

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V1

Gilbert Parker

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

With each volume of this subscription edition (1912) there is a special introduction, setting forth, in so far as seemed possible, the relation of each work to myself, to its companion works, and to the scheme of my literary life. Only one or two things, therefore, need be said here, as I wish God-speed to this edition, which, I trust, may help to make old friends warmer friends and new friends more understanding. Most of the novels and most of the short stories were suggested by incidents or characters which I had known, had heard of intimately, or, as in the case of the historical novels, had discovered in the works of historians. In no case are the main characters drawn absolutely from life; they are not portraits; and the proof of that is that no one has ever been able to identify, absolutely, any single character in these books. Indeed, it would be impossible for me to restrict myself to actual portraiture. It is trite to say that photography is not art, and photography has no charm for the artist, or the humanitarian indeed, in the portrayal of life. At its best it is only an exhibition of outer formal characteristics, idiosyncrasies, and contours. Freedom is the first essential of the artistic mind. As will be noticed in the introductions and original notes to several of these volumes, it is stated that they possess anachronisms; that they are not portraits of people living or dead, and that they only assume to be in harmony with the spirit of men and times and things. Perhaps in the first few pages of 'The Right of Way' portraiture is more nearly reached than in any other of these books, but it was only the nucleus, if I may say so, of a larger development which the original Charley Steele never attained. In the novel he grew to represent infinitely more than the original ever represented in his short life.

That would not be strange when it is remembered that the germ of The 'Right of Way' was growing in my mind over a long period of years, and it must necessarily have developed into a larger conception than the original character could have suggested. The same may be said of the chief characters in 'The Weavers'. The story of the two brothers David Claridge and Lord Eglington in that book was brewing in my mind for quite fifteen years, and the main incidents and characters of other novels in this edition had the same slow growth. My forthcoming novel, called 'The Judgment House', had been in my mind for nearly twenty years and only emerged when it was full grown, as it were; when I was so familiar with the characters that they seemed as real in all ways as though they were absolute people and incidents of one's own experience.

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Little more need be said. In outward form the publishers have made this edition beautiful. I should be ill-content if there was not also an element of beauty in the work of the author. To my mind truth alone is not sufficient. Every work of art, no matter how primitive in conception, how tragic or how painful, or even how grotesque in design like the gargoyles on Notre Dame must have, too, the elements of beauty that which lures and holds, the durable and delightful thing. I have a hope that these books of mine, as faithful to life as I could make them, have also been touched here and there by the staff of beauty. Otherwise their day will be short indeed; and I should wish for them a day a little longer at least than my day and span.

I launch the ship. May it visit many a port! May its freight never lie neglected on the quays!

INTRODUCTION

So far as my literary work is concerned 'Pierre and His People' may be likened to a new city built upon the ashes of an old one. Let me explain. While I was in Australia I began a series of short stories and sketches of life in Canada which I called 'Pike Pole Sketches on the Madawaska'. A very few of them were published in Australia, and I brought with me to England in 1889 about twenty of them to make into a volume. I told Archibald Forbes, the great war correspondent, of my wish for publication, and asked him if he would mind reading the sketches and stories before I approached a publisher. He immediately consented, and one day I brought him the little brown bag containing the tales.

A few days afterwards there came an invitation to lunch, and I went to Clarence Gate, Regent's Park, to learn what Archibald Forbes thought of my tales. We were quite merry at luncheon, and after luncheon, which for him was a glass of milk and a biscuit, Forbes said to me, "Those stories, Parker you have the best collection of titles I have ever known." He paused. I understood. To his mind the tales did not live up to their titles. He hastily added, "But I am going to give you a letter of introduction to Macmillan. I may be wrong." My reply was: "You need not give me a letter to Macmillan unless I write and ask you for it."

I took my little brown bag and went back to my comfortable rooms in an old-fashioned square. I sat down before the fire on this bleak winter's night with a couple of years' work on my knee. One by one I glanced through the stories and in some cases read them carefully, and one by one I put them in the fire, and watched them burn. I was heavy at heart, but I felt that Forbes was right, and my own instinct told me that my ideas were better than my performance and Forbes was right. Nothing was left of the tales; not a shred of paper, not a scrap of writing. They had all gone up the chimney in smoke. There was no self-pity. I had a grim kind of feeling regarding the thing, but I had no regrets, and I have never had any regrets since. I have forgotten most of the titles, and indeed all the stories except one. But Forbes and I were right; of that I am sure.

The next day after the arson I walked for hours where London was busiest. The shop windows fascinated me; they always did; but that day I seemed, subconsciously, to be looking for something. At last I found it. It was a second-hand shop in Covent Garden. In the window there was the uniform of an officer of the time of Wellington, and beside it the leather coat and fur cap of a trapper of the Hudson's Bay Company! At that window I commenced to build again upon the ashes of last night's fire. Pretty Pierre, the French half-breed, or rather the original of him as I knew him when a child, looked out of the window at me. So I went home, and sitting in front of the fire which had received my manuscript the night before, with a pad upon my knee, I began to write 'The Patrol of the Cypress Hills' which opens 'Pierre and His People'.

The next day was Sunday. I went to service at the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury, and while listening superficially to the sermon I was also reading the psalms. I came upon these words, "Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, that are out of remembrance," and this text, which I used in the story 'The Patrol of the Cypress Hills', became, in a sense, the text for all the stories which came after. It seemed to suggest the lives and the end of the lives of the workers of the pioneer world.

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So it was that Pierre and His People chiefly concerned those who had been wounded by Fate, and had suffered the robberies of life and time while they did their work in the wide places. It may be that my readers have found what I tried, instinctively, to convey in the pioneer life I portrayed "The soul of goodness in things evil." Such, on the whole, my observation had found in life, and the original of Pierre, with all his mistakes, misdemeanours, and even crimes, was such an one as I would have gone to in trouble or in hour of need, knowing that his face would never be turned from me.

These stories made their place at once. The 'Patrol of the Cypress Hills' was published first in 'The Independent' of New York and in 'Macmillan's Magazine' in England. Mr. Bliss Carman, then editor of 'The Independent', eagerly published several of them 'She of the Triple Chevron' and others. Mr. Carman's sympathy and insight were a great help to me in those early days. The then editor of 'Macmillan's Magazine', Mr. Mowbray Morris, was not, I think, quite so sure of the merits of the Pierre stories. He published them, but he was a little credulous regarding them, and he did not pat me on the back by any means. There was one, however, who made the best that is in 'Pierre and His People' possible; this was the unforgettable W. E. Henley, editor of 'The National Observer'. One day at a sitting I wrote a short story called 'Antoine and Angelique', and sent it to him almost before the ink was dry. The reply came by return of post: "It is almost, or quite, as good as can be. Send me another." So forthwith I sent him 'God's Garrison', and it was quickly followed by 'The Three Outlaws', 'The Tall Master', 'The Flood', 'The Cipher', 'A Prairie Vagabond', and several others. At length came 'The Stone', which brought a telegram of congratulation, and finally 'The Crimson Flag'. The acknowledgment of that was a postcard containing these all too-flattering words: "Bravo, Balzac!" Henley would print what no other editor would print; he gave a man his chance to do the boldest thing that was in him, and I can truthfully say that the doors which he threw open gave freedom to an imagination and an individuality of conception, for which I can never be sufficiently grateful.

These stories and others which appeared in 'The National Observer', in 'Macmillan's', in 'The English Illustrated Magazine' and others made many friends; so that when the book at length came out it was received with generous praise, though not without some criticism. It made its place, however, at once, and later appeared another series, called 'An Adventurer of the North', or, as it is called in this edition, 'A Romany of the Snows'. Through all the twenty stories of this second volume the character of Pierre moved; and by the time the last was written there was scarcely an important magazine in the English-speaking world which had not printed one or more of them. Whatever may be thought of the stories themselves, or of the manner in which the life of the Far North was portrayed, of one thing I am sure: Pierre was true to the life to his race, to his environment, to the conditions of pioneer life through which he moved. When the book first came out there was some criticism from Canada itself, but that criticism has long since died away, and it never was determined.

Plays have been founded on the 'Pierre' series, and one in particular, 'Pierre of the Plains', had a considerable success, with Mr. Edgar Selwyn, the adapter, in the main part. I do not know whether, if I were to begin again, I should have written all the Pierre stories in quite the same way. Perhaps it is just as well that I am not able to begin again. The stories made their own place in their own way, and that there is still a steady demand for 'Pierre and His People' and 'A Romany of the Snows' seems evidence that the editor of an important magazine in New York who declined to recommend them for publication to his firm (and later published several of the same series) was wrong, when he said that the tales "seemed not to be salient." Things that are not "salient" do not endure. It is twenty years since 'Pierre and His People' was produced and it still endures. For this I cannot but be deeply grateful. In any case, what 'Pierre' did was to open up a field which had not been opened before, but which other authors have exploited since with success and distinction. 'Pierre' was the pioneer of the Far North in fiction; that much may be said; and for the rest, Time is the test, and Time will have its way with me as with the rest.

NOTE

It is possible that a Note on the country portrayed in these stories may be in keeping. Until 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company first granted its charter by King Charles II practically ruled that vast region stretching from the

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fiftieth parallel of latitude to the Arctic Ocean a handful of adventurous men entrenched in forts and posts, yet trading with, and mostly peacefully conquering, many savage tribes. Once the sole master of the North, the H. B. C. (as it is familiarly called) is revered by the Indians and half-breeds as much as, if not more than, the Government established at Ottawa. It has had its forts within the Arctic Circle; it has successfully exploited a country larger than the United States. The Red River Valley, the Saskatchewan Valley, and British Columbia, are now belted by a great railway, and given to the plough; but in the far north life is much the same as it was a hundred years ago. There the trapper, clerk, trader, and factor are cast in the mould of another century, though possessing the acuter energies of this. The 'voyageur' and 'courier de bois' still exist, though, generally, under less picturesque names.

The bare story of the hardy and wonderful career of the adventurers trading in Hudson's Bay, of whom Prince Rupert was once chiefest, and the life of the prairies, may be found in histories and books of travel; but their romances, the near narratives of individual lives, have waited the telling. In this book I have tried to feel my way towards the heart of that life worthy of being loved by all British men, for it has given honest graves to gallant fellows of our breeding. Imperfectly, of course, I have done it; but there is much more to be told.

When I started *Pretty Pierre* on his travels, I did not know nor did he how far or wide his adventures and experiences would run. They have, however, extended from Quebec in the east to British Columbia in the west, and from the Cypress Hills in the south to the Coppermine River in the north. With a less adventurous man we had had fewer happenings. His faults were not of his race, that is, French and Indian, nor were his virtues; they belong to all peoples. But the expression of these is affected by the country itself. Pierre passes through this series of stories, connecting them, as he himself connects two races, and here and there links the past of the Hudson's Bay Company with more modern life and Canadian energy pushing northward. Here is something of romance "pure and simple," but also traditions and character, which are the single property of this austere but not cheerless heritage of our race.

All of the tales have appeared in magazines and journals namely, 'The National Observer', 'Macmillan's', 'The National Review', and 'The English Illustrated'; and 'The Independent of New York'. By the courtesy of the proprietors of these I am permitted to republish.

G. P.

HARPENDEN,
HERTFORDSHIRE,
July, 1892.

