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NORTHERN LIGHTS

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

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

TO-MORROW

"My, nothing's the matter with the world to-day! It's so good it almost hurts."

She raised her head from the white petticoat she was ironing, and gazed out of the doorway and down the valley with a warm light in her eyes and a glowing face. The snow-tipped mountains far above and away, the fir-covered, cedar-ranged foothills, and, lower down, the wonderful maple and ash woods, with their hundred autumn tints, all merging to one soft, red tone, the roar of the stream tumbling down the ravine from the heights, the air that braced the nerves--it all seemed to be part of her, the passion of life corresponding to the passion of living in her.

After watching the scene dreamily for a moment, she turned and laid the iron she had been using upon the hot stove near. Taking up another, she touched it with a moistened finger to test the heat, and, leaning above the table again, passed it over the linen for a few moments, smiling at something that was in her mind. Presently she held the petticoat up, turned it round, then hung it in front of her, eyeing it with critical pleasure.

"To-morrow!" she said, nodding at it. "You won't be seen, I suppose, but I'll know you're nice enough for a queen--and that's enough to know."

She blushed a little, as though someone had heard her words and was looking at her, then she carefully laid the petticoat over the back of a chair. "No queen's got one whiter, if I do say it," she continued, tossing her head.

In that, at any rate, she was right, for the water of the mountain springs was pure, the air was clear, and the sun was clarifying; and little ornamented or frilled as it was, the petticoat was exquisitely soft and delicate. It would have appealed to more eyes than a woman's.

"To-morrow!" She nodded at it again and turned again to the bright world outside. With arms raised and hands resting against the timbers of the doorway, she stood dreaming. A flock of pigeons passed with a whir not far away, and skirted the woods making down the valley. She watched their flight abstractedly, yet with a subconscious sense of pleasure. Life--they were Life, eager, buoyant, belonging to this wild region, where still the heart could feel so much at home, where the great world was missed so little.

Suddenly, as she gazed, a shot rang out down the valley, and two of the pigeons came tumbling to the ground, a stray feather floating after. With a startled exclamation she took a step forward. Her brain became confused and disturbed. She had looked out on Eden, and it had been ravaged before her eyes. She had been thinking of to-morrow, and this vast prospect of beauty and serenity had been part of the pageant in which it moved. Not the valley alone had been marauded, but that "To-morrow," and all it meant to her.

Instantly the valley had become clouded over for her, its glory and its grace despoiled. She turned back to the room where the white petticoat lay upon the chair, but stopped with a little cry of alarm.

A man was standing in the centre of the room. He had entered stealthily by the back door, and had waited for her to turn round. He was haggard and travel stained, and there was a feverish light in his eyes. His fingers trembled as they adjusted his belt, which seemed too large for him. Mechanically he buckled it tighter.

"You're Jenny Long, ain't you?" he asked. "I beg pardon for sneakin' in like this, but they're after me, some ranchers and a constable--one o' the Riders of the Plains. I've been tryin' to make this house all day. You're Jenny Long, ain't you?"

She had plenty of courage, and, after the first instant of shock, she had herself in hand. She had quickly observed his condition, had marked the candour of the eye and the decision and character of the face, and doubt of him found no place in her mind. She had the keen observation of the dweller in lonely places, where every traveller has the potentialities of a foe, while the door of hospitality is opened to him after the custom of the wilds. Year in, year out, since she was a little girl and came to live here with her Uncle Sanger when her father died--her mother had gone before she could speak--travellers had halted at this door, going North or coming South, had had bite and sup, and bed, may be, and had passed on, most of them never to be seen again. More than that, too, there had been moments of peril, such as when, alone, she had faced two wood-thieves with a revolver, as they were taking her mountain-pony with them, and herself had made them "hands-up," and had marched them into a

prospector's camp five miles away.

She had no doubt about the man before her. Whatever he had done, it was nothing dirty or mean--of that she was sure.

"Yes, I'm Jenny Long," she answered. "What have you done? What are they after you for?"

"Oh! to-morrow," he answered, "to-morrow I got to git to Bindon. It's life or death. I come from prospecting two hundred miles up North. I done it in two days and a half. My horse dropped dead--I'm near dead myself. I tried to borrow another horse up at Clancey's, and at Scotton's Drive, but they didn't know me, and they bounced me. So I borrowed a horse off Weigall's paddock, to make for here--to you. I didn't mean to keep that horse. Hell, I'm no horse-stealer! But I couldn't explain to them, except that I had to git to Bindon to save a man's life. If people laugh in your face, it's no use explainin'. I took a roan from Weigall's, and they got after me. 'Bout six miles up they shot at me an' hurt me."

She saw that one arm hung limp at his side and that his wrist was wound with a red bandana.

She started forward. "Are you hurt bad? Can I bind it up or wash it for you? I've got plenty of hot water here, and it's bad letting a wound get stale."

He shook his head. "I washed the hole clean in the creek below. I doubled on them. I had to go down past your place here, and then work back to be rid of them. But there's no telling when they'll drop on to the game, and come back for me. My only chance was to git to you. Even if I had a horse, I couldn't make Bindon in time. It's two days round the gorge by trail. A horse is no use now--I lost too much time since last night. I can't git to Bindon to-morrow in time, if I ride the trail."

"The river?" she asked abruptly.

"It's the only way. It cuts off fifty mile. That's why I come to you."

She frowned a little, her face became troubled, and her glance fell on his arm nervously. "What've I got to do with it?" she asked almost sharply.

"Even if this was all right,"--he touched the wounded arm--" I couldn't take the rapids in a canoe. I don't know them, an' it would be sure death. That's not the worst, for there's a man at Bindon would lose his life--p'raps twenty men--I dunno; but one man sure. To-morrow, it's go or stay with him. He was good--Lord, but he was good!--to my little gal years back. She'd only been married to me a year when he saved her, riskin' his own life. No one else had the pluck. My little gal, only twenty she was, an' pretty as a picture, an' me fifty miles away when the fire broke out in the hotel where she was. He'd have gone down to hell

for a friend, an' he saved my little gal. I had her for five years after that. That's why I got to git to Bindon to-morrow. If I don't, I don't want to see to-morrow. I got to go down the river to-night."

She knew what he was going to ask her. She knew he was thinking what all the North knew, that she was the first person to take the Dog Nose Rapids in a canoe, down the great river scarce a stone's-throw from her door; and that she had done it in safety many times. Not in all the West and North were there a half-dozen people who could take a canoe to Bindon, and they were not here. She knew that he meant to ask her to paddle him down the swift stream with its murderous rocks, to Bindon. She glanced at the white petticoat on the chair, and her lips tightened. To-morrow-tomorrow was as much to her here as it would be to this man before her, or the man he would save at Bindon. "What do you want?" she asked, hardening her heart. "Can't you see? I want you to hide me here till tonight. There's a full moon, an' it would be as plain goin' as by day. They told me about you up North, and I said to myself, 'If I git to Jenny Long, an' tell her about my friend at Bindon, an' my little gal, she'll take me down to Bindon in time.' My little gal would have paid her own debt if she'd ever had the chance. She didn't--she's lying up on Mazy Mountain. But one woman'll do a lot for the sake of another woman. Say, you'll do it, won't you? If I don't git there by to-morrow noon, it's no good."

She would not answer. He was asking more than he knew. Why should she be sacrificed? Was it her duty to pay the "little gal's debt," to save the man at Bindon? To-morrow was to be the great day in her own life. The one man in all the world was coming to marry her to-morrow. After four years' waiting, after a bitter quarrel in which both had been to blame, he was coming from the mining town of Selby to marry her to-morrow.

"What will happen? Why will your friend lose his life if you don't get to Bindon?"

"By noon to-morrow, by twelve o'clock noon; that's the plot; that's what they've schemed. Three days ago, I heard. I got a man free from trouble North--he was no good, but I thought he ought to have another chance, and I got him free. He told me of what was to be done at Bindon. There'd been a strike in the mine, an' my friend had took it in hand with knuckle-dusters on. He isn't the kind to fell a tree with a jack-knife. Then three of the strikers that had been turned away--they was the ringleaders--they laid a plan that'd make the devil sick. They've put a machine in the mine, an' timed it, an' it'll go off when my friend comes out of the mine at noon to-morrow."

Her face was pale now, and her eyes had a look of pain and horror. Her man--him that she was to marry--was the head of a mine also at Selby, forty miles beyond Bindon, and the horrible plot came home to her with piercing significance.

"Without a second's warning," he urged, "to go like that, the man that was so good to my little gal, an' me with a chance to save him, an'

others too, p'r'aps. You won't let it be. Say, I'm pinnin' my faith to you. I'm--"

Suddenly he swayed. She caught him, held him, and lowered him gently in a chair. Presently he opened his eyes. "It's want o' food, I suppose," he said. "If you've got a bit of bread and meat--I must keep up."

She went to a cupboard, but suddenly turned towards him again. Her ears had caught a sound outside in the underbush. He had heard also, and he half staggered to his feet.

"Quick-in here!" she said, and, opening a door, pushed him inside. "Lie down on my bed, and I'll bring you vittles as quick as I can," she added. Then she shut the door, turned to the ironing-board, and took up the iron, as the figure of a man darkened the doorway.

"Hello, Jinny, fixin' up for to-morrow?" the man said, stepping inside, with a rifle under his arm and some pigeons in his hand.

She nodded and gave him an impatient, scrutinising glance. His face had a fatuous kind of smile.

"Been celebrating the pigeons?" she asked drily, jerking her head towards the two birds, which she had seen drop from her Eden skies a short time before.

"I only had one swig of whiskey, honest Injun!" he answered. "I s'pose I might have waited till to-morrow, but I was dead-beat. I got a bear over by the Tenmile Reach, and I was tired. I ain't so young as I used to be, and, anyhow, what's the good! What's ahead of me? You're going to git married to-morrow after all these years we bin together, and you're going down to Selby from the mountains, where I won't see you, not once in a blue moon. Only that old trollop, Mother Massy, to look after me."

"Come down to Selby and live there. You'll be welcome by Jake and me."

He stood his gun in the corner and, swinging the pigeons in his hand, said: "Me live out of the mountains? Don't you know better than that? I couldn't breathe; and I wouldn't want to breathe. I've got my shack here, I got my fur business, and they're still fond of whiskey up North!" He chuckled to himself, as he thought of the illicit still farther up the mountain behind them. "I make enough to live on, and I've put a few dollars by, though I won't have so many after to-morrow, after I've given you a little pile, Jinny."

"P'r'aps there won't be any to-morrow, as you expect," she said slowly.

The old man started. "What, you and Jake ain't quarrelled again? You ain't broke it off at the last moment, same as before? You ain't had a letter from Jake?" He looked at the white petticoat on the chairback, and shook his head in bewilderment.

"I've had no letter," she answered. "I've had no letter from Selby for a month. It was all settled then, and there was no good writing, when he was coming to-morrow with the minister and the licence. Who do you think'd be postman from Selby here? It must have cost him ten dollars to send the last letter."

"Then what's the matter? I don't understand," the old man urged querulously. He did not want her to marry and leave him, but he wanted no more troubles; he did not relish being asked awkward questions by every mountaineer he met, as to why Jenny Long didn't marry Jake Lawson.

"There's only one way that I can be married tomorrow," she said at last, "and that's by you taking a man down the Dog Nose Rapids to Bindon to-night."

He dropped the pigeons on the floor, dumbfounded. "What in--"

He stopped short, in sheer incapacity, to go further. Jenny had not always been easy to understand, but she was wholly incomprehensible now.

She picked up the pigeons and was about to speak, but she glanced at the bedroom door, where her exhausted visitor had stretched himself on her bed, and beckoned her uncle to another room.

"There's a plate of vittles ready for you in there," she said. "I'll tell you as you eat."

He followed her into the little living-room adorned by the trophies of his earlier achievements with gun and rifle, and sat down at the table, where some food lay covered by a clean white cloth.

"No one'll ever look after me as you've done, Jinny," he said, as he lifted the cloth and saw the palatable dish ready for him. Then he remembered again about to-morrow and the Dog Nose Rapids.

"What's it all about, Jinny? What's that about my canoeing a man down to Bindon?"

"Eat, uncle," she said more softly than she had yet spoken, for his words about her care of him had brought a moisture to her eyes. "I'll be back in a minute and tell you all about it."

"Well, it's about took away my appetite," he said. "I feel a kind of sinking." He took from his pocket a bottle, poured some of its contents into a tin cup, and drank it off.

"No, I suppose you couldn't take a man down to Bindon," she said, as she saw his hand trembling on the cup. Then she turned and entered the other room again. Going to the cupboard, she hastily heaped a plate with food, and, taking a dipper of water from a pail near by, she entered her bedroom hastily and placed what she had brought on a small table, as her visitor rose slowly from the bed.

He was about to speak, but she made a protesting gesture.

"I can't tell you anything yet," she said. "Who was it come?" he asked.

"My uncle--I'm going to tell him."

"The men after me may git here any minute," he urged anxiously.

"They'd not be coming into my room," she answered, flushing slightly.

"Can't you hide me down by the river till we start?" he asked, his eyes eagerly searching her face. He was assuming that she would take him down the river: but she gave no sign.

"I've got to see if he'll take you first," she answered.

"He--your uncle, Tom Sanger? He drinks, I've heard. He'd never git to Bindon."

She did not reply directly to his words. "I'll come back and tell you. There's a place you could hide by the river where no one could ever find you," she said, and left the room.

As she stepped out, she saw the old man standing in the doorway of the other room. His face was petrified with amazement.

"Who you got in that room, Jinny? What man you got in that room? I heard a man's voice. Is it because o' him that you bin talkin' about no weddin' to-morrow? Is it one o' the others come back, puttin' you off Jake again?"

Her eyes flashed fire at his first words, and her breast heaved with anger, but suddenly she became composed again and motioned him to a chair.

"You eat, and I'll tell you all about it, Uncle Tom," she said, and, seating herself at the table also, she told him the story of the man who must go to Bindon.

When she had finished, the old man blinked at her for a minute without speaking, then he said slowly: "I heard something 'bout trouble down at Bindon yisterday from a Hudson's Bay man goin' North, but I didn't take it in. You've got a lot o' sense, Jinny, an' if you think he's tellin' the truth, why, it goes; but it's as big a mixup as a lariat in a steer's horns. You've got to hide him sure, whoever he is, for I wouldn't hand an Eskimo over, if I'd taken him in my home once; we're mountain people. A man ought to be hung for horse-stealin', but this was different. He was doing it to save a man's life, an' that man at Bindon was good to his little gal, an' she's dead."

He moved his head from side to side with the air of a sentimental philosopher. He had all the vanity of a man who had been a success in a small, shrewd, culpable way--had he not evaded the law for thirty years

with his whiskey-still?

