it; it was a girl. Here she is—Jenny Long! You got to thank her, Jake.”

Jake! Jake! The girl awakened to full understanding now. Jake—what Jake? She looked, then stumbled forward with a cry.

“Jake—it was my Jake!” she faltered. The mine-boss caught her in his arms. “You, Jenny! It’s you that’s saved me!”

Suddenly there was a rumble as of thunder, and a cloud of dust and stone rose from the Snowdrop Mine. The mine-boss tightened his arm round the girl’s waist. “That’s what I missed, through him and you, Jenny,” he said.

“What was you doing here, and not at Selby, Jake?” she asked.

“They sent for me-to stop the trouble here.”

“But what about our wedding to-day?” she asked with a frown.

“A man went from here with a letter to you three days ago,” he said, “asking you to come down here and be married. I suppose he got drunk, or had an accident, and didn’t reach you. It had to be. I was needed here—couldn’t tell what would happen.”

“It has happened out all right,” said Dingley, “and this’ll be the end of it. You got them miners solid now. The strikers’ll eat humble pie after to-day.”

“We’ll be married to-day, just the same,” the mine-boss said, as he gave some brandy to the girl.

But the girl shook her head. She was thinking of a white petticoat in a little house in the mountains. “I’m not going to be married to-day,” she said decisively.

“Well, to-morrow,” said the mine-boss.

But the girl shook her head again. “To-day is tomorrow,” she answered. “You can wait, Jake. I’m going back home to be married.”

QU’APPELLE

(Who calls?)

“But I’m white; I’m not an Indian. My father was a white man. I’ve been brought up as a white girl. I’ve had a white girl’s schooling.”

Her eyes flashed as she sprang to her feet and walked up and down the room for a moment, then stood still, facing her mother,—a dark-faced, pock-marked woman, with heavy, somnolent eyes, and waited for her to speak. The reply came slowly and sullenly—

“I am a Blackfoot woman. I lived on the Muskwat River among the braves for thirty years. I have killed buffalo. I have seen battles. Men, too, I have killed when they came to steal our horses and crept in on our lodges in the night-the Crees! I am a Blackfoot. You are the daughter of a Blackfoot woman. No medicine can cure that. Sit down. You have no sense. You are not white. They will not have you. Sit down.”

The girl’s handsome face flushed; she threw up her hands in an agony of protest. A dreadful anger was in her panting breast, but she could not speak. She seemed to choke with excess of feeling. For an instant she stood still, trembling with agitation, then she sat down suddenly on a great couch covered with soft deerskins and buffalo robes. There was deep in her the habit of obedience to this sombre but striking woman. She had been ruled firmly, almost oppressively, and she had not yet revolted. Seated on the couch, she gazed out of the window at the flying snow, her brain too much on fire for thought, passion beating like a pulse in all her lithe and graceful young body, which had known the storms of life and time for only twenty years.

The wind shrieked and the snow swept past in clouds of blinding drift, completely hiding from sight the town below them, whose civilisation had built itself many habitations and was making roads and streets on the green-brown plain, where herds of buffalo had stamped and streamed and thundered not long ago. The town was a mile and a half away, and these two were alone in a great circle of storm, one of them battling against a tempest which might yet overtake her, against which she had set her face ever since she could remember, though it had only come to violence since her father died two years before—a careless, strong, wilful white man, who had lived the Indian life for many years, but had been swallowed at last by the great wave of civilisation streaming westward and northward, wiping out the game and the Indian, and overwhelming the rough, fighting, hunting, pioneer life. Joel Renton had made money, by good luck chiefly, having held land here and there which he had got for nothing, and had then almost forgotten about it, and, when reminded of it, still held on to it with that defiant stubbornness which often possesses improvident and careless natures. He had never had any real business instinct, and to swagger a little over the land he held and to treat offers of purchase with contempt was the loud assertion of a capacity he did not possess. So it was that stubborn vanity, beneath which was his angry protest against the prejudice felt by the new people of the West for the white pioneer who married an Indian, and lived the Indian life,—so it was that this gave him competence and a comfortable home after the old trader had been driven out by the railway and the shopkeeper. With the first land he sold he sent his daughter away to school in a town farther east and south, where she had been brought in touch with a life that at once cramped and attracted her; where, too, she had felt the first chill of racial ostracism, and had proudly fought it to the end, her weapons being talent, industry, and a hot, defiant ambition.

There had been three years of bitter, almost half-sullen, struggle, lightened by one sweet friendship with a girl whose face she had since drawn in a hundred different poses on stray pieces of paper, on the walls of the big, well-lighted attic to which she retreated for hours every day, when she was not abroad on the prairies, riding the Indian pony that her uncle the Piegan Chief, Ice Breaker, had given her years before. Three years of struggle, and then her father had died, and the refuge for her vexed, defiant heart was gone. While he lived she could affirm the rights of a white man’s daughter, the rights of the daughter of a pioneer who had helped to make the West; and her pride in him had given a glow to her cheek and a spring to her step which drew every eye. In the chief street of Portage la Drome men would stop their trafficking and women nudge each other when she passed, and wherever she went she stirred interest, excited admiration, or aroused prejudice—but the prejudice did not matter so long as her father, Joel Renton, lived. Whatever his faults, and they were many—sometimes he drank too much, and swore a great deal, and bullied and stormed—she blinked at them all, for he was of the conquering race, a white man who had slept in white sheets and eaten off white tablecloths, and used a knife and fork, since he was born; and the women of his people had had soft petticoats and fine stockings, and silk gowns for festal days, and feathered hats of velvet, and shoes of polished leather, always and always, back through many generations. She had held her head high, for she was of his women, of the women of his people, with all their rights and all their claims. She had held it high till that stormy day—just such a day as this, with the surf of snow breaking against the house—when they carried him in out of the wild turmoil and snow, laying him on the couch where she now sat, and her head fell on his lifeless breast, and she cried out to him in vain to come back to her.

Before the world her head was still held high, but in the attic-room, and out on the prairies far away, where only the coyote or the prairie-hen saw, her head drooped, and her eyes grew heavy with pain and sombre protest. Once in an agony of loneliness, and cruelly hurt by a conspicuous slight put upon her at the Portage by the wife of the Reeve of the town, who had daughters twain of pure white blood got from behind the bar of a saloon in Winnipeg, she had thrown open her window at night with the frost below zero, and stood in her thin nightdress, craving the death which she hoped the cold would give her soon. It had not availed, however, and once again she had ridden out in a blizzard to die, but had come upon a man lost in the snow, and her own misery had passed from her, and her heart, full of the blood of plainsmen, had done for another what it would not do for itself. The Indian in her had, with strange, sure instinct, found its way to Portage la Drome, the man with both hands and one foot frozen, on her pony, she walking at his side, only conscious that she had saved one, not two, lives that day.

Here was another such day, here again was the storm in her heart which had driven her into the plains that other time, and here again was that tempest of white death outside.

“You have no sense. You are not white. They will not have you. Sit down—”

The words had fallen on her ears with a cold, deadly smother. There came a chill upon her which stilled the wild pulses in her, which suddenly robbed the eyes of their brightness and gave a drawn look to the face.

“You are not white. They will not have you, Pauline.” The Indian mother repeated the words after a moment, her eyes grown still more gloomy; for in her, too, there was a dark tide of passion moving. In all the outlived years this girl had ever turned to the white father rather than to her, and she had been left more and more alone. Her man had been kind to her, and she had been a faithful wife, but she had resented the natural instinct of her half-breed child, almost white herself and with the feelings and ways of the whites, to turn always to her father, as though to a superior guide, to a higher influence and authority. Was not she herself the descendant of Blackfoot and Piegan chiefs through generations of rulers and warriors? Was there not Piegan and Blackfoot blood in the girl’s veins? Must only the white man’s blood be reckoned when they made up their daily account and balanced the books of their lives, credit and debtor,—misunderstanding and kind act, neglect and tenderness, reproof and praise, gentleness and impulse, anger and caress,—to be set down in the everlasting record? Why must the Indian always give way—Indian habits, Indian desires, the Indian way of doing things, the Indian point of view, Indian food, Indian medicine? Was it all bad, and only that which belonged to white life good?

“Look at your face in the glass, Pauline,” she added at last. “You are good-looking, but it isn’t the good looks of the whites. The lodge of a chieftainess is the place for you. There you would have praise and honour; among the whites you are only a half-breed. What is the good? Let us go back to the life out there beyond the Muskwat River—up beyond. There is hunting still, a little, and the world is quiet, and nothing troubles. Only the wild dog barks at night, or the wolf sniffs at the door and all day there is singing. Somewhere out beyond the Muskwat the feasts go on, and the old men build the great fires, and tell tales, and call the wind out of the north, and make the thunder speak; and the young men ride to the hunt or go out to battle, and build lodges for the daughters of the tribe; and each man has his woman, and each woman has in her breast the honour of the tribe, and the little ones fill the lodge with laughter. Like a pocket of deerskin is every house, warm and small and full of good things. Hai-yai, what is this life to that! There you will be head and chief of all, for there is money enough for a thousand horses; and your father was a white man, and these are the days when the white man rules. Like clouds before the sun are the races of men, and one race rises and another falls. Here you are not first, but last; and the child of the white father and mother, though they be as the dirt that flies from a horse’s heels, it is before you. Your mother is a Blackfoot.”

As the woman spoke slowly and with many pauses, the girl’s mood changed, and there came into her eyes a strange, dark look deeper than anger. She listened with a sudden patience which stilled the agitation in her breast and gave a little touch of rigidity to her figure. Her eyes withdrew from the wild storm without and gravely settled on her mother’s face, and with the Indian woman’s last words understanding pierced, but did not dispel, the sombre and ominous look in her eyes. There was silence for a moment, and then she spoke almost as evenly as her mother had done.

“I will tell you everything. You are my mother, and I love you; but you will not see the truth. When my father took you from the lodges and brought you here, it was the end of the Indian life. It was for you to go on with him, but you would not go. I was young, but I saw, and I said that in all things I would go with him. I did not know that it would be hard, but at school, at the very first, I began to understand. There was only one, a French girl—I loved her—a girl who said to me, ‘You are as white as I am, as anyone, and your heart is the same, and you are beautiful.’ Yes, Manette said I was beautiful.”

She paused a moment, a misty, far-away look came into her eyes, her fingers clasped and unclasped, and she added:

“And her brother, Julien,—he was older,—when he came to visit Manette, he spoke to me as though I was all white, and was good to me. I have never forgotten, never. It was five years ago, but I remember him. He was tall and strong, and as good as Manette—as good as Manette. I loved Manette, but she suffered for me, for I was not like the others, and my ways were different—then. I had lived up there on the Warais among the lodges, and I had not seen things—only from my father, and he did so much in an Indian way. So I was sick at heart, and sometimes I wanted to die; and once—But there was Manette, and she would laugh and sing, and we would play together, and I would speak French and she would speak English, and I learned from her to forget the Indian ways. What were they to me? I had loved them when I was of them, but I came on to a better life. The Indian life is to the white life as the parfleche pouch to—to this.” She laid her hand upon a purse of delicate silver mesh hanging at her waist. “When your eyes are opened you must go on, you cannot stop. There is no going back. When you have read of all there is in the white man’s world, when you have seen, then there is no returning. You may end it all, if you wish, in the snow, in the river, but there is no returning. The lodge of a chief—ah, if my father had heard you say that—!”

The Indian woman shifted heavily in her chair, then shrank away from the look fixed on her. Once or twice she made as if she would speak, but sank down in the great chair, helpless and dismayed.

“The lodge of a chief!” the girl continued in a low, bitter voice. “What is the lodge of a chief? A smoky fire, a pot, a bed of skins, aih-yi! If the lodges of the Indians were millions, and I could be head of all, and rule the land, yet would I rather be a white girl in the hut of her white man, struggling for daily bread among the people who sweep the buffalo out, but open up the land with the plough, and make a thousand live where one lived before. It is peace you want, my mother, peace and solitude, in which the soul goes to sleep. Your days of hope are over, and you want to drowse by the fire. I want to see the white men’s cities grow, and the armies coming over the hill with the ploughs and the reapers and the mowers, and the wheels and the belts and engines of the great factories, and the white woman’s life spreading everywhere; for I am a white man’s daughter. I can’t be both Indian and white. I will not be like the sun when the shadow cuts across it and the land grows dark. I will not be half-breed. I will be white or I will be Indian; and I will be white, white only. My heart is white, my tongue is white, I think, I feel, as white people think and feel. What they wish, I wish; as they live, I live; as white women dress, I dress.”

She involuntarily drew up the dark red skirt she wore, showing a white petticoat and a pair of fine

stockings on an ankle as shapely as she had ever seen among all the white women she knew. She drew herself up with pride, and her body had a grace and ease which the white woman's convention had not cramped.

Yet, with all her protests, no one would have thought her English. She might have been Spanish, or Italian, or Roumanian, or Slav, though nothing of her Indian blood showed in purely Indian characteristics, and something sparkled in her, gave a radiance to her face and figure which the storm and struggle in her did not smother. The white women of Portage la Drome were too blind, too prejudiced, to see all that she really was, and admiring white men could do little, for Pauline would have nothing to do with them till the women met her absolutely as an equal; and from the other halfbreeds, who intermarried with each other and were content to take a lower place than the pure whites, she held aloof, save when any of them was ill or in trouble. Then she recognised the claim of race, and came to their doors with pity and soft impulses to help them. French and Scotch and English half-breeds, as they were, they understood how she was making a fight for all who were half-Indian, half-white, and watched her with a furtive devotion, acknowledging her superior place, and proud of it.

"I will not stay here," said the Indian mother with sullen stubbornness. "I will go back beyond the Warais. My life is my own life, and I will do what I like with it."

The girl started, but became composed again on the instant. "Is your life all your own, mother?" she asked. "I did not come into the world of my own will. If I had I would have come all white or all Indian. I am your daughter, and I am here, good or bad—is your life all your own?"

"You can marry and stay here, when I go. You are twenty. I had my man, your father, when I was seventeen. You can marry. There are men. You have money. They will marry you—and forget the rest."

With a cry of rage and misery the girl sprang to her feet and started forwards, but stopped suddenly at sound of a hasty knocking and a voice asking admittance. An instant later, a huge, bearded, broad-shouldered man stepped inside, shaking himself free of the snow, laughing half-sheepishly as he did so, and laying his fur-cap and gloves with exaggerated care on the wide window-sill.

"John Alloway," said the Indian woman in a voice of welcome, and with a brightening eye, for it would seem as though he came in answer to her words of a few moments before. With a mother's instinct she had divined at once the reason for the visit, though no warning thought crossed the mind of the girl, who placed a chair for their visitor with a heartiness which was real—was not this the white man she had saved from death in the snow a year ago? Her heart was soft towards the life she had kept in the world. She smiled at him, all the anger gone from her eyes, and there was almost a touch of tender anxiety in her voice as she said "What brought you out in this blizzard? It wasn't safe. It doesn't seem possible you got here from the Portage."

The huge ranchman and auctioneer laughed cheerily. "Once lost, twice get there," he exclaimed, with a quizzical toss of the head, thinking he had said a good thing. "It's a year ago to the very day that I was lost out back"—he jerked a thumb over his shoulder—"and you picked me up and brought me in; and what was I to do but come out on the anniversary and say thank you? I'd fixed up all year to come to you, and I wasn't to be stopped, 'cause it was like the day we first met, old Coldmaker hitting the world with his whips of frost, and shaking his ragged blankets of snow over the wild west."

"Just such a day," said the Indian woman after a pause. Pauline remained silent, placing a little bottle of cordial before their visitor, with which he presently regaled himself, raising his glass with an air.

"Many happy returns to us both!" he said, and threw the liquor down his throat, smacked his lips, and drew his hand down his great moustache and beard like some vast animal washing its face with its paw. Smiling and yet not at ease, he looked at the two women and nodded his head encouragingly, but whether the encouragement was for himself or for them he could not have told.

His last words, however, had altered the situation. The girl had caught at a suggestion in them which startled her. This rough white plainsman was come to make love to her, and to say—what? He was at once awkward and confident, afraid of her, of her refinement, grace, beauty, and education, and yet confident in the advantage of his position, a white man bending to a half-breed girl. He was not conscious of the condescension and majesty of his demeanour, but it was there, and his untutored words and ways must make it all too apparent to the girl. The revelation of the moment made her at once triumphant and humiliated. This white man had come to make love to her, that was apparent; but that he, ungrammatical, crude, and rough, should think he had but to put out his hand, and she in whom every subtle emotion and influence had delicate response, whose words and ways were as far removed from his as day from night, would fly to him, brought the flush of indignation to her cheek. She responded to his toast with a pleasant nod, however, and said:

"But if you will keep coming in such wild storms, there will not be many anniversaries." Laughing, she poured out another glass of liquor for him.

"Well, now, p'r'aps you're right, and so the only thing to do is not to keep coming, but to stay—stay right where you are."

The Indian woman could not see her daughter's face, which was turned to the fire, but she herself smiled at John Alloway, and nodded her head approvingly. Here was the cure for her own trouble and loneliness. Pauline and she, who lived in different worlds, and yet were tied to each other by circumstances they could not control, would each work out her own destiny after her own nature, since John Alloway had come a-wooing. She would go back on the Warais, and Pauline would remain at the Portage, a white woman with her white man. She would go back to the smoky fires in the huddled lodges; to the venison stew and the snake dance; to the feasts of the Medicine Men, and the long sleeps in the summer days, and the winter's tales, and be at rest among her own people; and Pauline would have revenge of the wife of the prancing Reeve, and perhaps the people would forget who her mother was.

With these thoughts flying through her sluggish mind, she rose and moved heavily from the room, with a parting look of encouragement at Alloway, as though to say, a man that is bold is surest.

With her back to the man, Pauline watched her mother leave the room, saw the look she gave Alloway. When the door was closed she turned and looked Alloway in the eyes.

“How old are you?” she asked suddenly.

He stirred in his seat nervously. “Why, fifty, about,” he answered with confusion.

“Then you’ll be wise not to go looking for anniversaries in blizzards, when they’re few at the best,” she said with a gentle and dangerous smile.

“Fifty-why, I’m as young as most men of thirty,” he responded with an uncertain laugh. “I’d have come here to-day if it had been snowing pitchforks and chain-lightning. I made up my mind I would. You saved my life, that’s dead sure; and I’d be down among the moles if it wasn’t for you and that Piegan pony of yours. Piegan ponies are wonders in a storm-seem to know their way by instinct. You, too—why, I bin on the plains all my life, and was no better than a baby that day; but you—why, you had Piegan in you, why, yes—”

He stopped short for a moment, checked by the look in her face, then went blindly on: “And you’ve got Blackfoot in you, too; and you just felt your way through the tornado and over the blind prairie like a bird reaching for the hills. It was as easy to you as picking out a moverick in a bunch of steers to me. But I never could make out what you was doing on the prairie that terrible day. I’ve thought of it a hundred times. What was you doing, if it ain’t cheek to ask?”

“I was trying to lose a life,” she answered quietly, her eyes dwelling on his face, yet not seeing him; for it all came back on her, the agony which had driven her out into the tempest to be lost evermore.

He laughed. “Well, now, that’s good,” he said; “that’s what they call speaking sarcastic. You was out to save, and not to lose, a life; that was proved to the satisfaction of the court.” He paused and chuckled to himself, thinking he had been witty, and continued: “And I was that court, and my judgment was that the debt of that life you saved had to be paid to you within one calendar year, with interest at the usual per cent for mortgages on good security. That was my judgment, and there’s no appeal from it. I am the great Justinian in this case.”

“Did you ever save anybody’s life?” she asked, putting the bottle of cordial away, as he filled his glass for the third time.

“Twice certain, and once dividin’ the honours,” he answered, pleased at the question.

“And did you expect to get any pay, with or without interest?” she added.

“Me? I never thought of it again. But yes—by gol, I did! One case was funny, as funny can be. It was Ricky Wharton over on the Muskwat River. I saved his life right enough, and he came to me a year after and said, You saved my life, now what are you going to do with it? I’m stony broke. I owe a hundred dollars, and I wouldn’t be owing it if you hadn’t saved my life. When you saved it I was five hunderd to the good, and I’d have left that much behind me. Now I’m on the rocks, because you insisted on saving my life; and you just got to take care of me.’ I ‘insisted!’ Well, that knocked me silly, and I took him on—blame me, if I didn’t keep Ricky a whole year, till he went north looking for gold. Get pay—why, I paid! Saving life has its responsibilities, little gal.”

“You can’t save life without running some risk yourself, not as a rule, can you?” she said, shrinking from his familiarity.

“Not as a rule,” he replied. “You took on a bit of risk with me, you and your Piegan pony.”

“Oh, I was young,” she responded, leaning over the table, and drawing faces on a piece of paper before her. “I could take more risks, I was only nineteen!”

“I don’t catch on,” he rejoined. “If it’s sixteen or—”

“Or fifty,” she interposed.

“What difference does it make? If you’re done for, it’s the same at nineteen as fifty, and vicey-versey.”

“No, it’s not the same,” she answered. “You leave so much more that you want to keep, when you go at fifty.”

“Well, I dunno. I never thought of that.”

“There’s all that has belonged to you. You’ve been married, and have children, haven’t you?”

He started, frowned, then straightened himself. “I got one girl—she’s east with her grandmother,” he said jerkily.

“That’s what I said; there’s more to leave behind at fifty,” she replied, a red spot on each cheek. She was not looking at him, but at the face of a man on the paper before her—a young man with abundant hair, a strong chin, and big, eloquent eyes; and all around his face she had drawn the face of a girl many times, and beneath the faces of both she was writing Manette and Julien.

The water was getting too deep for John Alloway.

He floundered towards the shore. “I’m no good at words,” he said—“no good at argyment; but I’ve got a gift for stories—round the fire of a night, with a pipe and a tin basin of tea; so I’m not going to try and match you. You’ve had a good education down at Winnipeg. Took every prize, they say, and led the school, though there was plenty of fuss because they let you do it, and let you stay there, being half-Indian. You never heard what was going on outside, I s’pose. It didn’t matter, for you won out. Blamed foolishness, trying to draw the line between red and white that way. Of course, it’s the women always, always the women, striking out for all-white or nothing. Down there at Portage they’ve treated you mean, mean as dirt. The Reeve’s wife—well, we’ll fix that up all right. I guess John Alloway ain’t to be bluffed. He knows too much and they all know he knows enough. When John Alloway, 32 Main Street, with a ranch on the Katanay, says, ‘We’re coming—Mr. and Mrs. John Alloway is coming,’ they’ll get out their cards visite, I guess.”

Pauline’s head bent lower, and she seemed laboriously etching lines into the faces before her—Manette and Julien, Julien and Manette; and there came into her eyes the youth and light and gaiety of the days when Julien came of an afternoon and the riverside rang with laughter; the dearest, lightest days she had ever spent.

The man of fifty went on, seeing nothing but a girl over whom he was presently going to throw the lasso of his affection, and take her home with him, yielding and glad, a white man, and his half-breed girl—but such a

half-breed!

"I seen enough of the way some of them women treated you," he continued, "and I sez to myself, Her turn next. There's a way out, I sez, and John Alloway pays his debts. When the anniversary comes round I'll put things right, I sez to myself. She saved my life, and she shall have the rest of it, if she'll take it, and will give a receipt in full, and open a new account in the name of John and Pauline Alloway. Catch it? See—Pauline?"

Slowly she got to her feet. There was a look in her eyes such as had been in her mother's a little while before, but a hundred times intensified: a look that belonged to the flood and flow of generations of Indian life, yet controlled in her by the order and understanding of centuries of white men's lives, the pervasive, dominating power of race.

For an instant she kept her eyes towards the window. The storm had suddenly ceased, and a glimmer of sunset light was breaking over the distant wastes of snow.

"You want to pay a debt you think you owe," she said, in a strange, lustreless voice, turning to him at last. "Well, you have paid it. You have given me a book to read which I will keep always. And I give you a receipt in full for your debt."

"I don't know about any book," he answered dazedly. "I want to marry you right away."

"I am sorry, but it is not necessary," she replied suggestively. Her face was very pale now.

"But I want to. It ain't a debt. That was only a way of putting it. I want to make you my wife. I got some position, and I can make the West sit up, and look at you and be glad."

Suddenly her anger flared out, low and vivid and fierce, but her words were slow and measured. "There is no reason why I should marry you—not one. You offer me marriage as a prince might give a penny to a beggar. If my mother were not an Indian woman, you would not have taken it all as a matter of course. But my father was a white man, and I am a white man's daughter, and I would rather marry an Indian, who would think me the best thing there was in the light of the sun, than marry you. Had I been pure white you would not have been so sure, you would have asked, not offered. I am not obliged to you. You ought to go to no woman as you came to me. See, the storm has stopped. You will be quite safe going back now. The snow will be deep, perhaps, but it is not far."

She went to the window, got his cap and gloves, and handed them to him. He took them, dumbfounded and overcome.

"Say, I ain't done it right, mebbe, but I meant well, and I'd be good to you and proud of you, and I'd love you better than anything I ever saw," he said shamefacedly, but eagerly and honestly too.

"Ah, you should have said those last words first," she answered.

"I say them now."

"They come too late; but they would have been too late in any case," she added. "Still, I am glad you said them."

She opened the door for him.

"I made a mistake," he urged humbly. "I understand better now. I never had any schoolin'."

"Oh, it isn't that," she answered gently. "Goodbye."

Suddenly he turned. "You're right—it couldn't ever be," he said. "You're—you're great. And I owe you my life still."

He stepped out into the biting air.

For a moment Pauline stood motionless in the middle of the room, her gaze fixed upon the door which had just closed; then, with a wild gesture of misery and despair, she threw herself upon the couch in a passionate outburst of weeping. Sobs shook her from head to foot, and her hands, clenched above her head, twitched convulsively.

Presently the door opened and her mother looked in eagerly. At what she saw her face darkened and hardened for an instant, but then the girl's utter abandonment of grief and agony convinced and conquered her. Some glimmer of the true understanding of the problem which Pauline represented got into her heart, and drove the sullen selfishness from her face and eyes and mind. She came over heavily and, sinking upon her knees, swept an arm around the girl's shoulder. She realised what had happened, and probably this was the first time in her life that she had ever come by instinct to a revelation of her daughter's mind, or of the faithful meaning of incidents of their lives.

"You said no to John Alloway," she murmured. Defiance and protest spoke in the swift gesture of the girl's hands. "You think because he was white that I'd drop into his arms! No—no—no!"

"You did right, little one."

The sobs suddenly stopped, and the girl seemed to listen with all her body. There was something in her Indian mother's voice she had never heard before—at least, not since she was a little child, and swung in a deer-skin hammock in a tamarac tree by Renton's Lodge, where the chiefs met, and the West paused to rest on its onward march. Something of the accents of the voice that crooned to her then was in the woman's tones now.

"He offered it like a lump of sugar to a bird—I know. He didn't know that you have great blood—yes, but it is true. My man's grandfather, he was of the blood of the kings of England. My man had the proof. And for a thousand years my people have been chiefs. There is no blood in all the West like yours. My heart was heavy, and dark thoughts came to me, because my man is gone, and the life is not my life, and I am only an Indian woman from the Warais, and my heart goes out there always now. But some great Medicine has been poured into my heart. As I stood at the door and saw you lying there, I called to the Sun. 'O great Spirit,' I said, 'help me to understand; for this girl is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, and Evil has come between us!' And the Sun Spirit poured the Medicine into my spirit, and there is no cloud between us now. It has passed away, and I see. Little white one, the white life is the only life, and I will live it with you till a white man comes and gives you a white man's home. But not John Alloway—shall the crow nest with the oriole?"

As the woman spoke with slow, measured voice, full of the cadences of a heart revealing itself, the girl's breath at first seemed to stop, so still she lay; then, as the true understanding of the words came to her, she panted with excitement, her breast heaved, and the blood flushed her face. When the slow voice ceased, and the room became still, she lay quiet for a moment, letting the new thing find secure lodgment in her thought; then, suddenly, she raised herself and threw her arms round her mother in a passion of affection.

"Lalika! O mother Lalika!" she said tenderly, and kissed her again and again. Not since she was a little girl, long before they left the Warais, had she called her mother by her Indian name, which her father had humorously taught her to do in those far-off happy days by the beautiful, singing river and the exquisite woods, when, with a bow and arrow, she had ranged a young Diana who slew only with love.

"Lalika, mother Lalika, it is like the old, old times," she added softly. "Ah, it does not matter now, for you understand!"

"I do not understand altogether," murmured the Indian woman gently. "I am not white, and there is a different way of thinking; but I will hold your hand, and we will live the white life together."

Cheek to cheek they saw the darkness come, and, afterwards, the silver moon steal up over a frozen world, in which the air bit like steel and braced the heart like wine. Then, at last, before it was nine o'clock, after her custom, the Indian woman went to bed, leaving her daughter brooding peacefully by the fire.

For a long time Pauline sat with hands clasped in her lap, her gaze on the tossing flames, in her heart and mind a new feeling of strength and purpose. The way before her was not clear, she saw no further than this day, and all that it had brought; yet she was as one that has crossed a direful flood and finds herself on a strange shore in an unknown country, with the twilight about her, yet with so much of danger passed that there was only the thought of the moment's safety round her, the camp-fire to be lit, and the bed to be made under the friendly trees and stars.

For a half-hour she sat so, and then, suddenly, she raised her head listening, leaning towards the window, through which the moonlight streamed. She heard her name called without, distinct and strange—"Pauline! Pauline!"

Starting up, she ran to the door and opened it. All was silent and cruelly cold. Nothing but the wide plain of snow and the steely air. But as she stood intently listening, the red glow from the fire behind her, again came the cry—"Pauline!" not far away. Her heart beat hard, and she raised her head and called—why was it she should call out in a language not her own? "Qu'appelle? Qu'appelle?"

And once again on the still night air came the trembling appeal—"Pauline!"

"Qu'appelle? Qu'appelle?" she cried, then, with a gasping murmur of understanding and recognition she ran forwards in the frozen night towards the sound of the voice. The same intuitive sense which had made her call out in French, without thought or reason, had revealed to her who it was that called; or was it that even in the one word uttered there was the note of a voice always remembered since those days with Manette at Winnipeg?

Not far away from the house, on the way to Portage la Drome, but a little distance from the road, was a crevasse, and towards this she sped, for once before an accident had happened there. Again the voice called as she sped—"Pauline!" and she cried out that she was coming. Presently she stood above the declivity, and peered over. Almost immediately below her, a few feet down, was a man lying in the snow. He had strayed from the obliterated road, and had fallen down the crevasse, twisting his foot cruelly. Unable to walk he had crawled several hundred yards in the snow, but his strength had given out, and then he had called to the house, on whose dark windows flickered the flames of the fire, the name of the girl he had come so far to see. With a cry of joy and pain at once she recognised him now. It was as her heart had said—it was Julien, Manette's brother. In a moment she was beside him, her arm around his shoulder.

"Pauline!" he said feebly, and fainted in her arms. An instant later she was speeding to the house, and, rousing her mother and two of the stablemen, she snatched a flask of brandy from a cupboard and hastened back.

An hour later Julien Labrosse lay in the great sitting-room beside the fire, his foot and ankle bandaged, and at ease, his face alight with all that had brought him there. And once again the Indian mother with a sure instinct knew why he had come, and saw that now her girl would have a white woman's home, and, for her man, one of the race like her father's race, white and conquering.

"I'm sorry to give trouble," Julien said, laughing—he had a trick of laughing lightly; "but I'll be able to get back to the Portage to-morrow."

To this the Indian mother said, however: "To please yourself is a great thing, but to please others is better; and so you will stay here till you can walk back to the Portage, M'sieu' Julien."

"Well, I've never been so comfortable," he said—"never so—happy. If you don't mind the trouble!" The Indian woman nodded pleasantly, and found an excuse to leave the room. But before she went she contrived to place near his elbow one of the scraps of paper on which Pauline had drawn his face, with that of Manette. It brought a light of hope and happiness into his eyes, and he thrust the paper under the fur robes of the couch.

"What are you doing with your life?" Pauline asked him, as his eyes sought hers a few moments later.

"Oh, I have a big piece of work before me," he answered eagerly, "a great chance—to build a bridge over the St. Lawrence, and I'm only thirty! I've got my start. Then, I've made over the old Seigneury my father left me, and I'm going to live in it. It will be a fine place, when I've done with it—comfortable and big, with old oak timbers and walls, and deep fireplaces, and carvings done in the time of Louis Quinze, and dark red velvet curtains for the drawingroom, and skins and furs. Yes, I must have skins and furs like these here." He smoothed the skins with his hand.

"Manette, she will live with you?" Pauline asked. "Oh no, her husband wouldn't like that. You see, Manette is to be married. She told me to tell you all about it."

He told her all there was to tell of Manette's courtship, and added that the wedding would take place in the spring.

“Manette wanted it when the leaves first flourish and the birds come back,” he said gaily; “and so she’s not going to live with me at the Seigneury, you see. No, there it is, as fine a house, good enough for a prince, and I shall be there alone, unless—”

His eyes met hers, and he caught the light that was in them, before the eyelids drooped over them and she turned her head to the fire. “But the spring is two months off yet,” he added.

“The spring?” she asked, puzzled, yet half afraid to speak.

“Yes, I’m going into my new house when Manette goes into her new house—in the spring. And I won’t go alone if—”

He caught her eyes again, but she rose hurriedly and said: “You must sleep now. Good-night.” She held out her hand.

“Well, I’ll tell you the rest to-morrow-to-morrow night when it’s quiet like this, and the stars shine,” he answered. “I’m going to have a home of my own like this—ah, bien sur, Pauline.”

That night the old Indian mother prayed to the Sun. “O great Spirit,” she said, “I give thanks for the Medicine poured into my heart. Be good to my white child when she goes with her man to the white man’s home far away. O great Spirit, when I return to the lodges of my people, be kind to me, for I shall be lonely; I shall not have my child; I shall not hear my white man’s voice. Give me good Medicine, O Sun and great Father, till my dream tells me that my man comes from over the hills for me once more.”

THE STAKE AND THE PLUMB-LINE

She went against all good judgment in marrying him; she cut herself off from her own people, from the life in which she had been an alluring and beautiful figure. Washington had never had two such seasons as those in which she moved; for the diplomatic circle who had had “the run of the world” knew her value, and were not content without her. She might have made a brilliant match with one ambassador thirty years older than herself—she was but twenty-two; and there were at least six attaches and secretaries of legation who entered upon a tournament for her heart and hand; but she was not for them. All her fine faculties of tact and fairness, of harmless strategy, and her gifts of wit and unexpected humour were needed to keep her cavaliers constant and hopeful to the last; but she never faltered, and she did not fail. The faces of old men brightened when they saw her, and one or two ancient figures who, for years, had been seldom seen at social functions now came when they knew she was to be present. There were, of course, a few women who said she would coquette with any male from nine to ninety; but no man ever said so; and there was none, from first to last, but smiled with pleasure at even the mention of her name, so had her vivacity, intelligence, and fine sympathy conquered them. She was a social artist by instinct. In their hearts they all recognised how fair and impartial she was; and she drew out of every man the best that was in him. The few women who did not like her said that she chattered; but the truth was she made other people talk by swift suggestion or delicate interrogation.

