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PIERRE AND HIS PEOPLE

TALES OF THE FAR NORTH

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

A PRAIRIE VAGABOND

SHE OF THE TRIPLE CHEVRON

THREE OUTLAWS

A PRAIRIE VAGABOND

Little Hammer was not a success. He was a disappointment to the missionaries; the officials of the Hudson's Bay Company said he was "no good;" the Mounted Police kept an eye on him; the Crees and Blackfeet would have nothing to do with him; and the half-breeds were profane regarding him. But Little Hammer was oblivious to any depreciation of his merits, and would not be suppressed. He loved the Hudson's Bay Company's Post at Yellow Quill with an unwavering love; he ranged the half-breed hospitality of Red Deer River, regardless of it being thrown at him as he in turn threw it at his dog; he saluted Sergeant Gellatly with a familiar How! whenever he saw him; he borrowed tabac of the half-breed women, and, strange to say, paid it back--with other tabac got by daily petition, until his prayer was granted, at the H. B. C. Post. He knew neither shame nor defeat, but where women were concerned he kept his word, and was singularly humble. It was a woman that induced him to be baptised. The day after the ceremony he begged "the loan of a dollar for the love of God" from the missionary; and being refused, straightway, and for the only time it was known of him, delivered a rumbling torrent of half-breed profanity, mixed with the unusual oaths of the barracks. Then he walked away with great humility. There was no swagger about Little Hammer. He was simply unquenchable and continuous. He sometimes got drunk; but on such occasions he sat down, or lay down, in the most convenient place, and, like Caesar beside Pompey's statue, wrapped his mantle about his face and forgot the world. He was a vagabond Indian, abandoned yet self-contained, outcast yet gregarious. No social ostracism unnerved him, no threats of the H. B. C. officials moved him;

and when in the winter of 187\_ he was driven from one place to another, starving and homeless, and came at last emaciated and nearly dead to the Post at Yellow Quill, he asked for food and shelter as if it were his right, and not as a mendicant.

One night, shortly after his reception and restoration, he was sitting in the store silently smoking the Company's tabac. Sergeant Gellatly entered. Little Hammer rose, offered his hand, and muttered, "How!"

The Sergeant thrust his hand aside, and said sharply: "Whin I take y'r hand, Little Hammer, it'll be to put a grip an y'r wrists that'll stay there till y'are in quarters out of which y'll come nayther winter nor summer. Put that in y'r pipe and smoke it, y' scamp!"

Little Hammer had a bad time at the Post that night. Lounging half-breeds reviled him; the H. B. C. officials rebuked him; and travellers who were coming and going shared in the derision, as foolish people do where one is brow-beaten by many. At last a trapper entered, whom seeing, Little Hammer drew his blanket up about his head. The trapper sat down very near Little Hammer, and began to smoke. He laid his plug-tabac and his knife on the counter beside him. Little Hammer reached over and took the knife, putting it swiftly within his blanket. The trapper saw the act, and, turning sharply on the Indian, called him a thief. Little Hammer chuckled strangely and said nothing; but his eyes peered sharply above the blanket. A laugh went round the store. In an instant the trapper, with a loud oath, caught at the Indian's throat; but as the blanket dropped back he gave a startled cry. There was the flash of a knife, and he fell back dead. Little Hammer stood above him, smiling, for a moment, and then, turning to Sergeant Gellatly, held out his arms silently for the handcuffs.

The next day two men were lost on the prairies. One was Sergeant Gellatly; the other was Little Hammer. The horses they rode travelled so close that the leg of the Indian crowded the leg of the white man; and the wilder the storm grew, the closer still they rode. A 'poudre' day, with its steely air and fatal frost, was an ill thing in the world; but these entangling blasts, these wild curtains of snow, were desolating even unto death. The sun above was smothered; the earth beneath was trackless; the compass stood for loss all round.

What could Sergeant Gellatly expect, riding with a murderer on his left hand: a heathen that had sent a knife through the heart of one of the lords of the North? What should the gods do but frown, or the elements be at, but howling on their path? What should one hope for but that vengeance should be taken out of the hands of mortals, and be delivered to the angry spirits?

But if the gods were angry at the Indian, why should Sergeant Gellatly only sway to and fro, and now laugh recklessly, and now fall sleepily forward on the neck of his horse; while the Indian rode straight, and neither wavered nor wandered in mind, but at last slipped from his horse and walked beside the other? It was at this moment that the soldier heard, "Sergeant Gellatly, Sergeant Gellatly," called through the blast;

and he thought it came from the skies, or from some other world. "Me darlin'," he said, "have y' come to me?" But the voice called again: "Sergeant Gellatly, keep awake! keep awake! You sleep, you die; that's it. Holy. Yes. How!" Then he knew that it was Little Hammer calling in his ear, and shaking him; that the Indian was dragging him from his horse . . . his revolver, where was it? he had forgotten . . . he nodded . . . nodded. But Little Hammer said: "Walk, hell! you walk, yes;" and Little Hammer struck him again and again; but one arm of the Indian was under his shoulder and around him, and the voice was anxious and kind. Slowly it came to him that Little Hammer was keeping him alive against the will of the spirits--but why should they strike him instead of the Indian? Was there any sun in the world? Had there ever been? or fire or heat anywhere, or anything but wind and snow in all God's universe? . . . Yes, there were bells ringing--soft bells of a village church; and there was incense burning--most sweet it was! and the coals in the censer--how beautiful, how comforting! He laughed with joy again, and he forgot how cold, how maliciously cold, he had been; he forgot how dreadful that hour was before he became warm; when he was pierced by myriad needles through the body, and there was an incredible aching at his heart.

And yet something kept thundering on his body, and a harsh voice shrieked at him, and there were many lights dancing over his shut eyes; and then curtains of darkness were dropped, and centuries of oblivion came; and then--then his eyes opened to a comforting silence, and some one was putting brandy between his teeth, and after a time he heard a voice say: "'Bien,' you see he was a murderer, but he save his captor. 'Voila,' such a heathen! But you will, all the same, bring him to justice--you call it that? But we shall see."

Then some one replied, and the words passed through an outer web of darkness and an inner haze of dreams. "The feet of Little Hammer were like wood on the floor when you brought the two in, Pretty Pierre--and lucky for them you found them. . . . The thing would read right in a book, but it's not according to the run of things up here, not by a damned sight!"

"Private Bradshaw," said the first voice again, "you do not know Little Hammer, nor that story of him. You wait for the trial. I have something to say. You think Little Hammer care for the prison, the rope?--Ah, when a man wait five years to kill--so! and it is done, he is glad sometimes when it is all over. Sergeant Gellatly there will wish he went to sleep forever in the snow, if Little Hammer come to the rope. Yes, I think."

And Sergeant Gellatly's brain was so numbed that he did not grasp the meaning of the words, though he said them over and over again. . . . Was he dead? No, for his body was beating, beating . . . well, it didn't matter . . . nothing mattered . . . he was sinking to forgetfulness . . . sinking.

So, for hours, for weeks--it might have been for years--and then he woke, clear and knowing, to "the unnatural, intolerable day"--it was that to him, with Little Hammer in prison. It was March when his memory and

vigour vanished; it was May when he grasped the full remembrance of himself, and of that fight for life on the prairie: of the hands that smote him that he should not sleep; of Little Hammer the slayer, who had driven death back discomfited, and brought his captor safe to where his own captivity and punishment awaited him.

When Sergeant Gellatly appeared in court at the trial he refused to bear witness against Little Hammer. "D' ye think--does wan av y' think--that I'll speak a word agin the man--haythen or no haythen--that pulled me out of me tomb and put me betune the barrack quilts? Here's the stripes aff me arm, and to gaol I'll go; but for what wint before I clapt the iron on his wrists, good or avil, divil a word will I say. An' here's me left hand, and there's me right fut, and an eye of me too, that I'd part with, for the cause of him that's done a trick that your honour wouldn't do--an' no shame to y' aither--an' y'd been where Little Hammer was with me."

His honour did not reply immediately, but he looked meditatively at Little Hammer before he said quietly,--"Perhaps not, perhaps not."

And Little Hammer, thinking he was expected to speak, drew his blanket up closely about him and grunted, "How!"

Pretty Pierre, the notorious half-breed, was then called. He kissed the Book, making the sign of the Cross swiftly as he did so, and unheeding the ironical, if hesitating, laughter in the court. Then he said:

"'Bien,' I will tell you the story--the whole truth. I was in the Stony Plains. Little Hammer was 'good Injin' then. . . . Yes, sacre! it is a fool who smiles at that. I have kissed the Book. Dam! . . . He would be chief soon when old Two Tails die. He was proud, then, Little Hammer. He go not to the Post for drink; he sell not next year's furs for this year's rations; he shoot straight."

Here Little Hammer stood up and said: "There is too much talk. Let me be. It is all done. The sun is set--I care not--I have killed him;" and then he drew his blanket about his face and sat down.

But Pierre continued: "Yes, you killed him--quick, after five years--that is so; but you will not speak to say why. Then, I will speak. The Injins say Little Hammer will be great man; he will bring the tribes together; and all the time Little Hammer was strong and silent and wise. Then Brigley the trapper--well, he was a thief and coward. He come to Little Hammer and say, 'I am hungry and tired.' Little Hammer give him food and sleep. He go away. 'Bien,' he come back and say,--'It is far to go; I have no horse.' So Little Hammer give him a horse too. Then he come back once again in the night when Little Hammer was away, and before morning he go; but when Little Hammer return, there lay his bride--only an Injin girl, but his bride--dead! You see? Eh? No? Well, the Captain at the Post he says it was the same as Lucrece.--I say it was like hell. It is not much to kill or to die--that is in the game; but that other, 'mon Dieu!' Little Hammer, you see how he hide his head: not because he kill the Tarquin, that Brigley, but because he is a poor 'vaurien' now, and he once was happy and had a wife. . . . What would you do, judge honourable? . . . Little Hammer, I shake your hand--so--How!"

But Little Hammer made no reply.

The judge sentenced Little Hammer to one month in gaol. He might have made it one thousand months--it would have been the same; for when, on the last morning of that month, they opened the door to set him free, he was gone. That is, the Little Hammer whom the high gods knew was gone; though an ill-nourished, self-strangled body was upright by the wall. The vagabond had paid his penalty, but desired no more of earth.

Upon the door was scratched the one word: How!

## SHE OF THE TRIPLE CHEVRON

Between Archangel's Rise and Pardon's Drive there was but one house. It was a tavern, and it was known as Galbraith's Place. There was no man in the Western Territories to whom it was not familiar. There was no traveller who crossed the lonely waste but was glad of it, and would go twenty miles out of his way to rest a night on a corn-husk bed which Jen Galbraith's hands had filled, to eat a meal that she had prepared, and to hear Peter Galbraith's tales of early days on the plains, when buffalo were like clouds on the horizon, when Indians were many and hostile, and when men called the great western prairie a wedge of the American desert.