"I know how he felt," he continued. "When Betsy died--we was only four years married--I could have crawled into a knot-hole an' died there. You got to save him, Jinny, but"--he came suddenly to his feet--"he ain't safe here. They might come any minute, if they've got back on his trail. I'll take him up the gorge. You know where."

"You sit still, Uncle Tom," she rejoined. "Leave him where he is a minute. There's things must be settled first. They ain't going to look for him in my bedroom, be they?"

The old man chuckled. "I'd like to see 'em at it. You got a temper, Jinny; and you got a pistol too, eh?" He chuckled again. "As good a shot as any in the mountains. I can see you darin' 'em to come on. But what if Jake come, and he found a man in your bedroom"--he wiped the tears of laughter from his eyes--"why, Jinny--!"

He stopped short, for there was anger in her face. "I don't want to hear any more of that. I do what I want to do," she snapped out.

"Well, well, you always done what you wanted; but we got to git him up the hills, till it's sure they're out o' the mountains and gone back. It'll be days, mebbe."

"Uncle Tom, you've took too much to drink," she answered. "You don't remember he's got to be at Bindon by to-morrow noon. He's got to save his friend by then."

"Pshaw! Who's going to take him down the river to-night? You're goin' to be married to-morrow. If you like, you can give him the canoe. It'll never come back, nor him neither!"

"You've been down with me," she responded suggestively. "And you went down once by yourself."

He shook his head. "I ain't been so well this summer. My sight ain't what it was. I can't stand the racket as I once could. 'Pears to me I'm gettin' old. No, I couldn't take them rapids, Jinny, not for one frozen minute."

She looked at him with trouble in her eyes, and her face lost some of its colour. She was fighting back the inevitable, even as its shadow fell upon her. "You wouldn't want a man to die, if you could save him, Uncle Tom--blown up, sent to Kingdom Come without any warning at all; and perhaps he's got them that love him--and the world so beautiful."

"Well, it ain't nice dyin' in the summer, when it's all sun, and there's plenty everywhere; but there's no one to go down the river with him. What's his name?"

Her struggle was over. She had urged him, but in very truth she was urging herself all the time, bringing herself to the axe of sacrifice.

"His name's Dingley. I'm going down the river with him--down to Bindon."

The old man's mouth opened in blank amazement. His eyes blinked helplessly.

"What you talkin' about, Jinny! Jake's comin' up with the minister, an' you're goin' to be married at noon to-morrow."

"I'm takin' him"--she jerked her head towards the room where Dingley was --"down Dog Nose Rapids to-night. He's risked his life for his friend, thinkin' of her that's dead an' gone, and a man's life is a man's life. If it was Jake's life in danger, what'd I think of a woman that could save him, and didn't?"

"Onct you broke off with Jake Lawson--the day before you was to be married; an' it's took years to make up an' agree again to be spliced. If Jake comes here to-morrow, and you ain't here, what do you think he'll do? The neighbours are comin' for fifty miles round, two is comin' up a hundred miles, an' you can't--Jinny, you can't do it. I bin sick of answerin' questions all these years 'bout you and Jake, an' I ain't goin' through it again. I've told more lies than there's straws in a tick."

She flamed out. "Then take him down the river yourself--a man to do a man's work. Are you afeard to take the risk?"

He held out his hands slowly and looked at them. They shook a little. "Yes, Jinny," he said sadly, "I'm afeard. I ain't what I was. I made a mistake, Jinny. I've took too much whiskey. I'm older than I ought to be. I oughtn't never to have had a whiskey-still, an' I wouldn't have drunk so much. I got money--money for you, Jinny, for you an' Jake, but I've lost what I'll never git back. I'm afeard to go down the river with him. I'd go smash in the Dog Nose Rapids. I got no nerve. I can't hunt the grizzly any more, nor the puma, Jinny. I got to keep to common shootin', now and henceforth, amen! No, I'd go smash in Dog Nose Rapids."

She caught his hands impulsively. "Don't you fret, Uncle Tom. You've bin a good uncle to me, and you've bin a good friend, and you ain't the first that's found whiskey too much for him. You ain't got an enemy in the mountains. Why, I've got two or three--"

"Shucks! Women--only women whose beaux left 'em to follow after you. That's nothing, an' they'll be your friends fast enough after you're married tomorrow."

"I ain't going to be married to-morrow. I'm going down to Bindon to-night. If Jake's mad, then it's all over, and there'll be more trouble among the women up here."

By this time they had entered the other room. The old man saw the white petticoat on the chair. "No woman in the mountains ever had a petticoat like that, Jinny. It'd make a dress, it's that pretty an' neat. Golly,

I'd like to see it on you, with the blue skirt over, and just hitched up a little."

"Oh, shut up--shut up!" she said in sudden anger, and caught up the petticoat as though she would put it away; but presently she laid it down again and smoothed it with quick, nervous fingers. "Can't you talk sense and leave my clothes alone? If Jake comes, and I'm not here, and he wants to make a fuss, and spoil everything, and won't wait, you give him this petticoat. You put it in his arms. I bet you'll have the laugh on him. He's got a temper."

"So've you, Jinny, dear, so've you," said the old man, laughing. "You're goin' to have your own way, same as ever--same as ever."

II

A moon of exquisite whiteness silvering the world, making shadows on the water as though it were sunlight and the daytime, giving a spectral look to the endless array of poplar trees on the banks, glittering on the foam of the rapids. The spangling stars made the arch of the sky like some gorgeous chancel in a cathedral as vast as life and time. Like the day which was ended, in which the mountain-girl had found a taste of Eden, it seemed too sacred for mortal strife. Now and again there came the note of a night-bird, the croak of a frog from the shore; but the serene stillness and beauty of the primeval North was over all.

For two hours after sunset it had all been silent and brooding, and then two figures appeared on the bank of the great river. A canoe was softly and hastily pushed out from its hidden shelter under the overhanging bank, and was noiselessly paddled out to midstream, dropping down the current meanwhile.

It was Jenny Long and the man who must get to Bindon. They had waited till nine o'clock, when the moon was high and full, to venture forth. Then Dingley had dropped from her bedroom window, had joined her under the trees, and they had sped away, while the man's hunters, who had come suddenly, and before Jenny could get him away into the woods, were carousing inside. These had tracked their man back to Tom Sanger's house, and at first they were incredulous that Jenny and her uncle had not seen him. They had prepared to search the house, and one had laid his finger on the latch of her bedroom door; but she had flared out with such anger that, mindful of the supper she had already begun to prepare for them, they had desisted, and the whiskey-jug which the old man brought out distracted their attention.

One of their number, known as the Man from Clancey's, had, however, been outside when Dingley had dropped from the window, and had seen him from a distance. He had not given the alarm, but had followed, to make the capture by himself. But Jenny had heard the stir of life behind them, and had made a sharp detour, so that they had reached the shore and were

out in mid-stream before their tracker got to the river. Then he called to them to return, but Jenny only bent a little lower and paddled on, guiding the canoe towards the safe channel through the first small rapids leading to the great Dog Nose Rapids.

A rifle-shot rang out, and a bullet "pinged" over the water and splintered the side of the canoe where Dingley sat. He looked calmly back, and saw the rifle raised again, but did not stir, in spite of Jenny's warning to lie down.

"He'll not fire on you so long as he can draw a bead on me," he said quietly.

Again a shot rang out, and the bullet sang past his head.

"If he hits me, you go straight on to Bindon," he continued. "Never mind about me. Go to the Snowdrop Mine. Get there by twelve o'clock, and warn them. Don't stop a second for me--"

Suddenly three shots rang out in succession--Tom Sanger's house had emptied itself on the bank of the river--and Dingley gave a sharp exclamation.

"They've hit me, but it's the same arm as before," he growled. "They got no right to fire at me. It's not the law. Don't stop," he added quickly, as he saw her half turn round.

Now there were loud voices on the shore. Old Tom Sanger was threatening to shoot the first man that fired again, and he would have kept his word.

"Who you firin' at?" he shouted. "That's my niece, Jinny Long, an' you let that boat alone. This ain't the land o' lynch law. Dingley ain't escaped from gaol. You got no right to fire at him."

"No one ever went down Dog Nose Rapids at night," said the Man from Clancey's, whose shot had got Dingley's arm. "There ain't a chance of them doing it. No one's ever done it."

The two were in the roaring rapids now, and the canoe was jumping through the foam like a racehorse. The keen eyes on the bank watched the canoe till it was lost in the half-gloom below the first rapids, and then they went slowly back to Tom Sanger's house.

"So there'll be no wedding to-morrow," said the Man from Clancey's.

"Funerals, more likely," drawled another.

"Jinny Long's in that canoe, an' she ginerally does what she wants to," said Tom Sanger sagely.

"Well, we done our best, and now I hope they'll get to Bindon," said another.

Sanger passed the jug to him freely. Then they sat down and talked of the people who had been drowned in Dog Nose Rapids and of the last wedding in the mountains.

III

It was as the Man from Clancey's had said, no one had ever gone down Dog Nose Rapids in the nighttime, and probably no one but Jenny Long would have ventured it. Dingley had had no idea what a perilous task had been set his rescuer. It was only when the angry roar of the great rapids floated up-stream to them, increasing in volume till they could see the terror of tumbling waters just below, and the canoe shot forward like a snake through the swift, smooth current which would sweep them into the vast caldron, that he realised the terrible hazard of the enterprise.

The moon was directly overhead when they drew upon the race of rocks and fighting water and foam. On either side only the shadowed shore, forsaken by the races which had hunted and roamed and ravaged here--not a light, nor any sign of life, or the friendliness of human presence to make their isolation less complete, their danger, as it were, shared by fellow-mortals. Bright as the moon was, it was not bright enough for perfect pilotage. Never in the history of white men had these rapids been ridden at nighttime. As they sped down the flume of the deep, irresistible current, and were launched into the trouble of rocks and water, Jenny realised how great their peril was, and how different the track of the waters looked at nighttime from daytime. Outlines seemed merged, rocks did not look the same, whirlpools had a different vortex, islands of stone had a new configuration. As they sped on, lurching, jumping, piercing a broken wall of wave and spray like a torpedo, shooting an almost sheer fall, she came to rely on a sense of intuition rather than memory, for night had transformed the waters.

Not a sound escaped either. The man kept his eyes fixed on the woman; the woman scanned the dreadful pathway with eyes deep-set and burning, resolute, vigilant, and yet defiant too, as though she had been trapped into this track of danger, and was fighting without great hope, but with the temerity and nonchalance of despair. Her arms were bare to the shoulder almost, and her face was again and again drenched; but second succeeded second, minute followed minute in a struggle which might well turn a man's hair grey, and now, at last--how many hours was it since they had been cast into this den of roaring waters!--at last, suddenly, over a large fall, and here smooth waters again, smooth and untroubled, and strong and deep. Then, and only then, did a word escape either; but the man had passed through torture and unavailing regret, for he realised that he had had no right to bring this girl into such a fight. It was not her friend who was in danger at Bindon. Her life had been risked without due warrant. "I didn't know, or I wouldn't have asked it," he said in a low voice. "Lord, but you are a wonder--to take that hurdle for no one that belonged to you, and to do it as you've done it. This country will rise to you." He looked back on the raging rapids far

behind, and he shuddered. "It was a close call, and no mistake. We must have been within a foot of down-you-go fifty times. But it's all right now, if we can last it out and git there." Again he glanced back, then turned to the girl. "It makes me pretty sick to look at it," he continued. "I bin through a lot, but that's as sharp practice as I want."

"Come here and let me bind up your arm," she answered. "They hit you--the sneaks! Are you bleeding much?"

He came near her carefully, as she got the big canoe out of the current into quieter water. She whipped the scarf from about her neck, and with his knife ripped up the seam of his sleeve. Her face was alive with the joy of conflict and elated with triumph. Her eyes were shining. She bathed the wound--the bullet had passed clean through the fleshy part of the arm--and then carefully tied the scarf round it over her handkerchief.

"I guess it's as good as a man could do it," she said at last.

"As good as any doctor," he rejoined.

"I wasn't talking of your arm," she said.

"Course not. Excuse me. You was talkin' of them rapids, and I've got to say there ain't a man that could have done it and come through like you. I guess the man that marries you'll get more than his share of luck."

"I want none of that," she said sharply, and picked up her paddle again, her eyes flashing anger.

He took a pistol from his pocket and offered it to her. "I didn't mean any harm by what I said. Take this if you think I won't know how to behave myself," he urged.

She flung up her head a little. "I knew what I was doing before I started," she said. "Put it away. How far is it, and can we do it in time?"

"If you can hold out, we can do it; but it means going all night and all morning; and it ain't dawn yet, by a long shot."

Dawn came at last, and the mist of early morning, and the imperious and dispelling sun; and with mouthfuls of food as they drifted on, the two fixed their eyes on the horizon beyond which lay Bindon. And now it seemed to the girl as though this race to save a life or many lives was the one thing in existence. To-morrow was to-day, and the white petticoat was lying in the little house in the mountains, and her wedding was an interminable distance off, so had this adventure drawn her into its risks and toils and haggard exhaustion.

Eight, nine, ten, eleven o'clock came, and then they saw signs of

settlement. Houses appeared here and there upon the banks, and now and then a horseman watched them from the shore, but they could not pause. Bindon--Bindon--Bindon--the Snowdrop Mine at Bindon, and a death-dealing machine timed to do its deadly work, were before the eyes of the two voyageurs.

Half-past eleven, and the town of Bindon was just beyond them. A quarter to twelve, and they had run their canoe into the bank beyond which were the smokestacks and chimneys of the mine. Bindon was peacefully pursuing its way, though here and there were little groups of strikers who had not resumed work.

Dingley and the girl scrambled up the bank. Trembling with fatigue, they hastened on. The man drew ahead of her, for she had paddled for fifteen hours, practically without ceasing, and the ground seemed to rise up at her. But she would not let him stop.

He hurried on, reached the mine, and entered, shouting the name of his friend. It was seven minutes to twelve.

A moment later, a half-dozen men came rushing from that portion of the mine where Dingley had been told the machine was placed, and at their head was Lawson, the man he had come to save.

The girl hastened on to meet them, but she grew faint and leaned against a tree, scarce conscious. She was roused by voices.

"No, it wasn't me, it wasn't me that done it; it was a girl. Here she is--Jenny Long! You got to thank her, Jake."

Jake! Jake! The girl awakened to full understanding now. Jake--what Jake? She looked, then stumbled forward with a cry.

"Jake--it was my Jake!" she faltered. The mine-boss caught her in his arms. "You, Jenny! It's you that's saved me!"

Suddenly there was a rumble as of thunder, and a cloud of dust and stone rose from the Snowdrop Mine. The mine-boss tightened his arm round the girl's waist. "That's what I missed, through him and you, Jenny," he said.

"What was you doing here, and not at Selby, Jake?" she asked.

"They sent for me-to stop the trouble here."

"But what about our wedding to-day?" she asked with a frown.