After the blow fell, Freddy Hartzman put the matter succinctly, and told the truth faithfully, when he said, “The first time I met her, I told her all I’d ever done that could be told, and all I wanted to do; including a resolve to carry her off to some desert place and set up a Kingdom of Two. I don’t know how she did it. I was like a tap, and poured myself out; and when it was all over, I thought she was the best talker I’d ever heard. But yet she’d done nothing except look at me and listen, and put in a question here and there, that was like a baby asking to see your watch. Oh, she was a lily-flower, was Sally Seabrook, and I’ve never been sorry I told her all my little story! It did me good. Poor darling—it makes me sick sometimes when I think of it. Yet she’ll win out all right—a hundred to one she’ll win out. She was a star.”

Freddy Hartzman was in an embassy of repute; he knew the chancelleries and salons of many nations, and was looked upon as one of the ablest and shrewdest men in the diplomatic service. He had written one of the best books on international law in existence, he talked English like a native, he had published a volume of delightful verse, and had omitted to publish several others, including a tiny volume which Sally Seabrook’s charms had inspired him to write. His view of her was shared by most men who knew the world, and especially by the elderly men who had a real knowledge of human nature, among whom was a certain important member of the United States executive called John Appleton. When the end of all things at Washington came for Sally, these two men united to bear her up, that her feet should not stumble upon the stony path of the hard journey she had undertaken.

Appleton was not a man of much speech, but his words had weight; for he was not only a minister; he came of an old family which had ruled the social destinies of a state, and had alternately controlled and disturbed its politics. On the day of the sensation, in the fiery cloud of which Sally disappeared, Appleton delivered himself of his mind in the matter at a reception given by the President.

“She will come back—and we will all take her back, be glad to have her back,” he said. “She has the grip of a lever which can lift the eternal hills with the right pressure. Leave her alone—leave her alone. This is a democratic country, and she’ll prove democracy a success before she’s done.”

The world knew that John Appleton had offered her marriage, and he had never hidden the fact. What they did not know was that she had told him what she meant to do before she did it. He had spoken to her plainly, bluntly, then with a voice that was blurred and a little broken, urging her against the course towards which she was set; but it had not availed; and, realising that he had come upon a powerful will underneath the sunny and so human surface, he had ceased to protest, to bear down upon her mind with his own iron force. When he realised that all his reasoning was wasted, that all worldly argument was vain, he made one last attempt, a forlorn hope, as though to put upon record what he believed to be the truth.

“There is no position you cannot occupy,” he said. “You have the perfect gift in private life, and you have a

public gift. You have a genius for ruling. Say, my dear, don't wreck it all. I know you are not for me, but there are better men in the country than I am. Hartzman will be a great man one day—he wants you. Young Tilden wants you; he has millions, and he will never disgrace them or you, the power which they can command, and the power which you have. And there are others. Your people have told you they will turn you off; the world will say things—will rend you. There is nothing so popular for the moment as the fall of a favourite. But that's nothing—it's nothing at all compared with the danger to yourself. I didn't sleep last night thinking of it. Yet I'm glad you wrote me; it gave me time to think, and I can tell you the truth as I see it. Haven't you thought that he will drag you down, down, down, wear out your soul, break and sicken your life, destroy your beauty—you are beautiful, my dear, beyond what the world sees, even. Give it up—ah, give it up, and don't break our hearts! There are too many people loving you for you to sacrifice them—and yourself, too.... You've had such a good time!"

"It's been like a dream," she interrupted, in a faraway voice, "like a dream, these two years."

"And it's been such a good dream," he urged; "and you will only go to a bad one, from which you will never wake. The thing has fastened on him; he will never give it up. And penniless, too—his father has cast him off. My girl, it's impossible. Listen to me. There's no one on earth that would do more for you than I would—no one."

"Dear, dear friend!" she cried with a sudden impulse, and caught his hand in hers and kissed it before he could draw it back. "You are so true, and you think you are right. But, but"—her eyes took on a deep, steady, far-away look—"but I will save him; and we shall not be penniless in the end. Meanwhile I have seven hundred dollars a year of my own. No one can touch that. Nothing can change me now—and I have promised."

When he saw her fixed determination, he made no further protest, but asked that he might help her, be with her the next day, when she was to take a step which the wise world would say must lead to sorrow and a miserable end.

The step she took was to marry Jim Templeton, the drunken, cast-off son of a millionaire senator from Kentucky, who controlled railways, and owned a bank, and had so resented his son's inebriate habits that for five years he had never permitted Jim's name to be mentioned in his presence. Jim had had twenty thousand dollars left him by his mother, and a small income of three hundred dollars from an investment which had been made for him when a little boy. And this had carried him on; for, drunken as he was, he had sense enough to eke out the money, limiting himself to three thousand dollars a year. He had four thousand dollars left, and his tiny income of three hundred, when he went to Sally Seabrook, after having been sober for a month, and begged her to marry him.

Before dissipation had made him look ten years older than he was, there had been no handsomer man in all America. Even yet he had a remarkable face; long, delicate, with dark brown eyes, as fair a forehead as man could wish, and black, waving hair, streaked with grey-grey, though he was but twenty-nine years of age.

When Sally was fifteen and he twenty-two, he had fallen in love with her and she with him; and nothing had broken the early romance. He had captured her young imagination, and had fastened his image on her heart. Her people, seeing the drift of things, had sent her to a school on the Hudson, and the two did not meet for some time. Then came a stolen interview, and a fastening of the rivets of attraction—for Jim had gifts of a wonderful kind. He knew his Horace and Anacreon and Heine and Lamartine and Dante in the originals, and a hundred others; he was a speaker of power and grace; and he had a clear, strong head for business. He was also a lawyer, and was junior attorney to his father's great business. It was because he had the real business gift, not because he had a brilliant and scholarly mind, that his father had taken him into his concerns, and was the more unforgiving when he gave way to temptation. Otherwise, he would have pensioned Jim off, and dismissed him from his mind as a useless, insignificant person; for Horace, Anacreon, and philosophy and history were to him the recreations of the feeble-minded. He had set his heart on Jim, and what Jim could do and would do by and by in the vast financial concerns he controlled, when he was ready to slip out and down; but Jim had disappointed him beyond calculation.

In the early days of their association Jim had left his post and taken to drink at critical moments in their operations. At first, high words had been spoken; then there came the strife of two dissimilar natures, and both were headstrong, and each proud and unrelenting in his own way. Then, at last, had come the separation, irrevocable and painful; and Jim had flung out into the world, a drunkard, who, sober for a fortnight or a month, or three months, would afterward go off on a spree, in which he quoted Sappho and Horace in taverns, and sang bacchanalian songs with a voice meant for the stage—a heritage from an ancestor who had sung upon the English stage a hundred years before. Even in his cups, even after his darling vice had submerged him, Jim Templeton was a man marked out from his fellows, distinguished and very handsome. Society, however, had ceased to recognise him for a long time, and he did not seek it. For two or three years he practised law now and then. He took cases, preferably criminal cases, for which very often he got no pay; but that, too, ceased at last. Now, in his quiet, sober intervals he read omnivorously, and worked out problems in physics for which he had a taste, until the old appetite surged over him again. Then his spirits rose, and he was the old brilliant talker, the joyous galliard until, in due time, he became silently and lethargically drunk.

In one of his sober intervals he had met Sally Seabrook in the street. It was the first time in four years, for he had avoided her, and though she had written to him once or twice, he had never answered her—shame was in his heart. Yet all the time the old song was in Sally's ears. Jim Templeton had touched her in some distant and intimate corner of her nature where none other had reached; and in all her gay life, when men had told their tale of admiration in their own way, her mind had gone back to Jim, and what he had said under the magnolia trees; and his voice had drowned all others. She was not blind to what he had become, but a deep belief possessed her that she, of all the world, could save him. She knew how futile it would look to the world, how wild a dream it looked even to her own heart, how perilous it was; but, play upon the surface of things as she had done so much and so often in her brief career, she was seized of convictions having origin, as it might seem, in something beyond herself.

So when she and Jim met in the street, the old true thing rushed upon them both, and for a moment they stood still and looked at each other. As they might look who say farewell forever, so did each dwell upon the other's face. That was the beginning of the new epoch. A few days more, and Jim came to her and said that she alone could save him; and she meant him to say it, had led him to the saying, for the same conviction was burned deep in her own soul. She knew the awful risk she was taking, that the step must mean social ostracism, and that her own people would be no kinder to her than society; but she gasped a prayer, smiled at Jim as though all were well, laid her plans, made him promise her one thing on his knees, and took the plunge.

Her people did as she expected. She was threatened with banishment from heart and home—with disinheritance; but she pursued her course; and the only person who stood with her and Jim at the altar was John Appleton, who would not be denied, and who had such a half-hour with Jim before the ceremony as neither of them forgot in the years that the locust ate thereafter. And, standing at the altar, Jim's eyes were still wet, with new resolves in his heart and a being at his side meant for the best man in the world. As he knelt beside her, awaiting the benediction, a sudden sense of the enormity of this act came upon him, and for her sake he would have drawn back then, had it not been too late. He realised that it was a crime to put this young, beautiful life in peril; that his own life was a poor, contemptible thing, and that he had been possessed of the egotism of the selfish and the young.

But the thing was done, and a new life was begun. Before they were launched upon it, however, before society had fully grasped the sensation, or they had left upon their journey to northern Canada, where Sally intended they should work out their problem and make their home, far and free from all old associations, a curious thing happened. Jim's father sent an urgent message to Sally to come to him. When she came, he told her she was mad, and asked her why she had thrown her life away.

"Why have you done it?" he said. "You—you knew all about him; you might have married the best man in the country. You could rule a kingdom; you have beauty and power, and make people do what you want: and you've got a sot."

"He is your son," she answered quietly.

She looked so beautiful and so fine as she stood there, fearless and challenging before him, that he was moved. But he would not show it.

"He was my son—when he was a man," he retorted grimly.

"He is the son of the woman you once loved," she answered.

The old man turned his head away.

"What would she have said to what you did to Jim?" He drew himself around sharply. Her dagger had gone home, but he would not let her know it.

"Leave her out of the question—she was a saint," he said roughly.

"She cannot be left out; nor can you. He got his temperament naturally; he inherited his weakness from your grandfather, from her father. Do you think you are in no way responsible?"

He was silent for a moment, but then said stubbornly: "Why—why have you done it? What's between him and me can't be helped; we are father and son; but you—you had no call, no responsibility."

"I love Jim. I always loved him, ever since I can remember, as you did. I see my way ahead. I will not desert him. No one cares what happens to him, no one but me. Your love wouldn't stand the test; mine will."

"Your folks have disinherited you,—you have almost nothing, and I will not change my mind. What do you see ahead of you?"

"Jim—only Jim—and God."

Her eyes were shining, her hands were clasped together at her side in the tenseness of her feeling, her indomitable spirit spoke in her face.

Suddenly the old man brought his fist down on the table with a bang. "It's a crime—oh, it's a crime, to risk your life so! You ought to have been locked up. I'd have done it."

"Listen to me," she rejoined quietly. "I know the risk. But do you think that I could have lived my life out, feeling that I might have saved Jim, and didn't try? You talk of beauty and power and ruling—you say what others have said to me. Which is the greater thing, to get what pleases one, or to work for something which is more to one than all else in the world? To save one life, one intellect, one great man—oh, he has the making of a great man in him!—to save a soul, would not life be well lost, would not love be well spent in doing it?"

"Love's labour lost," said the old man slowly, cynically, but not without emotion.

"I have ambition," she continued. "No girl was ever more ambitious, but my ambition is to make the most and best of myself. Place?—Jim and I will hold it yet. Power?—it shall be as it must be; but Jim and I will work for it to fulfil ourselves. For me—ah, if I can save him—and I mean to do so—do you think that I would not then have my heaven on earth? You want money—money—money, power, and to rule; and these are to you the best things in the world. I make my choice differently, though I would have these other things if I could; and I hope I shall. But Jim first—Jim first, your son, Jim—my husband, Jim."

The old man got to his feet slowly. She had him at bay. "But you are great," he said, "great! It is an awful stake—awful. Yet if you win, you'll have what money can't buy. And listen to me. We'll make the stake bigger. It will give it point, too, in another way. If you keep Jim sober for four years from the day of your marriage, on the last day of that four years I'll put in your hands for you and him, or for your child—if you have one—five millions of dollars. I am a man of my word. While Jim drinks I won't take him back; he's disinherited. I'll give him nothing now or hereafter. Save him for four years,—if he can do that he will do all, and there's five millions as sure as the sun's in heaven. Amen and amen."

He opened the door. There was a strange soft light in her eyes as she came to go.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" she said, looking at him whimsically.

He was disconcerted. She did not wait, but reached up and kissed him on the cheek. "Good-by," she said with a smile. "We'll win the stake. Good-by."

An instant, and she was gone. He shut the door, then turned and looked in a mirror on the wall. Abstractedly he touched the cheek she had kissed. Suddenly a change passed over his face. He dropped in a chair, and his fist struck the table as he said: “By God, she may do it, she may do it! But it’s life and death—it’s life and death.”

Society had its sensation, and then the veil dropped. For a long time none looked behind it except Jim’s father. He had too much at stake not to have his telescope upon them. A detective followed them to keep Jim’s record. But this they did not know.

II

From the day they left Washington Jim put his life and his fate in his wife’s hands. He meant to follow her judgment, and, self-willed and strong in intellect as he was, he said that she should have a fair chance of fulfilling her purpose. There had been many pour parlers as to what Jim should do. There was farming. She set that aside, because it meant capital, and it also meant monotony and loneliness; and capital was limited, and monotony and loneliness were bad for Jim, deadening an active brain which must not be deprived of stimulants—stimulants of a different sort, however, from those which had heretofore mastered it. There was the law. But Jim would have to become a citizen of Canada, change his flag, and where they meant to go—to the outskirts—there would be few opportunities for the law; and with not enough to do there would be danger. Railway construction? That seemed good in many ways, but Jim had not the professional knowledge necessary; his railway experience with his father had only been financial. Above all else he must have responsibility, discipline, and strict order in his life.

“Something that will be good for my natural vanity, and knock the nonsense out of me,” Jim agreed, as they drew farther and farther away from Washington and the past, and nearer and nearer to the Far North and their future. Never did two more honest souls put their hands in each other’s, and set forth upon the thorniest path to a goal which was their hearts’ desire. Since they had become one, there had come into Sally’s face that illumination which belongs only to souls possessed of an idea greater than themselves, outside themselves—saints, patriots; faces which have been washed in the salt tears dropped for others’ sorrows, and lighted by the fire of self-sacrifice. Sally Seabrook, the high-spirited, the radiant, the sweetly wilful, the provoking, to concentrate herself upon this narrow theme—to reconquer the lost paradise of one vexed mortal soul!

What did Jim’s life mean?—It was only one in the millions coming and going, and every man must work out his own salvation. Why should she cramp her soul to this one issue, when the same soul could spend itself upon the greater motives and in the larger circle? A wide world of influence had opened up before her; position, power, adulation, could all have been hers, as John Appleton and Jim’s father had said. She might have moved in well-trodden ways, through gardens of pleasure, lived a life where all would be made easy, where she would be shielded at every turn, and her beauty would be flattered by luxury into a constant glow. She was not so primitive, so unintellectual, as not to have thought of this, else her decision would have had less importance; she would have been no more than an infatuated emotional woman with a touch of second class drama in her nature. She had thought of it all, and she had made her choice. The easier course was the course for meaner souls, and she had not one vein of thin blood nor a small idea in her whole nature. She had a heart and mind for great issues. She believed that Jim had a great brain, and would and could accomplish great things. She knew that he had in him the strain of hereditary instinct—his mother’s father had ended a brief life in a drunken duel on the Mississippi, and Jim’s boyhood had never had discipline or direction, or any strenuous order. He might never acquire order, and the power that order and habit and the daily iteration of necessary thoughts and acts bring; but the prospect did not appal her. She had taken the risk with her eyes wide open; had set her own life and happiness in the hazard. But Jim must be saved, must be what his talents, his genius, entitled him to be. And the long game must have the long thought.

So, as they drew into the great Saskatchewan Valley, her hand in his, and hope in his eyes, and such a look of confidence and pride in her as brought back his old strong beauty of face, and smoothed the careworn lines of self-indulgence, she gave him his course: as a private he must join the North-West Mounted Police, the red-coated riders of the plains, and work his way up through every stage of responsibility, beginning at the foot of the ladder of humbleness and self-control. She believed that he would agree with her proposal; but her hands clasped his a little more firmly and solicitously—there was a faint, womanly fear at her heart—as she asked him if he would do it. The life meant more than occasional separation; it meant that there would be periods when she would not be with him; and there was great danger in that; but she knew that the risks must be taken, and he must not be wholly reliant on her presence for his moral strength.

His face fell for a moment when she made the suggestion, but it cleared presently, and he said with a dry laugh: “Well, I guess they must make me a sergeant pretty quick. I’m a colonel in the Kentucky Carbineers!”

She laughed, too; then a moment afterwards, womanlike, wondered if she was right, and was a little frightened. But that was only because she was not self-opinionated, and was anxious, more anxious than any woman in all the North.

It happened as Jim said; he was made a sergeant at once—Sally managed that; for, when it came to the point, and she saw the conditions in which the privates lived, and realised that Jim must be one of them and clean out the stables, and groom his horse and the officers’ horses, and fetch and carry, her heart failed her, and she thought that she was making her remedy needlessly heroical. So she went to see the Commissioner, who was on a tour of scrutiny on their arrival at the post, and, as better men than he had done in more knowing circles, he fell under her spell. If she had asked for a lieutenancy, he would probably have corrupted some member of Parliament into securing it for Jim.

But Jim was made a sergeant, and the Commissioner and the captain of the troop kept their eyes on him. So did other members of the troop who did not quite know their man, and attempted, figuratively, to pinch him here and there. They found that his actions were greater than his words, and both were in perfect harmony in the end, though his words often seemed pointless to their minds, until they understood that they had conveyed truths through a medium more like a heliograph than a telephone. By and by they begin to understand his heliographing, and, when they did that, they began to swear by him, not at him.

In time it was found that the troop never had a better disciplinarian than Jim. He knew when to shut his eyes, and when to keep them open. To non-essentials he kept his eyes shut; to essentials he kept them very wide open. There were some men of good birth from England and elsewhere among them, and these mostly understood him first. But they all understood Sally from the beginning, and after a little they were glad enough to be permitted to come, on occasion, to the five-roomed little house near the barracks, and hear her talk, then answer her questions, and, as men had done at Washington, open out their hearts to her. They noticed, however, that while she made them barley-water, and all kinds of soft drinks from citric acid, sarsaparilla and the like, and had one special drink of her own invention, which she called cream-nectar, no spirits were to be had. They also noticed that Jim never drank a drop of liquor, and by and by, one way or another, they got a glimmer of the real truth, before it became known who he really was or anything of his story. And the interest in the two, and in Jim's reformation, spread through the country, while Jim gained reputation as the smartest man in the force.

They were on the outskirts of civilisation; as Jim used to say, "One step ahead of the procession." Jim's duty was to guard the columns of settlement and progress, and to see that every man got his own rights and not more than his rights; that justice should be the plumb-line of march and settlement. His principle was embodied in certain words which he quoted once to Sally from the prophet Amos: "And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline."

On the day that Jim became a lieutenant his family increased by one. It was a girl, and they called her Nancy, after Jim's mother. It was the anniversary of their marriage, and, so far, Jim had won, with what fightings and strugglings and wrestlings of the spirit only Sally and himself knew. And she knew as well as he, and always saw the storm coming before it broke—a restlessness, then a moodiness, then a hungry, eager, helpless look, and afterwards an agony of longing, a feverish desire to break away and get the thrilling thing which would still the demon within him.

There had been moments when his doom seemed certain—he knew and she knew that if he once got drunk again he would fall never to rise. On one occasion, after a hard, long, hungry ride, he was half-mad with desire, but even as he seized the flask that was offered to him by his only enemy, the captain of B Troop, at the next station eastward, there came a sudden call to duty, two hundred Indians having gone upon the war-path. It saved him; it broke the spell. He had to mount and away, with the antidote and stimulant of responsibility driving him on.

Another occasion was equally perilous to his safety. They had been idle for days in a hot week in summer, waiting for orders to return from the rail-head where they had gone to quell a riot, and where drink and hilarity were common. Suddenly—more suddenly than it had ever come, the demon of his thirst had Jim by the throat. Sergeant Sewell, of the grey-stubble head, who loved him more than his sour heart had loved anybody in all his life, was holding himself ready for the physical assault he must make upon his superior officer, if he raised a glass to his lips, when salvation came once again. An accident had occurred far down on the railway line, and the operator of the telegraph-office had that very day been stricken down with pleurisy and pneumonia. In despair the manager had sent to Jim, eagerly hoping that he might help them, for the Riders of the Plains were a sort of court of appeal for every trouble in the Far North.

Instantly Jim was in the saddle with his troop. Out of curiosity he had learned telegraphy when a boy, as he had learned many things, and, arrived at the scene of the accident, he sent messages and received them—by sound, not on paper as did the official operator, to the amazement and pride of the troop. Then, between caring for the injured in the accident, against the coming of the relief train, and nursing the sick operator through the dark moments of his dangerous illness, he passed a crisis of his own disease triumphantly; but not the last crisis.

So the first and so the second and third years passed in safety.

III

"PLEASE, I want to go, too, Jim."

Jim swung round and caught the child up in his arms. "Say, how dare you call your father Jim—eh, tell me that?"

"It's what mummy calls you—it's pretty."

"I don't call her 'mummy' because you do, and you mustn't call me Jim because she does—do you hear?" The whimsical face lowered a little, then the rare and beautiful dark blue eyes raised slowly, shaded by the long lashes, and the voice said demurely, "Yes—Jim."

"Nancy—Nancy," said a voice from the corner in reproof, mingled with suppressed laughter. "Nancy, you musn't be saucy. You must say 'father' to—"

"Yes, mummy. I'll say father to—Jim."

"You imp—you imp of delight," said Jim, as he strained the dainty little lass to his breast, while she appeared interested in a wave of his black hair, which she curled around her finger.

Sally came forwards with the little parcel of sandwiches she had been preparing, and put them in the saddle-bags lying on a chair at the door, in readiness for the journey Jim was about to make. Her eyes were glistening, and her face had a heightened colour. The three years which had passed since she married had touched her not at all to her disadvantage, rather to her profit. She looked not an hour older; motherhood had only added to her charm, lending it a delightful gravity. The prairie life had given a shining quality to her handsomeness, an air of depth and firmness, an exquisite health and clearness to the colour in her cheeks. Her step was as light as Nancy's, elastic and buoyant—a gliding motion which gave a sinuous grace to the movements of her body. There had also come into her eyes a vigilance such as deaf people possess, a sensitive observation imparting a deeper intelligence to the face.

Here was the only change by which you could guess the story of her life. Her eyes were like the ears of an anxious mother who can never sleep till every child is abed; whose sense is quick to hear the faintest footstep without or within; and who, as years go on, and her children grow older and older, must still lie awake hearkening for the late footstep on the stair. In Sally's eyes was the story of the past three years: of love and

temptation and struggle, of watchfulness and yearning and anxiety, of determination and an inviolable hope. Her eyes had a deeper look than that in Jim's. Now, as she gazed at him, the maternal spirit rose up from the great well of protectiveness in her and engulfed both husband and child. There was always something of the maternal in her eyes when she looked at Jim. He did not see it—he saw only the wonderful blue, and the humour which had helped him over such difficult places these past three years. In steadying and strengthening Jim's will, in developing him from his Southern indolence into Northern industry and sense of responsibility, John Appleton's warnings had rung in Sally's ears, and Freddy Hartzman's forceful and high-minded personality had passed before her eyes with an appeal powerful and stimulating; but always she came to the same upland of serene faith and white-hearted resolve; and Jim became dearer and dearer.

The baby had done much to brace her faith in the future and comfort her anxious present. The child had intelligence of a rare order. She would lie by the half-hour on the floor, turning over the leaves of a book without pictures, and, before she could speak, would read from the pages in a language all her own. She made a fairy world for herself, peopled by characters to whom she gave names, to whom she assigned curious attributes and qualities. They were as real to her as though flesh and blood, and she was never lonely, and never cried; and she had buried herself in her father's heart. She had drawn to her the roughest men in the troop, and for old Sewell, the grim sergeant, she had a specially warm place.

"You can love me if you like," she had said to him at the very start, with the egotism of childhood; but made haste to add, "because I love you, Gri-Gri." She called him Gri-Gri from the first, but they knew only long afterwards that "gri-gri" meant "grey-grey," to signify that she called him after his grizzled hairs.

What she had been in the life-history of Sally and Jim they both knew. Jim regarded her with an almost superstitious feeling. Sally was his strength, his support, his inspiration, his bulwark of defence; Nancy was the charm he wore about his neck—his mascot, he called her. Once, when she was ill, he had suffered as he had never done before in his life. He could not sleep nor eat, and went about his duties like one in a dream. When his struggles against his enemy were fiercest, he kept saying over her name to himself, as though she could help him. Yet always it was Sally's hand he held in the darkest hours, in his brutal moments; for in this fight between appetite and will there are moments when only the animal seems to exist, and the soul disappears in the glare and gloom of the primal emotions. Nancy he called his "lucky sixpence," but he called Sally his "guinea-girl."

From first to last his whimsicality never deserted him. In his worst hours, some innate optimism and humour held him steady in his fight. It was not depression that possessed him at the worst, but the violence of an appetite most like a raging pain which men may endure with a smile upon their lips. He carried in his face the story of a conflict, the aftermath of bitter experience; and through all there pulsed the glow of experience. He had grown handsomer, and the graceful decision of his figure, the deliberate certainty of every action, heightened the force of a singular personality. As in the eyes of Sally, in his eyes was a long reflective look which told of things overcome, and yet of dangers present. His lips smiled often, but the eyes said: "I have lived, I have seen, I have suffered, and I must suffer more. I have loved, I have been loved under the shadow of the sword. Happiness I have had, and golden hours, but not peace—never peace. My soul has need of peace."

In the greater, deeper experience of their lives, the more material side of existence had grown less and less to them. Their home was a model of simple comfort and some luxury, though Jim had insisted that Sally's income should not be spent, except upon the child, and should be saved for the child, their home being kept on his pay and on the tiny income left by his mother. With the help of an Indian girl, and a half-breed for outdoor work and fires and gardening, Sally had cared for the house herself. Ingenious and tasteful, with a gift for cooking and an educated hand, she had made her little home as pretty as their few possessions would permit. Refinement covered all, and three or four-score books were like so many friends to comfort her when Jim was away; like kind and genial neighbours when he was at home. From Browning she had written down in her long sliding handwriting, and hung up beneath Jim's looking-glass, the heartening and inspiring words:

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

They had lived above the sordid, and there was something in the nature of Jim's life to help them to it. He belonged to a small handful of men who had control over an empire, with an individual responsibility and influence not contained in the scope of their commissions. It was a matter of moral force and character, and of uniform, symbolical only of the great power behind; of the long arm of the State; of the insistence of the law, which did not rely upon force alone, but on the certainty of its administration. In such conditions the smallest brain was bound to expand, to take on qualities of judgment and temperateness which would never be developed in ordinary circumstances. In the case of Jim Templeton, who needed no stimulant to his intellect, but rather a steadying quality, a sense of proportion, the daily routine, the command of men, the diverse nature of his duties, half civil, half military, the personal appeals made on all sides by the people of the country for advice, for help, for settlement of disputes, for information which his well-instructed mind could give—all these modified the romantic brilliance of his intellect, made it and himself more human.

It had not come to him all at once. His intellect at first stood in his way. His love of paradox, his deep observation, his insight, all made him inherently satirical, though not cruelly so; but satire had become pure whimsicality at last; and he came to see that, on the whole, the world was imperfect, but also, on the whole, was moving towards perfection rather than imperfection. He grew to realise that what seemed so often weakness in men was tendency and idiosyncrasy rather than evil. And in the end he thought better of himself as he came to think better of all others. For he had thought less of all the world because he had thought so little of himself. He had overestimated his own faults, had made them into crimes in his own eyes, and, observing things in others of similar import, had become almost a cynic in intellect, while in heart he had remained, a boy.

In all that he had changed a great deal. His heart was still the heart of a boy, but his intellect had sobered, softened, ripened—even in this secluded and seemingly unimportant life; as Sally had said and hoped it would. Sally's conviction had been right. But the triumph was not yet achieved. She knew it. On occasion the tones of his voice told her, the look that came into his eyes proclaimed it to her, his feverishness and restlessness made it certain. How many a night had she thrown her arm over his shoulder, and sought his hand and held it while in the dark silence, wide-eyed, dry-lipped, and with a throat like fire he had held himself back from falling. There was liquor in the house—the fight would not have been a fight without it. She had determined that he should see his enemy and meet him in the plains and face him down; and he was never many feet away from his possible disaster. Yet for long over three years all had gone well. There was another year. Would he last out the course?

At first the thought of the great stake for which she was playing in terms of currency, with the head of Jim's father on every note, was much with her. The amazing nature of the offer of five millions of dollars stimulated her imagination, roused her; gold coins are counters in the game of success, signs and tokens. Money alone could not have lured her; but rather what it represented—power, width of action, freedom to help when the heart prompted, machinery for carrying out large plans, ability to surround with advantage those whom we love. So, at first, while yet the memories of Washington were much with her, the appeal of the millions was strong. The gallant nature of the contest and the great stake braced her; she felt the blood quicken in her pulse.

But, all through, the other thing really mastered her: the fixed idea that Jim must be saved. As it deepened, the other life that she had lived became like the sports in which we shared when children, full of vivacious memory, shining with impulse and the stir of life, but not to be repeated—days and deeds outgrown. So the light of one idea shone in her face. Yet she was intensely human too; and if her eyes had not been set on the greater glory, the other thought might have vulgarised her mind, made her end and goal sordid—the descent of a nature rather than its ascension.

When Nancy came, the lesser idea, the stake, took on a new importance, for now it seemed to her that it was her duty to secure for the child its rightful heritage. Then Jim, too, appeared in a new light, as one who could never fulfil himself unless working through the natural channels of his birth, inheritance, and upbringing. Jim, drunken and unreliable, with broken will and fighting to find himself—the waste places were for him, until he was the master of his will and emotions. Once however, secure in ability to control himself, with cleansed brain and purpose defined, the widest field would still be too narrow for his talents—and the five, yes, the fifty millions of his father must be his.

She had never repented having married Jim; but twice in those three years she had broken down and wept as though her heart would break. There were times when Jim's nerves were shaken in his struggle against the unseen foe, and he had spoken to her querulously, almost sharply. Yet in her tears there was no reproach for him, rather for herself—the fear that she might lose her influence over him, that she could not keep him close to her heart, that he might drift away from her in the commonplaces and monotony of work and domestic life. Everything so depended on her being to him not only the one woman for whom he cared, but the woman without whom he could care for nothing else.

"Oh, my God, give me his love," she had prayed. "Let me keep it yet a little while. For his sake, not for my own, let me have the power to hold his love. Make my mind always quiet, and let me blow neither hot nor cold. Help me to keep my temper sweet and cheerful, so that he will find the room empty where I am not, and his footsteps will quicken when he comes to the door. Not for my sake, dear God, but for his, or my heart will break—it will break unless Thou dost help me to hold him. O Lord, keep me from tears; make my face happy that I may be goodly to his eyes, and forgive the selfishness of a poor woman who has little, and would keep her little and cherish it, for Christ's sake."

Twice had she poured out her heart so, in the agony of her fear that she should lose favour in Jim's sight—she did not know how alluring she was, in spite of the constant proofs offered her. She had had her will with all who came her way, from governor to Indian brave. Once, in a journey they had made far north, soon after they came, she had stayed at a Hudson's Bay Company's post for some days, while there came news of restlessness among the Indians, because of lack of food, and Jim had gone farther north to steady the tribes, leaving her with the factor and his wife and a halfbreed servant.

While she and the factor's wife were alone in the yard of the post one day, an Indian—chief, Arrowhead, in warpaint and feathers, entered suddenly, brandishing a long knife. He had been drinking, and there was danger in his black eyes. With a sudden inspiration she came forward quickly, nodded and smiled to him, and then pointed to a grindstone standing in the corner of the yard. As she did so, she saw Indians crowding into the gate armed with knives, guns, bows, and arrows. She beckoned to Arrowhead, and he followed her to the grindstone. She poured some water on the wheel and began to turn it, nodding at the now impassive Indian to begin. Presently he nodded also, and put his knife on the stone. She kept turning steadily, singing to herself the while, as with anxiety she saw the Indians drawing closer and closer in from the gate. Faster and faster she turned, and at last the Indian lifted his knife from the stone. She reached out her hand with simulated interest, felt the edge with her thumb, the Indian looking darkly at her the while. Presently, after feeling the edge himself, he bent over the stone again, and she went on turning the wheel still singing softly. At last he stopped again and felt the edge. With a smile which showed her fine white teeth, she said, "Is that for me?" making a significant sign across her throat at the same time.

The old Indian looked at her grimly, then slowly shook his head in negation.

"I go hunt Yellow Hawk to-night," he said. "I go fight; I like marry you when I come back. How!" he said and turned away towards the gate.

Some of his braves held back, the blackness of death in their looks. He saw. "My knife is sharp," he said. "The woman is brave. She shall live—go and fight Yellow Hawk, or starve and die."

Divining their misery, their hunger, and the savage thought that had come to them, Sally had whispered to the factor's wife to bring food, and the woman now came running out with two baskets full, and returned for more. Sally ran forward among the Indians and put the food into their hands. With grunts of satisfaction they

seized what she gave, and thrust it into their mouths, squatting on the ground. Arrowhead looked on stern and immobile, but when at last she and the factor's wife sat down before the braves with confidence and an air of friendliness, he sat down also; yet, famished as he was, he would not touch the food. At last Sally, realising his proud defiance of hunger, offered him a little lump of pemmican and a biscuit, and with a grunt he took it from her hands and ate it. Then, at his command a fire was lit, the pipe of peace was brought out, and Sally and the factor's wife touched their lips to it, and passed it on.

So was a new treaty of peace and loyalty made with Arrowhead and his tribe by a woman without fear, whose life had seemed not worth a minute's purchase; and, as the sun went down, Arrowhead and his men went forth to make war upon Yellow Hawk beside the Nettigon River. In this wise had her influence spread in the land.

. . . . . .

Standing now with the child in his arms and his wife looking at him with a shining moisture of the eyes, Jim laughed outright. There came upon him a sudden sense of power, of aggressive force—the will to do. Sally understood, and came and laughingly grasped his arm.

"Oh, Jim," she said playfully, "you are getting muscles like steel. You hadn't these when you were colonel of the Kentucky Carbineers!"

"I guess I need them now," he said, smiling, and with the child still in his arms drew her to a window looking northward. As far as the eye could see, nothing but snow, like a blanket spread over the land. Here and there in the wide expanse a tree silhouetted against the sky, a tracery of eccentric beauty, and off in the far distance a solitary horseman riding towards the postriding hard.