It was night on the prairie. Jen Galbraith stood in the doorway of the tavern sitting-room and watched a mighty beacon of flame rising before her, a hundred yards away. Every night this beacon made a circle of light on the prairie, and Galbraith's Place was in the centre of the circle. Summer and winter it burned from dusk to daylight. No hand fed it but that of Nature. It never failed; it was a cruse that was never empty. Upon Jen Galbraith it had a weird influence. It grew to be to her a kind of spiritual companion, though, perhaps, she would not so have named it. This flaming gas, bubbling up from the depths of the earth on the lonely plains, was to her a mysterious presence grateful to her; the receiver of her thoughts, the daily necessity in her life. It filled her too with a kind of awe; for, when it burned, she seemed not herself alone, but another self of her whom she could not quite understand. Yet she was no mere dreamer. Upon her practical strength of body and mind had come that rugged poetical sense, which touches all who live the life of mountain and prairie. She showed it in her speech; it had a measured cadence. She expressed it in her body; it had a free and rhythmic movement. And not Jen alone, but many another dweller on the prairie, looked upon it with a superstitious reverence akin to worship. A blizzard could not quench it. A gale of wind only fed its strength. A rain-storm made a mist about it, in which it was enshrined like a god. Peter Galbraith could not fully understand his daughter's fascination for this Prairie Star, as the North-West people called it. It was not without its natural influence upon him; but he regarded it most as a

comfortable advertisement, and he lamented every day that this never-failing gas well was not near a large population, and he still its owner. He was one of that large family in the earth who would turn the best things in their lives into merchandise. As it was, it brought much grist to his mill; for he was not averse to the exercise of the insinuating pleasures of euchre and poker in his tavern; and the hospitality which ranchmen, cowboys, and travellers sought at his hand was often prolonged, and also remunerative to him.

Pretty Pierre, who had his patrol as gamester defined, made semi-annual visits to Galbraith's Place. It occurred generally after the rounding-up and branding seasons, when the cowboys and ranchmen were "flush" with money. It was generally conceded that Monsieur Pierre would have made an early excursion to a place where none is ever "ordered up," if he had not been free with the money which he so plentifully won.

Card-playing was to him a science and a passion. He loved to win for winning's sake. After that, money, as he himself put it, was only fit to be spent for the good of the country, and that men should earn more. Since he put his philosophy into instant and generous practice, active and deadly prejudice against him did not have lengthened life.

The Mounted Police, or as they are more poetically called, the Riders of the Plains, watched Galbraith's Place, not from any apprehension of violent events, but because Galbraith was suspected of infringing the prevailing law of Prohibition, and because for some years it had been a tradition and a custom to keep an eye on Pierre.

As Jen Galbraith stood in the doorway looking abstractedly at the beacon, her fingers smoothing her snowy apron the while, she was thinking thus to herself: "Perhaps father is right. If that Prairie Star were only at Vancouver or Winnipeg instead of here, our Val could be something, more than a prairie-rider. He'd have been different, if father hadn't started this tavern business. Not that our Val is bad. He isn't; but if he had money he could buy a ranch,--or something."

Our Val, as Jen and her father called him, was a lad of twenty-two, one year younger than Jen. He was prairie-rider, cattle-dealer, scout, cowboy, happy-go-lucky vagrant,--a splendid Bohemian of the plains. As Jen said, he was not bad; but he had a fiery, wandering spirit, touched withal by the sunniest humour. He had never known any curb but Jen's love and care. That had kept him within bounds so far. All men of the prairie spoke well of him. The great new lands have codes and standards of morals quite their own. One enthusiastic admirer of this youth said, in Jen's hearing, "He's a Christian--Val Galbraith!" That was the western way of announcing a man as having great civic and social virtues. Perhaps the respect for Val Galbraith was deepened by the fact that there was no broncho or cayuse that he could not tame to the saddle.

Jen turned her face from the flame and looked away from the oasis of warmth it made, to where the light shaded away into darkness, a darkness that was unbroken for many a score of miles to the north and west. She sighed deeply and drew herself up with an aggressive motion as though she

was freeing herself of something. So she was. She was trying to shake off a feeling of oppression. Ten minutes ago the gaslighted house behind her had seemed like a prison. She felt that she must have air, space, and freedom.

She would have liked a long ride on the buffalo-track. That, she felt, would clear her mind. She was no romantic creature out of her sphere, no exotic. She was country-born and bred, and her blood had been charged by a prairie instinct passing through three generations. She was part of this life. Her mind was free and strong, and her body was free and healthy. While that freedom and health was genial, it revolted against what was gross or irregular. She loved horses and dogs, she liked to take a gun and ride away to the Poplar Hills in search of game, she found pleasure in visiting the Indian Reservation, and talking to Sun-in-the-North, the only good Indian chief she knew, or that anyone else on the prairies knew. She loved all that was strong and untamed, all that was panting with wild and glowing life. Splendidly developed, softly sinewy, warmly bountiful, yet without the least physical over-luxuriance or suggestiveness, Jen, with her tawny hair and dark-brown eyes, was a growth of unrestrained, unconventional, and eloquent life. Like Nature around her, glowing and fresh, yet glowing and hardy. There was, however, just a strain of pensiveness in her, partly owing to the fact that there were no women near her, that she had, virtually, lived her life as a woman alone.

As she thus looked into the undefined horizon two things were happening: a traveller was approaching Galbraith's Place from a point in that horizon; and in the house behind her someone was singing. The traveller sat erect upon his horse. He had not the free and lazy seat of the ordinary prairie-rider. It was a cavalry seat, and a military manner. He belonged to that handful of men who patrol a frontier of near a thousand miles, and are the security of peace in three hundred thousand miles of territory--the Riders of the Plains, the North-West Mounted Police.

This Rider of the Plains was Sergeant Thomas Gellatly, familiarly known as Sergeant Tom. Far away as he was he could see that a woman was standing in the tavern door. He guessed who it was, and his blood quickened at the guessing. But reining his horse on the furthest edge of the lighted circle, he said, debatingly: "I've little time enough to get to the Rise, and the order was to go through, hand the information to Inspector Jules, and be back within forty-eight hours. Is it flesh and blood they think I am? Me that's just come back from a journey of a hundred miles, and sent off again like this with but a taste of sleep and little food, and Corporal Byng sittin' there at Fort Desire with a pipe in his mouth and the fat on his back like a porpoise. It's famished I am with hunger, and thirty miles yet to do; and she, standin' there with a six months' welcome in her eye. . . . It's in the interest of Justice if I halt at Galbraith's Place for half-an-hour, bedad! The blackguard hid away there at Soldier's Knee will be arrested all the sooner; for horse and man will be able the better to travel. I'm glad it's not me that has to take him whoever he is. It's little I like leadin' a fellow-creature towards the gallows, or puttin' a bullet into him if he won't



come. . . . Now what will we do, Larry, me boy? "this to the broncho--"Go on without bite or sup, me achin' behind and empty before, and you laggin' in the legs, or stay here for the slice of an hour and get some heart into us? Stay here is it, me boy? then lave go me fut with your teeth and push on to the Prairie Star there." So saying, Sergeant Tom, whose language in soliloquy, or when excited, was more marked by a brogue than at other times, rode away towards Galbraith's Place.

In the tavern at that moment, Pretty Pierre was sitting on the bar-counter, where temperance drinks were professedly sold, singing to himself. His dress was singularly neat, if coarse, and his slouch hat was worn with an air of jauntiness according well with his slight make and almost girlish delicacy of complexion. He was puffing a cigarette, in the breaks of the song. Peter Galbraith, tall, gaunt, and sombre-looking, sat with his chair tilted back against the wall, rather nervously pulling at the strips of bark of which the yielding chair-seat was made. He may or may not have been listening to the song which had run through several verses. Where it had come from, no one knew; no one cared to know. The number of its verses were legion. Pierre had a sweet voice, of a peculiarly penetrating quality; still it was low and well-modulated, like the colour in his cheeks, which gave him his name.

These were the words he was singing as Sergeant Tom rode towards the tavern:

"The hot blood leaps in his quivering breast  
Voila! 'Tis his enemies near!  
There's a chasm deep on the mountain crest  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!  
They follow him close and they follow him fast,  
And he flies like a mountain deer;  
Then a mad, wild leap and he's safe at last!  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!  
A cry and a leap and the danger's past  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

At the close of the verse, Galbraith said: "I don't like that song. I--I don't like it. You're not a father, Pierre."

"No, I am not a father. I have some virtue of that. I have spared the world something, Pete Galbraith."

"You have the Devil's luck; your sins never get YOU into trouble."

A curious fire flashed in the half-breed's eyes, and he said, quietly: "Yes, I have great luck; but I have my little troubles at times--at times."

"They're different, though, from this trouble of Val's." There was something like a fog in the old man's throat.

"Yes, Val was quite foolish, you see. If he had killed a white man--

Pretty Pierre, for instance--well, there would have been a show of arrest, but he could escape. It was an Injin. The Government cherish the Injin much in these days. The redskin must be protected. It must be shown that at Ottawa there is justice. That is droll--quite. Eh, bien! Val will not try to escape. He waits too long--near twenty-four hours. Then, it is as you see. . . . You have not told her?" He nodded towards the door of the sittingroom.

"Nothing. It'll come on Jen soon enough if he doesn't get away, and bad enough if he does, and can't come back to us. She's fond of him--as fond of him as a mother. Always was wiser than our Val or me, Jen was. More sense than a judge, and proud but not too proud, Pierre--not too proud. She knows the right thing to do, like the Scriptures; and she does it too. . . . Where did you say he was hid?"

"In the Hollow at Soldier's Knee. He stayed too long at Moose Horn. Injins carried the news on to Fort Desire. When Val started south for the Border other Injins followed, and when a halt was made at Soldier's Knee they pushed across country over to Fort Desire. You see, Val's horse give out. I rode with him so far. My horse too was broke up. What was to be done? Well, I knew a ranchman not far from Soldier's Knee. I told Val to sleep, and I would go on and get the ranchman to send him a horse, while I come on to you. Then he could push on to the Border. I saw the ranchman, and he swore to send a horse to Val to-night. He will keep his word. He knows Val. That was at noon to-day, and I am here, you see, and you know all. The danger? Ah, my friend,--the Police Barracks at Archangel's Rise! If word is sent down there from Fort Desire before Val passes, they will have out a big patrol, and his chances,--well, you know them, the Riders of the Plains. But Val, I think will have luck, and get into Montana before they can stop him. I hope; yes."

"If I could do anything, Pierre! Can't we--"

The half-breed interrupted: "No, we can't do anything, Galbraith. I have done all. The ranchman knows me. He will keep his word, by the Great Heaven!" It would seem as if Pierre had reasons for relying on the ranchman other than ordinary prairie courtesy to law-breakers.

"Pierre, tell me the whole story over, slow and plain. It don't seem nateral to think of it; but if you go over it again, perhaps I can get the thing more reas'nable in my mind. No, it ain't nateral to me, Pierre--our Val running away." The old man leaned forward and put his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands.

"Eh, well, it was an Injin. So much. It was in self-defence--a little, but of course to prove that. There is the difficulty. You see, they were all drinking, and the Injin--he was a chief---proposed--he proposed that Val should sell him his sister, Jen Galbraith, to be the chief's squaw. He would give him a cayuse. Val's blood came up quick--quite quick. You know Val. He said between his teeth: 'Look out, Snow Devil, you Injin dog, or I'll have your heart. Do you think a white girl is like a redskin woman, to be sold as you sell your wives and daughters to

the squaw-men and white loafers, you reptile?' Then the Injin said an ugly word about Val's sister, and Val shot him dead like lightning.... Yes, that is good to swear, Galbraith. You are not the only one that curses the law in this world. It is not Justice that fills the gaols, but Law."