"A man went from here with a letter to you three days ago," he said, "asking you to come down here and be married. I suppose he got drunk, or had an accident, and didn't reach you. It had to be. I was needed here--couldn't tell what would happen."

"It has happened out all right," said Dingley, "and this'll be the end of

it. You got them miners solid now. The strikers'll eat humble pie after to-day."

"We'll be married to-day, just the same," the mine-boss said, as he gave some brandy to the girl.

But the girl shook her head. She was thinking of a white petticoat in a little house in the mountains. "I'm not going to be married to-day," she said decisively.

"Well, to-morrow," said the mine-boss.

But the girl shook her head again. "To-day is tomorrow," she answered. "You can wait, Jake. I'm going back home to be married."

QU'APPELLE

(Who calls?)

"But I'm white; I'm not an Indian. My father was a white man. I've been brought up as a white girl. I've had a white girl's schooling."

Her eyes flashed as she sprang to her feet and walked up and down the room for a moment, then stood still, facing her mother,--a dark-faced, pock-marked woman, with heavy, somnolent eyes, and waited for her to speak. The reply came slowly and sullenly--

"I am a Blackfoot woman. I lived on the Muskwat River among the braves for thirty years. I have killed buffalo. I have seen battles. Men, too, I have killed when they came to steal our horses and crept in on our lodges in the night--the Crees! I am a Blackfoot. You are the daughter of a Blackfoot woman. No medicine can cure that. Sit down. You have no sense. You are not white. They will not have you. Sit down."

The girl's handsome face flushed; she threw up her hands in an agony of protest. A dreadful anger was in her panting breast, but she could not speak. She seemed to choke with excess of feeling. For an instant she stood still, trembling with agitation, then she sat down suddenly on a great couch covered with soft deerskins and buffalo robes. There was deep in her the habit of obedience to this sombre but striking woman. She had been ruled firmly, almost oppressively, and she had not yet revolted. Seated on the couch, she gazed out of the window at the flying snow, her brain too much on fire for thought, passion beating like a pulse in all her lithe and graceful young body, which had known the storms of life and time for only twenty years.

The wind shrieked and the snow swept past in clouds of blinding drift,

completely hiding from sight the town below them, whose civilisation had built itself many habitations and was making roads and streets on the green-brown plain, where herds of buffalo had stamped and streamed and thundered not long ago. The town was a mile and a half away, and these two were alone in a great circle of storm, one of them battling against a tempest which might yet overtake her, against which she had set her face ever since she could remember, though it had only come to violence since her father died two years before--a careless, strong, wilful white man, who had lived the Indian life for many years, but had been swallowed at last by the great wave of civilisation streaming westward and northward, wiping out the game and the Indian, and overwhelming the rough, fighting, hunting, pioneer life. Joel Renton had made money, by good luck chiefly, having held land here and there which he had got for nothing, and had then almost forgotten about it, and, when reminded of it, still held on to it with that defiant stubbornness which often possesses improvident and careless natures. He had never had any real business instinct, and to swagger a little over the land he held and to treat offers of purchase with contempt was the loud assertion of a capacity he did not possess. So it was that stubborn vanity, beneath which was his angry protest against the prejudice felt by the new people of the West for the white pioneer who married an Indian, and lived the Indian life,--so it was that this gave him competence and a comfortable home after the old trader had been driven out by the railway and the shopkeeper. With the first land he sold he sent his daughter away to school in a town farther east and south, where she had been brought in touch with a life that at once cramped and attracted her; where, too, she had felt the first chill of racial ostracism, and had proudly fought it to the end, her weapons being talent, industry, and a hot, defiant ambition.

There had been three years of bitter, almost half-sullen, struggle, lightened by one sweet friendship with a girl whose face she had since drawn in a hundred different poses on stray pieces of paper, on the walls of the big, well-lighted attic to which she retreated for hours every day, when she was not abroad on the prairies, riding the Indian pony that her uncle the Piegan Chief, Ice Breaker, had given her years before. Three years of struggle, and then her father had died, and the refuge for her vexed, defiant heart was gone. While he lived she could affirm the rights of a white man's daughter, the rights of the daughter of a pioneer who had helped to make the West; and her pride in him had given a glow to her cheek and a spring to her step which drew every eye. In the chief street of Portage la Prouve men would stop their trafficking and women nudge each other when she passed, and wherever she went she stirred interest, excited admiration, or aroused prejudice--but the prejudice did not matter so long as her father, Joel Renton, lived. Whatever his faults, and they were many--sometimes he drank too much, and swore a great deal, and bullied and stormed--she blinked at them all, for he was of the conquering race, a white man who had slept in white sheets and eaten off white tablecloths, and used a knife and fork, since he was born; and the women of his people had had soft petticoats and fine stockings, and silk gowns for festal days, and feathered hats of velvet, and shoes of polished leather, always and always, back through many generations. She had held her head high, for she was of his women, of the women of his people, with all their rights and all their claims. She

had held it high till that stormy day--just such a day as this, with the surf of snow breaking against the house--when they carried him in out of the wild turmoil and snow, laying him on the couch where she now sat, and her head fell on his lifeless breast, and she cried out to him in vain to come back to her.

Before the world her head was still held high, but in the attic-room, and out on the prairies far away, where only the coyote or the prairie-hen saw, her head drooped, and her eyes grew heavy with pain and sombre protest. Once in an agony of loneliness, and cruelly hurt by a conspicuous slight put upon her at the Portage by the wife of the Reeve of the town, who had daughters twain of pure white blood got from behind the bar of a saloon in Winnipeg, she had thrown open her window at night with the frost below zero, and stood in her thin nightdress, craving the death which she hoped the cold would give her soon. It had not availed, however, and once again she had ridden out in a blizzard to die, but had come upon a man lost in the snow, and her own misery had passed from her, and her heart, full of the blood of plainsmen, had done for another what it would not do for itself. The Indian in her had, with strange, sure instinct, found its way to Portage la Drome, the man with both hands and one foot frozen, on her pony, she walking at his side, only conscious that she had saved one, not two, lives that day.

Here was another such day, here again was the storm in her heart which had driven her into the plains that other time, and here again was that tempest of white death outside.

"You have no sense. You are not white. They will not have you. Sit down--"

The words had fallen on her ears with a cold, deadly smother. There came a chill upon her which stilled the wild pulses in her, which suddenly robbed the eyes of their brightness and gave a drawn look to the face.

"You are not white. They will not have you, Pauline." The Indian mother repeated the words after a moment, her eyes grown still more gloomy; for in her, too, there was a dark tide of passion moving. In all the outlived years this girl had ever turned to the white father rather than to her, and she had been left more and more alone. Her man had been kind to her, and she had been a faithful wife, but she had resented the natural instinct of her half-breed child, almost white herself and with the feelings and ways of the whites, to turn always to her father, as though to a superior guide, to a higher influence and authority. Was not she herself the descendant of Blackfoot and Piegan chiefs through generations of rulers and warriors? Was there not Piegan and Blackfoot blood in the girl's veins? Must only the white man's blood be reckoned when they made up their daily account and balanced the books of their lives, credit and debtor,--misunderstanding and kind act, neglect and tenderness, reproof and praise, gentleness and impulse, anger and caress,--to be set down in the everlasting record? Why must the Indian always give way--Indian habits, Indian desires, the Indian way of doing things, the Indian point of view, Indian food, Indian medicine? Was it all bad, and only that which belonged to white life good?

"Look at your face in the glass, Pauline," she added at last. "You are good-looking, but it isn't the good looks of the whites. The lodge of a chieftainness is the place for you. There you would have praise and honour; among the whites you are only a half-breed. What is the good? Let us go back to the life out there beyond the Muskwat River--up beyond. There is hunting still, a little, and the world is quiet, and nothing troubles. Only the wild dog barks at night, or the wolf sniffs at the door and all day there is singing. Somewhere out beyond the Muskwat the feasts go on, and the old men build the great fires, and tell tales, and call the wind out of the north, and make the thunder speak; and the young men ride to the hunt or go out to battle, and build lodges for the daughters of the tribe; and each man has his woman, and each woman has in her breast the honour of the tribe, and the little ones fill the lodge with laughter. Like a pocket of deerskin is every house, warm and small and full of good things. Hai-yai, what is this life to that! There you will be head and chief of all, for there is money enough for a thousand horses; and your father was a white man, and these are the days when the white man rules. Like clouds before the sun are the races of men, and one race rises and another falls. Here you are not first, but last; and the child of the white father and mother, though they be as the dirt that flies from a horse's heels, it is before you. Your mother is a Blackfoot."

As the woman spoke slowly and with many pauses, the girl's mood changed, and there came into her eyes a strange, dark look deeper than anger. She listened with a sudden patience which stilled the agitation in her breast and gave a little touch of rigidity to her figure. Her eyes withdrew from the wild storm without and gravely settled on her mother's face, and with the Indian woman's last words understanding pierced, but did not dispel, the sombre and ominous look in her eyes. There was silence for a moment, and then she spoke almost as evenly as her mother had done.

"I will tell you everything. You are my mother, and I love you; but you will not see the truth. When my father took you from the lodges and brought you here, it was the end of the Indian life. It was for you to go on with him, but you would not go. I was young, but I saw, and I said that in all things I would go with him. I did not know that it would be hard, but at school, at the very first, I began to understand. There was only one, a French girl--I loved her--a girl who said to me, 'You are as white as I am, as anyone, and your heart is the same, and you are beautiful.' Yes, Manette said I was beautiful."

She paused a moment, a misty, far-away look came into her eyes, her fingers clasped and unclasped, and she added:

"And her brother, Julien,--he was older,--when he came to visit Manette, he spoke to me as though I was all white, and was good to me. I have never forgotten, never. It was five years ago, but I remember him. He was tall and strong, and as good as Manette--as good as Manette. I loved Manette, but she suffered for me, for I was not like the others, and my ways were different--then. I had lived up there on the Warais among the lodges, and I had not seen things--only from my father, and he did so

much in an Indian way. So I was sick at heart, and sometimes I wanted to die; and once--But there was Manette, and she would laugh and sing, and we would play together, and I would speak French and she would speak English, and I learned from her to forget the Indian ways. What were they to me? I had loved them when I was of them, but I came on to a better life. The Indian life is to the white life as the parfleche pouch to--to this." She laid her hand upon a purse of delicate silver mesh hanging at her waist. "When your eyes are opened you must go on, you cannot stop. There is no going back. When you have read of all there is in the white man's world, when you have seen, then there is no returning. You may end it all, if you wish, in the snow, in the river, but there is no returning. The lodge of a chief--ah, if my father had heard you say that--!"

The Indian woman shifted heavily in her chair, then shrank away from the look fixed on her. Once or twice she made as if she would speak, but sank down in the great chair, helpless and dismayed.

"The lodge of a chief!" the girl continued in a low, bitter voice.

"What is the lodge of a chief? A smoky fire, a pot, a bed of skins, aih-yi! If the lodges of the Indians were millions, and I could be head of all, and rule the land, yet would I rather be a white girl in the hut of her white man, struggling for daily bread among the people who sweep the buffalo out, but open up the land with the plough, and make a thousand live where one lived before. It is peace you want, my mother, peace and solitude, in which the soul goes to sleep. Your days of hope are over, and you want to drowse by the fire. I want to see the white men's cities grow, and the armies coming over the hill with the ploughs and the reapers and the mowers, and the wheels and the belts and engines of the great factories, and the white woman's life spreading everywhere; for I am a white man's daughter. I can't be both Indian and white. I will not be like the sun when the shadow cuts across it and the land grows dark. I will not be half-breed. I will be white or I will be Indian; and I will be white, white only. My heart is white, my tongue is white, I think, I feel, as white people think and feel. What they wish, I wish; as they live, I live; as white women dress, I dress."

She involuntarily drew up the dark red skirt she wore, showing a white petticoat and a pair of fine stockings on an ankle as shapely as she had ever seen among all the white women she knew. She drew herself up with pride, and her body had a grace and ease which the white woman's convention had not cramped.

Yet, with all her protests, no one would have thought her English. She might have been Spanish, or Italian, or Roumanian, or Slav, though nothing of her Indian blood showed in purely Indian characteristics, and something sparkled in her, gave a radiance to her face and figure which the storm and struggle in her did not smother. The white women of Portage la Drome were too blind, too prejudiced, to see all that she really was, and admiring white men could do little, for Pauline would have nothing to do with them till the women met her absolutely as an equal; and from the other halfbreeds, who intermarried with each other and were content to take a lower place than the pure whites, she held

aloof, save when any of them was ill or in trouble. Then she recognised the claim of race, and came to their doors with pity and soft impulses to help them. French and Scotch and English half-breeds, as they were, they understood how she was making a fight for all who were half-Indian, half-white, and watched her with a furtive devotion, acknowledging her superior place, and proud of it.

"I will not stay here," said the Indian mother with sullen stubbornness. "I will go back beyond the Warais. My life is my own life, and I will do what I like with it."

The girl started, but became composed again on the instant. "Is your life all your own, mother?" she asked. "I did not come into the world of my own will. If I had I would have come all white or all Indian. I am your daughter, and I am here, good or bad--is your life all your own?"

"You can marry and stay here, when I go. You are twenty. I had my man, your father, when I was seventeen. You can marry. There are men. You have money. They will marry you--and forget the rest."

With a cry of rage and misery the girl sprang to her feet and started forwards, but stopped suddenly at sound of a hasty knocking and a voice asking admittance. An instant later, a huge, bearded, broad-shouldered man stepped inside, shaking himself free of the snow, laughing half-sheepishly as he did so, and laying his fur-cap and gloves with exaggerated care on the wide window-sill.

"John Alloway," said the Indian woman in a voice of welcome, and with a brightening eye, for it would seem as though he came in answer to her words of a few moments before. With a mother's instinct she had divined at once the reason for the visit, though no warning thought crossed the mind of the girl, who placed a chair for their visitor with a heartiness which was real--was not this the white man she had saved from death in the snow a year ago? Her heart was soft towards the life she had kept in the world. She smiled at him, all the anger gone from her eyes, and there was almost a touch of tender anxiety in her voice as she said "What brought you out in this blizzard? It wasn't safe. It doesn't seem possible you got here from the Portage."

The huge ranchman and auctioneer laughed cheerily. "Once lost, twice get there," he exclaimed, with a quizzical toss of the head, thinking he had said a good thing. "It's a year ago to the very day that I was lost out back"--he jerked a thumb over his shoulder--"and you picked me up and brought me in; and what was I to do but come out on the anniversary and say thank you? I'd fixed up all year to come to you, and I wasn't to be stopped, 'cause it was like the day we first met, old Coldmaker hitting the world with his whips of frost, and shaking his ragged blankets of snow over the wild west."

"Just such a day," said the Indian woman after a pause. Pauline remained silent, placing a little bottle of cordial before their visitor, with which he presently regaled himself, raising his glass with an air.