"It was root, hog, or die with me, Sally," he continued, "and I rooted ... I wonder—that fellow on the horse—I have a feeling about him. See, he's been riding hard and long-you can tell by the way the horse drops his legs. He sags a bit himself.... But isn't it beautiful, all that out there—the real quintessence of life."

The air was full of delicate particles of frost on which the sun sparkled, and though there was neither bird nor insect, nor animal, nor stir of leaf, nor swaying branch or waving grass, life palpitated in the air, energy sang its song in the footstep that crunched the frosty ground, that broke the crusted snow; it was in the delicate wind that stirred the flag by the barracks away to the left; hope smiled in the wide prospect over which the thrilling, bracing air trembled. Sally had chosen right.

"You had a big thought when you brought me here, guinea-girl," he added presently. "We are going to win out here"—he set the child down—"you and I and this lucky sixpence." He took up his short fur coat. "Yes, we'll win, honey." Then, with a brooding look in his face, he added:

"'The end comes as came the beginning,
And shadows fail into the past;
And the goal, is it not worth the winning,
If it brings us but home at the last?

"'While far through the pain of waste places
We tread, 'tis a blossoming rod
That drives us to grace from disgraces,
From the fens to the gardens of God!'"

He paused reflectively. "It's strange that this life up here makes you feel that you must live a bigger life still, that this is only the wide porch to the great labour-house—it makes you want to do things. Well, we've got to win the stake first," he added with a laugh.

"The stake is a big one, Jim—bigger than you think."

"You and her and me—me that was in the gutter."

"What is the gutter, dadsie?" asked Nancy.

"The gutter—the gutter is where the dish-water goes, midget," he answered with a dry laugh.

"Oh, I don't think you'd like to be in the gutter," Nancy said solemnly.

"You have to get used to it first, miss," answered Jim. Suddenly Sally laid both hands on Jim's shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "You must win the stake Jim. Think—now!"

She laid a hand on the head of the child. He did not know that he was playing for a certain five millions, perhaps fifty millions, of dollars. She had never told him of his father's offer. He was fighting only for salvation, for those he loved, for freedom. As they stood there, the conviction had come upon her that they had come to the last battle-field, that this journey which Jim now must take would decide all, would give them perfect peace or lifelong pain. The shadow of battle was over them, but he had no foreboding, no premonition; he had never been so full of spirits and life.

To her adjuration Jim replied by burying his face in her golden hair, and he whispered: "Say, I've done near four years, my girl. I think I'm all right now—I think. This last six months, it's been easy—pretty fairly easy."

"Four months more, only four months more—God be good to us!" she said with a little gasp.

If he held out for four months more, the first great stage in their life—journey would be passed, the stake won.

"I saw a woman get an awful fall once," Jim said suddenly. "Her bones were broken in twelve places, and there wasn't a spot on her body without injury. They set and fixed up every broken bone except one. It was split down. They didn't dare perform the operation; she couldn't stand it. There was a limit to pain, and she had reached the boundary. Two years went by, and she got better every way, but inside her leg those broken pieces of bone were rubbing against each other. She tried to avoid the inevitable operation, but nature said, 'You must do it, or die in the end.' She yielded. Then came the long preparations for the operation. Her heart shrank, her mind got tortured. She'd suffered too much. She pulled herself together, and said, 'I must conquer this shrinking body of mine, by my will. How shall I do it?' Something within her said, 'Think and do for others. Forget yourself.' And so, as they got her ready for her torture, she visited hospitals, agonised

cripple as she was, and smiled and talked to the sick and broken, telling them of her own miseries endured and dangers faced, of the boundary of human suffering almost passed; and so she got her courage for her own trial. And she came out all right in the end. Well, that's the way I've felt sometimes. But I'm ready for my operation now whenever it comes, and it's coming, I know. Let it come when it must." He smiled. There came a knock at the door, and presently Sewell entered. "The Commissioner wishes you to come over, sir," he said.

"I was just coming, Sewell. Is all ready for the start?"

"Everything's ready, sir, but there's to be a change of orders. Something's happened—a bad job up in the Cree country, I think."

A few minutes later Jim was in the Commissioner's office. The murder of a Hudson's Bay Company's man had been committed in the Cree country. The stranger whom Jim and Sally had seen riding across the plains had brought the news for thirty miles, word of the murder having been carried from point to point. The Commissioner was uncertain what to do, as the Crees were restless through want of food and the absence of game, and a force sent to capture Arrowhead, the chief who had committed the murder, might precipitate trouble. Jim solved the problem by offering to go alone and bring the chief into the post. It was two hundred miles to the Cree encampment, and the journey had its double dangers.

Another officer was sent on the expedition for which Jim had been preparing, and he made ready to go upon his lonely duty. His wife did not know till three days after he had gone what the nature of his mission was.

IV

Jim made his journey in good weather with his faithful dogs alone, and came into the camp of the Crees armed with only a revolver. If he had gone with ten men, there would have been an instant melee, in which he would have lost his life. This is what the chief had expected, had prepared for; but Jim was more formidable alone, with power far behind him which could come with force and destroy the tribe, if resistance was offered, than with fifty men. His tongue had a gift of terse and picturesque speech, powerful with a people who had the gift of imagination. With five hundred men ready to turn him loose in the plains without dogs or food, he carried himself with a watchful coolness and complacent determination which got home to their minds with great force.

For hours the struggle for the murderer went on, a struggle of mind over inferior mind and matter. Arrowhead was a chief whose will had never been crossed by his own people, and to master that will by a superior will, to hold back the destructive force which, to the ignorant minds of the braves, was only a natural force of defence, meant a task needing more than authority behind it. For the very fear of that authority put in motion was an incentive to present resistance to stave off the day of trouble. The faces that surrounded Jim were thin with hunger, and the murder that had been committed by the chief had, as its origin, the foolish replies of the Hudson's Bay Company's man to their demand for supplies. Arrowhead had killed him with his own hand.

But Jim Templeton was of a different calibre. Although he had not been told it, he realised that, indirectly, hunger was the cause of the crime and might easily become the cause of another; for their tempers were sharper even than their appetites. Upon this he played; upon this he made an exhortation to the chief. He assumed that Arrowhead had become violent, because of his people's straits, that Arrowhead's heart yearned for his people and would make sacrifice for them. Now, if Arrowhead came quietly, he would see that supplies of food were sent at once, and that arrangements were made to meet the misery of their situation. Therefore, if Arrowhead came freely, he would have so much in his favour before his judges; if he would not come quietly, then he must be brought by force; and if they raised a hand to prevent it, then destruction would fall upon all—all save the women and children. The law must be obeyed. They might try to resist the law through him, but, if violence was shown, he would first kill Arrowhead, and then destruction would descend like a wind out of the north, darkness would swallow them, and their bones would cover the plains.

As he ended his words a young brave sprang forwards with hatchet raised. Jim's revolver slipped down into his palm from his sleeve, and a bullet caught the brave in the lifted arm. The hatchet dropped to the ground.

Then Jim's eyes blazed, and he turned a look of anger on the chief, his face pale and hard, as he said: "The stream rises above the banks; come with me, chief, or all will drown. I am master, and I speak. Ye are hungry because ye are idle. Ye call the world yours, yet ye will not stoop to gather from the earth the fruits of the earth. Ye sit idle in the summer, and women and children die round you when winter comes. Because the game is gone, ye say. Must the world stand still because a handful of Crees need a hunting-ground? Must the makers of cities and the wonders of the earth, who fill the land with plenty—must they stand far off, because the Crees and their chief would wander over millions of acres, for each man a million, when by a hundred, ay, by ten, each white man would live in plenty, and make the land rejoice. See. Here is the truth. When the Great Spirit draws the game away so that the hunting is poor, ye sit down and fill your hearts with murder, and in the blackness of your thoughts kill my brother. Idle and shiftless and evil ye are, while the earth cries out to give you of its plenty, a great harvest from a little seed, if ye will but dig and plant, and plough and sow and reap, and lend your backs to toil. Now hear and heed. The end is come.

"For this once ye shall be fed—by the blood of my heart, ye shall be fed! And another year ye shall labour, and get the fruits of your labour, and not stand waiting, as it were, till a fish shall pass the spear, or a stag water at your door, that ye may slay and eat. The end is come, ye idle men. O chief, harken! One of your braves would have slain me, even as you slew my brother—he one, and you a thousand. Speak to your people as I have spoken, and then come and answer for the deed done by your hand. And this I say that right shall be done between men and men. Speak."

Jim had made his great effort, and not without avail. Arrowhead rose slowly, the cloud gone out of his face, and spoke to his people, bidding them wait in peace until food came, and appointing his son chief in his stead until his return.

"The white man speaks truth, and I will go," he said. "I shall return," he continued, "if it be written so upon the leaves of the Tree of Life; and if it be not so written, I shall fade like a mist, and the tepees will know me not again. The days of my youth are spent, and my step no longer springs from the ground. I shuffle among the grass and the fallen leaves, and my eyes scarce know the stag from the doe. The white man is master—if

he wills it we shall die, if he wills it we shall live. And this was ever so. It is in the tale of our people. One tribe ruled, and the others were their slaves. If it is written on the leaves of the Tree of Life that the white man rule us for ever, then it shall be so. I have spoken. Now, behold I go."

Jim had conquered, and together they sped away with the dogs through the sweet-smelling spruce woods where every branch carried a cloth of white, and the only sound heard was the swish of a blanket of snow as it fell to the ground from the wide webs of green, or a twig snapped under the load it bore. Peace brooded in the silent and comforting forest, and Jim and Arrowhead, the Indian ever ahead, swung along, mile after mile, on their snow-shoes, emerging at last upon the wide white prairie.

A hundred miles of sun and fair weather, sleeping at night in the open in a trench dug in the snow, no fear in the thoughts of Jim, nor evil in the heart of the heathen man. There had been moments of watchfulness, of uncertainty, on Jim's part, the first few hours of the first night after they left the Cree reservation; but the conviction speedily came to Jim that all was well; for the chief slept soundly from the moment he lay down in his blankets between the dogs. Then Jim went to sleep as in his own bed, and, waking, found Arrowhead lighting a fire from a little load of sticks from the sledges. And between murderer and captor there sprang up the companionship of the open road which brings all men to a certain land of faith and understanding, unless they are perverted and vile. There was no vileness in Arrowhead. There were no handcuffs on his hands, no sign of captivity; they two ate out of the same dish, drank from the same basin, broke from the same bread. The crime of Arrowhead, the gallows waiting for him, seemed very far away. They were only two silent travellers, sharing the same hardship, helping to give material comfort to each other—in the inevitable democracy of those far places, where small things are not great nor great things small; where into men's hearts comes the knowledge of the things that matter; where, from the wide, starry sky, from the august loneliness, and the soul of the life which has brooded there for untold generations, God teaches the values of this world and the next.

One hundred miles of sun and fair weather, and then fifty miles of bitter, aching cold, with nights of peril from the increasing chill, so that Jim dared not sleep lest he should never wake again, but die benumbed and exhausted. Yet Arrowhead slept through all. Day after day so, and then ten miles of storm such as come only to the vast barrens of the northlands; and woe to the traveller upon whom the icy wind and the blinding snow descended! Woe came upon Jim Templeton and Arrowhead, the heathen.

In the awful struggle between man and nature that followed, the captive became the leader. The craft of the plains, the inherent instinct, the feeling which was more than eyesight became the only hope. One whole day to cover ten miles—an endless path of agony, in which Jim went down again and again, but came up blinded by snow and drift, and cut as with lashes by the angry wind. At the end of the ten miles was a Hudson's Bay Company's post and safety; and through ten hours had the two struggled towards it, going off at tangents, circling on their own tracks; but the Indian, by an instinct as sure as the needle to the pole, getting the direction to the post again, in the moments of direst peril and uncertainty. To Jim the world became a sea of maddening forces which buffeted him; a whirlpool of fire in which his brain was tortured, his mind was shrivelled up; a vast army rending itself, each man against the other. It was a purgatory of music, broken by discords; and then at last—how sweet it all was, after the eternity of misery—"Church bells and voices low," and Sally singing to him, Nancy's voice calling! Then, nothing but sleep—sleep, a sinking down millions of miles in an ether of drowsiness which thrilled him; and after—no more.

None who has suffered up to the limit of what the human body and soul may bear can remember the history of those distracted moments when the struggle became one between the forces in nature and the forces in man, between agonised body and smothered mind, yet with the divine intelligence of the created being directing, even though subconsciously, the fight.

How Arrowhead found the post in the mad storm he could never have told. Yet he found it, with Jim unconscious on the sledge and with limbs frozen, all the dogs gone but two, the leathers over the Indian's shoulders as he fell against the gate of the post with a shrill cry that roused the factor and his people within, together with Sergeant Sewell, who had been sent out from headquarters to await Jim's arrival there. It was Sewell's hand which first felt Jim's heart and pulse, and found that there was still life left, even before it could be done by the doctor from headquarters, who had come to visit a sick man at the post.

For hours they worked with snow upon the frozen limbs to bring back life and consciousness. Consciousness came at last with half delirium, half understanding; as emerging from the passing sleep of anaesthetics, the eye sees things and dimly registers them, before the brain has set them in any relation to life or comprehension.

But Jim was roused at last, and the doctor presently held to his lips a glass of brandy. Then from infinite distance Jim's understanding returned; the mind emerged, but not wholly, from the chaos in which it was travelling. His eyes stood out in eagerness.

"Brandy! brandy!" he said hungrily.

With an oath Sewell snatched the glass from the doctor's hand, put it on the table, then stooped to Jim's ear and said hoarsely: "Remember—Nancy. For God's sake, sir, don't drink."

Jim's head fell back, the fierce light went out of his eyes, the face became greyer and sharper. "Sally—Nancy—Nancy," he whispered, and his fingers clutched vaguely at the quilt.

"He must have brandy or he will die. The system is pumped out. He must be revived," said the doctor. He reached again for the glass of spirits.

Jim understood now. He was on the borderland between life and death; his feet were at the brink. "No—not—brandy, no!" he moaned. "Sally-Sally, kiss me," he said faintly, from the middle world in which he was.

"Quick, the broth!" said Sewell to the factor, who had been preparing it. "Quick, while there's a chance." He stooped and called into Jim's ear: "For the love of God, wake up, sir. They're coming—they're both coming—Nancy's coming. They'll soon be here." What matter that he lied, a life was at stake.

Jim's eyes opened again. The doctor was standing with the brandy in his hand. Half madly Jim reached out. "I must live until they come," he cried; "the brandy—give it me! Give it—ah, no, no, I must not!" he added,

gasping, his lips trembling, his hands shaking.

Sewell held the broth to his lips. He drank a little, yet his face became greyer and greyer; a bluish tinge spread about his mouth.

“Have you nothing else, sir?” asked Sewell in despair. The doctor put down the brandy, went quickly to his medicine-case, dropped into a glass some liquid from a phial, came over again, and poured a little between the lips; then a little more, as Jim’s eyes opened again; and at last every drop in the glass trickled down the sinewy throat.

Presently as they watched him the doctor said: “It will not do. He must have brandy. It has life-food in it.”

Jim understood the words. He knew that if he drank the brandy the chances against his future were terrible. He had made his vow, and he must keep it. Yet the thirst was on him; his enemy had him by the throat again, was dragging him down. Though his body was so cold, his throat was on fire. But in the extremity of his strength his mind fought on—fought on, growing weaker every moment. He was having his last fight. They watched him with an aching anxiety, and there was anger in the doctor’s face. He had no patience with these forces arrayed against him.

At last the doctor whispered to Sewell: “It’s no use; he must have the brandy, or he can’t live an hour.”

Sewell weakened; the tears fell down his rough, hard cheeks. “It’ll ruin him-it’s ruin or death.”

“Trust a little more in God, and in the man’s strength. Let us give him the chance. Force it down his throat—he’s not responsible,” said the physician, to whom saving life was more than all else.

Suddenly there appeared at the bedside Arrowhead, gaunt and weak, his face swollen, the skin of it broken by the whips of storm.

“He is my brother,” he said, and, stooping, laid both hands, which he had held before the fire for a long time, on Jim’s heart. “Take his feet, his hands, his, legs, and his head in your hands,” he said to them all. “Life is in us; we will give him life.”

He knelt down and kept both hands on Jim’s heart, while the others, even the doctor, awed by his act, did as they were bidden. “Shut your eyes. Let your life go into him. Think of him, and him alone. Now!” said Arrowhead in a strange voice.

He murmured, and continued murmuring, his body drawing closer and closer to Jim’s body, while in the deep silence, broken only by the chanting of his low monotonous voice, the others pressed Jim’s hands and head and feet and legs—six men under the command of a heathen murderer.

The minutes passed. The colour came back to Jim’s face, the skin of his hands filled up, they ceased twitching, his pulse got stronger, his eyes opened with a new light in them.

“I’m living, anyhow,” he said at last with a faint smile. “I’m hungry—broth, please.”

The fight was won, and Arrowhead, the pagan murderer, drew over to the fire and crouched down beside it, his back to the bed, impassive and still. They brought him a bowl of broth and bread, which he drank slowly, and placed the empty bowl between his knees. He sat there through the night, though they tried to make him lie down.

As the light came in at the windows, Sewell touched him on the shoulder, and said: “He is sleeping now.”

“I hear my brother breathe,” answered Arrowhead. “He will live.”

All night he had listened, and had heard Jim’s breath as only a man who has lived in waste places can hear. “He will live. What I take with one hand I give with the other.”

He had taken the life of the factor; he had given Jim his life. And when he was tried three months later for murder, some one else said this for him, and the hearts of all, judge and jury, were so moved they knew not what to do.

But Arrowhead was never sentenced, for, at the end of the first day’s trial, he lay down to sleep and never waked again. He was found the next morning still and cold, and there was clasped in his hands a little doll which Nancy had given him on one of her many visits to the prison during her father’s long illness. They found a piece of paper in his belt with these words in the Cree language: “With my hands on his heart at the post I gave him the life that was in me, saving but a little until now. Arrowhead, the chief, goes to find life again by the well at the root of the tree. How!”

V

On the evening of the day that Arrowhead made his journey to “the well at the root of the tree” a stranger knocked at the door of Captain Templeton’s cottage; then, without awaiting admittance, entered.

Jim was sitting with Nancy on his knee, her head against his shoulder, Sally at his side, her face alight with some inner joy. Before the knock came to the door Jim had just said, “Why do your eyes shine so, Sally? What’s in your mind?” She had been about to answer, to say to him what had been swelling her heart with pride, though she had not meant to tell him what he had forgotten—not till midnight. But the figure that entered the room, a big man with deep-set eyes, a man of power who had carried everything before him in the battle of life, answered for her.

“You have won the stake, Jim,” he said in a hoarse voice. “You and she have won the stake, and I’ve brought it—brought it.”

Before they could speak he placed in Sally’s hands bonds for five million dollars.

“Jim—Jim, my son!” he burst out. Then, suddenly, he sank into a chair and, putting his head in his hands, sobbed aloud.

“My God, but I’m proud of you—speak to me, Jim. You’ve broken me up.” He was ashamed of his tears, but he could not wipe them away.

“Father, dear old man!” said Jim, and put his hands on the broad shoulders.

Sally knelt down beside him, took both the great hands from the tear-stained face, and laid them against her cheek. But presently she put Nancy on his knees.

“I don’t like you to cry,” the child said softly; “but to-day I cried too, ‘cause my Indian man is dead.”

The old man could not speak, but he put his cheek down to hers. After a minute, “Oh, but she’s worth ten times that!” he said as Sally came close to him with the bundle he had thrust into her hands.

“What is it?” said Jim.

“It’s five million dollars—for Nancy,” she said. “Five-million—what?”

“The stake, Jim,” said Sally. “If you did not drink for four years—never touched a drop—we were to have five million dollars.”

“You never told him, then—you never told him that?” asked the old man.

“I wanted him to win without it,” she said. “If he won, he would be the stronger; if he lost, it would not be so hard for him to bear.”

The old man drew her down and kissed her cheek. He chuckled, though the tears were still in his eyes. “You are a wonder—the tenth wonder of the world!” he declared.

Jim stood staring at the bundle in Nancy’s hands. “Five millions—five million dollars!”—he kept saying to himself.

“I said Nancy’s worth ten times that, Jim.” The old man caught his hand and pressed it. “But it was a damned near thing, I tell you,” he added. “They tried to break me and my railways and my bank. I had to fight the combination, and there was one day when I hadn’t that five million dollars there, nor five. Jim, they tried to break the old man. And if they’d broken me, they’d have made me out a scoundrel to her—to this wife of yours who risked everything for both of us, for both of us, Jim; for she’d given up the world to save you, and she was playing like a soul in Hell for Heaven. If they’d broken me, I’d never have lifted my head again. When things were at their worst I played to save that five millions,—her stake and mine,—I played for that. I fought for it as a man fights his way out of a burning house. And I won—I won. And it was by fighting for that five millions I saved fifty—fifty millions, son. They didn’t break the old man, Jim. They didn’t break him—not much.”

“There are giants in the world still,” said Jim, his own eyes full. He knew now his father and himself, and he knew the meaning of all the bitter and misspent life of the old days. He and his father were on a level of understanding at last.

“Are you a giant?” asked Nancy, peering up into her grandfather’s eyes.

The old man laughed, then sighed. “Perhaps I was once, more or less, my dear—” saying to her what he meant for the other two. “Perhaps I was; but I’ve finished. I’m through. I’ve had my last fight.”

He looked at his son. “I pass the game on to you, Jim. You can do it. I knew you could do it as the reports came in this year. I’ve had a detective up here for four years. I had to do it. It was the devil in me.

“You’ve got to carry on the game, Jim; I’m done. I’ll stay home and potter about. I want to go back to Kentucky, and build up the old place, and take care of it a bit-your mother always loved it. I’d like to have it as it was when she was there long ago. But I’ll be ready to help you when I’m wanted, understand.”

“You want me to run things—your colossal schemes? You think—?”

“I don’t think. I’m old enough to know.”

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.”

. . . . . .

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.

A MAN, A FAMINE, AND A HEATHEN BOY

Athabasca in the Far North is the scene of this story—Athabasca, one of the most beautiful countries in the world in summer, but a cold, bare land in winter. Yet even in winter it is not so bleak and bitter as the districts south-west of it, for the Chinook winds steal through from the Pacific and temper the fierceness of the frozen Rockies. Yet forty and fifty degrees below zero is cold after all, and July strawberries in this wild North land are hardly compensation for seven months of ice and snow, no matter how clear and blue the sky, how sweet the sun during its short journey in the day. Some days, too, the sun may not be seen even when there is no storm, because of the fine, white, powdered frost in the air.

A day like this is called a poudre day; and woe to the man who tempts it unthinkingly, because the light makes the delicate mist of frost shine like silver. For that powder bites the skin white in short order, and sometimes reckless men lose ears, or noses, or hands under its sharp caress. But when it really storms in that Far North, then neither man nor beast should be abroad—not even the Eskimo dogs; though times and seasons can scarcely be chosen when travelling in Athabasca, for a storm comes unawares. Upon the plains you will see a cloud arising, not in the sky, but from the ground—a billowy surf of drifting snow; then another white billow from the sky will sweep down and meet it, and you are caught between.

He who went to Athabasca to live a generation ago had to ask himself if the long winter, spent chiefly indoors, with, maybe, a little trading with the Indians, meagre sport, and scant sun, savages and half-breeds the only companions, and out of all touch with the outside world, letters coming but once a year; with frozen fish and meat, always the same, as the staple items in a primitive fare; with danger from starvation and marauding tribes; with endless monotony, in which men sometimes go mad—he had to ask himself if these were to be cheerfully endured because, in the short summer, the air is heavenly, the rivers and lakes are full of fish, the flotilla of canoes of the fur-hunters is pouring down, and all is gaiety and pleasant turmoil; because there is good shooting in the autumn, and the smell of the land is like a garden, and hardy fruits and flowers are at hand.

That is a question which was asked William Rufus Holly once upon a time.

William Rufus Holly, often called “Averdoopoy,” sometimes “Sleeping Beauty,” always Billy Rufus, had had

a good education. He had been to high school and to college, and he had taken one or two prizes en route to graduation; but no fame travelled with him, save that he was the laziest man of any college year for a decade. He loved his little porringer, which is to say that he ate a good deal; and he loved to read books, which is not to say that he loved study; he hated getting out of bed, and he was constantly gated for morning chapel. More than once he had sweetly gone to sleep over his examination papers. This is not to say that he failed at his examinations—on the contrary, he always succeeded; but he only did enough to pass and no more; and he did not wish to do more than pass. His going to sleep at examinations was evidence that he was either indifferent or self-indulgent, and it certainly showed that he was without nervousness. He invariably roused himself, or his professor roused him, a half-hour before the papers should be handed in, and, as it were by a mathematical calculation, he had always done just enough to prevent him being plucked.

He slept at lectures, he slept in hall, he slept as he waited his turn to go to the wicket in a cricket match, and he invariably went to sleep afterwards. He even did so on the day he had made the biggest score, in the biggest game ever played between his college and the pick of the country; but he first gorged himself with cake and tea. The day he took his degree he had to be dragged from a huge grandfather's chair, and forced along in his ragged gown—"ten holes and twelve tatters"—to the function in the convocation hall. He looked so fat and shiny, so balmy and sleepy when he took his degree and was handed his prize for a poem on Sir John Franklin, that the public laughed, and the college men in the gallery began singing:

"Bye O, my baby,
Father will come to you soo-oon!"

He seemed not to care, but yawned in his hand as he put his prize book under his arm through one of the holes in his gown, and in two minutes was back in his room, and in another five was fast asleep.

It was the general opinion that William Rufus Holly, fat, yellow-haired, and twenty-four years old, was doomed to failure in life, in spite of the fact that he had a little income of a thousand dollars a year, and had made a century in an important game of cricket. Great, therefore, was the surprise of the college, and afterward of the Province, when, at the farewell dinner of the graduates, Sleeping Beauty announced, between his little open-eyed naps, that he was going Far North as a missionary.

At first it was thought he was joking, but when at last, in his calm and dreamy look, they saw he meant what he said, they rose and carried him round the room on a chair, making impromptu songs as they travelled. They toasted Billy Rufus again and again, some of them laughing till they cried at the thought of Averdoopoy going to the Arctic regions. But an uneasy seriousness fell upon these "beautiful, bountiful, brilliant boys," as Holly called them later, when in a simple, honest, but indolent speech he said he had applied for ordination.

Six months later William Rufus Holly, a deacon in holy orders, journeyed to Athabasca in the Far North. On his long journey there was plenty of time to think. He was embarked on a career which must for ever keep him in the wilds; for very seldom indeed does a missionary of the North ever return to the crowded cities or take a permanent part in civilised life.

What the loneliness of it would be he began to feel, as for hours and hours he saw no human being on the plains; in the thrilling stillness of the night; in fierce storms in the woods, when his half-breed guides bent their heads to meet the wind and rain, and did not speak for hours; in the long, adventurous journey on the river by day, in the cry of the plaintive loon at night; in the scant food for every meal. Yet what the pleasure would be he felt in the joyous air, the exquisite sunshine, the flocks of wild-fowl flying North, honking on their course; in the song of the half-breeds as they ran the rapids. Of course, he did not think these things quite as they are written here—all at once and all together; but in little pieces from time to time, feeling them rather than saying them to himself.

At least he did understand how serious a thing it was, his going as a missionary into the Far North. Why did he do it? Was it a whim, or the excited imagination of youth, or that prompting which the young often have to make the world better? Or was it a fine spirit of adventure with a good heart behind it? Perhaps it was a little of all these; but there was also something more, and it was to his credit.

Lazy as William Rufus Holly had been at school and college, he had still thought a good deal, even when he seemed only sleeping; perhaps he thought more because he slept so much, because he studied little and read a great deal. He always knew what everybody thought—that he would never do anything but play cricket till he got too heavy to run, and then would sink into a slothful, fat, and useless middle and old age; that his life would be a failure. And he knew that they were right; that if he stayed where he could live an easy life, a fat and easy life he would lead; that in a few years he would be good for nothing except to eat and sleep—no more. One day, waking suddenly from a bad dream of himself so fat as to be drawn about on a dray by monstrous fat oxen with rings through their noses, led by monkeys, he began to wonder what he should do—the hardest thing to do; for only the hardest life could possibly save him from failure, and, in spite of all, he really did want to make something of his life. He had been reading the story of Sir John Franklin's Arctic expedition, and all at once it came home to him that the only thing for him to do was to go to the Far North and stay there, coming back about once every ten years to tell the people in the cities what was being done in the wilds. Then there came the inspiration to write his poem on Sir John Franklin, and he had done so, winning the college prize for poetry. But no one had seen any change in him in those months; and, indeed, there had been little or no change, for he had an equable and practical, though imaginative, disposition, despite his avoirdupois, and his new purpose did not stir him yet from his comfortable sloth.

And in all the journey West and North he had not been stirred greatly from his ease of body, for the journey was not much harder than playing cricket every day, and there were only the thrill of the beautiful air, the new people, and the new scenes to rouse him. As yet there was no great responsibility. He scarcely realised what his life must be, until one particular day. Then Sleeping Beauty waked wide up, and from that day lost the name. Till then he had looked and borne himself like any other traveller, unrecognised as a parson or "mikonaree." He had not had prayers in camp en route, he had not preached, he had held no meetings. He was as yet William Rufus Holly, the cricketer, the laziest dreamer of a college decade. His religion was simple

and practical; he had never had any morbid ideas; he had lived a healthy, natural, and honourable life, until he went for a mikonaree, and if he had no cant, he had not a clear idea of how many-sided, how responsible, his life must be—until that one particular day. This is what happened then.

From Fort O'Call, an abandoned post of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Peace River, nearly the whole tribe of the Athabasca Indians in possession of the post now had come up the river, with their chief, Knife-in-the-Wind, to meet the mikonaree. Factors of the Hudson's Bay Company, coureurs de bois, and voyageurs had come among them at times, and once the renowned Father Lacombe, the Jesuit priest, had stayed with them three months; but never to this day had they seen a Protestant mikonaree, though once a factor, noted for his furious temper, his powers of running, and his generosity, had preached to them. These men, however, were both over fifty years old. The Athabascas did not hunger for the Christian religion, but a courier from Edmonton had brought them word that a mikonaree was coming to their country to stay, and they put off their stoical manner and allowed themselves the luxury of curiosity. That was why even the squaws and papooses came up the river with the braves, all wondering if the stranger had brought gifts with him, all eager for their shares; for it had been said by the courier of the tribe that "Oshondonto," their name for the newcomer, was bringing mysterious loads of well-wrapped bales and skins. Upon a point below the first rapids of the Little Manitou they waited with their camp-fires burning and their pipe of peace.

When the canoes bearing Oshondonto and his voyageurs shot the rapids to the song of the river,

"En roulant, ma boule roulant,
En roulant, ma boule!"

with the shrill voices of the boatmen rising to meet the cry of the startled water-fowl, the Athabascas crowded to the high banks. They grunted "How!" in greeting, as the foremost canoe made for the shore.

But if surprise could have changed the countenances of Indians, these Athabascas would not have known one another when the missionary stepped out upon the shore. They had looked to see a grey-bearded man like the chief factor who quarrelled and prayed; but they found instead a round-faced, clean-shaven youth, with big, good-natured eyes, yellow hair, and a roundness of body like that of a month-old bear's cub. They expected to find a man who, like the factor, could speak their language, and they found a cherub sort of youth who talked only English, French, and Chinook—that common language of the North—and a few words of their own language which he had learned on the way.

Besides, Oshondonto was so absent-minded at the moment, so absorbed in admiration of the garish scene before him, that he addressed the chief in French, of which Knife-in-the-Wind knew but the one word cache, which all the North knows.

But presently William Rufus Holly recovered himself, and in stumbling Chinook made himself understood. Opening a bale, he brought out beads and tobacco and some bright red flannel, and two hundred Indians sat round him and grunted "How!" and received his gifts with little comment. Then the pipe of peace went round, and Oshondonto smoked it becomingly.

But he saw that the Indians despised him for his youth, his fatness, his yellow hair as soft as a girl's, his cherub face, browned though it was by the sun and weather.

As he handed the pipe to Knife-in-the-Wind, an Indian called Silver Tassel, with a cruel face, said grimly:

"Why does Oshondonto travel to us?"

William Rufus Holly's eyes steadied on those of the Indian as he replied in Chinook: "To teach the way to Manitou the Mighty, to tell the Athabascas of the Great Chief who died to save the world."

"The story is told in many ways; which is right? There was the factor, Word of Thunder. There is the song they sing at Edmonton—I have heard."

"The Great Chief is the same Chief," answered the missionary. "If you tell of Fort O'Call, and Knife-in-the-Wind tells of Fort O'Call, he and you will speak different words, and one will put in one thing and one will leave out another; men's tongues are different. But Fort O'Call is the-same, and the Great Chief is the same."

"It was a long time ago," said Knife-in-the-Wind sourly, "many thousand moons, as the pebbles in the river, the years."

"It is the same world, and it is the same Chief, and it was to save us," answered William Rufus Holly, smiling, yet with a fluttering heart, for the first test of his life had come.

In anger Knife-in-the-Wind thrust an arrow into the ground and said:

"How can the white man who died thousands of moons ago in a far country save the red man to-day?"

"A strong man should bear so weak a tale," broke in Silver Tassel ruthlessly. "Are we children that the Great Chief sends a child as messenger?"

For a moment Billy Rufus did not know how to reply, and in the pause Knife-in-the-Wind broke in two pieces the arrow he had thrust in the ground in token of displeasure.

Suddenly, as Oshondonto was about to speak, Silver Tassel sprang to his feet, seized in his arms a lad of twelve who was standing near, and running to the bank, dropped him into the swift current.

"If Oshondonto be not a child, let him save the lad," said Silver Tassel, standing on the brink.

Instantly William Rufus Holly was on his feet. His coat was off before Silver Tassel's words were out of his mouth, and crying, "In the name of the Great White Chief!" he jumped into the rushing current. "In the name of your Manitou, come on, Silver Tassel!" he called up from the water, and struck out for the lad.

Not pausing an instant, Silver Tassel sprang into the flood, into the whirling eddies and dangerous current below the first rapids and above the second.

Then came the struggle for Wingo of the Cree tribe, a waif among the Athabascas, whose father had been slain as they travelled, by a wandering tribe of Blackfeet. Never was there a braver rivalry, although the odds were with the Indian-in lightness, in brutal strength. With the mikonaree, however, were skill, and that sort of strength which the world calls "moral," the strength of a good and desperate purpose. Oshondonto knew that

on the issue of this shameless business—this cruel sport of Silver Tassel—would depend his future on the Peace River. As he shot forward with strong strokes in the whirling torrent after the helpless lad, who, only able to keep himself afloat, was being swept down towards the rapids below, he glanced up to the bank along which the Athabascas were running. He saw the garish colours of their dresses; he saw the ignorant medicine man, with his mysterious bag, making incantations; he saw the tepee of the chief, with its barbarous pennant above; he saw the idle, naked children tearing at the entrails of a calf; and he realised that this was a deadly tournament between civilisation and barbarism.