The old man rose and walked up and down the room in a shuffling kind of way. His best days were done, the spring of his life was gone, and the step was that of a man who had little more of activity and force with which to turn the halting wheels of life. His face was not altogether good, yet it was not evil. There was a sinister droop to the eyelids, a suggestion of cruelty about the mouth; but there was more of good-nature and passive strength than either in the general expression. One could see that some genial influence had dominated what was inherently cruel and sinister in him. Still the sinister predisposition was there.

"He can't never come here, Pierre, can he?" he asked, despairingly.

"No, he can't come here, Galbraith. And look: if the Riders of the Plains should stop here to-night, or to-morrow, you will be cool--cool, eh?"

"Yes, I will be quite cool, Pierre." Then he seemed to think of something else and looked up half-curiously, half-inquiringly at the half-breed.

Pierre saw this. He whistled quietly to himself for a little, and then called the old man over to where he sat. Leaning slightly forward he made his reply to the look that had been bent upon him. He touched Galbraith's breast lightly with his delicate fingers, and said: "I have not much love for the world, Pete Galbraith, and not much love for men and women altogether; they are fools--nearly all. Some men--you know--treat me well. They drink with me--much. They would make life a hell for me if I was poor--shoot me, perhaps, quick!--if--if I didn't shoot first. They would wipe me with their feet. They would spoil Pretty Pierre." This he said with a grim kind of humour and scorn, refined in its suppressed force. Fastidious as he was in appearance, Pierre was not vain. He had been created with a sense of refinement that reduced the grossness of his life; but he did not trade on it; he simply accepted it and lived it naturally after his kind. He was not good at heart, and he never pretended to be so. He continued: "No, I have not much love; but Val, well, I think of him some. His tongue is straight; he makes no lies. His heart is fire; his arms are strong; he has no fear. He does not love Pierre; but he does not pretend to love him. He does not think of me like the rest. So much the more when his trouble comes I help him. I help him to the death if he needs me. To make him my friend--that is good. Eh? Perhaps. You see, Galbraith?"

The old man nodded thoughtfully, and after a little pause said: "I have killed Injins myself;" and he made a motion of his head backward, suggestive of the past.

With a shrug of his shoulders the other replied "Yes, so have I--

sometimes. But the government was different then, and there were no Riders of the Plains." His white teeth showed menacingly under his slight moustache. Then there was another pause. Pierre was watching the other.

"What's that you're doing, Galbraith?"

"Rubbin' laudanum on my gums for this toothache. Have to use it for nuralgy, too."

Galbraith put the little vial back in his waistcoat pocket, and presently said: "What will you have to drink, Pretty Pierre?" That was his way of showing gratitude.

"I am reform. I will take coffee, if Jen Galbraith will make some. Too much broke glass inside is not good. Yes."

Galbraith went into the sitting-room to ask Jen to make the coffee. Pierre, still sitting on the bar-counter, sang to himself a verse of a rough-and-ready, satirical prairie ballad:

"The Riders of the Plains, my boys, are twenty thousand strong  
Oh, Lordy, don't they make the prairies how!  
'Tis their lot to smile on virtue and to collar what is wrong,  
And to intercept the happy flowin' bowl.

They've a notion, that in glory, when we wicked ones have chains  
They will all be major-generals--and that!  
They're a lovely band of pilgrims are the Riders of the Plains  
Will some sinner please to pass around the hat?"

As he reached the last two lines of the verse the door opened and Sergeant Tom entered. Pretty Pierre did not stop singing. His eyes simply grew a little brighter, his cheek flushed ever so slightly, and there was an increase of vigour in the closing notes.

Sergeant Tom smiled a little grimly, then he nodded and said: "Been at it ever since, Pretty Pierre? You were singing the same song on the same spot when I passed here six months ago."

"Eh, Sergeant Tom, it is you? What brings you so far from your straw-bed at Fort Desire?" From underneath his hat-brim Pierre scanned the face of the trooper closely.

"Business. Not to smile on virtue, but to collar what is wrong. I guess you ought to be ready by this time to go into quarters, Pierre. You've had a long innings."

"Not yet, Sergeant Tom, though I love the Irish, and your company would make me happy. But I am so innocent, and the world--it cannot spare me yet. But I think you come to smile on virtue, all the same, Sergeant Tom. She is beautiful is Jen Galbraith. Ah, that makes your eye bright --so! You Riders of the Plains, you do two things at one time. You make

this hour someone happy, and that hour someone unhappy. In one hand the soft glove of kindness, in the other, voila! the cold glove of steel. We cannot all be great like that, Sergeant Tom."

"Not great, but clever. Voila, the Pretty Pierre! In one hand he holds the soft paper, the pictures that deceive--kings, queens, and knaves; in the other, pictures in gold and silver--money won from the pockets of fools. And so, as you say, 'bien,' and we each have our way, bedad!"

Sergeant Tom noticed that the half-breed's eyes nearly closed, as if to hide the malevolence that was in them. He would not have been surprised to see a pistol drawn. But he was quite fearless, and if it was not his duty to provoke a difficulty, his fighting nature would not shrink from giving as good as he got. Besides, so far as that nature permitted, he hated Pretty Pierre. He knew the ruin that this gambler had caused here and there in the West, and he was glad that Fort Desire, at any rate, knew him less than it did formerly.

Just then Peter Galbraith entered with the coffee, followed by Jen. When the old man saw his visitor he stood still with sudden fear; but catching a warning look from the eye of the half-breed, he made an effort to be steady, and said: "Well, Jen, if it isn't Sergeant Tom! And what brings you down here, Sergeant Tom? After some scalawag that's broke the law?"

Sergeant Tom had not noticed the blanched anxiety in the father's face; for his eyes were seeking those of the daughter. He answered the question as he advanced towards Jen: "Yes and no, Galbraith; I'm only takin' orders to those who will be after some scalawag by daylight in the mornin', or before. The hand of a traveller to you, Miss Jen."

Her eyes replied to his in one language; her lips spoke another. "And who is the law-breaker, Sergeant Tom?" she said, as she took his hand.

Galbraith's eyes strained towards the soldier till the reply came: "And I don't know that; not wan o' me. I'd ridden in to Fort Desire from another duty, a matter of a hundred miles, whin the major says to me, 'There's murder been done at Moose Horn. Take these orders down to Archangel's Rise, and deliver them and be back here within forty-eight hours.' And here I am on the way, and, if I wasn't ready to drop for want of a bite and sup, I'd be movin' away from here to the south at this moment."

Galbraith was trembling with excitement. Pierre warned him by a look, and almost immediately afterward gave him a reassuring nod, as if an important and favourable idea had occurred to him.

Jen, looking at the Sergeant's handsome face, said: "It's six months to a day since you were here, Sergeant Tom."

"What an almanac you are, Miss!"

Pretty Pierre sipping his coffee here interrupted musingly: "But her almanac is not always so reliable. So I think. When was I here last,

Ma'm'selle?"

With something like menace in her eyes Jen replied: "You were here six months ago to-day, when you won thirty dollars from our Val; and then again, just thirty days after that."

"Ah, so! You remember with a difference."

A moment after, Sergeant Tom being occupied in talking to Jen, Pierre whispered to Peter Galbraith: "His horse--then the laudanum!"

Galbraith was puzzled for a moment, but soon nodded significantly, and the sinister droop to his eyes became more marked. He turned to the Sergeant and said, "Your horse must be fed as well as yourself, Sergeant Tom. I'll look after the beast, and Jen will take care of you. There's some fresh coffee, isn't there, Jen?"

Jen nodded an affirmative. Galbraith knew that the Sergeant would trust no one to feed his horse but himself, and the offer therefore was made with design.

Sergeant Tom replied instantly: "No, I'll do it if someone will show me the grass pile."

Pierre slipped quietly from the counter, and said, "I know the way, Galbraith. I will show."

Jen turned to the sitting-room, and Sergeant Tom moved to the tavern door, followed by Pierre, who, as he passed Galbraith, touched the old man's waistcoat pocket, and said: "Thirty drops in the coffee."

Then he passed out, singing softly:

"And he sleepeth so well, and he sleepeth so long  
The fight it was hard, my dear;  
And his foes were many and swift and strong  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

There was danger ahead for Sergeant Thomas Gellatly. Galbraith followed his daughter to the sitting-room. She went to the kitchen and brought bread, and cold venison, and prairie fowl, and stewed dried apples--the stay and luxury of all rural Canadian homes. The coffee-pot was then placed on the table. Then the old man said: "Better give him some of that old cheese, Jen, hadn't you? It's in the cellar." He wanted to be rid of her for a few moments. "S'pose I had," and Jen vanished.

Now was Galbraith's chance. He took the vial of laudanum from his pocket, and opened the coffee-pot. It was half full. This would not suit. Someone else--Jen--might drink the coffee also! Yet it had to be done. Sergeant Tom should not go on. Inspector Jules and his Riders of the Plains must not be put upon the track of Val. Twelve hours would make all the difference. Pour out a cup of coffee?--Yes, of course, that would do. It was poured out quickly, and then thirty drops of laudanum

were carefully counted into it. Hark, they are coming back!--Just in time. Sergeant Tom and Pierre enter from outside, and then Jen from the kitchen. Galbraith is pouring another cup of coffee as they enter, and he says: "Just to be sociable I'm goin' to have a cup of coffee with you, Sergeant Tom. How you Riders of the Plains get waited on hand and foot!" Did some warning flash through Sergeant Tom's mind or body, some mental shock or some physical chill? For he distinctly shivered, though he was not cold. He seemed suddenly oppressed with a sense of danger. But his eyes fell on Jen, and the hesitation, for which he did not then try to account, passed. Jen, clear-faced and true, invited him to sit and eat, and he, starting half-abstractedly, responded to her "Draw nigh, Sergeant Tom," and sat down. Commonplace as the words were, they thrilled him, for he thought of a table of his own in a home of his own, and the same words spoken everyday, but without the "Sergeant,"--simply "Tom."

He ate heartily and sipped his coffee slowly, talking meanwhile to Jen and Galbraith. Pretty Pierre watched them all. Presently the gambler said: "Let us go and have our game of euchre, Galbraith. Ma'm'selle can well take care of Sergeant Tom."

Galbraith drank the rest of his coffee, rose, and passed with Pierre into the bar-room. Then the halfbreed said to him, "You were careful--thirty drops?"

"Yes, thirty drops." The latent cruelty of the old man's nature was awake.

"That is right. It is sleep; not death. He will sleep so sound for half a day, perhaps eighteen hours, and then!--Val will have a long start."

In the sitting-room Sergeant Tom was saying: "Where is your brother, Miss Galbraith?" He had no idea that the order in his pocket was for the arrest of that brother. He merely asked the question to start the talk.

He and Jen had met but five or six times; but the impression left on the minds of both was pleasant--ineradicable. Yet, as Sergeant Tom often asked himself during the past six months, why should he think of her? The life he led was one of severe endurance, and harshness, and austerity. Into it there could not possibly enter anything of home. He was but a noncommissioned officer of the Mounted Police, and beyond that he had nothing. Ireland had not been kind to him. He had left her inhospitable shores, and after years of absence he had but a couple of hundred dollars laid up--enough to purchase his discharge and something over, but nothing with which to start a home. Ranching required capital. No, it couldn't be thought of; and yet he had thought of it, try as he would not to do so. And she? There was that about this man who had lived life on two continents, in whose blood ran the warm and chivalrous Celtic fire, which appealed to her. His physical manhood was noble, if rugged; his disposition genial and free, if schooled, but not entirely, to that reserve which his occupation made necessary--a reserve he would have been more careful to maintain, in speaking of his mission a short time back in the bar-room, if Jen had not been there. She called out the frankest part of him; she opened the doors of his nature; she attracted

confidence as the sun does the sunflower.

