Northern Lights, v4

Gilbert Parker

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A MAN, A FAMINE, AND A HEATHEN BOY

Athabasca in the Far North is the scene of this story Athabasca, one of the most beautiful countries in the world in summer, but a cold, bare land in winter. Yet even in winter it is not so bleak and bitter as the districts south−west of it, for the Chinook winds steal through from the Pacific and temper the fierceness of the frozen Rockies. Yet forty and fifty degrees below zero is cold after all, and July strawberries in this wild North land are hardly compensation for seven months of ice and snow, no matter how clear and blue the sky, how sweet the sun during its short journey in the day. Some days, too, the sun may not be seen even when there is no storm, because of the fine, white, powdered frost in the air.

A day like this is called a poudre day; and woe to the man who tempts it unthinkingly, because the light makes the delicate mist of frost shine like silver. For that powder bites the skin white in short order, and sometimes reckless men lose ears, or noses, or hands under its sharp caress. But when it really storms in that Far North, then neither man nor beast should be abroad not even the Eskimo dogs; though times and seasons can scarcely be chosen when travelling in Athabasca, for a storm comes unawares. Upon the plains you will see a cloud arising, not in the sky, but from the ground a billowy surf of drifting snow; then another white billow from the sky will sweep down and meet it, and you are caught between.

He who went to Athabasca to live a generation ago had to ask himself if the long winter, spent chiefly indoors, with, maybe, a little trading with the Indians, meagre sport, and scant sun, savages and half−breeds the only companions, and out of all touch with the outside world, letters coming but once a year; with frozen fish and meat, always the same, as the staple items in a primitive fare; with danger from starvation and marauding tribes; with endless monotony, in which men sometimes go mad he had to ask himself if these were to be cheerfully endured because, in the short summer, the air is heavenly, the rivers and lakes are full of fish, the flotilla of canoes of the fur−hunters is pouring down, and all is gaiety and pleasant turmoil; because there is good shooting in the autumn, and the smell of the land is like a garden, and hardy fruits and flowers are at hand.

That is a question which was asked William Rufus Holly once upon a time.

William Rufus Holly, often called "Averdoopoy," sometimes "Sleeping Beauty," always Billy Rufus, had had a good education. He had been to high school and to college, and he had taken one or two prizes en route to graduation; but no fame travelled with him, save that he was the laziest man of any college year for a decade. He loved his little porringer, which is to say that he ate a good deal; and he loved to read books, which is not to say

that he loved study; he hated getting out of bed, and he was constantly gated for morning chapel. More than once he had sweetly gone to sleep over his examination papers. This is not to say that he failed at his examinations on the contrary, he always succeeded; but he only did enough to pass and no more; and he did not wish to do more than pass. His going to sleep at examinations was evidence that he was either indifferent or self−indulgent, and it certainly showed that he was without nervousness. He invariably roused himself, or his professor roused him, a half−hour before the papers should be handed in, and, as it were by a mathematical calculation, he had always done just enough to prevent him being plucked.

He slept at lectures, he slept in hall, he slept as he waited his turn to go to the wicket in a cricket match, and he invariably went to sleep afterwards. He even did so on the day he had made the biggest score, in the biggest game ever played between his college and the pick of the country; but he first gorged himself with cake and tea. The day he took his degree he had to be dragged from a huge grandfather's chair, and forced along in his ragged gown "ten holes and twelve tatters" to the function in the convocation hall. He looked so fat and shiny, so balmy and sleepy when he took his degree and was handed his prize for a poem on Sir John Franklin, that the public laughed, and the college men in the gallery began singing:

"Bye O, my baby,
Father will come to you soo−oon!"

He seemed not to care, but yawned in his hand as he put his prize book under his arm through one of the holes in his gown, and in two minutes was back in his room, and in another five was fast asleep.

It was the general opinion that William Rufus Holly, fat, yellow−haired, and twenty−four years old, was doomed to failure in life, in spite of the fact that he had a little income of a thousand dollars a year, and had made a century in an important game of cricket. Great, therefore, was the surprise of the college, and afterward of the Province, when, at the farewell dinner of the graduates, Sleeping Beauty announced, between his little open−eyed naps, that he was going Far North as a missionary.

At first it was thought he was joking, but when at last, in his calm and dreamy look, they saw he meant what he said, they rose and carried him round the room on a chair, making impromptu songs as they travelled. They toasted Billy Rufus again and again, some of them laughing till they cried at the thought of Averdoopoy going to the Arctic regions. But an uneasy seriousness fell upon these "beautiful, bountiful, brilliant boys," as Holly called them later, when in a simple, honest, but indolent speech he said he had applied for ordination.

Six months later William Rufus Holly, a deacon in holy orders, journeyed to Athabasca in the Far North. On his long journey there was plenty of time to think. He was embarked on a career which must for ever keep him in the wilds; for very seldom indeed does a missionary of the North ever return to the crowded cities or take a permanent part in civilised life.

What the loneliness of it would be he began to feel, as for hours and hours he saw no human being on the plains; in the thrilling stillness of the night; in fierce storms in the woods, when his half−breed guides bent their heads to meet the wind and rain, and did not speak for hours; in the long, adventurous journey on the river by day, in the cry of the plaintive loon at night; in the scant food for every meal. Yet what the pleasure would be he felt in the joyous air, the exquisite sunshine, the flocks of wild−fowl flying North, honking on their course; in the song of the half−breeds as they ran the rapids. Of course, he did not think these things quite as they are written here all at once and all together; but in little pieces from time to time, feeling them rather than saying them to himself.

At least he did understand how serious a thing it was, his going as a missionary into the Far North. Why did he do it? Was it a whim, or the excited imagination of youth, or that prompting which the young often have to make the world better? Or was it a fine spirit of adventure with a good heart behind it? Perhaps it was a little of all these; but there was also something more, and it was to his credit.

Lazy as William Rufus Holly had been at school and college, he had still thought a good deal, even when he seemed only sleeping; perhaps he thought more because he slept so much, because he studied little and read a great deal. He always knew what everybody thought that he would never do anything but play cricket till he got too heavy to run, and then would sink into a slothful, fat, and useless middle and old age; that his life would be a failure. And he knew that they were right; that if he stayed where he could live an easy life, a fat and easy life he would lead; that in a few years he would be good for nothing except to eat and sleep no more. One day, waking suddenly from a bad dream of himself so fat as to be drawn about on a dray by monstrous fat oxen with rings through their noses, led by monkeys, he began to wonder what he should do the hardest thing to do; for only the hardest life could possibly save him from failure, and, in spite of all, he really did want to make something of his life. He had been reading the story of Sir John Franklin's Arctic expedition, and all at once it came home to him that the only thing for him to do was to go to the Far North and stay there, coming back about once every ten years to tell the people in the cities what was being done in the wilds. Then there came the inspiration to write his poem on Sir John Franklin, and he had done so, winning the college prize for poetry. But no one had seen any change in him in those months; and, indeed, there had been little or no change, for he had an equable and practical, though imaginative, disposition, despite his avoirdupois, and his new purpose did not stir him yet from his comfortable sloth.

And in all the journey West and North he had not been stirred greatly from his ease of body, for the journey was not much harder than playing cricket every day, and there were only the thrill of the beautiful air, the new people, and the new scenes to rouse him. As yet there was no great responsibility. He scarcely realised what his life must be, until one particular day. Then Sleeping Beauty waked wide up, and from that day lost the name. Till then he had looked and borne himself like any other traveller, unrecognised as a parson or "mikonaree." He had not had prayers in camp en route, he had not preached, he had held no meetings. He was as yet William Rufus Holly, the cricketer, the laziest dreamer of a college decade. His religion was simple and practical; he had never had any morbid ideas; he had lived a healthy, natural, and honourable life, until he went for a mikonaree, and if he had no cant, he had not a clear idea of how many−sided, how responsible, his life must be until that one particular day. This is what happened then.

From Fort O'Call, an abandoned post of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Peace River, nearly the whole tribe of the Athabasca Indians in possession of the post now had come up the river, with their chief, Knife−in−the−Wind, to meet the mikonaree. Factors of the Hudson's Bay Company, coureurs de bois, and voyageurs had come among them at times, and once the renowned Father Lacombe, the Jesuit priest, had stayed with them three months; but never to this day had they seen a Protestant mikonaree, though once a factor, noted for his furious temper, his powers of running, and his generosity, had preached to them. These men, however, were both over fifty years old. The Athabascas did not hunger for the Christian religion, but a courier from Edmonton had brought them word that a mikonaree was coming to their country to stay, and they put off their stoical manner and allowed themselves the luxury of curiosity. That was why even the squaws and papooses came up the river with the braves, all wondering if the stranger had brought gifts with him, all eager for their shares; for it had been said by the courier of the tribe that "Oshondonto," their name for the newcomer, was bringing mysterious loads of well−wrapped bales and skins. Upon a point below the first rapids of the Little Manitou they waited with their camp−fires burning and their pipe of peace.

When the canoes bearing Oshondonto and his voyageurs shot the rapids to the song of the river,

> "En roulant, ma boule roulant,
> En roulant, ma boule!"

with the shrill voices of the boatmen rising to meet the cry of the startled water−fowl, the Athabascas crowded to the high banks. They grunted "How!" in greeting, as the foremost canoe made for the shore.

But if surprise could have changed the countenances of Indians, these Athabascas would not have known one another when the missionary stepped out upon the shore. They had looked to see a grey−bearded man like the chief factor who quarrelled and prayed; but they found instead a round− faced, clean−shaven youth, with big, good−natured eyes, yellow hair, and a roundness of body like that of a month−old bear's cub. They expected to find a man who, like the factor, could speak their language, and they found a cherub sort of youth who talked only English, French, and Chinook that common language of the North and a few words of their own language which he had learned on the way.

Besides, Oshondonto was so absent−minded at the moment, so absorbed in admiration of the garish scene before him, that he addressed the chief in French, of which Knife−in−the−Wind knew but the one word cache, which all the North knows.

But presently William Rufus Holly recovered himself, and in stumbling Chinook made himself understood. Opening a bale, he brought out beads and tobacco and some bright red flannel, and two hundred Indians sat round him and grunted "How!" and received his gifts with little comment. Then the pipe of peace went round, and Oshondonto smoked it becomingly.

But he saw that the Indians despised him for his youth, his fatness, his yellow hair as soft as a girl's, his cherub face, browned though it was by the sun and weather.

As he handed the pipe to Knife−in−the−Wind, an Indian called Silver Tassel, with a cruel face, said grimly:

"Why does Oshondonto travel to us?"

William Rufus Holly's eyes steadied on those of the Indian as he replied in Chinook: "To teach the way to Manitou the Mighty, to tell the Athabascas of the Great Chief who died to save the world."

"The story is told in many ways; which is right? There was the factor, Word of Thunder. There is the song they sing at Edmonton I have heard."

"The Great Chief is the same Chief," answered the missionary. "If you tell of Fort O'Call, and Knife−in−the−Wind tells of Fort O'Call, he and you will speak different words, and one will put in one thing and one will leave out another; men's tongues are different. But Fort O'Call is the−same, and the Great Chief is the same."

"It was a long time ago," said Knife−in−the−Wind sourly, "many thousand moons, as the pebbles in the river, the years."

"It is the same world, and it is the same Chief, and it was to save us," answered William Rufus Holly, smiling, yet with a fluttering heart, for the first test of his life had come.

In anger Knife−in−the−Wind thrust an arrow into the ground and said:

"How can the white man who died thousands of moons ago in a far country save the red man to−day?"

"A strong man should bear so weak a tale," broke in Silver Tassel ruthlessly. "Are we children that the Great Chief sends a child as messenger?"

For a moment Billy Rufus did not know how to reply, and in the pause Knife−in−the−Wind broke in two pieces the arrow he had thrust in the ground in token of displeasure.

Suddenly, as Oshondonto was about to speak, Silver Tassel sprang to his feet, seized in his arms a lad of twelve who was standing near, and running to the bank, dropped him into the swift current.

"If Oshondonto be not a child, let him save the lad," said Silver Tassel, standing on the brink.

Instantly William Rufus Holly was on his feet. His coat was off before Silver Tassel's words were out of his mouth, and crying, "In the name of the Great White Chief!" he jumped into the rushing current. "In the name of your Manitou, come on, Silver Tassel!" he called up from the water, and struck out for the lad.

Not pausing an instant, Silver Tassel sprang into the flood, into the whirling eddies and dangerous current below the first rapids and above the second.

Then came the struggle for Wingo of the Cree tribe, a waif among the Athabascas, whose father had been slain as they travelled, by a wandering tribe of Blackfeet. Never was there a braver rivalry, although the odds were with the Indian−in lightness, in brutal strength. With the mikonaree, however, were skill, and that sort of strength which the world calls "moral," the strength of a good and desperate purpose. Oshondonto knew that on the issue of this shameless business this cruel sport of Silver Tassel would depend his future on the Peace River. As he shot forward with strong strokes in the whirling torrent after the helpless lad, who, only able to keep himself afloat, was being swept down towards the rapids below, he glanced up to the bank along which the Athabascas were running. He saw the garish colours of their dresses; he saw the ignorant medicine man, with his mysterious bag, making incantations; he saw the tepee of the chief, with its barbarous pennant above; he saw the idle, naked children tearing at the entrails of a calf; and he realised that this was a deadly tournament between civilisation and barbarism.

Silver Tassel was gaining on him, they were both overhauling the boy; it was now to see which should reach Wingo first, which should take him to shore. That is, if both were not carried under before they reached him; that is, if, having reached him, they and he would ever get to shore; for, lower down, before it reached the rapids, the current ran horribly smooth and strong, and here and there were jagged rocks just beneath the surface.