Silver Tassel was gaining on him, they were both overhauling the boy; it was now to see which should reach Wingo first, which should take him to shore. That is, if both were not carried under before they reached him; that is, if, having reached him, they and he would ever get to shore; for, lower down, before it reached the rapids, the current ran horribly smooth and strong, and here and there were jagged rocks just beneath the surface.

Still Silver Tassel gained on him, as they both gained on the boy. Oshondonto swam strong and hard, but he swam with his eye on the struggle for the shore also; he was not putting forth his utmost strength, for he knew it would be bitterly needed, perhaps to save his own life by a last effort.

Silver Tassel passed him when they were about fifty feet from the boy. Shooting by on his side, with a long stroke and the plunge of his body like a projectile, the dark face with the long black hair plastering it turned towards his own, in fierce triumph Silver Tassel cried “How!” in derision.

Billy Rufus set his teeth and lay down to his work like a sportsman. His face had lost its roses, and it was set and determined, but there was no look of fear upon it, nor did his heart sink when a cry of triumph went up from the crowd on the banks. The white man knew by old experience in the cricket-field and in many a boat-race that it is well not to halloo till you are out of the woods. His mettle was up, he was not the Reverend William Rufus Holly, missionary, but Billy Rufus, the champion cricketer, the sportsman playing a long game.

Silver Tassel reached the boy, who was bruised and bleeding and at his last gasp, and throwing an arm round him, struck out for the shore. The current was very strong, and he battled fiercely as Billy Rufus, not far above, moved down toward them at an angle. For a few yards Silver Tassel was going strong, then his pace slackened, he seemed to sink lower in the water, and his stroke became splashing and irregular. Suddenly he struck a rock, which bruised him badly, and, swerving from his course, he lost his stroke and let go the boy.

By this time the mikonaree had swept beyond them, and he caught the boy by his long hair as he was being swept below. Striking out for the shore, he swam with bold, strong strokes, his judgment guiding him well past rocks beneath the surface. Ten feet from shore he heard a cry of alarm from above. It concerned Silver Tassel, he knew, but he could not look round yet.

In another moment the boy was dragged up the bank by strong hands, and Billy Rufus swung round in the water towards Silver Tassel, who, in his confused energy, had struck another rock, and, exhausted now, was being swept towards the rapids. Silver Tassel’s shoulder scarcely showed, his strength was gone. In a flash Billy Rufus saw there was but one thing to do. He must run the rapids with Silver Tassel-there was no other way. It would be a fight through the jaws of death; but no Indian’s eyes had a better sense for river-life than William Rufus Holly’s.

How he reached Silver Tassel, and drew the Indian’s arm over his own shoulder; how they drove down into the boiling flood; how Billy Rufus’s fat body was battered and torn and ran red with blood from twenty flesh wounds; but how by luck beyond the telling he brought Silver Tassel through safely into the quiet water a quarter of a mile below the rapids, and was hauled out, both more dead than alive, is a tale still told by the Athabascas around their camp-fire. The rapids are known to-day as the Mikonaree Rapids.

The end of this beginning of the young man’s career was that Silver Tassel gave him the word of eternal friendship, Knife-in-the-Wind took him into the tribe, and the boy Wingo became his very own, to share his home, and his travels, no longer a waif among the Athabascas.

After three days’ feasting, at the end of which the missionary held his first service and preached his first sermon, to the accompaniment of grunts of satisfaction from the whole tribe of Athabascas, William Rufus Holly began his work in the Far North.

The journey to Fort O’Call was a procession of triumph, for, as it was summer, there was plenty of food, the missionary had been a success, and he had distributed many gifts of beads and flannel.

All went well for many moons, although converts were uncertain and baptisms few, and the work was hard and the loneliness at times terrible. But at last came dark days.

One summer and autumn there had been poor fishing and shooting, the caches of meat were fewer on the plains, and almost nothing had come up to Fort O’Call from Edmonton, far below. The yearly supplies for the missionary, paid for out of his private income—the bacon, beans, tea, coffee and flour—had been raided by a band of hostile Indians, and he viewed with deep concern the progress of the severe winter. Although three years of hard, frugal life had made his muscles like iron, they had only mellowed his temper, increased his flesh and rounded his face; nor did he look an hour older than on the day when he had won Wingo for his willing slave and devoted friend.

He never resented the frequent ingratitude of the Indians; he said little when they quarrelled over the small comforts his little income brought them yearly from the South. He had been doctor, lawyer, judge among them, although he interfered little in the larger disputes, and was forced to shut his eyes to intertribal enmities. He had no deep faith that he could quite civilise them; he knew that their conversion was only on the surface, and he fell back on his personal influence with them. By this he could check even the excesses of the worst man in the tribe, his old enemy, Silver Tassel of the bad heart, who yet was ready always to give a tooth for a tooth, and accepted the fact that he owed Oshondonto his life.

When famine crawled across the plains to the doors of the settlement and housed itself at Fort O’Call, Silver Tassel acted badly, however, and sowed fault-finding among the thoughtless of the tribe.

“What manner of Great Spirit is it who lets the food of his chief Oshondonto fall into the hands of the

Blackfeet?" he said. "Oshondonto says the Great Spirit hears. What has the Great Spirit to say? Let Oshondonto ask."

Again, when they all were hungrier, he went among them with complaining words. "If the white man's Great Spirit can do all things, let him give Oshondonto and the Athabascas food."

The missionary did not know of Silver Tassel's foolish words, but he saw the downcast face of Knife-in-the-Wind, the sullen looks of the people; and he unpacked the box he had reserved jealously for the darkest days that might come. For meal after meal he divided these delicacies among them—morsels of biscuit, and tinned meats, and dried fruits. But his eyes meanwhile were turned again and again to the storm raging without, as it had raged for this the longest week he had ever spent. If it would but slacken, a boat could go out to the nets set in the lake near by some days before, when the sun of spring had melted the ice. From the hour the nets had been set the storm had raged. On the day when the last morsel of meat and biscuit had been given away the storm had not abated, and he saw with misgiving the gloomy, stolid faces of the Indians round him. One man, two children, and three women had died in a fortnight. He dreaded to think what might happen, his heart ached at the looks of gaunt suffering in the faces of all; he saw, for the first time, how black and bitter Knife-in-the-Wind looked as Silver Tassel whispered to him.

With the colour all gone from his cheeks, he left the post and made his way to the edge of the lake where his canoe was kept. Making it ready for the launch, he came back to the Fort. Assembling the Indians, who had watched his movements closely, he told them that he was going through the storm to the nets on the lake, and asked for a volunteer to go with him.

No one replied. He pleaded-for the sake of the women and children.

Then Knife-in-the-Wind spoke. "Oshondonto will die if he goes. It is a fool's journey—does the wolverine walk into an empty trap?"

Billy Rufus spoke passionately now. His genial spirit fled; he reproached them.

Silver Tassel spoke up loudly. "Let Oshondonto's Great Spirit carry him to the nets alone, and back again with fish for the heathen the Great Chief died to save."

"You have a wicked heart, Silver Tassel. You know well that one man can't handle the boat and the nets also. Is there no one of you—?"

A figure shot forwards from a corner. "I will go with Oshondonto," came the voice of Wingo, the waif of the Crees.

The eye of the mikonaree flashed round in contempt on the tribe. Then suddenly it softened, and he said to the lad: "We will go together, Wingo."

Taking the boy by the hand, he ran with him through the rough wind to the shore, launched the canoe on the tossing lake, and paddled away through the tempest.

The bitter winds of an angry spring, the sleet and wet snow of a belated winter, the floating blocks of ice crushing against the side of the boat, the black water swishing over man and boy, the harsh, inclement world near and far.... The passage made at last to the nets; the brave Wingo steadying the canoe—a skilful hand sufficing where the strength of a Samson would not have availed; the nets half full, and the breaking cry of joy from the lips of the waif-a cry that pierced the storm and brought back an answering cry from the crowd of Indians on the far shore... The quarter-hour of danger in the tossing canoe; the nets too heavy to be dragged, and fastened to the thwarts instead; the canoe going shoreward jerkily, a cork on the waves with an anchor behind; heavier seas and winds roaring down on them as they slowly near the shore; and at last, in one awful moment, the canoe upset, and the man and the boy in the water. ... Then both clinging to the upturned canoe as it is driven nearer and nearer shore.... The boy washed off once, twice, and the man with his arm round clinging-clinging, as the shrieking storm answers to the calling of the Athabascas on the shore, and drives craft and fish and man and boy down upon the banks; no savage bold enough to plunge in to their rescue. ... At last a rope thrown, a drowning man's wrists wound round it, his teeth set in it—and now, at last, a man and a heathen boy, both insensible, being carried to the mikonaree's but and laid upon two beds, one on either side of the small room, as the red sun goes slowly down. ... The two still bodies on bearskins in the hut, and a hundred superstitious Indians flying from the face of death.... The two alone in the light of the flickering fire; the many gone to feast on fish, the price of lives.

But the price was not yet paid, for the man waked from insensibility—waked to see himself with the body of the boy beside him in the red light of the fires.

For a moment his heart stopped beating, he turned sick and faint. Deserted by those for whom he risked his life!... How long had he lain there? What time was it? When was it that he had fought his way to the nets and back again-hours maybe? And the dead boy there, Wingo, who had risked his life, also dead—how long? His heart leaped—ah! not hours, only minutes maybe. It was sundown as unconsciousness came on him—Indians would not stay with the dead after sundown. Maybe it was only ten minutes-five minutes—one minute ago since they left him!...

His watch! Shaking fingers drew it out, wild eyes scanned it. It was not stopped. Then it could have only been minutes ago. Trembling to his feet, he staggered over to Wingo, he felt the body, he held a mirror to the lips. Yes, surely there was light moisture on the glass.

Then began another fight with death—William Rufus Holly struggling to bring to life again Wingo, the waif of the Crees.

The blood came back to his own heart with a rush as the mad desire to save this life came on him. He talked to the dumb face, he prayed in a kind of delirium, as he moved the arms up and down, as he tilted the body, as he rubbed, chafed and strove. He forgot he was a missionary, he almost cursed himself. "For them—for cowards, I risked his life, the brave lad with no home. Oh, God! give him back to me!" he sobbed. "What right had I to risk his life for theirs? I should have shot the first man that refused to go.... Wingo, speak! Wake up! Come back!"

The sweat poured from him in his desperation and weakness. He said to himself that he had put this young life into the hazard without cause. Had he, then, saved the lad from the rapids and Silver Tassel's brutality

only to have him drag fish out of the jaws of death for Silver Tassel's meal?

It seemed to him that he had been working for hours, though it was in fact only a short time, when the eyes of the lad slowly opened and closed again, and he began to breathe spasmodically. A cry of joy came from the lips of the missionary, and he worked harder still. At last the eyes opened wide, stayed open, saw the figure bent over him, and the lips whispered, "Oshondonto—my master," as a cup of brandy was held to his lips.

He had conquered the Athabascas for ever. Even Silver Tassel acknowledged his power, and he as industriously spread abroad the report that the mikonaree had raised Wingo from the dead, as he had sown dissension during the famine. But the result was that the missionary had power in the land, and the belief in him was so great, that, when Knife-in-the-Wind died, the tribe came to ask him to raise their chief from the dead. They never quite believed that he could not—not even Silver Tassel, who now rules the Athabascas and is ruled by William Rufus Holly: which is a very good thing for the Athabascas.

Billy Rufus the cricketer had won the game, and somehow the Reverend William Rufus Holly the missionary never repented the strong language he used against the Athabascas, as he was bringing Wingo back to life, though it was not what is called "strictly canonical."

THE HEALING SPRINGS AND THE PIONEERS

He came out of the mysterious South one summer day, driving before him a few sheep, a cow, and a long-eared mule which carried his tent and other necessaries, and camped outside the town on a knoll, at the base of which was a thicket of close shrub. During the first day no one in Jansen thought anything of it, for it was a land of pilgrimage, and hundreds came and went on their journeys in search of free homesteads and good water and pasturage. But when, after three days, he was still there, Nicolle Terasse, who had little to do, and an insatiable curiosity, went out to see him. He found a new sensation for Jansen. This is what he said when he came back:

"You want know 'bout him, bagosh! Dat is somet'ing to see, dat man—Ingles is his name. Sooch hair—mooch long an' brown, and a leetla beard not so brown, an' a leather sole onto his feet, and a grey coat to his ankles—yes, so like dat. An' his voice—voila, it is like water in a cave. He is a great man—I dunno not; but he spik at me like dis, 'Is dere sick, and cripple, and stay in-bed people here dat can't get up?' he say. An' I say, 'Not plenty, but some-bagosh! Dere is dat Miss Greet, an' ole Ma'am Drouchy, an' dat young Pete Hayes—an' so on.' 'Well, if they have faith I will heal them,' he spik at me. 'From de Healing Springs dey shall rise to walk,' he say. Bagosh, you not t'ink dat true? Den you go see."

So Jansen turned out to see, and besides the man they found a curious thing. At the foot of the knoll, in a space which he had cleared, was a hot spring that bubbled and rose and sank, and drained away into the thirsty ground. Luck had been with Ingles the Faith Healer. Whether he knew of the existence of this spring, or whether he chanced upon it, he did not say; but while he held Jansen in the palm of his hand, in the feverish days that followed, there were many who attached mysterious significance to it, who claimed for it supernatural origin. In any case, the one man who had known of the existence of this spring was far away from Jansen, and he did not return till a day of reckoning came for the Faith Healer.

Meanwhile Jansen made pilgrimage to the Springs of Healing, and at unexpected times Ingles suddenly appeared in the town, and stood at street corners; and in his "Patmian voice," as Flood Rawley the lawyer called it, warned the people to flee their sins, and purifying their hearts, learn to cure all ills of mind and body, the weaknesses of the sinful flesh and the "ancient evil" in their souls, by faith that saves.

"'Is not the life more than meat'" he asked them. "And if, peradventure, there be those among you who have true belief in hearts all purged of evil, and yet are maimed, or sick of body, come to me, and I will lay my hands upon you, and I will heal you." Thus he cried.

There were those so wrought upon by his strange eloquence and spiritual passion, so hypnotised by his physical and mental exaltation, that they rose up from the hand-laying and the prayer eased of their ailments. Others he called upon to lie in the hot spring at the foot of the hill for varying periods, before the laying on of hands, and these also, crippled, or rigid with troubles' of the bone, announced that they were healed.

People flocked from other towns, and though, to some who had been cured, their pains and sickness returned, there were a few who bore perfect evidence to his teaching and healing, and followed him, "converted and consecrated," as though he were a new Messiah. In this corner of the West was such a revival as none could remember—not even those who had been to camp meetings in the East in their youth, and had seen the Spirit descend upon hundreds and draw them to the anxious seat.

Then came the great sensation—the Faith Healer converted Laura Sloly. Upon which Jansen drew its breath painfully; for, while it was willing to bend to the inspiration of the moment, and to be swept on a tide of excitement into that enchanted field called Imagination, it wanted to preserve its institutions—and Laura Sloly had come to be an institution. Jansen had always plumed itself, and smiled, when she passed; and even now the most sentimentally religious of them inwardly anticipated the time when the town would return to its normal condition; and that condition would not be normal if there were any change in Laura Sloly. It mattered little whether most people were changed or not because one state of their minds could not be less or more interesting than another; but a change in Laura. Sloly could not be for the better.

Her father had come to the West in the early days, and had prospered by degrees until a town grew up beside his ranch; and though he did not acquire as much permanent wealth from this golden chance as might have been expected, and lost much he did make by speculation, still he had his rich ranch left, and it, and he, and Laura were part of the history of Jansen. Laura had been born at Jansen before even it had a name. Next to her father she was the oldest inhabitant, and she had a prestige which was given to no one else.

Everything had conspired to make her a figure of moment and interest. She was handsome in almost a

mannish sort of way, being of such height and straightness, and her brown eyes had a depth and fire in which more than a few men had drowned themselves. Also, once she had saved a settlement by riding ahead of a marauding Indian band to warn their intended victims, and had averted another tragedy of pioneer life. Pioneers proudly told strangers to Jansen of the girl of thirteen who rode a hundred and twenty miles without food, and sank inside the palisade of the Hudson's Bay Company's fort, as the gates closed upon the settlers taking refuge, the victim of brain fever at last. Cerebrospinal meningitis, the doctor from Winnipeg called it, and the memory of that time when men and women would not sleep till her crisis was past, was still fresh on the tongues of all.

Then she had married at seventeen, and, within a year, had lost both her husband and her baby, a child bereaved of her Playmates—for her husband had been but twenty years old and was younger far than she in everything. And since then, twelve years before, she had seen generations of lovers pass into the land they thought delectable; and their children flocked to her, hung about her, were carried off by her to the ranch, and kept for days, against the laughing protests of their parents. Flood Rawley called her the Pied Piper of Jansen, and indeed she had a voice that fluted and piped, and yet had so whimsical a note, that the hardest faces softened at the sound of it; and she did not keep its best notes for the few. She was impartial, almost impersonal; no woman was her enemy, and every man was her friend—and nothing more. She had never had an accepted lover since the day her Playmates left her. Every man except one had given up hope that he might win her; and though he had been gone from Jansen for two years, and had loved her since the days before the Playmates came and went, he never gave up hope, and was now to return and say again what he had mutely said for years—what she understood, and he knew she understood.

Tim Denton had been a wild sort in his brief day. He was a rough diamond, but he was a diamond, and was typical of the West—its heart, its courage, its freedom, and its force; capable of exquisite gentleness, strenuous to exaggeration, with a very primitive religion; and the only religion Tim knew was that of human nature. Jansen did not think Tim good enough—not within a comet shot—for Laura Sloly; but they thought him better than any one else.

But now Laura was a convert to the prophet of the Healing Springs, and those people who still retain their heads in the eddy of religious emotion were in despair. They dreaded to meet Laura; they kept away from the "protracted meetings," but were eager to hear about her and what she said and did. What they heard allayed their worst fears. She still smiled, and seemed as cheerful as before, they heard, and she neither spoke nor prayed in public, but she led the singing always. Now the anxious and the sceptical and the reactionary ventured out to see and hear; and seeing and hearing gave them a satisfaction they hardly dared express. She was more handsome than ever, and if her eyes glistened with a light they had never seen before, and awed them, her lips still smiled, and the old laugh came when she spoke to them. Their awe increased. This was "getting religion" with a difference.

But presently they received a shock. A whisper grew that Laura was in love with the Faith Healer. Some woman's instinct drove straight to the centre of a disconcerting possibility, and in consternation she told her husband; and Jansen husbands had a freemasonry of gossip. An hour, and all Jansen knew, or thought they knew; and the "saved" rejoiced; and the rest of the population, represented by Nicolle Terasse at one end and Flood Rawley at the other, flew to arms. No vigilance committee was ever more determined and secret and organised than the unconverted civic patriots, who were determined to restore Jansen to its old-time condition. They pointed out cold-bloodedly that the Faith Healer had failed three times where he had succeeded once; and that, admitting the successes, there was no proof that his religion was their cause. There were such things as hypnotism and magnetism and will-power, and abnormal mental stimulus on the part of the healed—to say nothing of the Healing Springs.

Carefully laying their plans, they quietly spread the rumour that Ingles had promised to restore to health old Mary Jewell, who had been bedridden ten years, and had sent word and prayed to have him lay his hands upon her—Catholic though she was. The Faith Healer, face to face with this supreme and definite test, would have retreated from it but for Laura Sloly. She expected him to do it, believed that he could, said that he would, herself arranged the day and the hour, and sang so much exaltation into him, that at last a spurious power seemed to possess him. He felt that there had entered into him something that could be depended on, not the mere flow of natural magnetism fed by an outdoor life and a temperament of great emotional force, and chance, and suggestion—and other things. If, at first, he had influenced Laura, some ill-controlled, latent idealism in him, working on a latent poetry and spirituality in her, somehow bringing her into nearer touch with her lost Playmates than she had been in the long years that had passed; she, in turn, had made his unrationalised brain reel; had caught him up into a higher air, on no wings of his own; had added another lover to her company of lovers—and the first impostor she had ever had. She who had known only honest men as friends, in one blind moment lost her perspicuous sense; her instinct seemed asleep. She believed in the man and in his healing. Was there anything more than that?

The day of the great test came, hot, brilliant, vivid. The air was of a delicate sharpness, and, as it came toward evening, the glamour of an August when the reapers reap was upon Jansen; and its people gathered round the house of Mary Jewell to await the miracle of faith. Apart from the emotional many who sang hymns and spiritual songs were a few determined men, bent on doing justice to Jansen though the heavens might fall. Whether or no Laura Sloly was in love with the Faith Healer, Jansen must look to its own honour—and hers. In any case, this peripatetic saint at Sloly's Ranch—the idea was intolerable; women must be saved in spite of themselves.

Laura was now in the house by the side of the bedridden Mary Jewell, waiting, confident, smiling, as she held the wasted hand on the coverlet. With her was a minister of the Baptist persuasion, who was swimming with the tide, and who approved of the Faith Healer's immersions in the hot Healing Springs; also a medical student who had pretended belief in Ingles, and two women weeping with unnecessary remorse for human failings of no dire kind. The windows were open, and those outside could see. Presently, in a lull of the singing, there was a stir in the crowd, and then, sudden loud greetings:

"My, if it ain't Tim Denton! Jerusalem! You back, Tim!"

These and other phrases caught the ear of Laura Sloly in the sick-room. A strange look flashed across her

face, and the depth of her eyes was troubled for a moment, as to the face of the old comes a tremor at the note of some long-forgotten song. Then she steadied herself and waited, catching bits of the loud talk which still floated towards her from without.

"What's up? Some one getting married—or a legacy, or a saw-off? Why, what a lot of Sunday-go-to-meeting folks to be sure!" Tim laughed loudly.

After which the quick tongue of Nicolle Terasse: "You want know? Tiens, be quiet; here he come. He cure you body and soul, ver' queeck—yes."

The crowd swayed and parted, and slowly, bare head uplifted, face looking to neither right nor left, the Faith Healer made his way to the door of the little house. The crowd hushed. Some were awed, some were overpoweringly interested, some were cruelly patient. Nicolle Terasse and others were whispering loudly to Tim Denton. That was the only sound, until the Healer got to the door. Then, on the steps, he turned to the multitude.

"Peace be to you all, and upon this house," he said and stepped through the doorway.

Tim Denton, who had been staring at the face of the Healer, stood for an instant like one with all his senses arrested. Then he gasped, and exclaimed, "Well, I'm eternally—" and broke off with a low laugh, which was at first mirthful, and then became ominous and hard.

"Oh, magnificent—magnificent—jerickety!" he said into the sky above him.

His friends who were not "saved," closed in on him to find the meaning of his words, but he pulled himself together, looked blankly at them, and asked them questions. They told him so much more than he cared to hear, that his face flushed a deep red—the bronze of it most like the colour of Laura Sloly's hair; then he turned pale. Men saw that he was roused beyond any feeling in themselves.

"'Sh!" he said. "Let's see what he can do." With the many who were silently praying, as they had been, bidden to do, the invincible ones leant forwards, watching the little room where healing—or tragedy—was afoot. As in a picture, framed by the window, they saw the kneeling figures, the Healer standing with outstretched arms. They heard his voice, sonorous and appealing, then commanding—and yet Mary Jewell did not rise from her bed and walk. Again, and yet again, the voice rang out, and still the woman lay motionless. Then he laid his hands upon her, and again he commanded her to rise.

There was a faint movement, a desperate struggle to obey, but Nature and Time and Disease had their way. Yet again there was the call. An agony stirred the bed. Then another great Healer came between, and mercifully dealt the sufferer a blow—Death has a gentle hand sometimes. Mary Jewell was bedridden still—and for ever.

Like a wind from the mountains the chill knowledge of death wailed through the window, and over the heads of the crowd. All the figures were upright now in the little room. Then those outside saw Laura Sloly lean over and close the sightless eyes. This done, she came to the door and opened it, and motioned for the Healer to leave. He hesitated, hearing the harsh murmur from the outskirts of the crowd. Once again she motioned, and he came. With a face deadly pale she surveyed the people before her silently for a moment, her eyes all huge and staring.

Presently she turned to Ingles and spoke to him quickly in a low voice; then, descending the steps, passed out through the lane made for her by the crowd, he following with shaking limbs and bowed bead.

Warning words had passed among the few invincible ones who waited where the Healer must pass into the open, and there was absolute stillness as Laura advanced. Their work was to come—quiet and swift and sure; but not yet.

Only one face Laura saw, as she led the way to the moment's safety—Tim Denton's; and it was as stricken as her own. She passed, then turned, and looked at him again. He understood; she wanted him.

He waited till she sprang into her waggon, after the Healer had mounted his mule and ridden away with ever-quickening pace into the prairie. Then he turned to the set, fierce men beside him.

"Leave him alone," he said, "leave him to me. I know him. You hear? Ain't I no rights? I tell you I knew him—South. You leave him to me."

They nodded, and he sprang into his saddle and rode away. They watched the figure of the Healer growing smaller in the dusty distance.

"Tim'll go to her," one said, "and perhaps they'll let the snake get off. Hadn't we best make sure?"

"Perhaps you'd better let him vamoose," said Flood Rawley anxiously. "Jansen is a law-abiding place!" The reply was decisive. Jansen had its honour to keep. It was the home of the Pioneers—Laura Sloly was a Pioneer.

Tim Denton was a Pioneer, with all the comradeship which lay in the word, and he was that sort of lover who has seen one woman, and can never see another—not the product of the most modern civilisation. Before Laura had had Playmates he had given all he had to give; he had waited and hoped ever since; and when the ruthless gossips had said to him before Mary Jewell's house that she was in love with the Faith Healer, nothing changed in him. For the man, for Ingles, Tim belonged to a primitive breed, and love was not in his heart. As he rode out to Sloly's Ranch, he ground his teeth in rage. But Laura had called him to her, and: "Well, what you say goes, Laura," he muttered at the end of a long hour of human passion and its repression. "If he's to go scot-free, then he's got to go; but the boys yonder'll drop on me, if he gets away. Can't you see what a swab he is, Laura?"

The brown eyes of the girl looked at him gently. The struggle between them was over; she had had her way—to save the preacher, impostor though he was; and now she felt, as she had never felt before in the same fashion, that this man was a man of men.

"Tim, you do not understand," she urged. "You say he was a landsharp in the South, and that he had to leave-"

"He had to vamoose, or take tar and feathers."

"But he had to leave. And he came here preaching and healing; and he is a hypocrite and a fraud—I know

that now, my eyes are opened. He didn't do what he said he could do, and it killed Mary Jewell—the shock; and there were other things he said he could do, and he didn't do them. Perhaps he is all bad, as you say—I don't think so. But he did some good things, and through him I've felt as I've never felt before about God and life, and about Walt and the baby—as though I'll see them again, sure. I've never felt that before. It was all as if they were lost in the hills, and no trail home, or out to where they are. Like as not God was working in him all the time, Tim; and he failed because he counted too much on the little he had, and made up for what he hadn't by what he pretended."

"He can pretend to himself, or God Almighty, or that lot down there"—he jerked a finger towards the town—"but to you, a girl, and a Pioneer—"

A flash of humour shot into her eyes at his last words, then they filled with tears, through which the smile shone. To pretend to "a Pioneer"—the splendid vanity and egotism of the West!

"He didn't pretend to me, Tim. People don't usually have to pretend to like me."

"You know what I'm driving at."

"Yes, yes, I know. And whatever he is, you've said that you will save him. I'm straight, you know that. Somehow, what I felt from his preaching—well, everything got sort of mixed up with him, and he was—was different. It was like the long dream of Walt and the baby, and he a part of it. I don't know what I felt, or what I might have felt for him. I'm a woman—I can't understand. But I know what I feel now. I never want to see him again on earth—or in Heaven. It needn't be necessary even in Heaven; but what happened between God and me through him stays, Tim; and so you must help him get away safe. It's in your hands—you say they left it to you."

"I don't trust that too much."

Suddenly he pointed out of the window towards the town. "See, I'm right; there they are, a dozen of 'em mounted. They're off, to run him down."

Her face paled; she glanced towards the Hill of Healing. "He's got an hour's start," she said; "he'll get into the mountains and be safe."

"If they don't catch him 'fore that."

"Or if you don't get to him first," she said, with nervous insistence.

He turned to her with a hard look; then, as he met her soft, fearless, beautiful eyes, his own grew gentle. "It takes a lot of doing. Yet I'll do it for you, Laura," he said. "But it's hard on the Pioneers." Once more her humour flashed, and it seemed to him that "getting religion" was not so depressing after all—wouldn't be, anyhow, when this nasty job was over. "The Pioneers will get over it, Tim," she rejoined. "They've swallowed a lot in their time. Heaven's gate will have to be pretty wide to let in a real Pioneer," she added. "He takes up so much room—ah, Timothy Denton!" she added, with an outburst of whimsical merriment.

"It hasn't spoiled you—being converted, has it?" he said, and gave a quick little laugh, which somehow did more for his ancient cause with her than all he had ever said or done. Then he stepped outside and swung into his saddle.

It had been a hard and anxious ride, but Tim had won, and was keeping his promise. The night had fallen before he got to the mountains, which he and the Pioneers had seen the Faith Healer enter. They had had four miles' start of Tim, and had ridden fiercely, and they entered the gulch into which the refugee had disappeared still two miles ahead.

The invincibles had seen Tim coming, but they had determined to make a sure thing of it, and would themselves do what was necessary with the impostor, and take no chances. So they pressed their horses, and he saw them swallowed by the trees, as darkness gathered. Changing his course, he entered the familiar hills, which he knew better than any pioneer of Jansen, and rode a diagonal course over the trail they would take. But night fell suddenly, and there was nothing to do but to wait till morning. There was comfort in this—the others must also wait, and the refugee could not go far. In any case, he must make for settlement or perish, since he had left behind his sheep and his cow.

It fell out better than Tim hoped. The Pioneers were as good hunters as was he, their instinct was as sure, their scouts and trackers were many, and he was but one. They found the Faith Healer by a little stream, eating bread and honey, and, like an ancient woodlander drinking from a horn—relics of his rank imposture. He made no resistance. They tried him formally, if perfunctorily; he admitted his imposture, and begged for his life. Then they stripped him naked, tied a bit of canvas round his waist, fastened him to a tree, and were about to complete his punishment when Tim Denton burst upon them.

Whether the rage Tim showed was all real or not; whether his accusations of bad faith came from so deeply wounded a spirit as he would have them believe, he was not likely to tell; but he claimed the prisoner as his own, and declined to say what he meant to do.

When, however, they saw the abject terror of the Faith Healer as he begged not to be left alone with Tim—for they had not meant death, and Ingles thought he read death in Tim's ferocious eyes—they laughed cynically, and left it to Tim to uphold the honour of Jansen and the Pioneers.

As they disappeared, the last thing they saw was Tim with his back to them, his hands on his hips, and a knife clasped in his fingers.

"He'll lift his scalp and make a monk of him," chuckled the oldest and hardest of them.

"Dat Tim will cut his heart out, I t'ink-bagosh!" said Nicolle Terasse, and took a drink of white-whiskey. For a long time Tim stood looking at the other, until no sound came from the woods, whither the Pioneers had gone. Then at last, slowly, and with no roughness, as the terror-stricken impostor shrank and withered, he cut the cords.

"Dress yourself," he said shortly, and sat down beside the stream, and washed his face and hands, as though to cleanse them from contamination. He appeared to take no notice of the other, though his ears keenly noted every movement.

The impostor dressed nervously, yet slowly; he scarce comprehended anything, except that he was not in

immediate danger. When he had finished, he stood looking at Tim, who was still seated on a log plunged in meditation.

It seemed hours before Tim turned round, and now his face was quiet, if set and determined. He walked slowly over, and stood looking at his victim for some time without speaking. The other's eyes dropped, and a greyness stole over his features. This steely calm was even more frightening than the ferocity which had previously been in his captor's face. At length the tense silence was broken.

"Wasn't the old game good enough? Was it played out? Why did you take to this? Why did you do it, Scranton?"

The voice quavered a little in reply. "I don't know. Something sort of pushed me into it."

"How did you come to start it?"

There was a long silence, then the husky reply came. "I got a sickener last time—"

"Yes, I remember, at Waywing."

"I got into the desert, and had hard times—awful for a while. I hadn't enough to eat, and I didn't know whether I'd die by hunger, or fever, or Indians—or snakes."

"Oh, you were seeing snakes!" said Tim grimly.

"Not the kind you mean; I hadn't anything to drink—"

"No, you never did drink, I remember—just was crooked, and slopped over women. Well, about the snakes?"

"I caught them to eat, and they were poison-snakes often. And I wasn't quick at first to get them safe by the neck—they're quick, too."

Tim laughed inwardly. "Getting your food by the sweat of your brow—and a snake in it, same as Adam! Well, was it in the desert you got your taste for honey, too, same as John the Baptist—that was his name, if I recomember?" He looked at the tin of honey on the ground.

"Not in the desert, but when I got to the grass-country."

"How long were you in the desert?"

"Close to a year."

Tim's eyes opened wider. He saw that the man was speaking the truth.

"Got to thinking in the desert, and sort of willing things to come to pass, and mooning along, you, and the sky, and the vultures, and the hot hills, and the snakes, and the flowers—eh?"

"There weren't any flowers till I got to the grass-country."

"Oh, cuss me, if you ain't simple for your kind! I know all about that. And when you got to the grass-country, you just picked up the honey, and the flowers, and a calf, and a lamb, and a mule here and there, 'without money and without price,' and walked on—that it?"

The other shrank before the steel in the voice, and nodded his head.

"But you kept thinking in the grass-country of what you'd felt and said and done—and willed, in the desert, I suppose?"

Again the other nodded.

"It seemed to you in the desert, as if you'd saved your own life a hundred times, as if you'd just willed food and drink and safety to come; as if Providence had been at your elbow?"

"It was like a dream, and it stayed with me. I had to think in the desert things I'd never thought before," was the half-abstracted answer.

"You felt good in the desert?" The other hung his head in shame.

"Makes you seem pretty small, doesn't it? You didn't stay long enough, I guess, to get what you were feeling for; you started in on the new racket too soon. You never got really possessed that you was a sinner. I expect that's it."

The other made no reply.

"Well, I don't know much about such things. I was loose brought up; but I've a friend"—Laura was before his eyes—"that says religion's all right, and long ago as I can remember my mother used to pray three times a day—with grace at meals, too. I know there's a lot in it for them that need it; and there seems to be a lot of folks needing it, if I'm to judge by folks down there at Jansen, specially when there's the laying-on of hands and the Healing Springs. Oh, that was a pigsty game, Scranton, that about God giving you the Healing Springs, like Moses and the rock! Why, I discovered them springs myself two years ago, before I went South, and I guess God wasn't helping me any—not after I've kept out of His way as I have. But, anyhow, religion's real; that's my sense of it; and you can get it, I bet, if you try. I've seen it got. A friend of mine got it—got it under your preaching; not from you; but you was the accident that brought it about, I expect. It's funny—it's merakilous, but it's so. Kneel down!" he added, with peremptory suddenness. "Kneel, Scranton!"

In fear the other knelt.