"Many happy returns to us both!" he said, and threw the liquor down his throat, smacked his lips, and drew his hand down his great moustache and beard like some vast animal washing its face with its paw. Smiling and yet not at ease, he looked at the two women and nodded his head encouragingly, but whether the encouragement was for himself or for them he could not have told.

His last words, however, had altered the situation. The girl had caught at a suggestion in them which startled her. This rough white plainsman was come to make love to her, and to say--what? He was at once awkward and confident, afraid of her, of her refinement, grace, beauty, and education, and yet confident in the advantage of his position, a white man bending to a half-breed girl. He was not conscious of the condescension and majesty of his demeanour, but it was there, and his untutored words and ways must make it all too apparent to the girl. The revelation of the moment made her at once triumphant and humiliated. This white man had come to make love to her, that was apparent; but that he, ungrammatical, crude, and rough, should think he had but to put out his hand, and she in whom every subtle emotion and influence had delicate response, whose words and ways were as far removed from his as day from night, would fly to him, brought the flush of indignation to her cheek. She responded to his toast with a pleasant nod, however, and said:

"But if you will keep coming in such wild storms, there will not be many anniversaries." Laughing, she poured out another glass of liquor for him.

"Well, now, p'r'aps you're right, and so the only thing to do is not to keep coming, but to stay--stay right where you are."

The Indian woman could not see her daughter's face, which was turned to the fire, but she herself smiled at John Alloway, and nodded her head approvingly. Here was the cure for her own trouble and loneliness. Pauline and she, who lived in different worlds, and yet were tied to each other by circumstances they could not control, would each work out her own destiny after her own nature, since John Alloway had come a-wooing. She would go back on the Warais, and Pauline would remain at the Portage, a white woman with her white man. She would go back to the smoky fires in the huddled lodges; to the venison stew and the snake dance; to the feasts of the Medicine Men, and the long sleeps in the summer days, and the winter's tales, and be at rest among her own people; and Pauline would have revenge of the wife of the prancing Reeve, and perhaps the people would forget who her mother was.

With these thoughts flying through her sluggish mind, she rose and moved heavily from the room, with a parting look of encouragement at Alloway, as though to say, a man that is bold is surest.

With her back to the man, Pauline watched her mother leave the room, saw the look she gave Alloway. When the door was closed she turned and looked Alloway in the eyes.

"How old are you?" she asked suddenly.

He stirred in his seat nervously. "Why, fifty, about," he answered with confusion.

"Then you'll be wise not to go looking for anniversaries in blizzards, when they're few at the best," she said with a gentle and dangerous smile.

"Fifty-why, I'm as young as most men of thirty," he responded with an uncertain laugh. "I'd have come here to-day if it had been snowing pitchforks and chain-lightning. I made up my mind I would. You saved my life, that's dead sure; and I'd be down among the moles if it wasn't for you and that Piegan pony of yours. Piegan ponies are wonders in a storm--seem to know their way by instinct. You, too--why, I bin on the plains all my life, and was no better than a baby that day; but you--why, you had Piegan in you, why, yes--"

He stopped short for a moment, checked by the look in her face, then went blindly on: "And you've got Blackfoot in you, too; and you just felt your way through the tornado and over the blind prairie like a bird reaching for the hills. It was as easy to you as picking out a moverick in a bunch of steers to me. But I never could make out what you was doing on the prairie that terrible day. I've thought of it a hundred times. What was you doing, if it ain't cheek to ask?"

"I was trying to lose a life," she answered quietly, her eyes dwelling on his face, yet not seeing him; for it all came back on her, the agony which had driven her out into the tempest to be lost evermore.

He laughed. "Well, now, that's good," he said; "that's what they call speaking sarcastic. You was out to save, and not to lose, a life; that was proved to the satisfaction of the court." He paused and chuckled to himself, thinking he had been witty, and continued: "And I was that court, and my judgment was that the debt of that life you saved had to be paid to you within one calendar year, with interest at the usual per cent for mortgages on good security. That was my judgment, and there's no appeal from it. I am the great Justinian in this case."

"Did you ever save anybody's life?" she asked, putting the bottle of cordial away, as he filled his glass for the third time.

"Twice certain, and once dividin' the honours," he answered, pleased at the question.

"And did you expect to get any pay, with or without interest?" she added.

"Me? I never thought of it again. But yes--by gol, I did! One case was funny, as funny can be. It was Ricky Wharton over on the Muskwat River. I saved his life right enough, and he came to me a year after and said, You saved my life, now what are you going to do with it? I'm stony broke. I owe a hundred dollars, and I wouldn't be owing it if you hadn't saved my life. When you saved it I was five hunderd to the good, and

I'd have left that much behind me. Now I'm on the rocks, because you insisted on saving my life; and you just got to take care of me.'

'I insisted!' Well, that knocked me silly, and I took him on--blame me, if I didn't keep Ricky a whole year, till he went north looking for gold. Get pay--why, I paid! Saving life has its responsibilities, little gal."

"You can't save life without running some risk yourself, not as a rule, can you?" she said, shrinking from his familiarity.

"Not as a rule," he replied. "You took on a bit of risk with me, you and your Piegan pony."

"Oh, I was young," she responded, leaning over the table, and drawing faces on a piece of paper before her. "I could take more risks, I was only nineteen!"

"I don't catch on," he rejoined. "If it's sixteen or--"

"Or fifty," she interposed.

"What difference does it make? If you're done for, it's the same at nineteen as fifty, and vicey-versey."

"No, it's not the same," she answered. "You leave so much more that you want to keep, when you go at fifty."

"Well, I dunno. I never thought of that."

"There's all that has belonged to you. You've been married, and have children, haven't you?"

He started, frowned, then straightened himself. "I got one girl--she's east with her grandmother," he said jerkily.

"That's what I said; there's more to leave behind at fifty," she replied, a red spot on each cheek. She was not looking at him, but at the face of a man on the paper before her--a young man with abundant hair, a strong chin, and big, eloquent eyes; and all around his face she had drawn the face of a girl many times, and beneath the faces of both she was writing Manette and Julien.

The water was getting too deep for John Alloway.

He floundered towards the shore. "I'm no good at words," he said--"no good at argyment; but I've got a gift for stories--round the fire of a night, with a pipe and a tin basin of tea; so I'm not going to try and match you. You've had a good education down at Winnipeg. Took every prize, they say, and led the school, though there was plenty of fuss because they let you do it, and let you stay there, being half-Indian. You never heard what was going on outside, I s'pose. It didn't matter, for you won out. Blamed foolishness, trying to draw the line between red and white that way. Of course, it's the women always, always the women, striking out for all-white or nothing. Down there at Portage they've

treated you mean, mean as dirt. The Reeve's wife--well, we'll fix that up all right. I guess John Alloway ain't to be bluffed. He knows too much and they all know he knows enough. When John Alloway, 32 Main Street, with a ranch on the Katanay, says, 'We're coming--Mr. and Mrs. John Alloway is coming,' they'll get out their cards visite, I guess."

Pauline's head bent lower, and she seemed laboriously etching lines into the faces before her--Manette and Julien, Julien and Manette; and there came into her eyes the youth and light and gaiety of the days when Julien came of an afternoon and the riverside rang with laughter; the dearest, lightest days she had ever spent.

The man of fifty went on, seeing nothing but a girl over whom he was presently going to throw the lasso of his affection, and take her home with him, yielding and glad, a white man, and his half-breed girl--but such a half-breed!

"I seen enough of the way some of them women treated you," he continued, "and I sez to myself, Her turn next. There's a way out, I sez, and John Alloway pays his debts. When the anniversary comes round I'll put things right, I sez to myself. She saved my life, and she shall have the rest of it, if she'll take it, and will give a receipt in full, and open a new account in the name of John and Pauline Alloway. Catch it? See--Pauline?"

Slowly she got to her feet. There was a look in her eyes such as had been in her mother's a little while before, but a hundred times intensified: a look that belonged to the flood and flow of generations of Indian life, yet controlled in her by the order and understanding of centuries of white men's lives, the pervasive, dominating power of race.

For an instant she kept her eyes towards the window. The storm had suddenly ceased, and a glimmer of sunset light was breaking over the distant wastes of snow.

"You want to pay a debt you think you owe," she said, in a strange, lustreless voice, turning to him at last. "Well, you have paid it. You have given me a book to read which I will keep always. And I give you a receipt in full for your debt."

"I don't know about any book," he answered dazedly. "I want to marry you right away."

"I am sorry, but it is not necessary," she replied suggestively. Her face was very pale now.

"But I want to. It ain't a debt. That was only a way of putting it. I want to make you my wife. I got some position, and I can make the West sit up, and look at you and be glad."

Suddenly her anger flared out, low and vivid and fierce, but her words were slow and measured. "There is no reason why I should marry you--not one. You offer me marriage as a prince might give a penny to a beggar.

If my mother were not an Indian woman, you would not have taken it all as a matter of course. But my father was a white man, and I am a white man's daughter, and I would rather marry an Indian, who would think me the best thing there was in the light of the sun, than marry you. Had I been pure white you would not have been so sure, you would have asked, not offered. I am not obliged to you. You ought to go to no woman as you came to me. See, the storm has stopped. You will be quite safe going back now. The snow will be deep, perhaps, but it is not far."

She went to the window, got his cap and gloves, and handed them to him. He took them, dumbfounded and overcome.

"Say, I ain't done it right, mebbe, but I meant well, and I'd be good to you and proud of you, and I'd love you better than anything I ever saw," he said shamefacedly, but eagerly and honestly too.

"Ah, you should have said those last words first," she answered.

"I say them now."

"They come too late; but they would have been too late in any case," she added. "Still, I am glad you said them."

She opened the door for him.

"I made a mistake," he urged humbly. "I understand better now. I never had any schoolin'."

"Oh, it isn't that," she answered gently. "Goodbye."

Suddenly he turned. "You're right--it couldn't ever be," he said. "You're--you're great. And I owe you my life still."

He stepped out into the biting air.

For a moment Pauline stood motionless in the middle of the room, her gaze fixed upon the door which had just closed; then, with a wild gesture of misery and despair, she threw herself upon the couch in a passionate outburst of weeping. Sobs shook her from head to foot, and her hands, clenched above her head, twitched convulsively.

Presently the door opened and her mother looked in eagerly. At what she saw her face darkened and hardened for an instant, but then the girl's utter abandonment of grief and agony convinced and conquered her. Some glimmer of the true understanding of the problem which Pauline represented got into her heart, and drove the sullen selfishness from her face and eyes and mind. She came over heavily and, sinking upon her knees, swept an arm around the girl's shoulder. She realised what had happened, and probably this was the first time in her life that she had ever come by instinct to a revelation of her daughter's mind, or of the faithful meaning of incidents of their lives.

"You said no to John Alloway," she murmured. Defiance and protest spoke

in the swift gesture of the girl's hands. "You think because he was white that I'd drop into his arms! No--no--no!"

"You did right, little one."

The sobs suddenly stopped, and the girl seemed to listen with all her body. There was something in her Indian mother's voice she had never heard before--at least, not since she was a little child, and swung in a deer-skin hammock in a tamarac tree by Renton's Lodge, where the chiefs met, and the West paused to rest on its onward march. Something of the accents of the voice that crooned to her then was in the woman's tones now.

"He offered it like a lump of sugar to a bird--I know. He didn't know that you have great blood--yes, but it is true. My man's grandfather, he was of the blood of the kings of England. My man had the proof. And for a thousand years my people have been chiefs. There is no blood in all the West like yours. My heart was heavy, and dark thoughts came to me, because my man is gone, and the life is not my life, and I am only an Indian woman from the Warais, and my heart goes out there always now. But some great Medicine has been poured into my heart. As I stood at the door and saw you lying there, I called to the Sun. 'O great Spirit,' I said, 'help me to understand; for this girl is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, and Evil has come between us!' And the Sun Spirit poured the Medicine into my spirit, and there is no cloud between us now. It has passed away, and I see. Little white one, the white life is the only life, and I will live it with you till a white man comes and gives you a white man's home. But not John Alloway--shall the crow nest with the oriole?"

As the woman spoke with slow, measured voice, full of the cadences of a heart revealing itself, the girl's breath at first seemed to stop, so still she lay; then, as the true understanding of the words came to her, she panted with excitement, her breast heaved, and the blood flushed her face. When the slow voice ceased, and the room became still, she lay quiet for a moment, letting the new thing find secure lodgment in her thought; then, suddenly, she raised herself and threw her arms round her mother in a passion of affection.

"Lalika! O mother Lalika!" she said tenderly, and kissed her again and again. Not since she was a little girl, long before they left the Warais, had she called her mother by her Indian name, which her father had humorously taught her to do in those far-off happy days by the beautiful, singing river and the exquisite woods, when, with a bow and arrow, she had ranged a young Diana who slew only with love.

"Lalika, mother Lalika, it is like the old, old times," she added softly. "Ah, it does not matter now, for you understand!"

"I do not understand altogether," murmured the Indian woman gently. "I am not white, and there is a different way of thinking; but I will hold your hand, and we will live the white life together."

Cheek to cheek they saw the darkness come, and, afterwards, the silver moon steal up over a frozen world, in which the air bit like steel and braced the heart like wine. Then, at last, before it was nine o'clock, after her custom, the Indian woman went to bed, leaving her daughter brooding peacefully by the fire.

For a long time Pauline sat with hands clasped in her lap, her gaze on the tossing flames, in her heart and mind a new feeling of strength and purpose. The way before her was not clear, she saw no further than this day, and all that it had brought; yet she was as one that has crossed a direful flood and finds herself on a strange shore in an unknown country, with the twilight about her, yet with so much of danger passed that there was only the thought of the moment's safety round her, the camp-fire to be lit, and the bed to be made under the friendly trees and stars.

For a half-hour she sat so, and then, suddenly, she raised her head listening, leaning towards the window, through which the moonlight streamed. She heard her name called without, distinct and strange-- "Pauline! Pauline!"

Starting up, she ran to the door and opened it. All was silent and cruelly cold. Nothing but the wide plain of snow and the steely air. But as she stood intently listening, the red glow from the fire behind her, again came the cry--"Pauline!" not far away. Her heart beat hard, and she raised her head and called--why was it she should call out in a language not her own? "Qu'appelle? Qu'appelle?"

And once again on the still night air came the trembling appeal-- "Pauline!"

"Qu'appelle? Qu'appelle?" she cried, then, with a gasping murmur of understanding and recognition she ran forwards in the frozen night towards the sound of the voice. The same intuitive sense which had made her call out in French, without thought or reason, had revealed to her who it was that called; or was it that even in the one word uttered there was the note of a voice always remembered since those days with Manette at Winnipeg?