THE PATROL OF THE CYPRESS HILLS

"He's too ha'sh," said old Alexander Windsor, as he shut the creaking door of the store after a vanishing figure, and turned to the big iron stove with outstretched hands; hands that were cold both summer and winter. He was of lean and frigid make.

"Sergeant Fones is too ha'sh," he repeated, as he pulled out the damper and cleared away the ashes with the iron poker.

Pretty Pierre blew a quick, straight column of cigarette smoke into the air, tilted his chair back, and said: "I do not know what you mean by 'ha'sh,' but he is the devil. Eh, well, there was more than one devil made sometime in the North West." He laughed softly.

"That gives you a chance in history, *Pretty Pierre*," said a voice from behind a pile of woollen goods and buffalo

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skins in the centre of the floor. The owner of the voice then walked to the window. He scratched some frost from the pane and looked out to where the trooper in dog-skin coat, gauntlets and cap, was mounting his broncho. The old man came and stood near the young man, the owner of the voice, and said again: "He's too ha'sh."

"Harsh you mean, father," added the other.

"Yes, harsh you mean, Old Brown Windsor, quite harsh," said Pierre.

Alexander Windsor, storekeeper and general dealer, was sometimes called "Old Brown Windsor" and sometimes "Old Aleck," to distinguish him from his son, who was known as "Young Aleck."

As the old man walked back again to the stove to warm his hands, Young Aleck continued: "He does his duty, that's all. If he doesn't wear kid gloves while at it, it's his choice. He doesn't go beyond his duty. You can bank on that. It would be hard to exceed that way out here."

"True, Young Aleck, so true; but then he wears gloves of iron, of ice. That is not good. Sometime the glove will be too hard and cold on a man's shoulder, and then! Well, I should like to be there," said Pierre, showing his white teeth.

Old Aleck shivered, and held his fingers where the stove was red hot.

The young man did not hear this speech; from the window he was watching Sergeant Fones as he rode towards the Big Divide. Presently he said: "He's going towards Humphrey's place. I " He stopped, bent his brows, caught one corner of his slight moustache between his teeth, and did not stir a muscle until the Sergeant had passed over the Divide.

Old Aleck was meanwhile dilating upon his theme before a passive listener. But Pierre was only passive outwardly. Besides hearkening to the father's complaints he was closely watching the son. Pierre was clever, and a good actor. He had learned the power of reserve and outward immobility. The Indian in him helped him there. He had heard what Young Aleck had just muttered; but to the man of the cold fingers he said: "You keep good whisky in spite of the law and the iron glove, Old Aleck." To the young man: "And you can drink it so free, eh, Young Aleck?"

The half-breed looked out of the corners of his eyes at the young man, but he did not raise the peak of his fur cap in doing so, and his glances askance were not seen.

Young Aleck had been writing something with his finger-nail on the frost of the pane, over and over again. When Pierre spoke to him thus he scratched out the word he had written, with what seemed unnecessary force. But in one corner it remained:

"Mab "

Pierre added: "That is what they say at Humphrey's ranch."

"Who says that at Humphrey's? Pierre, you lie!" was the sharp and threatening reply. The significance of this last statement had been often attested on the prairies by the piercing emphasis of a six-chambered revolver. It was evident that Young Aleck was in earnest. Pierre's eyes glowed in the shadow, but he idly replied:

"I do not remember quite who said it. Well, 'mon ami,' perhaps I lie; perhaps. Sometimes we dream things, and these dreams are true. You call it a lie 'bien!' Sergeant Fones, he dreams perhaps Old Aleck sells whisky against the law to men you call whisky runners, sometimes to Indians and half-breeds halfbreeds like Pretty Pierre. That

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was a dream of Sergeant Fones; but you see he believes it true. It is good sport, eh? Will you not take what is it? a silent partner? Yes; a silent partner, Old Aleck. Pretty Pierre has spare time, a little, to make money for his friends and for himself, eh?"

When did not Pierre have time to spare? He was a gambler. Unlike the majority of half-breeds, he had a pronounced French manner, nonchalant and debonair.

The Indian in him gave him coolness and nerve. His cheeks had a tinge of delicate red under their whiteness, like those of a woman. That was why he was called Pretty Pierre. The country had, however, felt a kind of weird menace in the name. It was used to snakes whose rattle gave notice of approach or signal of danger. But Pretty Pierre was like the death-adder, small and beautiful, silent and deadly. At one time he had made a secret of his trade, or thought he was doing so. In those days he was often to be seen at David Humphrey's home, and often in talk with Mab Humphrey; but it was there one night that the man who was ha'sh gave him his true character, with much candour and no comment.

Afterwards Pierre was not seen at Humphrey's ranch. Men prophesied that he would have revenge some day on Sergeant Fones; but he did not show anything on which this opinion could be based. He took no umbrage at being called Pretty Pierre the gambler. But for all that he was possessed of a devil.

Young Aleck had inherited some money through his dead mother from his grandfather, a Hudson's Bay factor. He had been in the East for some years, and when he came back he brought his "little pile" and an impressionable heart with him. The former Pretty Pierre and his friends set about to win; the latter, Mab Humphrey won without the trying. Yet Mab gave Young Aleck as much as he gave her. More. Because her love sprang from a simple, earnest, and uncontaminated life. Her purity and affection were being played against Pierre's designs and Young Aleck's weakness. With Aleck cards and liquor went together. Pierre seldom drank.

But what of Sergeant Fones? If the man that knew him best the Commandant had been asked for his history, the reply would have been: "Five years in the Service, rigid disciplinarian, best non-commissioned officer on the Patrol of the Cypress Hills." That was all the Commandant knew.

A soldier-policeman's life on the frontier is rough, solitary, and severe. Active duty and responsibility are all that make it endurable. To few is it fascinating. A free and thoughtful nature would, however, find much in it, in spite of great hardships, to give interest and even pleasure. The sense of breadth and vastness, and the inspiration of pure air could be a very gospel of strength, beauty, and courage, to such an one for a time. But was Sergeant Fones such an one? The Commandant's scornful reply to a question of the kind would have been: "He is the best soldier on the Patrol."

And so with hard gallops here and there after the refugees of crime or misfortune, or both, who fled before them like deer among the passes of the hills, and, like deer at bay, often fought like demons to the death; with border watchings, and protection and care and vigilance of the Indians; with hurried marches at sunrise, the thermometer at fifty degrees below zero often in winter, and open camps beneath the stars, and no camp at all, as often as not, winter and summer; with rough barrack fun and parade and drill and guard of prisoners; and with chances now and then to pay homage to a woman's face, the Mounted Force grew full of the Spirit of the West and became brown, valiant, and hardy, with wind and weather. Perhaps some of them longed to touch, oftener than they did, the hands of children, and to consider more the faces of women, for hearts are hearts even under a belted coat of red on the Fiftieth Parallel, but men of nerve do not blazon their feelings.

No one would have accused Sergeant Fones of having a heart. Men of keen discernment would have seen in him the little Bismarck of the Mounted Police. His name carried farther on the Cypress Hills Patrol than any other; and yet his officers could never say that he exceeded his duty or enlarged upon the orders he received. He had no sympathy with crime. Others of the force might wink at it; but his mind appeared to sit severely upright upon the

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cold platform of Penalty, in beholding breaches of the statutes. He would not have rained upon the unjust as the just if he had had the directing of the heavens. As Private Gellatly put it: "Sergeant Fones has the fear o' God in his heart, and the law of the land across his saddle, and the newest breech-loading at that!" He was part of the great machine of Order, the servant of Justice, the sentinel in the vestibule of Martial Law. His interpretation of duty worked upward as downward. Officers and privates were acted on by the force known as Sergeant Fones. Some people, like Old Brown Windsor, spoke hardly and openly of this force. There were three people who never did Pretty Pierre, Young Aleck, and Mab Humphrey. Pierre hated him; Young Aleck admired in him a quality lying dormant in himself decision; Mab Humphrey spoke unkindly of no one. Besides but no!

What was Sergeant Fones's country? No one knew. Where had he come from? No one asked him more than once. He could talk French with Pierre, a kind of French that sometimes made the undertone of red in the Frenchman's cheeks darker. He had been heard to speak German to a German prisoner, and once, when a gang of Italians were making trouble on a line of railway under construction, he arrested the leader, and, in a few swift, sharp words in the language of the rioters, settled the business. He had no accent that betrayed his nationality.

He had been recommended for a commission. The officer in command had hinted that the Sergeant might get a Christmas present. The officer had further said: "And if it was something that both you and the Patrol would be the better for, you couldn't object, Sergeant." But the Sergeant only saluted, looking steadily into the eyes of the officer. That was his reply. Private Gellatly, standing without, heard Sergeant Fones say, as he passed into the open air, and slowly bared his forehead to the winter sun:

"Exactly."

And Private Gellatly cried, with revolt in his voice, "Divils me own, the word that a't to have been full o' joy was like the clip of a rifle- breech."

Justice in a new country is administered with promptitude and vigour, or else not administered at all. Where an officer of the Mounted Police- Soldiery has all the powers of a magistrate, the law's delay and the insolence of office have little space in which to work. One of the commonest slips of virtue in the Canadian West was selling whisky contrary to the law of prohibition which prevailed. Whisky runners were land smugglers. Old Brown Windsor had, somehow, got the reputation of being connected with the whisky runners; not a very respectable business, and thought to be dangerous. Whisky runners were inclined to resent intrusion on their privacy with a touch of that biting inhospitableness which a moonlighter of Kentucky uses toward an inquisitive, unsympathetic marshal. On the Cypress Hills Patrol, however, the erring servants of Bacchus were having a hard time of it. Vigilance never slept there in the days of which these lines bear record. Old Brown Windsor had, in words, freely espoused the cause of the sinful. To the careless spectator it seemed a charitable siding with the suffering; a proof that the old man's heart was not so cold as his hands. Sergeant Fones thought differently, and his mission had just been to warn the store-keeper that there was menacing evidence gathering against him, and that his friendship with Golden Feather, the Indian Chief, had better cease at once. Sergeant Fones had a way of putting things. Old Brown Windsor endeavoured for a moment to be sarcastic. This was the brief dialogue in the domain of sarcasm:

"I s'pose you just lit round in a friendly sort of way, hopin' that I'd kenoodle with you later."

"Exactly."

There was an unpleasant click to the word. The old man's hands got colder. He had nothing more to say.

Before leaving, the Sergeant said something quietly and quickly to Young Aleck. Pierre observed, but could not hear. Young Aleck was uneasy; Pierre was perplexed. The Sergeant turned at the door, and said in French: "What are your chances for a Merry Christmas at Pardon's Drive, Pretty Pierre?" Pierre answered nothing. He shrugged his shoulders, and as the door closed, muttered, "Il est le diable." And he meant it. What should Sergeant Fones

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know of that intended meeting at Pardon's Drive on Christmas Day? And if he knew, what then? It was not against the law to play euchre. Still it perplexed Pierre. Before the Windsors, father and son, however, he was, as we have seen, playfully cool.

After quitting Old Brown Windsor's store, Sergeant Fones urged his stout broncho to a quicker pace than usual. The broncho was, like himself, wasteful of neither action nor affection. The Sergeant had caught him wild and independent, had brought him in, broken him, and taught him obedience. They understood each other; perhaps they loved each other. But about that even Private Gellatly had views in common with the general sentiment as to the character of Sergeant Fones. The private remarked once on this point "Sarpints alive! the heels of the one and the law of the other is the love of them. They'll weather together like the Divil and Death."