To his question she replied: "I do not know where our Val is. He went on a hunting expedition up north. We never can tell about him, when he will turn up or where he will be to-morrow. He may walk in any minute. We never feel uneasy. He always has such luck, and comes out safe and sound wherever he is. Father says Val's a hustler, and that nothing can keep in the road with him. But he's a little wild--a little. Still, we don't hector him, Sergeant Tom; hectoring never does any good, does it?"

"No, hectoring never does any good. And as for the wildness, if the heart of him's right, why that's easy out of him when he's older. It's a fine lad I thought him, the time I saw him here. It's his freedom I wish I had--me that has to travel all day and part of the night, and then part of the day and all night back again, and then a day of sleep and the same thing over again. And that's the life of me, sayin' nothin' of the frost and the blizzards, and no home to go to, and no one to have a meal for me like this when I turn up." And the sergeant wound up with, "Whooroo! there's a speech for you, Miss!" and laughed good-humouredly. For all that, there was in his eyes an appeal that went straight to Jen's heart.

But, woman-like, she would not open the way for him to say anything more definite just yet. She turned the subject. And yet again, woman-like, she knew it would lead to the same conclusion:

"You must go to-night?"

"Yes, I must."

"Nothing--nothing would keep you?"

"Nothing. Duty is duty, much as I'd like to stay, and you givin' me the bid. But my orders were strict. You don't know what discipline means, perhaps. It means obeyin' commands if you die for it; and my commands were to take a letter to Inspector Jules at Archangel's Rise to-night. It's a matter of murder or the like, and duty must be done, and me that sleepy, not forgettin' your presence, as ever a man was and looked the world in the face."

He drank the rest of the coffee and mechanically set the cup down, his eyes closing heavily as he did so. He made an effort, however, and pulled himself together. His eyes opened, and he looked at Jen steadily for a moment. Then he leaned over and touched her hand gently with his fingers,--Pierre's glove of kindness,--and said: "It's in my heart to want to stay; but a sight of you I'll have on my way back. But I must go on now, though I'm that drowsy I could lie down here and never stir again."

Jen said to herself: "Poor fellow, poor fellow, how tired he is! I wish"--but she withdrew her hand. He put his hand to his head, and said, absently: "It's my duty and it's orders, and . . . what was I sayin'?" The disgrace of me if, if . . . bedad! the sleep's on me; I'm awake, but I can't open my eyes. . . . If the orders of me--and a good meal



. . . and the disgrace . . . to do me duty--looked the world in the face--"

During this speech he staggered to his feet, Jen watching him anxiously the while. No suspicion of the cause of his trouble crossed her mind. She set it down to extreme natural exhaustion. Presently feeling the sofa behind him, he dropped upon it, and, falling back, began to breathe heavily. But even in this physical stupefaction he made an effort to reassert himself, to draw himself back from the coming unconsciousness. His eyes opened, but they were blind with sleep; and as if in a dream, he said: "My duty . . . disgrace . . . a long sleep . . . Jen, dearest"--how she started then!--"it must be done . . . my Jen!" and he said no more.

But these few words had opened up a world for her--a new-created world on the instant. Her life was illuminated. She felt the fulness of a great thought suffusing her face. A beautiful dream was upon her. It had come to her out of his sleep. But with its splendid advent there came the other thing that always is born with woman's love--an almost pathetic care of the being loved. In the deep love of women the maternal and protective sense works in the parallels of mutual regard. In her life now it sprang full-statured in action; love of him, care of him; his honour her honour; his life her life. He must not sleep like this if it was his duty to go on. Yet how utterly worn he must be! She had seen men brought in from fighting prairie fires for three days without sleep; had watched them drop on their beds, and lie like logs for thirty-six hours. This sleep of her lover was, therefore, not so strange to her. but it was perilous to the performance of his duty.

"Poor Sergeant Tom," she said. "Poor Tom," she added; and then, with a great flutter at the heart at last, "My Tom!" Yes, she said that; but she said it to the beacon, to the Prairie Star, burning outside brighter, it seemed to her, than it had ever done before. Then she sat down and watched him for many minutes, thinking at the end of each that she would wake him. But the minutes passed, his breathing grew heavier, and he did not stir. The Prairie Star made quivering and luminous curtains of red for the windows, and Jen's mind was quivering in vivid waves of feeling just the same. It seemed to her as if she was looking at life now through an atmosphere charged with some rare, refining essence, and that in it she stood exultingly. Perhaps she did not define it so; but that which we define she felt. And happy are they who feel it, and, feeling it, do not lose it in this world, and have the hope of carrying it into the next.

After a time she rose, went over to him and touched his shoulder. It seemed strange to her to do this thing. She drew back timidly from the pleasant shock of a new experience. Then she remembered that he ought to be on his way, and she shook him gently, then, with all her strength, and called to him quietly all the time, as if her low tones ought to wake him, if nothing else could. But he lay in a deep and stolid slumber. It was no use. She went to her seat and sat down to think. As she did so, her father entered the room.

"Did you call, Jen?" he said; and turned to the sofa. "I was calling to Sergeant Tom. He's asleep there; dead-gone, father. I can't wake him."

"Why should you wake him? He is tired."

The sinister lines in Galbraith's face had deepened greatly in the last hour. He went over and looked closely at the Sergeant, followed languidly by Pierre, who casually touched the pulse of the sleeping man, and said as casually:

"Eh, he sleep well; his pulse is like a baby; he was tired, much. He has had no sleep for one, two, three nights, perhaps; and a good meal, it makes him comfortable, and so you see!"

Then he touched lightly the triple chevron on Sergeant Tom's arm, and said:

"Eh, a man does much work for that. And then, to be moral and the friend of the law all the time!" Pierre here shrugged his shoulders. "It is easier to be wicked and free, and spend when one is rich, and starve when one is poor, than to be a sergeant and wear the triple chevron. But the sleep will do him good just the same, Jen Galbraith."

"He said that he must go to Archangel's Rise tonight, and be back at Fort Desire to-morrow night."

"Well, that's nothing to us, Jen," replied Galbraith, roughly. "He's got his own business to look after. He and his tribe are none too good to us and our tribe. He'd have your old father up to-morrow for selling a tired traveller a glass of brandy; and worse than that, ay, a great sight worse than that, mind you, Jen."

Jen did not notice, or, at least, did not heed, the excited emphasis on the last words. She thought that perhaps her father had been set against the Sergeant by Pierre.

"There, that'll do, father," she said. "It's easy to bark at a dead lion. Sergeant Tom's asleep, and you say things that you wouldn't say if he was awake. He never did us any harm, and you know that's true, father."

Galbraith was about to reply with anger; but he changed his mind and walked into the bar-room, followed by Pierre.

In Jen's mind a scheme had been hurriedly and clearly formed; and with her, to form it was to put it into execution. She went to Sergeant Tom, opened his coat, felt in the inside pocket, and drew forth an official envelope. It was addressed to Inspector Jules at Archangel's Rise. She put it back and buttoned up the coat again. Then she said, with her hands firmly clenching at her side,--"I'll do it."

She went into the adjoining room and got a quilt, which she threw over him, and a pillow, which she put under his head. Then she took his cap

and the cloak which he had thrown over a chair, as if to carry them away. But another thought occurred to her, for she looked towards the bar-room and put them down again. She glanced out of the window and saw that her father and Pierre had gone to lessen the volume of gas which was feeding the flame. This, she knew, meant that her father would go to bed when he came back to the house; and this suited her purpose. She waited till they had entered the bar-room again, and then she went to them, and said: "I guess he's asleep for all night. Best leave him where he is. I'm going. Good-night."

When she got back to the sitting-room she said to herself: "How old father's looking! He seems broken up to-day. He isn't what he used to be." She turned once more to look at Sergeant Tom, then she went to her room.

A little later Peter Galbraith and Pretty Pierre went to the sitting-room, and the old man drew from the Sergeant's pocket the envelope which Jen had seen. Pierre took it from him. "No, Pete Galbraith. Do not be a fool. Suppose you steal that paper. Sergeant Tom will miss it. He will understand. He will guess about the drug, then you will be in trouble. Val will be safe now. This Rider of the Plains will sleep long enough for that. There, I put the paper back. He sleeps like a log. No one can suspect the drug, and it is all as we like. No, we will not steal; that is wrong--quite wrong"--here Pretty Pierre showed his teeth. "We will go to bed. Come!"

Jen heard them ascend the stairs. She waited a half-hour, then she stole into Val's bedroom, and when she emerged again she had a bundle of clothes across her arm. A few minutes more and she walked into the sitting-room dressed in Val's clothes, and with her hair closely wound on the top of her head.

The house was still. The Prairie Star made the room light enough for her purpose. She took Sergeant Tom's cap and cloak and put them on. She drew the envelope from his pocket and put it in her bosom--she showed the woman there, though for the rest of this night she was to be a Rider of the Plains, She of the Triple Chevron.

She went towards the door, hesitated, drew back, then paused, stooped down quickly, tenderly touched the soldier's brow with her lips, and said: "I'll do it for you. You shall not be disgraced--Tom."

III

This was at half-past ten o'clock. At two o'clock a jaded and blown horse stood before the door of the barracks at Archangel's Rise. Its rider, muffled to the chin, was knocking, and at the same time pulling his cap down closely over his head. "Thank God the night is dusky," he said. We have heard that voice before. The hat and cloak are those of Sergeant Tom, but the voice is that of Jen Galbraith. There is some

danger in this act; danger for her lover, contempt for herself if she is discovered. Presently the door opens and a corporal appears. "Who's there? Oh," he added, as he caught sight of the familiar uniform; "where from?"

"From Fort Desire. Important orders to Inspector Jules. Require fresh horse to return with; must leave mine here. Have to go back at once."

"I say," said the corporal, taking the papers--"what's your name?"

"Gellatly--Sergeant Gellatly."

"Say, Sergeant Gellatly, this isn't accordin' to Hoyle--come in the night and go in the night and not stay long enough to have a swear at the Gover'ment. Why, you're comin' in, aren't you? You're comin' across the door-mat for a cup of coffee and a warm while the horse is gettin' ready, aren't you, Sergeant--Sergeant Gellatly, Sergeant Gellatly? I've heard of you, but--yes; I will hurry. Here, Waugh, this to Inspector Jules! If you won't step in and won't drink and will be unsociable, sergeant, why, come on and you shall have a horse as good as the one you've brought. I'm Corporal Galna."

Jen led the exhausted horse to the stables. Fortunately there was no lantern used, and therefore little chance for the garrulous corporal to study the face of his companion, even if he wished to do so. The risk was considerable; but Jen Galbraith was fired by that spirit of self-sacrifice which has held a world rocking to destruction on a balancing point of safety.

The horse was quickly saddled, Jen meanwhile remaining silent. While she was mounting, Corporal Galna drew and struck a match to light his pipe. He held it up for a moment as though to see the face of Sergeant Gellatly. Jen had just given a good-night, and the horse the word and a touch of the spur at the instant. Her face, that is, such of it as could be seen above the cloak and under the cap, was full in the light. Enough was seen, however, to call forth, in addition to Corporal Galna's good-night, the exclamation, "Well, I'm blowed!"

As Jen vanished into the night a moment after, she heard a voice calling --not Corporal Galna's--"Sergeant Gellatly, Sergeant Gellatly!" She supposed it was Inspector Jules, but she would not turn back now. Her work was done.