Not far away from the house, on the way to Portage la Drome, but a little distance from the road, was a crevasse, and towards this she sped, for once before an accident had happened there. Again the voice called as she sped--"Pauline!" and she cried out that she was coming. Presently she stood above the declivity, and peered over. Almost immediately below her, a few feet down, was a man lying in the snow. He had strayed from the obliterated road, and had fallen down the crevasse, twisting his foot cruelly. Unable to walk he had crawled several hundred yards in the snow, but his strength had given out, and then he had called to the house, on whose dark windows flickered the flames of the fire, the name of the girl he had come so far to see. With a cry of joy and pain at once she recognised him now. It was as her heart had said--it was Julien, Manette's brother. In a moment she was beside him, her arm around his shoulder.

"Pauline!" he said feebly, and fainted in her arms. An instant later she was speeding to the house, and, rousing her mother and two of the stablemen, she snatched a flask of brandy from a cupboard and hastened back.

An hour later Julien Labrosse lay in the great sitting-room beside the fire, his foot and ankle bandaged, and at ease, his face alight with all that had brought him there. And once again the Indian mother with a sure instinct knew why he had come, and saw that now her girl would have a white woman's home, and, for her man, one of the race like her father's race, white and conquering.

"I'm sorry to give trouble," Julien said, laughing--he had a trick of laughing lightly; "but I'll be able to get back to the Portage to-morrow."

To this the Indian mother said, however: "To please yourself is a great thing, but to please others is better; and so you will stay here till you can walk back to the Portage, M'sieu' Julien."

"Well, I've never been so comfortable," he said--"never so--happy. If you don't mind the trouble!" The Indian woman nodded pleasantly, and found an excuse to leave the room. But before she went she contrived to place near his elbow one of the scraps of paper on which Pauline had drawn his face, with that of Manette. It brought a light of hope and happiness into his eyes, and he thrust the paper under the fur robes of the couch.

"What are you doing with your life?" Pauline asked him, as his eyes sought hers a few moments later.

"Oh, I have a big piece of work before me," he answered eagerly, "a great chance--to build a bridge over the St. Lawrence, and I'm only thirty! I've got my start. Then, I've made over the old Seigneury my father left me, and I'm going to live in it. It will be a fine place, when I've done with it--comfortable and big, with old oak timbers and walls, and deep fireplaces, and carvings done in the time of Louis Quinze, and dark red velvet curtains for the drawingroom, and skins and furs. Yes, I must have skins and furs like these here." He smoothed the skins with his hand.

"Manette, she will live with you?" Pauline asked. "Oh no, her husband wouldn't like that. You see, Manette is to be married. She told me to tell you all about it."

He told her all there was to tell of Manette's courtship, and added that the wedding would take place in the spring.

"Manette wanted it when the leaves first flourish and the birds come back," he said gaily; "and so she's not going to live with me at the Seigneury, you see. No, there it is, as fine a house, good enough for a prince, and I shall be there alone, unless--"

His eyes met hers, and he caught the light that was in them, before the eyelids drooped over them and she turned her head to the fire. "But the spring is two months off yet," he added.

"The spring?" she asked, puzzled, yet half afraid to speak.

"Yes, I'm going into my new house when Manette goes into her new house-- in the spring. And I won't go alone if--"

He caught her eyes again, but she rose hurriedly and said: "You must sleep now. Good-night." She held out her hand.

"Well, I'll tell you the rest to-morrow-to-morrow night when it's quiet like this, and the stars shine," he answered. "I'm going to have a home of my own like this--ah, bien sur, Pauline."

That night the old Indian mother prayed to the Sun. "O great Spirit," she said, "I give thanks for the Medicine poured into my heart. Be good to my white child when she goes with her man to the white man's home far away. O great Spirit, when I return to the lodges of my people, be kind to me, for I shall be lonely; I shall not have my child; I shall not hear my white man's voice. Give me good Medicine, O Sun and great Father, till my dream tells me that my man comes from over the hills for me once more."

THE STAKE AND THE PLUMB-LINE

She went against all good judgment in marrying him; she cut herself off from her own people, from the life in which she had been an alluring and beautiful figure. Washington had never had two such seasons as those in which she moved; for the diplomatic circle who had had "the run of the world" knew her value, and were not content without her. She might have made a brilliant match with one ambassador thirty years older than herself--she was but twenty-two; and there were at least six attaches and secretaries of legation who entered upon a tournament for her heart and hand; but she was not for them. All her fine faculties of tact and fairness, of harmless strategy, and her gifts of wit and unexpected humour were needed to keep her cavaliers constant and hopeful to the last; but she never faltered, and she did not fail. The faces of old men brightened when they saw her, and one or two ancient figures who, for years, had been seldom seen at social functions now came when they knew she was to be present. There were, of course, a few women who said she would coquette with any male from nine to ninety; but no man ever said so; and there was none, from first to last, but smiled with pleasure at even the mention of her name, so had her vivacity, intelligence, and fine sympathy conquered them. She was a social artist by instinct. In their hearts they all recognised how fair and impartial she was; and she drew out of every man the best that was in him. The few women who did not

like her said that she chattered; but the truth was she made other people talk by swift suggestion or delicate interrogation.

After the blow fell, Freddy Hartzman put the matter succinctly, and told the truth faithfully, when he said, "The first time I met her, I told her all I'd ever done that could be told, and all I wanted to do; including a resolve to carry her off to some desert place and set up a Kingdom of Two. I don't know how she did it. I was like a tap, and poured myself out; and when it was all over, I thought she was the best talker I'd ever heard. But yet she'd done nothing except look at me and listen, and put in a question here and there, that was like a baby asking to see your watch. Oh, she was a lily-flower, was Sally Seabrook, and I've never been sorry I told her all my little story! It did me good. Poor darling--it makes me sick sometimes when I think of it. Yet she'll win out all right--a hundred to one she'll win out. She was a star."

Freddy Hartzman was in an embassy of repute; he knew the chancelleries and salons of many nations, and was looked upon as one of the ablest and shrewdest men in the diplomatic service. He had written one of the best books on international law in existence, he talked English like a native, he had published a volume of delightful verse, and had omitted to publish several others, including a tiny volume which Sally Seabrook's charms had inspired him to write. His view of her was shared by most men who knew the world, and especially by the elderly men who had a real knowledge of human nature, among whom was a certain important member of the United States executive called John Appleton. When the end of all things at Washington came for Sally, these two men united to bear her up, that her feet should not stumble upon the stony path of the hard journey she had undertaken.

Appleton was not a man of much speech, but his words had weight; for he was not only a minister; he came of an old family which had ruled the social destinies of a state, and had alternately controlled and disturbed its politics. On the day of the sensation, in the fiery cloud of which Sally disappeared, Appleton delivered himself of his mind in the matter at a reception given by the President.

"She will come back--and we will all take her back, be glad to have her back," he said. "She has the grip of a lever which can lift the eternal hills with the right pressure. Leave her alone--leave her alone. This is a democratic country, and she'll prove democracy a success before she's done."

The world knew that John Appleton had offered her marriage, and he had never hidden the fact. What they did not know was that she had told him what she meant to do before she did it. He had spoken to her plainly, bluntly, then with a voice that was blurred and a little broken, urging her against the course towards which she was set; but it had not availed; and, realising that he had come upon a powerful will underneath the sunny and so human surface, he had ceased to protest, to bear down upon her mind with his own iron force. When he realised that all his reasoning was wasted, that all worldly argument was vain, he made one last attempt, a forlorn hope, as though to put upon record what he believed to be the

truth.

"There is no position you cannot occupy," he said. "You have the perfect gift in private life, and you have a public gift. You have a genius for ruling. Say, my dear, don't wreck it all. I know you are not for me, but there are better men in the country than I am. Hartzman will be a great man one day--he wants you. Young Tilden wants you; he has millions, and he will never disgrace them or you, the power which they can command, and the power which you have. And there are others. Your people have told you they will turn you off; the world will say things--will rend you. There is nothing so popular for the moment as the fall of a favourite. But that's nothing--it's nothing at all compared with the danger to yourself. I didn't sleep last night thinking of it. Yet I'm glad you wrote me; it gave me time to think, and I can tell you the truth as I see it. Haven't you thought that he will drag you down, down, down, wear out your soul, break and sicken your life, destroy your beauty--you are beautiful, my dear, beyond what the world sees, even. Give it up--ah, give it up, and don't break our hearts! There are too many people loving you for you to sacrifice them--and yourself, too. . . . You've had such a good time!"

"It's been like a dream," she interrupted, in a faraway voice, "like a dream, these two years."

"And it's been such a good dream," he urged; "and you will only go to a bad one, from which you will never wake. The thing has fastened on him; he will never give it up. And penniless, too--his father has cast him off. My girl, it's impossible. Listen to me. There's no one on earth that would do more for you than I would--no one."

"Dear, dear friend!" she cried with a sudden impulse, and caught his hand in hers and kissed it before he could draw it back. "You are so true, and you think you are right. But, but"--her eyes took on a deep, steady, far-away look--"but I will save him; and we shall not be penniless in the end. Meanwhile I have seven hundred dollars a year of my own. No one can touch that. Nothing can change me now--and I have promised."

When he saw her fixed determination, he made no further protest, but asked that he might help her, be with her the next day, when she was to take a step which the wise world would say must lead to sorrow and a miserable end.

The step she took was to marry Jim Templeton, the drunken, cast-off son of a millionaire senator from Kentucky, who controlled railways, and owned a bank, and had so resented his son's inebriate habits that for five years he had never permitted Jim's name to be mentioned in his presence. Jim had had twenty thousand dollars left him by his mother, and a small income of three hundred dollars from an investment which had been made for him when a little boy. And this had carried him on; for, drunken as he was, he had sense enough to eke out the money, limiting himself to three thousand dollars a year. He had four thousand dollars left, and his tiny income of three hundred, when he went to Sally

Seabrook, after having been sober for a month, and begged her to marry him.

Before dissipation had made him look ten years older than he was, there had been no handsomer man in all America. Even yet he had a remarkable face; long, delicate, with dark brown eyes, as fair a forehead as man could wish, and black, waving hair, streaked with grey-grey, though he was but twenty-nine years of age.

When Sally was fifteen and he twenty-two, he had fallen in love with her and she with him; and nothing had broken the early romance. He had captured her young imagination, and had fastened his image on her heart. Her people, seeing the drift of things, had sent her to a school on the Hudson, and the two did not meet for some time. Then came a stolen interview, and a fastening of the rivets of attraction--for Jim had gifts of a wonderful kind. He knew his Horace and Anacreon and Heine and Lamartine and Dante in the originals, and a hundred others; he was a speaker of power and grace; and he had a clear, strong head for business. He was also a lawyer, and was junior attorney to his father's great business. It was because he had the real business gift, not because he had a brilliant and scholarly mind, that his father had taken him into his concerns, and was the more unforgiving when he gave way to temptation. Otherwise, he would have pensioned Jim off, and dismissed him from his mind as a useless, insignificant person; for Horace, Anacreon, and philosophy and history were to him the recreations of the feeble-minded. He had set his heart on Jim, and what Jim could do and would do by and by in the vast financial concerns he controlled, when he was ready to slip out and down; but Jim had disappointed him beyond calculation.

In the early days of their association Jim had left his post and taken to drink at critical moments in their operations. At first, high words had been spoken; then there came the strife of two dissimilar natures, and both were headstrong, and each proud and unrelenting in his own way. Then, at last, had come the separation, irrevocable and painful; and Jim had flung out into the world, a drunkard, who, sober for a fortnight or a month, or three months, would afterward go off on a spree, in which he quoted Sappho and Horace in taverns, and sang bacchanalian songs with a voice meant for the stage--a heritage from an ancestor who had sung upon the English stage a hundred years before. Even in his cups, even after his darling vice had submerged him, Jim Templeton was a man marked out from his fellows, distinguished and very handsome. Society, however, had ceased to recognise him for a long time, and he did not seek it. For two or three years he practised law now and then. He took cases, preferably criminal cases, for which very often he got no pay; but that, too, ceased at last. Now, in his quiet, sober intervals he read omnivorously, and worked out problems in physics for which he had a taste, until the old appetite surged over him again. Then his spirits rose, and he was the old brilliant talker, the joyous galliard until, in due time, he became silently and lethargically drunk.

In one of his sober intervals he had met Sally Seabrook in the street. It was the first time in four years, for he had avoided her, and though

she had written to him once or twice, he had never answered her--shame was in his heart. Yet all the time the old song was in Sally's ears.

Jim Templeton had touched her in some distant and intimate corner of her nature where none other had reached; and in all her gay life, when men had told their tale of admiration in their own way, her mind had gone back to Jim, and what he had said under the magnolia trees; and his voice had drowned all others. She was not blind to what he had become, but a deep belief possessed her that she, of all the world, could save him. She knew how futile it would look to the world, how wild a dream it looked even to her own heart, how perilous it was; but, play upon the surface of things as she had done so much and so often in her brief career, she was seized of convictions having origin, as it might seem, in something beyond herself.

So when she and Jim met in the street, the old true thing rushed upon them both, and for a moment they stood still and looked at each other. As they might look who say farewell forever, so did each dwell upon the other's face. That was the beginning of the new epoch. A few days more, and Jim came to her and said that she alone could save him; and she meant him to say it, had led him to the saying, for the same conviction was burned deep in her own soul. She knew the awful risk she was taking, that the step must mean social ostracism, and that her own people would be no kinder to her than society; but she gasped a prayer, smiled at Jim as though all were well, laid her plans, made him promise her one thing on his knees, and took the plunge.

Her people did as she expected. She was threatened with banishment from heart and home--with disinheritance; but she pursued her course; and the only person who stood with her and Jim at the altar was John Appleton, who would not be denied, and who had such a half-hour with Jim before the ceremony as neither of them forgot in the years that the locust ate thereafter. And, standing at the altar, Jim's eyes were still wet, with new resolves in his heart and a being at his side meant for the best man in the world. As he knelt beside her, awaiting the benediction, a sudden sense of the enormity of this act came upon him, and for her sake he would have drawn back then, had it not been too late. He realised that it was a crime to put this young, beautiful life in peril; that his own life was a poor, contemptible thing, and that he had been possessed of the egotism of the selfish and the young.

But the thing was done, and a new life was begun. Before they were launched upon it, however, before society had fully grasped the sensation, or they had left upon their journey to northern Canada, where Sally intended they should work out their problem and make their home, far and free from all old associations, a curious thing happened. Jim's father sent an urgent message to Sally to come to him. When she came, he told her she was mad, and asked her why she had thrown her life away.

"Why have you done it?" he said. "You--you knew all about him; you might have married the best man in the country. You could rule a kingdom; you have beauty and power, and make people do what you want: and you've got a sot."

"He is your son," she answered quietly.

She looked so beautiful and so fine as she stood there, fearless and challenging before him, that he was moved. But he would not show it.

"He was my son--when he was a man," he retorted grimly.

"He is the son of the woman you once loved," she answered.

