Northern Lights, Complete

Gilbert Parker

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NORTHERN LIGHTS, Complete

By Gilbert Parker

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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.

Volume 1.

A LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS
ONCE AT RED MAN'S RIVER
THE STROKE OF THE HOUR
BUCKMASTER'S BOY

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.

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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.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

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
It ain't for us to say what we're goin' to be, not always
Things in life git stronger than we are
We don't live in months and years, but just in minutes

NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

TO-MORROW
QU'APPELLE
THE STAKE AND THE PLUMB-LINE

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."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

I don't think. I'm old enough to know
Knew when to shut his eyes, and when to keep them open
Nothing so popular for the moment as the fall of a favourite
That he will find the room empty where I am not
The temerity and nonchalance of despair

NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

WHEN THE SWALLOWS HOMEWARD FLY
GEORGE'S WIFE
MARCILE

WHEN THE SWALLOWS HOMEWARD FLY

The arrogant sun had stalked away into the evening, trailing behind him banners of gold and crimson, and a swift twilight was streaming over the land. As the sun passed, the eyes of two men on a high hill followed it,

and the look of one was like a light in a window to a lost traveller. It had in it the sense of home and the tale of a journey done. Such a journey this man had made as few have ever attempted, and fewer accomplished. To the farthermost regions of snow and ice, where the shoulder of a continent juts out into the northwestern Arctic seas, he had travelled on foot and alone, save for his dogs, and for Indian guides, who now and then shepherded him from point to point. The vast ice-hummocks had been his housing, pemmican, the raw flesh of fish, and even the fat and oil of seals had been his food. Ever and ever through long months the everlasting white glitter of the snow and ice, ever and ever the cold stars, the cloudless sky, the moon at full, or swung like a white sickle in the sky to warn him that his life must be mown like grass. At night to sleep in a bag of fur and wool, by day the steely wind, or the air shaking with a filmy powder of frost; while the illimitably distant sun made the tiny flakes sparkle like silver--a poudre day, when the face and hands are most like to be frozen, and all so still and white and passionless, yet aching with energy. Hundreds upon hundreds of miles that endless trail went winding to the farthest North-west. No human being had ever trod its lengths before, though Indians or a stray Hudson's Bay Company man had made journeys over part of it during the years that have passed since Prince Rupert sent his adventurers to dot that northern land with posts and forts, and trace fine arteries of civilisation through the wastes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And he had returned. He was now looking down into the valley where the village lay. Far, far over, two days' march away, he could see the cluster of houses, and the glow of the sun on the tin spire of the little Mission Church where he had heard the girl and her mother sing, till the hearts of all were swept by feeling and ravished by the desire for "the peace of the Holy Grail." The village was, in truth, but a day's march away from him, but he was not alone, and the journey could not be hastened. Beside him, his eyes also upon the sunset and the village, was a man in a costume half-trapper, half-Indian, with bushy grey beard and massive frame, and a distant, sorrowful look, like that of one whose soul was tuned to past suffering. As he sat, his head sunk on his breast, his elbow resting on a stump of pine--the token of a progressive civilisation--his chin upon his hand, he looked like the figure of Moses made immortal by Michael Angelo. But his strength was not like that of the man beside him, who was thirty years younger. When he walked, it was as one who had no destination, who had no haven towards which to travel, who journeyed as one to whom the world is a wilderness, and one tent or one hut is the same as another, and none is home.

Like two ships meeting hull to hull on the wide seas, where a few miles of water will hide them from each other, whose ports are thousands of miles apart, whose courses are not the same, they two had met, the elder man, sick and worn, and near to death, in the poor hospitality of an Indian's tepee. John Bickersteth had nursed the old man back to strength, and had brought him southward with him--a silent companion, who spoke in monosyllables, who had no conversation at all of the past, and little of

the present; but who was a woodsman and an Arctic traveller of the most expert kind; who knew by instinct where the best places for shelter and for sleeping might be found; who never complained, and was wonderful with the dogs. Close as their association was, Bickersteth had felt concerning the other that his real self was in some other sphere or place towards which his mind was always turning, as though to bring it back.

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

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

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

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

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

With the joyous thought in his heart, that he had discovered anew one of the greatest gold-fields of the world, that a journey unparalleled had been accomplished, he turned towards his ancient companion, and a feeling of pity and human love enlarged within him. He, John Bickersteth, was going into a world again, where--as he believed--a happy fate awaited him; but what of this old man? He had brought him out of the wilds, out of the unknown--was he only taking him into the unknown again? Were there friends, any friends anywhere in the world waiting for him? He called himself by no name, he said he had no name. Whence came he? Of whom? Whither was he wending now? Bickersteth had thought of the problem often, and he had no answer for it save that he must be taken care of, if not by others, then by himself; for the old man had saved him from drowning; had also saved him from an awful death on a March day when he fell into a great hole and was knocked insensible in the drifting snow; had saved him from brooding on himself--the beginning of madness--by compelling him to think for another. And sometimes, as he had looked at the old man, his imagination had caught the spirit of the legend of the Indians, and he had cried out, "O soul, come back and give him memory--give him back his memory, Manitou the mighty!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

night.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bickersteth saw that the travail and strife had drained life and energy, and that he must not press the mind and vitality of this exile of time and the unknown too far. He felt that when the next test came the old man would either break completely, and sink down into another and everlasting forgetfulness, or tear away forever the veil between himself and his past, and emerge into a long-lost life. His strength must be shepherded,

and he must be kept quiet and undisturbed until they came to the town yonder in the valley, over which the night was slowly settling down. There two women waited, the two Alices, from both of whom had gone lovers into the North. The daughter was living over again in her young love the pangs of suspense through which her mother had passed. Two years since Bickersteth had gone, and not a sign!

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

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

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

"When the swallows homeward fly--"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GEORGE'S WIFE

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

The old, grey-bearded man, gnarled and angular, with overhanging brows and a harsh face, made this little speech of malice and unfriendliness,

looking out on the snow-covered prairie through the window. Far in the distance were a sleigh and horses like a spot in the snow, growing larger from minute to minute.

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

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

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

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

The old man waited for a minute in a painful silence, then he turned slowly round, and, with tight-pressed lips, looked at the woman in the rocking-chair. If it had been anyone else who had "talked back" at him, he would have made quick work of them, for he was of that class of tyrant who pride themselves on being self-made, and have an undue respect for their own judgment and importance. But the woman who had ventured to challenge his cold-blooded remarks about his dead son's wife, now hastening over the snow to the house her husband had left under a cloud eight years before, had no fear of him, and, maybe, no deep regard for him. He respected her, as did all who knew her--a very reticent, thoughtful, busy being, who had been like a well of comfort to so many that had drunk and passed on out of her life, out of time and time's experiences. Seventy-nine years saw her still upstanding, strong, full of work, and fuller of life's knowledge. It was she who had sent the horses and sleigh for "Gassy," when the old man, having read the letter that Cassy had written him, said that she could "freeze at the station" for all of him. Aunt Kate had said nothing then, but, when the time came, by her orders the sleigh and horses were at the station; and the old man had made no direct protest, for she was the one person he had never dominated nor bullied. If she had only talked, he would have worn her down, for he was fond of talking, and it was said by those who were cynical and incredulous about him that he had gone to prayer-meetings, had been a local preacher, only to hear his own voice. Probably if there had been

any politics in the West in his day, he would have been a politician, though it would have been too costly for his taste, and religion was very cheap; it enabled him to refuse to join in many forms of expenditure, on the ground that he "did not hold by such things."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

now made on George's memory roused him to anger, as much because it seemed to challenge his own judgment as cast a slight on the name of the boy whom he had cast off, yet who had a firmer hold on his heart than any human being ever had. It had only been pride which had prevented him from making it up with George before it was too late; but, all the more, he was set against the woman who "kicked up her heels for a living"; and, all the more, he resented Black Andy, who, in his own grim way, had managed to remain a partner with him in their present prosperity, and had done so little for it.

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

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

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

"Can't you leave the dead alone?" she asked in a voice ringing a little. "Can't you let them rest? Ain't it enough to quarrel about the living? Cassy'll be here soon," she added, peering out of the window, "and if I was you, I'd try and not make her sorry she ever married a Baragar. It ain't a feeling that'd make a sick woman live long."

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

Aunt Kate turned to Black Andy now.

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

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

"If she can sing and dance as she done nine years ago, I shouldn't wonder," answered Black Andy smoothly. These two men knew each other;

they had said hard things to each other for many a year, yet they lived on together unshaken by each other's moods and bitternesses.

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

Suddenly the old man raged out.

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

Aunt Kate set her lips.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Black Andy stood behind the stove, looking over at the new-comers with quizzical, almost furtive eyes, and his father remained for a moment with mouth open, gazing at his dead son's wife and child, as though not quite comprehending the scene. The sight of the boy had brought back, in some strange, embarrassing way, a vision of thirty years before, when George was a little boy in buckskin pants and jacket, and was beginning to ride the prairie with him. This boy was like George, yet not like him. The face was George's, the sensuous, luxurious mouth; but the eyes were not those of a Baragar, nor yet those of Aunt Kate's family; and they were not wholly like the mother's. They were full and brimming, while hers

were small and whimsical; yet they had her quick, humourous flashes and her quaintness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Both dead. What Abner done sent the old man to his grave. But Abner's

mother died a year before."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In a blaze of joy the sun swept down behind the southern hills, and the windows of Lumley's house at the Forks, catching the oblique rays, glittered and shone like flaming silver. Nothing of life showed, save the cattle here and there, creeping away to the shelter of the foothills for the night. The white, placid snow made a coverlet as wide as the vision

of the eye, save where spruce and cedar trees gave a touch of warmth and refuge here and there. A wonderful, buoyant peace seemed to rest upon the wide, silent expanse. The birds of song were gone South over the hills, and the living wild things of the prairies had stolen into winter quarters. Yet, as Cassy Mavor looked out upon the exquisite beauty of the scene, upon the splendid outspanning of the sun along the hills, the deep plangent blue of the sky and the thrilling light, she saw a world in agony and she heard the moans of the afflicted. The sun shone bright on the windows of Lumley's house, but she could hear the crying of Abner's wife, and of old Ezra and Eliza Lumley, when their children were stricken or shamed; when Abel Baragar drew tighter and tighter the chains of the mortgage, which at last made them tenants in the house once their own. Only eight years ago, and all this had happened. And what had not happened to her, too, in those eight years!

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

What had made her fall in love with George Baragar?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aunt Kate nodded, then tried to explain.

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

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

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

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

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

as it did before. It did all right before, didn't it?" She handed the bowl of boneset tea. "Take it; it'll do you good, Cassy," she added.

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

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

"He laughs sometimes--kind o' laughs."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I've left the stage. My voice went when I got a bad cold again, and I

couldn't stand the draughts of the theatre, and so I couldn't dance, either. I'm finished with the stage. I've come out here for good and all.

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

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

"You want to board here?"

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

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

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

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

"I ain't goin' to like you

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