A half-hour later Corporal Galna confided to Private Waugh that Sergeant Gellatly was too damned pretty for the force--wondered if they called him Beauty at Fort Desire--couldn't call him Pretty Gellatly, for there was Pretty Pierre who had right of possession to that title--would like to ask him what soap he used for his complexion--'twasn't this yellow bar-soap of the barracks, which wouldn't lather, he'd bet his ultimate dollar.

Waugh, who had sometime seen Sergeant Gellatly, entered into a disputation on the point. He said that "Sergeant Tom was good-looking,

a regular Irish thoroughbred; but he wasn't pretty, not much!--guessed Corporal Galna had nightmare, and finally, as the interest in the theme increased in fervour, announced that Sergeant Tom could loosen the teeth of, and knock the spots off, any man among the Riders, from Archangel's Rise to the Cypress Hills. Pretty--not much--thoroughbred all over!"

And Corporal Galna replied, sarcastically,--"That he might be able for spot dispersion of such a kind, but he had two as pretty spots on his cheek, and as white and touch-no-tobacco teeth as any female ever had." Private Waugh declared then that Corporal Galna would be saying Sergeant Gellatly wasn't a man at all, and wore earrings, and put his hair into papers; and when he could find no further enlargement of sarcasm, consigned the Corporal to a fiery place of future torment reserved for lunatics.

At this critical juncture Waugh was ordered to proceed to Inspector Jules. A few minutes after, he was riding away toward Soldier's Knee, with the Inspector and another private, to capture Val Galbraith, the slayer of Snow Devil, while four other troopers also started off in different directions.

#### IV

It was six o'clock when Jen drew rein in the yard at Galbraith's Place. Through the dank humours of the darkest time of the night she had watched the first grey streaks of dawn appear. She had caught her breath with fear at the thought that, by some accident, she might not get back before seven o'clock, the hour when her father rose. She trembled also at the supposition of Sergeant Tom awaking and finding his papers gone. But her fearfulness and excitement was not that of weakness, rather that of a finely nervous nature, having strong elements of imagination, and, therefore, great capacities for suffering as for joy; but yet elastic, vigorous, and possessing unusual powers of endurance. Such natures rebuild as fast as they are exhausted. In the devitalising time preceding the dawn she had felt a sudden faintness come over her for a moment; but her will surmounted it, and, when she saw the ruddy streaks of pink and red glorify the horizon, she felt a sudden exaltation of physical strength. She was a child of the light, she loved the warm flame of the sun, the white gleam of the moon. Holding in her horse to give him a five minutes' rest, she rose in her saddle and looked round. She was alone in her circle of vision, she and her horse. The long hillocks of prairie rolled away like the sea to the flushed morning, and the far-off Cypress Hills broke the monotonous skyline of the south. Already the air was dissipated of its choking weight, and the vast solitude was filling with that sense of freedom which night seems to shut in as with four walls, and day to widen gloriously. Tears sprang to her eyes from a sudden rush of feeling; but her lips were smiling. The world was so different from what it was yesterday. Something had quickened her into a glowing life.

Then she urged the horse on, and never halted till she reached home. She unsaddled the animal that had shared with her the hardship of the long, hard ride, hobbled it, and entered the house quickly. No one was stirring. Sergeant Tom was still asleep. This she saw, as she hurriedly passed in and laid the cap and cloak where she had found them. Then, once again, she touched the brow of the sleeper with her lips, and went to her room to divest herself of Val's clothes. The thing had been done without anyone knowing of her absence. But she was frightened as she looked into the mirror. She was haggard, and her eyes were bloodshot. Eight hours or nearly in the saddle, at ten miles an hour, had told on her severely; as well it might. Even a prairie-born woman, however, understands the art and use of grooming better than a man. Warm water quickly heated at the gas, with a little acetic acid in it, used generally for her scouring,--and then cold water with oatmeal flour, took away in part the dulness and the lines in the flesh. But the eyes! Jen remembered the vial of tincture of myrrh left by a young Englishman a year ago, and used by him for refreshing his eyes after a drinking bout. She got it, tried the tincture, and saw and felt an immediate benefit. Then she made a cup of strong green tea, and in ten minutes was like herself again. Now for the horse. She went quickly out where she could not be seen from the windows of the house, and gave him a rubbing down till he was quite dry. Then she gave him a little water and some feed. The horse was really the touchstone of discovery. But Jen trusted in her star. If the worst came she would tell the tale. It must be told anyway to Sergeant Tom--but that was different now. Even if the thing became known it would only be a thing to be teased about by her father and others, and she could stop that. Poor girl, as though that was the worst that was to come from her act!

Sergeant Tom slept deeply and soundly. He had not stirred. His breathing was unnaturally heavy, Jen thought, but, no suspicion of foul play came to her mind yet. Why should it? She gave herself up to a sweet and simple sense of pride in the deed she had done for him, disturbed but slightly by the chances of discovery, and the remembrance of the match that showed her face at Archangel's Rise. Her hands touched the flaxen hair of the soldier, and her eyes grew luminous. One night had stirred all her soul to its depths. A new woman had been born in her. Val was dear to her--her brother Val; but she realised now that another had come who would occupy a place that neither father, nor brother, nor any other could fill. Yet it was a most weird set of tragic circumstances. This man before her had been set to do a task which might deprive her brother of his life, certainly of his freedom; that would disgrace him; her father had done a great wrong too, had put in danger the life of the man she loved, to save his son; she herself in doing this deed for her lover had placed her brother in jeopardy, had crossed swords with her father's purposes, had done the one thing that stood between that father's son and safety; Pretty Pierre, whom she hated and despised, and thought to be the enemy of her brother and of her home, had proved himself a friend; and behind it all was the brother's crime committed to avenge an insult to her name.

But such is life. Men and women are unwittingly their own executioners, and the executioners of those they love.

An hour passed, and then Galbraith and Pierre appeared. Jen noticed that her father went over to Sergeant Tom and rather anxiously felt his pulse. Once in the night the old man had come down and done the same thing. Pierre said something in an undertone. Did they think he was ill? That was Jon's thought. She watched them closely; but the half-breed knew that she was watching, and the two said nothing more to each other. But Pierre said, in a careless way: "It is good he have that sleep. He was played out, quite."

Jon replied, a secret triumph at her heart: "But what about his orders, the papers he was to carry to Archangel's Rise? What about his being back at Fort Desire in the time given him?"

"It is not much matter about the papers. The poor devil that Inspector Jules would arrest--well, he will get off, perhaps, but that does no one harm. Eh, Galbraith? The law is sometimes unkind. And as for obeying orders, why, the prairie is wide, it is a hard ride, horses go wrong; --a little tale of trouble to Inspector Jules, another at Fort Desire, and who is to know except Pete Galbraith, Jen Galbraith, and Pierre? Poor Sergeant Tom. It was good he sleep so."

Jen felt there was irony behind the smooth words of the gambler. He had a habit of saying things, as they express it in that country, between his teeth. That signifies what is animal-like and cruel. Galbraith stood silent during Pierre's remarks, but, when he had finished, said:

"Yes, it's all right if he doesn't sleep too long; but there's the trouble--too long!"

Pierre frowned a warning, and then added, with unconcern: "I remember when you sleep thirty hours, Galbraith--after the prairie fire, three years ago, eh!"

"Well, that's so; that's so as you say it. We'll let him sleep till noon, or longer--or longer, won't we, Pierre?"

"Yes, till noon is good, or longer."

"But he shall not sleep longer if I can wake him," said Jen. "You do not think of the trouble all this sleeping may make for him."

"But then--but then, there is the trouble he will make for others, if he wakes. Think. A poor devil trying to escape the law!"

"But we have nothing to do with that, and justice is justice, Pierre."

"Eh, well, perhaps, perhaps!" Galbraith was silent.

Jen felt that so far as Sergeant Tom's papers were concerned he was safe; but she felt also that by noon he ought to be on his way back to Fort Desire--after she had told him what she had done. She was anxious for his honour. That her lover shall appear well before the world, is a thing deep in the heart of every woman. It is a pride for which she will deny herself, even of the presence of that lover.

"Till noon," Jen said, "and then he must go."

VI

Jen watched to see if her father or Pierre would notice that the horse was changed, had been travelled during the night, or that it was a different one altogether. As the morning wore away she saw that they did not notice the fact. This ignorance was perhaps owing largely to the appearance of several ranchmen from near the American border. They spent their time in the bar-room, and when they left it was nearly noon. Still Sergeant Tom slept. Jen now went to him and tried to wake him. She lifted him to a sitting position, but his head fell on her shoulder. Disheartened, she laid him down again. But now at last an undefined suspicion began to take possession of her. It made her uneasy; it filled her with a vague sense of alarm. Was this sleep natural? She remembered that, when her father and others had slept so long after the prairie fire, she had waked them once to give them drink and a little food, and they did not breathe so heavily as he was doing. Yet what could be done? What was the matter? There was not a doctor nearer than a hundred miles. She thought of bleeding,--the old-fashioned remedy still used on the prairies--but she decided to wait a little. Somehow she felt that she would receive no help from her father or Pierre. Had they anything to do with this sleep? Was it connected with the papers? No, not that, for they had not sought to take them, and had not made any remark about their being gone. This showed their unconcern on that point. She could not fathom the mystery, but the suspicion of something irregular deepened. Her father could have no reason for injuring Sergeant Tom; but Pretty Pierre--that was another matter. Yet she remembered too that her father had appeared the more anxious of the two about the Sergeant's sleep. She recalled that he said: "Yes, it's all right, if he doesn't sleep too long."

But Pierre could play a part, she knew, and could involve others in trouble, and escape himself. He was a man with a reputation for occasional wickednesses of a naked, decided type. She knew that he was possessed of a devil, of a very reserved devil, but liable to bold action on occasions. She knew that he valued the chances of life or death no more than he valued the thousand and one other chances of small importance, which occur in daily experience. It was his creed that one doesn't go till the game is done and all the cards are played. He had a stoic indifference to events.



He might be capable of poisoning--poisoning! ah, that thought! of poisoning Sergeant Tom for some cause. But her father? The two seemed to act alike in the matter. Could her father approve of any harm happening to Tom? She thought of the meal he had eaten, of the coffee he had drunk. The coffee--was that the key? But she said to herself that she was foolish, that her love had made her so. No, it could not be.

But a fear grew upon her, strive as she would against it. She waited silently and watched, and twice or thrice made ineffectual efforts to rouse him. Her father came in once. He showed anxiety; that was unmistakable, but was it the anxiety of guilt of any kind? She said nothing. At five o'clock matters abruptly came to a climax. Jen was in the kitchen, but, hearing footsteps in the sitting-room, she opened the door quietly. Her father was bending over Sergeant Tom, and Pierre was speaking: "No, no, Galbraith, it is all right. You are a fool. It could not kill him."

"Kill him--kill him," she repeated gaspingly to herself.

"You see he was exhausted; he may sleep for hours yet. Yes, he is safe, I think."

"But Jen, she suspects something, she--"

"Hush!" said Pretty Pierre. He saw her standing near. She had glided forward and stood with flashing eyes turned, now upon the one, and now upon the other. Finally they rested on Galbraith.

"Tell me what you have done to him; what you and Pretty Pierre have done to him. You have some secret. I will know." She leaned forward, something of the tigress in the poise of her body. "I tell you, I will know." Her voice was low, and vibrated with fierceness and determination. Her eyes glowed, and her nostrils trembled with disdain and indignation. As they drew back,--the old man sullenly, the gambler with a slight gesture of impatience,--she came a step nearer to them and waited, the cords of her shapely throat swelling with excitement. A moment so, and then she said in a tone that suggested menace, determination:

"You have poisoned him. Tell me the truth. Do you hear, father--the truth, or I will hate you. I will make you repent it till you die."

"But--" Pierre began.

She interrupted him. "Do not speak, Pretty Pierre. You are a devil. You will lie. Father--!" She waited. "What difference does it make to you, Jen?" "What difference--what difference to me? That you should be a murderer?"

"But that is not so, that is a dream of yours, Ma'm'selle," said Pierre.

She turned to her father again. "Father, will you tell the truth to me? I warn you it will be better for you both."

The old man's brow was sullen, and his lips were twitching nervously. "You care more for him than you do for your own flesh and blood, Jen. There's nothing to get mad about like that. I'll tell you when he's gone. . . . Let's--let's wake him," he added, nervously.

He stooped down and lifted the sleeping man to a sitting posture. Pierre assisted him.

Jen saw that the half-breed believed Sergeant Tom could be wakened, and her fear diminished slightly, if her indignation did not. They lifted the soldier to his feet. Pierre pressed the point of a pin deep into his arm. Jen started forward, woman-like, to check the action, but drew back, for she saw heroic measures might be necessary to bring him to consciousness. But, nevertheless, her anger broke bounds, and she said: "Cowards--cowards! What spite made you do this?"

"Damnation, Jen," said the father, "you'll hector me till I make you sorry. What's this Irish policeman to you? What's he beside your own flesh and blood, I say again."

"Why does my own flesh and blood do such wicked tricks to an Irish soldier? Why does it give poison to an Irish soldier?"

"Poison, Jen? You needn't speak so ghost-like. It was only a dose of laudanum; not enough to kill him. Ask Pierre."

Inwardly she believed him, and said a Thank-God to herself, but to the half-breed she remarked: "Yes, ask Pierre--you are behind all this! It is some evil scheme of yours. Why did you do it? Tell the truth for once." Her eyes swam angrily with Pierre's.

Pierre was complacent; he admired her wild attacks. He smiled, and replied: "My dear, it was a whim of mine; but you need not tell him, all the same, when he wakes. You see this is your father's house, though the whim is mine. But look: he is waking--the pin is good. Some cold water, quick!"

The cold water was brought and dashed into the face of the soldier. He showed signs of returning consciousness. The effect of the laudanum had been intensified by the thoroughly exhausted condition of the body.

But the man was perfectly healthy, and this helped to resist the danger of a fatal result.

Pierre kept up an intermittent speech. "Yes, it was a mere whim of mine. Eh, he will think he has been an ass to sleep so long, and on duty, and orders to carry to Archangel's Rise!" Here he showed his teeth again, white and regular like a dog's. That was the impression they gave, his lips were so red, and the contrast was so great. One almost expected to find that the roof of his mouth was black, like that of a well-bred hound; but there is no evidence available on the point.

"There, that is good," he said. "Now set him down, Pete Galbraith. Yes--so, so! Sergeant Tom, ah, you will wake well, soon. Now the eyes a little wider. Good. Eh, Sergeant Tom, what is the matter? It is breakfast time--quite."

Sergeant Tom's eyes opened slowly and looked dazedly before him for a minute. Then they fell on Pierre. At first there was no recognition, then they became consciously clearer. "Pretty Pierre, you here in the barracks!" he said. He put his hand to his head, then rubbed his eyes roughly and looked up again. This time he saw Jen and her father. His bewilderment increased. Then he added: "What is the matter? Have I been asleep? What--!" He remembered. He staggered to his feet and felt his pockets quickly and anxiously for his letter. It was gone.

"The letter!" he said. "My orders! Who has robbed me? Faith, I remember. I could not keep awake after I drank the coffee. My papers are gone, I tell you, Galbraith," he said, fiercely.

Then he turned to Jen: "You are not in this, Jen. Tell me."

She was silent for a moment, then was about to answer, when he turned to the gambler and said: "You are at the bottom of this. Give me my papers." But Pierre and Galbraith were as dumbfounded as the Sergeant himself to know that the letter was gone. They were stunned beyond speech when Jen said, flushing: "No, Sergeant Tom, I am the thief. When I could not wake you, I took the letter from your pocket and carried it to Inspector Jules last night,--or, rather, Sergeant Gellatly carried them. I wore his cap and cloak and passed for him."

"You carried that letter to Inspector Jules last night, Jen?" said the soldier, all his heart in his voice.

Jen saw her father blanch, his mouth open blankly, and his lips refuse to utter the words on them. For the first time she comprehended some danger to him, to herself--to Val!

"Father, father," she said,--" what is it?"

Pierre shrugged his shoulders and rejoined: "Eh, the devil! Such mistakes of women. They are fools--all." The old man put out a shaking hand and caught his daughter's arm. His look was of mingled wonder and despair, as he said, in a gasping whisper, "You carried that letter to Archangel's Rise?"

"Yes," she answered, faltering now; "Sergeant Tom had said how important it was, you remember. That it was his duty to take it to Inspector Jules, and be back within forty-eight hours. He fell asleep. I could not wake him. I thought, what if he were my brother--our Val. So, when you and Pretty Pierre went to bed, I put on Val's clothes, took Sergeant Tom's cloak and hat, carried the orders to Jules, and was back here by six o'clock this morning."

Sergeant Tom's eyes told his tale of gratitude. He made a step towards

her; but the old man, with a strange ferocity, motioned him back, saying,

"Go away from this house. Go quick. Go now, I tell you, or by God,-- I'll--"

Here Pretty Pierre touched his arm.

Sergeant Tom drew back, not because he feared but as if to get a mental perspective of the situation. Galbraith again said to his daughter,-- "Jen, you carried them papers? You! for him--for the Law!" Then he turned from her, and with hand clenched and teeth set spoke to the soldier: "Haven't you heard enough? Curse you, why don't you go?"

Sergeant Tom replied coolly: "Not so fast, Galbraith. There's some mystery in all this. There's my sleep to be accounted for yet. You had some reason, some"--he caught the eyes of Pierre. He paused. A light began to dawn on his mind, and he looked at Jen, who stood rigidly pale, her eyes fixed fearfully, anxiously, upon him. She too was beginning to frame in her mind a possible horror; the thing that had so changed her father, the cause for drugging the soldier. There was a silence in which Pierre first, and then all, detected the sound of horses' hoofs. Pierre went to the door and looked out. He turned round again, and shrugged his shoulders with an expression of helplessness. But as he saw Jen was about to speak, and Sergeant Tom to move towards the door, he put up his hand to stay them both, and said: "A little--wait!"

Then all were silent. Jen's fingers nervously clasped and unclasped, and her eyes were strained towards the door. Sergeant Tom stood watching her pityingly; the old man's head was bowed. The sound of galloping grew plainer. It stopped. An instant and then three horsemen appeared before the door. One was Inspector Jules, one was Private Waugh, and the other between them was--let Jen tell who he was. With an agonised cry she rushed from the house and threw herself against the saddle, and with her arms about the prisoner, cried: "Oh, Val, Val, it was you! It was you they were after. It was you that--oh no, no, no! My poor Val, and I can't tell you--I can't tell you!"

Great as was her grief and self-reproach, she felt it would be cruel to tell him the part she had taken in placing him in this position. She hated herself, but why deepen his misery? His face was pale, but it had its old, open, fearless look, which dissipation had not greatly marred. His eyelids quivered, but he smiled, and touching her with his steel-bound hands, gently said:

"Never mind, Jen. It isn't so bad. You see it was this way: Snow Devil said something about someone that belonged to me, that cares more about me than I deserve. Well, he died sudden, and I was there at the time. That's all. I was trying with the help of Pretty Pierre to get out of the country"--and he waved his hand towards the half-breed.

"With Pretty Pierre--Pierre?" she said.

"Yes, he isn't all gambler. But they were too quick for me, and here I

am. Jules is a hustler on the march. But he said he'd stop here and let me see you and dad as we go up to Fort Desire, and--there, don't mind, Sis--don't mind it so!"

Her sobs had ceased, but she clung to him as if she could never let him go. Her father stood near her, all the lines in his face deepened into bitterness. To him Val said: "Why, dad, what's the matter? Your hand is shaky. Don't you get this thing eatin' at your heart.

"It isn't worth it. That Injin would have died if you'd been in my place, I guess. Between you and me, I expect to give Jules the slip before we get there." And he laughed at the Inspector, who laughed a little austere too, and in his heart wished that it was anyone else he had as a prisoner than Val Galbraith, who was a favourite with the Riders of the Plains.

Sergeant Tom had been standing in the doorway regarding this scene, and working out in his mind the complications that had led to it. At this point he came forward, and Inspector Jules said to him, after a curt salutation:

"You were in a hurry last night, Sergeant Gellatly. You don't seem so pushed for time now. Usual thing. When a man seems over-zealous--drink, cards, or women behind it. But your taste is good, even if, under present circumstances"--He stopped, for he saw a threatening look in the eyes of the other, and that other said: "We won't discuss that matter, Inspector, if you please. I'm going on to Fort Desire now. I couldn't have seen you if I'd wanted to last night."

"That's nonsense. If you had waited one minute longer at the barracks you could have done so. I called to you as you were leaving, but you didn't turn back."

"No. I didn't hear you."

All were listening to this conversation, and none more curiously than Private Waugh. Many a time in days to come he pictured the scene for the benefit of his comrades. Pretty Pierre, leaning against the hitching-post near the bar-room, said languidly:

"But, Inspector, he speaks the truth--quite: that is a virtue of the Riders of the Plains." Val had his eyes on the half-breed, and a look of understanding passed between them. While Val and his father and sister were saying their farewells in few words, but with homely demonstrations, Sergeant Tom brought his horse round and mounted it. Inspector Jules gave the word to move on. As they started, Gellatly, who fell behind the others slightly, leaned down and whispered: "Forgive me, Jen. You did a noble act for me, and the life of me would prove to you that I'm grateful. It's sorry, sorry I am. But I'll do what I can for Val, as sure as the heart's in me. Good-bye, Jen."

She looked up with a faint hope in her eyes. "Goodbye!" she said. "I believe you . . . Good-bye!"

In a few minutes there was only a cloud of dust on the prairie to tell where the Law and its quarry were. And of those left behind, one was a broken-spirited old man with sorrow melting away the sinister look in his face; one, a girl hovering between the tempest of bitterness and a storm of self-reproach; and one a half-breed gambler, who again sat on the bar-counter smoking a cigarette and singing to himself, as indolently as if he were not in the presence of a painful drama of life, perhaps a tragedy. But was the song so pointless to the occasion, after all, and was the man so abstracted and indifferent as he seemed? For thus the song ran:

"Oh, the bird in a cage and the bird on a tree  
Voila! 'tis a different fear!  
The maiden weeps and she bends the knee  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!  
But the bird in a cage has a friend in the tree,  
And the maiden she dries her tear:  
And the night is dark and no moon you see  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!  
When the doors are open the bird is free  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

## VII

These words kept ringing in Jen's ears as she stood again in the doorway that night with her face turned to the beacon. How different it seemed now! When she saw it last night it was a cheerful spirit of light--a something suggesting comfort, companionship, aspiration, a friend to the traveller, and a mysterious, but delightful, association. In the morning when she returned from that fortunate, yet most unfortunate, ride, it was still burning, but its warm flame was exhausted in the glow of the life-giving sun; the dream and delight of the night robbed of its glamour by the garish morning; like her own body, its task done, sinking before the unrelieved scrutiny of the day. To-night it burned with a different radiance. It came in fiery palpitations from the earth. It made a sound that was now like the moan of pine trees, now like the rumble of far-off artillery. The slight wind that blew spread the topmost crest of flame into strands of ruddy hair, and, looking at it, Jen saw herself rocked to and fro by tumultuous emotions, yet fuller of strength and larger of life than ever she had been. Her hot veins beat with determination, with a love which she drove back by another, cherished now more than it had ever been, because danger threatened the boy to whom she had been as a mother. In twenty-four hours she had grown to the full stature of love and suffering.

There were shadows that betrayed less roundness to her face; there were lines that told of weariness; but in her eyes there was a glowing light of hope. She raised her face to the stars and unconsciously paraphrasing Pierre's song said: "Oh, the God that dost save us, hear!"

A hand touched her arm, and a voice said, huskily, "Jen, I wanted to save him and--and not let you know of it; that's all. You're not keepin' a grudge agin me, my girl?"

She did not move nor turn her head. "I've no grudge, father; but--if--if you had told me, 'twouldn't be on my mind that I had made it worse for Val."

The kindness in the voice reassured him, and he ventured to say: "I didn't think you'd be carin' for one of the Riders of the Plains, Jen."

Then the old man trembled lest she should resent his words. She seemed about to do so, but the flush faded from her brow, and she said, simply: "I care for Val most, father. But he didn't know he was getting Val into trouble."

She suddenly quivered as a wave of emotion passed through her; and she said, with a sob in her voice: "Oh, it's all scrub country, father, and no paths, and--and I wish I had a mother!"

The old man sat down in the doorway and bowed his grey head in his arms. Then, after a moment, he whispered:

"She's been dead twenty-two years, Jen. The day Val was born she went away. I'd a-been a better man if she'd a-lived, Jen; and a better father."

This was an unusual demonstration between these two. She watched him sadly for a moment, and then, leaning over and touching him gently on the shoulder, said: "It's worse for you than it is for me, father. Don't feel so bad. Perhaps we shall save him yet."

He caught a gleam of hope in her words: "Mebbe, Jen, mebbe!" and he raised his face to the light.

This ritual of affection was crude and unadorned; but it was real. They sat there for half-an-hour, silent.

Then a figure came out of the shadows behind the house and stood before them. It was Pierre.

"I go to-morrow morning, Galbraith," he said. The old man nodded, but did not reply.

"I go to Fort Desire," the gambler added.

Jen faced him. "What do you go there for, Pretty Pierre?"

"It is my whim. Besides, there is Val. He might want a horse some dark night."

"Pierre, do you mean that?"

"As much as Sergeant Tom means what he says. Every man has his friends. Pretty Pierre has a fancy for Val Galbraith--a little. It suits him to go to Fort Desire. Jen Galbraith, you make a grand ride last night. You do a bold thing--all for a man. We shall see what he will do for you. And if he does nothing--ah! you can trust the tongue of Pretty Pierre. He will wish he could die, instead of--Eh, bien, good-night!" He moved away. Jen followed him. She held out her hand. It was the first time she had ever done so to this man.

"I believe you," she said. "I believe that you mean well to our Val. I am sorry that I called you a devil." He smiled. "Ma'm'selle, that is nothing. You spoke true. But devils have their friends--and their whims. So you see, good-night."

"Mebbe it will come out all right, Jen--mebbe!" said the old man.

But Jen did not reply. She was thinking hard, her eyes upon the Prairie Star. Living life to the hilt greatly illumines the outlook of the mind. She was beginning to understand that evil is not absolute, and that good is often an occasion more than a condition.

There was a long silence again. At last the old man rose to go and reduce the volume of flame for the night; but Jen stopped him. "No, father, let it burn all it can to-night. It's comforting."

"Mebbe so--mebbe!" he said.

A faint refrain came to them from within the house:

"When doors are open the bird is free  
Oh, the sweet Saint Gabrielle hear!"

## VIII

It was a lovely morning. The prairie billowed away endlessly to the south, and heaved away in vastness to the north; and the fresh, sharp air sent the blood beating through the veins. In the bar-room some early traveller was talking to Peter Galbraith. A wandering band of Indians was camped about a mile away, the only sign of humanity in the waste. Jen sat in the doorway culling dried apples. Though tragedies occur in lives of the humble, they must still do the dull and ordinary task. They cannot stop to cherish morbidity, to feed upon their sorrow; they must care for themselves and labour for others. And well is it for them that it is so.

The Indian camp brings unpleasant memories to Jen's mind. She knows it belongs to old Sun-in-the-North, and that he will not come to see her now, nor could she, or would she, go to him. Between her and that race there can never again be kindly communion. And now she sees, for the



first time, two horsemen riding slowly in the track from Fort Desire towards Galbraith's Place. She notices that one sits upright, and one seems leaning forward on his horse's neck. She shades her eyes with her hand, but she cannot distinguish who they are. But she has seen men tied to their horses ride as that man is riding, when stricken with fever, bruised by falling timber, lacerated by a grizzly, wounded by a bullet, or crushed by a herd of buffaloes. She remembered at that moment the time that a horse had struck Val with its forefeet, and torn the flesh from his chest, and how he had been brought home tied to a broncho's back.

The thought of this drove her into the house, to have Val's bed prepared for the sufferer, whoever he was. Almost unconsciously she put on the little table beside the bed a bunch of everlasting prairie flowers, and shaded the light to the point of quiet and comfort.

Then she went outside again. The travellers now were not far away. She recognised the upright rider. It was Pretty Pierre. The other--she could not tell. She called to her father. She had a fear which she did not care to face alone. "See, see, father," she said, "Pretty Pierre and--and can it be Val?" For the moment she seemed unable to stir. But the old man shook his head, and said: "No, Jen, it can't be. It ain't Val."

Then another thought possessed her. Her lips trembled, and, throwing her head back as does a deer when it starts to shake off its pursuers by flight, she ran swiftly towards the riders. The traveller standing beside Galbraith said: "That man is hurt, wounded probably. I didn't expect to have a patient in the middle of the plains. I'm a doctor. Perhaps I can be of use here?" When a hundred yards away Jen recognised the recumbent rider. A thousand thoughts flashed through her brain. What had happened? Why was he dressed in civilian's clothes? A moment, and she was at his horse's head. Another, and her warm hand clasped the pale, moist, and wrinkled one which hung by the horse's neck. His coat at the shoulder was stained with blood, and there was a handkerchief about his head. This--this was Sergeant Tom Gellatly!

She looked up at Pierre, an agony of inquiry in her eyes, and pointing mutely to the wounded man. Pierre spoke with a tone of seriousness not common to his voice: "You see, Jen Galbraith, it was brave. Sergeant Tom one day resigns the Mounted Police. He leaves the Riders of the Plains. That is not easy to understand, for he is in much favour with the officers. But he buys himself out, and there is the end of the Sergeant and his triple chevron. That is one day. That night, two men on a ferry are crossing the Saskatchewan at Fort Desire. They are fired at from the shore behind. One man is hit twice. But they get across, cut the ferry loose, mount horses, and ride away together. The man that was hit--yes, Sergeant Tom. The other that was not hit was Val Galbraith."

Jen gave a cry of mingled joy and pain, and said, with Tom Gellatly's cold hand clasped to her bosom: "Val, our Val, is free, is safe."

"Yes, Val is free and safe-quite. The Riders of the Plains could not

cross the river. It was too high. And so Tom Gellatly and Val got away. Val rides straight for the American border, and the other rides here." They were now near the house, but Jen said, eagerly: "Go on. Tell me all."

"I knew what had happened soon, and I rode away, too, and last night I found Tom Gellatly lying beside his horse on the prairie. I have brought him here to you. You two are even now, Jen Galbraith."

They were at the tavern door. The traveller and Pierre lifted, down the wounded and unconscious man, and brought him and laid him on Val Galbraith's bed.

The traveller examined the wounds in the shoulder and the head, and said: "The head is all right. If I can get the bullet out of the shoulder he'll be safe enough--in time."

The surgery was skilful but rude, for proper instruments were not at hand; and in a few hours he, whom we shall still call Sergeant Tom, lay quietly sleeping, the pallor gone from his face and the feeling of death from his hand.

It was near midnight when he waked. Jen was sitting beside him. He looked round and saw her. Her face was touched with the light that shone from the Prairie Star. "Jen," he said, and held out his hand.

She turned from the window and stood beside his bed. She took his outstretched hand. "You are better, Sergeant Tom?" she said, gently.

"Yes, I'm better; but it's not Sergeant Tom I am any longer, Jen."

"I forgot that."

"I owed you a great debt, Jen. I couldn't remain one of the Riders of the Plains and try to pay it. I left them. Then I tried to save Val, and I did. I knew how to do it without getting anyone else into trouble. It is well to know the trick of a lock and the hour that guard is changed. I had left, but I relieved guard that night just the same. It was a new man on watch. It's only a minute I had; for the regular relief watch was almost at my heels. I got Val out just in time. They discovered us, and we had a run for it. Pretty Pierre has told you. That's right. Val is safe now--"

In a low strained voice, interrupting him, she said, "Did Val leave you wounded so on the prairie?"

"Don't let that ate at your heart. No, he didn't. I hurried him off, and he didn't know how bad I was hit. But I--I've paid my debt, haven't I, Jen?" With eyes that could not see for tears, she touched pityingly, lovingly, the wounds on his head and shoulder, and said: "These pay a greater debt than you ever owed me. You risked your life for me--yes, for me. You have given up everything to do it. I can't pay you the great difference. No, never!"

"Yes--yes, you can, if you will, Jen. It's as aisy! If you'll say what I say, I'll give you quit of that difference, as you call it, forever and ever."

"First, tell me. Is Val quite, quite safe?"

"Yes, he's safe over the border by this time; and to tell you the truth, the Riders of the Plains wouldn't be dyin' to arrest him again if he was in Canada, which he isn't. It's little they wanted to fire at us, I know, when we were crossin' the river, but it had to be done, you see, and us within sight. Will you say what I ask you, Jen?"

She did not speak, but pressed his hand ever so slightly.

"Tom Gellatly, I promise," he said.

"Tom Gellatly, I promise--"

"To give you as much--"

"To give you as much--"

"Love--"

There was a pause, and then she falteringly said, "Love--"

"As you give to me--"

"As you give to me--"

"And I'll take you poor as you are--"

"And I'll take you poor as you are--"

"To be my husband as long as you live--"

"To be my husband as long as you live--"

"So help me, God."

"So help me, God."

She stooped with dropping tears, and he kissed her once. Then what was girl in her timidly drew back, while what was woman in her, and therefore maternal, yearned over the sufferer.

They had not seen the figure of an old man at the door. They did not hear him enter. They only knew of Peter Galbraith's presence when he said: "Mebbe--mebbe I might say Amen!"

### THREE OUTLAWS

The missionary at Fort Anne of the H. B. C. was violently in earnest. Before he piously followed the latest and most amply endowed batch of settlers, who had in turn preceded the new railway to the Fort, the word scandal had no place in the vocabulary of the citizens. The H. B. C. had never imported it into the Chinook language, the common meeting-ground of all the tribes of the North; and the British men and native-born, who made the Fort their home, or place of sojourn, had never found need for its use. Justice was so quickly distributed, men were so open in their conduct, good and bad, that none looked askance, nor put their actions in ambush, nor studied innuendo. But this was not according to the new dispensation--that is, the dispensation which shrewdly followed the settlers, who as shrewdly preceded the railway. And, the dispensation and the missionary were known also as the Reverend Ezra Badgley, who, on his own declaration, in times past had "a call" to preach, and in the far East had served as local preacher, then probationer, then went on circuit, and now was missionary in a district of which the choice did credit to his astuteness, and gave room for his piety and for his holy rage against the Philistines. He loved a word for righteous mouthing, and in a moment of inspiration pagan and scandal came to him. Upon these two words he stamped, through them he perspired mightily, and with them he clenched his stubby fingers--such fingers as dug trenches, or snatched lewdly at soft flesh, in days of barbarian battle. To him all men were Pagans who loved not the sound of his voice, nor wrestled with him in prayer before the Lord, nor fed him with rich food, nor gave him much strong green tea to drink. But these men were of opaque stuff, and were not dismayed, and they called him St. Anthony, and with a prophetic and deadly patience waited. The time came when the missionary shook his denouncing finger mostly at Pretty Pierre, who carefully nursed his silent wrath until the occasion should arrive for a delicate revenge which hath its hour with every man, if, hating, he knows how to bide the will of Fate.

The hour came. A girl had been found dying on the roadside beyond the Fort by the drunken doctor of the place and Pierre. Pierre was with her when she died.

"An' who's to bury her, the poor colleen?" said Shon McGann afterwards.

Pierre musingly replied: "She is a Protestant. There is but one man."

After many pertinent and vigorous remarks, Shon added, "A Pagan is it, he calls you, Pierre, you that's had the holy water on y'r forehead, and the cross on the water, and that knows the book o' the Mass like the cards in a pack? Sinner y' are, and so are we all, God save us! say I; and weavin' the stripes for our backs He may be, and little I'd think of Him failin' in that: but Pagan--faith, it's black should be the white of the eyes of that preachin' sneak, and a rattle of teeth in his throat--divils go round me!"

The half-breed, still musing, replied: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth--is that it, Shon?" "Nivir a word truer by song or by book, and stand by the text, say I. For Papist I am, and Papist are you; and the imps from below in y'r fingers whip poker is the game; and outlaws as they call us both--you for what it doesn't concern me, and I for a wild night in ould Donegal--but Pagan, wurra! whin shall it be, Pierre?"

"When shall it to be?"

"True for you. The teeth in his throat and a lump to his eye, and what more be the will o' God. Fightin' there'll be, av coorse; but by you I'll stand, and sorra inch will I give, if they'll do it with sticks or with guns, and not with the blisterin' tongue that's lied of me and me frinds--for frind I call you, Pierre, that loved me little in days gone by. And proud I am not of you, nor you of me; but we've tasted the bitter of avil days together, and divils surround me, if I don't go down with you or come up with you, whichever it be! For there's dirt, as I say on their tongues, and over their shoulder they look at you, and not with an eye full front."

Pierre was cool, even pensive. His lips parted slightly once or twice, and showed a row of white, malicious teeth. For the rest, he looked as if he were politely interested but not moved by the excitement of the other. He slowly rolled a cigarette and replied: "He says it is a scandal that I live at Fort Anne. Well, I was here before he came, and I shall be here after he goes--yes. A scandal--tsh! what is that? You know the word 'Raca' of the Book? Well, there shall be more 'Raca; soon --perhaps. No, there shall not be fighting as you think, Shon; but--" here Pierre rose, came over, and spread his fingers lightly on Shon's breast "but this thing is between this man and me, Shon McGann, and you shall see a great matter. Perhaps there will be blood, perhaps not--perhaps only an end." And the half-breed looked up at the Irishman from under his dark brows so covertly and meaningly that Shon saw visions of a trouble as silent as a plague, as resistless as a great flood. This noiseless vengeance was not after his own heart. He almost shivered as the delicate fingers drummed on his breast.

"Angels begird me, Pretty Pierre, but it's little I'd like you for enemy o' mine; for I know that you'd wait for y'r foe with death in y'r hand, and pity far from y'r heart; and y'd smile as you pulled the black-cap on y'r head, and laugh as you drew the life out of him, God knows how! Arrah, give me, sez I, the crack of a stick, the bite of a gun, or the clip of a sabre's edge, with a shout in y'r mouth the while!"

Though Pierre still listened lazily, there was a wicked fire in his eyes. His words now came from his teeth with cutting precision. "I have a great thought tonight, Shon McGann. I will tell you when we meet again. But, my friend, one must not be too rash--no, not too brutal. Even the sabre should fall at the right time, and then swift and still. Noise is not battle. Well, 'au revoir!' To-morrow I shall tell you many things." He caught Shon's hand quickly, as quickly dropped it, and went out indolently singing a favourite song,--"Voici le sabre de mon Pere!"

It was dark. Pretty Pierre stood still, and thought for a while. At last he spoke aloud: "Well, I shall do it, now I have him--so!" And he opened and shut his hand swiftly and firmly. He moved on, avoiding the more habited parts of the place, and by a roundabout came to a house standing very close to the bank of the river. He went softly to the door and listened. Light shone through the curtain of a window. He went to the window and looked beneath the curtain. Then he came back to the door, opened it very gently, stepped inside, and closed it behind him.

A man seated at a table, eating, rose; a man on whom greed had set its mark--greed of the flesh, greed of men's praise, greed of money. His frame was thick-set, his body was heavily nourished, his eye was shifty but intelligent; and a close observer would have seen something elusive, something furtive and sinister, in his face. His lips were greasy with meat as he stood up, and a fear sprang to his face, so that its fat looked sickly. But he said hoarsely, and with an attempt at being brave --"How dare you enter my house with out knocking? What do you want?"

The half-breed waved a hand protestingly towards him. "Pardon!" he said. "Be seated, and finish your meal. Do you know me?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Well, as I said, do not stop your meal. I have come to speak with you very quietly about a scandal--a scandal, you understand. This is Sunday night, a good time to talk of such things." Pierre seated himself at the table, opposite the man.

But the man replied: "I have nothing to say to you. You are--"

The half-breed interrupted: "Yes, I know, a Pagan fattening--" here he smiled, and looked at his thin hands--"fattening for the shambles of the damned, as you have said from the pulpit, Reverend Ezra Badgley. But you will permit me--a sinner as you say--to speak to you like this while you sit down and eat. I regret to disturb you, but you will sit, eh?"

Pierre's tone was smooth and low, almost deferential, and his eyes, wide open now, and hot with some hidden purpose, were fixed compellingly on the man. The missionary sat, and, having recovered slightly, fumbled with a knife and fork. A napkin was still beneath his greasy chin. He did not take it away.

Pierre then spoke slowly: "Yes, it is a scandal concerning a sinner--and a Pagan. . . . Will you permit me to light a cigarette? Thank you . . . . You have said many harsh things about me: well, as you see, I am amiable. I lived at Fort Anne before you came. They call me Pretty Pierre. Why is my cheek so? Because I drink no wine; I eat not much. Pardon, pork like that on your plate--no! no! I do not take green tea as there in your cup; I do not love women, one or many. Again, pardon, I say."

The other drew his brows together with an attempt at pious frowning and

indignation; but there was a cold, sneering smile now turned upon him, and it changed the frown to anxiety, and made his lips twitch, and the food he had eaten grow heavy within him.

"I come to the scandal slowly. The woman? She was a young girl travelling from the far East, to search for a man who had--spoiled her. She was found by me and another. Ah, you start so! . . . Will you not listen? . . . Well, she died to-night."

Here the missionary gasped, and caught with both hands at the table.

"But before she died she gave two things into my hands: a packet of letters--a man is a fool to write such letters--and a small bottle of poison--laudanum, old-fashioned but sure. The letters were from the man at Fort Anne--the man, you hear! The other was for her death, if he would not take her to his arms again. Women are mad when they love. And so she came to Fort Anne, but not in time. The scandal is great, because the man is holy--sit down!"

The half-breed said the last two words sharply, but not loudly. They both sat down slowly again, looking each other in the eyes. Then Pierre drew from his pocket a small bottle and a packet of letters, and held them before him. "I have this to say: there are citizens of Fort Anne who stand for justice more than law; who have no love for the ways of St. Anthony. There is a Pagan, too, an outlaw, who knows when it is time to give blow for blow with the holy man. Well, we understand each other, 'hein?'"

The elusive, sinister look in the missionary's face was etched in strong lines now. A dogged sullenness hung about his lips. He noticed that one hand only of Pierre was occupied with the relics of the dead girl; the other was free to act suddenly on a hip pocket. "What do you want me to do?" he said, not whiningly, for beneath the selfish flesh and shallow outworks there were the elements of a warrior--all pulpy now, but they were there.

"This," was the reply: "for you to make one more outlaw at Fort Anne by drinking what is in this bottle--sit down, quick, by God!" He placed the bottle within reach of the other. "Then you shall have these letters; and there is the fire. After? Well, you will have a great sleep, the good people will find you, they will bury you, weeping much, and no one knows here but me. Refuse that, and there is the other, the Law--ah, the poor girl was so very young!--and the wild Justice which is sometimes quicker than Law. Well? well?"

The missionary sat as if paralysed, his face all grey, his eyes fixed on the half-breed. "Are you man or devil?" he groaned at length.

With a slight, fantastic gesture Pierre replied: "It was said that a devil entered into me at birth, but that was mere scandal--'peut-etre.' You shall think as you will."

There was silence. The sullenness about the missionary's lips became

charged with a contempt more animal than human. The Reverend Ezra Badgley knew that the man before him was absolute in his determination, and that the Pagans of Fort Anne would show him little mercy, while his flock would leave him to his fate. He looked at the bottle. The silence grew, so that the ticking of the watch in the missionary's pocket could be heard plainly, having for its background of sound the continuous swish of the river. Pretty Pierre's eyes were never taken off the other, whose gaze, again, was fixed upon the bottle with a terrible fascination. An hour, two hours, passed. The fire burned lower. It was midnight; and now the watch no longer ticked; it had fulfilled its day's work. The missionary shuddered slightly at this. He looked up to see the resolute gloom of the half-breed's eyes, and that sneering smile, fixed upon him still. Then he turned once more to the bottle. . . . His heavy hand moved slowly towards it. His stubby fingers perspired and showed sickly in the light. . . . They closed about the bottle. Then suddenly he raised it, and drained it at a draught. He sighed once heavily and as if a great inward pain was over. Rising he took the letters silently pushed towards him, and dropped them into the fire. He went to the window, raised it, and threw the bottle into the river. The cork was left: Pierre pointed to it. He took it up with a strange smile and thrust it into the coals. Then he sat down by the table, leaning his arms upon it, his eyes staring painfully before him, and the forgotten napkin still about his neck. Soon the eyes closed, and, with a moan on his lips, his head dropped forward on his arms. . . . Pierre rose, and, looking at the figure soon to be breathless as the baked meats about it, said: "Bien,' he was not all coward. No."

Then he turned and went out into the night.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Delicate revenge which hath its hour with every man  
Good is often an occasion more than a condition  
He does not love Pierre; but he does not pretend to love him  
It is not Justice that fills the gaols, but Law  
It is not much to kill or to die--that is in the game  
Men and women are unwittingly their own executioners  
Noise is not battle  
She was beginning to understand that evil is not absolute  
The Government cherish the Injin much in these days

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