The old man turned his head away.

"What would she have said to what you did to Jim?" He drew himself around sharply. Her dagger had gone home, but he would not let her know it.

"Leave her out of the question--she was a saint," he said roughly.

"She cannot be left out; nor can you. He got his temperament naturally; he inherited his weakness from your grandfather, from her father. Do you think you are in no way responsible?"

He was silent for a moment, but then said stubbornly: "Why--why have you done it? What's between him and me can't be helped; we are father and son; but you--you had no call, no responsibility."

"I love Jim. I always loved him, ever since I can remember, as you did. I see my way ahead. I will not desert him. No one cares what happens to him, no one but me. Your love wouldn't stand the test; mine will."

"Your folks have disinherited you,--you have almost nothing, and I will not change my mind. What do you see ahead of you?"

"Jim--only Jim--and God."

Her eyes were shining, her hands were clasped together at her side in the tenseness of her feeling, her indomitable spirit spoke in her face.

Suddenly the old man brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"It's a crime--oh, it's a crime, to risk your life so! You ought to have been locked up. I'd have done it."

"Listen to me," she rejoined quietly. "I know the risk. But do you think that I could have lived my life out, feeling that I might have saved Jim, and didn't try? You talk of beauty and power and ruling--you say what others have said to me. Which is the greater thing, to get what pleases one, or to work for something which is more to one than all else in the world? To save one life, one intellect, one great man--oh, he has the making of a great man in him!--to save a soul, would not life be well lost, would not love be well spent in doing it?"

"Love's labour lost," said the old man slowly, cynically, but not without emotion.

"I have ambition," she continued. "No girl was ever more ambitious, but my ambition is to make the most and best of myself. Place?--Jim and I will hold it yet. Power?--it shall be as it must be; but Jim and I will work for it to fulfil ourselves. For me--ah, if I can save him--and I mean to do so--do you think that I would not then have my heaven on earth? You want money--money--money, power, and to rule; and these are to you the best things in the world. I make my choice differently, though I would have these other things if I could; and I hope I shall. But Jim first--Jim first, your son, Jim--my husband, Jim."

The old man got to his feet slowly. She had him at bay. "But you are great," he said, "great! It is an awful stake--awful. Yet if you win, you'll have what money can't buy. And listen to me. We'll make the stake bigger. It will give it point, too, in another way. If you keep Jim sober for four years from the day of your marriage, on the last day of that four years I'll put in your hands for you and him, or for your child--if you have one--five millions of dollars. I am a man of my word. While Jim drinks I won't take him back; he's disinherited. I'll give him nothing now or hereafter. Save him for four years,--if he can do that he will do all, and there's five millions as sure as the sun's in heaven. Amen and amen."

He opened the door. There was a strange soft light in her eyes as she came to go.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" she said, looking at him whimsically.

He was disconcerted. She did not wait, but reached up and kissed him on the cheek. "Good-by," she said with a smile. "We'll win the stake. Good-by."

An instant, and she was gone. He shut the door, then turned and looked in a mirror on the wall. Abstractedly he touched the cheek she had kissed. Suddenly a change passed over his face. He dropped in a chair, and his fist struck the table as he said: "By God, she may do it, she may do it! But it's life and death--it's life and death."

Society had its sensation, and then the veil dropped. For a long time none looked behind it except Jim's father. He had too much at stake not to have his telescope upon them. A detective followed them to keep Jim's record. But this they did not know.

II

From the day they left Washington Jim put his life and his fate in his wife's hands. He meant to follow her judgment, and, self-willed and strong in intellect as he was, he said that she should have a fair chance of fulfilling her purpose. There had been many pour parlors as to what Jim should do. There was farming. She set that aside, because it meant capital, and it also meant monotony and loneliness; and capital was

limited, and monotony and loneliness were bad for Jim, deadening an active brain which must not be deprived of stimulants--stimulants of a different sort, however, from those which had heretofore mastered it. There was the law. But Jim would have to become a citizen of Canada, change his flag, and where they meant to go--to the outskirts--there would be few opportunities for the law; and with not enough to do there would be danger. Railway construction? That seemed good in many ways, but Jim had not the professional knowledge necessary; his railway experience with his father had only been financial. Above all else he must have responsibility, discipline, and strict order in his life.

"Something that will be good for my natural vanity, and knock the nonsense out of me," Jim agreed, as they drew farther and farther away from Washington and the past, and nearer and nearer to the Far North and their future. Never did two more honest souls put their hands in each other's, and set forth upon the thorniest path to a goal which was their hearts' desire. Since they had become one, there had come into Sally's face that illumination which belongs only to souls possessed of an idea greater than themselves, outside themselves--saints, patriots; faces which have been washed in the salt tears dropped for others' sorrows, and lighted by the fire of self-sacrifice. Sally Seabrook, the high-spirited, the radiant, the sweetly wilful, the provoking, to concentrate herself upon this narrow theme--to reconquer the lost paradise of one vexed mortal soul!

What did Jim's life mean?--It was only one in the millions coming and going, and every man must work out his own salvation. Why should she cramp her soul to this one issue, when the same soul could spend itself upon the greater motives and in the larger circle? A wide world of influence had opened up before her; position, power, adulation, could all have been hers, as John Appleton and Jim's father had said. She might have moved in well-trodden ways, through gardens of pleasure, lived a life where all would be made easy, where she would be shielded at every turn, and her beauty would be flattered by luxury into a constant glow. She was not so primitive, so unintellectual, as not to have thought of this, else her decision would have had less importance; she would have been no more than an infatuated emotional woman with a touch of second class drama in her nature. She had thought of it all, and she had made her choice. The easier course was the course for meaner souls, and she had not one vein of thin blood nor a small idea in her whole nature. She had a heart and mind for great issues. She believed that Jim had a great brain, and would and could accomplish great things. She knew that he had in him the strain of hereditary instinct--his mother's father had ended a brief life in a drunken duel on the Mississippi, and Jim's boyhood had never had discipline or direction, or any strenuous order. He might never acquire order, and the power that order and habit and the daily iteration of necessary thoughts and acts bring; but the prospect did not appal her. She had taken the risk with her eyes wide open; had set her own life and happiness in the hazard. But Jim must be saved, must be what his talents, his genius, entitled him to be. And the long game must have the long thought.

So, as they drew into the great Saskatchewan Valley, her hand in his,

and hope in his eyes, and such a look of confidence and pride in her as brought back his old strong beauty of face, and smoothed the careworn lines of self-indulgence, she gave him his course: as a private he must join the North-West Mounted Police, the red-coated riders of the plains, and work his way up through every stage of responsibility, beginning at the foot of the ladder of humbleness and self-control. She believed that he would agree with her proposal; but her hands clasped his a little more firmly and solicitously--there was a faint, womanly fear at her heart--as she asked him if he would do it. The life meant more than occasional separation; it meant that there would be periods when she would not be with him; and there was great danger in that; but she knew that the risks must be taken, and he must not be wholly reliant on her presence for his moral strength.

His face fell for a moment when she made the suggestion, but it cleared presently, and he said with a dry laugh: "Well, I guess they must make me a sergeant pretty quick. I'm a colonel in the Kentucky Carbineers!"

She laughed, too; then a moment afterwards, womanlike, wondered if she was right, and was a little frightened. But that was only because she was not self-opinionated, and was anxious, more anxious than any woman in all the North.

It happened as Jim said; he was made a sergeant at once--Sally managed that; for, when it came to the point, and she saw the conditions in which the privates lived, and realised that Jim must be one of them and clean out the stables, and groom his horse and the officers' horses, and fetch and carry, her heart failed her, and she thought that she was making her remedy needlessly heroic. So she went to see the Commissioner, who was on a tour of scrutiny on their arrival at the post, and, as better men than he had done in more knowing circles, he fell under her spell. If she had asked for a lieutenantcy, he would probably have corrupted some member of Parliament into securing it for Jim.

But Jim was made a sergeant, and the Commissioner and the captain of the troop kept their eyes on him. So did other members of the troop who did not quite know their man, and attempted, figuratively, to pinch him here and there. They found that his actions were greater than his words, and both were in perfect harmony in the end, though his words often seemed pointless to their minds, until they understood that they had conveyed truths through a medium more like a heliograph than a telephone. By and by they began to understand his heliographing, and, when they did that, they began to swear by him, not at him.

In time it was found that the troop never had a better disciplinarian than Jim. He knew when to shut his eyes, and when to keep them open. To non-essentials he kept his eyes shut; to essentials he kept them very wide open. There were some men of good birth from England and elsewhere among them, and these mostly understood him first. But they all understood Sally from the beginning, and after a little they were glad enough to be permitted to come, on occasion, to the five-roomed little house near the barracks, and hear her talk, then answer her questions, and, as men had done at Washington, open out their hearts to her. They

noticed, however, that while she made them barley-water, and all kinds of soft drinks from citric acid, sarsaparilla and the like, and had one special drink of her own invention, which she called cream-nectar, no spirits were to be had. They also noticed that Jim never drank a drop of liquor, and by and by, one way or another, they got a glimmer of the real truth, before it became known who he really was or anything of his story. And the interest in the two, and in Jim's reformation, spread through the country, while Jim gained reputation as the smartest man in the force.

They were on the outskirts of civilisation; as Jim used to say, "One step ahead of the procession." Jim's duty was to guard the columns of settlement and progress, and to see that every man got his own rights and not more than his rights; that justice should be the plumb-line of march and settlement. His principle was embodied in certain words which he quoted once to Sally from the prophet Amos: "And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline."

On the day that Jim became a lieutenant his family increased by one. It was a girl, and they called her Nancy, after Jim's mother. It was the anniversary of their marriage, and, so far, Jim had won, with what fightings and strugglings and wrestlings of the spirit only Sally and himself knew. And she knew as well as he, and always saw the storm coming before it broke--a restlessness, then a moodiness, then a hungry, eager, helpless look, and afterwards an agony of longing, a feverish desire to break away and get the thrilling thing which would still the demon within him.

There had been moments when his doom seemed certain--he knew and she knew that if he once got drunk again he would fall never to rise. On one occasion, after a hard, long, hungry ride, he was half-mad with desire, but even as he seized the flask that was offered to him by his only enemy, the captain of B Troop, at the next station eastward, there came a sudden call to duty, two hundred Indians having gone upon the war-path. It saved him; it broke the spell. He had to mount and away, with the antidote and stimulant of responsibility driving him on.

Another occasion was equally perilous to his safety. They had been idle for days in a hot week in summer, waiting for orders to return from the rail-head where they had gone to quell a riot, and where drink and hilarity were common. Suddenly--more suddenly than it had ever come, the demon of his thirst had Jim by the throat. Sergeant Sewell, of the grey-stubble head, who loved him more than his sour heart had loved anybody in all his life, was holding himself ready for the physical assault he must make upon his superior officer, if he raised a glass to his lips, when salvation came once again. An accident had occurred far down on the railway line, and the operator of the telegraph-office had that very day been stricken down with pleurisy and pneumonia. In despair the manager had sent to Jim, eagerly hoping that he might help them, for the Riders of the Plains were a sort of court of appeal for every trouble in the Far North.

Instantly Jim was in the saddle with his troop. Out of curiosity he had learned telegraphy when a boy, as he had learned many things, and,

arrived at the scene of the accident, he sent messages and received them--by sound, not on paper as did the official operator, to the amazement and pride of the troop. Then, between caring for the injured in the accident, against the coming of the relief train, and nursing the sick operator through the dark moments of his dangerous illness, he passed a crisis of his own disease triumphantly; but not the last crisis.

So the first and so the second and third years passed in safety.

III

"PLEASE, I want to go, too, Jim."

Jim swung round and caught the child up in his arms. "Say, how dare you call your father Jim--eh, tell me that?"

"It's what mummy calls you--it's pretty."

"I don't call her 'mummy' because you do, and you mustn't call me Jim because she does--do you hear?" The whimsical face lowered a little, then the rare and beautiful dark blue eyes raised slowly, shaded by the long lashes, and the voice said demurely, "Yes--Jim."

"Nancy--Nancy," said a voice from the corner in reproof, mingled with suppressed laughter. "Nancy, you musn't be saucy. You must say 'father' to--"

"Yes, mummy. I'll say father to--Jim."

"You imp--you imp of delight," said Jim, as he strained the dainty little lass to his breast, while she appeared interested in a wave of his black hair, which she curled around her finger.

Sally came forwards with the little parcel of sandwiches she had been preparing, and put them in the saddle-bags lying on a chair at the door, in readiness for the journey Jim was about to make. Her eyes were glistening, and her face had a heightened colour. The three years which had passed since she married had touched her not at all to her disadvantage, rather to her profit. She looked not an hour older; motherhood had only added to her charm, lending it a delightful gravity. The prairie life had given a shining quality to her handsomeness, an air of depth and firmness, an exquisite health and clearness to the colour in her cheeks. Her step was as light as Nancy's, elastic and buoyant--a gliding motion which gave a sinuous grace to the movements of her body. There had also come into her eyes a vigilance such as deaf people possess, a sensitive observation imparting a deeper intelligence to the face.

Here was the only change by which you could guess the story of her life. Her eyes were like the ears of an anxious mother who can never sleep till

every child is abed; whose sense is quick to hear the faintest footstep without or within; and who, as years go on, and her children grow older and older, must still lie awake hearkening for the late footstep on the stair. In Sally's eyes was the story of the past three years: of love and temptation and struggle, of watchfulness and yearning and anxiety, of determination and an inviolable hope. Her eyes had a deeper look than that in Jim's. Now, as she gazed at him, the maternal spirit rose up from the great well of protectiveness in her and engulfed both husband and child. There was always something of the maternal in her eyes when she looked at Jim. He did not see it--he saw only the wonderful blue, and the humour which had helped him over such difficult places these past three years. In steadying and strengthening Jim's will, in developing him from his Southern indolence into Northern industry and sense of responsibility, John Appleton's warnings had rung in Sally's ears, and Freddy Hartzman's forceful and high-minded personality had passed before her eyes with an appeal powerful and stimulating; but always she came to the same upland of serene faith and white-hearted resolve; and Jim became dearer and dearer.

The baby had done much to brace her faith in the future and comfort her anxious present. The child had intelligence of a rare order. She would lie by the half-hour on the floor, turning over the leaves of a book without pictures, and, before she could speak, would read from the pages in a language all her own. She made a fairy world for herself, peopled by characters to whom she gave names, to whom she assigned curious attributes and qualities. They were as real to her as though flesh and blood, and she was never lonely, and never cried; and she had buried herself in her father's heart. She had drawn to her the roughest men in the troop, and for old Sewell, the grim sergeant, she had a specially warm place.

"You can love me if you like," she had said to him at the very start, with the egotism of childhood; but made haste to add, "because I love you, Gri-Gri." She called him Gri-Gri from the first, but they knew only long afterwards that "gri-gri" meant "grey-grey," to signify that she called him after his grizzled hairs.