Still Silver Tassel gained on him, as they both gained on the boy. Oshondonto swam strong and hard, but he swam with his eye on the struggle for the shore also; he was not putting forth his utmost strength, for he knew it would be bitterly needed, perhaps to save his own life by a last effort.

Silver Tassel passed him when they were about fifty feet from the boy. Shooting by on his side, with a long stroke and the plunge of his body like a projectile, the dark face with the long black hair plastering it turned towards his own, in fierce triumph Silver Tassel cried "How!" in derision.

Billy Rufus set his teeth and lay down to his work like a sportsman. His face had lost its roses, and it was set and determined, but there was no look of fear upon it, nor did his heart sink when a cry of triumph went up from the crowd on the banks. The white man knew by old experience in the cricket−field and in many a boat−race that it is well not to halloo till you are out of the woods. His mettle was up, he was not the Reverend William Rufus Holly, missionary, but Billy Rufus, the champion cricketer, the sportsman playing a long game.

Silver Tassel reached the boy, who was bruised and bleeding and at his last gasp, and throwing an arm round him, struck out for the shore. The current was very strong, and he battled fiercely as Billy Rufus, not far above, moved down toward them at an angle. For a few yards Silver Tassel was going strong, then his pace slackened, he seemed to sink lower in the water, and his stroke became splashing and irregular. Suddenly he struck a rock, which bruised him badly, and, swerving from his course, he lost his stroke and let go the boy.

By this time the mikonaree had swept beyond them, and he caught the boy by his long hair as he was being swept below. Striking out for the shore, he swam with bold, strong strokes, his judgment guiding him well past rocks

beneath the surface. Ten feet from shore he heard a cry of alarm from above. It concerned Silver Tassel, he knew, but he could not look round yet.

In another moment the boy was dragged up the bank by strong hands, and Billy Rufus swung round in the water towards Silver Tassel, who, in his confused energy, had struck another rock, and, exhausted now, was being swept towards the rapids. Silver Tassel's shoulder scarcely showed, his strength was gone. In a flash Billy Rufus saw there was but one thing to do. He must run the rapids with Silver Tassel−there was no other way. It would be a fight through the jaws of death; but no Indian's eyes had a better sense for river−life than William Rufus Holly's.

How he reached Silver Tassel, and drew the Indian's arm over his own shoulder; how they drove down into the boiling flood; how Billy Rufus's fat body was battered and torn and ran red with blood from twenty flesh wounds; but how by luck beyond the telling he brought Silver Tassel through safely into the quiet water a quarter of a mile below the rapids, and was hauled out, both more dead than alive, is a tale still told by the Athabascas around their camp−fire. The rapids are known to−day as the Mikonaree Rapids.

The end of this beginning of the young man's career was that Silver Tassel gave him the word of eternal friendship, Knife−in−the−Wind took him into the tribe, and the boy Wingo became his very own, to share his home, and his travels, no longer a waif among the Athabascas.

After three days' feasting, at the end of which the missionary held his first service and preached his first sermon, to the accompaniment of grunts of satisfaction from the whole tribe of Athabascas, William Rufus Holly began his work in the Far North.

The journey to Fort O'Call was a procession of triumph, for, as it was summer, there was plenty of food, the missionary had been a success, and he had distributed many gifts of beads and flannel.

All went well for many moons, although converts were uncertain and baptisms few, and the work was hard and the loneliness at times terrible. But at last came dark days.

One summer and autumn there had been poor fishing and shooting, the caches of meat were fewer on the plains, and almost nothing had come up to Fort O'Call from Edmonton, far below. The yearly supplies for the missionary, paid for out of his private income the bacon, beans, tea, coffee and flour had been raided by a band of hostile Indians, and he viewed with deep concern the progress of the severe winter. Although three years of hard, frugal life had made his muscles like iron, they had only mellowed his temper, increased his flesh and rounded his face; nor did he look an hour older than on the day when he had won Wingo for his willing slave and devoted friend.

He never resented the frequent ingratitude of the Indians; he said little when they quarrelled over the small comforts his little income brought them yearly from the South. He had been doctor, lawyer, judge among them, although he interfered little in the larger disputes, and was forced to shut his eyes to intertribal enmities. He had no deep faith that he could quite civilise them; he knew that their conversion was only on the surface, and he fell back on his personal influence with them. By this he could check even the excesses of the worst man in the tribe, his old enemy, Silver Tassel of the bad heart, who yet was ready always to give a tooth for a tooth, and accepted the fact that he owed Oshondonto his life.

When famine crawled across the plains to the doors of the settlement and housed itself at Fort O'Call, Silver Tassel acted badly, however, and sowed fault−finding among the thoughtless of the tribe.

"What manner of Great Spirit is it who lets the food of his chief Oshondonto fall into the hands of the Blackfeet?" he said. "Oshondonto says the Great Spirit hears. What has the Great Spirit to say? Let Oshondonto ask."

Again, when they all were hungrier, he went among them with complaining words. "If the white man's Great Spirit can do all things, let him give Oshondonto and the Athabascas food."

The missionary did not know of Silver Tassel's foolish words, but he saw the downcast face of Knife−in−the−Wind, the sullen looks of the people; and he unpacked the box he had reserved jealously for the darkest days that might come. For meal after meal he divided these delicacies among them morsels of biscuit, and tinned meats, and dried fruits. But his eyes meanwhile were turned again and again to the storm raging without, as it had raged for this the longest week he had ever spent. If it would but slacken, a boat could go out to the nets set in the lake near by some days before, when the sun of spring had melted the ice. From the hour the nets had been set the storm had raged. On the day when the last morsel of meat and biscuit had been given away the storm had not abated, and he saw with misgiving the gloomy, stolid faces of the Indians round him. One man, two children, and three women had died in a fortnight. He dreaded to think what might happen, his heart ached at the looks of gaunt suffering in the faces of all; he saw, for the first time, how black and bitter Knife−in−the−Wind looked as Silver Tassel whispered to him.

With the colour all gone from his cheeks, he left the post and made his way to the edge of the lake where his canoe was kept. Making it ready for the launch, he came back to the Fort. Assembling the Indians, who had watched his movements closely, he told them that he was going through the storm to the nets on the lake, and asked for a volunteer to go with him.

No one replied. He pleaded−for the sake of the women and children.

Then Knife−in−the−Wind spoke. "Oshondonto will die if he goes. It is a fool's journey does the wolverine walk into an empty trap?"

Billy Rufus spoke passionately now. His genial spirit fled; he reproached them.

Silver Tassel spoke up loudly. "Let Oshondonto's Great Spirit carry him to the nets alone, and back again with fish for the heathen the Great Chief died to save."

"You have a wicked heart, Silver Tassel. You know well that one man can't handle the boat and the nets also. Is there no one of you ?"

A figure shot forwards from a corner. "I will go with Oshondonto," came the voice of Wingo, the waif of the Crees.

The eye of the mikonaree flashed round in contempt on the tribe. Then suddenly it softened, and he said to the lad: "We will go together, Wingo."

Taking the boy by the hand, he ran with him through the rough wind to the shore, launched the canoe on the tossing lake, and paddled away through the tempest.

The bitter winds of an angry spring, the sleet and wet snow of a belated winter, the floating blocks of ice crushing against the side of the boat, the black water swishing over man and boy, the harsh, inclement world near and far. . . . The passage made at last to the nets; the brave Wingo steadying the canoe a skilful hand sufficing where the strength of a Samson would not have availed; the nets half full, and the breaking cry of joy from the lips of the waif−a cry that pierced the storm and brought back an answering cry from the crowd of Indians on the far shore. . . . The quarter−hour of danger in the tossing canoe; the nets too heavy to be dragged, and fastened to the thwarts instead; the canoe going shoreward jerkily, a cork on the waves with an anchor behind; heavier seas and winds roaring down on them as they slowly near the shore; and at last, in one awful moment, the canoe upset, and the man and the boy in the water. . . . Then both clinging to the upturned canoe as it is driven nearer and nearer

shore.... The boy washed off once, twice, and the man with his arm round clinging−clinging, as the shrieking storm answers to the calling of the Athabascas on the shore, and drives craft and fish and man and boy down upon the banks; no savage bold enough to plunge in to their rescue. . . . At last a rope thrown, a drowning man's wrists wound round it, his teeth set in it and now, at last, a man and a heathen boy, both insensible, being carried to the mikonaree's but and laid upon two beds, one on either side of the small room, as the red sun goes slowly down. . . . The two still bodies on bearskins in the hut, and a hundred superstitious Indians flying from the face of death. . . . The two alone in the light of the flickering fire; the many gone to feast on fish, the price of lives.

But the price was not yet paid, for the man waked from insensibility waked to see himself with the body of the boy beside him in the red light of the fires.

For a moment his heart stopped beating, he turned sick and faint. Deserted by those for whom he risked his life! . . . How long had he lain there? What time was it? When was it that he had fought his way to the nets and back again−hours maybe? And the dead boy there, Wingo, who had risked his life, also dead how long? His heart leaped ah! not hours, only minutes maybe. It was sundown as unconsciousness came on him Indians would not stay with the dead after sundown. Maybe it was only ten minutes−five minutes one minute ago since they left him!. . .

His watch! Shaking fingers drew it out, wild eyes scanned it. It was not stopped. Then it could have only been minutes ago. Trembling to his feet, he staggered over to Wingo, he felt the body, he held a mirror to the lips. Yes, surely there was light moisture on the glass.

Then began another fight with death William Rufus Holly struggling to bring to life again Wingo, the waif of the Crees.

The blood came back to his own heart with a rush as the mad desire to save this life came on him. He talked to the dumb face, he prayed in a kind of delirium, as he moved the arms up and down, as he tilted the body, as he rubbed, chafed and strove. He forgot he was a missionary, he almost cursed himself. "For them for cowards, I risked his life, the brave lad with no home. Oh, God! give him back to me!" he sobbed. "What right had I to risk his life for theirs? I should have shot the first man that refused to go.... Wingo, speak! Wake up! Come back!"

The sweat poured from him in his desperation and weakness. He said to himself that he had put this young life into the hazard without cause. Had he, then, saved the lad from the rapids and Silver Tassel's brutality only to have him drag fish out of the jaws of death for Silver Tassel's meal?

It seemed to him that he had been working for hours, though it was in fact only a short time, when the eyes of the lad slowly opened and closed again, and he began to breathe spasmodically. A cry of joy came from the lips of the missionary, and he worked harder still. At last the eyes opened wide, stayed open, saw the figure bent over him, and the lips whispered, "Oshondonto my master," as a cup of brandy was held to his lips.

He had conquered the Athabascas for ever. Even Silver Tassel acknowledged his power, and he as industriously spread abroad the report that the mikonaree had raised Wingo from the dead, as he had sown dissension during the famine. But the result was that the missionary had power in the land, and the belief in him was so great, that, when Knife− in−the−Wind died, the tribe came to ask him to raise their chief from the dead. They never quite believed that he could not not even Silver Tassel, who now rules the Athabascas and is ruled by William Rufus Holly: which is a very good thing for the Athabascas.

Billy Rufus the cricketer had won the game, and somehow the Reverend William Rufus Holly the missionary never repented the strong language he used against the Athabascas, as he was bringing Wingo back to life, though it was not what is called "strictly canonical."

THE HEALING SPRINGS AND THE PIONEERS

He came out of the mysterious South one summer day, driving before him a few sheep, a cow, and a long−eared mule which carried his tent and other necessaries, and camped outside the town on a knoll, at the base of which was a thicket of close shrub. During the first day no one in Jansen thought anything of it, for it was a land of pilgrimage, and hundreds came and went on their journeys in search of free homesteads and good water and pasturage. But when, after three days, he was still there, Nicolle Terasse, who had little to do, and an insatiable curiosity, went out to see him. He found a new sensation for Jansen. This is what he said when he came back:

"You want know 'bout him, bagosh! Dat is somet'ing to see, dat man Ingles is his name. Sooch hair mooch long an' brown, and a leetla beard not so brown, an' a leather sole onto his feet, and a grey coat to his anklesyes, so like dat. An' his voice voila, it is like water in a cave. He is a great man I dunno not; but he spik at me like dis, 'Is dere sick, and cripple, and stay in−bed people here dat can't get up?' he say. An' I say, 'Not plenty, but some−bagosh! Dere is dat Miss Greet, an' ole Ma'am Drouchy, an' dat young Pete Hayes an' so on.' 'Well, if they have faith I will heal them,' he spik at me. 'From de Healing Springs dey shall rise to walk,' he say. Bagosh, you not t'ink dat true? Den you go see."

So Jansen turned out to see, and besides the man they found a curious thing. At the foot of the knoll, in a space which he had cleared, was a hot spring that bubbled and rose and sank, and drained away into the thirsty ground. Luck had been with Ingles the Faith Healer. Whether he knew of the existence of this spring, or whether he chanced upon it, he did not say; but while he held Jansen in the palm of his hand, in the feverish days that followed, there were many who attached mysterious significance to it, who claimed for it supernatural origin. In any case, the one man who had known of the existence of this spring was far away from Jansen, and he did not return till a day of reckoning came for the Faith Healer.

Meanwhile Jansen made pilgrimage to the Springs of Healing, and at unexpected times Ingles suddenly appeared in the town, and stood at street corners; and in his "Patmian voice," as Flood Rawley the lawyer called it, warned the people to flee their sins, and purifying their hearts, learn to cure all ills of mind and body, the weaknesses of the sinful flesh and the "ancient evil" in their souls, by faith that saves.

"'Is not the life more than meat'" he asked them. "And if, peradventure, there be those among you who have true belief in hearts all purged of evil, and yet are maimed, or sick of body, come to me, and I will lay my hands upon you, and I will heal you." Thus he cried.