"You're going to get religion now—here. You're going to pray for what you didn't get—and almost got—in the desert. You're going to ask forgiveness for all your damn tricks, and pray like a fanning-mill for the spirit to come down. You ain't a scoundrel at heart—a friend of mine says so. You're a weak vessel, cracked, perhaps. You've got to be saved, and start right over again—and 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow!' Pray—pray, Scranton, and tell the whole truth, and get it—get religion. Pray like blazes. You go on, and pray out loud. Remember the desert, and Mary Jewell, and your mother—did you have a mother, Scranton—say, did you have a mother, lad?"

Tim's voice suddenly lowered before the last word, for the Faith Healer had broken down in a torrent of tears.

"Oh, my mother—O God!" he groaned.

"Say, that's right—that's right—go on," said the other, and drew back a little, and sat down on a log. The

man on his knees was convulsed with misery. Denton, the world, disappeared. He prayed in agony. Presently Tim moved uneasily, then got up and walked about; and at last, with a strange, awed look, when an hour was past, he stole back into the shadow of the trees, while still the wounded soul poured out its misery and repentance.

Time moved on. A curious shyness possessed Tim now, a thing which he had never felt in his life. He moved about self-consciously, awkwardly, until at last there was a sudden silence over by the brook.

Tim looked, and saw the face of the kneeling man cleared, and quiet and shining. He hesitated, then stepped out, and came over.

"Have you got it?" he asked quietly. "It's noon now."

"May God help me to redeem my past," answered the other in a new voice.

"You've got it—sure?" Tim's voice was meditative. "God has spoken to me," was the simple answer. "I've got a friend'll be glad to hear that," he said; and once more, in imagination, he saw Laura Sloly standing at the door of her home, with a light in her eyes he had never seen before.

"You'll want some money for your journey?" Tim asked.

"I want nothing but to go away—far away," was the low reply.

"Well, you've lived in the desert—I guess you can live in the grass-country," came the dry response. "Good-bye-and good luck, Scranton."

Tim turned to go, moved on a few steps, then looked back.

"Don't be afraid—they'll not follow," he said. "I'll fix it for you all right."

But the man appeared not to hear; he was still on his knees.

Tim faced the woods once more.

He was about to mount his horse when he heard a step behind him. He turned sharply—and faced Laura. "I couldn't rest. I came out this morning. I've seen everything," she said.

"You didn't trust me," he said heavily.

"I never did anything else," she answered.

He gazed half-fearfully into her eyes. "Well?" he asked. "I've done my best, as I said I would."

"Tim," she said, and slipped a hand in his, "would you mind the religion—if you had me?"

THE LITTLE WIDOW OF JANSEN

Her advent to Jansen was propitious. Smallpox in its most virulent form had broken out in the French-Canadian portion of the town, and, coming with some professional nurses from the East, herself an amateur, to attend the sufferers, she worked with such skill and devotion that the official thanks of the Corporation were offered her, together with a tiny gold watch, the gift of grateful citizens. But she still remained on at Jansen, saying always, however, that she was "going East in the spring."

Five years had passed, and still she had not gone East, but remained perched in the rooms she had first taken, over the Imperial Bank, while the town grew up swiftly round her. And even when the young bank manager married, and wished to take over the rooms, she sent him to the right-about from his own premises in her gay, masterful way. The young manager behaved well in the circumstances, because he had asked her to marry him, and she had dismissed him with a warning against challenging his own happiness—that was the way she had put it. Perhaps he was galled the less because others had striven for the same prize, and had been thrust back, with an almost tender misgiving as to their sense of self-preservation and sanity. Some of them were eligible enough, and all were of some position in the West. Yet she smiled them firmly away, to the wonder of Jansen, and to its satisfaction, for was it not a tribute to all that she would distinguish no particular unit by her permanent favour? But for one so sprightly and almost frivolous in manner at times, the self-denial seemed incongruous. She was unconventional enough to sit on the side-walk with a half-dozen children round her blowing bubbles, or to romp in any garden, or in the street, playing Puss-in-the-ring; yet this only made her more popular. Jansen's admiration was at its highest, however, when she rode in the annual steeplechase with the best horsemen of the province. She had the gift of doing as well as of being.

"'Tis the light heart she has, and slippin' in and out of things like a humming-bird, no easier to ketch, and no longer to stay," said Finden, the rich Irish landbroker, suggestively to Father Bourassa, the huge French-Canadian priest who had worked with her through all the dark weeks of the smallpox epidemic, and who knew what lay beneath the outer gaiety. She had been buoyant of spirit beside the beds of the sick, and her words were full of raillery and humour, yet there was ever a gentle note behind all; and the priest had seen her eyes shining with tears, as she bent over some stricken sufferer bound upon an interminable journey.

"Bedad! as bright a little spark as ever struck off the steel," added Finden to the priest, with a sidelong, inquisitive look, "but a heart no bigger than a marrowfat pea-selfishness, all self. Keepin' herself for herself when there's manny a good man needin' her. Mother o' Moses, how manny! From Terry O'Ryan, brother of a peer, at Latouche, to Bernard Bapty, son of a millionaire, at Vancouver, there's a string o' them. All pride and self; and as fair a lot they've been as ever entered for the Marriage Cup. Now, isn't that so, father?"

Finden's brogue did not come from a plebeian origin. It was part of his commercial equipment, an asset of his boyhood spent among the peasants on the family estate in Galway.

Father Bourassa fanned himself with the black broadbrim hat he wore, and looked benignly but quizzically on the wiry, sharp-faced Irishman.

"You t'ink her heart is leetla. But perhaps it is your mind not so big enough to see—hein?" The priest laughed noiselessly, showing white teeth. "Was it so selfish in Madame to refuse the name of Finden—n'est-

ce pas?”

Finden flushed, then burst into a laugh. “I’d almost forgotten I was one of them—the first almost. Blessed be he that expects nothing, for he’ll get it, sure. It was my duty, and I did it. Was she to feel that Jansen did not price her high? Bedad, father, I rose betimes and did it, before anny man should say he set me the lead. Before the carpet in the parlour was down, and with the bare boards soundin’ to my words, I offered her the name of Finden.”

“And so—the first of the long line! Bien, it is an honour.” The priest paused a moment, looked at Finden with a curious reflective look, and then said: “And so you t’ink there is no one; that she will say yes not at all—no?”

They were sitting on Father Bourassa’s veranda, on the outskirts of the town, above the great river, along which had travelled millions of bygone people, fighting, roaming, hunting, trapping; and they could hear it rushing past, see the swirling eddies, the impetuous currents, the occasional rafts moving majestically down the stream. They were facing the wild North, where civilisation was hacking and hewing and ploughing its way to newer and newer cities, in an empire ever spreading to the Pole.

Finden’s glance loitered on this scene before he replied. At length, screwing up one eye, and with a suggestive smile, he answered: “Sure, it’s all a matter of time, to the selfishest woman. ‘Tis not the same with women as with men; you see, they don’t get younger—that’s a point. But”—he gave a meaning glance at the priest—“but perhaps she’s not going to wait for that, after all. And there he rides, a fine figure of a man, too, if I have to say it!”

“M’sieu’ Varley?” the priest responded, and watched a galloping horseman to whom Finden had pointed, till he rounded the corner of a little wood.

“Varley, the great London surgeon, sure! Say, father, it’s a hundred to one she’d take him, if—”

There was a curious look in Father Bourassa’s face, a cloud in his eyes. He sighed. “London, it is ver’ far away,” he remarked obliquely.

“What’s to that? If she is with the right man, near or far is nothing.”

“So far—from home,” said the priest reflectively, but his eyes furtively watched the other’s face.

“But home’s where man and wife are.”

The priest now looked him straight in the eyes. “Then, as you say, she will not marry M’sieu’ Varley—hein?”

The humour died out of Finden’s face. His eyes met the priest’s eyes steadily. “Did I say that? Then my tongue wasn’t making a fool of me, after all. How did you guess I knew—everything, father?”

“A priest knows many t’ings—so.”

There was a moment of gloom, then the Irishman brightened. He came straight to the heart of the mystery around which they had been maneuvering. “Have you seen her husband—Meydon—this year? It isn’t his usual time to come yet.”

Father Bourassa’s eyes drew those of his friend into, the light of a new understanding and revelation. They understood and trusted each other.

“Helas! He is there in the hospital,” he answered, and nodded towards a building not far away, which had been part of an old Hudson’s Bay Company’s fort. It had been hastily adapted as a hospital for the smallpox victims.

“Oh, it’s Meydon, is it, that bad case I heard of to-day?”

The priest nodded again and ‘pointed. “Voila, Madame Meydon, she is coming. She has seen him—her hoosban’.”

Finden’s eyes followed the gesture. The little widow of Jansen was coming from the hospital, walking slowly towards the river.

“As purty a woman, too—as purty and as straight bewhiles. What is the matter with him—with Meydon?” Finden asked, after a moment.

“An accident in the woods—so. He arrive, it is las’ night, from Great Slave Lake.”

Finden sighed. “Ten years ago he was a man to look at twice—before he did It and got away. Now his own mother wouldn’t know him—bad ‘cess to him! I knew him from the cradle almost. I spotted him here by a knife-cut I gave him in the hand when we were lads together. A divil of a timper always both of us had, but the good-nature was with me, and I didn’t drink and gamble and carry a pistol. It’s ten years since he did the killing, down in Quebec, and I don’t suppose the police will get him now. He’s been counted dead. I recognised him here the night after I asked her how she liked the name of Finden. She doesn’t know that I ever knew him. And he didn’t recognise me-twenty-five years since we met before! It would be better if he went under the sod. Is he pretty sick, father?”

“He will die unless the surgeon’s knife it cure him before twenty-four hours, and—”

“And Doctor Brydon is sick, and Doctor Hadley away at Winnipeg, and this is two hundred miles from nowhere! It looks as if the police’ll never get him, eh?”

“You have not tell any one—never?”

Finden laughed. “Though I’m not a priest, I can lock myself up as tight as anny. There’s no tongue that’s so tied, when tying’s needed, as the one that babbles most bewhiles. Babbling covers a lot of secrets.”

“So you t’ink it better Meydon should die, as Hadley is away and Brydon is sick-hein?”

“Oh, I think—”

Finden stopped short, for a horse’s hoofs sounded on the turf beside the house, and presently Varley, the great London surgeon, rounded the corner and stopped his horse in front of the veranda.

He lifted his hat to the priest. “I hear there’s a bad case at the hospital,” he said.

“It is ver’ dangerous,” answered Father Bourassa; “but, voila, come in! There is something cool to drink. Ah yes, he is ver’ bad, that man from the Great Slave Lake.”

Inside the house, with the cooling drinks, Varley pressed his questions, and presently, much interested, told at some length of singular cases which had passed through his hands—one a man with his neck broken, who had lived for six months afterward.

"Broken as a man's neck is broken by hanging—dislocation, really—the disjointing of the medulla oblongata, if you don't mind technicalities," he said. "But I kept him living just the same. Time enough for him to repent in and get ready to go. A most interesting case. He was a criminal, too, and wanted to die; but you have to keep life going if you can, to the last inch of resistance."

The priest looked thoughtfully out of the window; Finden's eyes were screwed up in a questioning way, but neither made any response to Varley's remarks. There was a long minute's silence. They were all three roused by hearing a light footstep on the veranda.

Father Bourassa put down his glass and hastened into the hallway. Finden caught a glimpse of a woman's figure, and, without a word, passed abruptly from the dining-room where they were, into the priest's study, leaving Varley alone. Varley turned to look after him, stared, and shrugged his shoulders.

"The manners of the West," he said good-humouredly, and turned again to the hallway, from whence came the sound of the priest's voice. Presently there was another voice—a woman's. He flushed slightly and involuntarily straightened himself.

"Valerie," he murmured.

An instant afterwards she entered the room with the priest. She was dressed in a severely simple suit of grey, which set off to advantage her slim, graceful figure. There seemed no reason why she should have been called the little widow of Jansen, for she was not small, but she was very finely and delicately made, and the name had been but an expression of Jansen's paternal feeling for her. She had always had a good deal of fresh colour, but to-day she seemed pale, though her eyes had a strange disturbing light. It was not that they brightened on seeing this man before her; they had been brighter, burningly bright, when she left the hospital, where, since it had been built, she had been the one visitor of authority—Jansen had given her that honour. She had a gift of smiling, and she smiled now, but it came from grace of mind rather than from humour. As Finden had said, "She was for ever acting, and never doin' any harm by it."

Certainly she was doing no harm by it now; nevertheless, it was acting. Could it be otherwise, with what was behind her life—a husband who had ruined her youth, had committed homicide, had escaped capture, but who had not subsequently died, as the world believed he had done, so circumstantial was the evidence. He was not man enough to make the accepted belief in his death a fact. What could she do but act, since the day she got a letter from the Far North, which took her out to Jansen, nominally to nurse those stricken with smallpox under Father Bourassa's care, actually to be where her wretched husband could come to her once a year, as he had asked with an impossible selfishness?

Each year she had seen him for an hour or less, giving him money, speaking to him over a gulf so wide that it seemed sometimes as though her voice could not be heard across it; each year opening a grave to look at the embalmed face of one who had long since died in shame, which only brought back the cruellest of all memories, that which one would give one's best years to forget. With a fortitude beyond description she had faced it, gently, quietly, but firmly faced it—firmly, because she had to be firm in keeping him within those bounds the invasion of which would have killed her. And after the first struggle with his unchangeable brutality it had been easier: for into his degenerate brain there had come a faint understanding of the real situation and of her. He had kept his side of the gulf, but gloating on this touch between the old luxurious, indulgent life, with its refined vices, and this present coarse, hard life, where pleasures were few and gross. The free Northern life of toil and hardship had not refined him. He greedily hung over this treasure, which was not for his spending, yet was his own—as though in a bank he had hoards of money which he might not withdraw.

So the years had gone on, with their recurrent dreaded anniversaries, carrying misery almost too great to be borne by this woman mated to the loathed phantom of a sad, dead life; and when this black day of each year was over, for a few days afterwards she went nowhere, was seen by none. Yet, when she did appear again, it was with her old laughing manner, her cheerful and teasing words, her quick response to the emotions of others.

So it had gone till Varley had come to follow the open air life for four months, after a heavy illness due to blood-poisoning got in his surgical work in London. She had been able to live her life without too great a struggle till he came. Other men had flattered her vanity, had given her a sense of power, had made her understand her possibilities, but nothing more—nothing of what Varley brought with him. And before three months had gone, she knew that no man had ever interested her as Varley had done. Ten years before, she would not have appreciated or understood him, this intellectual, clean-shaven, rigidly abstemious man, whose pleasures belonged to the fishing-rod and the gun and the horse, and who had come to be so great a friend of him who had been her best friend—Father Bourassa. Father Bourassa had come to know the truth—not from her, for she had ever been a Protestant, but from her husband, who, Catholic by birth and a renegade from all religion, had had a moment of spurious emotion, when he went and confessed to Father Bourassa and got absolution, pleading for the priest's care of his wife. Afterwards Father Bourassa made up his mind that the confession had a purpose behind it other than repentance, and he deeply resented the use to which he thought he was being put—a kind of spy upon the beautiful woman whom Jansen loved, and who, in spite of any outward flippancy, was above reproach.

In vital things the instinct becomes abnormally acute, and, one day, when the priest looked at her commiseratingly, she had divined what moved him. However it was, she drove him into a corner with a question to which he dare not answer yes, but to which he might not answer no, and did not; and she realised that he knew the truth, and she was the better for his knowing, though her secret was no longer a secret. She was not aware that Finden also knew. Then Varley came, bringing a new joy and interest in her life, and a new suffering also, for she realised that if she were free, and Varley asked her to marry him, she would consent.

But when he did ask her, she said no with a pang that cut her heart in two. He had stayed his four months,

and it was now six months, and he was going at last-tomorrow. He had stayed to give her time to learn to say yes, and to take her back with him to London; and she knew that he would speak again to-day, and that she must say no again; but she had kept him from saying the words till now. And the man who had ruined her life and had poisoned her true spirit was come back broken and battered. He was hanging between life and death; and now—for he was going to-morrow—Varley would speak again.

The half-hour she had just spent in the hospital with Meydon had tried her cruelly. She had left the building in a vortex of conflicting emotions, with the call of duty and of honour ringing through a thousand other voices of temptation and desire, the inner pleadings for a little happiness while yet she was young. After she married Meydon, there had only been a few short weeks of joy before her black disillusion came, and she had realised how bitter must be her martyrdom.

When she left the hospital, she seemed moving in a dream, as one, intoxicated by some elixir, might move unheeding among event and accident and vexing life and roaring multitudes. And all the while the river flowing through the endless prairies, high-banked, ennobled by living woods, lipped with green, kept surging in her ears, inviting her, alluring her—alluring her with a force too deep and powerful for weak human nature to bear for long. It would ease her pain, it said; it would still the tumult and the storm; it would solve her problem, it would give her peace. But as she moved along the river-bank among the trees, she met the little niece of the priest, who lived in his house, singing as though she was born but to sing, a song which Finden had written and Father Bourassa had set to music. Did not the distant West know Father Bourassa's gift, and did not Protestants attend Mass to hear him play the organ afterwards? The fresh, clear voice of the child rang through the trees, stealing the stricken heart away from the lure of the river:

"Will you come back home, where the young larks are singin'?
The door is open wide, and the bells of Lynn are ringin';
There's a little lake I know,
And a boat you used to row
To the shore beyond that's quiet—will you come back home?

Will you come back, darlin'? Never heed the pain and blightin',
Never trouble that you're wounded, that you bear the scars of fightin';
Here's the luck o' Heaven to you,
Here's the hand of love will brew you
The cup of peace—ah, darlin', will you come back home?"

She stood listening for a few moments, and, under the spell of the fresh, young voice, the homely, heart-searching words, and the intimate sweetness of the woods, the despairing apathy lifted slowly away. She started forwards again with a new understanding, her footsteps quickened. She would go to Father Bourassa. He would understand. She would tell him all. He would help her to do what now she knew she must do, ask Leonard Varley to save her husband's life—Leonard Varley to save her husband's life!

When she stepped upon the veranda of the priest's house, she did not know that Varley was inside. She had no time to think. She was ushered into the room where he was, with the confusing fact of his presence fresh upon her. She had had but a word or two with the priest, but enough for him to know what she meant to do, and that it must be done at once.

Varley advanced to meet her. She shuddered inwardly to think what a difference there was between the fallen creature she had left behind in the hospital and this tall, dark, self-contained man, whose name was familiar in the surgeries of Europe, who had climbed from being the son of a clockmaker to his present distinguished place.

"Have you come for absolution, also?" he asked with a smile; "or is it to get a bill of excommunication against your only enemy—there couldn't be more than one?"

Cheerful as his words were, he was shrewdly observing her, for her paleness, and the strange light in her eyes, gave him a sense of anxiety. He wondered what trouble was on her.

"Excommunication?" he repeated.

The unintended truth went home. She winced, even as she responded with that quaint note in her voice which gave humour to her speech. "Yes, excommunication," she replied; "but why an enemy? Do we not need to excommunicate our friends sometimes?"

"That is a hard saying," he answered soberly. Tears sprang to her eyes, but she mastered herself, and brought the crisis abruptly.

"I want you to save a man's life," she said, with her eyes looking straight into his. "Will you do it?"

His face grew grave and eager. "I want you to save a man's happiness," he answered. "Will you do it?"

"That man yonder will die unless your skill saves him," she urged.

"This man here will go away unhappy and alone, unless your heart befriends him," he replied, coming closer to her.

"At sunrise to-morrow he goes." He tried to take her hand.

"Oh, please, please," she pleaded, with a quick, protesting gesture. "Sunrise is far off, but the man's fate is near, and you must save him. You only can do so, for Doctor Hadley is away, and Doctor Brydon is sick, and in any case Doctor Brydon dare not attempt the operation alone. It is too critical and difficult, he says."

"So I have heard," he answered, with a new note in his voice, his professional instinct roused in spite of himself. "Who is this man? What interests you in him?"

"To how many unknown people have you given your skill for nothing—your skill and all your experience to utter strangers, no matter how low or poor! Is it not so? Well, I cannot give to strangers what you have given to so many, but I can help in my own way."

"You want me to see the man at once?"

"If you will."

“What is his name? I know of his accident and the circumstances.”

She hesitated for an instant, then said, “He is called Draper—a trapper and woodsman.”

“But I was going away to-morrow at sunrise. All my arrangements are made,” he urged, his eyes holding hers, his passion swimming in his eyes again.

“But you will not see a man die, if you can save him?” she pleaded, unable now to meet his look, its mastery and its depth.

Her heart had almost leaped with joy at the suggestion that he could not stay; but as suddenly self-reproach and shame filled her mind, and she had challenged him so. But yet, what right had she to sacrifice this man she loved to the perverted criminal who had spoiled her youth and taken away from her every dear illusion of her life and heart? By every right of justice and humanity she was no more the wife of Henry Meydon than if she had never seen him. He had forfeited every claim upon her, dragged in the mire her unspotted life—unspotted, for in all temptation, in her defenceless position, she had kept the whole commandment; she had, while at the mercy of her own temperament, fought her way through all, with a weeping heart and laughing lips. Had she not longed for a little home with a great love, and a strong, true man? Ah, it had been lonely, bitterly lonely! Yet she had remained true to the scoundrel, from whom she could not free herself without putting him in the grasp of the law to atone for his crime. She was punished for his crimes; she was denied the exercise of her womanhood in order to shield him. Still she remembered that once she had loved him, those years ago, when he first won her heart from those so much better than he, who loved her so much more honestly; and this memory had helped her in a way. She had tried to be true to it, that dead, lost thing, of which this man who came once a year to see her, and now, lying with his life at stake in the hospital, was the repellent ghost.

“Ah, you will not see him die?” she urged.

“It seems to move you greatly what happens to this man,” he said, his determined dark eyes searching hers, for she baffled him. If she could feel so much for a “casual,” why not a little more feeling for him? Suddenly, as he drew her eyes to him again, there came the conviction that they were full of feeling for him. They were sending a message, an appealing, passionate message, which told him more than he had ever heard from her or seen in her face before. Yes, she was his! Without a spoken word she had told him so. What, then, held her back? But women were a race by themselves, and he knew that he must wait till she chose to have him know what she had unintentionally conveyed but now.

“Yes, I am moved,” she continued slowly. “Who can tell what this man might do with his life, if it is saved! Don’t you think of that? It isn’t the importance of a life that’s at stake; it’s the importance of living; and we do not live alone, do we?”

His mind was made up. “I will not, cannot promise anything till I have seen him. But I will go and see him, and I’ll send you word later what I can do, or not do. Will that satisfy you? If I cannot do it, I will come to say good-by.”

Her face was set with suppressed feeling. She held out her hand to him impulsively, and was about to speak, but suddenly caught the hand away again from his thrilling grasp and, turning hurriedly, left the room. In the hall she met Father Bourassa.

“Go with him to the hospital,” she whispered, and disappeared through the doorway.

Immediately after she had gone, a man came driving hard to bring Father Bourassa to visit a dying Catholic in the prairie, and it was Finden who accompanied Varley to the hospital, waited for him till his examination of the “casual” was concluded, and met him outside.

“Can it be done?” he asked of Varley. “I’ll take word to Father Bourassa.”

“It can be done—it will be done,” answered Varley absently. “I do not understand the man. He has been in a different sphere of life. He tried to hide it, but the speech—occasionally! I wonder.”

“You wonder if he’s worth saving?”

Varley shrugged his shoulders impatiently. “No, that’s not what I meant.”

Finden smiled to himself. “Is it a difficult case?” he asked.

“Critical and delicate; but it has been my specialty.”

“One of the local doctors couldn’t do it, I suppose?”

“They would be foolish to try.”

“And you are going away at sunrise to-morrow?”

“Who told you that?” Varley’s voice was abrupt, impatient.

“I heard you say so-everybody knows it.... That’s a bad man yonder, Varley.” He jerked his thumb towards the hospital. “A terrible bad man, he’s been. A gentleman once, and fell down—fell down hard. He’s done more harm than most men. He’s broken a woman’s heart and spoilt her life, and, if he lives, there’s no chance for her, none at all. He killed a man, and the law wants him; and she can’t free herself without ruining him; and she can’t marry the man she loves because of that villain yonder, crying for his life to be saved. By Josh and by Joan, but it’s a shame, a dirty shame, it is!”

Suddenly Varley turned and gripped his arm with fingers of steel.

“His name—his real name?”

“His name’s Meydon—and a dirty shame it is, Varley.”

Varley was white. He had been leading his horse and talking to Finden. He mounted quickly now, and was about to ride away, but stopped short again. “Who knows—who knows the truth?” he asked.

“Father Bourassa and me—no others,” he answered. “I knew Meydon thirty years ago.”

There was a moment’s hesitation, then Varley said hoarsely, “Tell me—tell me all.”

When all was told, he turned his horse towards the wide waste of the prairie, and galloped away. Finden watched him till he was lost to view beyond the bluff.

“Now, a man like that, you can’t guess what he’ll do,” he said reflectively. “He’s a high-stepper, and there’s no telling what foolishness will get hold of him. It’d be safer if he got lost on the prairie for twenty-four hours. He said that Meydon’s only got twenty-four hours, if the trick isn’t done! Well—”

He took a penny from his pocket. “I’ll toss for it. Heads he does it, and tails he doesn’t.”

He tossed. It came down heads. “Well, there’s one more fool in the world than I thought,” he said philosophically, as though he had settled the question; as though the man riding away into the prairie with a dark problem to be solved had told the penny what he meant to do.

Mrs. Meydon, Father Bourassa, and Finden stood in the little waiting-room of the hospital at Jansen, one at each window, and watched the wild thunderstorm which had broken over the prairie. The white heliographs of the elements flashed their warnings across the black sky, and the roaring artillery of the thunder came after, making the circle of prairie and tree and stream a theatre of anger and conflict. The streets of Jansen were washed with flood, and the green and gold things of garden and field and harvest crumbled beneath the sheets of rain.

The faces at the window of the little room of the hospital, however, were but half-conscious of the storm; it seemed only an accompaniment of their thoughts, to typify the elements of tragedy surrounding them.

For Varley there had been but one thing to do. A life might be saved, and it was his duty to save it. He had ridden back from the prairie as the sun was setting the night before, and had made all arrangements at the hospital, giving orders that Meydon should have no food whatever till the operation was performed the next afternoon, and nothing to drink except a little brandy-and-water.

The operation was performed successfully, and Varley had issued from the operating-room with the look of a man who had gone through an ordeal which had taxed his nerve to the utmost, to find Valerie Meydon waiting, with a piteous, dazed look in her eyes. But this look passed when she heard him say, “All right!” The words brought a sense of relief, for if he had failed it would have seemed almost unbearable in the circumstances—the cup of trembling must be drunk to the dregs.

Few words had passed between them, and he had gone, while she remained behind with Father Bourassa, till the patient should wake from the sleep into which he had fallen when Varley left.

But within two hours they sent for Varley again, for Meydon was in evident danger. Varley had come, and had now been with the patient for some time.

At last the door opened and Varley came in quickly. He beckoned to Mrs. Meydon and to Father Bourassa. “He wishes to speak with you,” he said to her. “There is little time.”

Her eyes scarcely saw him, as she left the room and passed to where Meydon lay nerveless, but with wide-open eyes, waiting for her. The eyes closed, however, before she reached the bed. Presently they opened again, but the lids remained fixed. He did not hear what she said.

. . . . . .

In the little waiting-room, Finden said to Varley, “What happened?”

“Food was absolutely forbidden, but he got it from another patient early this morning while the nurse was out for a moment. It has killed him.”

“‘Twas the least he could do, but no credit’s due him. It was to be. I’m not envying Father Bourassa nor her there with him.”

Varley made no reply. He was watching the receding storm with eyes which told nothing.

Finden spoke once more, but Varley did not hear him. Presently the door opened and Father Bourassa entered. He made a gesture of the hand to signify that all was over.

Outside, the sun was breaking through the clouds upon the Western prairie, and there floated through the evening air the sound of a child’s voice singing beneath the trees that fringed the river:

“Will you come back, darlin’? Never heed the pain and blightin’,
Never trouble that you’re wounded, that you bear the scars of
fightin’;
Here’s the luck o’ Heaven to you,
Here’s the hand of love will brew you
The cup of peace-ah, darlin’, will you come back home?”

WATCHING THE RISE OF ORION

“In all the wide border his steed was the best,” and the name and fame of Terence O’Ryan were known from Strathcona to Qu’appelle. He had ambition of several kinds, and he had the virtue of not caring who knew of it. He had no guile, and little money; but never a day’s work was too hard for him, and he took bad luck, when it came, with a jerk of the shoulder and a good-natured surprise on his clean-shaven face that suited well his wide grey eyes and large, luxurious mouth. He had an estate, half ranch, half farm, with a French Canadian manager named Vigon, an old prospector who viewed every foot of land in the world with the eye of the discoverer. Gold, coal, iron, oil, he searched for them everywhere, making sure that sooner or later he would find them. Once Vigon had found coal. That was when he worked for a man called Constantine Jopp, and had given him great profit; but he, the discoverer, had been put off with a horse and a hundred dollars. He was now as devoted to Terence O’Ryan as he had been faithful to Constantine Jopp, whom he cursed waking and sleeping.

In his time O’Ryan had speculated, and lost; he had floated a coal mine, and “been had”; he had run for the

local legislature, had been elected, and then unseated for bribery committed by an agent; he had run races at Regina, and won—he had won for three years in succession; and this had kept him going and restored his finances when they were at their worst. He was, in truth, the best rider in the country, and, so far, was the owner also of the best three-year-old that the West had produced. He achieved popularity without effort. The West laughed at his enterprises and loved him; he was at once a public moral and a hero. It was a legend of the West that his forbears had been kings in Ireland like Brian Borhoime. He did not contradict this; he never contradicted anything. His challenge to all fun and satire and misrepresentation was, “What’ll be the differ a hundred years from now!”

He did not use this phrase, however, towards one experience—the advent of Miss Molly Mackinder, the heiress, and the challenge that reverberated through the West after her arrival. Philosophy deserted him then; he fell back on the primary emotions of mankind.

A month after Miss Mackinder’s arrival at La Touche a dramatic performance was given at the old fort, in which the officers of the Mounted Police took part, together with many civilians who fancied themselves. By that time the district had realised that Terry O’Ryan had surrendered to what they called “the laying on of hands” by Molly Mackinder. It was not certain, however, that the surrender was complete, because O’Ryan had been wounded before, and yet had not been taken captive altogether. His complete surrender seemed now more certain to the public because the lady had a fortune of two hundred thousand dollars, and that amount of money would be useful to an ambitious man in the growing West. It would, as Gow Johnson said, “Let him sit back and view the landscape o’er, before he puts his ploughshare in the mud.”

There was an outdoor scene in the play produced by the impetuous amateurs, and dialogue had been interpolated by three “imps of fame” at the suggestion of Constantine Jopp, one of the three, who bore malice towards O’Ryan, though this his colleagues did not know distinctly. The scene was a camp-fire—a starlit night, a colloquy between the three, upon which the hero of the drama, played by Terry O’Ryan, should break, after having, unknown to them, but in sight of the audience, overheard their kind of intentions towards himself.

The night came. When the curtain rose for the third act there was exposed a star-sown sky, in which the galaxy of Orion was shown with distinctness, each star sharply twinkling from the electric power behind-a pretty scene evoking great applause. O’Ryan had never seen this back curtain—they had taken care that he should not—and, standing in the wings awaiting his cue, he was unprepared for the laughter of the audience, first low and uncertain, then growing, then insistent, and now a peal of ungovernable mirth, as one by one they understood the significance of the stars of Orion on the back curtain.

O’Ryan got his cue, and came on to an outburst of applause which shook the walls. La Touche rose at him, among them Miss Molly Mackinder in the front row with the notables.

He did not see the back curtain, or Orion blazing in the ultramarine blue. According to the stage directions, he was to steal along the trees at the wings, and listen to the talk of the men at the fire plotting against him, who were presently to pretend good comradeship to his face. It was a vigorous melodrama with some touches of true Western feeling. After listening for a moment, O’Ryan was to creep up the stage again towards the back curtain, giving a cue for his appearance.

When the hilarious applause at his entrance had somewhat subsided, the three took up their parable, but it was not the parable of the play. They used dialogue not in the original. It had a significance which the audience were not slow to appreciate, and went far to turn “The Sunburst Trail” at this point into a comedy-farce. When this new dialogue began, O’Ryan could scarcely trust his ears, or realise what was happening.

“Ah, look,” said Dicky Fergus at the fire, “as fine a night as ever I saw in the West! The sky’s a picture. You could almost hand the stars down, they’re so near.”

“What’s that clump together on the right—what are they called in astronomy?” asked Constantine Jopp, with a leer.

“Orion is the name—a beauty, ain’t it?” answered Fergus.

“I’ve been watching Orion rise,” said the third—Holden was his name. “Many’s the time I’ve watched Orion rising. Orion’s the star for me. Say, he wipes ‘em all out—right out. Watch him rising now.”

By a manipulation of the lights Orion moved up the back curtain slowly, and blazed with light nearer the zenith. And La Touche had more than the worth of its money in this opening to the third act of the play. O’Ryan was a favourite, at whom La Touche loved to jeer, and the parable of the stars convulsed them.

At the first words O’Ryan put a hand on himself and tried to grasp the meaning of it all, but his entrance and the subsequent applause had confused him. Presently, however, he turned to the back curtain, as Orion moved slowly up the heavens, and found the key to the situation. He gasped. Then he listened to the dialogue which had nothing to do with “The Sunburst Trail.”

“What did Orion do, and why does he rise? Has he got to rise? Why was the gent called Orion in them far-off days?” asked Holden.

“He did some hunting in his time—with a club,” Fergus replied. “He kept making hits, he did. Orion was a spoiler. When he took the field there was no room for the rest of the race. Why does he rise? Because it is a habit. They could always get a rise out of Orion. The Athens Eirenicon said that yeast might fail to rise, but touch the button and Orion would rise like a bird.”

At that instant the galaxy jerked up the back curtain again, and when the audience could control itself, Constantine Jopp, grinning meanly, asked:

“Why does he wear the girdle?”

“It is not a girdle—it is a belt,” was Dicky Fergus’s reply. “The gods gave it to him because he was a favourite. There was a lady called Artemis—she was the last of them. But he went visiting with Eos, another lady of previous acquaintance, down at a place called Ortygia, and Artemis shot him dead with a shaft Apollo had given her; but she didn’t marry Apollo neither. She laid Orion out on the sky, with his glittering belt, around him. And Orion keeps on rising.”

“Will he ever stop rising?” asked Holden.

Followed for the conspirators a disconcerting moment; for, when the laughter had subsided, a lazy voice came from the back of the hall, “He’ll stop long enough to play with Apollo a little, I guess.”

It was Gow Johnson who had spoken, and no man knew Terry O’Ryan better, or could gauge more truly the course he would take. He had been in many an enterprise, many a brush with O’Ryan, and his friendship would bear any strain.