What she had been in the life-history of Sally and Jim they both knew. Jim regarded her with an almost superstitious feeling. Sally was his strength, his support, his inspiration, his bulwark of defence; Nancy was the charm he wore about his neck--his mascot, he called her. Once, when she was ill, he had suffered as he had never done before in his life. He could not sleep nor eat, and went about his duties like one in a dream. When his struggles against his enemy were fiercest, he kept saying over her name to himself, as though she could help him. Yet always it was Sally's hand he held in the darkest hours, in his brutal moments; for in this fight between appetite and will there are moments when only the animal seems to exist, and the soul disappears in the glare and gloom of the primal emotions. Nancy he called his "lucky sixpence," but he called Sally his "guinea-girl."

From first to last his whimsicality never deserted him. In his worst hours, some innate optimism and humour held him steady in his fight.

It was not depression that possessed him at the worst, but the violence of an appetite most like a raging pain which men may endure with a smile upon their lips. He carried in his face the story of a conflict, the aftermath of bitter experience; and through all there pulsed the glow of experience. He had grown handsomer, and the graceful decision of his figure, the deliberate certainty of every action, heightened the force of a singular personality. As in the eyes of Sally, in his eyes was a long reflective look which told of things overcome, and yet of dangers present. His lips smiled often, but the eyes said: "I have lived, I have seen, I have suffered, and I must suffer more. I have loved, I have been loved under the shadow of the sword. Happiness I have had, and golden hours, but not peace--never peace. My soul has need of peace."

In the greater, deeper experience of their lives, the more material side of existence had grown less and less to them. Their home was a model of simple comfort and some luxury, though Jim had insisted that Sally's income should not be spent, except upon the child, and should be saved for the child, their home being kept on his pay and on the tiny income left by his mother. With the help of an Indian girl, and a half-breed for outdoor work and fires and gardening, Sally had cared for the house herself. Ingenious and tasteful, with a gift for cooking and an educated hand, she had made her little home as pretty as their few possessions would permit. Refinement covered all, and three or four-score books were like so many friends to comfort her when Jim was away; like kind and genial neighbours when he was at home. From Browning she had written down in her long sliding handwriting, and hung up beneath Jim's looking-glass, the heartening and inspiring words:

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

They had lived above the sordid, and there was something in the nature of Jim's life to help them to it. He belonged to a small handful of men who had control over an empire, with an individual responsibility and influence not contained in the scope of their commissions. It was a matter of moral force and character, and of uniform, symbolical only of the great power behind; of the long arm of the State; of the insistence of the law, which did not rely upon force alone, but on the certainty of its administration. In such conditions the smallest brain was bound to expand, to take on qualities of judgment and temperateness which would never be developed in ordinary circumstances. In the case of Jim Templeton, who needed no stimulant to his intellect, but rather a steadying quality, a sense of proportion, the daily routine, the command of men, the diverse nature of his duties, half civil, half military, the personal appeals made on all sides by the people of the country for advice, for help, for settlement of disputes, for information which his well-instructed mind could give--all these modified the romantic brilliance of his intellect, made it and himself more human.

It had not come to him all at once. His intellect at first stood in his

way. His love of paradox, his deep observation, his insight, all made him inherently satirical, though not cruelly so; but satire had become pure whimsicality at last; and he came to see that, on the whole, the world was imperfect, but also, on the whole, was moving towards perfection rather than imperfection. He grew to realise that what seemed so often weakness in men was tendency and idiosyncrasy rather than evil. And in the end he thought better of himself as he came to think better of all others. For he had thought less of all the world because he had thought so little of himself. He had overestimated his own faults, had made them into crimes in his own eyes, and, observing things in others of similar import, had become almost a cynic in intellect, while in heart he had remained, a boy.

In all that he had changed a great deal. His heart was still the heart of a boy, but his intellect had sobered, softened, ripened--even in this secluded and seemingly unimportant life; as Sally had said and hoped it would. Sally's conviction had been right. But the triumph was not yet achieved. She knew it. On occasion the tones of his voice told her, the look that came into his eyes proclaimed it to her, his feverishness and restlessness made it certain. How many a night had she thrown her arm over his shoulder, and sought his hand and held it while in the dark silence, wide-eyed, dry-lipped, and with a throat like fire he had held himself back from falling. There was liquor in the house--the fight would not have been a fight without it. She had determined that he should see his enemy and meet him in the plains and face him down; and he was never many feet away from his possible disaster. Yet for long over three years all had gone well. There was another year. Would he last out the course?

At first the thought of the great stake for which she was playing in terms of currency, with the head of Jim's father on every note, was much with her. The amazing nature of the offer of five millions of dollars stimulated her imagination, roused her; gold coins are counters in the game of success, signs and tokens. Money alone could not have lured her; but rather what it represented--power, width of action, freedom to help when the heart prompted, machinery for carrying out large plans, ability to surround with advantage those whom we love. So, at first, while yet the memories of Washington were much with her, the appeal of the millions was strong. The gallant nature of the contest and the great stake braced her; she felt the blood quicken in her pulse.

But, all through, the other thing really mastered her: the fixed idea that Jim must be saved. As it deepened, the other life that she had lived became like the sports in which we shared when children, full of vivacious memory, shining with impulse and the stir of life, but not to be repeated--days and deeds outgrown. So the light of one idea shone in her face. Yet she was intensely human too; and if her eyes had not been set on the greater glory, the other thought might have vulgarised her mind, made her end and goal sordid--the descent of a nature rather than its ascension.

When Nancy came, the lesser idea, the stake, took on a new importance, for now it seemed to her that it was her duty to secure for the child its

rightful heritage. Then Jim, too, appeared in a new light, as one who could never fulfil himself unless working through the natural channels of his birth, inheritance, and upbringing. Jim, drunken and unreliable, with broken will and fighting to find himself--the waste places were for him, until he was the master of his will and emotions. Once however, secure in ability to control himself, with cleansed brain and purpose defined, the widest field would still be too narrow for his talents--and the five, yes, the fifty millions of his father must be his.

She had never repented having married Jim; but twice in those three years she had broken down and wept as though her heart would break. There were times when Jim's nerves were shaken in his struggle against the unseen foe, and he had spoken to her querulously, almost sharply. Yet in her tears there was no reproach for him, rather for herself--the fear that she might lose her influence over him, that she could not keep him close to her heart, that he might drift away from her in the commonplaces and monotony of work and domestic life. Everything so depended on her being to him not only the one woman for whom he cared, but the woman without whom he could care for nothing else.

"Oh, my God, give me his love," she had prayed. "Let me keep it yet a little while. For his sake, not for my own, let me have the power to hold his love. Make my mind always quiet, and let me blow neither hot nor cold. Help me to keep my temper sweet and cheerful, so that he will find the room empty where I am not, and his footsteps will quicken when he comes to the door. Not for my sake, dear God, but for his, or my heart will break--it will break unless Thou dost help me to hold him. O Lord, keep me from tears; make my face happy that I may be goodly to his eyes, and forgive the selfishness of a poor woman who has little, and would keep her little and cherish it, for Christ's sake."

Twice had she poured out her heart so, in the agony of her fear that she should lose favour in Jim's sight--she did not know how alluring she was, in spite of the constant proofs offered her. She had had her will with all who came her way, from governor to Indian brave. Once, in a journey they had made far north, soon after they came, she had stayed at a Hudson's Bay Company's post for some days, while there came news of restlessness among the Indians, because of lack of food, and Jim had gone farther north to steady the tribes, leaving her with the factor and his wife and a halfbreed servant.

While she and the factor's wife were alone in the yard of the post one day, an Indian--chief, Arrowhead, in warpaint and feathers, entered suddenly, brandishing a long knife. He had been drinking, and there was danger in his black eyes. With a sudden inspiration she came forward quickly, nodded and smiled to him, and then pointed to a grindstone standing in the corner of the yard. As she did so, she saw Indians crowding into the gate armed with knives, guns, bows, and arrows. She beckoned to Arrowhead, and he followed her to the grindstone. She poured some water on the wheel and began to turn it, nodding at the now impassive Indian to begin. Presently he nodded also, and put his knife on the stone. She kept turning steadily, singing to herself the while, as with anxiety she saw the Indians drawing closer and closer in from the

gate. Faster and faster she turned, and at last the Indian lifted his knife from the stone. She reached out her hand with simulated interest, felt the edge with her thumb, the Indian looking darkly at her the while. Presently, after feeling the edge himself, he bent over the stone again, and she went on turning the wheel still singing softly. At last he stopped again and felt the edge. With a smile which showed her fine white teeth, she said, "Is that for me?" making a significant sign across her throat at the same time.

The old Indian looked at her grimly, then slowly shook his head in negation.

"I go hunt Yellow Hawk to-night," he said. "I go fight; I like marry you when I come back. How!" he said and turned away towards the gate.

Some of his braves held back, the blackness of death in their looks. He saw. "My knife is sharp," he said. "The woman is brave. She shall live--go and fight Yellow Hawk, or starve and die."

Divining their misery, their hunger, and the savage thought that had come to them, Sally had whispered to the factor's wife to bring food, and the woman now came running out with two baskets full, and returned for more. Sally ran forward among the Indians and put the food into their hands. With grunts of satisfaction they seized what she gave, and thrust it into their mouths, squatting on the ground. Arrowhead looked on stern and immobile, but when at last she and the factor's wife sat down before the braves with confidence and an air of friendliness, he sat down also; yet, famished as he was, he would not touch the food. At last Sally, realising his proud defiance of hunger, offered him a little lump of pemmican and a biscuit, and with a grunt he took it from her hands and ate it. Then, at his command a fire was lit, the pipe of peace was brought out, and Sally and the factor's wife touched their lips to it, and passed it on.

So was a new treaty of peace and loyalty made with Arrowhead and his tribe by a woman without fear, whose life had seemed not worth a minute's purchase; and, as the sun went down, Arrowhead and his men went forth to make war upon Yellow Hawk beside the Nettigon River. In this wise had her influence spread in the land.

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Standing now with the child in his arms and his wife looking at him with a shining moisture of the eyes, Jim laughed outright. There came upon him a sudden sense of power, of aggressive force--the will to do. Sally understood, and came and laughingly grasped his arm.

"Oh, Jim," she said playfully, "you are getting muscles like steel. You hadn't these when you were colonel of the Kentucky Carbineers!"

"I guess I need them now," he said, smiling, and with the child still in his arms drew her to a window looking northward. As far as the eye could see, nothing but snow, like a blanket spread over the land. Here and

there in the wide expanse a tree silhouetted against the sky, a tracery of eccentric beauty, and off in the far distance a solitary horseman riding towards the postriding hard.

"It was root, hog, or die with me, Sally," he continued, "and I rooted. . . . I wonder--that fellow on the horse--I have a feeling about him. See, he's been riding hard and long--you can tell by the way the horse drops his legs. He sags a bit himself. . . . But isn't it beautiful, all that out there--the real quintessence of life."

The air was full of delicate particles of frost on which the sun sparkled, and though there was neither bird nor insect, nor animal, nor stir of leaf, nor swaying branch or waving grass, life palpitated in the air, energy sang its song in the footstep that crunched the frosty ground, that broke the crusted snow; it was in the delicate wind that stirred the flag by the barracks away to the left; hope smiled in the wide prospect over which the thrilling, bracing air trembled. Sally had chosen right.

"You had a big thought when you brought me here, guinea-girl," he added presently. "We are going to win out here"--he set the child down--"you and I and this lucky sixpence." He took up his short fur coat. "Yes, we'll win, honey." Then, with a brooding look in his face, he added:

"The end comes as came the beginning,
And shadows fall into the past;
And the goal, is it not worth the winning,
If it brings us but home at the last?"

"While far through the pain of waste places
We tread, 'tis a blossoming rod
That drives us to grace from disgraces,
From the fens to the gardens of God!"

He paused reflectively. "It's strange that this life up here makes you feel that you must live a bigger life still, that this is only the wide porch to the great labour-house--it makes you want to do things. Well, we've got to win the stake first," he added with a laugh.

"The stake is a big one, Jim--bigger than you think."

"You and her and me--me that was in the gutter."

"What is the gutter, dadsie?" asked Nancy.

"The gutter--the gutter is where the dish-water goes, midget," he answered with a dry laugh.

"Oh, I don't think you'd like to be in the gutter," Nancy said solemnly.

"You have to get used to it first, miss," answered Jim. Suddenly Sally laid both hands on Jim's shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "You must win the stake Jim. Think--now!"

She laid a hand on the head of the child. He did not know that he was playing for a certain five millions, perhaps fifty millions, of dollars. She had never told him of his father's offer. He was fighting only for salvation, for those he loved, for freedom. As they stood there, the conviction had come upon her that they had come to the last battle-field, that this journey which Jim now must take would decide all, would give them perfect peace or lifelong pain. The shadow of battle was over them, but he had no foreboding, no premonition; he had never been so full of spirits and life.

To her adjuration Jim replied by burying his face in her golden hair, and he whispered: "Say, I've done near four years, my girl. I think I'm all right now--I think. This last six months, it's been easy--pretty fairly easy."

"Four months more, only four months more--God be good to us!" she said with a little gasp.

If he held out for four months more, the first great stage in their life --journey would be passed, the stake won.

"I saw a woman get an awful fall once," Jim said suddenly. "Her bones were broken in twelve places, and there wasn't a spot on her body without injury. They set and fixed up every broken bone except one. It was split down. They didn't dare perform the operation; she couldn't stand it. There was a limit to pain, and she had reached the boundary. Two years went by, and she got better every way, but inside her leg those broken pieces of bone were rubbing against each other. She tried to avoid the inevitable operation, but nature said, 'You must do it, or die in the end.' She yielded. Then came the long preparations for the operation. Her heart shrank, her mind got tortured. She'd suffered too much. She pulled herself together, and said, 'I must conquer this shrinking body of mine, by my will. How shall I do it?' Something within her said, 'Think and do for others. Forget yourself.' And so, as they got her ready for her torture, she visited hospitals, agonised cripple as she was, and smiled and talked to the sick and broken, telling them of her own miseries endured and dangers faced, of the boundary of human suffering almost passed; and so she got her courage for her own trial. And she came out all right in the end. Well, that's the way I've felt sometimes. But I'm ready for my operation now whenever it comes, and it's coming,

I know. Let it come when it must." He smiled. There came a knock at the door, and presently Sewell entered. "The Commissioner wishes you to come over, sir," he said.

"I was just coming, Sewell. Is all ready for the start?"

"Everything's ready, sir, but there's to be a change of orders. Something's happened--a bad job up in the Cree country, I think."