The Sergeant was brooding; that was not like him. He was hesitating; that was less like him. He turned his broncho round as if to cross the Big Divide and to go back to Windsor's store; but he changed his mind again, and rode on toward David Humphrey's ranch. He sat as if he had been born in the saddle. His was a face for the artist, strong and clear, and having a dominant expression of force. The eyes were deepset and watchful. A kind of disdain might be traced in the curve of the short upper lip, to which the moustache was clipped close a good fit, like his coat. The disdain was more marked this morning.

The first part of his ride had been seen by Young Aleck, the second part by Mab Humphrey. Her first thought on seeing him was one of apprehension for Young Aleck and those of Young Aleck's name. She knew that people spoke of her lover as a ne'er-do-weel; and that they associated his name freely with that of Pretty Pierre and his gang. She had a dread of Pierre, and, only the night before, she had determined to make one last great effort to save Aleck, and if he would not be saved strange that, thinking it all over again, as she watched the figure on horseback coming nearer, her mind should swerve to what she had heard of Sergeant Fones's expected promotion. Then she fell to wondering if anyone had ever given him a real Christmas present; if he had any friends at all; if life meant anything more to him than carrying the law of the land across his saddle. Again he suddenly came to her in a new thought, free from apprehension, and as the champion of her cause to defeat the half-breed and his gang, and save Aleck from present danger or future perils.

She was such a woman as prairies nurture; in spirit broad and thoughtful and full of energy; not so deep as the mountain woman, not so imaginative, but with more persistency, more daring. Youth to her was a warmth, a glory. She hated excess and lawlessness, but she could understand it. She felt sometimes as if she must go far away into the unpeopled spaces, and shriek out her soul to the stars from the fulness of too much life. She supposed men had feelings of that kind too, but that they fell to playing cards and drinking instead of crying to the stars. Still, she preferred her way.

Once, Sergeant Fones, on leaving the house, said grimly after his fashion: "Not Mab but Ariadne excuse a soldier's bluntness..... Good-bye!" and with a brusque salute he had ridden away. What he meant she did not know and could not ask. The thought instantly came to her mind: Not Sergeant Fones; but who? She wondered if Ariadne was born on the prairie. What knew she of the girl who helped Theseus, her lover, to slay the Minotaur? What guessed she of the Slopes of Naxos? How old was Ariadne? Twenty? For that was Mab's age. Was Ariadne beautiful? She ran her fingers loosely through her short brown hair, waving softly about her Greek-shaped head, and reasoned that Ariadne must have been presentable, or Sergeant Fones would not have made the comparison. She hoped Ariadne could ride well, for she could.

But how white the world looked this morning, and how proud and brilliant the sky! Nothing in the plane of vision but waves of snow stretching to the Cypress Hills; far to the left a solitary house, with its tin roof flashing back the sun, and to the right the Big Divide. It was an old-fashioned winter, not one in which bare ground and sharp winds make life outdoors inhospitable. Snow is hospitable-clean, impacted snow; restful and silent. But there was one spot in the area of white, on which Mab's eyes were fixed now, with something different in them from what had been there. Again it was a memory with which Sergeant Fones was associated. One day in the summer just

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past she had watched him and his company put away to rest under the cool sod, where many another lay in silent company, a prairie wanderer, some outcast from a better life gone by. Afterwards, in her home, she saw the Sergeant stand at the window, looking out towards the spot where the waves in the sea of grass were more regular and greener than elsewhere, and were surmounted by a high cross. She said to him for she of all was never shy of his stern ways:

"Why is the grass always greenest there, Sergeant Fones?"

He knew what she meant, and slowly said: "It is the Barracks of the Free."

She had no views of life save those of duty and work and natural joy and loving a ne'er-do-weel, and she said: "I do not understand that."

And the Sergeant replied: "Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, who are out of remembrance."

But Mab said again: "I do not understand that either."

The Sergeant did not at once reply. He stepped to the door and gave a short command to some one without, and in a moment his company was mounted in line; handsome, dashing fellows; one the son of an English nobleman, one the brother of an eminent Canadian politician, one related to a celebrated English dramatist. He ran his eye along the line, then turned to Mab, raised his cap with machine-like precision, and said: "No, I suppose you do not understand that. Keep Aleck Windsor from Pretty Pierre and his gang. Good-bye."

Then he mounted and rode away. Every other man in the company looked back to where the girl stood in the doorway; he did not. Private Gellatly said, with a shake of the head, as she was lost to view: "Devils bestir me, what a widdy she'll make!" It was understood that Aleck Windsor and Mab Humphrey were to be married on the coming New Year's Day. What connection was there between the words of Sergeant Fones and those of Private Gellatly? None, perhaps.

Mab thought upon that day as she looked out, this December morning, and saw Sergeant Fones dismounting at the door. David Humphrey, who was outside, offered to put up the Sergeant's horse; but he said: "No, if you'll hold him just a moment, Mr. Humphrey, I'll ask for a drink of something warm, and move on. Miss Humphrey is inside, I suppose?"

"She'll give you a drink of the best to be had on your patrol, Sergeant," was the laughing reply. "Thanks for that, but tea or coffee is good enough for me," said the Sergeant. Entering, the coffee was soon in the hand of the hardy soldier. Once he paused in his drinking and scanned Mab's face closely. Most people would have said the Sergeant had an affair of the law in hand, and was searching the face of a criminal; but most people are not good at interpretation. Mab was speaking to the chore-girl at the same time and did not see the look. If she could have defined her thoughts when she, in turn, glanced into the Sergeant's face, a moment afterwards, she would have said, "Austerity fills this man. Isolation marks him for its own." In the eyes were only purpose, decision, and command. Was that the look that had been fixed upon her face a moment ago? It must have been. His features had not changed a breath. Mab began their talk.

"They say you are to get a Christmas present of promotion, Sergeant Fones."

"I have not seen it gazetted," he answered enigmatically.

"You and your friends will be glad of it."

"I like the service."

"You will have more freedom with a commission." He made no reply, but rose and walked to the window, and looked out across the snow, drawing on his gauntlets as he did so.

She saw that he was looking where the grass in summer was the greenest!

He turned and said:

"I am going to barracks now. I suppose Young Aleck will be in quarters here on Christmas Day, Miss Mab?"

"I think so," and she blushed.

"Did he say he would be here?"

"Yes."

"Exactly."

He looked toward the coffee. Then: "Thank you.....Good-bye."

"Sergeant?"

"Miss Humphrey!"

"Will you not come to us on Christmas Day?"

His eyelids closed swiftly and opened again. "I shall be on duty."

"And promoted?"

"Perhaps."

"And merry and happy?" she smiled to herself to think of Sergeant Fones being merry and happy.

"Exactly."

The word suited him.

He paused a moment with his fingers on the latch, and turned round as if to speak; pulled off his gauntlet, and then as quickly put it on again. Had he meant to offer his hand in good-bye? He had never been seen to take the hand of anyone except with the might of the law visible in steel.

He opened the door with the right hand, but turned round as he stepped out, so that the left held it while he faced the warmth of the room and the face of the girl. The door closed.

Mounted, and having said good-bye to Mr. Humphrey, he turned towards the house, raised his cap with soldierly brusqueness, and rode away in the direction of the barracks.

The girl did not watch him. She was thinking of Young Aleck, and of Christmas Day, now near. The Sergeant did not look back.

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V1

Meantime the party at Windsor's store was broken up. Pretty Pierre and Young Aleck had talked together, and the old man had heard his son say: "Remember, Pierre, it is for the last time." Then they talked after this fashion:

"Ah, I know, 'mon ami;' for the last time! 'Eh, bien,' you will spend Christmas Day with us too no? You surely will not leave us on the day of good fortune? Where better can you take your pleasure for the last time? One day is not enough for farewell. Two, three; that is the magic number. You will, eh? no? Well, well, you will come to-morrow and eh, 'mon ami,' where do you go the next day? Oh, 'pardon,' I forgot, you spend the Christmas Day I know. And the day of the New Year? Ah, Young Aleck, that is what they say the devil for the devil's luck. So."

"Stop that, Pierre." There was fierceness in the tone. "I spend the Christmas Day where you don't, and as I like, and the rest doesn't concern you. I drink with you, I play with you 'bien!' As you say yourself, 'bien,' isn't that enough?"

"'Pardon!' We will not quarrel. No; we spend not the Christmas Day after the same fashion, quite. Then, to-morrow at Pardon's Drive! Adieu!"

Pretty Pierre went out of one door, a malediction between his white teeth, and Aleck went out of another door with a malediction upon his gloomy lips. But both maledictions were levelled at the same person. Poor Aleck.

"Poor Aleck!" That is the way we sometimes think of a good nature gone awry; one that has learned to say cruel maledictions to itself, and against which demons hurl their deadly maledictions too. Alas, for the ne'er-do-weel!

That night a stalwart figure passed from David Humphrey's door, carrying with him the warm atmosphere of a good woman's love. The chilly outer air of the world seemed not to touch him, Love's curtains were drawn so close. Had one stood within "the Hunter's Room," as it was called, a little while before, one would have seen a man's head bowed before a woman, and her hand smoothing back the hair from the handsome brow where dissipation had drawn some deep lines. Presently the hand raised the head until the eyes of the woman looked full into the eyes of the man.

"You will not go to Pardon's Drive again, will you, Aleck?"

"Never again after Christmas Day, Mab. But I must go to-morrow. I have given my word."

"I know. To meet Pretty Pierre and all the rest, and for what? Oh, Aleck, isn't the suspicion about your father enough, but you must put this on me as well?"

"My father must suffer for his wrong-doing if he does wrong, and I for mine."

There was a moment's silence. He bowed his head again.

"And I have done wrong to us both. Forgive me, Mab."

She leaned over and caressed his hair. "I forgive you, Aleck."

A thousand new thoughts were thrilling through him. Yet this man had given his word to do that for which he must ask forgiveness of the woman he loved. But to Pretty Pierre, forgiven or unforgiven, he would keep his word. She understood it better than most of those who read this brief record can. Every sphere has its code of honour and duty peculiar to itself.

"You will come to me on Christmas morning, Aleck?"

"I will come on Christmas morning."

"And no more after that of Pretty Pierre?"

"And no more of Pretty Pierre."

She trusted him; but neither could reckon with unknown forces.

Sergeant Fones, sitting in the barracks in talk with Private Gellatly, said at that moment in a swift silence, "Exactly."

Pretty Pierre, at Pardon's Drive, drinking a glass of brandy at that moment, said to the ceiling:

"No more of Pretty Pierre after to-morrow night, monsieur! Bien! If it is for the last time, then it is for the last time. So....so."

He smiled. His teeth were amazingly white.

The stalwart figure strode on under the stars, the white night a lens for visions of days of rejoicing to come. All evil was far from him. The dolorous tide rolled back in this hour from his life, and he revelled in the light of a new day.

"When I've played my last card to-morrow night with Pretty Pierre, I'll begin the world again," he whispered.

And Sergeant Fones in the barracks said just then, in response to a further remark of Private Gellatly, "Exactly."

Young Aleck fell to singing:

"Out from your vineland come
Into the prairies wild;
Here will we make our home,
Father, mother, and child;
Come, my love, to our home,
Father, mother, and child,
Father, mother, and "

He fell to thinking again "and child and child," it was in his ears and in his heart.