O’Ryan recovered himself from the moment he saw the back curtain, and he did not find any fun in the thing. It took a hold on him out of all proportion to its importance. He realised that he had come to the parting of the ways in his life. It suddenly came upon him that something had been lacking in him in the past; and that his want of success in many things had not been wholly due to bad luck. He had been eager, enterprising, a genius almost at seeing good things; and yet others had reaped where he had sown. He had believed too much in his fellow-man. For the first time in his life he resented the friendly, almost affectionate satire of his many friends. It was amusing, it was delightful; but down beneath it all there was a little touch of ridicule. He had more brains than any of them, and he had known it in a way; he had led them sometimes, too, as on raids against cattle-stealers, and in a brush with half-breeds and Indians; as when he stood for the legislature; but he felt now for the first time that he had not made the most of himself, that there was something hurting to self-respect in this prank played upon him. When he came to that point his resentment went higher. He thought of Molly Mackinder, and he heard all too acutely the vague veiled references to her in their satire. By the time Gow Johnson spoke he had mastered himself, however, and had made up his mind. He stood still for a moment.

“Now, please, my cue,” he said quietly and satirically from the trees near the wings.

He was smiling, but Gow Johnson’s prognostication was right; and ere long the audience realised that he was right. There was standing before them not the Terry O’Ryan they had known, but another. He threw himself fully into his part—a young rancher made deputy sheriff, who by the occasional exercise of his duty had incurred the hatred of a small floating population that lived by fraud, violence, and cattle-stealing. The conspiracy was to raid his cattle, to lure him to pursuit, to ambush him, and kill him. Terry now played the part with a naturalness and force which soon lifted the play away from the farcical element introduced into it by those who had interpolated the gibes at himself. They had gone a step too far.

“He’s going large,” said Gow Johnson, as the act drew near its close, and the climax neared, where O’Ryan was to enter upon a physical struggle with his assailants. “His blood’s up. There’ll be hell to pay.”

To Gow Johnson the play had instantly become real, and O’Ryan an injured man at bay, the victim of the act—not of the fictitious characters of the play, but of the three men, Fergus, Holden, and Constantine Jopp, who had planned the discomfiture of O’Ryan; and he felt that the victim’s resentment would fall heaviest on Constantine Jopp, the bully, an old schoolmate of Terry’s.

Jopp was older than O’Ryan by three years, which in men is little, but in boys, at a certain time of life, is much. It means, generally, weight and height, an advantage in a scrimmage. Constantine Jopp had been the plague and tyrant of O’Ryan’s boyhood. He was now a big, leering fellow with much money of his own, got chiefly from the coal discovered on his place by Vigon, the half-breed French Canadian. He had a sense of dark and malicious humour, a long horse-like face, with little beady eyes and a huge frame.

Again and again had Terry fought him as a boy at school, and often he had been badly whipped, but he had never refused the challenge of an insult when he was twelve and Jopp fifteen. The climax to their enmity at school had come one day when Terry was seized with a cramp while bathing, and after having gone down twice was rescued by Jopp, who dragged him out by the hair of the head. He had been restored to consciousness on the bank and carried to his home, where he lay ill for days. During the course of the slight fever which followed the accident his hair was cut close to his head. Impetuous always, his first thought was to go and thank Constantine Jopp for having saved his life. As soon as he was able he went forth to find his rescuer, and met him suddenly on turning a corner of the street. Before he could stammer out the gratitude that was in his heart, Jopp, eyeing him with a sneering smile, said drawlingly:

“If you’d had your hair cut like that I couldn’t have got you out, could I? Holy, what a sight! Next time I’ll take you by the scruff, putty-face—bah!”

That was enough for Terry. He had swallowed the insult, stuttered his thanks to the jeering laugh of the lank bully, and had gone home and cried in shame and rage.

It was the one real shadow in his life. Ill luck and good luck had been taken with an equable mind; but the fact that he must, while he lived, own the supreme debt of his life to a boy and afterwards to a man whom he hated by instinct was a constant cloud on him. Jopp owned him. For some years they did not meet, and then at last they again were thrown together in the West, when Jopp settled at La Touche. It was gall and wormwood to Terry, but he steeled himself to be friendly, although the man was as great a bully as the boy, as offensive in mind and character; but withal acute and able in his way, and with a reputation for commercial sharpness which would be called by another name in a different civilisation. They met constantly, and O’Ryan always put a hand on himself, and forced himself to be friendly. Once when Jopp became desperately ill there had been—though he fought it down, and condemned himself in every term of reproach—a sense of relief in the thought that perhaps his ancient debt would now be cancelled. It had gone on so long. And Constantine Jopp had never lost an opportunity of vexing him, of torturing him, of giving veiled thrusts, which he knew O’Ryan could not resent. It was the constant pin-prick of a mean soul, who had an advantage of which he could never be dispossessed—unless the ledger was balanced in some inscrutable way.

Apparently bent on amusement only, and hiding his hatred from his colleagues, Jopp had been the instigator and begetter of the huge joke of the play; but it was the brains of Dick Fergus which had carried it out, written the dialogue, and planned the electric appliances of the back curtain—for he was an engineer and electrician. Neither he nor Holden had known the old antipathy of Terry and Constantine Jopp. There was only one man who knew the whole truth, and that was Gow Johnson, to whom Terry had once told all. At the last moment Fergus had interpolated certain points in the dialogue which were not even included at rehearsal. These referred to Apollo. He had a shrewd notion that Jopp had an idea of marrying Molly Mackinder if he could, cousins though they were; and he was also aware that Jopp, knowing Molly’s liking for

Terry, had tried to poison her mind against him, through suggestive gossip about a little widow at Jansen, thirty miles away. He had in so far succeeded that, on the very day of the performance, Molly had declined to be driven home from the race-course by Terry, despite the fact that Terry had won the chief race and owned the only dog-cart in the West.

As the day went on Fergus realised, as had Gow Johnson, that Jopp had raised a demon. The air was electric. The play was drawing near to its climax—an attempt to capture the deputy sheriff, tie him to a tree, and leave him bound and gagged alone in the waste. There was a glitter in Terry's eyes, belying the lips which smiled in keeping with the character he presented. A look of hardness was stamped on his face, and the outlines of the temples were as sharp as the chin was set and the voice slow and penetrating.

Molly Mackinder's eyes were riveted on him. She sat very still, her hands clasped in her lap, watching his every move. Instinct told her that Terry was holding himself in; that some latent fierceness and iron force in him had emerged into life; and that he meant to have revenge on Constantine Jopp one way or another, and that soon; for she had heard the rumour flying through the hall that her cousin was the cause of the practical joke just played. From hints she had had from Constantine that very day she knew that the rumour was the truth; and she recalled now with shrinking dislike the grimace accompanying the suggestion. She had not resented it then, being herself angry with Terry because of the little widow at Jansen.

Presently the silence in the hall became acute; the senses of the audience were strained to the utmost. The acting before them was more realistic than anything they had ever seen, or were ever likely to see again in La Touche. All three conspirators, Fergus, Holden, and Jopp, realised that O'Ryan's acting had behind it an animal anger which transformed him. When he looked into their eyes it was with a steely directness harder and fiercer than was observed by the audience. Once there was occasion for O'Ryan to catch Fergus by the arm, and Fergus winced from the grip. When standing in the wings with Terry he ventured to apologise playfully for the joke, but Terry made no answer; and once again he had whispered good-naturedly as they stood together on the stage; but the reply had been a low, scornful laugh. Fergus realised that a critical moment was at hand. The play provided for some dialogue between Jopp and Terry, and he observed with anxiety that Terry now interpolated certain phrases meant to warn Constantine, and to excite him to anger also.

The moment came upon them sooner than the text of the play warranted. O'Ryan deliberately left out several sentences, and gave a later cue, and the struggle for his capture was precipitated. Terry meant to make the struggle real. So thrilling had been the scene that to an extent the audience was prepared for what followed; but they did not grasp the full reality—that the play was now only a vehicle for a personal issue of a desperate character. No one had ever seen O'Ryan angry; and now that the demon of rage was on him, directed by a will suddenly grown to its full height, they saw not only a powerful character in a powerful melodrama, but a man of wild force. When the three desperadoes closed in on O'Ryan, and, with a blow from the shoulder which was not a pretence, he sent Holden into a far corner gasping for breath and moaning with pain, the audience broke out into wild cheering. It was superb acting, they thought. As most of them had never seen the play, they were not surprised when Holden did not again join the attack on the deputy sheriff. Those who did know the drama—among them Molly Mackinder—became dismayed, then anxious. Fergus and Jopp knew well from the blow O'Ryan had given that, unless they could drag him down, the end must be disaster to some one. They were struggling with him for personal safety now. The play was forgotten, though mechanically O'Ryan and Fergus repeated the exclamations and the few phrases belonging to the part. Jopp was silent, fighting with a malice which belongs to only half-breed, or half-bred, natures; and from far back in his own nature the distant Indian strain in him was working in savage hatred. The two were desperately hanging on to O'Ryan like pumas on a grizzly, when suddenly, with a twist he had learned from Ogami the Jap on the Smoky River, the slim Fergus was slung backward to the ground with the tendons of his arm strained and the arm itself useless for further work. There remained now Constantine Jopp, heavier and more powerful than O'Ryan.

For O'Ryan the theatre, the people, disappeared. He was a boy again on the village green, with the bully before him who had tortured his young days. He forgot the old debt to the foe who saved his life; he forgot everything, except that once again, as of old, Constantine Jopp was fighting him, with long, strong arms trying to bring him to the ground. Jopp's superior height gave him an advantage in a close grip; the strength of his gorilla-like arms was difficult to withstand. Both were forgetful of the world, and the two other injured men, silent and awed, were watching the fight, in which one of them, at least, was powerless to take part.

The audience was breathless. Most now saw the grim reality of the scene before them; and when at last O'Ryan's powerful right hand got a grip upon the throat of Jopp, and they saw the grip tighten, tighten, and Jopp's face go from red to purple, a hundred people gasped. Excited men made as though to move toward the stage; but the majority still believed that it all belonged to the play, and shouted "Sit down!"

Suddenly the voice of Gow Johnson was heard "Don't kill him—let go, boy!"

The voice rang out with sharp anxiety, and pierced the fog of passion and rage in which O'Ryan was moving. He realised what he was doing, the real sense of it came upon him. Suddenly he let go the lank throat of his enemy, and, by a supreme effort, flung him across the stage, where Jopp lay resting on his hands, his bleared eyes looking at Terry with the fear and horror still in them which had come with that tightening grip on his throat.

Silence fell suddenly on the theatre. The audience was standing. A woman sobbed somewhere in a far corner, but the rest were dismayed and speechless. A few steps before them all was Molly Mackinder, white and frightened, but in her eyes was a look of understanding as she gazed at Terry. Breathing hard, Terry stood still in the middle of the stage, the red fog not yet gone out of his eyes, his hands clasped at his side, vaguely realising the audience again. Behind him was the back curtain in which the lights of Orion twinkled aggressively. The three men who had attacked him were still where he had thrown them.

The silence was intense, the strain oppressive. But now a drawling voice came from the back of the hall. "Are you watching the rise of Orion?" it said. It was the voice of Gow Johnson.

The strain was broken; the audience dissolved in laughter; but it was not hilarious; it was the nervous

laughter of relief, touched off by a native humour always present in the dweller of the prairie.

"I beg your pardon," said Terry quietly and abstractedly to the audience.

And the scene-shifter bethought himself and let down the curtain.

The fourth act was not played that night. The people had had more than the worth of their money. In a few moments the stage was crowded with people from the audience, but both Jopp and O'Ryan had disappeared.

Among the visitors to the stage was Molly Mackinder. There was a meaning smile upon her face as she said to Dicky Fergus:

"It was quite wonderful, wasn't it—like a scene out of the classics—the gladiators or something?"

Fergus gave a wary smile as he answered: "Yes. I felt like saying Ave Caesar, Ave! and I watched to see Artemis drop her handkerchief."

"She dropped it, but you were too busy to pick it up. It would have been a useful sling for your arm," she added with thoughtful malice. "It seemed so real—you all acted so well, so appropriately. And how you keep it up!" she added, as he cringed when some one knocked against his elbow, hurting the injured tendons.

Fergus looked at her meditatively before he answered. "Oh, I think we'll likely keep it up for some time," he rejoined ironically.

"Then the play isn't finished?" she added. "There is another act? Yes, I thought there was, the programme said four."

"Oh yes, there's another act," he answered, "but it isn't to be played now; and I'm not in it."

"No, I suppose you are not in it. You really weren't in the last act. Who will be in it?"

Fergus suddenly laughed outright, as he looked at Holden expostulating intently to a crowd of people round him. "Well, honour bright, I don't think there'll be anybody in it except little Conny Jopp and gentle Terry O'Ryan; and Conny mayn't be in it very long. But he'll be in it for a while, I guess. You see, the curtain came down in the middle of a situation, not at the end of it. The curtain has to rise again."

"Perhaps Orion will rise again—you think so?" She laughed in satire; for Dicky Fergus had made love to her during the last three months with unsuppressed activity, and she knew him in his sentimental moments; which is fatal. It is fatal if, in a duet, one breathes fire and the other frost.

"If you want my opinion," he said in a lower voice, as they moved towards the door, while people tried to listen to them—"if you want it straight, I think Orion has risen—right up where shines the evening star—Oh, say, now," he broke off, "haven't you had enough fun out of me? I tell you, it was touch and go. He nearly broke my arm—would have done it, if I hadn't gone limp to him; and your cousin Conny Jopp, little Conny Jopp, was as near Kingdom Come as a man wants at his age. I saw an elephant go 'must' once in India, and it was as like O'Ryan as putty is to dough. It isn't all over either, for O'Ryan will forget and forgive, and Jopp won't. He's your cousin, but he's a sulker. If he has to sit up nights to do it, he'll try to get back on O'Ryan. He'll sit up nights, but he'll do it, if he can. And whatever it is, it won't be pretty."

Outside the door they met Gow Johnson, excitement in his eyes. He heard Fergus's last words.

"He'll see Orion rising if he sits up nights," Gow Johnson said. "The game is with Terry—at last." Then he called to the dispersing gossiping crowd: "Hold on—hold on, you people. I've got news for you. Folks, this is O'Ryan's night. It's his in the starry firmament. Look at him shine," he cried, stretching out his arm towards the heavens, where the glittering galaxy hung near the zenith. "Terry O'Ryan, our O'Ryan—he's struck oil—on his ranch it's been struck. Old Vigon found it. Terry's got his own at last. O'Ryan's in it—in it alone. Now, let's hear the prairie-whisper," he shouted, in a great raucous voice. "Let's hear the prairie-whisper. What is it?"

The crowd responded in a hoarse shout for O'Ryan and his fortune. Even the women shouted—all except Molly Mackinder. She was wondering if O'Ryan risen would be the same to her as O'Ryan rising. She got into her carriage with a sigh, though she said to the few friends with her:

"If it's true, it's splendid. He deserves it too. Oh, I'm glad—I'm so glad." She laughed; but the laugh was a little hysterical.

She was both glad and sorry. Yet as she drove home over the prairie she was silent. Far off in the east was a bright light. It was a bonfire built on O'Ryan's ranch, near where he had struck oil—struck it rich. The light grew and grew, and the prairie was alive with people hurrying towards it. La Touche should have had the news hours earlier, but the half-breed French-Canadian, Vigon, who had made the discovery, and had started for La Touche with the news, went suddenly off his head with excitement, and had ridden away into the prairie fiercely shouting his joy to an invisible world. The news had been brought in later by a farmhand.

Terry O'Ryan had really struck oil, and his ranch was a scene of decent revelry, of which Gow Johnson was master. But the central figure of it all, the man who had, in truth, risen like a star, had become to La Touche all at once its notoriety as well as its favourite, its great man as well as its friend, he was nowhere to be found. He had been seen riding full speed into the prairie towards the Kourmash Wood, and the starlit night had swallowed him. Constantine Jopp had also disappeared; but at first no one gave that thought or consideration.

As the night went on, however, a feeling began to stir which it is not good to rouse in frontier lands. It is sure to exhibit itself in forms more objective than are found in great populations where methods of punishment are various, and even when deadly are often refined. But society in new places has only limited resources, and is thrown back on primary ways and means. La Touche was no exception, and the keener spirits, to whom O'Ryan had ever been "a white man," and who so rejoiced in his good luck now that they drank his health a hundred times in his own whiskey and cider, were simmering with desire for a public reproval of Constantine Jopp's conduct. Though it was pointed out to them by the astute Gow Johnson that Fergus and Holden had participated in the colossal joke of the play, they had learned indirectly also the whole truth concerning the past of the two men. They realised that Fergus and Holden had been duped by Jopp into the escapade. Their primitive sense of justice exonerated the humourists and arraigned the one malicious man. As the night wore on they decided on the punishment to be meted out by La Touche to the

man who had not “acted on the square.”

Gow Johnson saw, too late, that he had roused a spirit as hard to appease as the demon roused in O’Ryan earlier in the evening. He would have enjoyed the battue of punishment under ordinary circumstances; but he knew that Miss Molly Mackinder would be humiliated and indignant at the half-savage penalty they meant to exact. He had determined that O’Ryan should marry her; and this might be an obstruction in the path. It was true that O’Ryan now would be a rich man—one of the richest in the West, unless all signs failed; but meanwhile a union of fortunes would only be an added benefit. Besides, he had seen that O’Ryan was in earnest, and what O’Ryan wanted he himself wanted even more strongly. He was not concerned greatly for O’Ryan’s absence. He guessed that Terry had ridden away into the night to work off the dark spirit that was on him, to have it out with himself. Gow Johnson was a philosopher. He was twenty years older than O’Ryan, and he had studied his friend as a pious monk his missal.

He was right in his judgment. When Terry left the theatre he was like one in a dream, every nerve in his body at tension, his head aflame, his pulses throbbing. For miles he rode away into the waste along the northern trail, ever away from La Touche and his own home. He did not know of the great good fortune that had come to him; and if, in this hour, he had known, he would not have cared. As he rode on and on remorse drew him into its grasp. Shame seized him that he had let passion be his master, that he had lost his self-control, had taken a revenge out of all proportion to the injury and insult to himself. It did not ease his mind that he knew Constantine Jopp had done the thing out of meanness and malice; for he was alive to-night in the light of the stars, with the sweet crisp air blowing in his face, because of an act of courage on the part of his schooldays’ foe. He remembered now that, when he was drowning, he had clung to Jopp with frenzied arms and had endangered the bully’s life also. The long torture of owing this debt to so mean a soul was on him still, was rooted in him; but suddenly, in the silent searching night, some spirit whispered in his ear that this was the price which he must pay for his life saved to the world, a compromise with the Inexorable Thing. On the verge of oblivion and the end, he had been snatched back by relenting Fate, which requires something for something given, when laws are overridden and doom defeated. Yes, the price he was meant to pay was gratitude to one of shrivelled soul and innate antipathy; and he had not been man enough to see the trial through to the end! With a little increased strain put upon his vanity and pride he had run amuck. Like some heathen gladiator he had ravaged in the ring. He had gone down into the basements of human life and there made a cockpit for his animal rage, till, in the contest, brain and intellect had been saturated by the fumes and sweat of fleshly fury.

How quiet the night was, how soothing to the fevered mind and body, how the cool air laved the heated head and flushed the lungs of the rheum of passion! He rode on and on, farther and farther away from home, his back upon the scenes where his daily deeds were done. It was long past midnight before he turned his horse’s head again homeward.

Buried in his thoughts, now calm and determined, with a new life grown up in him, a new strength different from the mastering force which gave him a strength in the theatre like one in delirium, he noticed nothing. He was only conscious of the omniscient night and its warm penetrating friendliness; as, in a great trouble, when no words can be spoken, a cool kind palm steals into the trembling hand of misery and stills it, gives it strength and life and an even pulse. He was now master in the house of his soul, and had no fear or doubt as to the future, or as to his course.

His first duty was to go to Constantine Jopp, and speak his regret like a man. And after that it would be his duty to carry a double debt his life long for the life saved, for the wrong done. He owed an apology to La Touche, and he was scarcely aware that the native gentlemanliness in him had said through his fever of passion over the footlights: “I beg your pardon.” In his heart he felt that he had offered a mean affront to every person present, to the town where his interests lay, where his heart lay.

Where his heart lay—Molly Mackinder! He knew now that vanity had something to do, if not all to do, with his violent acts, and though there suddenly shot through his mind, as he rode back, a savage thrill at the remembrance of how he had handled the three, it was only a passing emotion. He was bent on putting himself right with Jopp and with La Touche. With the former his way was clear; he did not yet see his way as to La Touche. How would he be able to make the amende honorable to La Touche?

By and by he became somewhat less absorbed and enveloped by the comforting night. He saw the glimmer of red light afar, and vaguely wondered what it was. It was in the direction of O’Ryan’s Ranch, but he thought nothing of it, because it burned steadily. It was probably a fire lighted by settlers trailing to the farther north. While the night wore on he rode as slowly back to the town as he had galloped from it like a centaur with a captive.

Again and again Molly Mackinder’s face came before him; but he resolutely shut it out of his thoughts. He felt that he had no right to think of her until he had “done the right thing” by Jopp and by La Touche. Yet the look in her face as the curtain came down, it was not that of one indifferent to him or to what he did. He neared the town half-way between midnight and morning. Almost unconsciously avoiding the main streets, he rode a roundabout way towards the little house where Constantine Jopp lived. He could hear loud noises in the streets, singing, and hoarse shouts. Then silence came, then shouts, and silence again. It was all quiet as he rode up to Jopp’s house, standing on the outskirts of the town. There was a bright light in the window of a room.

Jopp, then, was still up. He would not wait till tomorrow. He would do the right thing now. He would put things straight with his foe before he slept; he would do it at any sacrifice to his pride. He had conquered his pride.

He dismounted, threw the bridle over a post, and, going into the garden, knocked gently at the door. There was no response. He knocked again, and listened intently. Now he heard a sound-like a smothered cry or groan. He opened the door quickly and entered. It was dark. In another room beyond was a light. From it came the same sound he had heard before, but louder; also there was a shuffling footstep. Springing forward to the half-open door, he pushed it wide, and met the terror-stricken eyes of Constantine Jopp—the same look that he had seen at the theatre when his hands were on Jopp’s throat, but more ghastly.

Jopp was bound to a chair by a lasso. Both arms were fastened to the chair-arm, and beneath them, on the floor, were bowls into which blood dripped from his punctured wrists.

He had hardly taken it all in—the work of an instant—when he saw crouched in a corner, madness in his eyes, his half-breed Vigon. He grasped the situation in a flash. Vigon had gone mad, had lain in wait in Jopp's house, and when the man he hated had seated himself in the chair, had lassoed him, bound him, and was slowly bleeding him to death.

He had no time to think. Before he could act Vigon was upon him also, frenzy in his eyes, a knife clutched in his hand. Reason had fled, and he only saw in O'Ryan the frustrator of his revenge. He had watched the drip, drip from his victim's wrists with a dreadful joy.

They were man and man, but O'Ryan found in this grisly contest a vaster trial of strength than in the fight upon the stage a few hours ago. The first lunge that Vigon made struck him on the tip of the shoulder, and drew blood; but he caught the hand holding the knife in an iron grasp, while the half-breed, with superhuman strength, tried in vain for the long brown throat of the man for whom he had struck oil. As they struggled and twisted, the eyes of the victim in the chair watched them with agonised emotions. For him it was life or death. He could not cry out—his mouth was gagged; but to O'Ryan his groans were like a distant echo of his own hoarse gasps as he fought his desperate fight. Terry was as one in an awful dream battling with vague impersonal powers which slowly strangled his life, yet held him back in torture from the final surrender.

For minutes they struggled. At last O'Ryan's strength came to the point of breaking, for Vigon was a powerful man, and to this was added a madman's energy. He felt that the end was coming. But all at once, through the groans of the victim in the chair, Terry became conscious of noises outside—such noises as he had heard before he entered the house, only nearer and louder. At the same time he heard a horse's hoofs, then a knock at the door, and a voice calling: "Jopp! Jopp!"

He made a last desperate struggle, and shouted hoarsely.

An instant later there were footsteps in the room, followed by a cry of fright and amazement.

It was Gow Johnson. He had come to warn Constantine Jopp that a crowd were come to tar and feather him, and to get him away on his own horse.

Now he sprang to the front door, called to the approaching crowd for help, then ran back to help O'Ryan. A moment later a dozen men had Vigon secure, and had released Constantine Jopp, now almost dead from loss of blood.

As they took the gag from his mouth and tied their handkerchiefs round his bleeding wrists, Jopp sobbed aloud. His eyes were fixed on Terry O'Ryan. Terry met the look, and grasped the limp hand lying on the chair-arm.

"I'm sorry, O'Ryan, I'm sorry for all I've done to you," Jopp sobbed. "I was a sneak, but I want to own it. I want to be square now. You can tar and feather me, if you like. I deserve it." He looked at the others. "I deserve it," he repeated.

"That's what the boys had thought would be appropriate," said Gow Johnson with a dry chuckle, and the crowd looked at each other and winked. The wink was kindly, however. "To own up and take your gruel" was the easiest way to touch the men of the prairie.

A half-hour later the roisterers, who had meant to carry Constantine Jopp on a rail, carried Terry O'Ryan on their shoulders through the town, against his will. As they passed the house where Miss Mackinder lived some one shouted:

"Are you watching the rise of Orion?"

Many a time thereafter Terry O'Ryan and Molly Mackinder looked at the galaxy in the evening sky with laughter and with pride. It had played its part with Fate against Constantine Jopp and the little widow at Jansen. It had never shone so brightly as on the night when Vigon struck oil on O'Ryan's ranch. But Vigon had no memory of that. Such is the irony of life.

THE ERROR OF THE DAY

The "Error of the Day" may be defined as "The difference between the distance or range which must be put upon the sights in order to hit the target and the actual distance from the gun to the target."—Admiralty Note.

A great naval gun never fires twice alike. It varies from day to day, and expert allowance has to be made in sighting every time it is fired. Variations in atmosphere, condition of ammunition, and the wear of the gun are the contributory causes to the ever-varying "Error of the Day."

.....

"Say, ain't he pretty?"

"A Jim-dandy-oh, my!"

"What's his price in the open market?"

"Thirty millions-I think not."

Then was heard the voice of Billy Goat—his name was William Goatry

"Out in the cold world, out in the street;
Nothing to wear, and nothing to eat,
Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam,
Child of misfortune, I'm driven from home."

A loud laugh followed, for Billy Goat was a popular person at Kowatin in the Saskatchewan country. He had an inimitable drollery, heightened by a cast in his eye, a very large mouth, and a round, good-humoured face; also he had a hand and arm like iron, and was altogether a great man on a “spree.”

There had been a two days’ spree at Kowatin, for no other reason than that there had been great excitement over the capture and the subsequent escape of a prairie-rover, who had robbed the contractor’s money-chest at the rail-head on the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Forty miles from Kowatin he had been caught by, and escaped from, the tall, brown-eyed man with the hard-bitten face who leaned against the open window of the tavern, looking indifferently at the jeering crowd before him. For a police officer he was not unpopular with them, but he had been a failure for once, and, as Billy Goat had said: “It tickled us to death to see a rider of the plains off his trolley—on the cold, cold ground, same as you and me.”

They did not undervalue him. If he had been less a man than he was, they would not have taken the trouble to cover him with their drunken ribaldry. He had scored off them in the past in just such sprees as this, when he had the power to do so, and used the power good-naturedly and quietly—but used it.

Then, he was Sergeant Foyle of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, on duty in a district as large as the United Kingdom. And he had no greater admirer than Billy Goat, who now reviled him. Not without cause, in a way, for he had reviled himself to this extent, that when the prairie-rover, Halbeck, escaped on the way to Prince Albert, after six months’ hunt for him and a final capture in the Kowatin district, Foyle resigned the Force before the Commissioner could reproach him or call him to account. Usually so exact, so certain of his target, some care had not been taken, he had miscalculated, and there had been the Error of the Day. Whatever it was, it had seemed to him fatal; and he had turned his face from the barrack yard.

Then he had made his way to the Happy Land Hotel at Kowatin, to begin life as “a free and independent gent on the loose,” as Billy Goat had said. To resign had seemed extreme; because, though the Commissioner was vexed at Halbeck’s escape, Foyle was the best non-commissioned officer in the Force. He had frightened horse thieves and bogus land-agents and speculators out of the country; had fearlessly tracked down a criminal or a band of criminals when the odds were heavy against him. He carried on his cheek the scars of two bullets, and there was one white lock in his brown hair, where an arrow had torn the scalp away as, alone, he drove into the Post a score of Indians, fresh from raiding the cattle of an immigrant trailing north.

Now he was out of work, or so it seemed; he had stepped down from his scarlet-coated dignity, from the place of guardian and guide of civilisation, into the idleness of a tavern stoop.

As the little group swayed round him, and Billy Goat started another song, Foyle roused himself as though to move away—he was waiting for the mail-stage to take him south:

“Oh, father, dear father, come home with me now,
The clock in the steeple strikes one;
You said you were coming right home from the shop
As soon as your day’s work was done.
Come home—come home—”

The song arrested him, and he leaned back against the window again. A curious look came into his eyes, a look that had nothing to do with the acts of the people before him. It was searching into a scene beyond this bright sunlight and the far green-brown grass, and the little oasis of trees in the distance marking a homestead and the dust of the wagon-wheels, out on the trail beyond the grain-elevator-beyond the blue horizon’s rim, quivering in the heat, and into regions where this crisp, clear, life-giving, life-saving air never blew.

“You said you were coming right home from the shop
As soon as your day’s work was done.
Come home—come home—”

He remembered when he had first heard this song in a play called ‘Ten Nights in a Bar-room’, many years before, and how it had wrenched his heart and soul, and covered him with a sudden cloud of shame and anger. For his father had been a drunkard, and his brother had grown up a drunkard, that brother whom he had not seen for ten years until—until—

He shuddered, closed his eyes, as though to shut out something that the mind saw. He had had a rough life, he had become inured to the seamy side of things—there was a seamy side even in this clean, free, wide land; and he had no sentimentality; though something seemed to hurt and shame him now.

“As soon as your day’s work was done.
Come home—come home—”

The crowd was uproarious. The exhilaration had become a kind of delirium. Men were losing their heads; there was an element of irresponsibility in the new outbreak likely to breed some violent act, which every man of them would lament when sober again.

Nettlewood Foyle watched the dust rising from the wheels of the stage, which had passed the elevator and was nearing the Prairie Home Hotel far down the street. He would soon leave behind him this noisy ribaldry of which he was the centre. He tossed his cheroot away. Suddenly he heard a low voice behind him.

“Why don’t you hit out, sergeant?” it said.

He started almost violently, and turned round. Then his face flushed, his eyes blurred with feeling and deep surprise, and his lips parted in a whispered exclamation and greeting.

A girl’s face from the shade of the sitting-room was looking out at him, half-smiling, but with heightened colour and a suppressed agitation. The girl was not more than twenty-five, graceful, supple, and strong. Her chin was dimpled; across her right temple was a slight scar. She had eyes of a wonderful deep blue; they seemed to swim with light. As Foyle gazed at her for a moment dumfounded, with a quizzical suggestion and smiling still a little more, she said:

“You used to be a little quicker, Nett.” The voice appeared to attempt unconcern; but it quivered from a force of feeling underneath. It was so long since she had seen him.

He was about to reply, but, at the instant, a reveller pushed him with a foot behind the knees so that they were sprung forward. The crowd laughed—all save Billy Goat, who knew his man.

Like lightning, and with cold fury in his eyes, Foyle caught the tall cattleman by the forearm, and, with a swift, dexterous twist, had the fellow in his power.

“Down—down, to your knees, you skunk,” he said in a low, fierce voice.

The knees of the big man bent,—Foyle had not taken lessons of Ogami, the Jap, for nothing—they bent, and the cattleman squealed, so intense was the pain. It was break or bend; and he bent—to the ground and lay there. Foyle stood over him for a moment, a hard light in his eyes, and then, as if bethinking himself, he looked at the other roisterers, and said:

“There’s a limit, and he reached it. Your mouths are your own, and you can blow off to suit your fancy, but if any one thinks I’m a tame coyote to be poked with a stick—!” He broke off, stooped over, and helped the man before him to his feet. The arm had been strained, and the big fellow nursed it.

“Hell, but you’re a twister!” the cattleman said with a grimace of pain.

Billy Goat was a gentleman, after his kind, and he liked Sergeant Foyle with a great liking. He turned to the crowd and spoke.

“Say, boys, this mine’s worked out. Let’s leave the Happy Land to Foyle. Boys, what is he—what—is he? What—is—Sergeant Foyle—boys?”

The roar of the song they all knew came in reply, as Billy Goat waved his arms about like the wild leader of a wild orchestra:

“Sergeant Foyle, oh, he’s a knocker from the West,
He’s a chase-me-Charley, come-and-kiss-me tiger from the zoo;
He’s a dandy on the pinch, and he’s got a double cinch
On the gent that’s going careless, and he’ll soon cinch you:
And he’ll soon—and he’ll soon—cinch you!”

Foyle watched them go, dancing, stumbling, calling back at him, as they moved towards the Prairie Home Hotel:

“And he’ll soon-and he’ll soon-cinch you!”

His under lip came out, his eyes half-closed, as he watched them. “I’ve done my last cinch. I’ve done my last cinch,” he murmured.

Then, suddenly, the look in his face changed, the eyes swam as they had done a minute before at the sight of the girl in the room behind. Whatever his trouble was, that face had obscured it in a flash, and the pools of feeling far down in the depths of a lonely nature had been stirred. Recognition, memory, tenderness, desire swam in his face, made generous and kind the hard lines of the strong mouth. In an instant he had swung himself over the window-sill. The girl had drawn away now into a more shaded corner of the room, and she regarded him with a mingled anxiety and eagerness. Was she afraid of something? Did she fear that—she knew not quite what, but it had to do with a long ago.

“It was time you hit out, Nett,” she said, half shyly. “You’re more patient than you used to be, but you’re surer. My, that was a twist you gave him, Nett. Aren’t you glad to see me?” she added hastily, and with an effort to hide her agitation.

He reached out and took her hand with a strange shyness, and a self-consciousness which was alien to his nature. The touch of her hand thrilled him. Their eyes met. She dropped hers. Then he gathered him self together. “Glad to see you? Of course, of course, I’m glad. You stunned me, Jo. Why, do you know where you are? You’re a thousand miles from home. I can’t get it through my head, not really. What brings you here? It’s ten years—ten years since I saw you, and you were only fifteen, but a fifteen that was as good as twenty.”

He scanned her face closely. “What’s that scar on your forehead, Jo? You hadn’t that—then.”

“I ran up against something,” she said evasively, her eyes glittering, “and it left that scar. Does it look so bad?”

“No, you’d never notice it, if you weren’t looking close as I am. You see, I knew your face so well ten years ago.”

He shook his head with a forced kind of smile. It became him, however, for he smiled rarely; and the smile was like a lantern turned on his face; it gave light and warmth to its quiet strength-or hardness.

“You were always quizzing,” she said with an attempt at a laugh—“always trying to find out things. That’s why you made them reckon with you out here. You always could see behind things; always would have your own way; always were meant to be a success.”