A few minutes later Jim was in the Commissioner's office. The murder of

a Hudson's Bay Company's man had been committed in the Cree country. The stranger whom Jim and Sally had seen riding across the plains had brought the news for thirty miles, word of the murder having been carried from point to point. The Commissioner was uncertain what to do, as the Crees were restless through want of food and the absence of game, and a force sent to capture Arrowhead, the chief who had committed the murder, might precipitate trouble. Jim solved the problem by offering to go alone and bring the chief into the post. It was two hundred miles to the Cree encampment, and the journey had its double dangers.

Another officer was sent on the expedition for which Jim had been preparing, and he made ready to go upon his lonely duty. His wife did not know till three days after he had gone what the nature of his mission was.

IV

Jim made his journey in good weather with his faithful dogs alone, and came into the camp of the Crees armed with only a revolver. If he had gone with ten men, there would have been an instant melee, in which he would have lost his life. This is what the chief had expected, had prepared for; but Jim was more formidable alone, with power far behind him which could come with force and destroy the tribe, if resistance was offered, than with fifty men. His tongue had a gift of terse and picturesque speech, powerful with a people who had the gift of imagination. With five hundred men ready to turn him loose in the plains without dogs or food, he carried himself with a watchful coolness and complacent determination which got home to their minds with great force.

For hours the struggle for the murderer went on, a struggle of mind over inferior mind and matter. Arrowhead was a chief whose will had never been crossed by his own people, and to master that will by a superior will, to hold back the destructive force which, to the ignorant minds of the braves, was only a natural force of defence, meant a task needing more than authority behind it. For the very fear of that authority put in motion was an incentive to present resistance to stave off the day of trouble. The faces that surrounded Jim were thin with hunger, and the murder that had been committed by the chief had, as its origin, the foolish replies of the Hudson's Bay Company's man to their demand for supplies. Arrowhead had killed him with his own hand.

But Jim Templeton was of a different calibre. Although he had not been told it, he realised that, indirectly, hunger was the cause of the crime and might easily become the cause of another; for their tempers were sharper even than their appetites. Upon this he played; upon this he made an exhortation to the chief. He assumed that Arrowhead had become violent, because of his people's straits, that Arrowhead's heart yearned for his people and would make sacrifice for them. Now, if Arrowhead came quietly, he would see that supplies of food were sent at once, and that arrangements were made to meet the misery of their situation. Therefore,

if Arrowhead came freely, he would have so much in his favour before his judges; if he would not come quietly, then he must be brought by force; and if they raised a hand to prevent it, then destruction would fall upon all--all save the women and children. The law must be obeyed. They might try to resist the law through him, but, if violence was shown, he would first kill Arrowhead, and then destruction would descend like a wind out of the north, darkness would swallow them, and their bones would cover the plains.

As he ended his words a young brave sprang forwards with hatchet raised. Jim's revolver slipped down into his palm from his sleeve, and a bullet caught the brave in the lifted arm. The hatchet dropped to the ground.

Then Jim's eyes blazed, and he turned a look of anger on the chief, his face pale and hard, as he said: "The stream rises above the banks; come with me, chief, or all will drown. I am master, and I speak. Ye are hungry because ye are idle. Ye call the world yours, yet ye will not stoop to gather from the earth the fruits of the earth. Ye sit idle in the summer, and women and children die round you when winter comes. Because the game is gone, ye say. Must the world stand still because a handful of Crees need a hunting-ground? Must the makers of cities and the wonders of the earth, who fill the land with plenty--must they stand far off, because the Crees and their chief would wander over millions of acres, for each man a million, when by a hundred, ay, by ten, each white man would live in plenty, and make the land rejoice. See. Here is the truth. When the Great Spirit draws the game away so that the hunting is poor, ye sit down and fill your hearts with murder, and in the blackness of your thoughts kill my brother. Idle and shiftless and evil ye are, while the earth cries out to give you of its plenty, a great harvest from a little seed, if ye will but dig and plant, and plough and sow and reap, and lend your backs to toil. Now hear and heed. The end is come.

"For this once ye shall be fed--by the blood of my heart, ye shall be fed! And another year ye shall labour, and get the fruits of your labour, and not stand waiting, as it were, till a fish shall pass the spear, or a stag water at your door, that ye may slay and eat. The end is come, ye idle men. O chief, harken! One of your braves would have slain me, even as you slew my brother--he one, and you a thousand. Speak to your people as I have spoken, and then come and answer for the deed done by your hand. And this I say that right shall be done between men and men. Speak."

Jim had made his great effort, and not without avail. Arrowhead rose slowly, the cloud gone out of his face, and spoke to his people, bidding them wait in peace until food came, and appointing his son chief in his stead until his return.

"The white man speaks truth, and I will go," he said. "I shall return," he continued, "if it be written so upon the leaves of the Tree of Life; and if it be not so written, I shall fade like a mist, and the tepees will know me not again. The days of my youth are spent, and my step no longer springs from the ground. I shuffle among the grass and the fallen leaves, and my eyes scarce know the stag from the doe. The white man is

master--if he wills it we shall die, if he wills it we shall live. And this was ever so. It is in the tale of our people. One tribe ruled, and the others were their slaves. If it is written on the leaves of the Tree of Life that the white man rule us for ever, then it shall be so. I have spoken. Now, behold I go."

Jim had conquered, and together they sped away with the dogs through the sweet-smelling spruce woods where every branch carried a cloth of white, and the only sound heard was the swish of a blanket of snow as it fell to the ground from the wide webs of green, or a twig snapped under the load it bore. Peace brooded in the silent and comforting forest, and Jim and Arrowhead, the Indian ever ahead, swung along, mile after mile, on their snow-shoes, emerging at last upon the wide white prairie.

A hundred miles of sun and fair weather, sleeping at night in the open in a trench dug in the snow, no fear in the thoughts of Jim, nor evil in the heart of the heathen man. There had been moments of watchfulness, of uncertainty, on Jim's part, the first few hours of the first night after they left the Cree reservation; but the conviction speedily came to Jim that all was well; for the chief slept soundly from the moment he lay down in his blankets between the dogs. Then Jim went to sleep as in his own bed, and, waking, found Arrowhead lighting a fire from a little load of sticks from the sledges. And between murderer and captor there sprang up the companionship of the open road which brings all men to a certain land of faith and understanding, unless they are perverted and vile.

There was no vileness in Arrowhead. There were no handcuffs on his hands, no sign of captivity; they two ate out of the same dish, drank from the same basin, broke from the same bread. The crime of Arrowhead, the gallows waiting for him, seemed very far away. They were only two silent travellers, sharing the same hardship, helping to give material comfort to each other--in the inevitable democracy of those far places, where small things are not great nor great things small; where into men's hearts comes the knowledge of the things that matter; where, from the wide, starry sky, from the august loneliness, and the soul of the life which has brooded there for untold generations, God teaches the values of this world and the next.

One hundred miles of sun and fair weather, and then fifty miles of bitter, aching cold, with nights of peril from the increasing chill, so that Jim dared not sleep lest he should never wake again, but die benumbed and exhausted. Yet Arrowhead slept through all. Day after day so, and then ten miles of storm such as come only to the vast barrens of the northlands; and woe to the traveller upon whom the icy wind and the blinding snow descended! Woe came upon Jim Templeton and Arrowhead, the heathen.

In the awful struggle between man and nature that followed, the captive became the leader. The craft of the plains, the inherent instinct, the feeling which was more than eyesight became the only hope. One whole day to cover ten miles--an endless path of agony, in which Jim went down again and again, but came up blinded by snow and drift, and cut as with lashes by the angry wind. At the end of the ten miles was a Hudson's Bay Company's post and safety; and through ten hours had the two struggled

towards it, going off at tangents, circling on their own tracks; but the Indian, by an instinct as sure as the needle to the pole, getting the direction to the post again, in the moments of direst peril and uncertainty. To Jim the world became a sea of maddening forces which buffeted him; a whirlpool of fire in which his brain was tortured, his mind was shrivelled up; a vast army rending itself, each man against the other. It was a purgatory of music, broken by discords; and then at last--how sweet it all was, after the eternity of misery--"Church bells and voices low," and Sally singing to him, Nancy's voice calling! Then, nothing but sleep--sleep, a sinking down millions of miles in an ether of drowsiness which thrilled him; and after--no more.

None who has suffered up to the limit of what the human body and soul may bear can remember the history of those distracted moments when the struggle became one between the forces in nature and the forces in man, between agonised body and smothered mind, yet with the divine intelligence of the created being directing, even though subconsciously, the fight.

How Arrowhead found the post in the mad storm he could never have told. Yet he found it, with Jim unconscious on the sledge and with limbs frozen, all the dogs gone but two, the leathers over the Indian's shoulders as he fell against the gate of the post with a shrill cry that roused the factor and his people within, together with Sergeant Sewell, who had been sent out from headquarters to await Jim's arrival there. It was Sewell's hand which first felt Jim's heart and pulse, and found that there was still life left, even before it could be done by the doctor from headquarters, who had come to visit a sick man at the post.

For hours they worked with snow upon the frozen limbs to bring back life and consciousness. Consciousness came at last with half delirium, half understanding; as emerging from the passing sleep of anaesthetics, the eye sees things and dimly registers them, before the brain has set them in any relation to life or comprehension.

But Jim was roused at last, and the doctor presently held to his lips a glass of brandy. Then from infinite distance Jim's understanding returned; the mind emerged, but not wholly, from the chaos in which it was travelling. His eyes stood out in eagerness.

"Brandy! brandy!" he said hungrily.

With an oath Sewell snatched the glass from the doctor's hand, put it on the table, then stooped to Jim's ear and said hoarsely: "Remember--Nancy. For God's sake, sir, don't drink."

Jim's head fell back, the fierce light went out of his eyes, the face became greyer and sharper. "Sally--Nancy--Nancy," he whispered, and his fingers clutched vaguely at the quilt.

"He must have brandy or he will die. The system is pumped out. He must be revived," said the doctor. He reached again for the glass of spirits.

Jim understood now. He was on the borderland between life and death; his feet were at the brink. "No--not--brandy, no!" he moaned. "Sally--Sally, kiss me," he said faintly, from the middle world in which he was.

"Quick, the broth!" said Sewell to the factor, who had been preparing it. "Quick, while there's a chance." He stooped and called into Jim's ear: "For the love of God, wake up, sir. They're coming--they're both coming--Nancy's coming. They'll soon be here." What matter that he lied, a life was at stake.

Jim's eyes opened again. The doctor was standing with the brandy in his hand. Half madly Jim reached out. "I must live until they come," he cried; "the brandy--give it me! Give it--ah, no, no, I must not!" he added, gasping, his lips trembling, his hands shaking.

Sewell held the broth to his lips. He drank a little, yet his face became greyer and greyer; a bluish tinge spread about his mouth.

"Have you nothing else, sir?" asked Sewell in despair. The doctor put down the brandy, went quickly to his medicine-case, dropped into a glass some liquid from a phial, came over again, and poured a little between the lips; then a little more, as Jim's eyes opened again; and at last every drop in the glass trickled down the sinewy throat.

Presently as they watched him the doctor said: "It will not do. He must have brandy. It has life-food in it."

Jim understood the words. He knew that if he drank the brandy the chances against his future were terrible. He had made his vow, and he must keep it. Yet the thirst was on him; his enemy had him by the throat again, was dragging him down. Though his body was so cold, his throat was on fire. But in the extremity of his strength his mind fought on--fought on, growing weaker every moment. He was having his last fight. They watched him with an aching anxiety, and there was anger in the doctor's face. He had no patience with these forces arrayed against him.

At last the doctor whispered to Sewell: "It's no use; he must have the brandy, or he can't live an hour."

Sewell weakened; the tears fell down his rough, hard cheeks. "It'll ruin him--it's ruin or death."

"Trust a little more in God, and in the man's strength. Let us give him the chance. Force it down his throat--he's not responsible," said the physician, to whom saving life was more than all else.

Suddenly there appeared at the bedside Arrowhead, gaunt and weak, his face swollen, the skin of it broken by the whips of storm.

"He is my brother," he said, and, stooping, laid both hands, which he had held before the fire for a long time, on Jim's heart. "Take his feet, his hands, his, legs, and his head in your hands," he said to them all. "Life is in us; we will give him life."

He knelt down and kept both hands on Jim's heart, while the others, even the doctor, awed by his act, did as they were bidden. "Shut your eyes. Let your life go into him. Think of him, and him alone. Now!" said Arrowhead in a strange voice.

He murmured, and continued murmuring, his body drawing closer and closer to Jim's body, while in the deep silence, broken only by the chanting of his low monotonous voice, the others pressed Jim's hands and head and feet and legs--six men under the command of a heathen murderer.

The minutes passed. The colour came back to Jim's face, the skin of his hands filled up, they ceased twitching, his pulse got stronger, his eyes opened with a new light in them.

"I'm living, anyhow," he said at last with a faint smile. "I'm hungry--broth, please."

The fight was won, and Arrowhead, the pagan murderer, drew over to the fire and crouched down beside it, his back to the bed, impassive and still. They brought him a bowl of broth and bread, which he drank slowly, and placed the empty bowl between his knees. He sat there through the night, though they tried to make him lie down.

As the light came in at the windows, Sewell touched him on the shoulder, and said: "He is sleeping now."

"I hear my brother breathe," answered Arrowhead. "He will live."

All night he had listened, and had heard Jim's breath as only a man who has lived in waste places can hear. "He will live. What I take with one hand I give with the other."

He had taken the life of the factor; he had given Jim his life. And when he was tried three months later for murder, some one else said this for him, and the hearts of all, judge and jury, were so moved they knew not what to do.

But Arrowhead was never sentenced, for, at the end of the first day's trial, he lay down to sleep and never waked again. He was found the next morning still and cold, and there was clasped in his hands a little doll which Nancy had given him on one of her many visits to the prison during her father's long illness. They found a piece of paper in his belt with these words in the Cree language: "With my hands on his heart at the post I gave him the life that was in me, saving but a little until now. Arrowhead, the chief, goes to find life again by the well at the root of the tree. How!"

On the evening of the day that Arrowhead made his journey to "the well at the root of the tree" a stranger knocked at the door of Captain Templeton's cottage; then, without awaiting admittance, entered.

Jim was sitting with Nancy on his knee, her head against his shoulder, Sally at his side, her face alight with some inner joy. Before the knock came to the door Jim had just said, "Why do your eyes shine so, Sally? What's in your mind?" She had been about to answer, to say to him what had been swelling her heart with pride, though she had not meant to tell him what he had forgotten--not till midnight. But the figure that entered the room, a big man with deep-set eyes, a man of power who had carried everything before him in the battle of life, answered for her.

"You have won the stake, Jim," he said in a hoarse voice. "You and she have won the stake, and I've brought it--brought it."

Before they could speak he placed in Sally's hands bonds for five million dollars.

"Jim--Jim, my son!" he burst out. Then, suddenly, he sank into a chair and, putting his head in his hands, sobbed aloud.

"My God, but I'm proud of you--speak to me, