Annette, The Metis Spy

Joseph Edmund Collins

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ANNETTE, THE METIS SPY:
A HEROINE OF THE N.W. REBELLION.
BY
EDMUND COLLINS.

CHAPTER I. LE CHEF FALLS IN LOVE WITH THE HALF−BREED MAIDEN.

The sun was hanging low in the clear blue over the prairie, as two riders hurried their ponies along a blind trail toward a distant range of purple hills that lay like sleepy watchers along the banks of the Red River.

The beasts must have ridden far, for their flanks were white with foam, and their riders were splashed with froth and mud,

“The day is nearly done, mon ami,” said one, stretching out his arm and measuring the height of the sun from the horizon. “How red it is; and mark these blood−stains upon its face! It gives warning to the tyrants who oppress these fair plains; but they cannot read the signs.”

There was not a motion anywhere in all the heavens, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the dull trample of the ponies' hoofs upon the sod. On either side was the wide level prairie, covered with thick, tall grass, through which blazed the purple, crimson and garnet blooms, of vetch and wild pease. The tiger lily, too, rose here and there like a sturdy queen of beauty with its great terra cotta petals, specked with umber−brown. Here and there, also, upon the mellow level, stood a clump of poplars or white oaks—prim like virgins without suitors, with their robes drawn close about them; but when over the unmeasured plain the wind blew, they bowed their heads gracefully, as a company of eastern girls when the king commands.

As the two horsemen rode silently around one of these clumps, there suddenly came through the hush the sound of a girl's voice singing. The song was exquisitely worded and touching, and the singer's voice was sweet and limpid as the notes of a bobolink. They marvelled much who the singer might be, and proposed that both should leave the path and join the unknown fair one. Dismounting, they fastened their horses in the shelter of the poplars, and proceeded on foot toward the point whence the singing came. A few minutes walk brought the two beyond a small poplar grove, and there, upon a fallen tree−bole, in the delicious cool of the afternoon, they saw the songstress sitting. She was a maiden of about eighteen years, and her soft, silky, dark hair was over her shoulders. In girlish fancy she had woven for herself a crown of flowers out of marigolds and daisies, and put it upon her head.

She did not hear the footsteps of the men upon the soft prairie, and they did not at once reveal themselves, but stood a little way back listening to her. She had ceased her song, and was gazing beyond intently. On the naked limb of a desolate, thunder−riven tree that stood apart from its lush, green−boughed neighbours, sat a thrush in a most melancholy attitude. Every few seconds he would utter a note of song, sometimes low and sorrowful, then in a louder key, and more plaintive, as if he were calling for some responsive voice from far away over the prairie.

“Dear bird, you have lost your mate, and are crying for her,” the girl said, stretching out her little brown hand compassionately toward the crouching songster. “Your companions have gone to the South, and you wait here, trusting that your mate will come back, and not journey to summer lands without you. Is not that so, my poor bird? Ah, would that I could go with you where there are always flowers, and ever can be heard the ripple of little brooks. Here the leaves will soon fall, ah, me! and the daisies wither; and, instead of the delight of summer, we shall have only the cry of hungry wolves, and the bellowing of bitter winds above the lonesome plains. But could I go to the South, there is no one who would sing over my absence one lamenting note, as you sing, my bird, for the mate with whom you had so many hours of sweet love−making in these prairie thickets. Nobody loves me, woos me, cares for me, or sings about me. I am not even as the wild rose here, though it seems to be alone, and is forbidden to take its walk; for it holds up its bright face and can see its lover; and he breathes back upon the kind, willing, breeze−puffs, through all the summer, sweet−scented love messages, tidings of a matrimony as delicious as that of the angels.”

She stood up, and raised her arms above her head yearningly. The autumn wind was cooing in her hair, and softly swaying its silken meshes.

“Farewell, my desolate one; may your poor little heart be gladder soon. Could I but be a bird, and you would have me for a companion, your lamenting should not be for long. We should journey, loitering and love−making all the long sweet way, from here to the South, and have no repining.”

Turning around, she perceived two men standing close beside her. She became very confused, and clutched for her robe to cover her face, but she had strayed away among the flowers without it. Very deeply she blushed

that the strangers should have heard her; and she spake not.

"Bonjour, ma belle fille." It was the tall commanding one who had addressed her. He drew closer, and she, in a very low voice, her olive face stained with a faint flush of crimson, answered,

"Bonjour, Monsieur."

"Be not abashed. We heard what you were saying to the bird, and I think the sentiments were very pretty."

This but confused the little prairie beauty all the more. But the gallant stranger took no heed of her embarrassment.

"With part of your declaration I cannot agree. A maiden with such charms as yours is not left long to sigh for a lover. Believe me, I should like to be that bird, to whom you said you would, if you could, offer love and companionship."

The stranger made no disguise of his admiration for the beautiful girl of the plains. He stepped up by her side, and was about to take her hand after delivering himself of this gallant speech, but she quickly drew it away. Then, turning to his companion,

"We must sup before leaving this settlement, and we shall accompany this bonny maiden home. Go you and fetch the horses; Mademoiselle and myself shall walk together." The other did as he was directed, and the stranger and the songstress took their way along a little grassy path. The ravishing beauty of the girl was more than the amorously− disposed stranger could resist, and suddenly stretching out his arms, he sought to kiss her. But the soft−eyed fawn of the desert soon showed herself in the guise of a petit bete sauvage. With an angry scream, she bounded away from his grasp.

"How do you dare take this liberty with me, Monsieur," she said, her eyes kindled with anger and hurt pride. "You first meanly come and intrude upon my privacy; next you must turn what knowledge you gain by acting spy and eavesdropper, into a means of offering me insult. You have heard me say that I had no lover to sigh for me. I spoke the truth: I *have* no such lover. But you I will not accept as one." And turning with flushed cheek and gleaming eyes, she entered a cosy, clean−kept cottage. But she soon reflected that she had been guilty of an inhospitable act in not asking the strangers to enter. Suddenly turning, she walked rapidly back, and overtook the crest−fallen wooer and his companion, and said in a voice from which every trace of her late anger had disappeared.

"Entrez, Messieurs."

The man's countenance speedily lost its gloom, and, respectfully touching his hat, he said:

"Oui, Mademoiselle, avec le plus grand plaisir." Tripping lightly ahead she announced the two strangers, and then returned, going to the bars where the cows were lowing, waiting to be milked. The persistent stranger had not, by any means, made up his mind to desist in his wooing.

"The colt shies," he murmured, "when she first sees the halter. Presently, she becomes tractable enough." Then, while he sat waiting for the evening meal, blithely through the hush of the exquisite evening came the voice of the girl. She was singing from *La Claire Fontaine*.

"A la claire fontaine
Je m'allais promener,
J'ai trouve l'eau si belle
Que je me suis baigne"

Her song ended with her work, and as she passed the strangers with her two flowing pails of yellow milk, Riel whispered softly, as he touched her sweet little hand:

"Ah, ma petite amie!"

The same flash came in her eyes, the same proud blood appeared red through the dusk of her cheek, but she restrained herself. He was a guest under her father's roof, and she would suffer the offence to pass. The persistent gallant was more crest−fallen by this last silent rebuke than by the first with its angry words. The first, in his vanity, he had deemed an outburst of petulance, instead of an expression of personal dislike, especially as the girl had so suddenly calmed herself, and extended hospitalities.

He gnashed his teeth that a half−breed girl, in an obscure village, should resent his advances; he for whom, if his own understanding was to be trusted, so many bright eyes were languishing. At the evening meal he received courteous, kindly attention from Annette; but this was all. He related with much eloquence all that he had seen in the big world in the East, during his school days, and took good care that his hosts should know how important a

person he was in the colony of Red River. To his mortification, he frequently observed in the midst of one of his most self−glorifying speeches that the girl's eyes were abstracted. He was certain that she was not interested in him, or in his exploits.

“Can she have a lover?” he asked himself, a keen arrow of jealousy entering at his heart, and vibrating through his veins. “No, this cannot be. She said in her musings on the prairie, that she had nobody who would sing a sad song if she were to go to the South. Stop! She may love, and not find her passion requited. I shall stay here until the morrow, and let the great cause wait. Through the evening I shall reveal who I am, and then see what is in the wind.”

During the course of the evening the audacious stranger was somewhat confounded to learn that the father of his fair hostess was none other than Colonel Marton, an ex−officer of the Hudson Bay Company, a man of wide influence among all the Metis people, and one of the most sturdy champions of the half−breed cause. Indeed he was aware that Colonel Marton was at this very time about preaching resistance to the people, organising forces, and preparing to strike a blow at the authority of the Government in the North−West.

“It is discourteous, perhaps, Mademoiselle, that I should not disclose to you who I am, even though the safety of my present undertaking demands that I should remain unknown.”

“If Monsieur has good reasons, or any reasons, for withholding his name, I pray that he will not consider himself under any obligation to reveal it.”

“It would be absurd to keep such a secret, Ma petite Brighteye, from the beautiful daughter of a man so prominent in our holy cause as Colonel Marton. You this evening entertain, Mademoiselle, none other than Louis Riel, the Metis chief.”

“Monsieur Riel,” exclaimed the girl in astonishment, and somewhat in awe. “Why, we thought that Monsieur was far beyond the prairie, providing ammunition for the troops.”

“I have been there Mademoiselle, and seen every trusty Metis armed, and ready to follow when the leaders cry Allons!”

Paul, the girl's brother, believed that there had never lived a hero so brave and so mighty as the man now under his father's roof. As for poor Annette, she bethought of her outburst of temper and lack of respect toward the chief; and she trembled to think that she might have given offense to a man so illustrious, and one who was the head of the sacred cause of her father and of her people.

“But why should he address a poor simple girl like me?” she mused; and then as she reflected that the leader had a wife and children in Montana, and if report spoke true, a half−breed bride in a prairie village besides, a round red spot came into each cheek and burned there like a little fire.

The chief watched the changing colour in the maiden's face, and saw also in the great dark, velvety eyes, the reflection of her thoughts as they came and went, plainly as you may see the shadows upon an autumn day chase each other over the prairie meadows.

Paul went out for a little; the chief's companion had retired to his couch; and Riel was left alone with the girl.

“Mademoiselle must not shrink from me; she is too beautiful to be unkind. Ah ma petite Amie, those adorable lips of yours are made to kiss and kiss, not to pout and cry a lover nay. Through this wide land there is many a maid who would glory in the love, my beautiful girl, that I offer you.” He advanced towards the maid, trembling with his passion, and dropped upon his knee.

“You would not let me kiss your lovely lips; pray sweet lady of my heart, let me take your sweet little hand.”

The girl was trembling like a bird when the eagle's wings hover over its nest. “O, why does a great hero like Monsieur address such words to me? I am only a simple girl, living here upon the plains; besides, if I could give the brave leader my heart, it would be wrong to do so, for he is already wedded.”

“Do not speak of the ceremonies which men have muttered, binding man and woman, when the *heart* cries out. Do not deny me your love my sweet girl,” and the villain once more seized the maiden's waist, and sought to kiss her lips. But she screamed, and struggled from his embrace.

“Paul, Paul, mon frere, come to me.” Her cries speedily brought her brother. But Monsieur Riel had taken his seat, and he lowered upon the girl who sat like a frightened fawn upon her chair, her great eyes glimmering with starting tears.

“What is wrong Annette?” the boy asked, leaning affectionately over his sister.

“She is not brave Paul. A shadow passed the window which was nothing more than my own, and she believed

it to be that of a hostile Indian."

"What a silly girl you are, Annette," her brother said, softly smiting her cheek with his finger−tips.

The maiden did not make any explanation, but in a very wretched and embarrassed way arose and said, "Good night."

Nothing was said about the matter in the morning, and as the girl passed on her way to milk the cows Riel murmured,

"Mademoiselle will not say anything of the cause of her out−cry last night?"

"I will not Monsieur; if you will promise not to address any words of love−making to me again."

"I promise nothing, foolish maiden; but I have to ask that you will not make of Louis Riel an enemy."

When breakfast was ended he perceived Annette rush to the window, and then hastily and with a dainty coyness withdraw her head from the pane; and at the same moment he heard a sprightly tune whistle'd. Looking down the meadow he saw a tall, well−formed young white man, a gun on his back, and a dog at his heels, walking along the little path toward the cottage,

"This is the lover," he muttered; "curses upon him." From that moment he hated with all the bitterness of his nature the man now striding carelessly up towards the cottage door.

"Bonjour, mademoiselle et messieurs" the newcomer said in cheery tones, as he entered, making a low bow.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Stephens, was the reply. Louis Riel, intently watching, saw the girl's colour come and go as she spoke to the visitor. The young man stayed only for a few moments, and the chief observed that everybody in the house treated him as if in some way he had been the benefactor of all. When he arose to go, Paul, who knew of every widgeon in the mere beyond the cottonwood grove, and where the last flock of quail had been seen to alight, followed him out of the door, and very secretly communicated his knowledge. Annette had seen a large flock of turkeys upon the prairie a few moments walk south of the poplar grove, and perhaps they had not yet gone away.

"When did you see them, ma chere demoiselle?" enquired Stephens. You know turkeys do not settle down like immigrants on one spot, and wait till we inhabitants of the plains come out and shoot them. Was it last week, or only the day before yesterday?" There was a very merry twinkle in his eye as he went on with this banter. Annette affected to pout, but she answered.

"This morning, while the dew was shining upon the grass, and you, I doubt not, were sleeping soundly, I was abroad on the plains for the cows. It was then I saw them. I am glad, however, that you have pointed out the difference between turkeys and immigrants. I did not know it before." He handed her a sun−flower which he had plucked on the way, saying,

"There, for your valuable information, I give you that. Next time I come, if you are able to tell me where I can find several flocks, I shall bring you some coppers." With a world of mischief in his eyes, he disappeared, and Annette, in spite of herself, could not conceal from everybody in the house a quick little sigh at his departure.

"It seems to me this Monsieur Stephens is a great favourite with you folk?" said M. Riel, when the young man had left the cottage. "Now had I come for sport, no pretty eyes would have seen any flocks to reserve for me." And he gave a somewhat sneering glance at poor Annette, who was pretending to be engaged in examining the petals of the sun−flower, although she was all the while thinking of the mischievous, manly, sunny−hearted lad who had given it to her. M. Riel's words and the sneer were lost, so far as she was concerned. Her ears were where her heart was, out on the plain beyond the cottonwood, where she could see the tall, straight, lithe figure of young Stephens, and his dog at his heels.

"Oui, Monsieur," returned Paul, "Monsieur Stephens is a very great favourite with our family. We are under an obligation to him that it will be difficult ever to repay."

"Whence comes this benefactor," queried M. Riel, with an ugly sneer, "and how has he placed you under such an obligation?" Then, reflecting that he was showing a bitterness respecting the young man which he could neither explain nor justify, he said:

'"Mais, pardonnez−moi. Think me not rude for asking these questions. When pretty eyes are employed to see, and pretty lips to tell of, game for one sportsman in preference to another, the neglected one might be excused for seeking to know in what way fortune has been kind with his rival."

"Shall I tell the whole story, Annette" enquired Paul, or will you do so?"

"O, I know that you will not leave anything out that can show the bravery of Mr. Stephens," replied the girl.

“Well, last spring, Annette was spending some days with her aunt, a few miles up Red River. It was the flood time, and as you remember, the river was swollen to a point higher than it had ever reached within the memory of any body in the settlement. Annette is venturesome, and since a child has shown a keen delight in going upon boats, or paddling a canoe; so, one day, during the visit which I have mentioned, she went into a birch that swung in a little pond, formed behind her uncle's premises by the over−flowing of the stream's channel. Untying the canoe, she seized the blade and began to paddle about in the lazy water. Presently she reached the eddies, which, since a child, she has always called the 'rings of the water−witches,' wherever she learned that term. Her cousin Violette was standing in the doorway as she saw Annette move off, and she cried out to her to beware of the eddies; but my sister, wayward and reckless as it is her habit to be in such matters, merely replied with a laugh; and then as the canoe began to turn round and round in the gurgling circles she cried out.

“I am in the rings of the water−witches. C'est bon! bon! C'est magnifique! O I wish you were with me, Violette, ma chere. It is so delightful to go round and round.” A little way beyond, not more than twice the canoe's length, rushed by roaring, the full tide of the river.

“Beware, Annette, beware, for the love of heaven, of the river. If you get a little further out, and these eddies must drag you out, you will be in the mad current, and no arm can paddle the canoe to land out of the flood. Then, dear, there is the fall below, and the fans of the mill. Come back, won't you! But my sister heeded not the words. She only laughed, and began dipping water from the eddies with the paddle−blade, as if it were a spoon she had in her hand. 'I am dipping water from the witches−rings,' she cried. 'How the drops sparkle! Every one is a glittering jewel. I wish you were here with me, Violette!' Suddenly and in an altered tone, she cried, 'Mon Dieu! My paddle is gone.' The paddle had no sooner glided out into the rushing, turbulent waters than the canoe followed it, and Annette saw herself drifting on to her doom. Half a mile below was the fall, and at the side of the fall, went ever and ever around with tremendous violence, the rending fans of the water−mill. Annette knew full well that any drift boat, or log, or raft, carried down the river at freshet−flow, was always swept into the toils of the inexorable wheels. Yet, if she were reckless and without heed a few minutes before, I am told that now she was calm. Violette gave the alarm that Annette was adrift in the river without a paddle, and in a few seconds every body living near had turned out, and was running down the shore. Several brought paddies, but it took hard running to keep up with the canoe, for the flood was racing at a speed of eight miles an hour. When they did get up in line each one flung out a paddle. But one fell too far out, and another not far enough. About fifteen men were along the banks in violent excitement, and every one of them saw nothing but doom for Annette. As the canoe neared a point about two hundred yards above the falls, a young white−man—all the rest were bois−brules—rushed out upon the bank, with a paddle in his hand, and without a word sprang into the mad waters. With a few strokes he was at the side of the canoe, and put the paddle into Annette's hand. 'Here;' he said, 'Keep away from the mill; that is your only danger; and steer sheer over the falls, getting as close as possible to the left bank.' The height of the fall, as you are aware, was not more than fifteen or eighteen feet, and there was plenty of water below, with not very much danger from rocks. 'Go you on shore now and I will meet my doom, or achieve my safety,' my sister said; but the young man answered, 'Nay, I will go over the fall too: I can then be of some service to you.' So he swam along by the canoe's side directing my sister, and shaping the course of the prow on the very brink of the fall. Then all shot over together. The canoe and Annette, and the young man were buried far under the terrible mass of water, but they soon came to the surface again, when the heroic stranger seized my sister, and through the fury of the mad churning flood, landed her unhurt upon the bank. That young man was Philip Edmund Stephens, whom you saw here this morning. Is it any wonder, think you, Monsieur, that when Annette sees wild turkeys upon the prairie, she keeps the knowledge of it to herself till she gets the ear of her deliverer?

“A very brave act, indeed, on the part of this young man,” replied the swarthy M. Riel. “He has excellent judgment, I perceive, or he would not so readily have calculated that no harm could come to any one who could swim well, by being carried over the Falls.”

Annette's eyes flashed a little at this cold blooded discounting of the generous, uncalculating bravery of her young preserver; but she made no reply.

“This Monsieur Stephens is, if I mistake not, Mademoiselle, a very zealous servant of Government, and his chief duty now is to keep watch over the assemblies held by the Half−breed people. I cannot suppose that Colonel Marton is aware of the intimacy between a deadly enemy of our cause and the members of his household.”

“Indeed, Monsieur, there is no intimacy more than what you have seen,” the girl replied, the roses now out of

her cheek. “Thrice, since rescuing me, Mr. Stephens has been at our home, and I believe that, henceforth, his duty will take him to a distant part of the territory.” As she said these words her eyes fell, and her bosom heaved a little.

Riel was upon his feet. “If I find this young spy anywhere about this settlement again, I shall see that he is cared for.” Then as Paul and his companion went out, he drew himself to his full height and continued:

“Annette, get your heart away from this young man; such love can only bring you ruin. From me you shall hear again, and hear soon. Farewell.” As the girl put out her hand, he drew her suddenly into his arms, and before she could cry or struggle, kissed her upon the mouth.

Then he was gone.

CHAPTER II. ANNETTE FORMS AN HEROIC RESOLVE.

All day long Annette was in sore trouble, for she felt that the words of the rebel chief boded no good to herself or to her deliverer.

“Why should he think that I loved Captain Stephens?” the girl murmured, as a soft tinge of crimson stole into her cheek. “I am sure that I behaved in no way to him, that a girl should not act towards the man who had risked his life to save hers.”

With the dusk came her father, his horse covered with foam; for he had ridden fast and far.

“Why is my daughter's cheek so pale?” he asked as he came into the sweet, tidy cottage, with its trailing morning glories, and bunches of mignonette.

“I have been a little disturbed, papa. The Metis chief and one of his friends stayed here last night. O, I do fear that we are now very near an outbreak. Is it not so, my father? Will you not tell me?”

“It is even so, child. Already nearly a thousand men, including Bois− Brule's and Indians have arms in their hands, and await the words of their leaders.”

“But, papa, can good really come of this insurrection which you propose? I mean, mon pere, can you and Monsieur Riel, with your scattered followers, who have no money, no garrisons, no means of holding out in a long struggle, hope to overcome the numerous trained soldiers of the Government, with the money and the enthusiasm of a nation at their back?”

“You talk, my daughter, as if some friend of Government had been pouring his tale into your ear. Now, Annette, child, I love you very dearly, and I am grateful to this young man who has saved your life; but as the opinions which you have expressed could only have come from him I must ask that further intercourse between you and him ceases till this great issue has been fought out and settled.”

“Captain Stephens, mon pere, has never uttered a word to me about these matters; and the opinions which I have, worthless though they be, are my own. Ah, papa, you surely have not forgotten the last struggle. Monsieur Riel, then, had some sort of right to set up his authority in a province which for a time came not under the jurisdiction of the Company or of the Dominion; the clergy were at his back; he had possession of the strongest Fort in the North−West Territories, and provisions enough to supply his forces for a year. Yet, at the very beating of the soldiers' drums he fled like a felon, and was obliged to beg a mouthful of food in his flight to exile. The circumstances now are not nearly so auspicious. How, then, can you hope to succeed?”

“You are not familiar, child, with affairs in these territories; and you neither know the extent of the discontent, nor the causes which have led to it. The Half−Breed people and the Indian tribes have been treated by government and their agents, worse than we would use our dogs. Instead of sending honest and capable men to rule here, they appoint adventurers whose only object is to make money during their residence, at the expense of the people. You are not wholly ignorant of the conduct of Lieutenant−Governor Tewtney. Since his arrival in the territories he has never been known to give a patient hour to hearing the grievances of the half−breed people; but he is forever abroad grabbing up plots of choice land, and securing timber and mineral leases; or furthering the schemes of knots of friends and advisers gathered about him. I shall relate one instance which has just came to light, and it will serve as an example of this man's career. Some time ago a friend of his imported a large quantity of meat, but upon arrival it was found to be unwholesome and foul. This man went to Governor Tewtney and he said.

“'All my consignment of meat is spoilt. Isn't that a great loss?'

“'No loss at all my dear friend,' replied the Governor: 'give it to the Indians and half−breeds.' Now you are aware that government had undertaken to give relief to the Indians and to the Metis, with employment that would bring them food. Well, this meat was given to both, and for every pound of the foul meat the wretched Breed or Indian was charged fifteen, cents. One of the chief's and also a Metis, went to the Governor and complained that the meat was vile and unwholesome; but they only received this in reply:

“'You are becoming very choice, you fellows. You will eat this meat, or starve and be d—d.'

“Year after year, the half−breed who has toiled upon his holding, has applied for a grant of this holding under the law, but has applied in vain; and a friend of Mr. Tewtney coming in may drive him off his farm, and profit by his toil and skill.

"All these things have been represented at Ottawa by the priests and the people; and the only reply that has been obtained, in effect, is this:

"'What a troublesome, noisy set these savages and half−breeds are! Cease pestering us. We will not, and cannot, do more for you than we have done.'

"When a new minister of these Territories was appointed, our priests waited at his office and besought him for God's holy sake, to listen to the people's wrongs; and to enquire into the doings of Governor Tewtney; but it is a fact that he actually went asleep in his chair, while the delegates were stating their case. Instead of making enquiry into the grievances, he hastily packed his trunks and went away to England to obtain a knighthood, which had been promised to him. While he was running back and forth between his lodgings and Downing street, the officials here were laying upon our backs the last weight that our endurance could bear."

While he was speaking there suddenly arose, outside, a jingling of bells, and a clashing of cymbals; and looking through the window father and daughter beheld a numerous band of painted Indians advancing, brandishing tomahawks, and singing war songs.

"I hope these savages will not make a bungle of things," the Colonel said; "I wonder who has started them upon the war−path?" Then going to the door he raised his voice.

"Where go my friends the Crees?"

The chief, a tall and magnificent savage, put his finger on his lips and advanced:

"Me speak inside with the colonel. Chief Louis Riel has ordered our braves to surround the Hickory Bush, when the moon rises. Captain Stephens, police spy, and heap of other spies there. Take em all and put em in wigwam a long way off. Mebbe shoot em. Tall Elk comes to see if Great Colonel would like to come too."

"Thank you, chief; I would rather not be at the capture of Captain Stephens. You know he saved la Reina here, from being drowned in the whirlpool."

The "Queen" was the name by which Annette was known among all the Indians and Metis that lived upon the plain. "But," continued the Colonel, "I hope that Tall Elk and his braves will do no harm to Stephens. He is not with us, but he is a brave, good man, and love our people. In acting against us he is only doing his duty."

"Ugh! It is well," grunted the chief. "Will look after Stephens myself."

But this assurance did not satisfy Annette, who stood, during the dialogue, with throbbing heart and pale cheek. The threats of the Rebel Chief still lingered in her ear; and she knew that her deliverer's life would not be safe in the hands of the terrible man. She said naught, but a bold resolution passed like a flame through her brain. In a little while the chief departed, and at the head of his painted warriors struck out across the dark prairie in the direction of Hickory Bush. The Bush was about twelve miles distant, and the rising of the moon would be in two hours.

In a little while the girl said, "Papa, I am so disturbed to−night that I cannot sit up with you as long as usual: good−night." Then she kissed her father who caressed her silken hair; and she left the room.

Now, Annette had as a companion or attendant, an orphan girl, named Julie. She was not tall and graceful like Annette, but her olive face was stained with delicate carnation, and her little mouth resembled a rose just about to open. She was intelligent, active and affectionate; and the great aim of her existence was to serve a mistress whom she almost adored.

"Come to me, Julie," Annette whispered as she passed the girl.

"Well, mademoiselle, what can Julie do?"

"Captain Stephens, as you are aware, ma petite Julie, is to be captured to−night by those savages who have just left our house. Monsieur Riel hates my deliverer, and I shudder to think that he should fall into his hands. I mean to−night to warn him of his danger.

"Brava!" exclaimed the girl; "c'est bon! It is so like my brave mistress. Ah, mademoiselle, I have seen Monsieur le Chef look upon you; and there was great love in his eye. But it was not the good, the *holy* kind. Ah! It was bad. He hates le Capitaine, because he saved you from the chute.

"Ah, then my little Julie, you know? Yes, it is all as you say; and this is why my heart flutters so for the fate of Monsieur Stephens. I want my bay saddled and led quietly out to the poplar bush; and I shall come there in a little."

Julie kissed the forehead of her mistress, and then tripped away daintily and softly as a fawn to do the bidding.

Before ten minutes had elapsed, an Indian boy, of lithe and graceful figure, walked swiftly down the path

toward the bush. As he reached the little grove, another figure emerged from the shadow and said in a low tone:

"Tres bien!" This was Julie, and the Indian boy was Annette, disguised so perfectly that her father could not have guessed the truth were he standing by. She wore a buff coat and deer skin leggings; and about her waist was a belt in which were stuck a long knife and a pair of pistols. She patted her pony, took the bridle in her little brown hand, and vaulted lightly into her seat. "There now, Julie; return quickly, and go to your room."

"Au plaisir, portez−vous bien, ma maitresse."

"I shall take care of myself. Adieu;" and she galloped down the grassy knoll, and out upon the prairie.

Although the plain was a great, dusky blur, this observant maiden knew the route as accurately as if the meridian sun were shining; and her horse, guessing that his mistress was on an errand of life and death, flew lightly over the level sod, as if he were a thing woven of the winds. She was aware that her horse could outdistance an Indian pony; and after half an hour's ride knew that the band must now be fully a couple of miles in the rear. But she kept on till she judged that fifteen minutes more must bring her to the encampment at Hickory Bush. Then through the hush of the night came to her ear a far off, indistinct sound, which resembled galloping thunder. She knew not what it could mean, unless indeed it was the tumult of some distant waterfall, borne hither now because, mayhap, a storm was brewing, and the dense air was a better carrier of the sound. The moon was now pushing its wide yellow edge above the plain, and she was enabled to see objects for a considerable distance around. But nothing met her view, save here and there a hummock or a clump of poplars. She rode on marvelling what the sound might be, for the noise was constantly becoming louder, and growing

"Nearer, clearer, deadlier than before"

when lo! out of the west come what seemed a dim shadow moving across the plain. With hushed breath she watched the dark mass move along like some destroying tempest and, as it seemed to her, with ten thousand devils at its core. Chained to the ground with a terrible awe, she stood fast for many minutes, till at last in the dim light she saw eye−balls that blazed like fire, heads crested with rugged, uncouth horns and shaggy manes; and then snouts thrust down, flaring nostrils, and rearing tails.

"My God, a buffalo herd!" she exclaimed. Close at hand was a tall boulder in the shelter of which she instantly secured her horse; then running a few paces to where stood a tall, sturdy poplar, she clambered into its branches.

Then the tremendous mass, headed by maddened bulls, with blazing eyes and foaming nostrils, drove onward toward the south, like an unchained hurricane. Some of the terrified beasts ran against the trees, crushing horns and skull, and fell prone upon the plain to be trampled to jelly by the hundreds of thousands in rear. The tree upon which the girl had taken refuge received many a shock from a crazed bull; and it seemed to Annette from her perch in the branches, as if all the face of the plains was being hurled toward the south in the wildest turmoil. Hell itself let loose could present no such spectacle as this myriad mass of brute life sweeping over the lonely plain under the elfin light of the new−risen moon. Clouds of steam, wreathing themselves into spectral shapes rose from the dusky, writhing mass, and the flaming of myriad eyeballs in the gloom presented a picture more terrible than ever came into the imagination of the writer of the Inferno.

The spectacle, as observed by the girl some twenty feet from the ground, might be likened somewhat to a turbulent sea when a sturdy tide sets against the storm, and the mad waves tumble hither and thither, foiled and impelled, yet for all the confusion and obstruction moving in one direction with a sweep and a force that no power could chain.

Circling among and around the strange dusk clouds of steam that went up from the herd were scores of turkey buzzards, their obscene heads bent downward, their sodden eyes gleaming with expectancy. Well they knew that many a gorgeous feast awaited them wherever boulder, tree or swamp lay in the path of the mighty herd. At last the face of the prairie had ceased its surging; no lurid eye−ball light gleamed out of the dusk; and the tempest of cattle had passed, and went rolling out into the unbounded stretches of the dim, yellow plain.

When the ground was clear she descended from the tree, every limb trembling, lest in the delay the Indians should have accomplished their object. When she reached her horse, she found near by a heap of dead and struggling buffalo, which in their headlong race had run over the bluff front of the boulder. When she resumed her gallop she observed that the great amplitude of rich grasses was like unto a ploughed field. The herbage had been literally crushed into mire, and this the innumerable hoofs had churned up with the soft rich soil. The leguminous odors of the trodden clover and the rank masses of wild pease, together with the dank earthy smell of the broken

sod, rose offensively in the girl's face. Her course now lay along an upland covered with straggling copses of white oak and poplar. In the dim valley beyond, lying drunken under the moonlight, was Hickory Bush. Upon the solid crest of the little hill the hoofs rang out sharply; but the girl's quick ear detected noises besides those which came from the trample of her horse. Still she swept on, with a long swing, resembling the flight of a swallow. A small grove lay in front, and as she swerved around this a horseman sprang suddenly before her.

“Stop!”

CHAPTER III. THE LITTLE MAIDEN'S BRAVERY.

She pulled her rein, but her eye flashed and she grasped the butt of her pistol.

"Who dares call upon me to stop? Have I not the right of way on these prairies?"

"I call you to stop," replied the horseman, riding up close to the girl, and pushing back his hat. "*I* do. Look and see if you know me?" Full well she knew who the interceptor was. The first sound of his voice had gone with a shiver to her heart. "Ah, you know the Metis chief?"

"But I wish to pass on, monsieur. Even you, le grand Chef, have no right to stop me without cause; and I now ask you again to let me pass."

"I will not because I have reason."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"You are a spy. You are an enemy to the cause."

"Even to you, monsieur, I say it is a lie. I will pass;" and she struck her heels into her horse's flank. The animal bounded forward, but the rebel chief seized the bridle, as he cried:

"You are an enemy to the cause; and you go now to the enemy. I know you, mademoiselle Annette." And a terrible light blazed in his eyes, as he looked the disguised maiden in the face.

"Ay, monsieur! you are quick at penetrating disguises. I am Mademoiselle Annette; and I go to the enemy. Nor can monsieur hinder me." As she spoke these words she suddenly drew a pistol, and cocking it placed the cold, glittering barrel within a foot of the leader's face.

"Unhand my bridle or by our Holy Lady I fire." The coward hand quivered, the fingers relaxed, and the bridle was free.

"Now I advise monsieur to meddle with me no more this night. I will not suffer any bar to my project; I have sworn it." So saying her horse sprang forward, and she disappeared down the slope, leaving the baulked chief sitting upon his horse still as a stone. Away, away out over the soft grassy plain she sped, swiftly and as lightly as a bird might fly. Three minutes brought her in sight of Hickory Bush, a grove of trees straggling up from the flat in the moonlight, and resembling a congregation of witches with draggled hair, suffering torture. Beyond the trees shone a cluster of white camps; and the girl's heart gave a great bound as she saw by the order prevailing there, that the inmates had been so far unmolested. She sprang into the midst of the camps and shouted,

"Awaken! Arise! Quick! The Crees are bound hither to make you captives. Allons! Allons!"

A tall supple figure sprang from one of the tents. How readily she recognised his manly step, his proud head, his bright eye, his musical voice.

"Who are you? Why this attack?"

"I am you friend. Away, if you value your liberty, and mount your horse. I await to lead you from the danger." With motion quick and noiseless as the movements of night birds, the inmates of the tents armed themselves, strapped their knapsacks, and got into the saddle. No one questioned the graceful Indian boy further. There was something so appealing in his voice, so impatient in his gestures as he waited for their departure, that suspicion could not lurk in any mind.

"Hark!" cried the unknown. "They come. Hear you not the dull trample of their hoofs?"

"By the saints in heaven, yes, and I see them too," said one of the party, looking from his saddle through a night−glass.

"Away, away," cried the Indian boy. "Follow me;" and as the savages behind surrounded the empty tents with their hellish cries, he led the rescued ones at full speed down the valley, around the northern edge of Hickory Ridge, and out toward the Chequered Hills. After half an hour's ride, he drew bridle and the company gathered about him. Captain Stephens was the first to speak.

"Brave lad, we owe our liberty to you; yet wherefore, I am sure, I cannot tell."

But the boy only raised his hand, as if imposing silence upon that point.

"You are by no means safe from the Indians yet. They will scour the plains, and on this untrodden prairie you cannot conceal your trail. My advice is that you make no delay, but push on to Fort Pitt, which is only about twelve miles distant."

“Of all points this is the one that I should most desire to be at,” responded Stephens; “but I do not know that I can find Pitt.”

One of the number had been at the Fort a few years before; but he could not make it again from this unknown part of the prairie.

“Follow me, then,” answered the unknown. “I shall take you through the hills by a short route to the river. Then you need but to follow the bank to find the fort;” and as he spoke he once more dashed his heels into his horse's flanks and set off towards the center of the group of hills, that resembled in the distance a row of Dutchwomen in heavy petticoats.

Several times as the party followed their deliverer, Stephens would exclaim,

“Where have I heard that voice? The tone is familiar to me, but I cannot give the slightest guess as to the boys' identity.”

“Do you think he is an Indian?” enquired one.

“His voice is certainly finer and sweeter than any Indian's that I have ever heard. And his French is perfect.

“True, captain, and notice the delicate little hands that he has, and the proud, dainty poise of his head. He is evidently in disguise; and what is equally plain, he does not relish our attempts at penetrating his identity.” Upon the crest of a round hill, the guide stayed his horse and pointed eastward.

“A few minutes ride will take you to the river; half an hour then to the north and you are at Pitt. Before I leave, just a word. Tall Elk put on paint to−day, and before the set of to−morrow's sun, there is not a Cree in all the region who will not be on the war−path. To−morrow the chief goes to Big Bear, to press him to dig up the hatchet; so Messieurs, look to your guns in the Fort, as you will have more than three hundred enemies under the stockades before the rising of the next moon. Au revoir.”

Before any of the group could utter a word of thanks, the mysterious boy was off again to the north−west with the speed of the wind.

“That voice!” exclaimed Stephen striking his forehead. “I know it surely; whose *can* it be?” and bewildered past hope of enlightenment, he turned his horse down the slope, and dashed towards the Saskatchewan. His followers and himself were admitted readily enough by Inspector Dicken, a son of the great novelist, and destined afterwards to be one of the heroes of the war.

When Annette rode away from Louis Riel to give warning to her lover, the rebel chief ground his teeth and swore terrible oaths.

“It is as well” he muttered; “I have now justifiable grounds for depriving her of liberty.” Putting a whistle to his mouth he blew a long blast, which was immediately answered from a clump of cottonwood, about a quarter of a mile distant. Then came the tramp of hoofs, and a minute later a horseman drew bridle by his chief.

“The spy has escaped me, Jean, and he was none other than I supposed, ma belle Demoiselle. She did not deny that she was on a mission hostile to our interests, and when I remonstrated, she held a pistol in my face and swore by the Virgin that she would fire. This is reason enough, Jean, for her apprehension. Let us away.”

The chief led along the skirt of the upland, till he entered the mouth of a wide, darksome valley. Upon either side straggled a growth of mixed larch and cedar; in the centre was a dismal bog, through which slowly rolled a black, foul stream. As they passed along the shoulder of solid ground, troops of birds rose out of the wide sea of bog, and the noise of their wings made a low, mournful whirring as they passed in dark troops upwards into the ever−deepening dusk.

Then out of the gloom came a Ding Dong, like the low, solemn beat of a bell. Jean crossed himself and exclaimed,

“Mon Dieu! What is that Monsieur?”

“What, afraid Jean? That is no toll for a lost soul, but the crying of the dismal bell bird.”

“I never heard it before Mon Chef.”

“And may never hear it again. It lives only in the most doleful and solitary swamps, and I doubt if there is another place in all the wide territories save here, where you may hear its voice.”

It had now grown so dark that the horses could only tread their way by instinct, and at every noise or cry that came from the swamp, Jeans' blood shivered in his veins. He had no idea where his master was leading him, and had refrained from 'asking all along, though the query hung constantly upon his tongue. Then a pair of noiseless wings brushed his cheek, paused, and hovered about his head; while two red eyes glared at him.

"In the name of God what is it?" he screamed, smiting the creature with the handle of his whip. "Where are you leading me Mon Chef?"

"Peace Jean, I did not believe that you were such an arrant coward. You shall soon see where I go. It is seldom that man is seen or heard in this region, and the strange creatures marvel. That was one of the large night−hawks which so terrified your weak senses. Do you see yonder light?"

From a point which appeared to be the head of the valley, came a piercing white light, and its reflection fell upon the wide, black, shining stream that ran through the valley, like the links of a golden chain.

"Yonder, Jean, is the abode of Mother Jubal—thither am I bound."

"What, to Madame Jubal, the Snake Charmer, the witch, the woman that comes to her enemies when they sleep at nights, and thickens their blood with cold? I thought, Monsieur, that she lived in hell, and only appeared on earth when she came to do harm to mankind."

"You will find her of the earth, Jean; but she has ever been willing to do my behests."

By the reflection of the light could be seen a hut standing in a cup−shaped niche at the head of the valley. It was ringed around with draggled larch and cedars; and a belt of dark hills encircled it. No moonlight penetrated here, save toward the dawn, when pale beams fell slantwise across the ghostly swamp.

As the horses, drew near there was heard to come from the hut a low, suppressed yelp, half like the bark of a dog, yet resembling the cry of a wolf. The door was open, and by a low table, upon which burned the clear, unflickering light which the two had seen so far down the valley, sat the old woman. Upon hearing the approach of footsteps, she blew out this light, and through the hideous gloom the Too whit, Too whoo of an owl came from the cabin. Then several pairs of eyes began to gleam at the intruders out of the dusk, and all the while several throats went on repeating in ghostly tones Too whit, Too whoo.

The chief pulled up his horse, while his companion shivered from head to foot. Then raising his voice, he cried:

"Jubal, relight your lamp; I have come far to see you. You know me, Jubal. Monsieur le chef?"

"Pardonnez moi," croaked the hag, as she struck the light. Then came in quavering tones:

"Entrez."

What a brushing of soft wings and gleaming of eyes! The hut was literally filled with living creatures.

"These are my children," the old woman said, with a horrible quaking laugh, as she pointed to the perches. Rows of pert ravens stood upon tip−toe along the bars looking with bright eyes upon the strangers; while here and there an owl opened his crooked beak and said Too whit, Too whoo. A strange creature, with wolfish head and limbs, crouched by the hearth; but after three or four furtive glances at the intruders, he skulked back into a dark corner of the cabin. From this retreat he continued to glare with shy, treacherous eyes.

The old woman was short, and stooped; but her eyes were wonderfully bright. Nay, when she looked from the dark corner, phosphorescent jets seemed to break from them.

"Come, mother, toss the cup and tell me what Fortune has in store for me this time," said the chief, who had seated himself upon a low, creaking stool in the corner.

"I will," she replied; "why should I not when I am honoured so much as to receive a visit from le grand chef de Metis." And hobbling away, she took from a nook a large cup without a handle, black on the outside and white within. Tea was brewed which the Rebel chief drank, leaving naught but the dregs. Then Jubal muttered some words, which her visitors could not understand, and threw up the cup. She had no sooner done this than the crows began to chatter and caw, and the owls to cry; and each time that the cup ascended, they all raised themselves upon their feet and elevated their wings. When the cup came into her hand from the ceiling the third time, she looked toward the perches and said:

"Peace children." Then turning to the dark, oily chief, she said, "Listen, O Monsieur, while I read. Here are bands of men hurrying across the prairie into the gorges, and concealing themselves in the wood. There is the flash of sabres, and the smoke of cannon. Everywhere a bloody war is raging; and Indians are tearing away men, and women, and children from their homes to captivity.

"Ah! what is this I see here? A girl. Monsieur woos her, but she is turned away. The maiden flies; Monsieur follows, and he overtakes the maiden. Then he bears her away with guards around her, through a deep valley, till he reaches a hut. Now he hands her over to an ugly hag— and the name of that hag is Jubal. Is it not so, Monsieur?" and the crone, turning from the cup, looked with a hideous grin in the face of the Rebel chief.

“Oui, Jubal. You have guessed aright. To−morrow or the next day, Jean will bring hither a young woman. She is to be strictly guarded in that room where you kept—....

“Jubal remembers; Monsieur need not mention names.”

“C'est bon! Well, Jubal, you need not exercise any severity towards the maiden, save that of a rigid confinement to her room. Me you shall hear from again.”

“Is the maiden a pretty bird?” the crone asked with a chuckle.

“That matters not, Jubal,” the chief replied, somewhat haughtily. “She is a dangerous young person, and has been playing the traitor to our cause. The only means of proceeding against the girl, is to take her liberty away. I am in hopes of persuading her to a right frame of mind, and with this end in view, I shall be obliged to pay some visits here during her captivity.”

“I understand,” quavered the hag; and the gleam in her eyes, as she laid her hand upon the chiefs shoulder, was most diabolical to see. “My poor simple son is down to the village with the pony for some provisions for my little cabin. Ma belle I shall be able to use handsomely, when she comes.” Fetching then a black bottle, around which were many tangles of cob−web, she set it before; her visitors. The chief took a long draught. Jean swallowed enough to enable him to stand boldly up and stare at the owls, and the bright−eyed ravens.

“Let us away, Jean,” cried the chief now in high spirits as the old Jamaica began to race through his veins; and flinging himself into his saddle, he rode of at a fleet pace.

Jean opened not his mouth till he found himself once more upon the plain, in the light of the honest moon. The Rebel chief now checking his pony's gait said:

“I suppose you have control enough over your fears now to listen to me?”

“Oui Monsieur.”

“You will be able to−morrow night to find the den that we have left?”

“Without difficulty, Mon Chef.”

“Well; to−morrow you ride away to Tall Elk, and give him this message from me.

“Colonel Marton is abroad, and his daughter, Annette, the enemy of the Indian and the Half−breed, is at home. She must be secured this evening before the moon rises. Bring up twenty braves; approach the house carefully, and fetch the maiden where directed. You will see that the braves make no noise, for this girl is as wary as the wild goose, and that little minx, Julie, her maid, is almost as wide−awake.”

And as Jean rode away, the villain muttered to himself, “We shall see my proud bird how long you will gainsay Louis Riel after I get you under Jubal's bolt and lock. Go with you from Canada as my wife, and fly the honours with which this revolution will crown my brows? No, by the Mater purissima. You have been too scornful my pretty maiden; you have not concealed your preference for this English dog; you have held your rebellious pistol in my face. Ah, no, ma petite Annette; but I shall amuse myself, sometimes, after the brunt of the day's labour, by riding up the dismal valley, and stroking your broken wings. When I have served my mood, played to the full with the caged bird, Jubal can let it go to attract some new mate. Holy virgin, but my triumph will be very sweet! Yea, Annette, to have you in one's own power is a sweet thing; nothing can be sweeter except the vengeance which shall feast itself at the same source as my passion.”

He raised his arm in the direction of White Oaks, where lay the girl's cottage, and cried like a triumphant fiend.

“Bonsoir. Adieu, ma belle Annette. Sweet dreams about your lover to−night. To−morrow I shall bathe my face in the coils of your silken hair.” And he was away.

When Jean rode away from his master he fell into a train of musing. “Methinks,” he said aloud after a long pause, “that we had better kill two birds with one stone to−morrow. If the master take the mistress, I do not see why the man should not have the maid.” And as the fellow reached this conclusion his little weasel eyes brightened as if each were the point of a glow worm; and he smote the flank of his horse with his heavy heel. “You one day turned up your sweet, haughty nose, Julie, when I told you how beautiful you were, and that I would like to kiss the dew off your red lips. Well, Julie, my plan for the morrow is to denounce you to Tall Elk as a spy; and after I have got possession of you, my pretty one, with a brave at one side of your pony, and myself at the other, we shall march to the cottonwood where the door of ma mere stands always open to her son, and that which belongs to him.” So, chuckling over the fair prospects of the morrow, the fellow urged his pony to the full of its speed, down to the little village of St. Ignace.

Just as the sun went down like a shield of burning brass over the gray line of the prairie on the morrow, a cringing, stealthy−looking man might be seen riding a sorrel pony towards the verge of Alka Swamp, near which were camped the painted warriors of Tall Elk. As he drew near the squaws began to clap their hands, and the lean, ugly dogs gave several short yelps. Tall Elk came to the door of his wigwam, wherein sat several pretty young Cree wives sewing beads and dainty work upon his war jacket; and going to the horseman he said:

“The messenger from the great chief is welcome. What is his command for Tall Elk?”

When the savage had heard the orders of the rebel chief, and the additional instructions of Jean, he grunted: “Ugh; sorry to do this. The two girls were always kind to the Indians; and our braves will not like to do this against La Reine. But we must obey the orders of le grand chef.”

“It is well. Let your braves be ready to start when the gopher comes out of his burrow.” Fastening his horse to a cottonwood tree, this miscreant emissary began to whistle a tune, and walked about among the lodges, seeking to attract the attention of some pretty Indian maiden, of which there were many in the tents. The braves were abroad a little way, some looking for elk and others for muskrat, so that the impudent Metis might go about seeking to break hearts without any risk of getting a broken head.

When night had fallen over the prairie, and the bull−frog and the cricket filled the lower air with a confusing din of small sounds, thirty dusky warriors, mounted upon their ponies, with Tall Elk and Jean at their head, crossed over the ridge and struck out for White Oaks. An hour's ride brought them to an elevation from which they saw a light twinkling through the grove. Jean's small eyes were gleaming with foul expectation—he was thinking of his lovely booty, safe under the lock and key of his hideous little Metis mother.

“Let us spread our force now, chief,” he whispered to Tall Elk. And we leave them drawing their circle of horses, stealthily and swiftly, around the silent cottage.

CHAPTER IV. ANNETTE'S LOVER IN DANGER.

When Annette parted from Captain Stephens and his companions, she returned homeward through a region of the prairie over which lay no trail. She approached her cottage with noiseless tread; but the quick eyes of Julie saw her coming, and she stole forth like a kitten.

“Welcome mademoiselle;—is he safe?”

“Oui Julie. He is now—they are now—in Fort Pitt.”

“Bon, Bon! To−morrow all the warriors upon the plain and all the Breeds arise; and your father leads them. Oh, such throngs as came around our house since you went away mademoiselle, beating drums, dancing in the ring, and singing chansons de guerre. And, O mademoiselle, there was among the Crees one chief, so tall, and so noble−looking; and he will some day come back again to, to—see me.” She squirmed very gently, and poised upon one dainty foot, till her pretty hip curved outward; and she pecked at her little forefinger with her rosy mouth as she made this pretty speech: “I think I like the chief so much mademoiselle; I know he is brave, and I do not think that he is altogether un sauvage.”

“Oh! has my little Julie lost her heart? I hope your chief has left a little for me.”

“I like mon chef, a good deal, but I love mademoiselle better than anybody in the world;” and the sweet, round, dimpled little maiden put her smooth arms closely and tenderly about the neck of her mistress.

“But how came about this sudden captivation of heart?” They were now in Annette's sweet tasty bed chamber, fresh and cool with the night air, and delicately fragrant with the breath of prairie flowers.

“You will not wonder when I tell you mademoiselle. You know I went away, shortly after the arrival of the warriors, to the little gray fountain. I sat here listening to the gurgle of the water, for my heart was sad, and filled with troublesome forebodings about you, and your deliverer 'Ah, I said, before ma maitresse fell into the freshet river, she wanted no stranger's love but mine. Now he who delivered her from death below the Chute, has crept into her heart; and she may think no more of her fond, and faithful Julie.”

“What an absurd, sweet, little creature it is,” murmured Annette.

“There I sat, dabbling my fingers in the babbling water when I saw a straight, tall, handsome man approaching me. He walked direct to the fountain and lifting his cap said:

“'Pardonnez, ma chere Julie.' His large eyes were very bright, but the light shining in them was a great tenderness.

“I did not know what to reply, but I rose to go, saying.

“'Monsieur le chef will excuse me. It is late; and I must return.'

“He folded his arms across his breast, and turned so that the moonlight shone full upon his face.

“'Does not the sweet Julie remember?'

“I looked at him in astonishment, but could not see any familiar likeness in his face.”

“'Does little Julie remember many years ago? Wild men stole her away from her home, and a Cree chief rode to the village of the robbers, and smote them in their tents. Then he took upon his saddle a little girl with skin like the peach, and lips like the rose in bud. He carried her to his home upon the banks of the Saskatchewan, and she lived two years in his tent. During the summer days she played among the flowers, or hooked gold−fish in the river. She had a companion who was ever at her side, the chief's son, whom the people called Little Poplar. He loved the maiden, and when they took her away to her home upon the far prairie, he mourned by day and by night, and vowed that he would leave no house or wigwam unsearched till he saw his maid again. To−night as he came to this cottage he saw the face that he has sought in vain for so many years. He now stands before the maiden of his heart. Sweet, ma Julie, do you forget your little boy lover of the sunny Saskatchewan?'

“Ah, my mistress, what could I say when it all came back so plain, and told in his rich, deep, musical voice? I do not know whether it was wrong or no; but without speaking any word to my beautiful chief I went up to him and laid my head against his breast. And he kissed me, and kissed me again, and stroked my hair; and whispered in my ear that when the war was over he would come and wed me, and fetch me wherever my heart desired. But I said that I would not live apart from you; that I had consecrated my life to the service of my sweet mistress.

“'I have seen her,' he replied. 'Her face is beautiful and good;' and then, mademoiselle, the silly chief said a

great big untruth, but I know he only did so because he loves me so much. He declared, ma belle mademoiselle, that I was just as pretty as my mistress."

"Your beauty is only equalled by your naivete;" Annette exclaimed, fondly brushing back a stray lock from the forehead of the little maid.

"I have no doubt that your chief is good, brave, and handsome; but he should be all these in a high degree before he is worthy to get such a girl as yourself, ma Julie. Now, away to your bed, and sleep of your lover. I go, too, for I am tired."

With the morrow's sun all the neutral tribes were astir and mixing their paint; and long before Annette or her little maid had risen, Colonel Marton had saddled his horse, and ridden towards the rendez−vous at Burnt Hills.

The bright, windless day passed over the prairie, and whenever Annette spoke of the bravery of Captain Stephens, Julie would tell some praises of the chief with the graceful loins and the great luminous eye.

"Your lover has said that he would come to see you, Julie, but, ah me, in these troublesome times Captain Stephens can no more return to our cottage. Do you know, my little friend, that I cannot bear being cooped up here during all this strife and tumult, when brave men and defenceless women are at the mercy of savages and ill−advised men of our own class. There have been evil and oppressive doings by government and its agents, but I do not think that Monsieur Riel and my father have taken the prudent course to remove the wrongs. It will not be fair or honorable war; for when the savage and cruel instincts of the red men are once aroused, they will treat the innocent like the guilty, and neither woman nor child will be safe from their horrible vengeance. Therefore, Annette, I have made up my mind to go forth tomorrow in my Indian−boy disguise.

"I shall not betray my people or bur friends, but I shall pass from one force to the other, and whenever I can warn the loyal troops, or apprise their people of danger, I shall do it. You Julie I shall leave in the care of my aunt at the Portage; for it is not safe for you, it would not be safe for you and me together, to remain in this deserted cottage alone during these looting and lawless times."

The two maidens were now alone, save for the presence of a Cree drudge; for Paul had mounted a pony and followed his father, with pistols in his holster−pipes, and a large bowie knife stuck into his belt.

So as evening drew on Annette had packed, in little, portable parcels all the valuables about the house; and when she sat down to supper with Julie at her side, she said that everything was now ready, and that they needed but to get into the saddle in the morning. Little did these two girls know, as they sat quietly eating their supper, that there was at this very moment a band of painted enemies hurrying across the dim prairie toward their cottage! Everything was perfectly still in the house, and the tick−tack of the clock smote the silence. The heart of each girl was far away, and the eyes of both were on the white, sweet floor.

Annette was the first to raise her eyes, and a short cry of terror burst from her lips. For there in the entrance of the little dining−room stood the tall, straight figure of an Indian chief. The cry brought Julie to her senses, and she too looked up: but she gave no cry; the blood came surging into her sweet head till her cheeks, and her smooth throat, and her little shell−like ears, became the color of a blown carnation.

"Little Poplar," she exclaimed. "Mademoiselle," turning toward her mistress, "it is about him that I have told you;" and the dainty maiden crept softly as a kitten over to the side of the handsome chief. He smiled, stooped, and touched her forehead with his lips. Then he rose to the height of his splendid stature again, and took off his cap.

"There is danger to mademoiselle and to ma Julie. Just now a band of painted Crees with Tall Elk and Jean, Le Grand Chef's man, at their head are coming to make you prisoners. Follow me instantly."

In a few moments the two girls were gliding swiftly from the house toward the corral where their horses stood tethered, the chief bearing the little packages of valuables in his arms. There was no time to be lost, and as the trio rode away from the corral, the neighing of the enemies' ponies close at hand burst in a wild shower upon their ears.

"Follow me," whispered the chief, and as he rode around the shoulder of the gloomy hill, the cries of the disappointed Indians were borne upon the night. When they reached the level prairie the chief reined in his horse, and the three paced along side by side.

"How can we thank the brave chief enough for his care and help," Annette said in the heartiest tones of her sweet voice.

"I was passing through the village of Tall Elk at the set of sun, and heard the great chief's man, Jean, say, 'It

will be a good catch to−night for master and man, won't it? I take Julie; Le Grand Chef gets the other.' I then enquired of Tall Elk, and he told me of their plans. The house was to be surrounded before moonrise; mademoiselle was to be seized and taken away to the hut of the hag Jubal, and Julie was to be borne to the cabin of Jean's mother." As he spoke these words a terrible light gleamed in his eyes, and he muttered,

"Had this man. Jean, succeeded I should have hunted him down and taken out his heart."

When they were far beyond the enemy's reach, Annette said,

"Will the chef ride to yonder cottonwood and wait there until his Julie and myself have put on apparel more suited to our present inclinations?" Tall Poplar rode away; but when he joined the maidens again a great look of dismay came into his eyes.

"Where are—" but before he ended the words, the truth flashed across him, and he burst out in a tone of mirth and approval: "Brava, brava: there is not a man in all the plains that can name these two Indian boys."

Annette remained during the balance of the night with her aunt; but she arose before the dew was dry, and with the other lad at her side, for Julie would not remain behind her mistress, was off at a brisk canter towards Fort Pitt. The news which she had heard lent speed to Annette. From far and near the Crees had come to enroll themselves under the banner of the blood−thirsty chief, Big Bear; and the murderous hordes were at that very moment, she knew, menacing the poorly garrisoned fort with rifle, hatchet and fire.

All over the territory, I may say, the Indians had now begun to sing and dance, and to brandish their tomahawks. Their way of living during late years has been altogether too slow, too dead−and−alive, too unlike the ways of their ancestors, when once at least in each year, every warrior returned to his lodge with scalp locks dangling at his belt.

Les Gros Ventres for the time, forgot their corporosity, and began to dance and howl, and declare that they would fight till all their blood was spilt with M. Riel, or his adjutant M. Marton.

The Blackfeet began to hold pow−wows, and tell their squaws that there would soon be good feasts. For many a day they had been casting covetous eyes upon the fat cattle of their white neighbours. Along too, came the feeble remnant of the once agile Salteaux, inquiring if it was to be war; and if so, would there be big feasts?

"Oh, big feasts, big feasts," was the reply. "Plenty fat cattle in the corrals; and heaps of, mange in the store." So the Salteaux were happy, and, somewhat in their old fashion, went vaulting homewards.

Tidings of fight, and feast, and turmoil reached the Crees, and they sallied out from the tents, while the large−eyed squaws sat silent, marvelling what was to come of it all.

High into the air the Nez Perce thrust his nostril; for he had got scent of the battle from afar. And last, but not least, came the remnant of that tribe whose chief had shot Custer in the Black Hills. The Sioux only required to be shown where the enemy lay; but in his enthusiasm he did not lose sight of the fat cattle grazing upon the prairies.

But we return for a time to Captain Stephens and his party. When their deliverer, the Indian boy, departed, they rode along the bank of the Saskatchewan, according to the lad's instructions, and in half an hour were in sight of Pitt. Inspector Dicken was glad enough to receive this addition to his little assistance; and informed Captain Stephens that he had resolved to fight it out against the forces menacing him.

"What is the number of the enemy?" enquired Stephens.

"About a hundred armed braves I should judge," Inspector Dicken replied. "Big Bear accompanied by a dozen wives came under the stockade this morning, and invited me to have a talk. With the coolest effrontery he informed me that if I would leave the fort, surrender my arms, and accompany him, with my men, into his wigwams, that he would give me a guarantee against all harm. If I refused these terms, he said he would first let his young men amuse themselves by a couple of days' firing at our forces; and that afterwards he would burn the Fort and put the inmates to death.

"I expostulated with the greasy, swaggering ruffian, but he only swore, and reiterated his threats. Then I told him to be gone for an insolent savage, and that if I found him prowling about the Fort again, I should send my men to take charge of him. Thereat his squaws began to jeer, and cut capers; and squatting upon the sod in a row they made mouths, and poked their fingers at me. Then they arose yelling and waving their arms, and followed the savage. It appears that after the chief left me, he went to the people of our town and proposed the same terms; for an hour later, to my horror, I saw the chief factor of the Hudson Bay Company, his wife and daughters, and several others following the Indian to his wigwams. Had these people put themselves under our protection, and the men aided us in defence, we might have laughed defiance at the five score of the enemy who threaten."

"But," returned Stephens, "I fear that you do not count at its full the force preparing itself to attack. From all I can gather a hundred or so of Plain Crees will come here to−day under Tall Elk; while the total strength of the Stonies, who will rise at Big Bear's call, cannot be less than five hundred."

Inspector Dicken looked grave; but he was a brave man and busied himself in making preparations. The total number of his force, including mounted police and civilians was 24; and each man had a Winchester and about twenty rounds of ammunition.

"Two of my scouts are abroad," he said, "reconnoitering; they should be here by this time." While he was yet speaking a storm of yelling came from the wigwams of Big Bear, and three or four score of braves were seen pouring from their tents, like bees bundling out of a hive. Each one had a gun in his hand, and a hatchet in his belt. The cause of this sudden commotion was soon apparent: about half a mile distant, two police scouts were riding leisurely along the plain towards the Fort, and evidently not suspecting the danger which menaced them. They advanced to a point about two hundred yards from the stockades; then a yell went up from a body of prostrate savages, and immediately half a hundred rifles were discharged. One of the men fell from his horse, dead, upon the prairie; but the other rode through the storm of lead to the Fort, and entered struck by half a dozen bullets.

"The devils have begun!" muttered the Inspector, and he quivered from head to foot, but not with fear.

The first taste of blood set the savages in a high state of exultation. They gathered yelling and dancing, and flashing their weapons in the sun around the door of the chief. Big Bear pulled off his feathered cap and threw it several times in the air. Then turning to his wives he told them to make ready for a White Dog feast; and he bade his braves go and fetch the animals.

So a large fire was built upon the prairie, a short distance from the chief's lodge, and the huge festival pot was suspended from a crane over the roaring flames. First, about fifteen gallons of water were put in; then Big Bear's wives, some of whom were old and wrinkled, others being lithe as fawns, plump and bright−eyed, busied themselves gathering herbs.

Some digged deep into the marsh for "bog−bane," others searched among the knotted roots for the little nut−like tuber that clings to the root of the flag, while a few brought to the pot wild parsnips, and the dried stalks of the prairie parsley. A coy little maiden whom many a hunter wooed, but failed to win, had in her sweet little brown hands a tangle of wintergreen vines, and maiden−hair.

Then came striding along the young hunters with the dogs. Each dog selected for the feast was white as the driven snow. If a black hair, or a blue hair, or a brown hair was discovered anywhere upon his body he was taken away; but if he were *sans reproche* he was put into the pot just as he was, with head, and hide, and paws, and tail, his throat simply having been cut.

Six dogs were thrown in, and the roots and stalks of the prairie plants, together with salt, and bunches of the wild pepper−plant, and of swamp mustard, were added for seasoning. Through the reserves round about for many miles swarthy heralds proclaimed that the great Chief Big Bear was giving a White Dog feast to his braves before summoning them to the war−path. The feast was, in Indian experience, a magnificent one, and before the young men departed they swore to Big Bear that they returned only for their war−paint and arms, and that before the set of the next sun they would be back at his side.

True to their word the Indians came, hideous in their yellow paint. If you stood to leeward of them upon the plain a mile away you could clearly get the raw, earthy smell of the ochre from their hands and faces. Some had black bars streaked across their cheeks, and hideous crimson circles about their eyes. Some, likewise, had stars in pipe−clay painted upon the forehead, and others were diabolical in the figures of horrid beasts, painted with savage skill upon their naked breasts.

The beleaguered could notice all these preparations with their glasses; and the men spoke to each other in low tones. Savages seemed to be gathering from all points of the compass, and massing upon the plateau round about the camps of the Cree Chief. But several bands were stationed around the Fort, in such a manner as to cut off retreat from the stockades should escape be attempted.

Close to the fort was the shining, yellow Saskatchewan; and for miles, with a glass, you could see the bright coils of its leisurely waters, as that proud river pierced its way through the great stretch of plain till it became lost in the haze of the distance.

"If you were only upon the river in yonder flat boat," said Captain Stephens, "you might drop quietly down to

Battleford. The reinforcement would come quite opportunely to Morrison."

"I do not care to leave here without giving the rebels a little of our lead," the Inspector replied. "But even though I desired to do so, now, the thing as you see is impossible."

Night fell, and when it came there was not a star in the sky. A heavy mass of indigo−coloured cloud had risen before the set of sun, in the south east, and crept slowly over the whole heavens, widening its dark arms as it came. So when night fell there was not a point of light to be seen anywhere in the heavens.

"It would seem," murmured one, "as if God were going to aid the savages with His darkness."

Shortly after dark the wind began to wail like a tortured spirit along the plain; and in the lull between the blasts the cry of strange night−birds could be heard coining from each little thicket of white oak or cottonwood.

Louder and louder grew the screaming of the tempest, and it shrieked through the ribs of the stockade, like a Titan blowing through the teeth of a giant comb.

Inspector Dicken, with Captain Stephens at his side, was standing at the edge of the stockade. Not a sound came from the plateau, and not a glimmer of light appeared in the darkness. Then the great, wide, black night suddenly opened its jaws and launched forth an avalanche of blinding, white light. The two men bounded in their places; then came a roll of mighty thunder, as if it were moving on tremendous wheels and destroying all the heavens.

No enemy yet!

But the besieged had hardly breathed their breath of relief, before there arose upon the dark air, a din of sound so diabolical that you might believe the gates of hell had suddenly been thrown open. From every point around the fort went up a chorus of murderous yells, and then came the irregular flash and crack from rifles.

The Inspector ran hastily back among his men:

"Don't waste your ammunition," he said, "in the dark. Part of their plan is to burn the fort. Wait till they fire the torches, and then blaze at them in their own light."

Every man clenched his rifle, and the eyes of the brave band glimmered in the dark.

Crack! crack! crack! went the rifles of the savages, and now and again a sound, half like a snarl, and half like a sigh, went trailing over the fort. It was from the Indians' bullets.

"Keep close, my men," shouted the Inspector; "down upon your faces."

Drawn off their guard by the silence of the besieged, the enemy became more reckless, and lighting flambeaux of birch−bark, they began to wave them above their heads. The spluttering glare showed scores of savages, busy loading and discharging their rifles.

"Now, my men; ready! There, have at them." Crack, crack, crack, went the rifles, and in the blaze of the torches several of the enemy were seen writhing about the plain in their agony. Together with the exultant whoop, came cries of pain and rage; and perceiving the mistake that they had made, in exposing themselves to the guns of the garrison, the savages threw down their torches and fled for cover.

The conduct of some of the savages who received slight wounds was exceedingly ludicrous. One who had been shot, *in running away,* began to yell in the most pitiable way; and he ran about the plain in the glare of the light kicking up his heels and grabbing at the wounded spot.

Thereafter the enemy's firing was more desultory, but it was kept up for several hours, during which not a rifle flash came from the Fort. Then there arose the sharp yelp of a wolf through the night, and instantly the firing ceased. Not a sound could be heard anywhere, save the uneasy crying, and the occasional howls of the wind.

"The attack is to commence in right earnest now," Stephens whispered to Mr. Dicken; but in what shape the hovering assault was to come would be hard to guess.

They were not to be kept long in suspense, however. The pandemonium cry again went suddenly through the night and the storm; and an assault of axes was heard against the stockades.

"That is their game is it?" muttered the Inspector. "Now then, my lads, get your muzzles ready;" for the Indians had lighted a couple of torches for the benefit of those engaged chopping.

"Fire carefully, picking them off singly. Off you go!" Away went the rifles, and three more savages sprawled in the light of the torches. But others came into their places and chopped, and hacked, and smote like fiends, yelling, jumping, and frequently brandishing their axes above their heads; their eyes all the while gleaming with the very light of hell!

"Pick away at them boys," cried the inspector; "they must not be allowed to get through." But the men needed

no urging; each one loaded nimbly, fired with deliberation, and hit his man. This part of the contest continued for fully ten minutes, but sturdy as were the posts, it was plain that they must soon give way. Sometimes, it is true, the savages would draw rearward from their work, terrified at the heap of dead and wounded now accumulating about them; but it was only to return, as the waves that fall from the beach on the sea−shore come back to strike, with added fury. Meanwhile a number of lights had begun to appear upon the plateau, and the Inspector, turning to Captain Stephens said in a low grave voice:

“It cannot last much longer. See, they are coming with torch and faggot.” Scores of Indians were revealed in the blaze, hastening down the hill; and troops of squaws were perceived dragging loads of brush wood. Then one of the posts gave way and another was seen to totter. In the gloom of the Fort, the paling of many a brave man's cheek was noticed.

“They will be here instantly, my lads,” said Inspector Dicken in the same calm, firm voice. “But we will sell our lives like men. Hurrah!”

CHAPTER V. DIVERS ADVENTURES FOR OUR HEROINE.

We left Annette and her little companion speeding along the banks of the Saskatchewan bound for Pitt. They dare not come near the stockades, for the Indians had invested the high ground overlooking the Fort, and would be sure to make embarrassing enquiries of the two strange Indian boys.

“My plan is this Julie,” Annette said. “We shall camp in the valley beyond Turtle Hill, and when it grows dark, we can come in and see the state of affairs about the garrison.”

“Oui Mademoiselle; and Tall Poplar is to be at the stockade facing the river half an hour after sun−set. He said he would be there, in case that we should in any way need his assistance.”

“Bon, ma Julie. It seems to me that your fine chef may be of some use to us before these troubles end.”

Then the two dismounted, and tethering their horses set at work to pitch their tent. Annette had brought a tent, strapped to her saddle, from her aunt's; and the two sweet maidens opened out the folds, set up the white cotton in a cleared plot, in the centre of a copse of white oak, where it was securely screened from passing eyes. Julie took from her pony's back a thick, large rug, which was to serve the two for a coverlet; and going forth a short way the four little brown hands busied themselves breaking soft branches from the trees.

“There,” Annette said, as she put down her armful in the tent; “that will make a pillow as cosy as a sack of mallard's down. Now, Julie, we shall eat, then sleep till the afternoon; for I suspect that there will be little rest for us while the sun is below the prairie.”

Julie opened the hamper, and the winsome pair fell to, making a hearty meal from home−made bread, cold quail, and butter with the very perfume of the prairie flowers. A little way beyond a jet of cold, clear water came gurgling out of the rocks; and tripping away Julie fetched a cup. Then they fastened their hamper, put their pistols by their side, laid themselves down together, and fell asleep to the music of the little spring, and the bickering of gold finches in the leaves.

When Annette awoke, it was the mellow afternoon, and the sun shone like a great yellow shield low in the west. Annette stepped quietly out, her dainty little feet hardly crushing the flowers as she went, to take a peep at the horses. They, too, had lain down; but upon seeing the pair of large, bright, peering eyes, they arose, stretched themselves, whisked their tails, and began again feasting on the crisp, luscious grass.

When the sun's upper rim lay like a little semi−circle of fire over the far edge of the prairie, the two adventurers girded on their belts, and taking their revolvers, started away like a pair of prying fawns toward the Fort. Twilight does not tarry long upon the plains; and when the maidens reached the confines of the Fort, the stockades and the enclosed buildings were a mere dusky blur. Moving cautiously along the side facing the river, they perceived a straight, tall figure, awaiting them; and the handsome chief stepped up.

“I had been anxious, and was afraid for the safety of ma Julie and Mademoiselle.”

“Will they attack the Fort to−night?” Annette eagerly asked.

“This will be a bad night for the Fort. The braves have had a White Dog feast; and the Indians have assembled from far and near to fight for Big Bear. They attack in half an hour.”

“Can they hold out inside?”

“Twenty−four men against five hundred!” the chief replied. “First they will cut a breach in the stockade; then they will go in and burn down the Fort. Big Bear has asked the Inspector to surrender, but he has refused.”

“What is to be done, good chief? I have in there a white friend who saved my life; and I would like also to help the Inspector and his followers.”

The chief mused.

“My braves follow, and will be here before the first blow is struck. Perhaps I shall be able, at the last moment, to meet the wishes of Mademoiselle.” Julie took two or three dainty steps, and nestled her head in the breast of her lover. Again he stroked her hair, kissed her bright face, and murmured sweet words in her little ear. Then he said,

“I must go among the lodges, for if I am not present to join in the counsels of the leaders, I may be suspected. Wait, Mademoiselle, in the shelter of the bank till I come to you.” There was then a little sound like the explosion of a bubble, and Annette saw the chief raise his head from Julie's face.

“You little rogue,” she said, “how your love affairs profit by this war.” Then she tripped off to the point

designated by the chief, and lay down in the shadow with Julie at her side. It was while they lay nestling here that the storm of yells described in another chapter burst out. Annette shuddered and grasped the hand of her companion.

Then came the onslaught of musketry, the glare of flambeaux, and the response from the besieged. Through the wailing of the storm came, too, the thud, thud, thud of the choppers at the stockade, and the straggling shots of the brave twenty−four in the Fort.

“The stockade cannot stand long,” Annette whispered; “I wonder what delays your chief?” But while the words were yet quivering upon her lips, a figure moved swiftly towards them and whispered,

“Come.” And when they joined him: “I only wish to have Mademoiselle satisfied of the escape of her deliverer and of his friends.”

In a minute they were at the edge of the stockade; and, at a signal from the chief, a little postern opened, and they were admitted.

“Follow me,” he said, as he advanced, waving a small white cloth, and the two, close at his heels, found themselves at the door of the Fort. “Friends are here,” he whispered, through his tubed hand, to a policeman who had been watching the advancing trio from his sentry post; “let us enter.”

The policeman retreated, and in a moment reappeared with the Inspector and Captain Stephens at his side.

“Who are you?” asked the Inspector in a low voice.

“Friends.” Then Annette said, in a distinct voice:

“Monsieur Stephens may remember me?”

“The Indian boy who warned me of my danger!” he exclaimed, turning to the Inspector. “You may admit them.” In a moment Tall Elk was inside.

“I am a Cree chief, and twenty of my braves are friendly. When the Indians break through the stockade I shall guard this door, and you can pass out. Go directly to the river, and at the pier you will find a boat waiting. Then the river is clear before you to Battleford.” Saying these words the chief was gone, the two Indian boys following him.

At this moment a chorus of yelling, more infernal than any which had been heard before, arose, and, brandishing their weapons, the horde of infuriated savages began to pour through a large gap in the stockade.

“Follow me, my men,” whispered the Inspector, and with Stephens at his side he descended into the yard where the smoke from burning torches was so dense that the whole party passed through the group of friendly braves without attracting the attention of the hostile savages. They very speedily gained the river and found a large York boat, of shallow draught, which they pushed out into the slow sweep of tide. The chief was nowhere to be seen; but the two mysterious and beautiful Indian boys hovered along the gloomy brink of the river, frequently turning apprehensive eyes towards the Fort. As the boat moved downward so did they, flitting along like a pair of guardian angels. Immediately beside them they perceived a fierce−looking Indian, glaring through the dark upon the water.

He had evidently just perceived the boat, for, uttering a loud alarm− yell, he turned and was making off toward the Fort to give the tidings.

“Stop,” shouted Annette, in clear, thrilling Cree.

The savage stood a moment, and glared at this handsome lad of his tribe.

“If you move a step I shoot you. Drop to the ground.”

The Indian stood irresolute, but the girl made a sudden bound forward and held the glittering barrel of her revolver in his face.

“You are a Cree?” he inquired, in a voice quivering with an odd mixture of fear and rage.

“I am.”

“Why don't you let me alarm the braves? The police are escaping.”

“The Cree boy will not give his reasons; but his brother must obey.” The Indian stood looking upon Annette as if endeavouring to scan her features; and as if to help him in his object, a flash of flame from a burning building in the Fort shone for a moment upon the boy, and showed the cowardly warrior a pair of large, soft eyes, fringed with long lashes; a sweet oval face, and a delicate little hand. The sudden observation seemed to fill him with contempt and courage, and turning he bounded away with another wild yell.

Annette did not lower her arm, but she shut one of her eyes and fired, once, twice at the running savage. Up

went the wretch's arms and he fell upon the plain.

"Let us away Julie, the shots may bring some stragglers," and the two girls bounded along for nearly half a mile, when they were again in line with the barge.

"Boat ahoy," shouted Annette. "When you near the first island keep away to your right. There is a bar with sharp rocks in your way." A low musical,

"Merci mon petit ami" came to the shore; and Annette whispered:

"It is Monsieur Stephens who gives me thanks." Then straightening herself up, "It is time we got our horses; come." They hastened away to the little grove, folded the tent, saddled the horses, and in a few moments were galloping again towards the river. As they neared the bank they heard a tempest of yelling up the plain toward the Fort: and after listening for a moment, Annette said,

"The savages have discovered the flight, and they are now in pursuit. Can you speak much Cree, Julie?"

"Not much."

"Well, then you are to be my brother and a dummy; for I must meet the Indians."

"Mademoiselle must not put herself in danger. The Indians may know that you fired at the brave; perhaps he has given the alarm."

"Fear not, Julie. That poor savage has told no tales. But Monsieur Stephens must be saved, and if this band is not checked, both he and his friends are doomed. Half a mile below there are a hundred canoes upon the bank, and thither those screaming fiends are bound. Now, follow me, unless you care to ride back again to the hollow. I will impose no duty upon you except to remain dumb."

Then she struck her heels into her horse and rode full for the yelling band. As she drew near she raised her hand and shouted in perfect and musical Cree.

"Let the braves stand and hear their brother."

Big Bear who was leading, surrounded by two or three of his wives, stopped, and shouted to his braves to be still.

"What has our little brother to say?"

"Myself and my dumb brother have just escaped a great army of soldiers at Souris Creek."

The chief's eyes became blank with fright.

"Where were the white braves going?"

"Marching for Fort Pitt; and they will be here in fifteen minutes, for they are mounted on swift horses. If you go down to fight yonder boat, you will be attacked in rear."

"The boy speaks well," muttered the chief to his prettiest wife who was standing by his side; and that dainty Cree was feasting her eyes upon the beautiful face of the Indian lad. It might not have been so well for Annette had the chief seen the way in which his young wife stared at the little Indian scout.

"My braves will turn back," shouted Big Bear, "and when we get to the lodges we will hold a council. The little Cree brave and his dumb brother will come to o tents."

"Nay, brave chief," replied Annette, "my mother is on the way hither, and I must return and see that she is safe from harm." And despite the beseeching eyes of the chief's prettiest wife, the daring spy turned her horse and rode away followed by her dumb brother.

"Now Julie, we must see how it fares with the boat," and the two horses went at a long, swinging gallop down the banks of Saskatchewan. With the boat all was right, and in her clear, bird−like voice, Annette informed the fugitives that Big Bear and his braves had returned to their lodges.

"What turned then back?" enquired the same low, musical voice.

Annette hesitated, for she was not a girl that boasted of her achievements. There are enough of maids white and brown, of lesser character, to do that sort of thing.

"I told a story; I said that a great body of soldiers were close at hand."

"Brava, brava," and the girl heard many words of warm commendation spoken in the boat. Then letting her luminous eyes linger for a moment with a tender longing upon the barge, she raised her voice, saying,

"Bon voyage Messieurs," and was off through the dark like a swallow.

Meanwhile tidings of atrocities committed by Indians upon unoffending settlers, began to set the blood shivering in the veins of persons throughout the continent; and one horrible circumstance, bearing upon the story, I shall relate. At the distant settlement of Frog Lake, at the commencement of the tumult, when night came down,

Indians, smeared in hideous, raw, earthy−smelling paint, would creep about among the dwellings, and peer, with eyes gleaming with hate, through the window−panes at the innocent and unsuspecting inmates. At last one chief, with a diabolical face, said,

"Brothers, we must be avenged upon every white man and woman here. We will shoot them like dogs." The answer to this harangue was the clanking of barbaric instruments of music, the brandishing of tomahawks, and the gleam of hunting−knives. Secretly the Indians went among the Bois−Brules squatting about, and revealed their plans; but some of these people shrank with fear from the proposal. Others, however, said,

"We shall join you." So the plan was arranged, and it was not very long before it was carried out. And now runners were everywhere on the plains, telling that Marton had a mighty army made up of most of the brave Indians of the prairies, and comprising all the dead shots among the half−breeds; that he had encountered heavy forces of police and armed civilians, and overthrown them without losing a single man.

"Now is our time to strike," said the Indian with the fiendish face, and the wolf−like eyes.

Therefore, the 2nd day of April was fixed for the holding of a conference between the Indians and the white settlers. The malignant chief had settled the plan.

"When the white faces come to our lodge, they will expect no harm. Ugh! Then the red man will have his vengeance." So every Indian was instructed to have his rifle at hand in the lodge. The white folk wondered why the Indians had arranged for a conference.

"We can do nothing to help their case," they said. "It will only waste time to go." Many of them, therefore, remained at home, occupying themselves with their various duties, while the rest, merely for the sake of agreeableness, and of showing the Indians that they were interested in their affairs, proceeded to the place appointed for the pow−wow.

"We hope to smoke our pipes before our white brothers go away from us," was what the treacherous chief, with wolfish eyes, had said, in order to put the settlers off their guard.

The morning of the fateful day opened gloomily, as if it could not look cheerily down upon the bloody events planned in this distant wilderness. Low, indigo clouds pressed down upon the hills, but there was not a stir in all the air. No living thing was seen stirring, save troops of blue−jays which went scolding from tree to tree before the settlers as they proceeded to the conference. Here and there, also, was a half−famished, yellow, or black and yellow dog, with small head and long scraggy hair, skulking about the fields and among the wigwams of the Indians in search for food.

The lodge where the parley was to be held stood in a hollow. Behind was a tall hill, crowned with timber; round about it grew poplar, white oak, and firs; while in front rolled by a swift dark stream. Unsuspecting harm, two priests of the settlement, Oblat Fathers, named Fafard and Marchand, were the first at the spot.

"What a gloomy day," Pere Fafard said, "and this lodge set here in this desolate spot seems to make it more gloomy still. What, I wonder, is the nature of the business?" Then they knocked, and the chief was heard to say,

"Entrez." Opening the door, the two good priests walked in, and turned to look for seats. Ah! What was the sight presented! Eyes like those of wild beasts, aflame with hate and ferocity, gleamed from the gloom of the back portion of the room. The priests were amazed. They knew not what all this meant. Then a wild shriek was given, and the chief cried,

"Enemies to the red man, you have come to your doom." Then raising his rifle, he fired at Father Marchand. The levelling of his rifle was the general signal. A dozen other muzzles were pointed, and in briefer space than it takes to relate the two priests lay weltering in their blood, pierced each by half a dozen bullets.

"Clear away these corpses," shouted the chief, and "be ready for the next." There was soon another knock, and the same wolfish voice replied as before,

"Entrez." This time a tall, manly young fellow, named Charles Gowan, opened the door and entered, Always on the alert for Indian treachery, he had his suspicion now, before entering suspected strongly, that all was not right. He had only reached the settlement that morning, and had he returned sooner he would have counselled the settlers to pay no heed to the invitation. He was assured that several had already gone up to the pow−wow, so being brave and unselfish, he said,

"If there is any danger afoot, and my friends are at the meeting lodge, that is the place for me, not here." He had no sooner entered than his worst convictions were realized. With one quick glance he saw the bloodpools, the wolfish eyes, the rows of ready rifles.

"Hell hounds!" he cried, "what bloody work have you on hand? What means this?" pointing to the floor.

"It means," replied the chief, "that some of your paleface brethren have been losing their heart's blood there. It also means that the same fate awaits you." Resolved to sell his life as dearly as lay in his power, he sprang forward with a Colt's revolver, and discharged it twice. One Indian fell, and another set up a cry like the bellowing of a bull. But poor Gowan did not fire a third shot. A tall savage approached him from behind, and striking him upon the head with his rifle−stock felled him to the earth. Then the savages fired five or six shots into him as he lay upon the floor. The body was dragged away, and the blood−thirsty fiends sat waiting for the approach of another victim. Half an hour passed, and no other rap came upon the door. An hour went, and still no sound of foot−fall. All this while the savages sat mute as stones, each holding his rifle in readiness.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, "no more coming. We go down and shoot em at em houses." Then the fiend divided his warriors into four companies, each one of which was assigned a couple of murders. One party proceeded toward the house of Mr. Gowanlock. Creeping stealthily, they reached within forty yards of the dwelling without being perceived. Then Mrs. Gowanlock, a young woman, recently married, walked out of her abode, and gathering some kindling wood in her apron, returned again. When the Indians saw her, they threw themselves upon their faces, and so escaped observation. No one happened to be looking out of the window after Mrs. Gowanlock came back; but about half a minute afterwards several shadows flitted by the window, and immediately six or seven painted Indians, with rifles cocked, and uttering diabolical yells, burst into the house. The chief was with this party; and aiming his rifle, shot poor Gowanlock dead. Another aimed at a man named Gilchrist, but Mrs. Gowanlock heroically seized the savage's arms from behind, and prevented him for a moment or two. But the vile murderer shook her off, and falling back a pace or two, fired at her, killing her instantly.

The York boat, with its brave little band, reached Battleford in safety, and the two handsome Indian boys pitched their tents aloof upon the prairie, about, a mile distant from the Fort, selecting a little cup shaped hollow, rimmed around with scrubby white oak. The horses fed in the centre, and at the edge of the bushes gleamed the white sides of the tent.

That evening, as the two entered the town, they perceived a tall Indian standing by the gate.

"It is Little Poplar," whispered Julie; and seeing the two maidens about the same time, the chief stepped forward.

"Cruel work," he said, "reported from Frog Lake. Captain Stephens and two others were sent an hour ago with fast horses to enquire if the story is true. But he had not long passed this gate when I noticed Jean, the great chief's man, and a dozen of the Stoney Crees ride after him. I am sure that they are plotting him harm."

"What route did they take?" asked Annette, while her eyes grew large and bright.

"They went upon the muskeg trail. It leads directly to Frog Lake."

"Thank you again, chief; I go immediately." Julie likewise turned about.

"Nay, you must not encounter this peril with me; already you have ventured more than I should have permitted;" but a look of sorrowful reproach came into the little maiden's eye.

"Is Julie of no use, that her mistress will not consent for her to come? Did the faithful follower not say in the beginning that wherever her mistress went, there she would go? that the dangers of the mistress should be borne also by the maid?"

"Well, since you wish to come, dear girl, I will not gainsay you. But what thinks your chief about his darling courting all these dangers?"

"Little Poplar," the Indian replied, "is proud to see his sweetheart brave; and if she were not so brave, he could not love her half so much." And stooping, the noble chief kissed and kissed the maiden's forehead; and then, once, and very tenderly, her two red lips.

The pair now swiftly returned to the hollow, once again folded the tent, closed their hamper, saddled the horses, and struck out swiftly for the trail. They had practised eyes, and were soon convinced that both parties had gone by this route. Their horses were fairly fresh and they pushed on at high speed.

Their course lay over a long stretch of sodden marshes, brown with the russet of Indian pipes and the bronze of their leafage. Here and there a dry ridge lifted itself lazily out of the spongy flat, and afforded solid, buoyant footing. But a dull gray began to fall upon the plains. It was fog and they knew that less than half an hour of clear skies, and the sight of landscape, remained to them. So they sped on, now sinking deep in a mass of sodden liverwort, glistening in the most exquisite of green, again treading down a tangle of luscious, pale−yellow

“bake−apples.” The huge, noiseless mass soon reached the swampy plain; and it rolled as if upon wheels of floss, shutting out the sun and smothering the bluffs. The gloom was now so great that they could not see more than twenty paces on any hand, and every object in view seemed many times greater than its natural size, and distorted in shape. Miles and miles they went through swamp and tangle, till they heard the far−off, sullen roar of water. The land now also began to dip, and fifteen minutes' ride brought them to a low−lying region of swamp, sentinelled with dismal larches. Close at hand they heard the moaning of a slow stream; beyond was the muffled thunder of some tremendous waterfall. They were soon convinced that they were on the confines of the Styx River, a dreary, forbidding stream of ink−black water which wallowed through a larch swamp for many miles till it reached the face of a bold cliff down which its flood went booming with the sound of thunder. At every step now the horses sank almost to the knee; but as the trail was yet visible they pushed on, keeping close to the banks of the stream.

Beyond was a bluff of poplar and white oak, and as the riders passed round it, the gleam of a camp−fire about a quarter of a mile distant shone through the trees.

“Hist; here they are. We shall go behind this clump and pitch our tent; then we can see how affairs stand.”

The horses were corralled, the tent pitched, a fire lighted; and Julie was busy breaking branches for pillows. Annette prepared the supper.

“What is your next step, my ingenious hero mistress?”

“To steal up near the camp−fire and see to which party it belongs; or whether the worst has happened.” Her fingers trembled a little as she ate; but her heart was as brave as a lion's.

“Take your pistol, Julie, and let us go.” The night was pitchy dark, although the fog had rolled away; for the moon had not yet risen, and no light came from the few feeble stars that were out. Over swamp and tangle, across bare marsh, and through dense wood they went, lightly as a pair of fawns, till the warm, ruddy glare of the strange camp−fire shone on their faces.

“Lie you here,” whispered Annette, “while I go forward.” She was not absent many minutes, but when she returned her cheeks were pale and her voice quivered a little. “As I expected. Captain Stephens and his two companions are prisoners. He is lying upon the ground without any cover over him, and his hands are bound behind his back. I see only one other, and he is wounded;—the other must have been killed.”

“But there is no use in waiting here to−night. The band is divided into watches; and one division has lain down to sleep. From some words that I heard one of the braves say I judge that they will carry the prisoners to Beaver Mountain, where there is a Cree stronghold. Here they will be held to abide the will of le chef. The march will last at least three days. But as they advance they will grow less cautious; then we may be able to accomplish something. Come, let us get back to our tent.”

Stretching themselves upon the fresh, fragrant boughs, they drew the rug over their two sweet, tired bodies, and fell into a restoring sleep.

CHAPTER VI. A DARING RESCUE.

When they awoke the sun was up, the mists had rolled out of the hollow, and every bush and blade of grass glittered as if set in diamonds. Hard by the tent ran a little brook, leaping, rushing, eddying, gurgling, sparkling down the incline, to join the larger stream whose slow moaning had sounded so terrible in the fog and dark.

"It is full of fish," gleefully exclaimed Julie; and casting a fly (for they had not come without tackle), she soon landed a trout about a pound weight. It was a blending of pink and silver on the belly, and was mottled with dots of brown. "One apiece," she cried, as another beauty curled and leaped upon the grass, by one of Annette's deftly booted little feet.

The kit supplied two or three flat pans that could be stowed conveniently; and into one of these the fish were put.

"Now, Julie, while you prepare the breakfast, I shall go and take a look at how things stand in the next camp."

She crept noiselessly through bush and brake, and perceived the band just making ready for a start. Captain Stephens was put upon a horse in the centre of the cavalcade, and his companion, pale and blood−stained, rode next behind.

Annette and Julie cautiously followed, drawing close to the party when it rode through the bush, but keeping far in the rear when the course lay over the plain. Towards the set of sun, they observed a horseman about a mile behind them, riding at high speed. They waited till the man drew near, and perceived that he was a Cree Indian.

"Message from Little Poplar," the brave said, as he reined in his splashed and foam−flecked pony, "The Great Chief rages against mademoiselle, and has braves searching for her through every part of the territory." Producing a paper, he handed it to Annette. Upon it were written in bold letters the following:

PROCLAMATION.

Any one bringing to my presence a young person, disguised as a Cree spy, and riding a large gray mare, will receive a reward of $500. This spy and traitor is usually accompanied by another person of smaller stature, and also disguised as a Cree boy. Rides a black gelding. These traitors have heard our secret counsels as friends, and have gone and disclosed our plans to the enemy. They gave warning of our approach to a band of government officers; they procured the escape of the oppressors from Fort Pitt; and they turned away Big Bear and his braves from pursuit of the fugitives, by lies. Our first duty is to capture them. No injury is to be done to the chief offender, who is to be immediately brought to my presence.

LOUIS DAVID RIEL.

"Tell your brave chief, mon ami," Annette said, "that we shall take care to avoid the followers of le grand chef, and of unfriendly Indians."

The Indian turned his pony, and was about retracing his steps, when Julie rode up to him, and in her exquisitely timid little way, said in a soft voice,

"Faites mes amities a monsieur, votre chef." The Indian replied, "Oui, oui," and urged his pony to the height of its speed. When Julie joined her mistress there was a little rose in each cheek, and a gleam in her faintly humid eye.

"Sending a message to her chief?" Annette said, looking at the bright, brown beauty. "She need not have blushed at giving her message to the brave; he thought that she was an Indian lad."

"Oh, I forgot," Julie murmured; and she pressed her deftly booted feet against the flanks of her pony.

The savage was, evidently, not enamoured of the lonesome journey back to his chief, for rumour had peopled every square mile of all the plains with warriors, and with hidden assassins. And spread across that arc of the sky where the sun had just gone down, were troops of clouds, of crimson, and bronze and pink; and in their curious shapes the solitary rider saw mighty horses, bestrode by giant riders, all congregated to join in the war. He knew that these were the spirits of chiefs who had ruled the plains long before the stranger with the pale face came; they always assembled when great battles were to be fought; and when their brothers began to lose heart in the fray, they would descend from the clouds and give to each warrior the heart of the lion, and the arm of the jaguar.

His heart swelled with a wild war−fever as these thoughts passed through his brain. Then the darkness began to creep over the plains; it came softly and as remorselessly as the prairie panther; and a fear grew upon the

savage. The horsemen in the sky had come nearer to the earth; some of them had trooped across through the dusk, till they stood directly above his head; and he fancied that several of the figures had lowered themselves down till they almost touched him. In the deepening dusk he could not observe what they were doing. They at last actually reached the earth;—and three giants stood before his horse.

"Mon Dieu," shrieked the terrified creature, and his hand lost control over the reins. His pony did not heed the spectres, but walked straight on. Nay, he passed so close to one of the dread things that the Indian's arm brushed the goblin. Its touch was hard. The man shrieked, and in a terror that stopped the beating of his heart fell to the ground. When he arose, he found that the spectre was not from the sky; but only a tall prairie poplar.

Pray, readers, do not laugh at the unreasonable terror of this untutored savage. I have seen some of yourselves just as unreasonable.

While the Indian was suffering the sunset clouds to fill him, now with enthusiasm, and again with dread, Annette and Julie were keeping their ponies at their fleetest pace to regain sight of the party.

"Do you know, Julie, I feel a presentiment that an opportunity for the rescue will come to−night. The captors will not dream of pursuit so far from the frequented grounds and known trails, and they will be off their guard. See! yonder they camp;" and while she was yet speaking, a pyramid of scarlet flame, scattering showers of sparks, shot up from a recess in the bluff lying directly before them.

"Rein in, Julie, we must find a bluff a safe distance off for our horses. Should they get scent or sight of the ponies in yonder camp, and whinny, all would be lost."

So swerving to the left, and taking a course at right angles to their late one, they rode slowly and silently till a bluff rose from the prairie, a short distance in front, like a hill.

"We shall tether our horses here, Julie; but I believe our stay will not be a long one." And the pair dismounted, tied their tired beasts, and swiftly raised the white sides of their tent.

"Ee−e−e−e!" it was Julie who gave the shriek. The thicket was swarming with soft, noiseless wings, and a bird with burning eyes had brushed the face of the maiden with its pinion. "What is it, ma maitresse? It has two bright eyes, and it touched my face. Ee−e−e. O! There it is again."

"What is the matter, Julie? Do you want to bring Jean and his Indians here, with this pretty screaming of yours?"

"But it brushed me in the face twice, mademoiselle."

"These are only night hawks, Julie; they gather sometimes like this in our own poplar−grove."

"O−o that's what it was? Pardonnez−moi. What a simpleton I am, my mistress. Do you think they heard me?" and her sweet voice was now so low, that the locust, dozing among the spray of the golden−rod, could scarcely have heard her tones. The thicket was literally swarming with these noiseless birds; and wondering they flew round and round the figures of the intruders, but most of all did they marvel at the great mound of white that had been raised amongst them. Some of them, in alarm, rose high above the bluff, wheeling and darting hither and thither, and the girls could hear their c−h−u−n−g as if some hand, high up in the air, had smote the bass chord of a violoncello. But when the flame from the camp fire arose, terror seized every feathered thing in the bluff, and they all flew, in wild haste, away from the bewildering light.

Annette was now away wandering through the grove, gathering dry and fallen limbs for the fire; and as Julie bustled about through the long prairie grass, preparing the meal, she was startled with a little cry.

"Mon Dieu, what is it?" Julie hastened away to her mistress, her bright eyes widened and gleaming with alarm.

"What has happened my mistress?"

"Oh! is that all it is? Why Julie, I am just as silly as you are. I stooped to pick up what I thought a little bramble, but when I laid my hand upon it, it moved; and then went under the ground. It was a gopher. I am now rebuked for chiding the fears of my little maid."

"But anybody would scream at touching a live thing like that on the ground. It was foolish, though, to be frightened at a bird."

Generous, sweet little Julie!

They now busied themselves with their supper, brewing some tea in a shallow pan; and when they had spread their store of provisions they sat down by the side of the fire, and ate their meal of home−made bread and cold meat. It would have gladdened the heart of the most withered monk to see those two healthy, plump little maidens

in the flickering fire light, their garments loosened, their eyes glowing, their cheeks and lips in hue like the cherry, eating slice after slice of bread and meat, and draining cup after cup of the fragrant tea.

"Now Julie," Annette said rising, after the precious maiden had eaten enough to make some miserable philosopher ill for a week of dyspepsia, "I shall creep out and make a reconnaissance." And buckling on her belt, with its large bright−bladed knife, and her ready revolver, she went away softly and cunning as a cat. The very field−mouse could have known nothing of her coming till her sweet foot was upon its head: and when she came in sight of the hostile camp fire with the dull scarlet glow that the mass of dying embers threw out, she stooped so low that a spectator near by would have imagined that the dark thing moving across the level was a prairie dog.

At last she was at the very edge of the bluff, and was peering between the branches at the party, about the flight of an arrow within. Captain Stephens was there, full in the light, his arms and legs fast bound, and tied to a sturdy white oak tree. Near a poplar, a few paces distant, lay his comrade, likewise bound and fastened to a tree. Most of the Indians were asleep; the remainder lolled about, showing no evidence of keeping vigil. Jean she could not perceive; and she believed, and was no doubt right, that he was sleeping.

"It is well," the maiden ejaculated in a little whisper; and she returned swiftly and noiselessly as a shadow to her own camp fire.

"Most of them sleep; and presently there will not be an open eye among the braves. Ah, Julie, if you but saw how they have *him* bound—both of the captives, I mean." And her eyes flashed, while her hand made a little blind, convulsive motion toward her pistol. "We have no time now to waste; help me to pack." In the space of a few minutes everything was ready for a start, and the horses led away to another bluff which loomed up about five hundred yards distant. Julie could not divine the reason for this precaution, but Annette whispered,

"Child, the light of our fire might, at the first moment of flight lead to recapture, should any of my plans fail; and it would take us a half an hour to extinguish the embers by fetching water in our little pans."

Yes, Julie saw a little of what her mistress was aiming at; and reposed perfect trust in Annette's ability to do everything with skill and success. The beasts were tethered, and dark as was that prairie night, these two girls with skill as unerring as the instinct of a pair of night−hawks could come back and find them. Then they struck out through the long grass, and made for the bluff where lay the Stonies and their prisoners.

"Now, if we can find their ponies!" Annette said.

"Wherefore look for their ponies, mademoiselle?"

"You soon shall see. Ah, here they are; stay you there, Julie, I will come to you again presently." But Julie followed her mistress. A little shudder passed through her heart as she saw the dull glitter of something in her mistress' hand.

"I don't like to do this cruel thing; but then I spill only brute blood; and I do so to save the shedding of human blood." Julie now surmised what her mistress was about; and drew her own knife. Annette had already passed from one of the ponies, after pausing for a few seconds stooped by its hinder legs, to another; and with the knife still gleaming in her hand, performed upon the second beast what she had done to the first.

"You just cut the tendons of the hinder legs, I suppose, mademoiselle?" Julie enquired in a whisper.

"What, are you at work too, Julie?"

"Oui mademoiselle; I have cut yonder one, and yon;" and she darted away to continue the work of mutilation. In a few minutes the uncanny task was ended, and with a shudder at their hearts the girls wiped their knives and led away from the flock of lamed and bleeding beasts the horses of Captain Stephens and his brother captive. These they tethered beside their own, and again returned. They then proceeded with noiseless tread towards the hostile camp.

The fire had burnt lower, but the glow was still strong enough to reveal the condition of the camp. After Annette had counted every Indian, and convinced herself that one and all were soundly sleeping, and that Jean in his tent was the deepest slumberer of all, she whispered softly.

"Remain you here, Julie. Should I be discovered fly instantly and take horse. Don't tarry for me. Peace, ma petite amie; I go."

And softly as sleep she went away, and in among the trees till she stood within a pace of where her deliverer lay. He had been on the border land that divides the world from the realm of dreams; but through the wavering senses of his eye and ear, he was sensible of the faintest stir among the leaves, of a shadow moving near him. Instantly his eyes were wide open; and the dull glow of the embers revealed standing above him with his finger on

his lips, the figure of the beautiful Indian boy who had saved his life before. The next moment, the boy is leaning over him; in another moment his bonds are severed, and he is free.

“Go,” whispered the boy, pointing toward the bluff; “no noise.” These words were as low and as fine as the little whisper that you hear among the leaves of the alder when a faint wind comes out of the west on a summer's evening and moves them. And while he yet remained bewildered by the suddenness of the boy's appearance, his own deliverance, and the order that had been given to him, he perceived the lad stooping over his companion in captivity, and severing the thongs that bound him. Stephens now moved hastily away a short distance, and then turned. The captive was upon his feet, and his deliverer was beside him; but at the same moment he saw a tall savage bound to his feet, with hatchet uplifted, and make towards the two. At the same time he uttered the fierce alarum−yell of the Stoney tribe.

“Fly!” shouted the Indian boy to the white. “Away!” and then he turned to face the approaching foe. The savage came on, and when, as it seemed to Stephens, his hatchet was about to cleave the boy's skull, there was a pistol report, and the Indian fell with a convulsive toss of his arms. This was accomplished in the space of a couple of heart−beats; but the time was long enough to bring Jean and the entire party to their feet.

“Fly!” repeated the Indian boy, and he bounded swiftly out of the bluff, joining Stephens, his companion and Julie, who all four now led off across the dark prairie towards the horses.

“Ought we not get our horses,” Stephens enquired in a low hurried tone, for the noise of the pursuit from the camp was close, and tumultuous as a broken bedlam.

“You will get your horses, Monsieur,” Annette replied, and Captain Stephens implicitly relied upon the word of the beautiful youth. The grass upon the prairie was thick and high, and in some places lay in heavy tangles, making slow the progress of the refugees; but they were able to keep their distance ahead of the Indians, who with flaring flambeaux were following their trail like bloodhounds. Out of the darkness came a series of sharp whinnies, and the next moment they found themselves among the horses. The beasts were ready for mounting, and without delay or bungle, the party were instantly in the saddles and cantering briskly across the prairie. As they rode along cries of baffled rage came to their ears; and they knew that the Indians had discovered the plight of their ponies.

But when they had ridden beyond the sound of the enemies' voices, they slacked their pace, and Captain Stephens said,

“Brave lad, is it your intention to ride all night?”

“No, Monsieur; I purpose resting at the first suitable place, till moon−rise. It is not safe for our horses' legs travelling among the gopher−burrows in the dark. At any rate Monsieur le Capitaine and his companion must be hungry.”

“During my captivity I have eaten nothing save a piece of an elk's heart raw; and I do not believe that Phillips has taken anything.”

The truth is that Phillips had been severely wounded; and besides several shot wounds in his side, his left arm was at this moment in a sling, having been nigh severed from his body with a hatchet blow.

“No, I have not eaten; and I think it was as well while the fever of my wounds was upon me.”

“But,” continued Captain Stephens, “I am most anxious to rest that I may hear how came you, my brave lad, and your heroic companion, to get knowledge of our capture; how it is that fate seems to have singled you out to be my constant guardian−angel and deliverer. I trust that you will not refuse the explanations as you did on a former occasion. A man who has been thrice rescued from probable death, has good excuse for seeking to know all about the person who has delivered him.”

“I would much rather that Monsieur did not press me upon the point,” the boy replied in a low voice.

“But I will, my heroic lad. I believe that we met somewhere before under different circumstances; for several times I have noticed a familiar accent in your voice.”

“It is only a delusion, Monsieur,” she replied in the same low tone. “But, here is a bluff wherein we shall be likely to find some place to rest for a little;” and turning her horse, she led the way along a grassy lane which seemed, in the night, as regular as if it had been fashioned with human hands. As she halted and while her hand lay upon her horse's neck, she said:

“I have a tent which I regret I cannot offer to share with you; but we can prepare a comfortable supper upon the grass; and you can rest cosily in the warmth of the fire.” With these words she dismounted.

In a few minutes the white of the tent loomed through the dusk; and presently a fire was roaring and scattering about a spray of scarlet sparks.

Annette had some moments with Julie in the tent, while Stephens was busy making a comfortable resting−place for his wounded companion.

“Julie, I cannot longer keep this secret; when we have eaten, I shall tell him. But oh! I think it will nearly kill me to do it. I am so ashamed; our dress, you know, Julie.” And by the dull glimmer of the camp−fire Julie could see that her mistress' face was like a freshly−blown carnation.

“I would not mind telling mon chef, ma maitresse; Monsieur Stephens will prize you all the more for your bravery. And then it is so becoming;” and this sweetest of maids looked admiringly at the exquisite curves and grace of outline in her mistress. And she came to her softly as a mouse, taking the still blushing face into her brown hands, and looking lovingly into the luminous eyes.

“Ah Julie, your chief, or our own Metis, might admire us in this costume, but the ladies of Captain Stephens' acquaintance would shrink from doing that in which we see naught amiss. He may think it indelicate and—.” Once more the blood came stinging with a thousand sharp points in her temples; but Julie interposed:

“Nay, mademoiselle; if you have done anything unlike what white ladies do, it was for the sake of Captain Stephens; and if you did not adopt disguise, you could not have saved him.”

“True, sweet Julie; you fill me with courage;” and then she set about preparing the meal.

Captain Stephens was amazed at the deftness with which the young scout prepared the repast; and he lay upon the grass, with his eyes rivetted upon the nimble, noiseless, graceful lad. It puzzled him that the mysterious youth should persistently keep his head averted, and he was the more strongly decided to discover his identity. When the meal was ended Annette whispered,

“Julie will come with us; I never could tell him in the light of the fire.” Then turning towards Captain Stephens, with eyes looking timidly down, “If monsieur will walk forth a little with me and mon frere, I shall tell him something.”

Certainly, he would go, and was upon his feet beside the mysterious boy, whose colour had now become most fitful, changing from pale olive to the dye of the damask rose. They went beyond the bluff, and out upon the prairie, Stephens marvelling much, though speaking no word, what the handsome boy had to say to him.

“Monsieur,” she began in a soft, trembling voice, “has wondered who I am, and thinks he has heard my voice before. He has heard it—at the cottage of my father.”

Captain Stephens turned around and gazed with amazement at the lad.

“He has heard it elsewhere, too,” Annette went on—“he heard it on the brimming river; he saved me from death below the chute.”

“Heavens, Annette Marton! Sweet, generous, noble girl, why had I not guessed the truth,” and he stood rapt with gratitude and admiration before her. Kindly dusk of the starless prairie that hid the blushes and confusion of the girl!

Then in a low tone, as they walked aimlessly about upon the plain, she told him the story of her adventures, all of which my reader already knows. Then they returned; and when they neared the camp fire, Annette with a shy little run disappeared into her tent, murmuring softly,

“Au revoir, Monsieur.”

Her dreams were bewildering, yet delicious, that night; but there ran through them all a feeling of shame that he should have detected her in those unwomanly clothes. Indeed, the embarrassment went further than this; and once she imagined, the dear maiden, that she was by the edge of an amber−green pool fringed with rowan bushes and their vermillion berries, and that as she was about to step into it for a bath, there occurred what happened in the case of Artemis and her maids, the one upon whom her heart was set taking the place of Actaon. She gave a great scream and awoke, to find Julie sitting up and looking with wide affrighted eyes through the dusk at her mistress.

“Oh, I had such a horrid dream, Julie,” and nestling her head upon the bosom of her maid, she was soon asleep and wandering again in spirit with her lover through the prairie flowers.

They were astir early in the morning, and Annette, as was the habit of the Metis women, had about her shoulders a blanket of Indian red and Prussian blue. [Footnote: It is customary for Metis women, even the most coquettish and pretty of them, to wear blankets; and the hideous “fashion” is the chief barbaric trait which they

inherit from their wild ancestry. Annette, of course, donned the robe under a mental protest. E.C.] Captain Stephens had gone abroad upon the prairie in the morning, and with his pistol shot a pair of chickens. These he handed to Annette as he returned, saying,

"Here my little hero deliverer; and take this, too," handing her a tiger lily, moist with dew. "Now, in what way can I assist the Cree boy who has twice saved my life?" and he looked wistfully into the eyes of the brown maiden.

"If monsieur will just sit there upon the grass, petite and myself will get the meal;" and straightway she began to pluck and prepare the chickens which Stephens had given her. The sun burned through the cobalt blue of the prairie sky, and there was not anywhere in the great, blue dome an atom of cloud. The sun and the rays from the fire combined made the heat unbearable, and Annette with no little confusion laid by her blanket. Perceiving her discomfiture, Stephens arose and wandered about the prairie, picking flowers; and only returned in obedience to the call of Julie's little silver whistle.

Very soon, the party was in motion along the trail, Annette leading, Captain Stephens riding in rear beside Phillips, who was again feverish with his wounds.

They rode till the post meridian sun became too warm, and then obtaining shelter in a bluff, they lunched and rested for several hours. They then resumed their march and continued it till the set of sun. During the day Stephens rode frequently by the side of Annette, but she invariably made her horse mend its pace, and rode alone. Despite his admiring glances, and his deep expressions of gratitude, Stephens gradually began to resume his old playful manner of address. He referred to her as "the little Cree boy," and in speaking of her to Julie or Phillips, always used the word "he." Annette took no heed of this; she led the party through mazes of woodland, across stretches where there was no trail, or selected the camping−ground.

"The moon rises to−night about twelve, monsieur," she said to Stephens when supper had been ended, "and we had better resume our march then. There is a Cree village not far from here, and the braves are everywhere abroad. I do not think that travelling by day would be safe; for all the Indians must have read the proclamation."

About midnight a dusky yellow appeared in the south−east, and then the luminous, greenish−yellow rim of the moon appeared and began to flood the illimitable prairie with its wizard light.

"So this miscreant has been hunting you, Annette?" said Stephens, for both had unconsciously dropped in rear. "I suppose, ma petite, if I had the right to keep you from the fans of the water−mill, that I also hold the right of endeavouring to preserve you from a man whose arms would be worse than the rending wheel?" She said nothing, but there was gratitude enough in her eye to reward one for the most daring risk that man ever ran.

"You do not love this sooty persecutor, do you, ma chere?"—and then, seeing that such a question filled her with pain and shame, he said, "Hush now, petite; I shall not tease you any more." The confusion passed away, and her olive face brightened, as does the moon when the cloud drifts off its disc.

"I am very glad. Oh, if you only knew how I shudder at the sound of his name!"

"There now, let us forget about him," and reining his horse closer to hers, he leaned tenderly towards the girl. She said nothing, for she was very much confused. But the confusion was less embarrassment than a bewildered feeling of delight. Save for the dull thud, thud of the hoofs upon the sod, her companion might plainly have heard the riotous beating of the maiden's heart.

"And now, about that flower which I gave you this morning. What did you do with it?"

"Ah, Monsieur, where were your eyes? I have worn it in my hair all day. It is there now."

"Oh, I see. I am concerned with your head,—not with your heart. Is that it, ma petite bright eye? You know our white girls wear the flowers we give them under their throats—upon their bosom. This they do as a sign that the donor occupies a place in their heart."

He did not perceive in the dusky light that he was covering her with confusion. Upon no point was this maiden so sensitive, as the revelation that a habit or act of hers differed from that of the civilized girl. Her dear heart was almost bursting with shame, and this thought was running through her mind.

"What a savage I must seem in his eyes." Her own outspoken words seemed to burn through her body. "But how could I know where to wear my rose? I have read in English books that gentle ladies wear them there." And these lines of Tennyson [Footnote: I must say here for the benefit of the drivelling, cantankerous critic, with a squint in his eye, who never looks for anything good in a piece of writing, but is always in the search for a flaw, that I send passages from Tennyson floating through Annette's brain with good justification. She had received a

very fair education at a convent in Red River. She could speak and write both French and English with tolerable accuracy; and she could with her tawny little fingers, produce a true sketch of a prairie tree−clump, upon a sheet of cartridge paper, or a piece of birch rind. I am constrained to make this explanation because the passage appeared in another book of mine and evoked censure from one or two dismal wiseacres.—E.C.] came running through her head:

"She went by dale, and she went by down,
With a single rose *in her hair*."

These gave her some relief, for she thought, after all, that he might be only jesting. When the blood had gone from her forehead, she turned towards her lover, who had been looking at her since speaking, with a tender expression in his mischievous eyes.

"Do white girls never wear roses in their hair? I thought they did. Can it be wrong for me to wear mine in the same place?"

"Ah, my little barbarian, you do not understand me. If an ancient bachelor, whose head shone like the moon there in the sky, were to give to some blithe young belle a rose or a lily, she would, most likely, twist it in her hair; but if some other person had presented the flower, one whose eye was brighter, whose step was quicker, whose laugh was cheerier, whose years were fewer; in short, ma chere Annette, if some one for whom she cared just a little more than for any other man that walked over the face of creation, had presented it to her, she would not put it in her hair. No, my unsophisticated one, she would feel about with her unerring fingers, for the spot nearest her heart, and there she would fasten the gift. Now, ma Marie, suppose you had possessed all this information when I gave you the flower, where would you have pinned it?"

"Nobody has ever done so much for me as Monsieur. He leaped into the flood, risking his life to save mine. I would be an ungrateful girl, then, if I did not think more of him than of any other man; therefore, I would have pinned your flower on the spot nearest my heart."

Then, deftly, and before he could determine what her supple arms and nimble brown fingers were about, she had disengaged the lily from her hair, and pinned it upon her bosom.

"There now, Monsieur, is it in the right place?" and she looked at him with a glance exhibiting the most curious commingling of naivete and coquetry.

"I cannot answer. I do not think that you understand me yet. If the act of saving you from drowning were to determine the place you should wear the rose, then the head, as you first chose, was the proper spot. Do you know what the word Love means?"

"O, I could guess, perhaps, if I don't know. I have heard a good deal about it, and Violette, who is fond of a young Frenchman, has explained it so fully to me, that I think I know. Yes, Monsieur, I *do* know."

"Well, you little rogue, it takes one a long time to find out whether you do or not. In fact I am not quite satisfied on the point. However, let me suppose that you do know what love is; the all−consuming sort; the kind that sighs like the furnace. Well, supposing that a flower is worn over the heart only to express love of this sort, where would you, with full knowledge of this fact, have pinned the blossom that I plucked for you this morning?"

"Since I do not understand the meaning of the word love with very great clearness,—I think Monsieur has expressed the doubt that I do understand it—I would not have known where to pin the flower. I would not have worn it at all. I would, Monsieur, if home, have set it in a goblet, and taking my stitching, would have gazed upon it all the day, and prayed my guardian angel to give me some hint as to where I ought to put it on."

"You little savage, you have eluded me again. Do you remember me telling you that some day, if you found out for me a couple of good flocks of turkeys, I would bring you some coppers?"

"I do."

"Well, if you discovered a hundred flocks now I would not give you one." And then he leaned towards her again as if his lips yearned for hers. For her part, she took him exactly as she should have done. She never pouted;—If she had done so, I fancy that there would have been soon an end of the boyish, sunny raillery.

"Hallo! Petite, we are away, away in the rear. Set your horse going, for we must keep up with our escort." Away they went over the level plain, through flowers of every name and dye, the fresh, exquisite breeze bearing the scent of the myriad petals. After a sharp gallop over about three miles of plain, they overtook the main body of the escort, and all rode together through the glorious night, under the calm, bountiful moon.

"When this journey is ended we shall rest for a few days at my uncle's, my brave Cree," Stephens said.

“Running through the grounds is a little brook swarming with fish. Will you come fishing with me there, petite?”

“Oui, avec grand plaisir, Monsieur.”

“Of course, you shall fish with a pin−hook. I am not going to see you catch yourself with a barbed hook, like that which I shall use”

“Oh, Monsieur! Why will you always treat me as a baby!” and there was the most delicate, yet an utterly indescribable, sort of reproach in her voice and attitude, as she spoke these words.

“Then it is not a baby by any means,” and he looked with undisguised admiration upon the maiden, with all the mystic grace and the perfect development of her young womanhood. “It is a woman, a perfect little woman, a fairer, a sweeter, my own mignonnette, than any girl ever seen in these plains in all their history.”

“Oh, Monsieur is now gone to the other extreme. He is talking dangerously; for he will make me vain.”

“Does the ceaseless wooing of the sweet wild rose by soft winds, make that blossom vain? or is the moon spoilt because all the summer night ten thousand streams running under it sing its praises? As easy, Annette, to make vain the rose or the moon as to turn your head by telling your perfections.”

“Monsieur covers me with confusion!” and the little sweet told the truth. But it was a confusion very exquisite to her. It was like entrancing music in her veins; and gave her a delightful delirium about the temples. How fair all the glorious great round of the night, and the broad earth lit by the moon, seemed to her now, with the music of his words absorbing her body and soul. Everything was transfigured by a holy beauty, for Love had sanctified it, and clothed it in his own mystic and beautiful garments. It was with poor Marie, then, as it has some time or other been with us all: when every bird that sang, every leaf that whispered, had in its tone a cadence caught from the one loved voice. I have seen the steeple strain, and rock, and heard the bells peal out in all their clangorous melody, and I have fancied that this delirious ecstacy of sound that bathed the earth and went up to heaven was the voice of one sweet girl with dimples and sea−green eyes.

The mischievous young Stephens had grown more serious than Annette had ever seen him before.

“But, my little girl, what is to become of you during this period of tumult. It may continue long, and it is hard to say what the chances of war may have in store for your father.”

“I know not; though my heart is with the cause of my father and of his people, yet, I do not desire to see them triumph over your people. A government under the hateful chief would be intolerable; and whenever I can warn the white soldiers of danger, I shall do it.”

“What a hero you are Annette! How different from what I supposed on that day when I saw you sitting in your canoe in the midst of the racing flood.”

She was glad that Monsieur held what she had done in such high regard.

“Why dear girl, the story of your bravery will be told by the writers of books throughout all Christendom. Ah, Annette, I shall be so lonely when you go from me!”

Stephens was all the while growing more serious, and even becoming pathetic, which is a sign of something very delicious, and not uncommon, when you are travelling under a bewitching moon in company with a more bewitching maiden.

But there was so much mischief in his nature that he would rebound at any moment from a mood of pathos or seriousness to one of levity. “Well, Annette,” and he leaned yearningly towards her, “when you leave me to take the chances of this tumultuous time, the greatest light that I have known will have gone out of my life.”

“When I am absent from Monsieur, perhaps he never thinks of me.”

“What a little ingrate it is! Yesterday morning, while you were getting breakfast, I was upon the prairie, doing—what think you?”

How was Annette to know?

“Well, I was making verses about ma petite. I was describing her eyes, and her ears, and all her beautiful face.”

“Oh, Monsieur!” and again came the blood to her face till her cheeks rivalled the crimson dye of the vetch at their ponies' feat. Then in a little,

“What did Monsieur say about my ears? They are like those of all the Metis girls; and I do not think that they are as pretty as Julie's.”

Then he replied with the lines,

“Shells of rosy pink and silver are most like her dainty ears; Shells wherein the fisher maiden the sad Nereid's

singing hears."

"Oh, indeed Monsieur, my ears are not at all beautiful like that; indeed they're not." Then slightly changing her tone, "Perhaps le capitaine made these about some white maiden whose ears *are*, like that."

"What an ungrateful little creature it is!"

"No, but Monsieur cannot make me believe that my ears resemble shells, coloured in pink and silver. In his heart he is comparing my brown skin with the snow−white complexions of some of his Caucasian girls, and thinking how horrid mine is."

"Why, you irreconcilable little wretch, it is your complexion that most of all I adore. It is not 'brown;' who told you that it was? The colour of your skin I described in these lines, though you do not deserve that I should repeat them to you:"

"In the sunny, southern orchard fronting on some tawny beach, Exquisite with silky softness hangs the downy silver peach; But as dainty as the beauty of the bloom whereof I speak—Rain, nor sun, nor frost can change it—is the bloom on Annette's cheek."

"Oh, monsieur! I do not know what to say, if you really made these verses about me. If you did, they are not true; I am sure they are not;" and her confusion was a most exquisite sight to see.

"But I have not described your eyes yet; here are the two lines that I made about them:

"Annette's eyes are starlight mingled with the deepest dusk of
night;—
Eyes with lustre rich and glorious like some sweet, warm, southern
light."

"Oh, no, no, monsieur, they are not true; I don't want you to say any more of them to me," and she put her hand over her face; for the dear little one's embarrassment was very great.

"That is all I wrote about you; but I may write some more. You say, petite, that they are not true. I confess that they are not—true enough. Why, sweet, brave, and most lovely of girls, they fall far short of showing your merits in the full. I have so far tried to explain only what is beautiful in your face; but, darling, you have a nobleness of soul that no language of mine could describe.

"I believe, my heroic love, that you have regarded yourself as a mere plaything in my eyes. Why, ma chere, all of my heart you have irrevocably. One of your dear hands is more precious to me, than any other girl whom mine eyes have ever seen. Do you remember the definition of love that I tried to give you? Well, I gave it from my own experience. With such a love, my prairie flower, do I adore you. It is fit now that we are so soon to part, that I should tell you this: and you will know that every blow I strike, every noble deed I do, shall be for the approbation of the dear heart from whom fate severs me. And though the hours of absence will be dreary there will lie beyond the darkest of them one hope which shall blaze like a star through the night, and this is, that I shall soon be able to call my Annette my own sweet bride. Now, my beloved, if that wished−for time had come, and I were to say, 'Will you be mine, Annette,' what would your answer be?"

"I did not think it was necessary for Monsieur to ask me that question," she answered shyly, her beautiful eyes cast down; "I thought he knew."

"My own little hunted pet!" He checked his horse, and seized the bridle of Annette's pony, till the two animals stood close together. Then he kissed the girl upon her dew−wet lips, murmuring low,

"My love!"

Later on, they were in sight of the spot where they must part, and Phillips and Julie were awaiting them there. The light of the moon was wan now upon the prairie, for the dawn was spreading in silver across the eastern sky.

"My beloved must run no more risk, even for me," he said, leaning tenderly towards her.

She would be prudent, but she would always for his sake warn his friends of danger when she had knowledge of the same.

Again he breathed a low "Good−bye, my love," his eyes wistful, mournful and tender; and with Phillips at his side, then rode down a small gorge at the bottom of which were tangles of cedar and larch.

And as they rode suspecting naught of danger, several Indians hidden in the draggled bush arose and stealthily followed them.

CHAPTER VII. A FIGHT; A CAPTURE; AND THE GUARDIAN SWAN.

ANNETTE with a tear in the corner of each eye, and Julie at her side, rode on till the two came within sight of the shining waters of the indolent Saskatchewan. As they rode leisurely along its banks, Annette, now sighing and now Julie, they heard the trample of hoofs, and turning saw approaching an Indian chief, well mounted.

“Ah, your chef, ma petite,” Annette said, looking at Julie.

But Julie was well aware who the fast riding stranger was; and she was covered with the most becoming of blushes when her lover drew rein beside them.

“No time; Indians in pursuit of you. I said I would come ahead of braves to keep watch upon your movements. Ride to the south, and unless you find good bluffs to the east, don't rest till you reach Souris.” And he was about to go; but Julie, who had quietly managed to so work her left heel as to make her horse perform a right pass till its side touched that of the chief's pony, turned towards him, her face having the expression of a large note of interrogation, which if put in words would say, Are you going away without giving your Julie a kiss? while her lips would remind you of the half−opened rose that awaits the hovering shower.

The chief may have interpreted the mute and delicious appeal, but he was too full of alarm to accept the invitation, even though he could have conquered his sense of delicacy enough to do it before Annette.

“There now, I must be away, he said; and you must be off too.” Julie put down her head till her chin touched her bosom; but she turned her dusky eyes up towards her lover with irresistible effect, as she said,

“Won't you before you go? Ma maitresse will not mind.” It is not in the nature of man, even before the cannon's mouth, to resist such an appeal as there was upon the half−pouting, half−yearning lips of that Metis girl. He stooped suddenly, kissed her once, twice, thrice, and then was away.

Annette and Julie at the same moment turned their horses, and rode at a swift pace along the Saskatchewan; but they had barely started when a shower of fierce yells came to them, and turning in their saddles they saw a band of painted savages not more than five hundred paces distant, mounted on fleet ponies, and making for them at high speed. As for Julie's chief there was nothing to be seen of him.

“Where can the chief have gone, ma maitresse? Will the braves not know that he has played them false? Oh it was so selfish not to think of him;” and she turned again in her saddle, and once more scanned the plains for sight of her lover.

“Julie need not fear for the chief. He is very likely in that cottonwood bluff near where we parted.”

“He could hide safely there, think you mademoiselle?” and she gave her reins a joyous fling. Then in an altered tone, “But he must think me indifferent, that I did not ask him how he was to conceal from the braves knowledge of what he had done.”

“There is not much fear that he will think petite indifferent,” Annette replied in a playful tone. “A sweet girl that asks a lover to kiss her is not *indifferent*.”

“Oh, there now, mademoiselle; please don't! Oh, it was such a dreadful thing for me to do. Perhaps he will not like me for it;” and this wretched darling was the colour of a new−blown poppy.

“Why, Julie, they are closing upon us,” Annette exclaimed, as she turned to look at the pursuers. “Their ponies are fresh, and our horses cannot keep up a long run, I fear. Spur on, Julie,” and the girls put their horses at the top of their speed.

“There, we are holding our distance now Julie; and I think gaining a little,” she added after a few moments. “See, some of their ponies are falling out of the chase,” and a glance revealed four savages now several hundred yards in advance of the main body which were evidently unwilling to join further in the pursuit.

“These four Julie, must in the end overtake us. Note their lithe, large ponies, and what a buoyant spring they have.”

“How soon, mademoiselle, will they catch us? and what will we do then?”

“You must not ask two questions at once, Julie. I mean, you must not get frightened. As to the first question,”—the sentences were now and again broken by the swift galloping—“they will catch us probably in half an hour.”

“Oh, goodness,” Julie said.

“As to the second, we must fight them.”

“Mon Dieu, they will kill us mademoiselle.”

“Perhaps; but they will have to try hard. See yon valley with the tangles of bush?”

“Oui, mademoiselle.”

“I know that valley. Was there once with mon pere. Unless they keep directly upon our trait, I shall lead them into a pretty mess.” Altering her course, suddenly, for a bluff intervened and hid the movements of the girls from the savages, Annette followed by Julie made rapidly for the bottom of the valley, crossing through a belt of straggling cedar and larches, and then held her way along the skirt of the opposite ridge.

Faint, far−off yells told the girls that they had been again discovered, but they had the consolation of knowing that their pursuers must have lost almost a quarter of a mile. But the best part of the matter was that, as Annette had expected and planned, the Indians descended into the valley at a point much higher than that chosen by the pursued. They knew not of the stretch of quaking, treacherous bog, with its population of designing beaver; indeed, they would be certain to be lured by the bright, glittering green of the liverwort that clad the level where the ground was most unsubstantial.

Although I am not certain as to the prevalence of this weed in the swampy places of the North−West, I can affirm that I have scarcely ever seen a very dangerous quagmire that has not been covered with this exquisite little plant; and if I could credit the stories of the nursery, I would be able to believe that those malignant fairies who live about dangerous springs and shaking swamps, cover the ground with these dainty sprays of green to lure men to their destruction. Perhaps the fairies were as interested in the fortunes of Annette and Julie as, at my heart, I am; and that they decked this swamp in its cover of glistering green to hide the death beneath.

Well, whether the fairies did this thing or not, the savages were taking such a course that, in order to regain the trail of the fugitives, they must cross some portion of the treacherous bog. Annette's eye was upon their movements now.

“Pull rein, Julie;” and both brought their horses to a standstill.

“Well, ma maitresse, what now?” and the pet's hands trembled, and the roses were out of her cheek.

“See; they near the swamp, and will be able, after a struggle, to get through it. Now, Julie, I wish to ride down when they get fairly in the toils; but I would prefer that you should go in the direction we were pursuing. If everything is right, I shall soon overtake you.”

“Oh, I go with ma chere maitresse, to do whatever she does.”

“Brava, Julie; I do not think we have much to fear. Ha, they are in the toils. In fifteen minutes they will be out. Let us away.” While she guided her horse with her bridle hand, Julie perceived her unbutton her holster pipe, and seize and cock a Colt's revolver.

“I have one, too,” muttered Julie; “so I guess I'll do the same thing.” Not a bit of cowardice did the sweet exhibit now.

They were now within a hundred paces of that portion of the swamp wherein the braves were tangled. And if ever savages, or anything else, were in a mess, these painted warriors now were. They had reached the centre of the bog, and were floundering in it up to their horses' bellies. Their excitement was so intense that they had eyes for no other place than the spot where their horses floundered and writhed; and did not notice the approach of the fugitives. Nay, the two had reached the very edge of the quagmire before the Indians noticed the Cree boys. The yell that then went up from their throats was most comical.

Annette's arm was extended, and her revolver was pointed at the nearest savage; seeing which, Julie drew hers, and covered the next brave. But before she had the lid over her left eye, Annette had fired, and fired to effect, for the brave had gone over upon his back, and sprawled and splashed among the liverwort and the bog.

Julie next fired, and when she saw, as the result of her shot, the arm of the savage hang useless at his side, she cried—

“Bon, bon!” and cocked her pistol again.

“We must wing them, Julie,” Annette said, who had her arm extended once again. “I don't like to kill the wretches.” Then came a voice crying from the swamp, in dismal Cree—

“Don't fire any more; we won't follow the little scouts. We swear it by the Sun, and by the God of Thunder;” and laying his hand upon his hatchet, the terrified wretch faced the Sun and swore the oath: then turning towards the clouds wherein the Thunder God resides, he repeated his avowal with the same forms and solemnity of

gesture. Still Annette kept her arm extended.

"The braves talk with forked tongues, and we do not believe them," she replied, in the Cree language.

"But we have sworn it," the miserable savage replied, in a doleful voice.

"False men, swearing by false gods!" Annette replied. "No; we will not trust them. But let the braves listen. We do not want to kill them, and have decided to wing them instead."

"Oh, oh!" groaned the poor red−skins.

"There is no time to lose; the braves must not hide behind their ponies in that way, or we shall be obliged to fire at their bodies and kill them. They must come out so that we can shoot them in the legs."

The reader who has reached this point will likely say, "Well, Mr. Author, you are a bright individual. Why did not the Indians fire?" The truth is, they had no firearms, being supplied only with hatchets and spears; and they were not aware that the scouts had pistols.

"But we have nothing more to fear from them, mademoiselle," Julie said, "wherefore need we fire at them?"

"Nor do I intend to do so, Julie; I am only bent now on so frightening them that they will no more attempt pursuit. Moreover, I am anxious that they shall convey tidings of our bloodthirstiness among all the tribes; for when such rumour obtains circulation, we shall be harassed less by pursuit."

"C'est bien, ma maitresse; c'est bien."

"No more delay," shouted Annette. "Let the two braves stand up," But each one lay close under the lee of a struggling horse, holding the animal fast by the head, in order to keep him sure in the swamp.

"Put you up your pistol, Julie; leave this work to me." And once more presenting her little round, ferocious arm, she fired, hitting one of the shielding horses upon the fore shoulder. Maddened with pain, the brute flung himself out of his predicament, and left the Indian exposed, upon which Annette immediately fired. The savage uttered a terrible cry, flung up his arms, and fell without a move among the liverwort.

"Did you kill him, after all, mademoiselle?"

"No, Julie; the wretch is only shamming. I fired yards away from him. Now let the other brave stand up, or the same fate awaits him," the girl cried; and, presenting a picture of abject terror, the unfortunate redskin, who believed the third one shot at to be dead, drew himself out of his covert, and, putting his leg upon the horse, exposed himself to the pistol. Once more the bloodthirsty little scout fired, and with an agonized yell, the Indian sprawled in the marsh−mire. His leg he seized just above the knee, as if the bullet had entered at that point.

"Is he hit?" whispered Julie.

"No, silly petite; he is also making believe. How well the two rascals act their part. See the one playing dead. Well, we shall wait long enough to see his imposture exposed. He is sinking fast in the quagmire. His head is almost under now." She had scarce ceased, when the redskin gave a convulsive start, resembling a dying spasm, and got once more safely above the hungry swamp.

"He will continue to have the spasms right along," Julie whispered, "while we stay here."

"Yes; but for the sake of the two wounded ones—I believe mine is badly hurt—we shall ride away. But we must keep watch to−night, Julie. I believe these two men will follow; and if they find us sleeping, they will brain us." Then, turning to the tangle of struggling horses and Indians, she said in a stern voice—

"Some of you may only pretend that you have been wounded, and purpose following us. But we shall keep strict watch, and woe unto any one of you that we catch in pistol range again. We now leave you." With these words the two sanguinary girls turned their horses, and briskly rode away.

"What idiots they must have been to follow without fire−arms," Julie said.

"Had we been armed only with hatchets, how different the case would have been, enfant naif. You, child, may have considered this shedding of blood unnecessary, and therefore cruel."

Oh, no; Julie did not think it so. La maitresse knew better than she did.

"But there was only the choice between taking the method adopted, and openly meeting the four Indians on *terra firma*, when probably all the savages would have been killed; or, in the hurried shooting, we might have missed the mark, and been cloven or speared."

"Where shall my mistress camp to−night?"

"I know an extensive bluff, and we could penetrate it far enough to be tolerably safe from the braves."

When the upper rim of the sun burned like a semi−circlet of yellow, quivering flame, above the far flat prairie, the girls turned their horses towards a stretch of sombre wood that stood like a vast and solemn congregation of

cloaked men upon the level.

It was not considered prudent that night to kindle a fire; for one wandering spark might prove a signal to the foe. So they ate their meal, and Julie rolled herself up in her blanket, while Annette seated herself outside of the tent to keep vigil during the first watch.

"My mistress must not let me sleep too long; she ought not to sit up at all. What did I come for—if—not—to—to—." Here the tired, drowsy pet stopped, for she was asleep.

Annette sat upon her blanket, and heard no sound save the breaking of the grass and the grinding of the horses' teeth, as the hungry beasts fed. Her heart was not in the wood; it was away with her lover, and once more her blood tingled, and a delicious sensation made her heart warm as the words which he spoke when they rode together passed through her brain.

"Oh, what nice verses he made about my eyes and ears, and my skin. Ah, if he were only playing with me." An arrow now quivered for a moment in her heart. "But no; he has the two ways—he can be playful, and say all manner of teazing things; but, oh, he can be sincere. He never could have spoken in such a tone, with such a light in his eyes, with such an expression in his face, if all had not come from the bottom of his heart. And he will take me away, away out to the far east, where white men dwell, and put into some great mansion, and make me its mistress. Oh, it will be all so sweet. But the dearest part of all is that he will love me, and me alone. How proud I shall be that no other girl can say, that his heart is hers.

"Ah, Annette, just for your sweet sake, I trust that the future over which your heart now gloats will fit itself to such a dream. I think, somehow, that it will; for he seems true, and, darling, you are worthy. But you know it does not always happen in the way that you have fashioned it in your dear head. Some other girl *does* sometimes come with sly, soft feet and steal away hearts from trusting and adoring wives, and they have no remorse either in doing the cruel deed. Indeed, believe me, I have known them in their heart to glory that they had done this thing. You will, therefore, have to take your chance."

While Annette was in the midst of her reverie, her round dimpled cheek resting on her hands, one of the horses tossed his head and whinnied. "Julie, awake," she cried, quickly touching the sleeping girl; and then seizing her pistol took position behind a tree, whispering Julie to join her there. And as that frightened maiden hurried out from her warm nest, a voice came through the poplars saying,

"Fear not, Little Poplar comes."

"It is *his* voice, Mademoiselle," and immediately the sleep flew out of Julie's eyes, and left them luminous as the stars shining beyond the tree−tops.

"The chief is welcome," Annette replied; and Julie was upon her feet making a little voyage now in this direction, and now in that, in the endeavour to find him. All the while she kept saying, "This way! this way!" but in a tone so low that he could not have heard her at a distance of ten lengths of this small maiden. At last his tall, straight figure, resembling in very truth a little poplar, was seen moving towards the tent; and with a shy run Julie was at his side.

"I followed the four braves who were bent on your capture, and saw the affair in the swamp. When you rode away, one whom I supposed dead, arose and joined with another whose leg I had thought was broken in getting out the horses. One brave was really dead, and he has by this time sunk in the bog. A fourth had a broken arm, and he went away with the other two. They will not pursue again, so you may sleep in peace till the rise of sun. I shall put my blanket here. Should one approach, the ears of Little Poplar are as keen while the spirit of sleep hovers over him as while he is awake."

Julie's dreams were very happy that night.

On the morrow Little Poplar informed them that his heart was not now as much with the white people as it had been some little time ago. He was aware that the braves were for the most part unreasonable, and that they were easily led into wrong as well as to right doing.

"They have, I admit, committed some excesses; but it never can be forgotten that strangers have taken possession of their hunting grounds, and that, if they have no substitute to offer, the red children of the plains must die. My tongue could not tell, mademoiselle, nor your brain conceive, the sufferings that I have seen among our people in the long bitter winters, with only the snow for wrappers, and pieces of dried skins for food. Will the white man die of hunger while food is within his reach? No, he will beg it first, and then he will take by violence; but I have seen the young maiden and the withered crone gasp their last breath away upon the snow, while

ranches teeming with cattle lay not an hour's march away.

“If an Indian, with a wife, and a lodge full of children dying on a bitter winter's day of hunger, turn a calf from some nigh herd of white man's cattle, alarming tidings fly to the east, and white men and women learn, in their sumptuous houses, that the Indians do naught but plunder. But they would have no need, I repeat, to lay hands upon the ranchers' cattle if the white man had not come and stripped them of their boundless heritage, and put them upon reservations where a buffalo may never come. [Footnote: The words in the mouth of this chief are not exaggerations, and it is God's own truth that during late winters dozen after dozen of Indians, men and women and children, perished in the snow after they had devoured the skins that covered them. Yet these poor people are said to be under “the paternal care of Government.” Alas, our public men are only concerned in playing their wretched political game, and they sit intriguing, while the helpless creatures committed to their care perish like dogs, of hunger, in their lodges.—E.C.]

“And some of the soldiers who have come here from the east are more bent on earning reputation than on making peace. Some of their leaders do not want the cheap glory of 'killing a lot of Indians;' and I have with my own ears heard one of the Ontario magistrates, Col. Denison, declare that he did next come here to kill, but to prevent killing. If military affairs were now to be given into the hands of some men like him it would prove better for all concerned.

“But there is another officer, Major Beaver, who has made amazing marches; his men, in fact, have travelled like March hares. But give me a bluff, and fifty braves, and not one of all his rash and rushing followers will get back again to Ontario to boast of their deeds of daring.

“Some of our men have been guilty of excesses, but Government gave them its solemn pledge that if they returned to their reserves no harm should come to them. All of my braves have gone back, because I gave them the assurance that some of the officers gave to me. Yet, if I mistake not, Major Beaver is at this moment planning an attack upon us. His young men want to kill a few Indians, provided the thing can be done without any risk; and then they will be described as great heroes in the newspapers. They would fare very badly if they had to return without having 'a brush,' as the more war−like of them have put it, in the hearing of some of my friends.”

“Yes, mon chef,” Annette replied, “but you say that Colonel Denison and others advocate a healing of the present sores, and pacific measures. Then there are others who have always sympathized with the Indian, like Mr. Mair. Mon pere tells me that he has been for some time engaged on a beautiful poem, intended to show the injustice that has been heaped upon the children of the plains. With good counsels like these, surely no outrage will be done unto your people.”

“And now, where do the two brave scouts purpose going?” the chief enquired, as they came in sight of a small settlement nestling around the edge of a coil in the Saskatchewan.

Annette was going to see her aunt, and Julie was coming with her. They would remain there for a day or two to rest, and then they would go wherever their services were needed most.

“Oh! not to mademoiselle's aunt's. Le grand chef and his followers have twice been there looking for the scouts, and he has spies among the neutral braves who would speedily bring him the news of your arrival.”

“Then, what would the chief advise? Our hampers are exhausted now, and we must replenish them.”

The chief would go after the gopher had sought his burrow, and fetch all that the maidens needed. Beyond a wooded knoll, plain to the view, was a lake, and in the wood skirting the water would be a suitable camping ground. The chief advised the maidens to ride thither, as they must now be tired and hungry; he would fetch them the provisions and other things needed when the stars came out. Annette then scribbled a note to her aunt, and mentioned those little things that she needed. She would some day show her gratitude to sa tante for her kindness, and “made” her love and duties as girls of her race do with such grace. And the chief was away.

“Is Julie very tired?”

“Pas beaucoup, mademoiselle. If you want not to pitch tent now, I should be well able to ride for a couple of hours yet.”

“I want to hear what tidings there may be of Captain Stephens, Julie,” and her voice trembled a little. “I do not think that the braves who go in and out of the village can all be hostile. Those who are up to mischief have their paint on.”

Turning their horses towards the village, they perceived two braves riding towards them.

“I think I know one of these, Julie. Is not the taller one he who brought us the proclamation of le grand chef?”

"Oh, yes; the very one. How quick ma maitresse is in remembering persons." The Indian rode rapidly towards the two little scouts, and as he drew near he raised his hand.

"It is not safe down here," he said, in Cree, "for the scouts. A runner from the Stonies saw you both, and Little Poplar with you, this morning, and swiftly carried the news. It is likely that le grand chef knows of it before this. Little Poplar, who is now disguised as a medicine man, is yonder in the valley, and he charged me to come and warn the two scouts, his friends, to follow out the instructions that he gave them without any delay. He has got some tidings, too, about Stephens, le capitaine. Not good tidings, I think; a brave saw several of le chef's men steal after him down the Valley of the Snakes."

A short cry escaped from Annette's lips, and the blood shrunk chilled to her heart.

"Are there any tidings of a capture?"

"No; perhaps le capitaine escaped. Upon clear ground the white men's horses could easily outdistance the braves, who, it is said, were not mounted."

Unsatisfactory as this intelligence was, it left room to hope. But the beauty of the silvery lake, with its fringe of berried bushes; the scolding of the kingfisher as he gadded from one riven tree to another; the goblin laughter [Footnote: I borrow this most expressive phrase from my friend, Prof. Roberts, as vividly descriptive of the cry of the loon. John Burroughs applies the epithet "whinny," which is good; but it misses the sense of supernatural terror with which, to me, the cry of this bird in the moonlight is always associated.] of the stately loon, as he held his way across the wide stretch of shining, richly tinted water, might all as well have never been; for Annette saw them not. Julie was busy trying to cheer her.

"Be not down at heart, sweet my mistress. These territories are now invested by numerous soldiers from the East, and tidings of this capture, if such there has been, would speedily reach them. Throw away your care, and rest to−night. With the sun we shall rise to−morrow, ourselves restored, our horses fresh, and ascertain the facts. Inspector Dicken will know; and him we can reach in a two hours' ride."

"Sweet girl, in the hour of pain you always can give me consolation. Indians have also skulked after us; and it may be that the braves were only watching whither Captain Stephens went."

"My view precisely, mademoiselle; but we shall talk no more about it now. Sit beside me here upon the bank, and look at the peace and the beauty of all this scene." Under the shadow of the bank, with its matted growth of trees, the water was a pure myrtle green; midway in the expanse it was purple, and beyond, in the last faint light of the sun, it was an exquisite violet. The sand at their feet alternated in veins of umber brown, and ashes of roses; while the vermillion of the rowan berries made a vivid and gorgeous contrast to the glaucous green of the leafage.

Little ripples came upon the bright, pink sand that fringed the unvarying tide−mark.

"What causes the ripple now, Julie, when no breath of wind is in the heavens, and neither oar nor paddle is on the lake?"

"Stay; I thought that I heard it a moment ago! Yes, I hear it again. Hear you not the note of some waterfowl?"

Yes, Annette did hear it; but she could not say from what kind of bird the singing came.

"Well, my sweet mistress, the ripples which you now see swinging in upon the sand come from the same bird whose song you hear. The bird itself is the swan, made sacred to love."

"Oh, I remember something of the legend, Julie. Repeat it to me, s'il vous plait."

"Well; there was once a beautiful maiden of the plains, whom many of the bravest and most noble of the chiefs adored; but she disdained their wooing, for she loved with a passion that absorbed her soul and body a young man with hair like the corn leaves when, after rain, the sunlight is shot through the stalks. He stayed some days in the lodge of the chief, her father; and while his heart was yet full of love for the peach−skinned, star−eyed maiden, he was obliged to go away with his white brethren, who had come from over seas to trace the source and flow of some of our mighty rivers. The parting of the lovers was like the breaking of heart−strings. The maiden pined, and through all the summer sat among the flowers sighing for her darling with the amber−tinted hair. Her sleep refreshed her not, for through the night she dreamt of naught but the parting, and of the sorrow in his sky−blue eyes. In the day, her eyes were ever looking wistfully along the trail by which he had come, or gazing, with a woe past skill to describe, out along the stretch by which he had gone from her sight. Late in the autumn, when the petals of the rose and the daisy began to fall, and summer birds prepared for the flight to the south, the Great Spirit came softly down from a cumulus cloud and stood beside the maiden, as she sat upon the fading prairie. He told her of a glorious land out in the heavens, where spring endured for ever, and true lovers were

joined to have no more parting; and when she looked yearningly towards the region at which he pointed, he asked her if she would go thither with him. With joy unutterable she consented, and giving her hand into his, the two rose in the air and disappeared through a piled mass of rosy cloud. When she reached paradise, knowledge was given to her of the loves of maidens upon the earth, and reflecting how bitter her lot had been, she besought the God of Thunder, and the Ruler of the Spheres, to permit her to pass a portion of each year upon the earth, in order to watch over and console love−sick virgins who were separated from their betrothed. To her request the god consented, giving to the maiden the figure of a swan. Since that time she visits the earth a short time after midsummer day; and you can hear her singing upon our great inland waters during the night, at any place between the lonesome stretches of the far north to the great southern lakes, from the middle of summer till the first golden gleam comes in the maple leaf. Then she arises, and the hunter marvels at the beautiful bird with the white pinions which flies up into the heavens, and passes beyond the highest clouds."

"Harken now, mademoiselle; it sings again." And lo! from over the hushed face of the water came the notes of the guardian maiden.

"The song is not plaintive and sorrow−laden, as I have been told the swan's song is, Julie."

"No; the singing of the swan soothes and consoles. Hark again to it."

"Oh, it is divine, Julie, and creeps into my heart, filling me with comfort and exquisite peace."

"I doubt not, mademoiselle, that the maiden came to this lake to cheer your sorrowful spirit, and to give you surety that neither you nor your lover stand in danger."

"Ah, Julie; it is so sweet to think this. And this it is which the song tells me through the delightful quiet of my heart."

"Yes, my sweet mistress; and I had forgotten the most delicious tidings in the legend. The maiden's singing is always a guarantee that no harm can come to either of the lovers." And while Annette was feasting her spirit upon this new joy, the song of the swan, which for a minute or two had been hushed, suddenly was resumed close by; and looking, the two maidens saw a bird, beautiful, and endowed with grace of motion past description, move by, sending divers shining rings of water before it. Then a sudden darkness fell and hid the bird; but the song came at frequent intervals to the girls from the midst of the lake, and whenever a shadow passed over Annette's spirit, the singing was resumed. [Footnote: There is a legend among some of the Indian tribes of the North−West territories that the swan is a metamorphosed love−sick maiden, whose function and prerogative is to watch over all young virgins who have given away their hearts. It is a fact that the Indian hunters long refrained from killing the white swan in deference to a belief in this legend.—E.C.]

There was now a stir among the brambles near the girl's tent, and to Annette's "Qui vive?" came the response—

"It is Little Poplar."

"Oh, I am so glad that he is come," Julie said, and the eyes of this minx grew instantly larger, and ten times more bright.

Some of my fair readers may now desire to know "exactly" what this Indian chief, who is so conspicuous in the story "looked like." Well, he was just such a man as always finds an easy access to a woman's heart. It is true that he was "a savage," but if merit there be in "blood,"—and for my own part I would not have a dog unless I was sure about his pedigree,—he was descended of a long and illustrious line of chiefs, whose ancestors, mayhap, were foremost in that splendid civilization, that has left us an art mighty and full of wonders, centuries before the destroying sails of Cortez were spread upon the deep.

He was tall, and straight, and lithe; and he had a certain indefinable grace of gesture and address which fits itself only to one who, by descent and breeding, has been "to the manner born." His hair was dark, and almost silky fine; and the poise of his head would be a theme for the pen or the pencil of Rossetti. His eye was dark as night, but it revealed an immense range of expression; a capacity for great tenderness, and passion without bound. His nose approximated the aquiline type; his firm mouth was a bow of Cupid, and his skin was a light nut−brown. His dress was like that of a cow−boy, and was devoid of barbaric gauds. I suppose that is enough to say about him. [Footnote: I may say that when afterwards, through the fortunes of war, this same chief was brought as a prisoner before a certain paunchy officer, the attempt of the latter to show his dignity was a clumsy failure. The proud and splendid chief, with arms folded across his breast, and head slightly bowed, looked singularly out of place arraigned before the stumpy judge.—E. C.]

"And now," said the chief, putting down the hamper, "We shall see what your aunt has sent." Nimble fingers soon opened it, and found, besides le cafe and le the, as they were labelled, several petits pains—"Rolls!" cried Julie, smacking her hungry lips—a bunch of saucisses; of le fromage about a pound, and of la patisserie enough for a meal for the hungry girls.

"There now, Julie, we have coffee, and tea, and rolls, and sausage; a pound of cheese, fully, and pie enough for one delicious meal." Her sweet mouth was "watering," and when she came to un gigot de mouton, she cried, "What a sweet aunt she is! But when can we eat this whole leg of mutton?"

Oh, Julie was very hungry, and so was her chief; and Annette herself was like a bear. After all, very little would be left for the prairie dog.

"Does the chief think that Captain Stephens was in danger of capture by those Indians?" Annette ventured to ask. This is the question that had been upon her lips since the arrival of the chief, but she could not summon courage enough to ask it sooner.

"When last seen, mademoiselle, le capitaine and his wounded friend were moving slowly through the swampy bottom of the ravine; and many braves, with arms in their hands, were in close pursuit. But le capitaine may have gone upon the high ground and escaped; he easily could have done so."

There was not much consolation in this for Annette's foreboding heart; but as she lay down in her blanket, with Julie at her side, there came once more, through the stillness, from the bosom of the lake, the soothing song of the swan.

"Do you hear it again, Julie?"

Yes, Julie heard it: It was, without any doubt, singing to quiet the groundless apprehensions of sa maitresse. Then both the maidens slept. And whenever through the night Annette awoke, and began to think of her lover's peril and probable captivity, the soft, scented night wind bore to her ears a note or two of reassuring music from the throat of the maiden−bird.

Before the sun had cleared the horizon on the morrow the breakfast was ended, the tent rolled; and the saddles were upon the horses. Then the trio set out at a brisk trot; the chief to join his people upon their reserve, the girls to find Inspector Dicken at Battleford.

I do not like "breaking threads," but it is necessary that, for the present, I should allow my two Metis maidens to journey without my company, while I go back to where I left Captain Stephens in the gulch.

The route of the two horsemen lay through alternating swamp and grassland, and as the path was not much traversed, bush tangles here and there almost blocked the way. They had no misgiving as they rode, and expected to be soon with Inspector Dicken. The lower end of the gulch was not so cheerful as that portion where they had entered. The trees grew thicker; swamps composed the greater portion of the ground, and the long groping shores of the trees might be traced far through the black bog, till they found anchoring place at the skirt of the upland. At last they reached a point where the swamp extended across the entire valley; and further progress by the level was impossible.

"I fear, Phillips, that we shall be obliged to try the edge of the upland; but how our horses can make their way through the dense bush I am unable to see. Nevertheless, we must try it." As they turned their horses' heads, a din of yells burst upon their ears from the bushes round about; and immediately a score of savages with tomahawks uplift, headed by a Metis with snaky eyes, surrounded them.

"Surrender, messieurs; resistance is useless."

Stephens looked about him, and at one glance mastered the situation. Phillips was too ill of his wounds to be able to use his right arm, even though a dash down the trail by which they had come were practicable. For himself, he had a pair of Colt's revolvers; but before he could fire twice the savages would be enabled to brain him with their tomahawks.

"I surrender," he said, nodding to the hateful boisbrule; and the detestable eyes of the man gleamed as he said—

"Bind the prisoners."

CHAPTER VIII. THE STARS ARE KINDLY TO LE CHEF.

Ah! can it be that the swan sings, and soothes through the night the maiden with its song, when the lover is in the toils that jealousy and hate have set!

The party of braves, with the Metis at its head, turned and marched swiftly back over the path taken by Stephens, till they reached a point from which the bank was easily accessible. In a bluff upon the level the savages had tethered their ponies, which were speedily mounted. Then the party set out for “le corps de garde,” as the Metis put it, of “le grand chef.”

“Had le chef then a guard−house?” Stephens asked.

“Monsieur, the spy, and enemy of the half−breeds, will learn these things soon enough.” He had scarcely ended, however, before he seemed to regret the tone that he had adopted, and hastened to mend the matter. “I have instructions to be guarded about making known the affairs of le grand chef, monsieur, or I should be pleased to answer your question. I hope that the thongs are not hurting you.”

“I wonder what this rattlesnake would be at now?” Stephens asked himself, and then turning to the bois−brule—

“I do not much mind the binding, but you would do me a favour by relaxing those of my companion. He has been severely wounded, and inflammation has set in. If you were to remove his bonds altogether you would run no risk.”

“I shall do as you suggest, monsieur,” and in a minute Phillips was unbound.

“Now, if monsieur le capitaine will fall a little in rear with me, I should like some private conversation.” Stephens was fast bound, but play enough was left to one hand to guide his horse.

“Of course,” began the half−breed, you know something of those two Cree boys who go riding about the prairies and fighting with the Indians.”

“Yes; to one of these I twice owe my deliverance.”

“Ah, yes; to mademoiselle Annette. Now, monsieur, we know—I know— who the two are. The other is the demoiselle Julie, maid to demoiselle Annette.”

“Well, what if you do happen to know these facts?”

“I will tell monsieur. I love Julie very much, and if le capitaine will procure me an interview with the maiden, at some place where I shall name, I may be useful to him in the hour of peril.”

“I think,” replied Stephens, “that I am now talking with the confidential friend, secretary and adviser of M. Riel. You are the Jean of whom I have heard mention?”

“Oui, monsieur. I am Jean.”

“I fear, Jean, that I will be unable to procure this interview.”

“Oh, do not say so. A note written by you to the maiden is all that I should need, setting forth the time and the place. A neutral brave could be procured to fetch it to the house of mademoiselle's aunt.”

“Now, Jean, wherefore do you seek this interview with the girl?” Stephens asked, with a slight curl of contempt upon his lip.

“I want to tell her that I love her; and to arrange to have further meetings with la petite.”

“Why, Jean, I had been under the impression that once before you told this girl that you loved her, and that she turned up her pretty nose in disdain. But whether this be true or not, there is another fact which forms an insuperable barrier to your object. Julie loves another.” The eyes of the half−breed snapped and flamed with jealous rage.

“Some worthless vagabond, I suppose?” he said, fairly spitting the words out of him.

“O, no,” Stephens replied, with exasperating composure; “but a brave and illustrious Indian chief. A nobler looking man I have never laid my eyes upon. You could walk under his legs.”

“O, do you think so?” the little Metis replied, with a very ugly glance. “Now, monsieur, you have refused my offer, and listen to what you gain by doing so. By some means or other these two traitorous jades will be captured. Then le grand chef takes yours away up the dismal valley to Jubal's hut. I take your fine Indian chief's down to ma mere's ready cottage. As for you, if the maiden retain her reputed preferences she will be able, when the spring

arrives, to come out upon the prairie and plant daisies, or any other blossom to her liking, above you."

Stephens had been prepared for malignity, but of such devilish brutality as this he had not deemed any man living capable. He was so overwhelmed with horror and disgust that he simply waved his bridle hand, imposing peace. Thereat Jean pushed forward and gave some instructions to a savage, who immediately put the bonds again upon Phillips, tying the thongs so tight that the wounded man groaned with pain. Then the cavalcade resumed a brisk trot, slacking not until the prisoners found themselves before the stronghold of the rebel chief.

It is necessary to pause a moment here and point out that M. Riel had actually formed a provisional government, and succeeded by his passionate eloquence in deluding the Metis and Indians into the belief that he was exercising a lawful authority, inasmuch as the territories had not, within the interpretation of the law, passed from the Hudson Bay Company under the jurisdiction of Canada. Subject to this doctrine he laid down the right to establish tribunals of law, to try, and punish offenders against his authority, and do all other things that made for the stability and peace of the new regime.

A prominent white settler named Toltbon, had raised a company of volunteers and gone against the forces of the Metis leader; but his men were captured like a flock of sheep, and he himself locked up in the strongest room in the guard house.

Now at the very time that Jean and his prisoners drew up before the rebel stronghold, the chief himself was striding up and down his room with dishevelled hair and gleaming eye.

"If Jean cannot bring me either the girl or Stephens within the coming forty−eight hours, I shall go abroad myself, and scour the plains. What if after all they should come together, marry, and escape me. Curses, eternal curses upon them. Maledictions eternal upon my own worthless followers. By the Holy Mary, if Jean cannot catch one or other I shall put him to death for treason." While these hot words were upon his lips the door opened and Jean entered.

"I bring mon chef good news."

"Ah, what is it? Any tidings of Stephens?"

"He is at this very moment in the fort. I caught him in Larch Swamp on his return after being set free by Mademoiselle. He was most insulting to myself, and used very abusive language respecting you. I think, Monsieur, you have cause sufficient against him."

"Bon! bon! He shall not escape me this time," and rising, he began to stride up and down the floor, his eyes flaming with joy and vengeance.

"Now, Jean, give me your attention. At once go and put Toltbon in irons. I shall attend presently and declare that he is to be shot to−morrow. Suppliants will come beseeching me to spare his life; but at first I shall refuse to do so, and say that I am determined to carry out my sentence. At the last I shall yield. So far, so good. I do not know, now, whether you understand my methods."

"I think I do, mon chef," and there was a knowing twinkle in the eye of the ugly scoundrel.

"Well, this Stephens has an unbridled tongue, and is pretty certain to use it. If he does not, a little judicious goading will set him on. If possible, it would be well for one of the guards to provoke him to commit an assault. Could you rely upon any one of your men for such a bit of business?"

"Oui, Monsieur; I have such a man."

"Bon! let him be so provoked, and after his violence has been thoroughly trumpeted through the fort, make a declaration of the same formally to me. I will then direct you to try him by court martial. You are aware of how I desire him to be disposed of. When the news gets abroad that he is to be shot, some will be incredulous, and others will come to sue for his life. I shall reply to them: 'This is a matter of discipline. The man has deserved death, or the court? martial would not have sentenced him. I spared Toltbon's life, and already I have as fruits of my leniency increased turbulence and disrespect. My government must be respected, and the only way to teach its enemies this fact, is to make an example of one of the greatest offenders.' Lose no time in completing the work. We know not, else, what chance may rob our hands of the fellow. You understand? I am least of all mixed up in the matter, being more concerned with weightier affairs."

"Oui, Monsieur," and making an obeisance the murderous tool departed. Exactly as planned, it all fell out. Captain Toltbon was put in irons, and Riel declared that for the sake of peace and order he must be shot. Many people came and implored him to spare the condemned man's life; but he was inexorable. "At the eleventh hour," however, as the newspapers put it, yielding to solicitation, Riel said:

"He is spared."

Jean presented himself before his leader.

"Monsieur, I think it will not be necessary to employ stratagem in working our man to violence. He has been showering reproaches upon the guards, and loading your name with ignominious reproach. The guards knew my feelings; so during the night they put chains upon him. As the foremost one advanced with the manacles, the prisoner raised his arm, and dealt him a blow on the head, which felled him to the ground."

"Bon! bon!" Riel cried, while he rubbed his hands. "Without applying the little goad, he fulfils our will."

"Well, not in the strictest sense, mon chef. Luc had certain private instructions from me, and he carried them out in a very skilful manner."

"N'importe, Jean, n'importe how the thing came about; we have the cause against him, and that suffices. What do you now propose to do, for you are aware, Jean—" there was now a tone of diabolical raillery in his words—"that this matter is one in which I cannot concern myself, you being the best judge of what is due rebellious military prisoners?"

"Merci, mon chef! I shall endeavour to merit your further regard. My intention is to proceed forthwith to try him. Already, I have summoned the witnesses of his guilt; and he and you shall know our decision before another hour has passed." Then the faithful Monsieur Jean was gone.

"No, ma chere Annette. You shall never deck your nuptial chamber with daisies for Edmund Stephens. You will find occupation for your sweet little fingers in putting fresh roses upon the mound that covers him. For a *feu−de−joie* and the peal of marriage bells, I will give you, ma petite chere, the sullen toll that calls him to his open coffin, and the rattle of musketry that stills the tongue which uttered to you the last love pledge."

For an hour did he pace up and down the floor gloating over his revenge. Meanwhile, I shall leave him and follow the "adjutant−general," as Jean was known under the new regime. He proceeded to the private room of the military quarters, and entering found his subordinates assembled there.

"Messieurs," he said, "We know what our business is. We must lose no time in despatching it. But before commencing, let me say a few words. Monsieur Riel is so overweighted with other affairs that the matter of dealing with the man Stephens rests entirely in our hands. I have just left him, after endeavouring in vain to induce him to be present at the trial: but he could not spare the time to come. By skilfully sounding him, however, I discovered that his sentiments regarding the prisoner are exactly the same as those entertained by myself. What these are I need hardly say. It is now a struggle between the authority of the Provisional Government and a horde of rebellious persons of which the defendant is the most dangerous. The eyes of our followers are upon us; and if we permit the authority of Government to be defied, its officers reviled, and insult heaped upon us, depend upon it we shall speedily lose the hold we have gained after so many bitter struggles; and become a prey to the conspiracy which our enemies are so actively engaged in promoting. The very fact that this man Stephens leagued himself with our enemies, is an offence worthy of death; but I shall ask these persons who are here as witnesses to show you that since his capture he has merited death ten times over at our hands. With your permission, gentlemen, I will proceed:

"Edmund Stephens, of Prince Albert, stands charged before this court− martial with treasonable revolt against the peace and welfare of the colony; with having leagued himself with an armed party, whose object was the overthrow of authority as vested in our Provisional Government. He is likewise charged with having attempted criminal violence upon lawfully delegated guards appointed over him, during his incarceration; and likewise with inciting his fellow−prisoners to insubordination and tumult contrary to the order and well−being of this community.

"Luc Lestang."

That person came forward:

"Relate all you know in the conduct of the prisoner Stephens that may be regarded as treasonable and criminal."

"I have seen him in armed revolt against the authority of Monsieur le chef."

"Will you please state what have been his demeanour and conduct as a prisoner."

"He has been insulting and disorderly in the last degree."

"Will you specify a few particular examples?"

"I have frequently heard him describe the Provisional Government and its supporters as a band of mongrel

rough−scruffs; a greasy, insolent nest of traitors; and a lot of looting, riotous, unwashed savages. He has used language of this sort ever since his imprisonment. Likewise, I have heard him say that he would have the pleasure of assisting in hanging Monsieur Riel to a prairie poplar; and in putting tar and feathers upon his followers."

"Has he been guilty of any acts of violence?"

"He has been guilty of acts of violence. When he became unbearably insubordinate I found it my duty to put irons upon him. As I approached him with the handcuffs he smote me twice in the face, and I yet carry the mark that he gave me. [Here the precious witness pointed to his right eye, which was a dusky purple.] This black eye I received from one of his blows."

"That will do, Luc."

Another witness with the movements of a snake, and eyes as black as sloes, was called. He gave evidence which tallied exactly with that sworn to by Lestang. This, of course, was not an extraordinary coincidence, for he had been present while the first miscreant was giving his evidence. Yet poor Stephens, whose life was the issue of all the swearing, was not permitted to be present, but was kept in a distant room, chained there like a wild beast.

"The Court," said the Adjutant−General, "has heard the accusation against this man; and its duty is now to consider whether the safety and the peace of the district demand that the extreme penalty should be visited upon this enemy of both. The question is, whether he is worthy of death, or not. You will retire, gentlemen,—" there were four of them, exclusive of witnesses, and the clerk—"and find your verdict."

They were absent about two minutes. The foreman then advancing, said:

"Monsieur l'Adjutant, WE FIND THE PRISONER EDMUND STEPHENS, GUILTY."

Then drawing upon his head a black cap, the adjutant said:

"After due and deliberate trial by this Court, it has been found that the prisoner Edmund Stephens, is 'Guilty.' *I do, therefore, declare the sentence of this court−martial to be, that the prisoner be taken forth this day, at one o'clock, and shot*. And may God in His infinite bounty have mercy upon his soul."

CHAPTER IX. THE STARS TAKE A NEW COURSE.

Monsieur Riel had been all this while pacing up and down his room. A tap came upon his door.

“Entrez. Ah, it is you, mon adjudant!”

“Oui, mon president.”

“What tidings?”

“C'est accompli. The court−martial has found the prisoner guilty; and he is condemned to be shot at one o'clock this day.”

“Monsieur is expeditious! Monsieur is zealous. C'est bon; c'est bon; merci, Monsieur.” And the miscreant walked about delirious with his gratification. Then he came over to where his adjutant stood, and shook his hand; then he thrust his fingers through his hair, and half bellowed, his voice resembling that of some foul beast.

“La patrie has reason to be proud of her zealous son,” and he again shook the hand of his infamous lieutenant. Then with a very low bow Jean left the room, saying, as he departed.

“I shall endeavour to merit to the fullest the kindly eulogy which Monsieur le President bestows upon me.” The news of Stephens' sentence spread like fire. Some believed that the penalty would not be carried out, but others thought it would.

“If this prisoner is pardoned, people will treat the sentences of the provisional authorities as jokes. Riel must be aware of this; therefore Stephens is likely to suffer the full penalty.” Several persons called upon the tyrant and besought him to extend mercy to the condemned man; but he merely shrugged his shoulders!

“This prisoner has been in chronic rebellion. He has set bad example among the prisoners, assaulted his keeper, and loaded the Government with opprobrium. I may say to you, Messieurs, however, that I have really nothing to do with the man's case. In this time of tumult, when the operation of all laws is suspended, the court−martial is the only tribunal to which serious offenders can be referred. This young man Stephens has had fair trial, as fair as a British court−martial would have given him, and he has been sentenced to death. I assume that he would not have received such a sentence if he had not deserved it. Therefore I shall not interfere. There is no use, Messieurs, in pressing me upon the matter. At heart, I shall grieve as much as you to see the young man cut off; but his death I believe necessary now as an example to the hundreds who are desirous of overthrowing the authority which we have established in this district.” The petitioners left the monster with sorrowful faces.

“My God!” one of them exclaimed, “it is frightful to murder this young man, whose only offence is resistance to insult from his debased half−breed keeper. Is there nothing to be done?”

No, there was nothing to be done. The greasy, vindictive tyrant was lord and master of the situation. When Riel was alone, he began once more to walk his room, and thus mused aloud:

“I shall go down to his cell. Perhaps he may tell me where she is to be found.”

“Yes,” he was sure that he would succeed: “I shall get his secret by promising pardon; then I will spit upon his face and say, 'Die, dog; I'll not spare you.'“ So forth he sallied, and made his way to the cell where the young man sat in chains.

“Well, malignant tyrant, what do you here? Whatever your business is, let it be dispatched quickly; for your presence stifles me. What dishonourable proposal have you now to make?”

“Monsieur Stephens, it seems to be a pleasure to you to revile me. Yet have I sought to serve you;—yea, I would have been, would now be, your friend.”

“Peace; let me hear what it is that you now propose?”

“You are aware that it is ordered by court−martial, of which I was not a member, that you are to be shot at one o'clock this day? It is now just forty−five minutes of one. I can spare your life, and I will do it, upon one condition.”

“Pray let me hear what dishonour it is that you propose? I ask the question out of a curiosity to learn, if possible, a little more of your infamy.”

“And I reply to you that I shall take no notice of your revilings, but make my proposal. I simply ask you to state to me where this maiden Annette has betaken herself?”

“Where you will never find her. That's my answer, villain and tyrant; and now begone.”

"Perhaps you imagine that the sentence will not be carried out. I ask you to choose between life and liberty, and an almost immediate ignominious death."

"I care not for your revenge, or your mercy. Once more I say, get you gone." Then the ruffian turned round, rushed at the chained prisoner, and dealt him a terrific kick in the side, after which he spat upon his face.

"She shall be mine!" he hissed, "when your corpse lies mouldering in a dishonoured, traitor's grave." The young man was chained to a heavy table, but with a sudden wrench, he freed himself, raised both arms, and was about bringing down his manacled hands upon the tyrant miscreant—and that blow would have ended the rebellion at Prince Albert,—when Luc burst into the room, seized the prisoner, and threw him. While his brute knee was on Stephens' breast, and his greasy hand held the victim's throat, Riel made his escape, and turned back to his own quarters.

As for poor Stephens, when the tyrant and the brutal guard had left the cell, he began to pace up and down, sorely disturbed. He had somehow cherished the hope that the miscreant would be induced to commute the sentence to lengthy imprisonment. But the diabolical vengeance which he had seen in the tyrant's eye undermined all hope. Some friends were admitted to his cell, and they informed him that they had pleaded for him, but in vain.

And now we go back to Annette and Julie. Their horses soon took them to the post, wherein Inspector Dicken had taken up his abode for the nonce. They soon learnt that Captain Stephens and his friend had been captured, and that both had been hurried off to the stronghold of the rebel chief.

"Have any steps been taken for his rescue, monsieur?" Annette asked.

"None, I regret, have so far been practicable. I am detained on duty here with twenty men; and expect an attack hourly. I would surrender the fort and hasten to the rescue of my friend, but that the lives of more than a hundred women and children here depend upon my remaining."

"And where, monsieur, are the nearest troops? Holy Mother of God!" she exclaimed, "surely they will not permit le chef to put him to death without making an effort to save him."

"Anything possible will be done, my brave lad. The nearest troops are those of Colonel Denison. Here I will write you a note to the Colonel. He is an officer whom I much admire. He is quick at conceiving, and prompt and firmhanded in achievement. His force is mounted and a few of his troopers thundering into the rebels' nest would scatter them like rats."

"Speed, speed, monsieur," she cried, as she perceived the Inspector pause to consider the terms in which he should address the Colonel. "Let it be simply an introduction; and a mere statement that I have rendered service to you and to your forces."

"So be it," he replied; and then rapidly pencilled the note, which he put into her hand. A quick "Merci, merci," and the two were gone, and speedily upon their horses' backs. They had not ridden far before they espied a mounted party, evidently reconnoitering. Instead of pursuing its course, the party, upon perceiving the two Indian boys, turned their horses and rode towards the pair.

"Oh, Julie, I hope that they will not detain us. They judge, I suppose, that we are enemies."

"But you can tell them that we are not, mademoiselle."

"Ah, Julie, the world is not as truthful and as free from guile as you. They might not believe us. But I can at any rate show them the Inspector's note."

"Who goes there?" shouted the officer of the approaching party.

"Friends, who want to see Colonel Denison immediately.

"Consider yourselves in my charge now," the officer said, fitting very high and straight upon his horse.

"But will monsieur l'officier take us straightway to Colonel Denison?"

"In good time we shall see that officer," the starchy commander replied.

"But, monsieur, I pray you to make haste. It is a matter of the gravest importance that I should see him as speedily as possible. We were riding at a mad pace before you joined us, as witness our horses' flanks. This note I bear from Inspector Dicken to Colonel Denison."

The officer took it, opened it slowly, and cast his eye over the writing.

"I do not know whether this has been written by Dicken or not," he said, "as I have never seen his writing." Then folding the note he put it into his pocket.

"But that is my note, monsieur, my passport to Colonel Denison's attention. Wherefore do you keep it?"

The officious military gentleman did not feel called upon to explain why he had retained it. Now, all the while

the party was at a halt, and the agony that poor Annette was suffering may be imagined.

"Monsieur, I repeat," the girl said in a tone of agony, "it is of the utmost importance that I should reach Colonel Denison without delay. The life of one of your most valuable allies may depend upon your haste."

"Would you favour me with the name of this valuable ally?"

"Captain Stephens: he who has been made prisoner by the personal followers of the rebel chief."

"I have not heard anything about this capture," said Lieutenant Unworthy; "and it seems to me, if the thing occurred word must have reached us." This conceited block−head had not yet made a start.

"I implore you once again, monsieur, either to accompany us to the presence of the Colonel or to let us go alone. I do not see that you have any right to detain us. If harm comes to Captain Stephens you will remember that his blood must be upon your head. You are either stupid beyond words to describe, or bent upon showing your authority. Will you come, or let me go, to the Colonel?"

"I want neither lectures nor impertinent speeches," replied the numb− skull, putting on an air of severe dignity; nevertheless it was plain that Annette had frightened him.

"Forward, march—tro−o−o−t!" and the troop set out for Camp Denison. Whenever the word "W a−a−a−lk" came, the heart of the girl sank; but despite the anxiety and annoyance, the camps of Colonel Denison at last were in sight.

"Well, Unworthy," the Colonel said, "who are these boys you have brought in?" The Colonel was intently reading the faces of the little scouts, with his penetrating dark−grey eyes, as he asked the question.

"The largest of the two has a story about the capture of Captain Stephens, and declares a profuse interest in the affairs of that officer. I have taken the story with a pinch of salt; as I regard the two a pair of spies."

"May I speak, Colonel Denison?" the girl said, touching the brim of her broad hat respectfully.

"Most certainly, my lad. I shall be glad to hear anything that you have to say." Then turning to Unworthy,—"He looks no more like a spy than you do, man. Are you any judge of faces?"

"Well, monsieur," the girl began, her voice quivering, "l'officier," pointing to Unworthy, "says he believes that I am a spy. He has no ground for such a belief, but he *has* proof which must have taught him otherwise. Inspector Dicken gave me a note of introduction to you. This note l'officier has in his pocket, having rudely taken it away from me."

"Please, Mr. Unworthy, hand me this note." And as the officer did so, Colonel Denison, knitting his brows, said, "Pray, sir, why was this not handed to me at once?"

"Because I believe it is a forgery."

"Allow me, if you please, sir, to settle that point for myself." Then hastily reading the note, he said, "Yes, my spirited lad, I have already heard of your brave and noble deeds, and of yours, too," turning to Julie. "I am extremely sorry that any officer of the militia force should so lack discrimination as to have acted towards you as Mr. Unworthy has done."

Then the sweet girl, with a bounding heart, told him that she had come to him for a force of twenty men; that if he gave these, she could take them in a line as the bird flies to the stronghold of the rebel chief.

"Your suggestion is good," Colonel Denison replied; "and I will give you thirty men. Browninge," he shouted, calling to a clerical looking officer who was standing among a group of brother officers, "get thirty men in the saddle at once, and follow these scouts."

Browninge saluted, and went speedily to make preparations.

"Will you not dismount and take refreshments," the Colonel asked in a kindly tone, advancing a step nearer the two boys.

Annette could not eat anything. She felt excited till the troop got in motion. But Julie would not mind if she ate something. She was hungry now because she had not taken much breakfast; and the sweet gourmand was soon at work upon the choicest food in the Colonel's larder.

"If my experience of character during the years that I have spent upon the bench be of any value," the Colonel remarked in a low tone to some of his officers, "I could give you some interesting information about that scout," looking towards Annette, "and this other one as well," meaning Julie. "These boys, trust my word, are no more Crees than I am. Note the fineness of their features, and the well−bred air and the grace of the one on horseback." The remarks of the Colonel were brought to an end by the appearance of Browninge, who saluted, and announced that he was ready to go.

Julie jumped up, like a kitten, from her feasting, vaulting into the saddle; and while her mouth was yet half full of meat, thanked the Colonel for his hospitality. Annette simply said;

“Colonel Denison, my words fail me now to thank you. But I wish you knew my heart.” He simply waved his hand, and wished the party *bon voyage*. Then striking spurs into her horse, Annette led away across the level prairie towards the stronghold of the hateful Metis chief.

“I shall now give you my opinion, gentleman,” Colonel Denison said, as the horses disappeared over a knoll; “these two lads were not what they seemed. They were girls.”

“Impossible!”

“Well, we shall some day know. What is more, I am satisfied that the larger one has more than an ordinary interest in Stephens. She has twice already saved his life; and I should not be surprised if she were now to lay him once more under the obligation. Ha, truant,” he said, turning to one of his staff who had come from a nigh tree−clump, where he had been writing, “you should have been here to see the beautiful Metis maiden. She was in disguise, but her beauty was not less divine than that of your own Iena. Fancy the feelings of Stephens, when his own fortunes are bright, to have that beautiful girl straying about this wilderness. I can imagine him asking, in that passage which you gave me yesterday from your poem—

'My little flower amongst a weedy world,
Where art thou now? In deepest forest shade?
Or onward where the Sumach stands arrayed
In autumn splendour, its alluring form
Fruited, yet odious with the hidden worm?
Or, farther, by some still sequestered lake,
Loon−haunted, where the sinewy panthers slake
Their noon−day thirst, and never voice is heard
Joyous of singing waters, breeze or bird,
Save their wild waitings.'“

[Footnote: This passage is from the pages of the recently−published Canadian drama, “Tecumseh.”—E. C.]

Further conference was cut short by the hasty approach of a coureur du bois. The colonel approached as the man dismounted.

“Captain Stephens has been tried by le chef's court martial, and is condemned to be shot. Le chef has only a few braves and bois−brules about him; and I could fetch you to the nest in an hour and a half by hard riding.”

When the coureur learnt that the force had been dispatched he rode away again. And we shall likewise bid good−bye to the poet and the colonel, and join Browninge.

“Now, then, my good lad,” the lieutenant said, “we have turned out a large force at your bidding to−day. Are you certain (*a*) that Captain Stephens is at Chapeau Rouge; (*b*), that Riel is there; (*c*), that there is such a stronghold at all?”

“Certainement, monsieur.”

“It is well. Now, my men, keep in shelter of yonder bluff; for under cover of it only can we approach the den unperceived. We are now within three miles of the place.” The men received the intelligence with enthusiasm, and put their horses at best speed.

When only fifteen minutes more remained to poor Stephens, the clergyman signed to the others to leave the room; and then, with his hands folded before him, asked the condemned man if he had any message to leave, or any peace to make with God.

No; he was not afraid to meet his God. He had wronged no man, and kept within the bounds of the laws set for his kind. But he had a message to leave—it was enclosed in a letter which he put into the hand of the minister.

“It is for Annette Marton. Oh, my God. We have been only two days betrothed. It is very hard to die.”

“This doom was ordained for you, and you must try to meet it like a man.”

“Oh, it is not death I fear. That is nothing. But, ah, to leave my love.” After he had passed his hands across his temples, as if to clear his understanding, he said, in a voice grown low and calm—

“There is also upon the table a note to my sister, Aster. That is all I have to say.”

“Will you not pray with me awhile?”

“No; my heart is right; the rest matters not.”

There was now a rude bustling at the door; the rusty key was plied, and with a harsh scream the bolt flew back. Then the evil−looking Luc entered, followed by three others, all of whom seemed partially intoxicated.

“Your hour has come, young man,” Lestang said, in a brutal voice. “Let us be jogging.”

Stephens then bade good−bye to the visitors who had re−entered; to the clergyman, and to one or two prisoners detained for minor offences. His face was deathly pale, but his eye was steadfast and his step firm.

Beyond the entrance to the building, about an arrow's flight, was drawn up a firing party; and midway between these and one of the bastions of the fort was an open coffin. Thither Luc and his guard led the condemned man.

“Stop a moment till I bind you,” Luc said, taking a hempen cord from about his waist. Then he fastened Stephens' hands behind his back, and with the most devilish cruelty tied the cord far tighter than might be needed for the most refractory culprit. Indeed, his arms were almost dislocated at the shoulders, and when the brutal jailer saw the corners of his mouth twitch under the torture, he said, with a bestial sneer—

“It'll not hurt long. Should be patient.”

These words had barely escaped the fellow's lips when a terrified cry went up from a score of throats gathered about; and immediately a scene of the wildest confusion prevailed.

“Les soldats! Les soldats!” shouted one and all: and immediately the little Cree scout was seen upon the earthworks, the eyes of her horse gleaming, spray drifting from his open jaws. Close following Annette came Lieutenant Browninge waving his sword above his head, and shouting,

“Down with the rebels!” at the same time slashing the scurrying enemy in such a fashion with his sword as would gladden one's heart.

As for Annette, her quick eye at once showed her how the situation stood: her lover, his hands bound, a black cap over his eyes, a coffin beside him. Luc, the jailer, and chief of the executioners, remained at his post as long as possible; and at the first outburst of the din had called upon his party to fire. But these mahogany−complexioned executioners scurried like rats at the first cry. Most of them carried their arms with them, but Luc perceived a musket lying in a corner of the drill square. This he seized and levelled at Stephens, pulling the trigger, after careful aim. The rusty weapon missed fire, and the intrepid half−breed began hastily to chip the flint with the back of his sheath−knife; but while he was engaged in this laudable preparation, Annette came over the earthworks like a bird, smote him with the handle of her whip upon the crown, and sent him sprawling in the dust. With another bound she was at her lover's side; and slipping from her horse, she pulled off the hideous cap, cut his thongs,—and then the hero−darling waited to be taken to his heart.

The change in his fortunes was so sudden, and so amazing,—passing at one bound from the grave's edge back to freedom and love, that he was for some seconds unable to realize it, and his eyes and brain swam with a sense of happiness that reached delirium. But gradually it all began to grow clear: the scurrying figures of his captors and jailers; the shouting of mounted soldiers; the wistful eyes of his beloved looking at him.

“Ah, Annette; you again; my guardian angel!”

It took but a few minutes to restore order. It was ascertained that Riel and Jean had made their escape while Browninge's horse was yet half a mile away from the post; but they made their exit in secrecy.

“If we give the alarm,” Kiel muttered, as he prepared to get into the saddle, “there will be an instant stampede, and the execution will be stayed.”

“I agree with the decision of mon chef. Let Luc remain; he has courage enough to have the thing done with the soldiers at the very stockades.” And the two rode away helter−skelter, till a dozen miles lay between them and their treason nest.

“The rebel chief is gone; he skurried away half an hour ago,” was the tidings that one of the men brought to Browninge. That officer was not surprised; and ordered that the prisoners, which numbered about a dozen in all, be put in carts, and escorted by a guard of cavalry back to Camp Denison.

They were all tired, and it was resolved that the horses be permitted to rest for a couple of hours before returning.

“I can find the way back to your colonel's camp, monsieur Browninge, as easily by night as in the daylight.” Riel and his greasy followers lived like so many swine in a sty; but several brace of quail and chicken, and quarters of elk were found, which the two Cree boys at once began to prepare. A few loaves of bread were found, and a tolerable side of bacon, from all of which, with the pure, cold water that gurgled out of the side of a nigh

ridge, a sumptuous meal was promised.

Stephens objected to the Cree boys doing the drudgery, but Annette besought ham so sweetly with her eyes to let “the little scouts” do it, that he desisted. His glance, as he followed every movement of the maiden, had as much of mute adoration, reverent and tender, as ever has been seen in the eyes of a man. How little he had known the worth of this girl, when he toyed with her hair and put a straw into her dimples at her father's house! I suppose he regarded her as thoughtful men regard most girls before they become enslaved either to their fascination or their gifts. I do not care to write an ungallant speech, but I do say that I have so far in life looked upon men much as I do upon women; and I assume every man to be a fool till he has proven himself otherwise to *me*.

The sun was setting when the order to saddle was given; and with the two scouts leading, the party set out along nearly the same route by which they had come in the morning. A darkness that, without a flight of imagination, might be called “dense,” pressed upon the prairie, and only a few small and feeble points of star−light were to be seen. But on a sudden a mellow, green−tinted light burst out of the northern sky with a brightness that showed the startled expression upon every face. The horses pricked up their ears, and looked for a moment at the radiant, quivering, northern sky.

I have not bothered my readers with much description so far, and I trust that they will forgive me if I pause for a moment to do so now. After this great, aerial conflagration had continued for the space of five minutes, the light went out from the whole sky as suddenly and as entirely as though it were a lamp which some one had extinguished. After a few seconds of darkness, here and there a long rib of yellow light appeared; then these disappeared, and once more the party was in the pitchy dusk. Suddenly, however, fully half the heavens burst into flame again.

In the south the light was soft, and seemed unconnected with that of the east and north. The whole would remain for a few seconds quiescent, save for some slight, erratic pulsations, but all would at once madly undulate and quiver from end to end. It seemed at such times like a mighty cloth woven of the finest and softest floss, being violently shaken at both ends by invisible hands. But the most curious part of the phenomena was the noise, like the cracking of innumerable whips, which accompanied the pulsations in the auroral flame. [Footnote: Captain Huysbe mentions having heard this peculiar noise during auroral displays in the North−West; and Mr. Charles Mair and other authorities add their testimony to the same fact.—E. C.] The corruscations were produced in the valleys, among the bluffs, and far out over the face of the prairie. To lend terror to the stupendous and awful beauty of the scene, a ball of fire came out of the southern sky, passed slowly across the belt of agitated flame, and disappeared over the crest of a distant hill.

Above, the heavy masses of auroral cloud now began to assume the shape of a mighty umbrella, the enormous ribs of weird light forming in an apex above the heads of the party, and radiating towards all points of the compass. Sometimes these ribs would all shake, and then blend; but they would speedily rearray themselves in perfect and majestic symmetry. It was a most weirdly−beautiful sight, riding along the still and boundless prairie, when the merry dancing ceased for a moment, to see this stupendous dome of fluffy, ghost−like light suspended over their heads. For an hour they continued looking upon it; upon the yellow of the level prairie, and the yellow and gloom of the knolls and hollows. Then there was a universal flash so sudden as to be terrible; then a darkness equally as sudden. Not the faintest glow was there anywhere in all the wide heavens. It seemed as if God had blown out the mysterious light.

Stephens rode beside his love; and when the light went out of the sky, if Lieutenant Browninge had been concerned with the doings of the leaders, he would have been amazed to see the rescued captain lean over and deliberately kiss the Cree scout upon the lips. When the white sides of the tents of Capt. Denison appeared in view, Annette halted, and said that she and her brother must now ride in another direction.

“My brave boy, if by that term I rightly address you,” Browninge said, “I wish that you would accept the hospitalities of our camp;” but the scout refused, and after a few moments in conversation with Captain Stephens, rode away.

Meanwhile affairs had fallen out much as Little Poplar predicted. Captain Beaver, after thorough consideration of the matter, decided that it would never do to allow his men to return to Ontario without having a “brush with the Indians.” He therefore opened correspondence with Major Tonweight, pointing out the expediency of making an attack upon Little Poplar. “He is upon his reserve, it is true,” Beaver wrote, “but he has gathered his men together for the purpose of marching on Hatchet Creek, and there effecting a junction with the

rebel Metis. If you permit me to run down and give them a good trouncing, it will make an end of the contemplated league."

"Our policy," replied Tonweight, "is not to antagonize but to conciliate; to treat all as friends till they prove themselves to be enemies."

"But you will pay dear for your generous theory if this man, Little Poplar, succeeds in joining the rebels. And I assure you that the savage is now making ready to march.".

"The matter is in your own hands, then," Tonweight replied. "If all be as you say, you must consult your own judgment, and shoulder the responsibilities."

"Hurrah!" Beaver shouted. "Hurrah! Now then, boys, you'll have a brush. Get ready for a march. You know I am only supposing a case against these Indians," he said turning to a brother officer.

"Good God! is this outrage to occur!" Col. Denison exclaimed, when a Coureur−des−bois brought him the tidings.

And so, the sanguinary Beaver made ready to start.

"How much provisions do we need, Sir?" the purveyor asked.

"You do not need any. Let each man eat a hearty meal, and put some bread into his pocket. It is only going to be a short job. I'll kill a hundred or so," he said aside to a subordinate officer, "and then come straight back." Then he put himself at the head of his column, and swooped towards his prey.

So when Little Poplar, on the morning after the rescue of Captain Stephens, met the two maidens, there was great sorrow in his face.

"I have to fight your friends," he said, "but there is nothing else left me for choice. Beaver and his men are at this moment marching towards my reserve, though all my braves went back to peaceful occupation upon the assurance from English officers that no harm would come to them; but, as I have already stated, Beaver and his young men want to kill a lot of Indians, and return home great heroes. But they will make a grievous mistake. I shall lead them into a defile of swamp and bush tangle, where every one of the number will be at my mercy. I believe that this foolhardy man regards my followers as a band of dogs, whom he can kill as they run. But my men know not what fear is." Then kissing Julie, and bowing sorrowfully to Annette, this chief went away.

That very day, when midway upon his march, Captain Beaver was joined by two Cree scouts, one of whom besought him for a moment's interview.

He had no time to waste; but if the scout had anything very important to communicate he would listen.

"Then, Monsieur," Annette began, "my advice is that you call a halt of your troops. Little Poplar is in strong position upon his reserve; the swamps approaching his ground are quagmires; the bush is a tangle through which the rabbit may scarcely pass. The chief's men are numerous, and war is their occupation. They will destroy Monsieur's force."

"Indeed, I am at a loss to know why I should be an object of such solicitude to an Indian scout, whose sympathy and interest must be with those savages, against whom I now march." And without further parley he dismissed the lad.

That afternoon mirrors flashed signals from bluff to bluff; our men were surrounded by the enemy; and at the set of sun their lives lay at the−mercy of the men whom they had come to trounce. Julie was at the side of her lover, and tears were in her eyes.

"I beseech my chief for the sake of his love for me to desist, and allow these rash soldiers to depart." Her chief stood with arms folded upon his breast. There was sorrow on his face; but there was scorn there, too, as he turned affectionally to the sweet pleader.

"These men came down to massacre my people, that they might henceforth be clad with glory. They have not destroyed any of my men; but their dead strew the plain. They are at my mercy; so utterly, too, that if I desire it, not a man of all the host shall return to give tidings to his friends. You ask me to stay my hand. Ah! It is hard. But you ask it; you, my little lover−playmate of the sunny Saskatchewan. I consent!" Then he strode down among his men, and ordered them to cease. Naught−but the ascendancy which the splendid chief had gained over his followers, through his wisdom and his prowess, could have prevailed upon them to stay their hand, now that the men who had broken solemn faith were at their mercy. But they unstrung their bows, shouldered their muskets, and permitted the invaders to depart. Then Julie knelt at her lover's feet, and kissed his hand with reverent gratitude; and he laid his hand upon her head, and bade her arise.

Before I leave this feature of my narrative I may state that Captain Beaver subsequently sought to justify this wanton breach of faith with the Indians, upon the ground of military policy; affirming that the “punishment” which he inflicted upon the chief prevented the latter joining forces with the rebel Metis. As to the punishment there was very little inflicted upon the Indians;—it was emphatically conferred in another direction. As to the statement that the attack prevented Poplar from joining the rebel forces at Hatchet Creek, the same is absurdly untrue. Little Poplar did actually set out, after the attack, to join the bois−brules, and he deliberately—I was going to say contemptuously—exposed himself to the flank attack by Beaver's men, of which movement, we are told, he had been so much in dread. In due time, as the chief was pursuing his march, tidings came to him that the Metis had been overwhelmed. Then he surrendered; —and thereafter for many a dreary month there was no happiness for Julie. I may as well anticipate events, and say that this dear girl brought it emphatically to the knowledge of the authorities that her beloved chief early in the war had served the white people in the hour of peril; and that the offence for which he stood committed now had been forced upon him by the bad faith of a Canadian militia officer. At last he was released; and holding his hand, apparelled in proper attire, she walked out by his side to a little cottage wherein a priest stood waiting to wed the two. Her happiness was very great, as may be guessed when I state that in each of her beautiful eyes a tear glimmered like you see a drop of rain glitter upon the thorn bush, when the storm has ended, and the sun shines. Her lover took her many miles up the Saskatchewan, where she said she would remain till Annette got “settled.” A friend has lately been at her cottage, and he tells me that she has a “cherub of a baby,” absurdly like herself in all save its skin, which is rather of a mahogany cast. The chief and his petite wife are very happy; and many a time under the blossoms of their own orchard, or when the wind howls like a belated wolf, they discuss the alternation of sorrow and joy which fell to their lot when the two maidens went disguised as scouts over the unbounded prairie. My great wish is that all the pretty and noble−harted girls of my acquaintance may be as happy as my sweet Julie.

As for Annette, when the battle of Saw−Knife Creek ended, she was waiting for Julie to join her. Her hand was upon her horse's neck, and she was leaning against the animal thinking of her lover.

“Ah, at last!” The terrible words and the voice were but too plain. Turning she saw the rebel chief, triumph, passion, and revenge in his eyes. By his side were several Metis with muskets presented, ready to fire at the girl if she uttered a cry, or made resistance. Then they bound her arms, and set her upon her horse, which one of the chief's followers led by the bridle. They rode as fast as the ponies could travel across the prairie; and Annette's heart sank, and all hope seemed to die out of her life, as she realized, that the miscreants were hurrying towards the valley of Dismal Swamp where abode Jubal, the hideous hag.

As the party hurried along the skirt of the ridge flanking the swamp and the inky stream, lo! there came to her ears the notes of a bird's song. It was the guardian swan; and joy and hope crept into the maiden's bosom.

“Hear you yonder singing, my pretty bird?” the hideous chief asked, with a foul sneer. “Its song is always intended to console and reconcile maidens to their lovers.”

But she turned her head away with loathing, and answered him not. Then came a sudden trampling; swords gleamed; eyes flashed in the dusk; and before the helpless girl could gather her routed senses, the beastly chief was sent sprawling from his horse with a sabre−blow; his followers were routed; and she was free.

“My own beloved,” were the words whispered in her ear, and warm lips were pressed upon her mouth. “We no more part, my darling—never, never more.”

They rode along through the night, he telling of his love, and fashioning the future; she listening with bright eyes, and a happiness too great for words.

“You have asked me, darling, why I love *you* so? How it comes that of all the girls whom I have known, I should give my heart to you entire and for ever? Well, darling, I shall say naught of your heroism, which would alone make you illustrious and beloved in our historic annals for all time to come; but I shall regard you as a maiden who has never seen the brunt of battle, or done a deed of warlike valour. You have still enough of sterling worth to win my heart ten thousand times. You are beautiful, dear, and you are good as you are beautiful. You are true, because in you there is naught of affectation or of desire *to act a part; and there is on your lips no speech that is not the true expression of your thought. This I conceive to be the highest tribute−gift that man can offer a woman.”*

After all the turmoil and the besetting dangers this was very sweet to her;—and it was sweet to him.

In a little the rebellion ended, and Stephens came to the house of Annette's aunt, and wedded his beloved

there. Then he took her to wild, sweet places in the Territories; and after the lapse of a few weeks, went with her to the east, where both pleaded for the life of Colonel Marton. All men worshipped her when she came to our cities; and when she had obtained the boon for which she had come amongst us, she went away to the west again. She is happy now as woman can be, and my latest information is that Julie has prevailed upon her chief to change his place of abode and come with her to live, for the remainder of their days, close to the abode of her beloved mistress.

Annette is now the most popular woman in the North−West Territories. Her beauty seems to have attained a fuller development since we knew her as a maiden. Her mole is a deeper brown, I really believe, and her dimple deeper. But best of all her happiness is as well assured as her beauty.

THE END.

NOTES.

The preceding story lays no claim to value or accuracy in its descriptions of the North−West Territories. I have never seen that portion of our country; and to endeavour to describe faithfully a region of which I have only a hearsay knowledge would be foolish.

I have, therefore, arranged the geography of the Territories to suit my own conveniences. I speak of places that no one, will be able to find upon maps of the present or of the future. Wherever I want a valley or a swamp, I put the same; and I have taken the same liberty with respect to hills or waterfalls, The birds, and in some instances the plants and flowers of the prairies, I have also made to order.

I present some fiction in my story, and a large array of fact. I do not feel bound, however, to state which is the fact, and which the fiction.

I have not aimed at dramatic excellence in this book. Change of scene, incident and colour are the points which I had in view. There is not any sham sentiment in the book.

I have introduced a few passages, with little change from a small volume, entitled “The Story of Louis Riel.” These passages in no way effect the current of my story; but as I thought that they had some merit, I had no compunction in diverting them to present uses. The most notable authors have done this sort of thing; and chief amongst them I may mention Thackeray.

I beg likewise to say a word with respect to the book known as “The Story of Louis Riel.” That volume has been quoted as history; but it is largely fiction. There is no historic truth in the story therein written by me that Louis Riel conceived a passion for a beautiful girl named Marie; and that he put Thomas Scott to death, because the maiden gave her heart to that young white man. I have seen the story printed again and again as truth; but there is in it not one word of truth. This much I am glad to be able to say in justice to the memory of the miserable man, who has suffered a just penalty for his transgressions. I never intended that the work in question should be taken as history; and I should have made that point clear in an introduction, bearing my name, but that I was unwilling to take responsibility for the literary slovenliness, which was unavoidable through my haste in writing, and through Mr. D. A. Rose's hurry in publishing, the work. It occupied me only seventeen days; and I did not see my proofs.

Once more: one of the leading characters in that book, Mr. Charles Mair, is most unjustly treated. Him I held as one of the prime agents in the rebellion of 1869; but nothing could be further from the fact. His pen and his voice had always advocated justice and generosity towards the Indians and the Metis. As to his sentiments respecting the Indians, I need but refer to the drama of his “Tecumseh,” which Canadians have received with such enthusiasm.

NANCY, THE LIGHT−KEEPER'S DAUGHTER.

BY EDMUND COLLINS.

“Yes, that is a picture of Grace Darling, but I can tell you a story of great bravery, too, which the world has never heard, about the daughter of a light−keeper who lived on the shore of one of our Canadian lakes.” These words were spoken to me by an old Canadian fisherman in whose house I was spending a few nights while out for my autumn shooting.

“The girl's name was Nancy and her father was keeper of a small wooden light−house which stood chained to a ledge lying close to the harbour's mouth. The girl and her father lived alone upon the rock, but when the water

was smooth they went every day to the mainland in their little boat. One day in the late autumn the keeper was obliged to make a journey to a distant town, and as he could not reach home again till some hours after dark, he left the lighting of the light to Nancy. The girl and a number of others went among the hills in the afternoon to pick bake−apples, and they remained till the sun was only “a hand high" in the west. Then the party turned their steps toward the coast.

“There will be a heavy gale to−night,” the girl said, looking at the sky; for a mass of dark cloud resembling a ragged mountain had appeared up the coast and begun to roll rapidly toward the harbour. It is only those who live near the lakes, that know how suddenly sometimes a terrible hurricane will come out of a sky which was the most peaceful of azure only a few moments before. The tempest first moved along the level shore, casting an awful shadow upon the landscape for miles before it; then it smote the sea in its full fury.

To describe the tumult of sound as the gale drove onward would be impossible. A sad cry would swell out like the voice of a mother wailing for her child; then, pitched in a low, loud key, would come a noise like the howling of a soul condemned; while above the confusing din could be heard shrill whistles and cross pipings as if a host of mad spirits were signalling one another through the storm.

Nancy hurried to the shore where lay her little boat, and several fishermen were gathered about the dock.

“Girl,” said one, a hardy sailor who had been on the lakes in the roughest weather, “no boat would live now to reach the reef. Better wait till your father returns.”

“But if some ship, unable to clear the land with this ingale, should be obliged to run for the harbour, she could never enter without the light.”

“I was on the look−out a few moments ago, and there was nothing in sight. But, even if there was, it would be madness to launch a boat now. Look at these seas!”

The whole face of the gulf between the reef and the shore was a wilderness of raging water. The fisherman had hardly ceased speaking, when another of the coast people was seen hurrying down from the look−out.

“There is a ship about eight miles to the sou'west, with canvas close hauled; but I don't think that she will be able to weather the point.”

“If she cannot, then she must run for the harbour, and there will be no light,” Nancy exclaimed; and the colour faded out of her brown cheek. Then borrowing a telescope from one of the fishermen, she set out for the top of the look−out. While she held the glass in her trembling hands she saw the ship wear and turn her head toward the harbour. Gathering her plaid shawl hastily about her shoulders, she ran down the steep and returned to the dock.

“The ship is running for the harbour, and there *must* be a light. Here, help me to launch my boat.”

“Is the girl mad!” two or three voices exclaimed at once.

“Girl,” said the old man who had spoken before, “no small boat that ever swam can reach yonder ledge now. Why do you want to throw away your life? It cannot save the ship.”

“The boat is light,” Nancy replied, “and the canvas covering will keep it from filling, if I can only manage always to meet the sea head on. If I had a pair of after oars as well as my own there would not be much difficulty.” As she spoke these words, she looked at the group, as if calling for a volunteer: but nobody took her hint. They all cowered in the face of the gale, and some of them began to move away from the dock.

“Then I must go alone,” the girl said, as she threw off her shawl, and hastily tied up her mane of soft, black hair. “You will surely help me to launch the boat.” But no hand would help her. They saw the impetuous girl going to doom, and they would not be a party to her madness. Getting three or four round pieces of driftwood, which were slippery with water−slime, she laid them along the dock; two other billets she placed under the boat's keel. Then gathering her strength for one pull, she sent the boat into the churning surf. One of the fishermen advanced to detain her, but she waved him back with a gesture so determined and imperious that he hesitated. He then held consultation with his friends. Two or three now hurried down to the water's edge, but the boat had shot out beyond their reach, and was already rising like some great sea−bird over the mad waves. The girl had seized her oars and was rowing at a brisk rate toward the ledge. Sometimes a huge, green, glittering wave would arise and roll towards the shell, and the fishermen would close their eyes; but in response to the rower's quick wrist, the little skiff would turn and climb over the roaring crest of the terrible billow. Sometimes the boat was nowhere to be seen, and one of the spectators would say to another,

“It is all over!”

Presently, however, the cockle would rise out of the trough and appear upon the summit of a breaking sea,

looking like a large, crouching, sea−gull. On, steadily, the mite of a craft held its way, sometimes heading directly for the reef, again swerving to the right to mount a rampant billow. Smaller, and smaller grew the little figure, till it became a mere white speck away in the driving mist. The fishermen still remained huddled together in the dock; and as one, with the telescope in his hand, announced that the girl was now within a cable's length of the reef, a great look of shame came into their faces, that not one had shown courage enough to go with her. As for Nancy, in the midst of the ravening turmoil, she was cool of head and steady of arm, pulling with a sturdy stroke, and constantly turning her face to note the waves to be met with the full front of the skiff. Sometimes the cross wash from a sea would smite the boat upon the quarter, and for a moment expose it to destruction; but in response to the girl's quick judgment and steady wrist, the bold little prow would be instantly brought again in the face of the tempest. In one continuous storm the spray drove over her, and the skiff was more than half full of water. It was growing dark, and she could barely distinguish the opposite shore. But the danger of the passage was at last over, and her tiny craft was in the shelter of the gloomy reef.

There was a windlass bolted to the rock, with which she drew the skiff beyond the reach of the waves. Nimbly then she climbed the reef till she reached the door of the tower. A few seconds later all the fishermen saw the warm, yellow glare of the light streaming over the turbulent water.

Nancy was happy now, and her large eyes strained through the lantern of the tower to catch sight of the ship. She had not long to wait. Between the reef and the long stretch of eastern shore, a red light pulsed upon a wave, moving towards the harbour.

“Good!” the girl cried out, “she is midway in the channel and safe.” Then she descended to the basement, where she brewed a cup of tea, and sat down to a supper of cold sea−fowl, and juicy, white bread of her own baking.

The sleeping rooms were upon the middle story, but the girl began to grow uneasy at the increasing violence of the hurricane, and would not go to bed. Taking a book, she went to the lantern and sat upon a box to read. The whistling of the wind around the glass and the dome of zinc, the booming of the sea against the rock, and the brawling of the waters around her produced such a tumultuous din that persons speaking in the tower would be unable to hear each other.

Then dawned a new terror; and she looked upon the floor with wide−opened eyes and blanched lips. Twice since its establishment, during winter gales, had the tower been swept off the rock. It is true the present structure was substantially built, and was firmly secured to long iron “stringers” bolted to the solid rock; yet the sea was already surging against the base of the tower, and at every blow the edifice quivered till the machinery of steel and brass rang like a number of little bells. Upon the grated, iron pathway running around the lantern inside, she took her stand, and, thence, looked out. The light streamed far beyond the ledge and revealed the full fury of the sea. The agitated waters would recede from the reef upon the windward side like a jumper who runs backward, that he may be able to leap with greater force; then gathered up to the stature of a hill and crowned with roaring foam, it would return with soft tread, but terrible might, scaling the rock, and flinging its white arms around the waist of the tower. Throughout the tumult, flocks of sea−birds, driven from the surface, and bewildered in the dense darkness of the storm, would fly for the light and smite the lantern; and then they would fall backward into the surf, as if struck with a thunderbolt. Other creatures flew with more care; and Nancy shuddered as she saw the gleaming eyes of huge fish hawks outside, and beheld their dusky wings waving at the panes.

Many an hour of terror passed with no employment for the trembling watcher, save when the lamps grew dim and she moved from her standing place to snuff the wick and turn more flame. Stepping nervously down to the basement she found that it lacked only a quarter of four o'clock. In half an hour it would be dawn, and she was cheered by the thought as she re−ascended.

But how could a frail, wooden tower withstand these terrible shocks! As she trod the spiral stairs, the whole edifice trembled and creaked. Once, under a tremendous surge, she felt it reel. She hurried again to the iron pathway and looked out. Billow after billow came sweeping up the ledge, and did not pause till it smote the very lantern with its soft foam.

“Oh! merciful God deliver me!” the girl cried, as she espied far out a wave far more terrible and gigantic than any other which her frightened eyes had seen. Before it reached the reef, she believed that its storming crest was on a level with the lantern. Then it seemed as if the whole ocean, aroused to strike one overwhelming blow, fell in thunder upon the tower. Nancy was conscious of being hurled rapidly through space; then followed a crashing

sound, an overturning and a confusion that no pen could describe. The tower was in the sea.

She could never explain how it came about, but when she recovered from the shock she was floating close by one of the tower floors. The dawn had broken in glaring gray, and she was enabled to perceive her situation. The lower part of the tower was uppermost, and the lantern with its weight of machinery was beneath. Yes, God had heard her supplication; and, comparatively safe from the billows, she clung to a piece of timber, projecting above the floor. She was certain that the storm was abating; yet the wreck was drifting rapidly toward the inexorable rocks. Wave after wave passed over the uppermost part of the tower, and sometimes the water smote her so that her head reeled, and her senses became dimmed for some moments. A coil of rope hung from a spike in the wall, and fastening an end of it around her slim waist, she bound herself to a stout piece of timber.

A young man, passenger in the ship which the girl had saved, heard of the heroism of the light−keeper's daughter. As soon as light came, through promise of a liberal reward, he induced one of the sailors to come with him in the launch. Near the shore they met the floating tower, and saw lying upon the top, and bound there with a rope, the girl who had risked her life to save the vessel. They believed that she was dead, so pale was her beautiful face; and the coils of her soft hair were trailing in the surging water. But she was not dead, and, placed in the warm cabin of the delivered ship, soon opened her great, timorous eyes.

Now, that my story may seem like a novel, I may add that the brave young fellow who rescued Nancy was often seen afterwards about the girl's home. Indeed I doubt if the two were ever parted.