But Pretty Pierre was singing softly to himself in the room at Pardon's Drive:

"Three good friends with the wine at night
Vive la compagnie!
Two good friends when the sun grows bright
Vive la compagnie!
Vive la, vive la, vive l'amour!
Vive la, vive la, vive l'amour!
Three good friends, two good friends
Vive la compagnie!"

What did it mean?

PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH, V1

Private Gellatly was cousin to Idaho Jack, and Idaho Jack disliked Pretty Pierre, though he had been one of the gang. The cousins had seen each other lately, and Private Gellatly had had a talk with the man who was ha'sh. It may be that others besides Pierre had an idea of what it meant.

In the house at Pardon's Drive the next night sat eight men, of whom three were Pretty Pierre, Young Aleck, and Idaho Jack. Young Aleck's face was flushed with bad liquor and the worse excitement of play. This was one of the unreckoned forces. Was this the man that sang the tender song under the stars last night? Pretty Pierre's face was less pretty than usual; the cheeks were pallid, the eyes were hard and cold. Once he looked at his partner as if to say, "Not yet." Idaho Jack saw the look; he glanced at his watch; it was eleven o'clock. At that moment the door opened, and Sergeant Fones entered. All started to their feet, most with curses on their lips; but Sergeant Fones never seemed to hear anything that could make a feature of his face alter. Pierre's hand was on his hip, as if feeling for something. Sergeant Fones saw that; but he walked to where Aleck stood, with his unplayed cards still in his hand, and, laying a hand on his shoulder, said, "Come with me."

"Why should I go with you?" this with a drunken man's bravado.

"You are my prisoner."

Pierre stepped forward. "What is his crime?" he exclaimed.

"How does that concern you, Pretty Pierre?"

"He is my friend."

"Is he your friend, Aleck?"

What was there in the eyes of Sergeant Fones that forced the reply, "To-night, yes; to-morrow, no."

"Exactly. It is near to-morrow; come."

Aleck was led towards the door. Once more Pierre's hand went to his hip; but he was looking at the prisoner, not at the Sergeant. The Sergeant saw, and his fingers were at his belt. He opened the door. Aleck passed out. He followed. Two horses were tied to a post. With difficulty Aleck was mounted. Once on the way his brain began slowly to clear, but he grew painfully cold. It was a bitter night. How bitter it might have been for the ne'er-do-weel let the words of Idaho Jack, spoken in a long hour's talk next day with Old Brown Windsor, show. "Pretty Pierre, after the two were gone, said, with a shiver of curses, 'Another hour and it would have been done, and no one to blame. He was ready for trouble. His money was nearly finished. A little quarrel easily made, the door would open, and he would pass out. His horse would be gone, he could not come back; he would walk. The air is cold, quite, quite cold; and the snow is a soft bed. He would sleep well and sound, having seen Pretty Pierre for the last time. And now ' The rest was French and furtive."

From that hour Idaho Jack and Pretty Pierre parted company.

Riding from Pardon's Drive, Young Aleck noticed at last that they were not going towards the barracks. He said: "Why do you arrest me?"

The Sergeant replied: "You will know that soon enough. You are now going to your own home. Tomorrow you will keep your word and go to David Humphrey's place; the next day I will come for you. Which do you choose: to ride with me to-night to the barracks and know why you are arrested, or go, unknowing, as I bid you, and keep your word with the girl?"

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Through Aleck's fevered brain, there ran the words of the song he sang before

"Out from your vineland come
Into the prairies wild;
Here will we make our home,
Father, mother, and child."

He could have but one answer.

At the door of his home the Sergeant left him with the words, "Remember you are on parole."

Aleck noticed as the Sergeant rode away that the face of the sky had changed, and slight gusts of wind had come up. At any other time his mind would have dwelt upon the fact. It did not do so now.

Christmas Day came. People said that the fiercest night, since the blizzard day of 1863, had been passed. But the morning was clear and beautiful. The sun came up like a great flower expanding. First the yellow, then the purple, then the red, and then a mighty shield of roses. The world was a blanket of drift, and down, and glistening silver.

Mab Humphrey greeted her lover with such a smile as only springs to a thankful woman's lips. He had given his word and had kept it; and the path of the future seemed surer.

He was a prisoner on parole; still that did not depress him. Plans for coming days were talked of, and the laughter of many voices filled the house. The ne'er-do-weel was clothed and in his right mind. In the Hunter's Room the noblest trophy was the heart of a repentant prodigal.

In the barracks that morning a gazetted notice was posted, announcing, with such technical language as is the custom, that Sergeant Fones was promoted to be a lieutenant in the Mounted Police Force of the North West Territory. When the officer in command sent for him he could not be found. But he was found that morning; and when Private Gellatly, with a warm hand, touching the glove of "iron and ice" that, indeed, now said: "Sergeant Fones, you are promoted, God help you!" he gave no sign. Motionless, stern, erect, he sat there upon his horse, beside a stunted larch tree. The broncho seemed to understand, for he did not stir, and had not done so for hours; they could tell that. The bridle rein was still in the frigid fingers, and a smile was upon the face.

A smile upon the face of Sergeant Fones!

Perhaps he smiled that he was going to the Barracks of the Free

"Free among the Dead like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave, that are out of remembrance."

In the wild night he had lost his way, though but a few miles from the barracks.

He had done his duty rigidly in that sphere of life where he had lived so much alone among his many comrades. Had he exceeded his duty once in arresting Young Aleck?

When, the next day, Sergeant Fones lay in the barracks, over him the flag for which he had sworn to do honest service, and his promotion papers in his quiet hand, the two who loved each other stood beside him for many a throbbing minute. And one said to herself, silently: "I felt sometimes" but no more words did she say even to herself.

Old Aleck came in, and walked to where the Sergeant slept, wrapped close in that white frosted coverlet which man wears but once. He stood for a moment silent, his fingers numbly clasped.

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Private Gellatly spoke softly: "Angels betide me, it's little we knew the great of him till he wint away; the pride, and the law and the love of him."

In the tragedy that faced them this Christmas morning one at least had seen "the love of him." Perhaps the broncho had known it before.

Old Aleck laid a palm upon the hand he had never touched when it had life. "He's too ha'sh," he said slowly.

Private Gellatly looked up wonderingly. But the old man's eyes were wet.

GOD'S GARRISON

Twenty years ago there was trouble at Fort o' God. "Out of this place we get betwixt the suns," said Gyng the Factor. "No help that falls abaft tomorrow could save us. Food dwindles, and ammunition's nearly gone, and they'll have the cold steel in our scalp—locks if we stay. We'll creep along the Devil's Causeway, then through the Red Horn Woods, and so across the plains to Rupert House. Whip in the dogs, Baptiste, and be ready all of you at midnight."

"And Grah the Idiot what of him"? asked Pretty Pierre.

"He'll have to take his chance. If he can travel with us, so much the better for him"; and the Factor shrugged his shoulders.

"If not, so much the worse, eh"? returned Pretty Pierre.

"Work the sum out to suit yourself. We've got our necks to save. God'll have to help the Idiot if we can't."

"You hear, Grah Hamon, Idiot," said Pierre an hour afterwards, "we're going to leave Fort o' God and make for Rupert House. You've a dragging leg, you're gone in the savvy, you have to balance yourself with your hands as you waddle along, and you slobber when you talk; but you've got to cut away with us quick across the Beaver Plains, and Christ'll have to help you if we can't. That's what the Factor says, and that's how the case stands, Idiot 'bien?'"

"Grah want pipe bubble bubble wind blow," muttered the daft one.

Pretty Pierre bent over and said slowly: "If you stay here, Grah, the Indian get your scalp; if you go, the snow is deep and the frost is like a badger's tooth, and you can't be carried."

"Oh, Oh! my mother dead poor Annie by God, Grah want pipe poor Grah sleep in snow—bubble, bubble Oh, Oh! the long wind, fly away."

Pretty Pierre watched the great head of the Idiot as it swung heavily on his shoulders, and then said: "'Mais,' like that, so!" and turned away.

When the party were about to sally forth on their perilous path to safety, Gyng stood and cried angrily: "Well, why hasn't some one bundled up that moth-eaten Caliban? Curse it all, must I do everything myself?"

"But you see," said Pierre, "the Caliban stays at Fort o' God."

"You've got a Christian heart in you, so help me, Heaven!" replied the other. "No, sir, we give him a chance, and

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his Maker too for that matter, to show what He's willing to do for His misfits."

Pretty Pierre rejoined, "Well, I have thought. The game is all against Grah if he go; but there are two who stay at Fort o' God."

And that is how, when the Factor and his half-breeds and trappers stole away in silence towards the Devil's Causeway, Pierre and the Idiot remained behind. And that is why the flag of the H. B. C. still flew above Fort o' God in the New Year's sun just twenty years ago to-day.

The Hudson's Bay Company had never done a worse day's work than when they promoted Gyng to be chief factor. He loathed the heathen and he showed his loathing. He had a heart harder than iron, a speech that bruised worse than the hoof of an angry moose. And when at last he drove away a band of wandering Sioux, foodless, from the stores, siege and ambush took the place of prayer, and a nasty portion fell to Fort o' God. For the Indians found a great cache of buffalo meat, and, having sent the women and children south with the old men, gave constant and biting assurances to Gyng that the heathen hath his hour, even though he be a dog which is refused those scraps from the white man's table which give life in the hour of need. Besides all else, there was in the Fort the thing which the gods made last to humble the pride of men there was rum.

And the morning after Gyng and his men had departed, because it was a day when frost was master of the sun, and men grew wild for action, since to stand still was to face indignant Death, they, who camped without, prepared to make a sally upon the wooden gates. Pierre saw their intent, and hid in the ground some pemmican and all the scanty rum. Then he looked at his powder and shot, and saw that there was little left. If he spent it on the besiegers, how should they fare for beast and fowl in hungry days? And for his rifle he had but a brace of bullets. He rolled these in his hand, looking upon them with a grim smile. And the Idiot, seeing, rose and sidled towards him, and said: "Poor Grah want pipe bubble bubble." Then a light of childish cunning came into his eyes, and he touched the bullets blunderingly, and continued: "Plenty, plenty b'longs Grah give poor Grah pipe plenty, plenty, give you these."

And Pretty Pierre after a moment replied: "So that's it, Grah? you've got bullets stowed away? Well, I must have them. It's a one-sided game in which you get the tricks; but here's the pipe, Idiot my only pipe for your dribbling mouth my last good comrade. Now show me the bullets. Take me to them, daft one, quick."

A little later the Idiot sat inside the store, wrapped in loose furs, and blowing bubbles; while Pretty Pierre, with many handfuls of bullets by him, waited for the attack.

"Eh," he said, as he watched from a loophole, "Gyng and the others have got safely past the Causeway, and the rest is possible. Well, it hurts an idiot as much to die, perhaps, as a half-breed or a factor. It is good to stay here. If we fight, and go out swift like Grah's bubbles, it is the game. If we starve and sleep as did Grah's mother, then it also is the game. It is great to have all the chances against and then to win. We shall see."

With a sharp relish in his eye he watched the enemy coming slowly forward. Yet he talked almost idly to himself: "I have a thought of so long ago. A woman she was a mother, and it was on the Madawaska River, and she said: 'Sometimes I think a devil was your father, an angel sometimes. You were begot in an hour between a fighting and a mass: between blood and heaven. And when you were born you made no cry. They said that was a sign of evil. You refused the breast, and drank only of the milk of wild cattle. In baptism you flung your hand before your face that the water might not touch, nor the priest's finger make a cross upon the water. And they said it were better if you had been born an idiot than with an evil spirit; and that your hand would be against the loins that bore you. But Pierre, ah Pierre, you love your mother, do you not?' . . . And he standing now, his eye closed with the gate-chink in front of Fort o' God, said quietly: "She was of the race that hated these my mother; and she died of a wound they gave her at the Tete Blanche Hill. Well, for that you die now, Yellow Arm, if this gun has a bullet cold enough."