She was beginning to get control of herself again, was trying hard to keep things on the surface. “You were meant to succeed—you had to,” she added.

“I’ve been a failure—a dead failure,” he answered slowly. “So they say. So they said. You heard them, Jo.”

He jerked his head towards the open window.

“Oh, those drunken fools!” she exclaimed indignantly, and her face hardened. “How I hate drink! It spoils everything.”

There was silence for a moment. They were both thinking of the same thing—of the same man. He repeated a question.

“What brings you out here, Jo?” he asked gently. “Dorland,” she answered, her face setting into determination and anxiety.

His face became pinched. “Dorl!” he said heavily. “What for, Jo? What do you want with Dorl?”

“When Cynthy died she left her five hundred dollars a year to the baby, and—”

“Yes, yes, I know. Well, Jo?”

“Well, it was all right for five years—Dorland paid it in; but for five years he hasn’t paid anything. He’s taken it, stolen it from his own child by his own honest wife. I’ve come to get it—anyway, to stop him from doing it any more. His own child—it puts murder in my heart, Nett! I could kill him.”

He nodded grimly. “That’s likely. And you’ve kept, Dorl’s child with your own money all these years?”

“I’ve got four hundred dollars a year, Nett, you know; and I’ve been dressmaking—they say I’ve got taste,” she added, with a whimsical smile.

Nett nodded his head. “Five years. That’s twenty-five hundred dollars he’s stolen from his own child. It’s eight years old now, isn’t it?”

“Bobby is eight and a half,” she answered.

“And his schooling, and his clothing, and everything; and you have to pay for it all?”

“Oh, I don’t mind, Nett, it isn’t that. Bobby is Cynthy’s child; and I love him—love him; but I want him to have his rights. Dorl must give up his hold on that money—or—”

He nodded gravely. “Or you’ll set the law on him?”

“It’s one thing or the other. Better to do it now when Bobby is young and can’t understand.”

“Or read the newspapers,” he commented thoughtfully.

“I don’t think I’ve a hard heart,” she continued, “but I’d like to punish him, if it wasn’t that he’s your brother, Nett; and if it wasn’t for Bobby. Dorland was dreadfully cruel, even to Cynthy.”

“How did you know he was up here?” he asked. “From the lawyer that pays over the money. Dorland has had it sent out here to Kowatin this two years. And he sent word to the lawyer a month ago that he wanted it to get here as usual. The letter left the same day as I did, and it got here yesterday with me, I suppose. He’ll be after it-perhaps to-day. He wouldn’t let it wait long, Dorl wouldn’t.”

Foyle started. “To-day—to-day—”

There was a gleam in his eyes, a setting of the lips, a line sinking into the forehead between the eyes.

“I’ve been watching for him all day, and I’ll watch till he comes. I’m going to say some things to him that he won’t forget. I’m going to get Bobby’s money, or have the law do it—unless you think I’m a brute, Nett.” She looked at him wistfully.

“That’s all right. Don’t worry about me, Jo. He’s my brother, but I know him—I know him through and through. He’s done everything that a man can do and not be hanged. A thief, a drunkard, and a brute—and he killed a man out here,” he added hoarsely. “I found it out myself—myself. It was murder.”

Suddenly, as he looked at her, an idea seemed to flash into his mind. He came very near and looked at her closely. Then he reached over and almost touched the scar on her forehead.

“Did he do that, Jo?”

For an instant she was silent and looked down at the floor. Presently she raised her eyes, her face suffused. Once or twice she tried to speak, but failed. At last she gained courage and said:

“After Cynthy’s death I kept house for him for a year, taking care of little Bobby. I loved Bobby so—he has Cynthy’s eyes. One day Dorland—oh, Nett, of course I oughtn’t to have stayed there, I know it now; but I was only sixteen, and what did I understand! And my mother was dead. One day—oh, please, Nett, you can guess. He said something to me. I made him leave the house. Before I could make plans what to do, he came back mad with drink. I went for Bobby, to get out of the house, but he caught hold of me. I struck him in the face, and he threw me against the edge of the open door. It made the scar.”

Foyle’s face was white. “Why did you never write and tell me that, Jo? You know that I—” He stopped suddenly.

“You had gone out of our lives down there. I didn’t know where you were for a long time; and then—then it was all right about Bobby and me, except that Bobby didn’t get the money that was his. But now—”

Foyle’s voice was hoarse and low. “He made that scar, and he—and you only sixteen—Oh, my God!” Suddenly his face reddened, and he choked with shame and anger. “And he’s my brother!” was all that he could say.

“Do you see him up here ever?” she asked pityingly.

“I never saw him till a week ago.” A moment, then he added: “The letter wasn’t to be sent here in his own name, was it?”

She nodded. “Yes, in his own name, Dorland W. Foyle. Didn’t he go by that name when you saw him?”

There was an oppressive silence, in which she saw that something moved him strangely, and then he answered: “No, he was going by the name of Halbeck—Hiram Halbeck.”

The girl gasped. Then the whole thing burst upon her. “Hiram Halbeck! Hiram Halbeck, the thief—I read it all in the papers—the thief that you caught, and that got away. And you’ve left the Mounted Police because of it—oh, Nett!” Her eyes were full of tears, her face was drawn and grey.

He nodded. “I didn’t know who he was till I arrested him,” he said. “Then, afterward, I thought of his child, and let him get away; and for my poor old mother’s sake. She never knew how bad he was even as a boy. But I remember how he used to steal and drink the brandy from her bedside, when she had the fever. She never knew the worst of him. But I let him away in the night, Jo, and I resigned, and they thought that Halbeck had beaten me, had escaped. Of course I couldn’t stay in the Force, having done that. But, by the heaven above us, if I had him here now, I’d do the thing—do it, so help me God!”

“Why should you ruin your life for him?” she said, with an outburst of indignation. All that was in her heart welled up in her eyes at the thought of what Foyle was. “You must not do it. You shall not do it. He must pay for his wickedness, not you. It would be a sin. You and what becomes of you mean so much.” Suddenly with a flash of purpose she added: “He will come for that letter, Nett. He would run any kind of risk to get a dollar.

He will come here for that letter—perhaps today."

He shook his head moodily, oppressed by the trouble that was on him. "He's not likely to venture here, after what's happened."

"You don't know him as well as I do, Nett. He is so vain he'd do it, just to show that he could. He'd' probably come in the evening. Does any one know him here? So many people pass through Kowatin every day. Has any one seen him?"

"Only Billy Goatry," he answered, working his way to a solution of the dark problem. "Only Billy Goatry knows him. The fellow that led the singing—that was Goatry."

"There he is now," he added, as Billy Goat passed the window.

She came and laid a hand on his arm. "We've got to settle things with him," she said. "If Dorl comes, Nett —"

There was silence for a moment, then he caught her hand in his and held it. "If he comes, leave him to me, Jo. You will leave him to me?" he added anxiously.

"Yes," she answered. "You'll do what's right-by Bobby?"

"And by Dorl, too," he replied strangely. There were loud footsteps without.

"It's Goatry," said Foyle. "You stay here. I'll tell him everything. He's all right; he's a true friend. He'll not interfere."

The handle of the door turned slowly. "You keep watch on the post-office, Jo," he added.

Goatry came round the opening door with a grin. "Hope I don't intrude," he said, stealing a half-leering look at the girl. As soon as he saw her face, however, he straightened himself up and took on different manners. He had not been so intoxicated as he had made, out, and he seemed only "mellow" as he stood before them, with his corrugated face and queer, quaint look, the eye with the cast in it blinking faster than the other.

"It's all right, Goatry," said Foyle. "This lady is, one of my family from the East."

"Goin' on by stage?" Goatry said vaguely, as they shook hands.

She did not reply, for she was looking down the street, and presently she started as she gazed. She laid a hand suddenly on Foyle's arm.

"See—he's come," she said in a whisper, and as though not realising Goatry's presence. "He's come."

Goatry looked as well as Foyle. "Halbeck—the devil!" he said.

Foyle turned to him. "Stand by, Goatry. I want you to keep a shut mouth. I've work to do."

Goatry held out his hand. "I'm with you. If you get him this time, clamp him, clamp him like a tooth in a harrow."

Halbeck had stopped his horse at the post-office door. Dismounting he looked quickly round, then drew the reins over the horse's head, letting them trail, as is the custom of the West.

A few swift words passed between Goatry and Foyle. "I'll do this myself, Jo," he whispered to the girl presently. "Go into another room. I'll bring him here."

In another minute Goatry was leading the horse away from the post-office, while Foyle stood waiting quietly at the door. The departing footsteps of the horse brought Halbeck swiftly to the doorway, with a letter in his hand.

"Hi, there, you damned sucker!" he called after Goatry, and then saw Foyle waiting.

"What the hell—!" he said fiercely, his hand on something in his hip pocket.

"Keep quiet, Dorl. I want to have a little talk with you. Take your hand away from that gun—take it away," he added with a meaning not to be misunderstood.

Halbeck knew that one shout would have the town on him, and he did not know what card his brother was going to play. He let his arm drop to his side. "What's your game? What do you want?" he asked surlily.

"Come over to the Happy Land Hotel," Foyle answered, and in the light of what was in his mind his words had a grim irony.

With a snarl Halbeck stepped out. Goatry, who had handed the horse over to the hostler, watched them coming.

"Why did I never notice the likeness before?" Goatry said to himself. "But, gosh! what a difference in the men. Foyle's going to double cinch him this time, I guess."

He followed them inside the hall of the Happy Land. When they stepped into the sitting-room, he stood at the door waiting. The hotel was entirely empty, the roisterers at the Prairie Home having drawn off the idlers and spectators. The barman was nodding behind the bar, the proprietor was moving about in the backyard inspecting a horse. There was a cheerful warmth everywhere, the air was like an elixir, the pungent smell of a pine-tree at the door gave a kind of medicament to the indrawn breath. And to Billy Goat, who sometimes sang in the choir of a church not a hundred miles away—for people agreed to forget his occasional sprees—there came, he knew not why, the words of a hymn he had sung only the preceding Sunday:

"As pants the hart for cooling streams,
When heated in the chase—"

The words kept ringing in his ears as he listened to the conversation inside the room—the partition was thin, the door thinner, and he heard much. Foyle had asked him not to intervene, but only to stand by and await the issue of this final conference. He meant, however, to take a hand in, if he thought he was needed, and he kept his ear glued to the door. If he thought Foyle needed him—his fingers were on the handle of the door.

"Now, hurry up! What do you want with me?" asked Halbeck of his brother.

"Take your time," said ex-Sergeant Foyle, as he drew the blind three-quarters down, so that they could not

be seen from the street.

"I'm in a hurry, I tell you. I've got my plans. I'm going South. I've only just time to catch the Canadian Pacific three days from now, riding hard."

"You're not going South, Dorl."

"Where am I going, then?" was the sneering reply. "Not farther than the Happy Land."

"What the devil's all this? You don't mean you're trying to arrest me again, after letting me go?"

"You don't need to ask. You're my prisoner. You're my prisoner," he said in a louder voice—"until you free yourself."

"I'll do that damn quick, then," said the other, his hand flying to his hip.

"Sit down," was the sharp rejoinder, and a pistol was in his face before he could draw his own weapon. "Put your gun on the table," Foyle said quietly. Halbeck did so. There was no other way.

Foyle drew it over to himself. His brother made a motion to rise.

"Sit still, Dorl," came the warning voice.

White with rage, the freebooter sat still, his dissipated face and heavy angry lips looking like a debauched and villainous caricature of his brother before him.

"Yes, I suppose you'd have potted me, Dorl," said the ex-sergeant.

"You'd have thought no more of doing that than you did of killing Linley, the ranchman; than you did of trying to ruin Jo Byndon, your wife's sister, when she was sixteen years old, when she was caring for your child—giving her life for the child you brought into the world."

"What in the name of hell—it's a lie!"

"Don't bluster. I know the truth."

"Who told you-the truth?"

"She did—to-day—an hour ago."

"She here—out here?" There was a new cowed note in the voice.

"She is in the next room."

"What did she come here for?"

"To make you do right by your own child. I wonder what a jury of decent men would think about a man who robbed his child for five years, and let that child be fed and clothed and cared for by the girl he tried to destroy, the girl he taught what sin there was in the world."

"She put you up to this. She was always in love with you, and you know it."

There was a dangerous look in Foyle's eyes, and his jaw set hard. "There would be no shame in a decent woman caring for me, even if it was true. I haven't put myself outside the boundary as you have. You're my brother, but you're the worst scoundrel in the country—the worst unhanged. Put on the table there the letter in your pocket. It holds five hundred dollars belonging to your child. There's twenty-five hundred dollars more to be accounted for."

The other hesitated, then with an oath threw the letter on the table. "I'll pay the rest as soon as I can, if you'll stop this damned tomfoolery," he said sullenly, for he saw that he was in a hole.

"You'll pay it, I suppose, out of what you stole from the C.P.R. contractor's chest. No, I don't think that will do."

"You want me to go to prison, then?"

"I think not. The truth would come out at the trial—the whole truth—the murder, and all. There's your child Bobby. You've done him enough wrong already. Do you want him—but it doesn't matter whether you do or not—do you want him to carry through life the fact that his father was a jail-bird and a murderer, just as Jo Byndon carries the scar you made when you threw her against the door?"

"What do you want with me, then?" The man sank slowly and heavily back into the chair.

"There is a way—have you never thought of it? When you threatened others as you did me, and life seemed such a little thing in others—can't you think?"

Bewildered, the man looked around helplessly. In the silence which followed Foyle's words his brain was struggling to see a way out. Foyle's further words seemed to come from a great distance.

"It's not too late to do the decent thing. You'll never repent of all you've done; you'll never do different."

The old reckless, irresponsible spirit revived in the man; he had both courage and bravado, he was not hopeless yet of finding an escape from the net. He would not beg, he would struggle.

"I've lived as I meant to, and I'm not going to snivel or repent now. It's all a rotten business, anyhow," he rejoined.

With a sudden resolution the ex-sergeant put his own pistol in his pocket, then pushed Halbeck's pistol over towards him on the table. Halbeck's eyes lighted eagerly, grew red with excitement, then a change passed over them. They now settled on the pistol, and stayed. He heard Foyle's voice. "It's with you to do what you ought to do. Of course you can kill me. My pistol's in my pocket. But I don't think you will. You've murdered one man. You won't load your soul up with another. Besides, if you kill me, you will never get away from Kowatin alive. But it's with you—take your choice. It's me or you."

Halbeck's fingers crept out and found the pistol. "Do your duty, Dorl," said the ex-sergeant as he turned his back on his brother.

The door of the room opened, and Goatry stepped inside softly. He had work to do, if need be, and his face showed it. Halbeck did not see him.

There was a demon in Halbeck's eyes, as his brother stood, his back turned, taking his chances. A large mirror hung on the wall opposite Halbeck. Goatry was watching Halbeck's face in the glass, and saw the danger. He measured his distance.

All at once Halbeck caught Goatry's face in the mirror. The dark devilry faded out of his eyes. His lips moved in a whispered oath. Every way was blocked.

With a sudden wild resolution he raised the pistol to his head. It cracked, and he fell back heavily in the chair. There was a red trickle at the temple.

He had chosen the best way out.

"He had the pluck," said Goatry, as Foyle swung round with a face of misery.

A moment afterward came a rush of people. Goatry kept them back.

"Sergeant Foyle arrested Halbeck, and Halbeck's shot himself," Goatry explained to them.

A white-faced girl with a scar on her temple made her way into the room.

"Come away-come away, Jo," said the voice of the man she loved; and he did not let her see the lifeless figure in the chair.

Three days later the plains swallowed them, as they made their way with Billy Goatry to the headquarters of the Riders of the Plains, where Sergeant Foyle was asked to reconsider his resignation: which he did.

THE WHISPERER

"And thou shalt be brought down and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as of one that hath a familiar spirit out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust."

The harvest was all in, and, as far as eye could observe nothing remained of the golden sea of wheat which had covered the wide prairie save the yellow stubble, the bed of an ocean of wealth which had been gathered. Here, the yellow level was broken by a dark patch of fallow land, there, by a covert of trees also tinged with yellow, or deepening to crimson and mauve—the harbinger of autumn. The sun had not the insistent and intensive strength of more southerly climes; it was buoyant, confident and heartening, and it shone in a turquoise vault which covered and endeared the wide, even world beneath. Now and then a flock of wild ducks whirred past, making for the marshes or the innumerable lakes that vitalised the expanse, or buzzards hunched heavily along, frightened from some far resort by eager sportsmen.

That was above; but beneath, on a level with the unlifted eye, were houses here and there, looking in the vastness like dolls' habitations. Many of the houses stood blank and staring in the expanse, but some had trees, and others little oases of green. Everywhere prosperity, everywhere the strings of life pulled taut, signs that energy had been straining on the leash.

Yet there was one spot where it seemed that deadness made encampment. It could not be seen in the sweep of the eye, you must have travelled and looked vigilantly to find it; but it was there—a lake shimmering in the eager sun, washing against a reedy shore, a little river running into the reedy lake at one end and out at, the other, a small, dilapidated house half hid in a wood that stretched for half a mile or so upon a rising ground. In front of the house, not far from the lake, a man was lying asleep upon the ground, a rough felt hat drawn over his eyes.

Like the house, the man seemed dilapidated also: a slovenly, ill-dressed, demoralised figure he looked, even with his face covered. He seemed in a deep sleep. Wild ducks settled on the lake not far from him with a swish and flutter; a coyote ran past, veering as it saw the recumbent figure; a prairie hen rustled by with a shrill cluck, but he seemed oblivious to all. If asleep, he was evidently dreaming, for now and then he started, or his body twitched, and a muttering came from beneath the hat.

The battered house, the absence of barn or stable or garden, or any token of thrift or energy, marked the man as an excrescence in this theatre of hope and fruitful toil. It all belonged to some degenerate land, some exhausted civilisation, not to this field of vigour where life rang like silver.

So the man lay for hour upon hour. He slept as though he had been upon a long journey in which the body was worn to helplessness. Or was it that sleep of the worn-out spirit which, tortured by remembrance and remorse, at last sinks into the depths where the conscious vexes the unconscious—a little of fire, a little of ice, and now and then the turn of the screw?

The day marched nobly on towards evening, growing out of its blue and silver into a pervasive golden gleam; the bare, greyish houses on the prairie were transformed into miniature palaces of light. Presently a girl came out of the woods behind, looking at the neglected house with a half-pitying curiosity. She carried in one hand a fishing rod which had been telescoped till it was no bigger than a cane; in the other she carried a small fishing basket. Her father's shooting and fishing camp was a few miles away by a lake of greater size than this which she approached. She had tired of the gay company in camp, brought up for sport from beyond the American border where she also belonged, and she had come to explore the river running into this reedy lake. She turned from the house and came nearer to the lake, shaking her head, as though compassionating the poor, folk who lived there. She was beautiful. Her hair was brown, going to tawny, but in this soft light which enwrapped her, she was in a sort of topaz flame. As she came on, suddenly she stopped as though transfixed. She saw the man—and saw also a tragedy afoot.

The man stirred violently in his sleep, cried out, and started up. As he did so, a snake, disturbed in its travel past him, suddenly raised itself in anger. Startled out of sleep by some inner torture, the man heard the sinister rattle he knew so well, and gazed paralysed.

The girl had been but a few feet away when she first saw the man and his angry foe. An instant, then, with the instinct of the woods and the plains, and the courage that has habitation everywhere, dropping her basket

she sprang forward noiselessly. The short, telescoped fishing rod she carried swung round her head and completed its next half-circle at the head of the reptile, even as it was about to strike. The blow was sure, and with half-severed head the snake fell dead upon the ground beside the man.

He was like one who has been projected from one world to another, dazed, stricken, fearful. Presently the look of agonised dismay gave way to such an expression of relief as might come upon the face of a reprieved victim about to be given to the fire, or to the knife that flays. The place of dreams from which he had emerged was like hell, and this was some world of peace that he had not known these many years. Always one had been at his elbow—"a familiar spirit out of the ground"—whispering in his ear. He had been down in the abysses of life.

He glanced again at the girl, and realised what she had done: she had saved his life. Whether it had been worth saving was another question; but he had been near to the brink, had looked in, and the animal in him had shrunk back from the precipice in a confused agony of fear. He staggered to his feet.

"Where do you come from?" he said, pulling his coat closer to hide the ragged waistcoat underneath, and adjusting his worn and dirty hat—in his youth he had been vain and ambitious and good-looking also.

He asked his question in no impertinent tone, but in the low voice of one who "shall whisper out of the dust." He had not yet recovered from the first impression of his awakening, that the world in which he now stood was not a real world.

She understood, and half in pity and half in conquered repugnance said:

"I come from a camp beyond"—she indicated the direction by a gesture. "I had been fishing"—she took up the basket—"and chanced on you—then." She glanced at the snake significantly.

"You killed it in the nick of time," he said, in a voice that still spoke of the ground, but with a note of half-shamed gratitude. "I want to thank you," he added. "You were brave. It would have turned on you if you had missed. I know them. I've killed five." He spoke very slowly, huskily.

"Well, you are safe—that is the chief thing," she rejoined, making as though to depart. But presently she turned back. "Why are you so dreadfully poor—and everything?" she asked gently.

His eye wandered over the lake and back again before he answered her, in a dull, heavy tone: "I've had bad luck, and, when you get down, there are plenty to kick you farther."

"You weren't always poor as you are now—I mean long ago, when you were young."

"I'm not so old," he rejoined sluggishly—"only thirty-four."

She could not suppress her astonishment. She looked at the hair already grey, the hard, pinched face, the lustreless eyes.

"Yet it must seem long to you," she said with meaning. Now he laughed—a laugh sodden and mirthless. He was thinking of his boyhood. Everything, save one or two spots all fire or all darkness, was dim in his debilitated mind.

"Too far to go back," he said, with a gleam of the intelligence which had been strong in him once.

She caught the gleam. She had wisdom beyond her years. It was the greater because her mother was dead, and she had had so much wealth to dispense, for her father was rich beyond counting, and she controlled his household, and helped to regulate his charities. She saw that he was not of the labouring classes, that he had known better days; his speech, if abrupt and cheerless, was grammatical.

"If you cannot go back, you can go forwards," she said firmly. "Why should you be the only man in this beautiful land who lives like this, who is idle when there is so much to do, who sleeps in the daytime when there is so much time to sleep at night?"

A faint flush came on the greyish, colourless face. "I don't sleep at night," he returned moodily.

"Why don't you sleep?" she asked.

He did not answer, but stirred the body of the snake with his foot. The tail moved; he stamped upon the head with almost frenzied violence, out of keeping with his sluggishness.

She turned away, yet looked back once more—she felt tragedy around her. "It is never too late to mend," she said, and moved on, but stopped; for a young man came running from the woods towards her.

"I've had a hunt—such a hunt for you," the young man said eagerly, then stopped short when he saw to whom she had been talking. A look of disgust came upon his face as he drew her away, his hand on her arm.

"In Heaven's name, why did you talk to that man?" he said. "You ought not to have trusted yourself near him."

"What has he done?" she asked. "Is he so bad?"

"I've heard about him. I inquired the other day. He was once in a better position as a ranchman—ten years ago; but he came into some money one day, and he changed at once. He never had a good character; even before he got his money he used to gamble, and was getting a bad name. Afterwards he began drinking, and he took to gambling harder than ever. Presently his money all went and he had to work; but his bad habits had fastened on him, and now he lives from hand to mouth, sometimes working for a month, sometimes idle for months. There's something sinister about him, there's some mystery; for poverty or drink even—and he doesn't drink much now—couldn't make him what he is. He doesn't seek company, and he walks sometimes endless miles talking to himself, going as hard as he can. How did you come to speak to him, Grace?"

She told him all, with a curious abstraction in her voice, for she was thinking of the man from a standpoint which her companion could not realise. She was also trying to verify something in her memory. Ten years ago, so her lover had just said, the poor wretch behind them had been a different man; and there had shot into her mind the face of a ranchman she had seen with her father, the railway king, one evening when his "special" had stopped at a railway station on his tour through Montana—ten years ago. Why did the face of the ranchman which had fixed itself on her memory then, because he had come on the evening of her birthday and had spoiled it for her, having taken her father away from her for an hour—why did his face come to her now? What had it to do with the face of this outcast she had just left?

“What is his name?” she asked at last.

“Roger Lygon,” he answered.

“Roger Lygon,” she repeated mechanically. Something in the man chained her thought—his face that moment when her hand saved him and the awful fear left him, and a glimmer of light came into his eyes.

But her lover beside her broke into song. He was happy with her. Everything was before him, her beauty, her wealth, herself. He could not dwell upon dismal things; his voice rang out on the sharp sweet evening air:

“‘Oh, where did you get them, the bonny, bonny roses
That blossom in your cheeks, and the morning in your eyes?’
‘I got them on the North Trail, the road that never closes,
That widens to the seven gold gates of paradise.’
‘O come, let us camp in the North Trail together,
With the night-fires lit and the tent-pegs down.’”

Left alone, the man by the reedy lake stood watching them until they were out of view. The song came back to him, echoing across the waters:

“O come, let us camp on the North Trail together,
With the night-fires lit and the tent-pegs down.”

The sunset glow, the girl’s presence, had given him a moment’s illusion, had absorbed him for a moment, acting on his deadened nature like a narcotic at once soothing and stimulating. As some wild animal in a forgotten land, coming upon ruins of a vast civilisation, towers, temples, and palaces, in the golden glow of an Eastern evening, stands abashed and vaguely wondering, having neither reason to understand, nor feeling to enjoy, yet is arrested and abashed, so he stood. He had lived the last three years so much alone, had been cut off so completely from his kind—had lived so much alone. Yet to-night, at last, he would not be alone.

Some one was coming to-night, some one whom he had not seen for a long time. Letters had passed, the object of the visit had been defined, and he had spent the intervening days since the last letter had arrived, now agitated, now apathetic and sullen, now struggling with some invisible being that kept whispering in his ear, saying to him, “It was the price of fire, and blood, and shame. You did it—you—you—you! You are down, and you will never get up. You can only go lower still—fire, and blood, and shame!”

Criminal as he was he had never become hardened, he had only become degraded. Crime was not his vocation. He had no gift for it; still the crime he had committed had never been discovered—the crime that he did with others. There were himself and Dupont and another. Dupont was coming to-night—Dupont who had profited by the crime, and had not spent his profits, but had built upon them to further profit; for Dupont was avaricious and prudent, and a born criminal. Dupont had never had any compunctions or remorse, had never lost a night’s sleep because of what they two had done, instigated thereto by the other, who had paid them so well for the dark thing.

The other was Henderley, the financier. He was worse perhaps than Dupont, for he was in a different sphere of life, was rich beyond counting, and had been early nurtured in quiet Christian surroundings. The spirit of ambition, rivalry, and the methods of a degenerate and cruel finance had seized him, mastered him; so that, under the cloak of power—as a toreador hides the blade under the red cloth before his enemy the toro—he held a sword of capital which did cruel and vicious things, at last becoming criminal also. Henderley had incited and paid; the others, Dupont and Lygon, had acted and received. Henderley had had no remorse, none at any rate that weighed upon him; for he had got used to ruining rivals, and seeing strong men go down, and those who had fought him come to beg or borrow of him in the end. He had seen more than one commit suicide, and those they loved go down and farther down, and he had helped these up a little, but not enough to put them near his own plane again; and he could not see—it never occurred to him—that he had done any evil to them. Dupont thought upon his crimes now and then, and his heart hardened, for he had no moral feeling; Henderley did not think at all. It was left to the man of the reedy lake to pay the penalty of apprehension, to suffer the effects of crime upon a nature not naturally criminal.

Again and again, how many hundreds of times, had Roger Lygon seen in his sleep—had even seen awake so did hallucination possess him—the new cattle trail he had fired for scores of miles. The fire had destroyed the grass over millions of acres, two houses had been burned and three people had lost their lives; all to satisfy the savage desire of one man, to destroy the chance of a cattle trade over a great section of country for the railway which was to compete with his own—an act which, in the end, was futile, failed of its purpose. Dupont and Lygon had been paid their price, and had disappeared, and been forgotten—they were but pawns in his game—and there was no proof against Henderley. Henderley had forgotten. Lygon wished to forget, but Dupont remembered, and meant now to reap fresh profit by the remembrance.

Dupont was coming to-night, and the hatchet of crime was to be dug up again. So it had been planned. As the shadows fell, Lygon roused himself from his trance with a shiver. It was not cold, but in him there was a nervous agitation, making him cold from head to foot; his body seemed as impoverished as his mind. Looking with heavy-lidded eyes across the prairie, he saw in the distance the barracks of the Riders of the Plains and the jail near by, and his shuddering ceased. There was where he belonged, within four stone walls; yet here he was free to go where he willed, to live as he willed, with no eye upon him. With no eye upon him? There was no eye, but there was the Whisperer whom he could never drive away. Morning and night he heard the words, “You—you—you! Fire, and blood, and shame!” He had snatched sleep when he could find it, after long, long hours of tramping over the plains, ostensibly to shoot wild fowl, but in truth to bring on a great bodily fatigue—and sleep. His sleep only came then in the first watches of the night. As the night wore on the Whisperer began again, as the cloud of weariness lifted a little from him, and the senses were released from the heavy sedative of unnatural exertion.

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The dusk deepened. The moon slowly rose. He cooked his scanty meal, and took a deep draught from a

horn of whiskey from beneath a board in the flooring. He had not the courage to face Dupont without it, nor yet to forget what he must forget, if he was to do the work Dupont came to arrange—he must forget the girl who had saved his life and the influence of those strange moments in which she had spoken down to him, in the abyss where he had been lying.

He sat in the doorway, a fire gleaming behind him; he drank in the good air as though his lungs were thirsty for it, and saw the silver glitter of the moon upon the water. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the shining path the moon made upon the reedy lake fascinated his eye. Everything was so still except that whisper louder in his ear than it had ever been before.

Suddenly, upon the silver path upon the lake there shot a silent canoe, with a figure as silently paddling towards him. He gazed for a moment dismayed, and then got to his feet with a jerk.

"Dupont," he said mechanically.

The canoe swished among the reeds and rushes, scraped on the shore, and a tall, burly figure sprang from it, and stood still, looking at the house.

"Qui reste la—Lygon?" he asked.

"Dupont," was the nervous, hesitating reply. Dupont came forwards quickly. "Ah, ben, here we are again—so," he grunted cheerily.

Entering the house they sat before the fire, holding their hands to the warmth from force of habit, though the night was not cold.

"Ben, you will do it to-night—then?" Dupont said. "Sacre, it is time!"

"Do what?" rejoined the other heavily.

An angry light leapt into Dupont's eyes. "You not unnerstan' my letters-bah! You know it all right, so queeck."

The other remained silent, staring into the fire with wide, searching eyes.

Dupont put a hand on him. "You ketch my idee queeck. We mus' have more money from that Henderley—certainlee. It is ten years, and he t'ink it is all right. He t'ink we come no more becos' he give five t'ousan' dollars to us each. That was to do the t'ing, to fire the country. Now we want another ten t'ousan' to us each, to forget we do it for him—hein?"

Still there was no reply. Dupont went on, watching the other furtively, for he did not like this silence. But he would not resent it till he was sure there was good cause.

"It comes to suit us. He is over there at the Old Man Lak', where you can get at him easy, not like in the city where he lif'. Over in the States, he laugh mebbe, becos' he is at home, an' can buy off the law. But here—it is Canadaw, an' they not care eef he have hunder' meellion dollar. He know that—sure. Eef you say you not care a dam to go to jail, so you can put him there, too, becos' you have not'ing, an' so dam seeck of everyt'ing, he will t'ink ten t'ousan' dollar same as one cent to Nic Dupont—ben sur!"

Lygon nodded his head, still holding his hands to the blaze. With ten thousand dollars he could get away into—into another world somewhere, some world where he could forget; as he forgot for a moment this afternoon when the girl said to him, "It is never too late to mend."

Now as he thought of her, he pulled his coat together, and arranged the rough scarf at his neck involuntarily. Ten thousand dollars—but ten thousand dollars by blackmail, hush-money, the reward of fire, and blood, and shame! Was it to go on? Was he to commit a new crime?

He stirred, as though to shake off the net that he felt twisting round him, in the hands of the robust and powerful Dupont, on whom crime sat so lightly, who had flourished while he, Lygon, had gone lower and lower. Ten years ago he had been the better man, had taken the lead, was the master, Dupont the obedient confederate, the tool. Now, Dupont, once the rough river-driver, grown prosperous in a large way for him—who might yet be mayor of his town in Quebec—he held the rod of rule. Lygon was conscious that the fifty dollars sent him every New Year for five years by Dupont had been sent with a purpose, and that he was now Dupont's tool. Debilitated, demoralised, how could he, even if he wished, struggle against this powerful confederate, as powerful in will as in body? Yet if he had his own way he would not go to Henderley. He had lived with "a familiar spirit" so long, he feared the issue of this next excursion into the fens of crime.

Dupont was on his feet now. "He will be here only three days more—I haf find it so. To-night it mus' be done. As we go I will tell you what to say. I will wait at the Forks, an' we will come back togedder. His cheque will do. Eef he gif at all, the cheque is all right. He will not stop it. Eef he haf the money, it is better—sacre—yes. Eef he not gif—well, I will tell you, there is the other railway man he try to hurt, how would he like—But I will tell you on the river. Main'enant—queeck, we go."

Without a word Lygon took down another coat and put it on. Doing so he concealed a weapon quickly as Dupont stooped to pick a coal for his pipe from the blaze. Lygon had no fixed purpose in taking a weapon with him; it was only a vague instinct of caution that moved him.

In the canoe on the river, in an almost speechless apathy, he heard Dupont's voice giving him instructions.

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Henderley, the financier, had just finished his game of whist and dismissed his friends—it was equivalent to dismissal, rough yet genial as he seemed to be, so did immense wealth and its accompanying power affect his relations with those about him. In everything he was "considered." He was in good humour, for he had won all the evening, and with a smile he rubbed his hands among the notes—three thousand dollars it was. It was like a man with a pocket full of money, chuckling over a coin he has found in the street. Presently he heard a rustle of the inner tent-curtain and swung round. He faced the man from the reedy lake.

Instinctively he glanced round for a weapon, mechanically his hands firmly grasped the chair in front of him.

He had been in danger of his life many times, and he had no fear. He had been threatened with assassination more than once, and he had got used to the idea of danger; life to him was only a game.

He kept his nerve; he did not call out; he looked his visitor in the eyes.

“What are you doing here? Who are you?” he said.

“Don’t you know me?” answered Lygon, gazing intently at him.

Face to face with the man who had tempted him to crime, Lygon had a new sense of boldness, a sudden feeling of reprisal, a rushing desire to put the screw upon him. At sight of this millionaire with the pile of notes before him there vanished the sickening hesitation of the afternoon, of the journey with Dupont. The look of the robust, healthy financier was like acid in a wound; it maddened him.

“You will know me better soon,” Lygon added, his head twitching with excitement.

Henderley recognised him now. He gripped the armchair spasmodically, but presently regained a complete composure. He knew the game that was forward here; and he also thought that if once he yielded to blackmail there would never be an end to it. He made no pretence, but came straight to the point.