There were those so wrought upon by his strange eloquence and spiritual passion, so hypnotised by his physical and mental exaltation, that they rose up from the hand−laying and the prayer eased of their ailments. Others he called upon to lie in the hot spring at the foot of the hill for varying periods, before the laying on of hands, and these also, crippled, or rigid with troubles' of the bone, announced that they were healed.

People flocked from other towns, and though, to some who had been cured, their pains and sickness returned, there were a few who bore perfect evidence to his teaching and healing, and followed him, "converted and consecrated," as though he were a new Messiah. In this corner of the West was such a revival as none could remember not even those who had been to camp meetings in the East in their youth, and had seen the Spirit descend upon hundreds and draw them to the anxious seat.

Then came the great sensation the Faith Healer converted Laura Sloly. Upon which Jansen drew its breath painfully; for, while it was willing to bend to the inspiration of the moment, and to be swept on a tide of excitement into that enchanted field called Imagination, it wanted to preserve its institutions and Laura Sloly had come to be an institution. Jansen had always plumed itself, and smiled, when she passed; and even now the most sentimentally religious of them inwardly anticipated the time when the town would return to its normal condition;

and that condition would not be normal if there were any change in Laura Sloly. It mattered little whether most people were changed or not because one state of their minds could not be less or more interesting than another; but a change in Laura. Sloly could not be for the better.

Her father had come to the West in the early days, and had prospered by degrees until a town grew up beside his ranch; and though he did not acquire as much permanent wealth from this golden chance as might have been expected, and lost much he did make by speculation, still he had his rich ranch left, and it, and he, and Laura were part of the history of Jansen. Laura had been born at Jansen before even it had a name. Next to her father she was the oldest inhabitant, and she had a prestige which was given to no one else.

Everything had conspired to make her a figure of moment and interest. She was handsome in almost a mannish sort of way, being of such height and straightness, and her brown eyes had a depth and fire in which more than a few men had drowned themselves. Also, once she had saved a settlement by riding ahead of a marauding Indian band to warn their intended victims, and had averted another tragedy of pioneer life. Pioneers proudly told strangers to Jansen of the girl of thirteen who rode a hundred and twenty miles without food, and sank inside the palisade of the Hudson's Bay Company's fort, as the gates closed upon the settlers taking refuge, the victim of brain fever at last. Cerebrospinal meningitis, the doctor from Winnipeg called it, and the memory of that time when men and women would not sleep till her crisis was past, was still fresh on the tongues of all.

Then she had married at seventeen, and, within a year, had lost both her husband and her baby, a child bereaved of her Playmates for her husband had been but twenty years old and was younger far than she in everything. And since then, twelve years before, she had seen generations of lovers pass into the land they thought delectable; and their children flocked to her, hung about her, were carried off by her to the ranch, and kept for days, against the laughing protests of their parents. Flood Rawley called her the Pied Piper of Jansen, and indeed she had a voice that fluted and piped, and yet had so whimsical a note, that the hardest faces softened at the sound of it; and she did not keep its best notes for the few. She was impartial, almost impersonal; no woman was her enemy, and every man was her friend and nothing more. She had never had an accepted lover since the day her Playmates left her. Every man except one had given up hope that he might win her; and though he had been gone from Jansen for two years, and had loved her since the days before the Playmates came and went, he never gave up hope, and was now to return and say again what he had mutely said for years what she understood, and he knew she understood.

Tim Denton had been a wild sort in his brief day. He was a rough diamond, but he was a diamond, and was typical of the West its heart, its courage, its freedom, and its force; capable of exquisite gentleness, strenuous to exaggeration, with a very primitive religion; and the only religion Tim knew was that of human nature. Jansen did not think Tim good enough not within a comet shot for Laura Sloly; but they thought him better than any one else.

But now Laura was a convert to the prophet of the Healing Springs, and those people who still retain their heads in the eddy of religious emotion were in despair. They dreaded to meet Laura; they kept away from the "protracted meetings," but were eager to hear about her and what she said and did. What they heard allayed their worst fears. She still smiled, and seemed as cheerful as before, they heard, and she neither spoke nor prayed in public, but she led the singing always. Now the anxious and the sceptical and the reactionary ventured out to see and hear; and seeing and hearing gave them a satisfaction they hardly dared express. She was more handsome than ever, and if her eyes glistened with a light they had never seen before, and awed them, her lips still smiled, and the old laugh came when she spoke to them. Their awe increased. This was "getting religion" with a difference.

But presently they received a shock. A whisper grew that Laura was in love with the Faith Healer. Some woman's instinct drove straight to the centre of a disconcerting possibility, and in consternation she told her husband; and Jansen husbands had a freemasonry of gossip. An hour, and all Jansen knew, or thought they knew; and the

"saved" rejoiced; and the rest of the population, represented by Nicolle Terasse at one end and Flood Rawley at the other, flew to arms. No vigilance committee was ever more determined and secret and organised than the unconverted civic patriots, who were determined to restore Jansen to its old−time condition. They pointed out cold−bloodedly that the Faith Healer had failed three times where he had succeeded once; and that, admitting the successes, there was no proof that his religion was their cause. There were such things as hypnotism and magnetism and will−power, and abnormal mental stimulus on the part of the healed to say nothing of the Healing Springs.

Carefully laying their plans, they quietly spread the rumour that Ingles had promised to restore to health old Mary Jewell, who had been bedridden ten years, and had sent word and prayed to have him lay his hands upon her Catholic though she was. The Faith Healer, face to face with this supreme and definite test, would have retreated from it but for Laura Sloly. She expected him to do it, believed that he could, said that he would, herself arranged the day and the hour, and sang so much exaltation into him, that at last a spurious power seemed to possess him. He felt that there had entered into him something that could be depended on, not the mere flow of natural magnetism fed by an outdoor life and a temperament of great emotional force, and chance, and suggestion and other things. If, at first, he had influenced Laura, some ill− controlled, latent idealism in him, working on a latent poetry and spirituality in her, somehow bringing her into nearer touch with her lost Playmates than she had been in the long years that had passed; she, in turn, had made his unrationalised brain reel; had caught him up into a higher air, on no wings of his own; had added another lover to her company of lovers and the first impostor she had ever had. She who had known only honest men as friends, in one blind moment lost her perspicuous sense; her instinct seemed asleep. She believed in the man and in his healing. Was there anything more than that?

The day of the great test came, hot, brilliant, vivid. The air was of a delicate sharpness, and, as it came toward evening, the glamour of an August when the reapers reap was upon Jansen; and its people gathered round the house of Mary Jewell to await the miracle of faith. Apart from the emotional many who sang hymns and spiritual songs were a few determined men, bent on doing justice to Jansen though the heavens might fall. Whether or no Laura Sloly was in love with the Faith Healer, Jansen must look to its own honour and hers. In any case, this peripatetic saint at Sloly's Ranch the idea was intolerable; women must be saved in spite of themselves.

Laura was now in the house by the side of the bedridden Mary Jewell, waiting, confident, smiling, as she held the wasted hand on the coverlet. With her was a minister of the Baptist persuasion, who was swimming with the tide, and who approved of the Faith Healer's immersions in the hot Healing Springs; also a medical student who had pretended belief in Ingles, and two women weeping with unnecessary remorse for human failings of no dire kind. The windows were open, and those outside could see. Presently, in a lull of the singing, there was a stir in the crowd, and then, sudden loud greetings:

"My, if it ain't Tim Denton! Jerusalem! You back, Tim!"

These and other phrases caught the ear of Laura Sloly in the sick−room. A strange look flashed across her face, and the depth of her eyes was troubled for a moment, as to the face of the old comes a tremor at the note of some long−forgotten song. Then she steadied herself and waited, catching bits of the loud talk which still floated towards her from without.

"What's up? Some one getting married or a legacy, or a saw−off? Why, what a lot of Sunday−go−to−meeting folks to be sure!" Tim laughed loudly.

After which the quick tongue of Nicolle Terasse: "You want know? Tiens, be quiet; here he come. He cure you body and soul, ver' queeck yes."

The crowd swayed and parted, and slowly, bare head uplifted, face looking to neither right nor left, the Faith Healer made his way to the door of the little house. The crowd hushed. Some were awed, some were overpoweringly interested, some were cruelly patient. Nicolle Terasse and others were whispering loudly to Tim Denton. That was the only sound, until the Healer got to the door. Then, on the steps, he turned to the multitude.

"Peace be to you all, and upon this house," he said and stepped through the doorway.

Tim Denton, who had been staring at the face of the Healer, stood for an instant like one with all his senses arrested. Then he gasped, and exclaimed, "Well, I'm eternally " and broke off with a low laugh, which was at first mirthful, and then became ominous and hard.

"Oh, magnificent magnificent jerickety!" he said into the sky above him.

His friends who were not "saved," closed in on him to find the meaning of his words, but he pulled himself together, looked blankly at them, and asked them questions. They told him so much more than he cared to hear, that his face flushed a deep red the bronze of it most like the colour of Laura Sloly's hair; then he turned pale. Men saw that he was roused beyond any feeling in themselves.

"'Sh!" he said. "Let's see what he can do." With the many who were silently praying, as they had been, bidden to do, the invincible ones leant forwards, watching the little room where healing or tragedy was afoot. As in a picture, framed by the window, they saw the kneeling figures, the Healer standing with outstretched arms. They heard his voice, sonorous and appealing, then commanding and yet Mary Jewell did not rise from her bed and walk. Again, and yet again, the voice rang out, and still the woman lay motionless. Then he laid his hands upon her, and again he commanded her to rise.

There was a faint movement, a desperate struggle to obey, but Nature and Time and Disease had their way. Yet again there was the call. An agony stirred the bed. Then another great Healer came between, and mercifully dealt the sufferer a blow Death has a gentle hand sometimes. Mary Jewell was bedridden still and for ever.

Like a wind from the mountains the chill knowledge of death wailed through the window, and over the heads of the crowd. All the figures were upright now in the little room. Then those outside saw Laura Sloly lean over and close the sightless eyes. This done, she came to the door and opened it, and motioned for the Healer to leave. He hesitated, hearing the harsh murmur from the outskirts of the crowd. Once again she motioned, and he came. With a face deadly pale she surveyed the people before her silently for a moment, her eyes all huge and staring.

Presently she turned to Ingles and spoke to him quickly in a low voice; then, descending the steps, passed out through the lane made for her by the crowd, he following with shaking limbs and bowed bead.

Warning words had passed among the few invincible ones who waited where the Healer must pass into the open, and there was absolute stillness as Laura advanced. Their work was to come quiet and swift and sure; but not yet.

Only one face Laura saw, as she led the way to the moment's safety Tim Denton's; and it was as stricken as her own. She passed, then turned, and looked at him again. He understood; she wanted him.

He waited till she sprang into her waggon, after the Healer had mounted his mule and ridden away with ever−quickening pace into the prairie. Then he turned to the set, fierce men beside him.

"Leave him alone," he said, "leave him to me. I know him. You hear? Ain't I no rights? I tell you I knew him South. You leave him to me."

They nodded, and he sprang into his saddle and rode away. They watched the figure of the Healer growing smaller in the dusty distance.

"Tim'll go to her," one said, "and perhaps they'll let the snake get off. Hadn't we best make sure?"

"Perhaps you'd better let him vamoose," said Flood Rawley anxiously. "Jansen is a law−abiding place!" The reply was decisive. Jansen had its honour to keep. It was the home of the Pioneers Laura Sloly was a Pioneer.

Tim Denton was a Pioneer, with all the comradeship which lay in the word, and he was that sort of lover who has seen one woman, and can never see another not the product of the most modern civilisation. Before Laura had had Playmates he had given all he had to give; he had waited and hoped ever since; and when the ruthless gossips had said to him before Mary Jewell's house that she was in love with the Faith Healer, nothing changed in him. For the man, for Ingles, Tim belonged to a primitive breed, and love was not in his heart. As he rode out to Sloly's Ranch, he ground his teeth in rage. But Laura had called him to her, and: "Well, what you say goes, Laura," he muttered at the end of a long hour of human passion and its repression. "If he's to go scot−free, then he's got to go; but the boys yonder'll drop on me, if he gets away. Can't you see what a swab he is, Laura?"

The brown eyes of the girl looked at him gently. The struggle between them was over; she had had her way to save the preacher, impostor though he was; and now she felt, as she had never felt before in the same fashion, that this man was a man of men.

"Tim, you do not understand," she urged. "You say he was a landsharp in the South, and that he had to leave−"

"He had to vamoose, or take tar and feathers."

"But he had to leave. And he came here preaching and healing; and he is a hypocrite and a fraud I know that now, my eyes are opened. He didn't do what he said he could do, and it killed Mary Jewell the shock; and there were other things he said he could do, and he didn't do them. Perhaps he is all bad, as you say I don't think so. But he did some good things, and through him I've felt as I've never felt before about God and life, and about Walt and the baby as though I'll see them again, sure. I've never felt that before. It was all as if they were lost in the hills, and no trail home, or out to where they are. Like as not God was working in him all the time, Tim; and he failed because he counted too much on the little he had, and made up for what he hadn't by what he pretended."

"He can pretend to himself, or God Almighty, or that lot down there" he jerked a finger towards the town "but to you, a girl, and a Pioneer "

A flash of humour shot into her eyes at his last words, then they filled with tears, through which the smile shone. To pretend to "a Pioneer" the splendid vanity and egotism of the West!

"He didn't pretend to me, Tim. People don't usually have to pretend to like me."

"You know what I'm driving at."

"Yes, yes, I know. And whatever he is, you've said that you will save him. I'm straight, you know that. Somehow, what I felt from his preaching well, everything got sort of mixed up with him, and he was was different. It was like the long dream of Walt and the baby, and he a part of it. I don't know what I felt, or what I might have felt for him. I'm a woman I can't understand. But I know what I feel now. I never want to see him again on earth or in Heaven. It needn't be necessary even in Heaven; but what happened between God and me through him stays, Tim; and so you must help him get away safe. It's in your hands you say they left it to you."

"I don't trust that too much."

Suddenly he pointed out of the window towards the town. "See, I'm right; there they are, a dozen of 'em mounted. They're off, to run him down."

Her face paled; she glanced towards the Hill of Healing. "He's got an hour's start," she said; "he'll get into the mountains and be safe."

"If they don't catch him 'fore that."

"Or if you don't get to him first," she said, with nervous insistence.

He turned to her with a hard look; then, as he met her soft, fearless, beautiful eyes, his own grew gentle. "It takes a lot of doing. Yet I'll do it for you, Laura," he said. "But it's hard on the Pioneers." Once more her humour flashed, and it seemed to him that "getting religion" was not so depressing after all wouldn't be, anyhow, when this nasty job was over. "The Pioneers will get over it, Tim," she rejoined. "They've swallowed a lot in their time. Heaven's gate will have to be pretty wide to let in a real Pioneer," she added. "He takes up so much room ah, Timothy Denton!" she added, with an outburst of whimsical merriment.

"It hasn't spoiled you being converted, has it?" he, said, and gave a quick little laugh, which somehow did more for his ancient cause with her than all he had ever said or done. Then he stepped outside and swung into his saddle.

It had been a hard and anxious ride, but Tim had won, and was keeping his promise. The night had fallen before he got to the mountains, which he and the Pioneers had seen the Faith Healer enter. They had had four miles' start of Tim, and had ridden fiercely, and they entered the gulch into which the refugee had disappeared still two miles ahead.

The invincibles had seen Tim coming, but they had determined to make a sure thing of it, and would themselves do what was necessary with the impostor, and take no chances. So they pressed their horses, and he saw them swallowed by the trees, as darkness gathered. Changing his course, he entered the familiar hills, which he knew better than any pioneer of Jansen, and rode a diagonal course over the trail they would take. But night fell suddenly, and there was nothing to do but to wait till morning. There was comfort in this the others must also wait, and the refugee could not go far. In any case, he must make for settlement or perish, since he had left behind his sheep and his cow.

It fell out better than Tim hoped. The Pioneers were as good hunters as was he, their instinct was as sure, their scouts and trackers were many, and he was but one. They found the Faith Healer by a little stream, eating bread and honey, and, like an ancient woodlander drinking from a horn relics of his rank imposture. He made no resistance. They tried him formally, if perfunctorily; he admitted his imposture, and begged for his life. Then they stripped him naked, tied a bit of canvas round his waist, fastened him to a tree, and were about to complete his punishment when Tim Denton burst upon them.

Whether the rage Tim showed was all real or not; whether his accusations of bad faith came from so deeply wounded a spirit as he would have them believe, he was not likely to tell; but he claimed the prisoner as his own, and declined to say what he meant to do.

When, however, they saw the abject terror of the Faith Healer as he begged not to be left alone with Tim for they had not meant death, and Ingles thought he read death in Tim's ferocious eyes they laughed cynically, and left it to Tim to uphold the honour of Jansen and the Pioneers.

As they disappeared, the last thing they saw was Tim with his back to them, his hands on his hips, and a knife clasped in his fingers.

"He'll lift his scalp and make a monk of him," chuckled the oldest and hardest of them.

"Dat Tim will cut his heart out, I t'ink−bagosh!" said Nicolle Terasse, and took a drink of white−whiskey. For a long time Tim stood looking at the other, until no sound came from the woods, whither the Pioneers had gone. Then at last, slowly, and with no roughness, as the terror− stricken impostor shrank and withered, he cut the cords.

"Dress yourself," he said shortly, and sat down beside the stream, and washed his face and hands, as though to cleanse them from contamination. He appeared to take no notice of the other, though his ears keenly noted every movement.

The impostor dressed nervously, yet slowly; he scarce comprehended anything, except that he was not in immediate danger. When he had finished, he stood looking at Tim, who was still seated on a log plunged in meditation.

It seemed hours before Tim turned round, and now his face was quiet, if set and determined. He walked slowly over, and stood looking at his victim for some time without speaking. The other's eyes dropped, and a greyness stole over his features. This steely calm was even more frightening than the ferocity which had previously been in his captor's face. At length the tense silence was broken.

"Wasn't the old game good enough? Was it played out? Why did you take to this? Why did you do it, Scranton?"

The voice quavered a little in reply. "I don't know. Something sort of pushed me into it."

"How did you come to start it?"

There was a long silence, then the husky reply came. "I got a sickener last time "

"Yes, I remember, at Waywing."

"I got into the desert, and had hard times awful for a while. I hadn't enough to eat, and I didn't know whether I'd die by hunger, or fever, or Indians or snakes."

"Oh, you were seeing snakes!" said Tim grimly.

"Not the kind you mean; I hadn't anything to drink "

"No, you never did drink, I remember just was crooked, and slopped over women. Well, about the snakes?"

"I caught them to eat, and they were poison−snakes often. And I wasn't quick at first to get them safe by the neck they're quick, too."

Tim laughed inwardly. "Getting your food by the sweat of your brow and a snake in it, same as Adam! Well, was it in the desert you got your taste for honey, too, same as John the Baptist that was his name, if I recomember?" He looked at the tin of honey on the ground.

"Not in the desert, but when I got to the grass−country."

"How long were you in the desert?"

"Close to a year."

Tim's eyes opened wider. He saw that the man was speaking the truth.

"Got to thinking in the desert, and sort of willing things to come to pass, and mooning along, you, and the sky, and the vultures, and the hot hills, and the snakes, and the flowers eh?"

"There weren't any flowers till I got to the grass−country."

"Oh, cuss me, if you ain't simple for your kind! I know all about that. And when you got to the grass−country, you just picked up the honey, and the flowers, and a calf, and a lamb, and a mule here and there, 'without money and without price,' and walked on that it?"

The other shrank before the steel in the voice, and nodded his head.

"But you kept thinking in the grass−country of what you'd felt and said and done and willed, in the desert, I suppose?"

Again the other nodded.

"It seemed to you in the desert, as if you'd saved your own life a hundred times, as if you'd just willed food and drink and safety to come; as if Providence had been at your elbow?"

"It was like a dream, and it stayed with me. I had to think in the desert things I'd never thought before," was the half−abstracted answer.

"You felt good in the desert?" The other hung his head in shame.

"Makes you seem pretty small, doesn't it? You didn't stay long enough, I guess, to get what you were feeling for; you started in on the new racket too soon. You never got really possessed that you was a sinner. I expect that's it."

The other made no reply.

"Well, I don't know much about such things. I was loose brought up; but I've a friend" Laura was before his eyes "that says religion's all right, and long ago as I can remember my mother used to pray three times a day with grace at meals, too. I know there's a lot in it for them that need it; and there seems to be a lot of folks needing it, if I'm to judge by folks down there at Jansen, specially when there's the laying−on of hands and the Healing Springs. Oh, that was a pigsty game, Scranton, that about God giving you the Healing Springs, like Moses and the rock! Why, I discovered them springs myself two years ago, before I went South, and I guess God wasn't helping me any not after I've kept out of His way as I have. But, anyhow, religion's real; that's my sense of it; and you can get it, I bet, if you try. I've seen it got. A friend of mine got it got it under your preaching; not from you; but you was the accident that brought it about, I expect. It's funny it's merakilous, but it's so. Kneel down!" he added, with peremptory suddenness. "Kneel, Scranton!"

In fear the other knelt.

"You're going to get religion now here. You're going to pray for what you didn't get and almost got in the desert. You're going to ask forgiveness for all your damn tricks, and pray like a fanning−mill for the spirit to come down. You ain't a scoundrel at heart a friend of mine says so. You're a weak vessel, cracked, perhaps. You've got to be saved, and start right over again and 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow!' Pray pray, Scranton, and tell the whole truth, and get it get religion. Pray like blazes. You go on, and pray out loud. Remember the desert, and Mary Jewell, and your mother did you have a mother, Scranton say, did you have a mother, lad?"

Tim's voice suddenly lowered before the last word, for the Faith Healer had broken down in a torrent of tears.

"Oh, my mother O God!" he groaned.

"Say, that's right that's right go on," said the other, and drew back a little, and sat down on a log. The man on his knees was convulsed with misery. Denton, the world, disappeared. He prayed in agony. Presently Tim moved uneasily, then got up and walked about; and at last, with a strange, awed look, when an hour was past, he stole back into the shadow of the trees, while still the wounded soul poured out its misery and repentance.

Time moved on. A curious shyness possessed Tim now, a thing which he had never felt in his life. He moved about self−consciously, awkwardly, until at last there was a sudden silence over by the brook.

Tim looked, and saw the face of the kneeling man cleared, and quiet and shining. He hesitated, then stepped out, and came over.

"Have you got it?" he asked quietly. "It's noon now."

"May God help me to redeem my past," answered the other in a new voice.

"You've got it sure?" Tim's voice was meditative. "God has spoken to me," was the simple answer. "I've got a friend'll be glad to hear that," he said; and once more, in imagination, he saw Laura Sloly standing at the door of her home, with a light in her eyes he had never seen before.

"You'll want some money for your journey?" Tim asked.

"I want nothing but to go away far away," was the low reply.

"Well, you've lived in the desert I guess you can live in the grass− country," came the dry response. "Good−bye−and good luck, Scranton."

Tim turned to go, moved on a few steps, then looked back.

"Don't be afraid they'll not follow," he said. "I'll fix it for you all right."

But the man appeared not to hear; he was still on his knees.

Tim faced the woods once more.

He was about to mount his horse when he heard a step behind him. He turned sharply and faced Laura. "I couldn't rest. I came out this morning. I've seen everything," she said.

"You didn't trust me," he said heavily.

"I never did anything else," she answered.

He gazed half−fearfully into her eyes. "Well?" he asked. "I've done my best, as I said I would."

"Tim," she said, and slipped a hand in his, "would you mind the religion if you had me?"

THE LITTLE WIDOW OF JANSEN

Her advent to Jansen was propitious. Smallpox in its most virulent form had broken out in the French−Canadian portion of the town, and, coming with some professional nurses from the East, herself an amateur, to attend the sufferers, she worked with such skill and devotion that the official thanks of the Corporation were offered her, together with a tiny gold watch, the gift of grateful citizens. But she still remained on at Jansen, saying always, however, that she was "going East in the spring."

Five years had passed, and still she had not gone East, but remained perched in the rooms she had first taken, over the Imperial Bank, while the town grew up swiftly round her. And even when the young bank manager married, and wished to take over the rooms, she sent him to the right− about from his own premises in her gay, masterful way. The young manager behaved well in the circumstances, because he had asked her to marry him, and she had dismissed him with a warning against challenging his own happiness that was the way she had put it. Perhaps he was galled the less because others had striven for the same prize, and had been thrust back, with an almost tender misgiving as to their sense of self− preservation and sanity. Some of them were eligible enough, and all were of some position in the West. Yet she smiled them firmly away, to the wonder of Jansen, and to its satisfaction, for was it not a tribute to all that she would distinguish no particular unit by her permanent favour? But for one so sprightly and almost frivolous in manner at times, the self−denial seemed incongruous. She was unconventional enough to sit on the side−walk with a half−dozen children round her blowing bubbles, or to romp in any garden, or in the street, playing Puss−in−the− ring; yet this only made her more popular. Jansen's admiration was at its highest, however, when she rode in the annual steeplechase with the best horsemen of the province. She had the gift of doing as well as of being.

"'Tis the light heart she has, and slippin' in and out of things like a humming−bird, no easier to ketch, and no longer to stay," said Finden, the rich Irish landbroker, suggestively to Father Bourassa, the huge French−Canadian priest who had worked with her through all the dark weeks of the smallpox epidemic, and who knew what lay beneath the outer gaiety. She had been buoyant of spirit beside the beds of the sick, and her words were full of raillery and humour, yet there was ever a gentle note behind all; and the priest had seen her eyes shining with tears, as she bent over some stricken sufferer bound upon an interminable journey.

"Bedad! as bright a little spark as ever struck off the steel," added Finden to the priest, with a sidelong, inquisitive look, "but a heart no bigger than a marrowfat pea−selfishness, all self. Keepin' herself for herself when there's manny a good man needin' her. Mother o' Moses, how manny! From Terry O'Ryan, brother of a peer, at Latouche, to Bernard Bapty, son of a millionaire, at Vancouver, there's a string o' them. All pride and self; and as fair a lot they've been as ever entered for the Marriage Cup. Now, isn't that so, father?"

Finden's brogue did not come from a plebeian origin. It was part of his commercial equipment, an asset of his boyhood spent among the peasants on the family estate in Galway.

Father Bourassa fanned himself with the black broadbrim hat he wore, and looked benignly but quizzically on the wiry, sharp−faced Irishman.

"You t'ink her heart is leetla. But perhaps it is your mind not so big enough to see hein?" The priest laughed noiselessly, showing white teeth. "Was it so selfish in Madame to refuse the name of Finden n'est−ce pas?"

Finden flushed, then burst into a laugh. "I'd almost forgotten I was one of them the first almost. Blessed be he that expects nothing, for he'll get it, sure. It was my duty, and I did it. Was she to feel that Jansen did not price her high? Bedad, father, I rose betimes and did it, before anny man should say he set me the lead. Before the carpet in the parlour was down, and with the bare boards soundin' to my words, I offered her the name of Finden."

"And so the first of the long line! Bien, it is an honour." The priest paused a moment, looked at Finden with a curious reflective look, and then said: "And so you t'ink there is no one; that she will say yes not at all no?"

They were sitting on Father Bourassa's veranda, on the outskirts of the town, above the great river, along which had travelled millions of bygone people, fighting, roaming, hunting, trapping; and they could hear it rushing past, see the swirling eddies, the impetuous currents, the occasional rafts moving majestically down the stream. They were facing the wild North, where civilisation was hacking and hewing and ploughing its way to newer and newer cities, in an empire ever spreading to the Pole.

Finden's glance loitered on this scene before he replied. At length, screwing up one eye, and with a suggestive smile, he answered: "Sure, it's all a matter of time, to the selfishest woman. 'Tis not the same with women as with men; you see, they don't get younger that's a point. But" he gave a meaning glance at the priest "but perhaps she's not going to wait for that, after all. And there he rides, a fine figure of a man, too, if I have to say it!"

"M'sieu' Varley?" the priest responded, and watched a galloping horseman to whom Finden had pointed, till he rounded the corner of a little wood.

"Varley, the great London surgeon, sure! Say, father, it's a hundred to one she'd take him, if "

There was a curious look in Father Bourassa's face, a cloud in his eyes. He sighed. "London, it is ver' far away," he remarked obliquely.

"What's to that? If she is with the right man, near or far is nothing."

"So far from home," said the priest reflectively, but his eyes furtively watched the other's face.

"But home's where man and wife are."

The priest now looked him straight in the eyes. "Then, as you say, she will not marry M'sieu' Varley hein?"

The humour died out of Finden's face. His eyes met the priest's eyes steadily. "Did I say that? Then my tongue wasn't making a fool of me, after all. How did you guess I knew everything, father?"

"A priest knows many t'ings so."

There was a moment of gloom, then the Irishman brightened. He came straight to the heart of the mystery around which they had been maneuvering. "Have you seen her husband Meydon this year? It isn't his usual time to come yet."

Father Bourassa's eyes drew those of his friend into, the light of a new understanding and revelation. They understood and trusted each other.

"Helas! He is there in the hospital," he answered, and nodded towards a building not far away, which had been part of an old Hudson's Bay Company's fort. It had been hastily adapted as a hospital for the smallpox victims.

"Oh, it's Meydon, is it, that bad case I heard of to−day?"

The priest nodded again and 'pointed. "Voila, Madame Meydon, she is coming. She has seen him her hoosban'."

Finden's eyes followed the gesture. The little widow of Jansen was coming from the hospital, walking slowly towards the river.

"As purty a woman, too as purty and as straight bewhiles. What is the matter with him with Meydon?" Finden asked, after a moment.

"An accident in the woods so. He arrive, it is las' night, from Great Slave Lake."

Finden sighed. "Ten years ago he was a man to look at twice before he did It and got away. Now his own mother wouldn't know him bad 'cess to him! I knew him from the cradle almost. I spotted him here by a knife− cut I gave him in the hand when we were lads together. A divil of a timper always both of us had, but the good−nature was with me, and I didn't drink and gamble and carry a pistol. It's ten years since he did the killing, down in Quebec, and I don't suppose the police will get him now. He's been counted dead. I recognised him here the night after I asked her how she liked the name of Finden. She doesn't know that I ever knew him. And he didn't recognise me−twenty−five years since we met before! It would be better if he went under the sod. Is he pretty sick, father?"

"He will die unless the surgeon's knife it cure him before twenty−four hours, and "

"And Doctor Brydon is sick, and Doctor Hadley away at Winnipeg, and this is two hundred miles from nowhere! It looks as if the police'll never get him, eh?"

"You have not tell any one never?"

Finden laughed. "Though I'm not a priest, I can lock myself up as tight as anny. There's no tongue that's so tied, when tying's needed, as the one that babbles most bewhiles. Babbling covers a lot of secrets."

"So you t'ink it better Meydon should die, as Hadley is away and Brydon is sick−hein?"

"Oh, I think "

Finden stopped short, for a horse's hoofs sounded on the turf beside the house, and presently Varley, the great London surgeon, rounded the corner and stopped his horse in front of the veranda.

He lifted his hat to the priest. "I hear there's a bad case at the hospital," he said.

"It is ver' dangerous," answered Father Bourassa; "but, voila, come in! There is something cool to drink. Ah yes, he is ver' bad, that man from the Great Slave Lake."

Inside the house, with the cooling drinks, Varley pressed his questions, and presently, much interested, told at some length of singular cases which had passed through his hands one a man with his neck broken, who had lived for six months afterward.

"Broken as a man's neck is broken by hanging dislocation, really the disjointing of the medulla oblongata, if you don't mind technicalities," he said. "But I kept him living just the same. Time enough for him to repent in and get ready to go. A most interesting case. He was a criminal, too, and wanted to die; but you have to keep life going if you can, to the last inch of resistance."

The priest looked thoughtfully out of the window; Finden's eyes were screwed up in a questioning way, but neither made any response to Varley's remarks. There was a long minute's silence. They were all three roused by hearing a light footstep on the veranda.

Father Bourassa put down his glass and hastened into the hallway. Finden caught a glimpse of a woman's figure, and, without a word, passed abruptly from the dining−room where they were, into the priest's study, leaving

Varley alone. Varley turned to look after him, stared, and shrugged his shoulders.

"The manners of the West," he said good−humouredly, and turned again to the hallway, from whence came the sound of the priest's voice. Presently there was another voice a woman's. He flushed slightly and involuntarily straightened himself.

"Valerie," he murmured.

An instant afterwards she entered the room with the priest. She was dressed in a severely simple suit of grey, which set off to advantage her slim, graceful figure. There seemed no reason why she should have been called the little widow of Jansen, for she was not small, but she was very finely and delicately made, and the name had been but an expression of Jansen's paternal feeling for her. She had always had a good deal of fresh colour, but to−day she seemed pale, though her eyes had a strange disturbing light. It was not that they brightened on seeing this man before her; they had been brighter, burningly bright, when she left the hospital, where, since it had been built, she had been the one visitor of authority Jansen had given her that honour. She had a gift of smiling, and she smiled now, but it came from grace of mind rather than from humour. As Finden had said, "She was for ever acting, and never doin' any harm by it."

Certainly she was doing no harm by it now; nevertheless, it was acting. Could it be otherwise, with what was behind her life a husband who had ruined her youth, had committed homicide, had escaped capture, but who had not subsequently died, as the world believed he had done, so circumstantial was the evidence. He was not man enough to make the accepted belief in his death a fact. What could she do but act, since the day she got a letter from the Far North, which took her out to Jansen, nominally to nurse those stricken with smallpox under Father Bourassa's care, actually to be where her wretched husband could come to her once a year, as he had asked with an impossible selfishness?

Each year she had seen him for an hour or less, giving him money, speaking to him over a gulf so wide that it seemed sometimes as though her voice could not be heard across it; each year opening a grave to look at the embalmed face of one who had long since died in shame, which only brought back the cruellest of all memories, that which one would give one's best years to forget. With a fortitude beyond description she had faced it, gently, quietly, but firmly faced it firmly, because she had to be firm in keeping him within those bounds the invasion of which would have killed her. And after the first struggle with his unchangeable brutality it had been easier: for into his degenerate brain there had come a faint understanding of the real situation and of her. He had kept his side of the gulf, but gloating on this touch between the old luxurious, indulgent life, with its refined vices, and this present coarse, hard life, where pleasures were few and gross. The free Northern life of toil and hardship had not refined him. He greedily hung over this treasure, which was not for his spending, yet was his own as though in a bank he had hoards of money which he might not withdraw.

So the years had gone on, with their recurrent dreaded anniversaries, carrying misery almost too great to be borne by this woman mated to the loathed phantom of a sad, dead life; and when this black day of each year was over, for a few days afterwards she went nowhere, was seen by none. Yet, when she did appear again, it was with her old laughing manner, her cheerful and teasing words, her quick response to the emotions of others.

So it had gone till Varley had come to follow the open air life for four months, after a heavy illness due to blood−poisoning got in his surgical work in London. She had been able to live her life without too great a struggle till he came. Other men had flattered her vanity, had given her a sense of power, had made her understand her possibilities, but nothing more nothing of what Varley brought with him. And before three months had gone, she knew that no man had ever interested her as Varley had done. Ten years before, she would not have appreciated or understood him, this intellectual, clean−shaven, rigidly abstemious man, whose pleasures belonged to the fishing−rod and the gun and the horse, and who had come to be so great a friend of him who had been her best friend Father Bourassa. Father Bourassa had come to know the truth not from her, for she had ever been a

Protestant, but from her husband, who, Catholic by birth and a renegade from all religion, had had a moment of spurious emotion, when he went and confessed to Father Bourassa and got absolution, pleading for the priest's care of his wife. Afterwards Father Bourassa made up his mind that the confession had a purpose behind it other than repentance, and he deeply resented the use to which he thought he was being put a kind of spy upon the beautiful woman whom Jansen loved, and who, in spite of any outward flippancy, was above reproach.

In vital things the instinct becomes abnormally acute, and, one day, when the priest looked at her commiseratingly, she had divined what moved him. However it was, she drove him into a corner with a question to which he dare not answer yes, but to which he might not answer no, and did not; and she realised that he knew the truth, and she was the better for his knowing, though her secret was no longer a secret. She was not aware that Finden also knew. Then Varley came, bringing a new joy and interest in her life, and a new suffering also, for she realised that if she were free, and Varley asked her to marry him, she would consent.

But when he did ask her, she said no with a pang that cut her heart in two. He had stayed his four months, and it was now six months, and he was going at last−tomorrow. He had stayed to give her time to learn to say yes, and to take her back with him to London; and she knew that he would speak again to−day, and that she must say no again; but she had kept him from saying the words till now. And the man who had ruined her life and had poisoned her true spirit was come back broken and battered. He was hanging between life and death; and now for he was going to−morrow Varley would speak again.

The half−hour she had just spent in the hospital with Meydon had tried her cruelly. She had left the building in a vortex of conflicting emotions, with the call of duty and of honour ringing through a thousand other voices of temptation and desire, the inner pleadings for a little happiness while yet she was young. After she married Meydon, there had only been a few short weeks of joy before her black disillusion came, and she had realised how bitter must be her martyrdom.

When she left the hospital, she seemed moving in a dream, as one, intoxicated by some elixir, might move unheeding among event and accident and vexing life and roaring multitudes. And all the while the river flowing through the endless prairies, high−banked, ennobled by living woods, lipped with green, kept surging in her ears, inviting her, alluring her alluring her with a force too deep and powerful for weak human nature to bear for long. It would ease her pain, it said; it would still the tumult and the storm; it would solve her problem, it would give her peace. But as she moved along the river−bank among the trees, she met the little niece of the priest, who lived in his house, singing as though she was born but to sing, a song which Finden had written and Father Bourassa had set to music. Did not the distant West know Father Bourassa's gift, and did not Protestants attend Mass to hear him play the organ afterwards? The fresh, clear voice of the child rang through the trees, stealing the stricken heart away from the lure of the river:

"Will you come back home, where the young larks are singin'?
The door is open wide, and the bells of Lynn are ringin';
    There's a little lake I know,
    And a boat you used to row
To the shore beyond that's quiet will you come back home?

Will you come back, darlin'? Never heed the pain and blightin',
Never trouble that you're wounded, that you bear the scars of
fightin';
    Here's the luck o' Heaven to you,
    Here's the hand of love will brew you
The cup of peace ah, darlin', will you come back home?"

She stood listening for a few moments, and, under the spell of the fresh, young voice, the homely, heart−searching words, and the intimate sweetness of the woods, the despairing apathy lifted slowly away. She started forwards again with a new understanding, her footsteps quickened. She would go to Father Bourassa. He would understand. She would tell him all. He would help her to do what now she knew she must do, ask Leonard Varley to save her husband's life Leonard Varley to save her husband's life!

When she stepped upon the veranda of the priest's house, she did not know that Varley was inside. She had no time to think. She was ushered into the room where he was, with the confusing fact of his presence fresh upon her. She had had but a word or two with the priest, but enough for him to know what she meant to do, and that it must be done at once.

Varley advanced to meet her. She shuddered inwardly to think what a difference there was between the fallen creature she had left behind in the hospital and this tall, dark, self−contained man, whose name was familiar in the surgeries of Europe, who had climbed from being the son of a clockmaker to his present distinguished place.

"Have you come for absolution, also?" he asked with a smile; "or is it to get a bill of excommunication against your only enemy there couldn't be more than one?"

Cheerful as his words were, he was shrewdly observing her, for her paleness, and the strange light in her eyes, gave him a sense of anxiety. He wondered what trouble was on her.

"Excommunication?" he repeated.

The unintended truth went home. She winced, even as she responded with that quaint note in her voice which gave humour to her speech. "Yes, excommunication," she replied; "but why an enemy? Do we not need to excommunicate our friends sometimes?"

"That is a hard saying," he answered soberly. Tears sprang to her eyes, but she mastered herself, and brought the crisis abruptly.

"I want you to save a man's life," she said, with her eyes looking straight into his. "Will you do it?"

His face grew grave and eager. "I want you to save a man's happiness," he answered. "Will you do it?"

"That man yonder will die unless your skill saves him," she urged.

"This man here will go away unhappy and alone, unless your heart befriends him," he replied, coming closer to her.

"At sunrise to−morrow he goes." He tried to take her hand.

"Oh, please, please," she pleaded, with a quick, protesting gesture. "Sunrise is far off, but the man's fate is near, and you must save him. You only can do so, for Doctor Hadley is away, and Doctor Brydon is sick, and in any case Doctor Brydon dare not attempt the operation alone. It is too critical and difficult, he says."

"So I have heard," he answered, with a new note in his voice, his professional instinct roused in spite of himself. "Who is this man? What interests you in him?"

"To how many unknown people have you given your skill for nothing your skill and all your experience to utter strangers, no matter how low or poor! Is it not so? Well, I cannot give to strangers what you have given to so many, but I can help in my own way."

"You want me to see the man at once?"

"If you will."

"What is his name? I know of his accident and the circumstances."

She hesitated for an instant, then said, "He is called Draper a trapper and woodsman."

"But I was going away to−morrow at sunrise. All my arrangements are made," he urged, his eyes holding hers, his passion swimming in his eyes again.

"But you will not see a man die, if you can save him?" she pleaded, unable now to meet his look, its mastery and its depth.

Her heart had almost leaped with joy at the suggestion that he could not stay; but as suddenly self−reproach and shame filled her mind, and she had challenged him so. But yet, what right had she to sacrifice this man she loved to the perverted criminal who had spoiled her youth and taken away from her every dear illusion of her life and heart? By every right of justice and humanity she was no more the wife of Henry Meydon than if she had never seen him. He had forfeited every claim upon her, dragged in the mire her unspotted life unspotted, for in all temptation, in her defenceless position, she had kept the whole commandment; she had, while at the mercy of her own temperament, fought her way through all, with a weeping heart and laughing lips. Had she not longed for a little home with a great love, and a strong, true man? Ah, it had been lonely, bitterly lonely! Yet she had remained true to the scoundrel, from whom she could not free herself without putting him in the grasp of the law to atone for his crime. She was punished for his crimes; she was denied the exercise of her womanhood in order to shield him. Still she remembered that once she had loved him, those years ago, when he first won her heart from those so much better than he, who loved her so much more honestly; and this memory had helped her in a way. She had tried to be true to it, that dead, lost thing, of which this man who came once a year to see her, and now, lying with his life at stake in the hospital, was the repellent ghost.

"Ah, you will not see him die?" she urged.

"It seems to move you greatly what happens to this man," he said, his determined dark eyes searching hers, for she baffled him. If she could feel so much for a, "casual," why not a little more feeling for him? Suddenly, as he drew her eyes to him again, there came the conviction that they were full of feeling for him. They were sending a message, an appealing, passionate message, which told him more than he had ever heard from her or seen in her face before. Yes, she was his! Without a spoken word she had told him so. What, then, held her back? But women were a race by themselves, and he knew that he must wait till she chose to have him know what she had unintentionally conveyed but now.

"Yes, I am moved," she continued slowly. "Who can tell what this man might do with his life, if it is saved! Don't you think of that? It isn't the importance of a life that's at stake; it's the importance of living; and we do not live alone, do we?"

His mind was made up. "I will not, cannot promise anything till I have seen him. But I will go and see him, and I'll send you word later what I can do, or not do. Will that satisfy you? If I cannot do it, I will come to say good−by."

Her face was set with suppressed feeling. She held out her hand to him impulsively, and was about to speak, but suddenly caught the hand away again from his thrilling grasp and, turning hurriedly, left the room. In the hall she met Father Bourassa.

"Go with him to the hospital," she whispered, and disappeared through the doorway.

Immediately after she had gone, a man came driving hard to bring Father Bourassa to visit a dying Catholic in the prairie, and it was Finden who accompanied Varley to the hospital, waited for him till his examination of the "casual" was concluded, and met him outside.

"Can it be done?" he asked of Varley. "I'll take word to Father Bourassa."

"It can be done it will be done," answered Varley absently. "I do not understand the man. He has been in a different sphere of life. He tried to hide it, but the speech occasionally! I wonder."

"You wonder if he's worth saving?"

Varley shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "No, that's not what I meant."

Finden smiled to himself. "Is it a difficult case?" he asked.

"Critical and delicate; but it has been my specialty."

"One of the local doctors couldn't do it, I suppose?"

"They would be foolish to try."

"And you are going away at sunrise to−morrow?"

"Who told you that?" Varley's voice was abrupt, impatient.

"I heard you say so−everybody knows it. . . . That's a bad man yonder, Varley." He jerked his thumb towards the hospital. "A terrible bad man, he's been. A gentleman once, and fell down fell down hard. He's done more harm than most men. He's broken a woman's heart and spoilt her life, and, if he lives, there's no chance for her, none at all. He killed a man, and the law wants him; and she can't free herself without ruining him; and she can't marry the man she loves because of that villain yonder, crying for his life to be saved. By Josh and by Joan, but it's a shame, a dirty shame, it is!"

Suddenly Varley turned and gripped his arm with fingers of steel.

"His name his real name?"

"His name's Meydon and a dirty shame it is, Varley."

Varley was white. He had been leading his horse and talking to Finden. He mounted quickly now, and was about to ride away, but stopped short again. "Who knows who knows the truth?" he asked.

"Father Bourassa and me no others," he answered. "I knew Meydon thirty years ago."

There was a moment's hesitation, then Varley said hoarsely, "Tell me tell me all."

When all was told, he turned his horse towards the wide waste of the prairie, and galloped away. Finden watched him till he was lost to view beyond the bluff.

"Now, a man like that, you can't guess what he'll do," he said reflectively. "He's a high−stepper, and there's no telling what foolishness will get hold of him. It'd be safer if he got lost on the prairie for twenty−four hours. He said that Meydon's only got twenty− four hours, if the trick isn't done! Well "

He took a penny from his pocket. "I'll toss for it. Heads he does it, and tails he doesn't."

He tossed. It came down heads. "Well, there's one more fool in the world than I thought," he said philosophically, as though he had settled the question; as though the man riding away into the prairie with a dark problem to be solved had told the penny what he meant to do.

Mrs. Meydon, Father Bourassa, and Finden stood in the little waiting−room of the hospital at Jansen, one at each window, and watched the wild thunderstorm which had broken over the prairie. The white heliographs of the elements flashed their warnings across the black sky, and the roaring artillery of the thunder came after, making the circle of prairie and tree and stream a theatre of anger and conflict. The streets of Jansen were washed with flood, and the green and gold things of garden and field and harvest crumbled beneath the sheets of rain.

The faces at the window of the little room of the hospital, however, were but half−conscious of the storm; it seemed only an accompaniment of their thoughts, to typify the elements of tragedy surrounding them.

For Varley there had been but one thing to do. A life might be saved, and it was his duty to save it. He had ridden back from the prairie as the sun was setting the night before, and had made all arrangements at the hospital, giving orders that Meydon should have no food whatever till the operation was performed the next afternoon, and nothing to drink except a little brandy−and−water.

The operation was performed successfully, and Varley had issued from the operating−room with the look of a man who had gone through an ordeal which had taxed his nerve to the utmost, to find Valerie Meydon waiting, with a piteous, dazed look in her eyes. But this look passed when she heard him say, "All right!" The words brought a sense of relief, for if he had failed it would have seemed almost unbearable in the circumstances the cup of trembling must be drunk to the dregs.

Few words had passed between them, and he had gone, while she remained behind with Father Bourassa, till the patient should wake from the sleep into which he had fallen when Varley left.

But within two hours they sent for Varley again, for Meydon was in evident danger. Varley had come, and had now been with the patient for some time.

At last the door opened and Varley came in quickly. He beckoned to Mrs. Meydon and to Father Bourassa. "He wishes to speak with you," he said to her. "There is little time."

Her eyes scarcely saw him, as she left the room and passed to where Meydon lay nerveless, but with wide−open eyes, waiting for her. The eyes closed, however, before she reached the bed. Presently they opened again, but the lids remained fixed. He did not hear what she said.

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In the little waiting−room, Finden said to Varley, "What happened?"

"Food was absolutely forbidden, but he got it from another patient early this morning while the nurse was out for a moment. It has killed him."

"'Twas the least he could do, but no credit's due him. It was to be. I'm not envying Father Bourassa nor her there with him."

Varley made no reply. He was watching the receding storm with eyes which told nothing.

Finden spoke once more, but Varley did not hear him. Presently the door opened and Father Bourassa entered. He made a gesture of the hand to signify that all was over.

Outside, the sun was breaking through the clouds upon the Western prairie, and there floated through the evening air the sound of a child's voice singing beneath the trees that fringed the river:

"Will you come back, darlin'? Never heed the pain and blightin',
Never trouble that you're wounded, that you bear the scars of
fightin';
Here's the luck o' Heaven to you,
Here's the hand of love will brew you
The cup of peace−ah, darlin', will you come back home?"

WATCHING THE RISE OF ORION

"In all the wide border his steed was the best," and the name and fame of Terence O'Ryan were known from Strathcona to Qu'appelle. He had ambition of several kinds, and he had the virtue of not caring who knew of it. He had no guile, and little money; but never a day's work was too hard for him, and he took bad luck, when it came, with a jerk of the shoulder and a good−natured surprise on his clean−shaven face that suited well his wide grey eyes and large, luxurious mouth. He had an estate, half ranch, half farm, with a French Canadian manager named Vigon, an old prospector who viewed every foot of land in the world with the eye of the discoverer. Gold, coal, iron, oil, he searched for them everywhere, making sure that sooner or later he would find them. Once Vigon had found coal. That was when he worked for a man called Constantine Jopp, and had given him great profit; but he, the discoverer, had been put off with a horse and a hundred dollars. He was now as devoted to Terence O'Ryan as he had been faithful to Constantine Jopp, whom he cursed waking and sleeping.

In his time O'Ryan had speculated, and lost; he had floated a coal mine, and "been had"; he had run for the local legislature, had been elected, and then unseated for bribery committed by an agent; he had run races at Regina, and won he had won for three years in succession; and this had kept him going and restored his finances when they were at their worst. He was, in truth, the best rider in the country, and, so far, was the owner also of the best three−year−old that the West had produced. He achieved popularity without effort. The West laughed at his enterprises and loved him; he was at once a public moral and a hero. It was a legend of the West that his forbears had been kings in Ireland like Brian Borhoime. He did not contradict this; he never contradicted anything. His challenge to all fun and satire and misrepresentation was, "What'll be the differ a hundred years from now!"

He did not use this phrase, however, towards one experience the advent of Miss Molly Mackinder, the heiress, and the challenge that reverberated through the West after her arrival. Philosophy deserted him then; he fell back on the primary emotions of mankind.

A month after Miss Mackinder's arrival at La Touche a dramatic performance was given at the old fort, in which the officers of the Mounted Police took part, together with many civilians who fancied themselves. By that time the district had realised that Terry O'Ryan had surrendered to what they called "the laying on of hands" by Molly Mackinder. It was not certain, however, that the surrender was complete, because O'Ryan had been wounded before, and yet had not been taken captive altogether. His complete surrender seemed now more certain to the public because the lady had a fortune of two hundred thousand dollars, and that amount of money would be useful

to an ambitious man in the growing West. It would, as Gow Johnson said, "Let him sit back and view the landscape o'er, before he puts his ploughshare in the mud."

There was an outdoor scene in the play produced by the impetuous amateurs, and dialogue had been interpolated by three "imps of fame" at the suggestion of Constantine Jopp, one of the three, who bore malice towards O'Ryan, though this his colleagues did not know distinctly. The scene was a camp−fire a starlit night, a colloquy between the three, upon which the hero of the drama, played by Terry O'Ryan, should break, after having, unknown to them, but in sight of the audience, overheard their kind of intentions towards himself.

The night came. When the curtain rose for the third act there was exposed a star−sown sky, in which the galaxy of Orion was shown with distinctness, each star sharply twinkling from the electric power behind− a pretty scene evoking great applause. O'Ryan had never seen this back curtain they had taken care that he should not and, standing in the wings awaiting his cue, he was unprepared for the laughter of the audience, first low and uncertain, then growing, then insistent, and now a peal of ungovernable mirth, as one by one they understood the significance of the stars of Orion on the back curtain.

O'Ryan got his cue, and came on to an outburst of applause which shook the walls. La Touche rose at him, among them Miss Molly Mackinder in the front row with the notables.

He did not see the back curtain, or Orion blazing in the ultramarine blue. According to the stage directions, he was to steal along the trees at the wings, and listen to the talk of the men at the fire plotting against him, who were presently to pretend good comradeship to his face. It was a vigorous melodrama with some touches of true Western feeling. After listening for a moment, O'Ryan was to creep up the stage again towards the back curtain, giving a cue for his appearance.

When the hilarious applause at his entrance had somewhat subsided, the three took up their parable, but it was not the parable of the play. They used dialogue not in the original. It had a significance which the audience were not slow to appreciate, and went far to turn "The Sunburst Trail" at this point into a comedy−farce. When this new dialogue began, O'Ryan could scarcely trust his ears, or realise what was happening.

"Ah, look," said Dicky Fergus at the fire, "as fine a night as ever I saw in the West! The sky's a picture. You could almost hand the stars down, they're so near."

"What's that clump together on the right what are they called in astronomy?" asked Constantine Jopp, with a leer.

"Orion is the name a beauty, ain't it?" answered Fergus.

"I've been watching Orion rise," said the third Holden was his name. "Many's the time I've watched Orion rising. Orion's the star for me. Say, he wipes 'em all out right out. Watch him rising now."

By a manipulation of the lights Orion moved up the back curtain slowly, and blazed with light nearer the zenith. And La Touche had more than the worth of its money in this opening to the third act of the play. O'Ryan was a favourite, at whom La Touche loved to jeer, and the parable of the stars convulsed them.

At the first words O'Ryan put a hand on himself and tried to grasp the meaning of it all, but his entrance and the subsequent applause had confused him. Presently, however, he turned to the back curtain, as Orion moved slowly up the heavens, and found the key to the situation. He gasped. Then he listened to the dialogue which had nothing to do with "The Sunburst Trail."

"What did Orion do, and why does he rise? Has he got to rise? Why was the gent called Orion in them far−off days?" asked Holden.

"He did some hunting in his time with a club," Fergus replied. "He kept making hits, he did. Orion was a spoiler. When he took the field there was no room for the rest of the race. Why does he rise? Because it is a habit. They could always get a rise out of Orion. The Athens Eirenicon said that yeast might fail to rise, but touch the button and Orion would rise like a bird."

At that instant the galaxy jerked up the back curtain again, and when the audience could control itself, Constantine Jopp, grinning meanly, asked:

"Why does he wear the girdle?"

"It is not a girdle it is a belt," was Dicky Fergus's reply. "The gods gave it to him because he was a favourite. There was a lady called Artemis she was the last of them. But he went visiting with Eos, another lady of previous acquaintance, down at a place called Ortygia, and Artemis shot him dead with a shaft Apollo had given her; but she didn't marry Apollo neither. She laid Orion out on the sky, with his glittering belt, around him. And Orion keeps on rising."

"Will he ever stop rising?" asked Holden.

Followed for the conspirators a disconcerting moment; for, when the laughter had subsided, a lazy voice came from the back of the hall, "He'll stop long enough to play with Apollo a little, I guess."

It was Gow Johnson who had spoken, and no man knew Terry O'Ryan better, or could gauge more truly the course he would take. He had been in many an enterprise, many a brush with O'Ryan, and his friendship would bear any strain.

O'Ryan recovered himself from the moment he saw the back curtain, and he did not find any fun in the thing. It took a hold on him out of all proportion to its importance. He realised that he had come to the parting of the ways in his life. It suddenly came upon him that something had been lacking in him in the past; and that his want of success in many things had not been wholly due to bad luck. He had been eager, enterprising, a genius almost at seeing good things; and yet others had reaped where he had sown. He had believed too much in his fellow−man. For the first time in his life he resented the friendly, almost affectionate satire of his many friends. It was amusing, it was delightful; but down beneath it all there was a little touch of ridicule. He had more brains than any of them, and he had known it in a way; he had led them sometimes, too, as on raids against cattle−stealers, and in a brush with half−breeds and Indians; as when he stood for the legislature; but he felt now for the first time that he had not made the most of himself, that there was something hurting to self−respect in this prank played upon him. When he came to that point his resentment went higher. He thought of Molly Mackinder, and he heard all too acutely the vague veiled references to her in their satire. By the time Gow Johnson spoke he had mastered himself, however, and had made up his mind. He stood still for a moment.

"Now, please, my cue," he said quietly and satirically from the trees near the wings.

He was smiling, but Gow Johnson's prognostication was right; and ere long the audience realised that he was right. There was standing before them not the Terry O'Ryan they had known, but another. He threw himself fully into his part a young rancher made deputy sheriff, who by the occasional exercise of his duty had incurred the hatred of a small floating population that lived by fraud, violence, and cattle−stealing. The conspiracy was to raid his cattle, to lure him to pursuit, to ambush him, and kill him. Terry now played the part with a naturalness and force which soon lifted the play away from the farcical element introduced into it by those who had interpolated the gibes at himself. They had gone a step too far.

"He's going large," said Gow Johnson, as the act drew near its close, and the climax neared, where O'Ryan was to enter upon a physical struggle with his assailants. "His blood's up. There'll be hell to pay."

To Gow Johnson the play had instantly become real, and O'Ryan an injured man at bay, the victim of the act not of the fictitious characters of the play, but of the three men, Fergus, Holden, and Constantine Jopp, who had planned the discomfiture of O'Ryan; and he felt that the victim's resentment would fall heaviest on Constantine Jopp, the bully, an old schoolmate of Terry's.

Jopp was older than O'Ryan by three years, which in men is little, but in boys, at a certain time of life, is much. It means, generally, weight and height, an advantage in a scrimmage. Constantine Jopp had been the plague and tyrant of O'Ryan's boyhood. He was now a big, leering fellow with much money of his own, got chiefly from the coal discovered on his place by Vigon, the half−breed French Canadian. He had a sense of dark and malicious humour, a long horse−like face, with little beady eyes and a huge frame.

Again and again had Terry fought him as a boy at school, and often he had been badly whipped, but he had never refused the challenge of an insult when he was twelve and Jopp fifteen. The climax to their enmity at school had come one day when Terry was seized with a cramp while bathing, and after having gone down twice was rescued by Jopp, who dragged him out by the hair of the head. He had been restored to consciousness on the bank and carried to his home, where he lay ill for days. During the course of the slight fever which followed the accident his hair was cut close to his head. Impetuous always, his first thought was to go and thank Constantine Jopp for having saved his life. As soon as he was able he went forth to find his rescuer, and met him suddenly on turning a corner of the street. Before he could stammer out the gratitude that was in his heart, Jopp, eyeing him with a sneering smile, said drawlingly:

"If you'd had your hair cut like that I couldn't have got you out, could I? Holy, what a sight! Next time I'll take you by the scruff, putty− face bah!"

That was enough for Terry. He had swallowed the insult, stuttered his thanks to the jeering laugh of the lank bully, and had gone home and cried in shame and rage.

It was the one real shadow in his life. Ill luck and good luck had been taken with an equable mind; but the fact that he must, while he lived, own the supreme debt of his life to a boy and afterwards to a man whom he hated by instinct was a constant cloud on him. Jopp owned him. For some years they did not meet, and then at last they again were thrown together in the West, when Jopp settled at La Touche. It was gall and wormwood to Terry, but he steeled himself to be friendly, although the man was as great a bully as the boy, as offensive in mind and character; but withal acute and able in his way, and with a reputation for commercial sharpness which would be called by another name in a different civilisation. They met constantly, and O'Ryan always put a hand on himself, and forced himself to be friendly. Once when Jopp became desperately ill there had been though he fought it down, and condemned himself in every term of reproach a sense of relief in the thought that perhaps his ancient debt would now be cancelled. It had gone on so long. And Constantine Jopp had never lost an opportunity of vexing him, of torturing him, of giving veiled thrusts, which he knew O'Ryan could not resent. It was the constant pin−prick of a mean soul, who had an advantage of which he could never be dispossessed unless the ledger was balanced in some inscrutable way.

Apparently bent on amusement only, and hiding his hatred from his colleagues, Jopp had been the instigator and begetter of the huge joke of the play; but it was the brains of Dick Fergus which had carried it out, written the dialogue, and planned the electric appliances of the back curtain for he was an engineer and electrician. Neither he nor Holden had known the old antipathy of Terry and Constantine Jopp. There was only one man who knew the whole truth, and that was Gow Johnson, to whom Terry had once told all. At the last moment Fergus had interpolated certain points in the dialogue which were not even included at rehearsal. These referred to Apollo. He had a shrewd notion that Jopp had an idea of marrying Molly Mackinder if he could, cousins though they were; and he was also aware that Jopp, knowing Molly's liking for Terry, had tried to poison her mind against him, through suggestive gossip about a little widow at Jansen, thirty miles away. He had in so far succeeded that, on the very day of the performance, Molly had declined to be driven home from the race−course by Terry, despite

the fact that Terry had won the chief race and owned the only dog−cart in the West.

As the day went on Fergus realised, as had Gow Johnson, that Jopp had raised a demon. The air was electric. The play was drawing near to its climax an attempt to capture the deputy sheriff, tie him to a tree, and leave him bound and gagged alone in the waste. There was a glitter in Terry's eyes, belying the lips which smiled in keeping with the character he presented. A look of hardness was stamped on his face, and the outlines of the temples were as sharp as the chin was set and the voice slow and penetrating.

Molly Mackinder's eyes were riveted on him. She sat very still, her hands clasped in her lap, watching his every move. Instinct told her that Terry was holding himself in; that some latent fierceness and iron force in him had emerged into life; and that he meant to have revenge on Constantine Jopp one way or another, and that soon; for she had heard the rumour flying through the hall that her cousin was the cause of the practical joke just played. From hints she had had from Constantine that very day she knew that the rumour was the truth; and she recalled now with shrinking dislike the grimace accompanying the suggestion. She had not resented it then, being herself angry with Terry because of the little widow at Jansen.

Presently the silence in the hall became acute; the senses of the audience were strained to the utmost. The acting before them was more realistic than anything they had ever seen, or were ever likely to see again in La Touche. All three conspirators, Fergus, Holden, and Jopp, realised that O'Ryan's acting had behind it an animal anger which transformed him. When he looked into their eyes it was with a steely directness harder and fiercer than was observed by the audience. Once there was occasion for O'Ryan to catch Fergus by the arm, and Fergus winced from the grip. When standing in the wings with Terry he ventured to apologise playfully for the joke, but Terry made no answer; and once again he had whispered good−naturedly as they stood together on the stage; but the reply had been a low, scornful laugh. Fergus realised that a critical moment was at hand. The play provided for some dialogue between Jopp and Terry, and he observed with anxiety that Terry now interpolated certain phrases meant to warn Constantine, and to excite him to anger also.

The moment came upon them sooner than the text of the play warranted. O'Ryan deliberately left out several sentences, and gave a later cue, and the struggle for his capture was precipitated. Terry meant to make the struggle real. So thrilling had been the scene that to an extent the audience was prepared for what followed; but they did not grasp the full reality that the play was now only a vehicle for a personal issue of a desperate character. No one had ever seen O'Ryan angry; and now that the demon of rage was on him, directed by a will suddenly grown to its full height, they saw not only a powerful character in a powerful melodrama, but a man of wild force. When the three desperadoes closed in on O'Ryan, and, with a blow from the shoulder which was not a pretence, he sent Holden into a far corner gasping for breath and moaning with pain, the audience broke out into wild cheering. It was superb acting, they thought. As most of them had never seen the play, they were not surprised when Holden did not again join the attack on the deputy sheriff. Those who did know the drama among them Molly Mackinder became dismayed, then anxious. Fergus and Jopp knew well from the blow O'Ryan had given that, unless they could drag him down, the end must be disaster to some one. They were struggling with him for personal safety now. The play was forgotten, though mechanically O'Ryan and Fergus repeated the exclamations and the few phrases belonging to the part. Jopp was silent, fighting with a malice which belongs to only half−breed, or half−bred, natures; and from far back in his own nature the distant Indian strain in him was working in savage hatred. The two were desperately hanging on to O'Ryan like pumas on a grizzly, when suddenly, with a twist he had learned from Ogami the Jap on the Smoky River, the slim Fergus was slung backward to the ground with the tendons of his arm strained and the arm itself useless for further work. There remained now Constantine Jopp, heavier and more powerful than O'Ryan.

For O'Ryan the theatre, the people, disappeared. He was a boy again on the village green, with the bully before him who had tortured his young days. He forgot the old debt to the foe who saved his life; he forgot everything, except that once again, as of old, Constantine Jopp was fighting him, with long, strong arms trying to bring him to the ground. Jopp's superior height gave him an advantage in a close grip; the strength of his gorilla−like arms was

difficult to withstand. Both were forgetful of the world, and the two other injured men, silent and awed, were watching the, fight, in which one of them, at least, was powerless to take part.

The audience was breathless. Most now saw the grim reality of the scene before them; and when at last O'Ryan's powerful right hand got a grip upon the throat of Jopp, and they saw the grip tighten, tighten, and Jopp's face go from red to purple, a hundred people gasped. Excited men made as though to move toward the stage; but the majority still believed that it all belonged to the play, and shouted "Sit down!"

Suddenly the voice of Gow Johnson was heard "Don't kill him let go, boy!"

The voice rang out with sharp anxiety, and pierced the fog of passion and rage in which O'Ryan was moving. He realised what he was doing, the real sense of it came upon him. Suddenly he let go the lank throat of his enemy, and, by a supreme effort, flung him across the stage, where Jopp lay resting on his hands, his bleared eyes looking at Terry with the fear and horror still in them which had come with that tightening grip on his throat.

Silence fell suddenly on the theatre. The audience was standing. A woman sobbed somewhere in a far corner, but the rest were dismayed and speechless. A few steps before them all was Molly Mackinder, white and frightened, but in her eyes was a look of understanding as she gazed at Terry. Breathing hard, Terry stood still in the middle of the stage, the red fog not yet gone out of his eyes, his hands clasped at his side, vaguely realising the audience again. Behind him was the back curtain in which the lights of Orion twinkled aggressively. The three men who had attacked him were still where he had thrown them.

The silence was intense, the strain oppressive. But now a drawling voice came from the back of the hall. "Are you watching the rise of Orion?" it said. It was the voice of Gow Johnson.

The strain was broken; the audience dissolved in laughter; but it was not hilarious; it was the nervous laughter of relief, touched off by a native humour always present in the dweller of the prairie.

"I beg your pardon," said Terry quietly and abstractedly to the audience.

And the scene−shifter bethought himself and let down the curtain.

The fourth act was not played that night. The people had had more than the worth of their money. In a few moments the stage was crowded with people from the audience, but both Jopp and O'Ryan had disappeared.

Among the visitors to the stage was Molly Mackinder. There was a meaning smile upon her face as she said to Dicky Fergus:

"It was quite wonderful, wasn't it like a scene out of the classics the gladiators or something?"

Fergus gave a wary smile as he answered: "Yes. I felt like saying Ave Caesar, Ave! and I watched to see Artemis drop her handkerchief."

"She dropped it, but you were too busy to pick it up. It would have been a useful sling for your arm," she added with thoughtful malice. "It seemed so real you all acted so well, so appropriately. And how you keep it up!" she added, as he cringed when some one knocked against his elbow, hurting the injured tendons.

Fergus looked at her meditatively before he answered. "Oh, I think we'll likely keep it up for some time," he rejoined ironically.

"Then the play isn't finished?" she added. "There is another act? Yes, I thought there was, the programme said four."

"Oh yes, there's another act," he answered, "but it isn't to be played now; and I'm not in it."

"No, I suppose you are not in it. You really weren't in the last act. Who will be in it?"

Fergus suddenly laughed outright, as he looked at Holden expostulating intently to a crowd of people round him. "Well, honour bright, I don't think there'll be anybody in it except little Conny Jopp and gentle Terry O'Ryan; and Conny mayn't be in it very long. But he'll be in it for a while, I guess. You see, the curtain came down in the middle of a situation, not at the end of it. The curtain has to rise again."

"Perhaps Orion will rise again you think so?" She laughed in satire; for Dicky Fergus had made love to her during the last three months with unsuppressed activity, and she knew him in his sentimental moments; which is fatal. It is fatal if, in a duet, one breathes fire and the other frost.

"If you want my opinion," he said in a lower voice, as they moved towards the door, while people tried to listen to them "if you want it straight, I think Orion has risen right up where shines the evening star Oh, say, now," he broke off, "haven't you had enough fun out of me? I tell you, it was touch and go. He nearly broke my arm would have done it, if I hadn't gone limp to him; and your cousin Conny Jopp, little Conny Jopp, was as near Kingdom Come as a man wants at his age. I saw an elephant go 'must' once in India, and it was as like O'Ryan as putty is to dough. It isn't all over either, for O'Ryan will forget and forgive, and Jopp won't. He's your cousin, but he's a sulker. If he has to sit up nights to do it, he'll try to get back on O'Ryan. He'll sit up nights, but he'll do it, if he can. And whatever it is, it won't be pretty."

Outside the door they met Gow Johnson, excitement in his eyes. He heard Fergus's last words.

"He'll see Orion rising if he sits up nights," Gow Johnson said. "The game is with Terry at last." Then he called to the dispersing gossiping crowd: "Hold on hold on, you people. I've got news for you. Folks, this is O'Ryan's night. It's his in the starry firmament. Look at him shine," he cried, stretching out his arm towards the heavens, where the glittering galaxy hung near the zenith. "Terry O'Ryan, our O'Ryan he's struck oil on his ranch it's been struck. Old Vigon found it. Terry's got his own at last. O'Ryan's in it in it alone. Now, let's hear the prairie−whisper," he shouted, in a great raucous voice. "Let's hear the prairie−whisper. What is it?"

The crowd responded in a hoarse shout for O'Ryan and his fortune. Even the women shouted all except Molly Mackinder. She was wondering if O'Ryan risen would be the same to her as O'Ryan rising. She got into her carriage with a sigh, though she said to the few friends with her:

"If it's true, it's splendid. He deserves it too. Oh, I'm glad I'm so glad." She laughed; but the laugh was a little hysterical.

She was both glad and sorry. Yet as she drove home over the prairie she was silent. Far off in the east was a bright light. It was a bonfire built on O'Ryan's ranch, near where he had struck oil struck it rich. The light grew and grew, and the prairie was alive with people hurrying towards it. La Touche should have had the news hours earlier, but the half−breed French−Canadian, Vigon, who had made the discovery, and had started for La Touche with the news, went suddenly off his head with excitement, and had ridden away into the prairie fiercely shouting his joy to an invisible world. The news had been brought in later by a farmhand.

Terry O'Ryan had really struck oil, and his ranch was a scene of decent revelry, of which Gow Johnson was master. But the central figure of it all, the man who had, in truth, risen like a star, had become to La Touche all at once its notoriety as well as its favourite, its great man as well as its friend, he was nowhere to be found. He had

been seen riding full speed into the prairie towards the Kourmash Wood, and the starlit night had swallowed him. Constantine Jopp had also disappeared; but at first no one gave that thought or consideration.

As the night went on, however, a feeling began to stir which it is not good to rouse in frontier lands. It is sure to exhibit itself in forms more objective than are found in great populations where methods of punishment are various, and even when deadly are often refined. But society in new places has only limited resources, and is thrown back on primary ways and means. La Touche was no exception, and the keener spirits, to whom O'Ryan had ever been "a white man," and who so rejoiced in his good luck now that they drank his health a hundred times in his own whiskey and cider, were simmering with desire for a public reproval of Constantine Jopp's conduct. Though it was pointed out to them by the astute Gow Johnson that Fergus and Holden had participated in the colossal joke of the play, they had learned indirectly also the whole truth concerning the past of the two men. They realised that Fergus and Holden had been duped by Jopp into the escapade. Their primitive sense of justice exonerated the humourists and arraigned the one malicious man. As the night wore on they decided on the punishment to be meted out by La Touche to the man who had not "acted on the square."

Gow Johnson saw, too late, that he had roused a spirit as hard to appease as the demon roused in O'Ryan earlier in the evening. He would have enjoyed the battue of punishment under ordinary circumstances; but he knew that Miss Molly Mackinder would be humiliated and indignant at the half−savage penalty they meant to exact. He had determined that O'Ryan should marry her; and this might be an obstruction in the path. It was true that O'Ryan now would be a rich man one of the richest in the West, unless all signs failed; but meanwhile a union of fortunes would only be an added benefit. Besides, he had seen that O'Ryan was in earnest, and what O'Ryan wanted he himself wanted even more strongly. He was not concerned greatly for O'Ryan's absence. He guessed that Terry had ridden away into the night to work off the dark spirit that was on him, to have it out with himself. Gow Johnson was a philosopher. He was twenty years older than O'Ryan, and he had studied his friend as a pious monk his missal.

He was right in his judgment. When Terry left the theatre he was like one in a dream, every nerve in his body at tension, his head aflame, his pulses throbbing. For miles he rode away into the waste along the northern trail, ever away from La Touche and his own home. He did not know of the great good fortune that had come to him; and if, in this hour, he had known, he would not have cared. As he rode on and on remorse drew him into its grasp. Shame seized him that he had let passion be his master, that he had lost his self−control, had taken a revenge out of all proportion to the injury and insult to himself. It did not ease his mind that he knew Constantine Jopp had done the thing out of meanness and malice; for he was alive to−night in the light of the stars, with the sweet crisp air blowing in his face, because of an act of courage on the part of his schooldays' foe. He remembered now that, when he was drowning, he had clung to Jopp with frenzied arms and had endangered the bully's life also. The long torture of owing this debt to so mean a soul was on him still, was rooted in him; but suddenly, in the silent searching night, some spirit whispered in his ear that this was the price which he must pay for his life saved to the world, a compromise with the Inexorable Thing. On the verge of oblivion and the end, he had been snatched back by relenting Fate, which requires something for something given, when laws are overridden and doom defeated. Yes, the price he was meant to pay was gratitude to one of shrivelled soul and innate antipathy; and he had not been man enough to see the trial through to the end! With a little increased strain put upon his vanity and pride he had run amuck. Like some heathen gladiator he had ravaged in the ring. He had gone down into the basements of human life and there made a cockpit for his animal rage, till, in the contest, brain and intellect had been saturated by the fumes and sweat of fleshly fury.

How quiet the night was, how soothing to the fevered mind and body, how the cool air laved the heated head and flushed the lungs of the rheum of passion! He rode on and on, farther and farther away from home, his back upon the scenes where his daily deeds were done. It was long past midnight before he turned his horse's head again homeward.

Buried in his thoughts, now calm and determined, with a new life grown up in him, a new strength different from the mastering force which gave him a strength in the theatre like one in delirium, he noticed nothing. He was only conscious of the omniscient night and its warm penetrating friendliness; as, in a great trouble, when no words can be spoken, a cool kind palm steals into the trembling hand of misery and stills it, gives it strength and life and an even pulse. He was now master in the house of his soul, and had no fear or doubt as to the future, or as to his course.

His first duty was to go to Constantine Jopp, and speak his regret like a man. And after that it would be his duty to carry a double debt his life long for the life saved, for the wrong done. He owed an apology to La Touche, and he was scarcely aware that the native gentlemanliness in him had said through his fever of passion over the footlights: "I beg your pardon." In his heart he felt that he had offered a mean affront to every person present, to the town where his interests lay, where his heart lay.

Where his heart lay Molly Mackinder! He knew now that vanity had something to do, if not all to do, with his violent acts, and though there suddenly shot through his mind, as he rode back, a savage thrill at the remembrance of how he had handled the three, it was only a passing emotion. He was bent on putting himself right with Jopp and with La Touche. With the former his way was clear; he did not yet see his way as to La Touche. How would he be able to make the amende honorable to La Touche?

By and by he became somewhat less absorbed and enveloped by the comforting night. He saw the glimmer of red light afar, and vaguely wondered what it was. It was in the direction of O'Ryan's Ranch, but he thought nothing of it, because it burned steadily. It was probably a fire lighted by settlers trailing to the farther north. While the night wore on he rode as slowly back to the town as he had galloped from it like a centaur with a captive.

Again and again Molly Mackinder's face came before him; but he resolutely shut it out of his thoughts. He felt that he had no right to think of her until he had "done the right thing" by Jopp and by La Touche. Yet the look in her face as the curtain came down, it was not that of one indifferent to him or to what he did. He neared the town half−way between midnight and morning. Almost unconsciously avoiding the main streets, he rode a roundabout way towards the little house where Constantine Jopp lived. He could hear loud noises in the streets, singing, and hoarse shouts. Then silence came, then shouts, and silence again. It was all quiet as he rode up to Jopp's house, standing on the outskirts of the town. There was a bright light in the window of a room.

Jopp, then, was still up. He would not wait till tomorrow. He would do the right thing now. He would put things straight with his foe before he slept; he would do it at any sacrifice to his pride. He had conquered his pride.

He dismounted, threw the bridle over a post, and, going into the garden, knocked gently at the door. There was no response. He knocked again, and listened intently. Now he heard a sound−like a smothered cry or groan. He opened the door quickly and entered. It was dark. In another room beyond was a light. From it came the same sound he had heard before, but louder; also there was a shuffling footstep. Springing forward to the half−open door, he pushed it wide, and met the terror− stricken eyes of Constantine Jopp the same look that he had seen at the theatre when his hands were on Jopp's throat, but more ghastly.

Jopp was bound to a chair by a lasso. Both arms were fastened to the chair−arm, and beneath them, on the floor, were bowls into which blood dripped from his punctured wrists.

He had hardly taken it all in the work of an instant when he saw crouched in a corner, madness in his eyes, his half−breed Vigon. He grasped the situation in a flash. Vigon had gone mad, had lain in wait in Jopp's house, and when the man he hated had seated himself in the chair, had lassoed him, bound him, and was slowly bleeding him to death.

He had no time to think. Before he could act Vigon was upon him also, frenzy in his eyes, a knife clutched in his hand. Reason had fled, and he only saw in O'Ryan the frustrator of his revenge. He had watched the drip, drip from his victim's wrists with a dreadful joy.

They were man and man, but O'Ryan found in this grisly contest a vaster trial of strength than in the fight upon the stage a few hours ago. The first lunge that Vigon made struck him on the tip of the shoulder, and drew blood; but he caught the hand holding the knife in an iron grasp, while the half−breed, with superhuman strength, tried in vain for the long brown throat of the man for whom he had struck oil. As they struggled and twisted, the eyes of the victim in the chair watched them with agonised emotions. For him it was life or death. He could not cry out his mouth was gagged; but to O'Ryan his groans were like a distant echo of his own hoarse gasps as he fought his desperate fight. Terry was as one in an awful dream battling with vague impersonal powers which slowly strangled his life, yet held him back in torture from the final surrender.

For minutes they struggled. At last O'Ryan's strength came to the point of breaking, for Vigon was a powerful man, and to this was added a madman's energy. He felt that the end was coming. But all at once, through the groans of the victim in the chair, Terry became conscious of noises outside such noises as he had heard before he entered the house, only nearer and louder. At the same time he heard a horse's hoofs, then a knock at the door, and a voice calling: "Jopp! Jopp!"

He made a last desperate struggle, and shouted hoarsely.

An instant later there were footsteps in the room, followed by a cry of fright and amazement.

It was Gow Johnson. He had come to warn Constantine Jopp that a crowd were come to tar and feather him, and to get him away on his own horse.

Now he sprang to the front door, called to the approaching crowd for help, then ran back to help O'Ryan. A moment later a dozen men had Vigon secure, and had released Constantine Jopp, now almost dead from loss of blood.

As they took the gag from his mouth and tied their handkerchiefs round his bleeding wrists, Jopp sobbed aloud. His eyes were fixed on Terry O'Ryan. Terry met the look, and grasped the limp hand lying on the chair−arm.

"I'm sorry, O'Ryan, I'm sorry for all I've done to you," Jopp sobbed. "I was a sneak, but I want to own it. I want to be square now. You can tar and feather me, if you like. I deserve it." He looked at the others. "I deserve it," he repeated.

"That's what the boys had thought would be appropriate," said Gow Johnson with a dry chuckle, and the crowd looked at each other and winked. The wink was kindly, however. "To own up and take your gruel" was the easiest way to touch the men of the prairie.

A half−hour later the roisterers, who had meant to carry Constantine Jopp on a rail, carried Terry O'Ryan on their shoulders through the town, against his will. As they passed the house where Miss Mackinder lived some one shouted:

"Are you watching the rise of Orion?"

Many a time thereafter Terry O'Ryan and Molly Mackinder looked at the galaxy in the evening sky with laughter and with pride. It had played its part with Fate against Constantine Jopp and the little widow at Jansen. It had never shone so brightly as on the night when Vigon struck oil on O'Ryan's ranch. But Vigon had no memory of that. Such is the irony of life.