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A bullet pinged through the sharp air, as the Indians swarmed towards the gate, and Yellow Arm, the chief, fell. The besiegers paused; and then, as if at the command of the fallen man, they drew back, bearing him to the camp, where they sat down and mourned.

Pierre watched them for a time; and, seeing that they made no further move, retired into the store, where the Idiot muttered and was happy after his kind. "Grah got pipe blow away blow away to Annie pretty soon."

"Yes, Grah, there's chance enough that you'll blow away to Annie pretty soon," remarked the other.

"Grah have white eagles fly, fly on the wind oh, oh, bubble, bubble!" and he sent the filmy globes floating from the pipe that a camp of river-drivers had given the half-breed winters before.

Pierre stood and looked at the wandering eyes, behind which were the torturings of an immense and confused intelligence; a life that fell deformed before the weight of too much brain, so that all tottered from the womb into the gutters of foolishness, and the tongue mumbled of chaos when it should have told marvellous things. And the half-breed, the thought of this coming upon him, said: "Well, I think the matters of hell have fallen across the things of heaven, and there is storm. If for one moment he could think clear, it would be great."

He bethought him of a certain chant, taught him by a medicine man in childhood, which, sung to the waving of a torch in a place of darkness, caused evil spirits to pass from those possessed, and good spirits to reign in their stead. And he raised the Idiot to his feet, and brought him, maundering, to a room where no light was. He kneeled before him with a lighted torch of bear's fat and the tendons of the deer, and waving it gently to and fro, sang the ancient rune, until the eye of the Idiot, following the torch at a tangent as it waved, suddenly became fixed upon the flame, when it ceased to move. And the words of the chant ran through Grah's ears, and pierced to the remote parts of his being; and a sickening trouble came upon his face, and the lips ceased to drip, and were caught up in twinges of pain. . . . The chant rolled on: "Go forth, go forth upon them, thou, the Scarlet Hunter! Drive them forth into the wilds, drive them crying forth! Enter in, O enter in, and lie upon the couch of peace, the couch of peace within my wigwam, thou the wise one! Behold, I call to thee!"

And Pierre, looking upon the Idiot, saw his face glow, and his eye stream steadily to the light, and he said, "What is it that you see, Grah? speak!"

All pitifulness and struggle had gone from the Idiot's face, and a strong calm fell upon it, and the voice of a man that God had created spoke slowly: "There is an end of blood. The great chief Yellow Arm is fallen. He goeth to the plains where his wife will mourn upon his knees, and his children cry, because he that gathered food is gone, and the pots are empty on the fire. And they who follow him shall fight no more. Two shall live through bitter days, and when the leaves shall shine in the sun again, there shall good things befall. But one shall go upon a long journey with the singing birds in the path of the white eagle. He shall travel, and not cease until he reach the place where fools, and children, and they into whom a devil entered through the gates of birth, find the mothers who bore them. But the other goeth at a different time " At this point the light in Pretty Pierre's hand flickered and went out, and through the darkness there came a voice, the voice of an idiot, that whimpered: "Grah want pipe Annie, Annie dead."

The angel of wisdom was gone, and chaos spluttered on the lolling lips again; the Idiot sat feeling for the pipe that he had dropped.

And never again through the days that came and went could Pierre, by any conjuring, or any swaying torch, make the fool into a man again. The devils of confusion were returned forever. But there had been one glimpse of the god. And it was as the Idiot had said when he saw with the eyes of that god: no more blood was shed. The garrison of this fort held it unmolested. The besiegers knew not that two men only stayed within the walls; and because the chief begged to be taken south to die, they left the place surrounded by its moats of ice and its

trenches of famine; and they came not back.

But other foes more deadly than the angry heathen came, and they were called Hunger and Loneliness. The one destroyeth the body and the other the brain. But Grah was not lonely, nor did he hunger. He blew his bubbles, and muttered of a wind whereon a useless thing a film of water, a butterfly, or a fool might ride beyond the reach of spirit, or man, or heathen. His flesh remained the same, and grew not less; but that of Pierre wasted, and his eye grew darker with suffering. For man is only man, and hunger is a cruel thing. To give one's food to feed a fool, and to search the silent plains in vain for any living thing to kill, is a matter for angels to do and bear, and not mere mortals. But this man had a strength of his own like to his code of living, which was his own and not another's. And at last, when spring leaped gaily forth from the grey cloak of winter, and men of the H. B. C. came to relieve Fort o' God, and entered at its gates, a gaunt man, leaning on his rifle, greeted them standing like a warrior, though his body was like that of one who had lain in the grave. He answered to the name of Pierre without pride, but like a man and not as a sick woman. And huddled on the floor beside him was an idiot fondling a pipe, with a shred of pemmican at his lips.

As if in irony of man's sacrifice, the All Hail and the Master of Things permitted the fool to fulfil his own prophecy, and die of a sudden sickness in the coming-on of summer. But he of God's Garrison that remained repented not of his deed. Such men have no repentance, neither of good nor evil.

A HAZARD OF THE NORTH

Nobody except Gregory Thorne and myself knows the history of the Man and Woman, who lived on the Height of Land, just where Dog Ear River falls into Marigold Lake. This portion of the Height of Land is a lonely country. The sun marches over it distantly, and the man of the East the braggart calls it outcast; but animals love it; and the shades of the long-gone trapper and 'voyageur' saunter without mourning through its fastnesses. When you are in doubt, trust God's dumb creatures and the happy dead who whisper pleasant promptings to us, and whose knowledge is mighty. Besides, the Man and Woman lived there, and Gregory Thorne says that they could recover a lost paradise. But Gregory Thorne is an insolent youth. The names of these people were John and Audrey Malbrouck; the Man was known to the makers of backwoods history as Captain John. Gregory says about that but no, not yet! let his first meeting with the Man and the Woman be described in his own words, unusual and flippant as they sometimes are; for though he is a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, and a brother of a Right Honourable, he has conceived it his duty to emancipate himself in the matter of style in language; and he has succeeded.

"It was autumn," he said, "all colours; beautiful and nippy on the Height of Land; wild ducks, the which no man could number, and bear's meat abroad in the world. I was alone. I had hunted all day, leaving my mark now and then as I journeyed, with a cache of slaughter here, and a blazed hickory there. I was hungry as a circus tiger did you ever eat slippery elm bark? yes, I was as bad as that. I guessed from what I had been told, that the Malbrouck show must be hereaway somewhere. I smelled the lake miles off oh, you could too if you were half the animal I am; I followed my nose and the slippery-elm between my teeth, and came at a double-quick suddenly on the fair domain. There the two sat in front of the house like turtle-doves, and as silent as a middy after his first kiss. Much as I ached to get my tooth into something filling, I wished that I had 'em under my pencil, with that royal sun making a rainbow of the lake, the woods all scarlet and gold, and that mist of purple eh, you've seen it? and they sitting there monarchs of it all, like that duffer of a king who had operas played for his solitary benefit. But I hadn't a pencil and I had a hunger, and I said 'How!' like any other Injin insolent, wasn't it? Then the Man rose, and he said I was welcome, and she smiled an approving but not very immediate smile, and she kept her seat, she kept her seat, my boy, and that was the first thing that set me thinking. She didn't seem to be conscious that there was before her one of the latest representatives from Belgravia, not she! But when I took an honest look at her face, I understood. I'm glad that I had my hat in my hand, polite as any Frenchman on the threshold of a blanchisserie: for I learned very soon that the Woman had been in Belgravia too, and knew far more than I did

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about what was what. When she did rise to array the supper table, it struck me that if Josephine Beauharnais had been like her, she might have kept her hold on Napoleon, and saved his fortunes; made Europe France; and France the world. I could not understand it. Jimmy Haldane had said to me when I was asking for Malbrouck's place on the compass, 'Don't put on any side with them, my Greg, or you'll take a day off for penitence.' They were both tall and good to look at, even if he was a bit rugged, with neck all wire and muscle, and had big knuckles. But she had hands like those in a picture of Velasquez, with a warm whiteness and educated that's it, educated hands.

"She wasn't young, but she seemed so. Her eyes looked up and out at you earnestly, yet not inquisitively, and more occupied with something in her mind, than with what was before her. In short, she was a lady; not one by virtue of a visit to the gods that rule o'er Buckingham Palace, but by the claims of good breeding and long descent. She puzzled me, eluded me she reminded me of someone; but who? Someone I liked, because I felt a thrill of admiration whenever I looked at her but it was no use, I couldn't remember. I soon found myself talking to her according to St. James the palace, you know and at once I entered a bet with my beloved aunt, the dowager who never refuses to take my offer, though she seldom wins, and she's ten thousand miles away, and has to take my word for it that I should find out the history of this Man and Woman before another Christmas morning, which wasn't more than two months off. You know whether or not I won it, my son."

I had frequently hinted to Gregory that I was old enough to be his father, and that in calling me his son, his language was misplaced; and I repeated it at that moment. He nodded good-humouredly, and continued:

"I was born insolent, my s my ancestor. Well, after I had cleared a space at the supper table, and had, with permission, lighted my pipe, I began to talk. . . Oh yes, I did give them a chance occasionally; don't interrupt. . . . I gossiped about England, France, the universe. From the brief comments they made I saw they knew all about it, and understood my social argot, all but a few words is there anything peculiar about any of my words? After having exhausted Europe and Asia I discussed America; talked about Quebec, the folklore of the French Canadians, the 'voyageurs' from old Maisonneuve down. All the history I knew I rallied, and was suddenly bowled out. For Malbrouck followed my trail from the time I began to talk, and in ten minutes he had proved me to be a baby in knowledge, an emaciated baby; he eliminated me from the equation. He first tripped me on the training of naval cadets; then on the Crimea; then on the taking of Quebec; then on the Franco-Prussian War; then, with a sudden round-up, on India. I had been trusting to vague outlines of history; I felt when he began to talk that I was dealing with a man who not only knew history, but had lived it. He talked in the fewest but directest words, and waxed eloquent in a blunt and colossal way. But seeing his wife's eyes fixed on him intently, he suddenly pulled up, and no more did I get from him on the subject. He stopped so suddenly that in order to help over the awkwardness, though I'm not really sure there was any, I began to hum a song to myself. Now, upon my soul, I didn't think what I was humming; it was some subterranean association of things, I suppose but that doesn't matter here. I only state it to clear myself of any unnecessary insolence. These were the words I was maundering with this noble voice of mine:

"The news I bring, fair Lady,
Will make your tears run down

Put off your rose-red dress so fine
And doff your satin gown!

Monsieur Malbrouck is dead, alas!
And buried, too, for aye;

I saw four officers who bore
His mighty corse away.

.....
We saw above the laurels,

His soul fly forth amain.

And each one fell upon his face
And then rose up again.

And so we sang the glories,
For which great Malbrouck bled;
Mironton, Mironton, Mirontaine,
Great Malbrouck, he is dead.'

"I felt the silence grow peculiar, uncomfortable. I looked up. Mrs. Malbrouck was rising to her feet with a look in her face that would make angels sorry a startled, sorrowful thing that comes from a sleeping pain. What an ass I was! Why, the Man's name was Malbrouck; her name was Malbrouck awful insolence! But surely there was something in the story of the song itself that had moved her. As I afterward knew, that was it. Malbrouck sat still and unmoved, though I thought I saw something stern and masterful in his face as he turned to me; but again instantly his eyes were bent on his wife with a comforting and affectionate expression. She disappeared into the house. Hoping to make it appear that I hadn't noticed anything, I dropped my voice a little and went on, intending, however, to stop at the end of the verse:

"Malbrouck has gone a-fighting,
Mironton, Mironton, Mirontaine!"

"I ended there; because Malbrouck's heavy hand was laid on my shoulder, and he said: 'If you please, not that song.'

"I suspect I acted like an idiot. I stammered out apologies, went down on my litanies, figuratively speaking, and was all the same confident that my excuses were making bad infernally worse. But somehow the old chap had taken a liking to me. No, of course you couldn't understand that. Not that he was so old, you know; but he had the way of retired royalty about him, as if he had lived life up to the hilt, and was all pulse and granite. Then he began to talk in his quiet way about hunting and fishing; about stalking in the Highlands and tiger-hunting in India; and wound up with some wonderful stuff about moose-hunting, the sport of Canada. This made me itch like sin, just to get my fingers on a trigger, with a full moose-yard in view. I can feel it now the bound in the blood as I caught at Malbrouck's arm and said: 'By George, I must kill moose; that's sport for Vikings, and I was meant to be a Viking or a gladiator.' Malbrouck at once replied that he would give me some moose-hunting in December if I would come up to Marigold Lake. I couldn't exactly reply on the instant, because, you see, there wasn't much chance for board and lodging thereabouts, unless but he went on to say that I should make his house my 'public,' perhaps he didn't say it quite in those terms, that he and his wife would be glad to have me. With a couple of Indians we could go north-west, where the moose-yards were, and have some sport both exciting and prodigious. Well, I'm a muff, I know, but I didn't refuse that. Besides, I began to see the safe side of the bet I had made with my aunt, the dowager, and I was more than pleased with what had come to pass so far. Lucky for you, too, you yarn-spinner, that the thing did develop so, or you wouldn't be getting fame and shekels out of the results of my story.

"Well, I got one thing out of the night's experience; and it was that the Malbroucks were no plebs., that they had had their day where plates are blue and gold and the spoons are solid coin. But what had sent them up here among the moose, the Indians, and the conies whatever THEY are? How should I get at it? Insolence, you say? Yes, that. I should come up here in December, and I should mulct my aunt in the price of a new breech-loader. But I found out nothing the next morning, and I left with a paternal benediction from Malbrouck, and a smile from his wife that sent my blood tingling as it hadn't tingled since a certain season in London, which began with my tuneful lyre sounding hopeful numbers and ended with it hanging on the willows.

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"When I thought it all over, as I trudged back on yesterday's track, I concluded that I had told them all my history from my youth up until now, and had got nothing from them in return. I had exhausted my family records, bit by bit, like a curate in his first parish; and had gone so far as to testify that one of my ancestors had been banished to Australia for political crimes. Distinctly they had me at an advantage, though, to be sure, I had betrayed Mrs. Malbrouck into something more than a suspicion of emotion.

"When I got back to my old camp, I could find out nothing from the other fellows; but Jacques Pontiac told me that his old mate, Pretty Pierre, who in recent days had fallen from grace, knew something of these people that no one else guessed, because he had let them a part of his house in the parish of St. Genevieve in Quebec, years before. Pierre had testified to one fact, that a child a girl had been born to Mrs. Malbrouck in his house, but all further knowledge he had withheld. Pretty Pierre was off in the Rocky Mountains practising his profession chiefly poker and was not available for information. What did I, Gregory Thorne, want of the information anyway? That's the point, my son. Judging from after-developments I suppose it was what the foolish call occult sympathy. Well, where was that girl-child? Jacques Pontiac didn't know. Nobody knew. And I couldn't get rid of Mrs. Malbrouck's face; it haunted me; the broad brow, deep eyes, and high-bred sweetness all beautifully animal. Don't laugh: I find astonishing likenesses between the perfectly human and the perfectly animal. Did you never see how beautiful and modest the faces of deer are; how chic and sensitive is the manner of a hound; nor the keen, warm look in the eye of a well-bred mare? Why, I'd rather be a good horse of blood and temper than half the fellows I know. You are not an animal lover as I am; yes, even when I shoot them or fight them I admire them, just as I'd admire a swordsman who, in 'quart,' would give me death by the wonderful upper thrust. It's all a battle; all a game of love and slaughter, my son, and both go together.

"Well, as I say, her face followed me. Watch how the thing developed. By the prairie-track I went over to Fort Desire, near the Rockies, almost immediately after this, to see about buying a ranch with my old chum at Trinity, Polly Cliffshawe Polydore, you know. Whom should I meet in a hut on the ranch but Jacques's friend, Pretty Pierre. This was luck; but he was not like Jacques Pontiac, he was secretive as a Buddhist deity. He had a good many of the characteristics that go to a fashionable diplomatist: clever, wicked, cool, and in speech doing the vanishing trick just when you wanted him. But my star of fortune was with me. One day Silverbottle, an Indian, being in a murderous humour, put a bullet in Pretty Pierre's leg, and would have added another, only I stopped it suddenly. While in his bed he told me what he knew of the Malbroucks.

"This is the fashion of it. John and Audrey Malbrouck had come to Quebec in the year 1865, and sojourned in the parish of St. Genevieve, in the house of the mother of Pretty Pierre. Of an inquiring turn of mind, the French half-breed desired to know concerning the history of these English people, who, being poor, were yet gentle, and spoke French with a grace and accent which was to the French-Canadian patois as Shakespeare's English is to that of Seven Dials. Pierre's methods of inquisitiveness were not strictly dishonest. He did not open letters, he did not besiege dispatch-boxes, he did not ask impudent questions; he watched and listened. In his own way he found out that the man had been a soldier in the ranks, and that he had served in India. They were most attached to the child, whose name was Marguerite. One day a visitor, a lady, came to them. She seemed to be the cause of much unhappiness to Mrs. Malbrouck. And Pierre was alert enough to discover that this distinguished-looking person desired to take the child away with her. To this the young mother would not consent, and the visitor departed with some chillingly-polite phrases, part English, part French, beyond the exact comprehension of Pierre, and leaving the father and mother and little Marguerite happy. Then, however, these people seemed to become suddenly poorer, and Malbrouck began farming in a humble, but not entirely successful way. The energy of the man was prodigious; but his luck was sardonic. Floods destroyed his first crops, prices ran low, debt accumulated, foreclosure of mortgage occurred, and Malbrouck and the wife and child went west.

"Five years later, Pretty Pierre saw them again at Marigold Lake: Malbrouck as agent for the Hudson's Bay Company still poor, but contented. It was at this period that the former visitor again appeared, clothed in purple and fine linen, and, strange as it may seem, succeeded in carrying off the little child, leaving the father and mother broken, but still devoted to each other.

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"Pretty Pierre closed his narration with these words: 'Bien,' that Malbrouck, he is great. I have not much love of men, but he well, if he say, "See, Pierre, I go to the home of the white bear and the winter that never ends; perhaps we come back, perhaps we die; but there will be sport for men " 'voila!' I would go. To know one strong man in this world is good. Perhaps, some time I will go to him yes, Pierre, the gambler, will go to him, and say: It is good for the wild dog that he live near the lion. And the child, she was beautiful; she had a light heart and a sweet way.'"

It was with this slight knowledge that Gregory Thorne set out on his journey over the great Canadian prairie to Marigold Lake, for his December moose-hunt.

Gregory has since told me that, as he travelled with Jacques Pontiac across the Height of Land to his destination, he had uncomfortable feelings; presentiments, peculiar reflections of the past, and melancholy a thing far from habitual with him. Insolence is all very well, but you cannot apply it to indefinite thoughts; it isn't effective with vague presentiments. And when Gregory's insolence was taken away from him, he was very like other mortals; virtue had gone out of him; his brown cheek and frank eye had lost something of their charm. It was these unusual broodings that worried him; he waked up suddenly one night calling, "Margaret! Margaret!" like any childlike lover. And that did not please him. He believed in things that, as he said himself, "he could get between his fingers;" he had little sympathy with morbid sentimentalities. But there was an English Margaret in his life; and he, like many another childlike man, had fallen in love, and with her very much in love indeed; and a star had crossed his love to a degree that greatly shocked him and pleased the girl's relatives. She was the granddaughter of a certain haughty dame of high degree, who regarded icily this poorest of younger sons, and held her darling aloof. Gregory, very like a blunt unreasoning lover, sought to carry the redoubt by wild assault; and was overwhelmingly routed. The young lady, though finding some avowed pleasure in his company, accompanied by brilliant misunderstanding of his advances and full-front speeches, had never given him enough encouragement to warrant his playing young Lochinvar in Park Lane; and his cup became full when, at the close of the season, she was whisked off to the seclusion of a country-seat, whose walls to him were impregnable. His defeat was then, and afterwards, complete. He pluckily replied to the derision of his relatives with multiplied derision, demanded his inheritance, got his traps together, bought a fur coat, and straightway sailed the wintry seas to Canada.

His experiences had not soured his temper. He believed that every dog has his day, and that Fate was very malicious; that it brought down the proud, and rewarded the patient; that it took up its abode in marble halls, and was the mocker at the feast. All this had reference, of course, to the time when he should rich as any nabob return to London, and be victorious over his enemy in Park Lane. It was singular that he believed this thing would occur; but he did. He had not yet made his fortune, but he had been successful in the game of buying and selling lands, and luck seemed to dog his path. He was fearless, and he had a keen eye for all the points of every game every game but love.

Yet he was born to succeed in that game too. For though his theory was, that everything should be treated with impertinence before you could get a proper view of it, he was markedly respectful to people. Few could resist him; his impudence of ideas was so pleasantly mixed with delicately suggested admiration of those to whom he talked. It was impossible that John Malbrouck and his wife could have received him other than they did; his was the eloquent, conquering spirit.

II.

By the time he reached Lake Marigold he had shaken off all those hovering fancies of the woods, which, after all, might only have been the whisperings of those friendly and far-seeing spirits who liked the lad as he journeyed through their lonely pleasure-grounds. John Malbrouck greeted him with quiet cordiality, and Mrs. Malbrouck smiled upon him with a different smile from that with which she had speeded him a month before; there was in it

a new light of knowledge, and Gregory could not understand it. It struck him as singular that the lady should be dressed in finer garments than she wore when he last saw her; though certainly her purple became her. She wore it as if born to it; and with an air more sedately courteous than he had ever seen, save at one house in Park Lane. Had this rustle of fine trappings been made for him? No; the woman had a mind above such snobbishness, he thought. He suffered for a moment the pang of a cynical idea; but the eyes of Mrs. Malbrouck were on him and he knew that he was as nothing before her. Her eyes how they were fixed upon him! Only two women had looked so truthfully at him before: his dead mother and Margaret. And Margaret why, how strangely now at this instant came the thought that she was like his Margaret! Wonder sprang to his eyes. At that moment a door opened and a girl entered the room a girl lissome, sweet-faced, well-bred of manner, who came slowly towards them.

"My daughter, Mr. Thorne," the mother briefly remarked. There was no surprise in the girl's face, only an even reserve of pleasure, as she held out her hand and said: "Mr. Gregory Thorne and I are old enemies." Gregory Thorne's nerve forsook him for an instant. He knew now the reason of his vague presentiments in the woods; he understood why, one night, when he had been more childlike than usual in his memory of the one woman who could make life joyous for him, the voice of a voyageur, not Jacques's nor that of any one in camp, sang:

"My dear love, she waits for me,
 None other my world is adorning;
 My true love I come to thee,
 My dear, the white star of the morning.
 Eagles spread out your wings,
 Behold where the red dawn is breaking!
 Hark, 'tis my darling sings,
 The flowers, the song-birds awaking;
 See, where she comes to me,
 My love, ah, my dear love!"

And here she was. He raised her hand to his lips, and said: "Miss Carley, you have your enemy at an advantage."

"Miss Carley in Park Lane, Margaret Malbrouck here in my old home," she replied.

There ran swiftly through the young man's brain the brief story that Pretty Pierre had told him. This, then, was the child who had been carried away, and who, years after, had made captive his heart in London town! Well, one thing was clear, the girl's mother here seemed inclined to be kinder to him than was the guardian grandmother if she was the grandmother because they had their first talk undisturbed, it may be encouraged; amiable mothers do such deeds at times.

"And now pray, Mr. Thorne," she continued, "may I ask how came you here in my father's house after having treated me so cavalierly in London? not even sending a P.P.C. when you vanished from your worshippers in Vanity Fair."

"As for my being here, it is simply a case of blind fate; as for my friends, the only one I wanted to be sorry for my going was behind earthworks which I could not scale in order to leave my card, or or anything else of more importance; and being left as it were to the inclemency of a winter world, I fled from "

She interrupted him. "What! the conqueror, you, flying from your Moscow?"

He felt rather helpless under her gay raillery; but he said:

"Well, I didn't burn my kremlin behind me."

"Your kremlin?"

"My ships, then: they they are just the same," he earnestly pleaded. Foolish youth, to attempt to take such a heart by surprise and storm!

"That is very interesting," she said, "but hardly wise. To make fortunes and be happy in new countries, one should forget the old ones. Meditation is the enemy of action."

"There's one meditation could make me conquer the North Pole, if I could but grasp it definitely."

"Grasp the North Pole? That would be awkward for your friends and gratifying to your enemies, if one may believe science and history. But, perhaps, you are in earnest after all, poor fellow! for my father tells me you are going over the hills and far away to the moose–yards. How valiant you are, and how quickly you grasp the essentials of fortune– making!"

"Miss Malbrouck, I am in earnest, and I've always been in earnest in one thing at least. I came out here to make money, and I've made some, and shall make more; but just now the moose are as brands for the burning, and I have a gun sulky for want of exercise."

"What an eloquent warrior–temper! And to whom are your deeds of valour to be dedicated? Before whom do you intend to lay your trophies of the chase?"

"Before the most provoking but worshipful lady that I know."

"Who is the sylvan maid? What princess of the glade has now the homage of your impressionable heart, Mr. Thorne?"

And Gregory Thorne, his native insolence standing him in no stead, said very humbly:

"You are that sylvan maid, that princess ah, is this fair to me, is it fair, I ask you?"

"You really mean that about the trophies"? she replied. "And shall you return like the mighty khans, with captive tigers and lions, led by stalwart slaves, in your train, or shall they be captive moose or grizzlies?"

"Grizzlies are not possible here," he said, with cheerful seriousness, "but the moose is possible, and more, if you would be kinder Margaret."

"Your supper, see, is ready," she said. "I venture to hope your appetite has not suffered because of long absence from your friends."

He could only dumbly answer by a protesting motion of the hand, and his smile was not remarkably buoyant.

The next morning they started on their moose–hunt. Gregory Thorne was cast down when he crossed the threshold into the winter morning without hand–clasp or god–speed from Margaret Malbrouck; but Mrs. Malbrouck was there, and Gregory, looking into her eyes, thought how good a thing it would be for him, if some such face looked benignly out on him every morning, before he ventured forth into the deceitful day. But what was the use of wishing! Margaret evidently did not care. And though the air was clear and the sun shone brightly, he felt there was a cheerless wind blowing on him; a wind that chilled him; and he hummed to himself bitterly a song of the voyageurs:

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"O, O, the winter wind, the North wind,
My snow-bird, where art thou gone?
O, O, the wailing wind the night wind,
The cold nest; I am alone.
O, O, my snow-bird!

"O, O, the waving sky, the white sky,
My snow-bird thou fliest far;
O, O, the eagle's cry, the wild cry,
My lost love, my lonely star.
O, O, my snow-bird!"

He was about to start briskly forward to join Malbrouck and his Indians, who were already on their way, when he heard his name called, and, turning, he saw Margaret in the doorway, her fingers held to the tips of her ears, as yet unused to the frost. He ran back to where she stood, and held out his hand. "I was afraid," he bluntly said, "that you wouldn't forsake your morning sleep to say good-bye to me."

"It isn't always the custom, is it," she replied, "for ladies to send the very early hunter away with a tally-ho? But since you have the grace to be afraid of anything, I can excuse myself to myself for fleeing the pleasantest dreams to speed you on your warlike path."

At this he brightened very much, but she, as if repenting she had given him so much pleasure, added: "I wanted to say good-bye to my father, you know; and " she paused.

"And"? he added.

"And to tell him that you have fond relatives in the old land who would mourn your early taking off; and, therefore, to beg him, for their sakes, to keep you safe from any outrageous moose that mightn't know how the world needed you."

"But there you are mistaken," he said; "I haven't anyone who would really care, worse luck! except the dowager; and she, perhaps, would be consoled to know that I had died in battle, even with a moose, and was clear of the possibility of hanging another lost reputation on the family tree, to say nothing of suspension from any other kind of tree. But, if it should be the other way; if I should see your father in the path of an outrageous moose what then?"

"My father is a hunter born," she responded; "he is a great man," she proudly added.

"Of course, of course," he replied. "Good-bye. I'll take him your love. Good-bye!" and he turned away.

"Good-bye," she gaily replied; and yet, one looking closely would have seen that this stalwart fellow was pleasant to her eyes, and as she closed the door to his hand waving farewell to her from the pines, she said, reflecting on his words:

"You'll take him my love, will you? But, Master Gregory, you carry a freight of which you do not know the measure; and, perhaps, you never shall, though you are very brave and honest, and not so impudent as you used to be, and I'm not so sure that I like you so much better for that either, Monsieur Gregory."

Then she went and laid her cheek against her mother's, and said: "They've gone away for big game, mother dear; what shall be our quarry?"

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"My child," the mother replied, "the story of our lives since last you were with me is my only quarry. I want to know from your own lips all that you have been in that life which once was mine also, but far away from me now, even though you come from it, bringing its memories without its messages."

"Dear, do you think that life there was so sweet to me? It meant as little to your daughter as to you. She was always a child of the wild woods. What rustle of pretty gowns is pleasant as the silken shiver of the maple leaves in summer at this door? The happiest time in that life was when we got away to Holwood or Marchurst, with the balls and calls all over."

Mrs. Malbrouck smoothed her daughter's hand gently and smiled approvingly.

"But that old life of yours, mother; what was it? You said that you would tell me some day. Tell me now. Grandmother was fond of me poor grandmother! But she would never tell me anything. How I longed to be back with you!.... Sometimes you came to me in my sleep, and called to me to come with you; and then again, when I was gay in the sunshine, you came, and only smiled but never beckoned; though your eyes seemed to me very sad, and I wondered if mine would not also become sad through looking in them so are they sad, mother?" And she laughed up brightly into her mother's face.

"No, dear; they are like the stars. You ask me for my part in that life. I will tell you soon, but not now. Be patient. Do you not tire of this lonely life? Are you truly not anxious to return to "

"To the husks that the swine did eat?' No, no, no; for, see: I was born for a free, strong life; the prairie or the wild wood, or else to live in some far castle in Welsh mountains, where I should never hear the voice of the social Thou must! oh, what a must! never to be quite free or natural. To be the slave of the code. I was born I know not how! but so longing for the sky, and space, and endless woods. I think I never saw an animal but I loved it, nor ever lounged the mornings out at Holwood but I wished it were a hut on the mountain side, and you and father with me." Here she whispered, in a kind of awe: "And yet to think that Holwood is now mine, and that I am mistress there, and that I must go back to it if only you would go back with me.... ah, dear, isn't it your duty to go back with me"? she added, hesitatingly.

Audrey Malbrouck drew her daughter hungrily to her bosom, and said: "Yes, dear, I will go back, if it chances that you need me; but your father and I have lived the best days of our lives here, and we are content. But, my Margaret, there is another to be thought of too, is there not? And in that case is my duty then so clear?"

The girl's hand closed on her mother's, and she knew her heart had been truly read.

III.

The hunters pursued their way, swinging grandly along on their snow-shoes, as they made for the Wild Hawk Woods. It would seem as if Malbrouck was testing Gregory's strength and stride, for the march that day was a long and hard one. He was equal to the test, and even Big Moccasin, the chief, grunted sound approval. But every day brought out new capacities for endurance and larger resources; so that Malbrouck, who had known the clash of civilisation with barbarian battle, and deeds both dour and doughty, and who loved a man of might, regarded this youth with increasing favour. By simple processes he drew from Gregory his aims and ambitions, and found the real courage and power behind the front of irony the language of manhood and culture which was crusted by free and easy idioms. Now and then they saw moose-tracks, but they were some days out before they came to a moose-yard a spot hoof-beaten by the moose; his home, from which he strays, and to which he returns at times like a repentant prodigal. Now the sport began. The dog-trains were put out of view, and Big Moccasin and another Indian went off immediately to explore the country round about. A few hours, and word was brought that there was a small herd feeding not far away. Together they crept stealthily within range of the cattle. Gregory

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Thorne's blood leaped as he saw the noble quarry, with their wide-spread horns, sniffing the air, in which they had detected something unusual. Their leader, a colossal beast, stamped with his forefoot, and threw back his head with a snort.

"The first shot belongs to you, Mr. Thorne," said Malbrouck. "In the shoulder, you know. You have him in good line. I'll take the heifer."

Gregory showed all the coolness of an old hunter, though his lips twitched slightly with excitement. He took a short but steady aim, and fired. The beast plunged forward and then fell on his knees. The others broke away. Malbrouck fired and killed a heifer, and then all ran in pursuit as the moose made for the woods.

Gregory, in the pride of his first slaughter, sprang away towards the wounded leader, which, sunk to the earth, was shaking its great horns to and fro. When at close range, he raised his gun to fire again, but the moose rose suddenly, and with a wild bellowing sound rushed at Gregory, who knew full well that a straight stroke from those hoofs would end his moose-hunting days. He fired, but to no effect. He could not, like a toreador, jump aside, for those mighty horns would sweep too wide a space. He dropped on his knees swiftly, and as the great antlers almost touched him, and he could feel the roaring breath of the mad creature in his face, he slipped a cartridge in, and fired as he swung round; but at that instant a dark body bore him down. He was aware of grasping those sweeping horns, conscious of a blow which tore the flesh from his chest; and then his knife how came it in his hand? with the instinct of the true hunter. He plunged it once, twice, past a foaming mouth, into that firm body, and then both fell together; each having fought valiantly after his kind.

Gregory dragged himself from beneath the still heaving body, and stretched to his feet; but a blindness came, and the next knowledge he had was of brandy being poured slowly between his teeth, and of a voice coming through endless distances: "A fighter, a born fighter," it said. "The pluck of Lucifer good boy!"

Then the voice left those humming spaces of infinity, and said: "Tilt him this way a little, Big Moccasin. There, press firmly, so. Now the band steady together tighter now the withes a little higher up cut them here." There was a slight pause, and then: "There, that's as good as an army surgeon could do it. He'll be as sound as a bell in two weeks. Eh, well, how do you feel now? Better? That's right! Like to be on your feet, would you? Wait. Here, a sup of this. There you are. . . . Well?"

"Well," said the young man, faintly, "he was a beauty."

Malbrouck looked at him a moment, thoughtfully, and then said: "Yes, he was a beauty."

"I want a dozen more like him, and then I shall be able to drop 'em as neat as, you do."

"H'm! the order is large. I'm afraid we shall have to fill it at some other time;" and Malbrouck smiled a little grimly.

"What! only one moose to take back to the Height of Land, to " something in the eye of the other stopped him.

"To? Yes, to"? and now the eye had a suggestion of humour.

"To show I'm not a tenderfoot."

"Yes, to show you're not a tenderfoot. I fancy that will be hardly necessary. Oh, you will be up, eh? Well!"

"Well, I'm a tottering imbecile. What's the matter with my legs? my prophetic soul, it hurts! Oh, I see; that's where the old warrior's hoof caught me sideways. Now, I'll tell you what, I'm going to have another moose to take

back to Marigold Lake."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I'm going to take back a young, live moose."

"A significant ambition. For what? a sacrifice to the gods you have offended in your classic existence?"

"Both. A peace-offering, and a sacrifice to a goddess."

"Young man," said the other, the light of a smile playing on his lips, "Prosperity be thy page! Big Moccasin, what of this young live moose?"

The Indian shook his head doubtfully.

"But I tell you I shall have that live moose, if I have to stay here to see it grow."

And Malbrouck liked his pluck, and wished him good luck. And the good luck came. They travelled back slowly to the Height of Land, making a circuit. For a week they saw no more moose; but meanwhile Gregory's hurt quickly healed. They had now left only eight days in which to get back to Dog Ear River and Marigold Lake. If the young moose was to come it must come soon. It came soon.

They chanced upon a moose-yard, and while the Indians were beating the woods, Malbrouck and Gregory watched.

Soon a cow and a young moose came swinging down to the embankment. Malbrouck whispered: "Now if you must have your live moose, here's a lasso. I'll bring down the cow. The young one's horns are not large. Remember, no pulling. I'll do that. Keep your broken chest and bad arm safe. Now!"

Down came the cow with a plunge into the yard—dead. The lasso, too, was over the horns of the calf, and in an instant Malbrouck was swinging away with it over the snow. It was making for the trees exactly what Malbrouck desired. He deftly threw the rope round a sapling, but not too taut, lest the moose's horns should be injured. The plucky animal now turned on him. He sprang behind a tree, and at that instant he heard the thud of hoofs behind him. He turned to see a huge bull-moose bounding towards him. He was between two fires, and quite unarmed. Those hoofs had murder in them. But at the instant a rifle shot rang out, and he only caught the forward rush of the antlers as the beast fell.

The young moose now had ceased its struggles, and came forward to the dead bull with that hollow sound of mourning peculiar to its kind. Though it afterwards struggled once or twice to be free, it became docile and was easily taught, when its anger and fear were over.

And Gregory Thorne had his live moose. He had also, by that splendid shot, achieved with one arm, saved Malbrouck from peril, perhaps from death.

They drew up before the house at Marigold Lake on the afternoon of the day before Christmas, a triumphal procession. The moose was driven, a peaceful captive with a wreath of cedar leaves around its neck the humorous conception of Gregory Thorne. Malbrouck had announced their coming by a blast from his horn, and Margaret was standing in the doorway wrapped in furs, which may have come originally from Hudson's Bay, but which had been deftly re-manufactured in Regent Street.

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Astonishment, pleasure, beamed in her eyes. She clapped her hands gaily, and cried: "Welcome, welcome, merry-men all!" She kissed her father; she called to her mother to come and see; then she said to Gregory, with arch raillery, as she held out her hand: "Oh, companion of hunters, comest thou like Jacques in Arden from dropping the trustful tear upon the prey of others, or bringest thou quarry of thine own? Art thou a warrior sated with spoil, master of the sports, spectator of the fight, Prince, or Pistol? Answer, what art thou?"

And he, with a touch of his old insolence, though with something of irony too, for he had hoped for a different fashion of greeting, said:

"All, lady, all! The Olympian all! The player of many parts. I am Touchstone, Jacques, and yet Orlando too."

"And yet Orlando too, my daughter," said Malbrouck, gravely. "He saved your father from the hoofs of a moose bent on sacrifice. Had your father his eye, his nerve, his power to shoot with one arm a bull moose at long range, so! he would not refuse to be called a great hunter, but wear the title gladly."

Margaret Malbrouck's face became anxious instantly. "He saved you from danger from injury, father"? she slowly said, and looked earnestly at Gregory; "but why to shoot with one arm only?"

"Because in a fight of his own with a moose a hand-to-hand fight he had a bad moment with the hoofs of the beast."

And this young man, who had a reputation for insolence, blushed, so that the paleness which the girl now noticed in his face was banished; and to turn the subject he interposed:

"Here is the live moose that I said I should bring. Now say that he's a beauty, please. Your father and I "

But Malbrouck interrupted:

"He lassoed it with his one arm, Margaret. He was determined to do it himself, because, being a superstitious gentleman, as well as a hunter, he had some foolish notion that this capture would propitiate a goddess whom he imagined required offerings of the kind."

"It is the privilege of the gods to be merciful," she said. "This peace-offering should propitiate the angriest, cruellest goddess in the universe; and for one who was neither angry nor really cruel well, she should be satisfied.... altogether satisfied," she added, as she put her cheek against the warm fur of the captive's neck, and let it feel her hand with its lips.

There was silence for a minute, and then with his old gay spirit all returned, and as if to give an air not too serious to the situation, Gregory, remembering his Euripides, said:

".let the steer bleed,
And the rich altars, as they pay their vows,
Breathe incense to the gods: for me, I rise
To better life, and grateful own the blessing."

"A pagan thought for a Christmas Eve," she said to him, with her fingers feeling for the folds of silken flesh in the throat of the moose; "but wounded men must be humoured. And, mother dear, here are our Argonauts returned; and and now I think I will go."

With a quick kiss on her father's cheek not so quick but he caught the tear that ran through her happy smile she vanished into the house.

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That night there was gladness in this home. Mirth sprang to the lips of the men like foam on a beaker of wine, so that the evening ran towards midnight swiftly. All the tale of the hunt was given by Malbrouck to joyful ears; for the mother lived again her youth in the sunrise of this romance which was being sped before her eyes; and the father, knowing that in this world there is nothing so good as courage, nothing so base as the shifting eye, looked on the young man, and was satisfied, and told his story well; told it as a brave man would tell it, bluntly as to deeds done, warmly as to the pleasures of good sport, directly as to all. In the eye of the young man there had come the glance of larger life, of a new-developed manhood. When he felt that dun body crashing on him, and his life closing with its strength, and ran the good knife home, there flashed through his mind how much life meant to the dying, how much it ought to mean to the living; and then this girl, this Margaret, swam before his eyes and he had been graver since.

He knew, as truly as if she had told him, that she could never mate with any man who was a loiterer on God's highway, who could live life without some sincerity in his aims. It all came to him again in this room, so austere in its appointments, yet so gracious, so full of the spirit of humanity without a note of ennui, or the rust of careless deeds. As this thought grew he looked at the face of the girl, then at the faces of the father and mother, and the memory of his boast came back that he would win the stake he laid, to know the story of John and Audrey Malbrouck before this coming Christmas morning. With a faint smile at his own past insolent self, he glanced at the clock. It was eleven. "I have lost my bet," he unconsciously said aloud.

He was roused by John Malbrouck remarking: "Yes, you have lost your bet? Well, what was it"? The youth, the childlike quality in him," flushed his face deeply, and then, with a sudden burst of frankness, he said:

"I did not know that I had spoken. As for the bet, I deserve to be thrashed for ever having made it; but, duffer as I am, I want you to know that I'm something worse than duffer. The first time I met you I made a bet that I should know your history before Christmas Day. I haven't a word to say for myself. I'm contemptible. I beg your pardon; for your history is none of my business. I was really interested; that's all; but your lives, I believe it, as if it was in the Bible, have been great yes, that's the word! and I'm a better chap for having known you, though, perhaps, I've known you all along, because, you see, I've I've been friends with your daughter and—well, really I haven't anything else to say, except that I hope you'll forgive me, and let me know you always."

Malbrouck regarded him for a moment with a grave smile, and then looked toward his wife. Both turned their glances quickly upon Margaret, whose eyes were on the fire. The look upon her face was very gentle; something new and beautiful had come to reign there.

A moment, and Malbrouck spoke: "You did what was youthful and curious, but not wrong; and you shall not lose your hazard. I "

"No, do not tell me," Gregory interrupted; "only let me be pardoned."

"As I said, lad, you shall not lose your hazard. I will tell you the brief tale of two lives."

"But, I beg of you! For the instant I forgot. I have more to confess." And Gregory told them in substance what Pretty Pierre had disclosed to him in the Rocky Mountains.

When he had finished, Malbrouck said: "My tale then is briefer still: I was a common soldier, English and humble by my mother, French and noble through my father noble, but poor. In Burmah, at an outbreak among the natives, I rescued my colonel from immediate and horrible death, though he died in my arms from the injuries he received. His daughter too, it was my fortune, through God's Providence, to save from great danger. She became my wife. You remember that song you sang the day we first met you?"

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"It brought her father back to mind painfully. When we came to England her people her mother would not receive me. For myself I did not care; for my wife, that was another matter. She loved me and preferred to go with me anywhere; to a new country, preferably. We came to Canada.

"We were forgotten in England. Time moves so fast, even if the records in red-books stand. Our daughter went to her grandmother to be brought up and educated in England though it was a sore trial to us both that she might fill nobly that place in life for which she is destined. With all she learned she did not forget us. We were happy save in her absence. We are happy now; not because she is mistress of Holwood and Marchurst for her grandmother and another is dead but because such as she is our daughter, and "

He said no more. Margaret was beside him, and her fingers were on his lips.

Gregory came to his feet suddenly, and with a troubled face.

"Mistress of Holwood and Marchurst!" he said; and his mind ran over his own great deficiencies, and the list of eligible and anxious suitors that Park Lane could muster. He had never thought of her in the light of a great heiress.

But he looked down at her as she knelt at her father's knee, her eyes upturned to his, and the tide of his fear retreated; for he saw in them the same look she had given him when she leaned her cheek against the moose's neck that afternoon.

When the clock struck twelve upon a moment's pleasant silence, John Malbrouck said to Gregory Thorne:

"Yes, you have won your Christmas hazard, my boy."

But a softer voice than his whispered: "Are you content Gregory?"

The Spirits of Christmas-tide, whose paths lie north as well as south, smiled as they wrote his answer on their tablets; for they knew, as the man said, that he would always be content, and which is more in the sight of angels that the woman would be content also.