“You can do nothing; there is no proof,” he said with firm assurance.

“There is Dupont,” answered Lygon doggedly.

“Who is Dupont?”

“The French Canadian who helped me—I divided with him.”

“You said the man who helped you died. You wrote that to me. I suppose you are lying now.”

Henderley coolly straightened the notes on the table, smoothing out the wrinkles, arranging them according to their denominations with an apparently interested eye; yet he was vigilantly watching the outcast before him. To yield to blackmail would be fatal; not to yield to it—he could not see his way. He had long ago forgotten the fire, and blood, and shame. No Whisperer reminded him of that black page in the history of his life; he had been immune of conscience. He could not understand this man before him. It was as bad a case of human degradation as ever he had seen—he remembered the stalwart, if dissipated, ranchman who had acted on his instigation. He knew now that he had made a foolish blunder then, that the scheme had been one of his failures; but he had never looked on it as with eyes reproving crime. As a hundred thoughts tending towards the solution of the problem by which he was faced, flashed through his mind, and he rejected them all, he repeated mechanically the phrase, “I suppose you are lying now.”

“Dupont is here—not a mile away,” was the reply. “He will give proof. He would go to jail or to the gallows to put you there, if you do not pay. He is a devil—Dupont.”

Still the great man could not see his way out. He must temporise for a little longer, for rashness might bring scandal or noise; and near by was his daughter, the apple of his eye.

“What do you want? How much did you figure you could get out of me, if I let you bleed me?” he asked sneeringly and coolly. “Come now, how much?”

Lygon, in whom a blind hatred of the man still raged, was about to reply, when he heard a voice calling, “Daddy, Daddy!”

Suddenly the red, half-insane light died down in Lygon’s eyes. He saw the snake upon the ground by the reedy lake, the girl standing over it—the girl with the tawny hair. This was her voice.

Henderley had made a step towards a curtain opening into another room of the great tent, but before he could reach it the curtain was pushed back, and the girl entered with a smile.

“May I come in?” she said; then stood still astonished; seeing Lygon.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “Oh—you!”

All at once a look came into her face which stirred it as a flying insect stirs the water of a pool. On the instant she remembered that she had seen the man before.

It was ten years ago in Montana on the night of her birthday. Her father had been called away to talk with this man, and she had seen him from the steps of the “special.” It was only the caricature of the once strong, erect ranchman that she saw, but there was no mistake, she recognised him now.

Lygon, dumfounded, looked from her to her father, and he saw now in Henderley’s eyes a fear that was not to be misunderstood.

Here was where Henderley could be smitten, could be brought to his knees. It was the vulnerable part of him. Lygon could see that he was stunned. The great financier was in his power. He looked back again to the girl, and her face was full of trouble.

A sharp suspicion was in her heart that somehow or other her father was responsible for this man’s degradation and ruin. She looked Lygon in the eyes.

“Did you want to see me?” she asked.

She scarcely knew why she said it; but she was sensible of trouble, maybe of tragedy, somewhere; and she had a vague dread of she knew not what, for hide it, avoid it, as she had done so often, there was in her heart an unhappy doubt concerning her father.

A great change had come over Lygon. Her presence had altered him. He was again where she had left him in the afternoon.

He heard her say to her father, “This was the man I told you of—at the reedy lake. Did you come to see me?” she repeated.

“I did not know you were here,” he answered. “I came”—he was conscious of Henderley’s staring eyes fixed upon him helplessly—“I came to ask your father if he would not buy my shack. There is good shooting at the lake; the ducks come plenty, sometimes. I want to get away, to start again somewhere. I’ve been a failure. I want to get away, right away south. If he would buy it I could start again. I’ve had no luck.” He had invented it on the moment, but the girl understood better than Lygon or Henderley could have dreamed. She had seen the change pass over Lygon. Henderley had a hand on himself again, and the startled look went out of his eyes.

“What do you want for your shack and the lake?” he asked with restored confidence. The fellow no doubt

was grateful that his daughter had saved his life, he thought.

"Five hundred dollars," answered Lygon quickly. Henderley would have handed over all that lay on the table before him but that he thought it better not to do so. "I'll buy it," he said. "You seem to have been hit hard. Here is the money. Bring me the deed to-morrow—to-morrow."

"I'll not take the money till I give you the deed," said Lygon. "It will do to-morrow. It's doing me a good turn. I'll get away and start again somewhere. I've done no good up here. Thank you, sir—thank you." Before they realised it, the tent-curtain rose and fell, and he was gone into the night.

The trouble was still deep in the girl's eyes as she kissed her father, and he, with an overdone cheerfulness, wished her a good night.

The man of iron had been changed into a man of straw once at least in his lifetime.

Lygon found Dupont at the Forks.

"Eh ben, it is all right—yes?" Dupont asked eagerly as Lygon joined him.

"Yes, it is all right," answered Lygon.

With an exulting laugh and an obscene oath, Dupont pushed out the canoe, and they got away into the moonlight. No word was spoken for some distance, but Dupont kept giving grunts of satisfaction.

"You got the ten t'ousan' each—in cash or cheque, eh? The cheque or the money-hein?"

"I've got nothing," answered Lygon. Dupont dropped his paddle with a curse.

"You got not'ing! You said eet was all right," he growled.

"It is all right. I got nothing. I asked for nothing. I have had enough. I have finished."

With a roar of rage Dupont sprang on him, and caught him by the throat as the canoe swayed and dipped. He was blind with fury.

Lygon tried with one hand for his knife, and got it, but the pressure on his throat was growing terrible. For minutes the struggle continued, for Lygon was fighting with the desperation of one who makes his last awful onset against fate and doom.

Dupont also had his knife at work. At last it drank blood, but as he got it home, he suddenly reeled blindly, lost his balance, and lurched into the water with a groan.

Lygon, weapon in hand, and bleeding freely, waited for him to rise and make for the canoe again.

Ten, twenty, fifty seconds passed. Dupont did not rise. A minute went by, and still there was no stir, no sign. Dupont would never rise again. In his wild rage he had burst a blood vessel on the brain.

Lygon bound up his reeking wound as best he could. He did—it calmly, whispering to himself the while.

"I must do it. I must get there if I can. I will not be afraid to die then," he muttered to himself. Presently he grasped an oar and paddled feebly.

A slight wind had risen, and, as he turned the boat in to face the Forks again, it helped to carry the canoe to the landing-place.

Lygon dragged himself out. He did not try to draw the canoe up, but began this journey of a mile back to the tent he had left so recently. First, step by step, leaning against trees, drawing himself forwards, a journey as long to his determined mind as from youth to age. Would it never end? It seemed a terrible climbing up the sides of a cliff, and, as he struggled fainting on, all sorts of sounds were in his ears, but he realised that the Whisperer was no longer there. The sounds he heard did not torture, they helped his stumbling feet. They were like the murmur of waters, like the sounds of the forest and soft, booming bells. But the bells were only the beatings of his heart-so loud, so swift.

He was on his knees now crawling on-on-on. At last there came a light, suddenly bursting on him from a tent, he was so near. Then he called, and called again, and fell forwards on his face. But now he heard a voice above him. It was her voice. He had blindly struggled on to die near her, near where she was, she was so pitiful and good.

He had accomplished his journey, and her voice was speaking above him. There were other voices, but it was only hers that he heard.

"God help him—oh, God help him!" she was saying. He drew a long quiet breath. "I will sleep now," he said clearly.

He would hear the Whisperer no more.

AS DEEP AS THE SEA

"What can I do, Dan? I'm broke, too. My last dollar went to pay my last debt to-day. I've nothing but what I stand in. I've got prospects, but I can't discount prospects at the banks." The speaker laughed bitterly. "I've reaped and I'm sowing, the same as you, Dan."

The other made a nervous motion of protest. "No; not the same as me, Flood—not the same. It's sink or swim with me, and if you can't help me—oh, I'd take my gruel without whining, if it wasn't for Di! It's that knocks me over. It's the shame to her. Oh, what a cursed ass and fool—and thief, I've been!"

"Thief-thief?"

Flood Rawley dropped the flaming match with which he was about to light a cheroot, and stood staring, his dark-blue eyes growing wider, his worn, handsome face becoming drawn, as swift conviction mastered him. He felt that the black words which had fallen from his friend's lips—from the lips of Diana Welldon's brother—were the truth. He looked at the plump face, the full amiable eyes, now misty with fright, at the

characterless hand nervously feeling the golden moustache, at the well-fed, inert body; and he knew that whatever the trouble or the peril, Dan Welldon could not surmount it alone.

"What is it?" Rawley asked rather sharply, his fingers running through his slightly grizzled, black hair, but not excitedly, for he wanted no scenes; and if this thing could hurt Di Welldon, and action was necessary, he must remain cool. What she was to him, Heaven and he only knew; what she had done for him, perhaps neither understood fully as yet. "What is it—quick?" he added, and his words were like a sharp grip upon Dan Welldon's shoulder. "Racing—cards?"

Dan nodded. "Yes, over at Askatoon; five hundred on Jibway, the favourite—he fell at the last fence; five hundred at poker with Nick Fison; and a thousand in land speculation at Edmonton, on margin. Everything went wrong."

"And so you put your hand in the railway company's money-chest?"

"It seemed such a dead certainty—Jibway; and the Edmonton corner-blocks, too. I'd had luck with Nick before; but—well, there it is, Flood."

"They know—the railway people—Shaughnessy knows?"

"Yes, the president knows. He's at Calgary now. They telegraphed him, and he wired to give me till midnight to pay up, or go to jail. They're watching me now. I can't stir. There's no escape, and there's no one I can ask for help but you. That's why I've come, Flood."

"Lord, what a fool! Couldn't you see what the end would be, if your plunging didn't come off? You—you oughtn't to bet, or speculate, or play cards, you're not clever enough. You've got blind rashness, and so you think you're bold. And Di—oh, you idiot! And on a salary of a thousand dollars a year!"

"I suppose Di would help me; but I couldn't explain." The weak face puckered, a lifeless kind of tear gathered in the ox-like eyes.

"Yes, she probably would help you. She'd probably give you all she's saved to go to Europe with and study, saved from her pictures sold at twenty per cent of their value; and she'd mortgage the little income she's got to keep her brother out of jail. Of course she would, and of course you ought to be ashamed of yourself for thinking of it." Rawley lighted his cigar and smoked fiercely.

"It would be better for her than my going to jail," stubbornly replied the other. "But I don't want to tell her, or to ask her for money. That's why I've come to you. You needn't be so hard, Flood; you've not been a saint; and Di knows it."

Rawley took the cheroot from his mouth, threw back his head, and laughed mirthlessly, ironically. Then suddenly he stopped and looked round the room till his eyes rested on a portrait-drawing which hung on the wall opposite the window, through which the sun poured. It was the face of a girl with beautiful bronzed hair, and full, fine, beautifully modelled face, with brown eyes deep and brooding, which seemed to have time and space behind them—not before them. The lips were delicate and full, and had the look suggesting a smile which the inward thought has stayed. It was like one of the Titian women—like a Titian that hangs on the wall of the Gallery at Munich. The head and neck, the whole personality, had an air of distinction and destiny. The drawing had been done by a wandering duchess who had seen the girl sketching in the foothills, when on a visit to that "Wild West" which has such power to refine and inspire minds not superior to Nature. Its replica was carried to a castle in Scotland. It had been the gift of Diana Welldon on a certain day not long ago, when Flood Rawley had made a pledge to her, which was as vital to him and to his future as two thousand dollars were vital to Dan Welldon now.

"You've not been a saint, and Di knows it," repeated the weak brother of a girl whose fame belonged to the West; whose name was a signal for cheerful looks; whose buoyant humour and impartial friendliness gained her innumerable friends; and whose talent, understood by few, gave her a certain protection, lifting her a little away from the outwardly crude and provincial life around her.

When Rawley spoke, it was with quiet deliberation, and even gentleness. "I haven't been a saint, and she knows it, as you say, Dan; but the law is on my side as yet, and it isn't on yours. There's the difference."

"You used to gamble yourself; you were pretty tough, and you oughtn't to walk up my back with hobnailed boots."

"Yes, I gambled, Dan, and I drank, and I raised a dust out here. My record was writ pretty big. But I didn't lay my hands on the ark of the social covenant, whose inscription is, Thou shalt not steal; and that's why I'm poor but proud, and no one's watching for me round the corner, same as you."

Welldon's half-defiant petulance disappeared. "What's done can't be undone." Then, with a sudden burst of anguish: "Oh, get me out of this somehow!"

"How? I've got no money. By speaking to your sister?"

The other was silent.

"Shall I do it?" Rawley peered anxiously into the other's face, and he knew that there was no real security against the shameful trouble being laid bare to her.

"I want a chance to start straight again."

The voice was fluttered, almost whining; it carried no conviction; but the words had in them a reminder of words that Rawley himself had said to Diana Welldon but a few months ago, and a new spirit stirred in him. He stepped forwards and, gripping Dan's shoulder with a hand of steel, said fiercely:

"No, Dan. I'd rather take you to her in your coffin. She's never known you, never seen what most of us have seen, that all you have—or nearly all—is your lovely looks, and what they call a kind heart. There's only you two in your family, and she's got to live with you—awhile, anyhow. She couldn't stand this business. She mustn't stand it. She's had enough to put up with in me; but at the worst she could pass me by on the other side, and there would be an end. It would have been said that Flood Rawley had got his deserts. It's different with you." His voice changed, softened. "Dan, I made a pledge to her that I'd never play cards again for money while I lived, and it wasn't a thing to take on without some cogitation. But I cogitated, and took it on, and started life over again—me! Began practising law again—barrister, solicitor, notary public—at forty. And

at last I've got my chance in a big case against the Canadian Pacific. It'll make me or break me, Dan.... There, I wanted you to see where I stand with Di; and now I want you to promise me that you'll not leave these rooms till I see you again. I'll get you clear; I'll save you, Dan."

"Flood! Oh, my God, Flood!" The voice was broken.

"You've got to stay here, and you're to remember not to get the funk, even if I don't come before midnight. I'll be here then, if I'm alive. If you don't keep your word—but, there, you will." Both hands gripped the graceful shoulders of the miscreant like a vice.

"So help me, Flood," was the frightened, whispered reply, "I'll make it up to you somehow, some day. I'll pay you back."

Rawley caught up his cap from the table. "Steady—steady. Don't go at a fence till you're sure of your seat, Dan," he said. Then with a long look at the portrait on the wall, and an exclamation which the other did not hear, he left the room with a set, determined face.

. . . . . .

"Who told you? What brought you, Flood?" the girl asked, her chin in her long, white hands, her head turned from the easel to him, a book in her lap, the sun breaking through the leaves upon her hat, touching the Titian hair with splendour.

"Fate brought me, and didn't tell me," he answered, with a whimsical quirk of the mouth, and his trouble lurking behind the sea-deep eyes.

"Wouldn't you have come if you knew I was here?" she urged archly.

"Not for two thousand dollars," he answered, the look of trouble deepening in his eyes, but his lips were smiling. He had a quaint sense of humour, and at his last gasp would have noted the ridiculous thing. And surely it was a droll malignity of Fate to bring him here to her whom, in this moment of all moments in his life, he wished far away. Fate meant to try him to the uttermost. This hurdle of trial was high indeed.

"Two thousand dollars—nothing less?" she inquired gaily. "You are too specific for a real lover."

"Fate fixed the amount," he added drily. "Fate—you talk so much of Fate," she replied gravely, and her eyes looked into the distance. "You make me think of it too, and I don't want to do so. I don't want to feel helpless, to be the child of Accident and Destiny."

"Oh, you get the same thing in the 'fore-ordination' that old Minister M'Gregor preaches every Sunday. 'Be elect or be damned,' he says to us all. Names aren't important; but, anyhow, it was Fate that led me here."

"Are you sure it wasn't me?" she asked softly. "Are you sure I wasn't calling you, and you had to come?"

"Well, it was en route, anyhow; and you are always calling, if I must tell you," he laughed. Suddenly he became grave. "I hear you call me in the night sometimes, and I start up and say 'Yes, Di!' out of my sleep. It's a queer hallucination. I've got you on the brain, certainly."

"It seems to vex you—certainly," she said, opening the book that lay in her lap, "and your eyes trouble me to-day. They've got a look that used to be in them, Flood, before—before you promised; and another look I don't understand and don't like. I suppose it's always so. The real business of life is trying to understand each other."

"You have wonderful thoughts for one that's had so little chance," he said. "That's because you're a genius, I suppose. Teaching can't give that sort of thing—the insight."

"What is the matter, Flood?" she asked suddenly again, her breast heaving, her delicate, rounded fingers interlacing. "I heard a man say once that you were 'as deep as the sea.' He did not mean it kindly, but I do. You are in trouble, and I want to share it if I can. Where were you going when you came across me here?"

"To see old Busby, the quack-doctor up there," he answered, nodding towards a shrubbed and wooded hillock behind them.

"Old Busby!" she rejoined in amazement. "What do you want with him—not medicine of that old quack, that dreadful man?"

"He cures people sometimes. A good many out here owe him more than they'll ever pay him."

"Is he as rich an old miser as they say?"

"He doesn't look rich, does he?" was the enigmatical answer.

"Does any one know his real history? He didn't come from nowhere. He must have had friends once. Some one must once have cared for him, though he seems such a monster now."

"Yet he cures people sometimes," he rejoined abstractedly. "Probably there's some good underneath. I'm going to try and see."

"What is it. What is your business with him? Won't you tell me? Is it so secret?"

"I want him to help me in a case I've got in hand. A client of mine is in trouble—you mustn't ask about it; and he can help, I think—I think so." He got to his feet. "I must be going, Di," he added. Suddenly a flush swept over his face, and he reached out and took both her hands. "Oh, you are a million times too good for me!" he said. "But if all goes well, I'll do my best to make you forget it."

"Wait—wait one moment," she answered. "Before you go, I want you to hear what I've been reading over and over to myself just now. It is from a book I got from Quebec, called 'When Time Shall Pass'. It is a story of two like you and me. The man is writing to the woman, and it has things that you have said to me—in a different way."

"No, I don't talk like a book, but I know a star in a dark night when I see it," he answered, with a catch in his throat.

"Hush," she said, catching his hand in hers, as she read, while all around them the sounds of summer—the distant clack of a reaper, the crack of a whip, the locusts droning, the whir of a young partridge, the squeak of a chipmunk—were tuned to the harmony of the moment and her voice:

“‘Night and the sombre silence, oh, my love, and one star shining! First, warm, velvety sleep, and then this quick, quiet waking to your voice which seems to call me. Is it—is it you that calls? Do you sometimes, even in your dreams, speak to me? Far beneath unconsciousness is there the summons of your spirit to me?... I like to think so. I like to think that this thing which has come to us is deeper, greater than we are. Sometimes day and night there flash before my eyes—my mind’s eyes—pictures of you and me in places unfamiliar, landscapes never before seen, activities uncomprehended and unknown, bright, alluring glimpses of some second being, some possible, maybe never-to-be-realised future, alas! Yet these swift-moving shutters of the soul, or imagination, or reality —who shall say which?—give me a joy never before felt in life. If I am not a better man for this love of mine for you, I am more than I was, and shall be more than I am. Much of my life in the past was mean and small, so much that I have said and done has been unworthy —my love for you is too sharp a light for my gross imperfections of the past! Come what will, be what must, I stake my life, my heart, my soul on you—that beautiful, beloved face; those deep eyes in which my being is drowned; those lucid, perfect hands that have bound me to the mast of your destiny. I cannot go back, I must go forwards: now I must keep on loving you or be shipwrecked. I did not know that this was in me, this tide of love, this current of devotion. Destiny plays me beyond my ken, beyond my dreams. O Cithaeron! Turn from me now—or never, O my love! Loose me from the mast, and let the storm and wave wash me out into the sea of your forgetfulness now—or never!... But keep me, keep me, if your love is great enough, if I bring you any light or joy; for I am yours to my uttermost note of life.’”

“He knew—he knew!” Rawley said, catching her wrists in his hands and drawing her to him. “If I could write, that’s what I should have said to you, beautiful and beloved. How mean and small and ugly my life was till you made me over. I was a bad lot.”

“So much hung on one little promise,” she said, and drew closer to him. “You were never bad,” she added; then, with an arm sweeping the universe, “Oh, isn’t it all good, and isn’t it all worth living?”

His face lost its glow. Over in the town her brother faced a ruined life, and the girl beside him, a dark humiliation and a shame which would poison her life hereafter, unless—his look turned to the little house where the quack-doctor lived. He loosed her hands.

“Now for Caliban,” he said.

“I shall be Ariel and follow you-in my heart,” she said. “Be sure and make him tell you the story of his life,” she added with a laugh, as his lips swept the hair behind her ears.

As he moved swiftly away, watching his long strides, she said proudly, “As deep as the sea.”

After a moment she added: “And he was once a gambler, until, until—” she glanced at the open book, then with sweet mockery looked at her hands—“until ‘those lucid, perfect hands bound me to the mast of your destiny.’ O vain Diana! But they are rather beautiful,” she added softly, “and I am rather happy.” There was something like a gay little chuckle in her throat.

“O vain Diana!” she repeated.

.....

Rawley entered the door of the but on the hill without ceremony. There was no need for courtesy, and the work he had come to do could be easier done without it.

Old Busby was crouched over a table, his mouth lapping milk from a full bowl on the table. He scarcely raised his head when Rawley entered—through the open door he had seen his visitor coming. He sipped on, his straggling beard dripping. There was silence for a time.

“What do you want?” he growled at last.

“Finish your swill, and then we can talk,” said Rawley carelessly. He took a chair near the door, lighted a cheroot and smoked, watching the old man, as he tipped the great bowl towards his face, as though it were some wild animal feeding. The clothes were patched and worn, the coat-front was spattered with stains of all kinds, the hair and beard were unkempt and long, giving him what would have been the look of a mangy lion, but that the face had the expression of some beast less honourable. The eyes, however, were malignantly intelligent, the hands, ill-cared for, were long, well-shaped and capable, but of a hateful yellow colour like the face. And through all was a sense of power, dark and almost mediaeval. Secret, evilly wise and inhuman, he looked a being apart, whom men might seek for help in dark purposes.

“What do you want—medicine?” he muttered at last, wiping his beard and mouth with the palm of his hand, and the palm on his knees.

Rawley looked at the ominous-looking bottles on the shelves above the old man’s head; at the forceps, knives, and other surgical instruments on the walls—they at least were bright and clean—and, taking the cheroot slowly from his mouth, he said:

“Shin-plasters are what I want. A friend of mine has caught his leg in a trap.”

The old man gave an evil chuckle at the joke, for a “shin-plaster” was a money-note worth a quarter of a dollar.

“I’ve got some,” he growled in reply, “but they cost twenty-five cents each. You can have them for your friend at the price.”

“I want eight thousand of them from you. He’s hurt pretty bad,” was the dogged, dry answer.

The shaggy eyebrows of the quack drew together, and the eyes peered out sharply through half-closed lids. “There’s plenty of wanting and not much getting in this world,” he rejoined, with a leer of contempt, and spat on the floor, while yet the furtive watchfulness of the eyes indicated a mind ill at ease.

Smoke came in placid puffs from the cheroot—Rawley was smoking very hard, but with a judicial meditation, as it seemed.

“Yes, but if you want a thing so bad that, to get it, you’ll face the devil or the Beast of Revelations, it’s likely to come to you.”

“You call me a beast?” The reddish-brown face grew black like that of a Bedouin in his rage.

“I said the Beast of Revelations—don’t you know the Scriptures?”

“I know that a fool is to be answered according to his folly,” was the hoarse reply, and the great head wagged to and fro in its smarting rage.

“Well, I’m doing my best; and perhaps when the folly is all out, we’ll come to the revelations of the Beast.” There was a silence, in which the gross impostor shifted heavily in his seat, while a hand twitched across the mouth, and then caught at the breast of the threadbare black coat abstractedly.

Rawley leaned forward, one elbow on a knee, the cheroot in his fingers. He spoke almost confidentially, as to some ignorant and misguided savage—as he had talked to Indian chiefs in his time, when searching for the truth regarding some crime:

“I’ve had a lot of revelations in my time. A lawyer and a doctor always do. And though there are folks who say I’m no lawyer, as there are those who say with greater truth that you’re no doctor, speaking technically, we’ve both had ‘revelations.’ You’ve seen a lot that’s seamy, and so have I. You’re pretty seamy yourself. In fact, you’re as bad a man as ever saved lives—and lost them. You’ve had a long tether, and you’ve swung on it—swung wide. But you’ve had a lot of luck that you haven’t swung high, too.”

He paused and flicked away the ash from his cheroot, while the figure before him swayed animal-like from side to side, muttering.

“You’ve got brains, a great lot of brains of a kind—however you came by them,” Rawley continued; “and you’ve kept a lot of people in the West from passing in their cheques before their time. You’ve rooked ‘em, chiselled ‘em out of a lot of cash, too. There was old Lamson—fifteen hundred for the goitre on his neck; and Mrs. Gilligan for the cancer—two thousand, wasn’t it? Tincture of Lebanon leaves you called the medicine, didn’t you? You must have made fifty thousand or so in the last ten years.”

“What I’ve made I’ll keep,” was the guttural answer, and the talon-like fingers clawed the table.

“You’ve made people pay high for curing them, saving them sometimes; but you haven’t paid me high for saving you in the courts; and there’s one case that you haven’t paid me for at all. That was when the patient died—and you didn’t.”

The face of the old man became mottled with a sudden fear, but he jerked it forwards once or twice with an effort at self-control. Presently he steadied to the ordeal of suspense, while he kept saying to himself, “What does he know—what—which?”

“Malpractice resulting in death—that was poor Jimmy Tearle; and something else resulting in death—that was the switchman’s wife. And the law is hard in the West where a woman’s in the case—quick and hard. Yes, you’ve swung wide on your tether; look out that you don’t swing high, old man.”

“You can prove nothing; it’s bluff;” came the reply in a tone of malice and of fear.

“You forget. I was your lawyer in Jimmy Tearle’s case, and a letter’s been found written by the switchman’s wife to her husband. It reached me the night he was killed by the avalanche. It was handed over to me by the post-office, as the lawyer acting for the relatives. I’ve read it. I’ve got it. It gives you away.”

“I wasn’t alone.” Fear had now disappeared, and the old man was fighting.

“No, you weren’t alone; and if the switchman and the switchman’s wife weren’t dead and out of it all; and if the other man that didn’t matter any more than you wasn’t alive and hadn’t a family that does matter, I wouldn’t be asking you peaceably for two thousand dollars as my fee for getting you off two cases that might have sent you to prison for twenty years, or, maybe, hung you to the nearest tree.”

The heavy body pulled itself together, the hands clinched. “Blackmail-you think I’ll stand it?”

“Yes, I think you will. I want two thousand dollars to help a friend in a hole, and I mean to have it, if you think your neck’s worth it.”

Teeth, wonderfully white, showed through the shaggy beard. “If I had to go to prison—or swing, as you say, do you think I’d go with my mouth shut? I’d not pay up alone. The West would crack—holy Heaven, I know enough to make it sick. Go on and see! I’ve got the West in my hand.” He opened and shut his fingers with a grimace of cruelty which shook Rawley in spite of himself.

Rawley had trusted to the inspiration of the moment; he had had no clearly defined plan; he had believed that he could frighten the old man, and by force of will bend him to his purposes. It had all been more difficult than he had expected. He kept cool, imperturbable, and determined, however. He knew that what the old quack said was true—the West might shake with scandal concerning a few who, no doubt, in remorse and secret fear, had more than paid the penalty of their offences. But he thought of Di Welldon and of her criminal brother, and every nerve, every faculty was screwed to its utmost limit of endurance and capacity.

Suddenly the old man gave a new turn to the event. He got up and, rummaging in an old box, drew out a dice-box. Rattling the dice, he threw them out on the table before him, a strange, excited look crossing his face.

“Play for it,” he said in a harsh, croaking voice. “Play for the two thousand. Win it if you can. You want it bad. I want to keep it bad. It’s nice to have; it makes a man feel warm—money does. I’d sleep in ten-dollar bills, I’d have my clothes made of them, if I could; I’d have my house papered with them; I’d eat ‘em. Oh, I know, I know about you—and her—Diana Welldon! You’ve sworn off gambling, and you’ve kept your pledge for near a year. Well, it’s twenty years since I gambled—twenty years. I gambled with these then.” He shook the dice in the box. “I gambled everything I had away—more than two thousand dollars, more than two thousand dollars.” He laughed a raw, mirthless laugh. “Well, you’re the greatest gambler in the West. So was I-in the East. It pulverised me at last, when I’d nothing left—and drink, drink, drink. I gave up both one night and came out West.

“I started doctoring here. I’ve got money, plenty of money—medicine, mines, land got it for me. I’ve been lucky. Now you come to bluff me—me! You don’t know old Busby.” He spat on the floor. “I’m not to be bluffed. I know too much. Before they could lynch me I’d talk. But to play you, the greatest gambler in the West, for two thousand dollars—yes, I’d like the sting of it again. Twos, fours, double-sixes—the gentleman’s game!” He rattled the dice and threw them with a flourish out on the table, his evil face lighting up. “Come! You can’t have something for nothing,” he growled.

As he spoke, a change came over Rawley’s face. It lost its cool imperturbability, it grew paler, the veins on the fine forehead stood out, a new, flaring light came into the eyes. The old gambler’s spirit was alive. But even as it rose, sweeping him into that area of fiery abstraction where every nerve is strung to a fine tension, and the surrounding world disappears, he saw the face of Diana Welldon, he remembered her words to him not an hour before, and the issue of the conflict, other considerations apart, was without doubt. But there was her brother and his certain fate, if the two thousand dollars were not paid in by midnight. He was desperate. It was in reality for Diana’s sake. He approached the table, and his old calm returned.

“I have no money to play with,” he said quietly. With a gasp of satisfaction, the old man fumbled in the inside of his coat and drew out layers of ten, fifty, and hundred-dollar bills. It was lined with them. He passed a pile over to Rawley—two thousand dollars. He placed a similar pile before himself.

As Rawley laid his hand on the bills, the thought rushed through his mind, “You have it—keep it!” but he put it away from him. With a gentleman he might have done it, with this man before him, it was impossible. He must take his chances; and it was the only chance in which he had hope now, unless he appealed for humanity’s sake, for the girl’s sake, and told the real truth. It might avail. Well, that would be the last resort.

“For small stakes?” said the grimy quack in a gloating voice.

Rawley nodded and then added, “We stop at eleven o’clock, unless I’ve lost or won all before that.”

“And stake what’s left on the last throw?”

“Yes.”

There was silence for a moment, in which Rawley seemed to grow older, and a set look came to his mouth—a broken pledge, no matter what the cause, brings heavy penalties to the honest mind. He shut his eyes for an instant, and, when he opened them, he saw that his fellow-gambler was watching him with an enigmatical and furtive smile. Did this Caliban have some understanding of what was at stake in his heart and soul?

“Play!” Rawley said sharply, and was himself again. For hour after hour there was scarce a sound, save the rattle of the dice and an occasional exclamation from the old man as he threw a double-six. As dusk fell, the door had been shut, and a lighted lantern was hung over their heads.

Fortune had fluctuated. Once the old man’s pile had diminished to two notes, then the luck had changed and his pile grew larger; then fell again; but, as the hands of the clock on the wall above the blue medicine bottles reached a quarter to eleven, it increased steadily throw after throw.

Now the player’s fever was in Rawley’s eyes. His face was deadly pale, but his hand threw steadily, calmly, almost negligently, as it might seem. All at once, at eight minutes to eleven, the luck turned in his favour, and his pile mounted again. Time after time he dropped double-sixes. It was almost uncanny. He seemed to see the dice in the box, and his hand threw them out with the precision of a machine. Long afterwards he had this vivid illusion that he could see the dice in the box. As the clock was about to strike eleven he had before him three thousand eight hundred dollars. It was his throw.

“Two hundred,” he said in a whisper, and threw. He won.

With a gasp of relief, he got to his feet, the money in his hand. He stepped backward from the table, then staggered, and a faintness passed over him. He had sat so long without moving that his legs bent under him. There was a pail of water with a dipper in it on a bench. He caught up a dipperful of water, drank it empty, and let it fall in the pail again with a clatter.

“Dan,” he said abstractedly, “Dan, you’re all safe now.”

Then he seemed to wake, as from a dream, and looked at the man at the table. Busby was leaning on it with both hands, and staring at Rawley like some animal jaded and beaten from pursuit. Rawley walked back to the table and laid down two thousand dollars.

“I only wanted two thousand,” he said, and put the other two thousand in his pocket.

The evil eyes gloated, the long fingers clutched the pile, and swept it into a great inside pocket. Then the shaggy head bent forwards.

“You said it was for Dan,” he said—“Dan Welldon?”

Rawley hesitated. “What is that to you?” he replied at last.

With a sudden impulse the old impostor lurched round, opened a box, drew out a roll, and threw it on the table.

“It’s got to be known sometime,” he said, “and you’ll be my lawyer when I’m put into the ground—you’re clever. They call me a quack. Malpractice—bah! There’s my diploma—James Clifton Welldon. Right enough, isn’t it?”

Rawley was petrified. He knew the forgotten story of James Clifton Welldon, the specialist, turned gambler, who had almost ruined his own brother—the father of Dan and Diana—at cards and dice, and had then ruined himself and disappeared. Here, where his brother had died, he had come years ago, and practised medicine as a quack.

“Oh, there’s plenty of proof, if it’s wanted!” he said. “I’ve got it here.” He tapped the box behind him. “Why did I do it? Because it’s my way. And you’re going to marry my niece, and ‘ll have it all some day. But not till I’ve finished with it—not unless you win it from me at dice or cards.... But no”—something human came into the old, degenerate face—“no more gambling for the man that’s to marry Diana. There’s a wonder and a beauty!” He chuckled to himself. “She’ll be rich when I’ve done with it. You’re a lucky man—ay, you’re lucky.”

Rawley was about to tell the old man what the two thousand dollars was for, but a fresh wave of repugnance passed over him, and, hastily drinking another dipperful of water, he opened the door. He looked

back. The old man was crouching forward, lapping milk from the great bowl, his beard dripping. In disgust he swung round again. The fresh, clear air caught his face.

With a gasp of relief he stepped out into the night, closing the door behind him.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Babbling covers a lot of secrets
Being a man of very few ideas, he cherished those he had
Beneath it all there was a little touch of ridicule
Don't go at a fence till you're sure of your seat
Even bad company's better than no company at all
Future of those who will not see, because to see is to suffer
I like when I like, and I like a lot when I like
I don't think. I'm old enough to know
It ain't for us to say what we're goin' to be, not always
Knew when to shut his eyes, and when to keep them open
Nothing so popular for the moment as the fall of a favourite
Self-will, self-pride, and self-righteousness were big in him
That he will find the room empty where I am not
The temerity and nonchalance of despair
The real business of life is trying to understand each other
Things in life git stronger than we are
Tyranny of the little man, given a power
We don't live in months and years, but just in minutes
What'll be the differ a hundred years from now
You've got blind rashness, and so you think you're bold

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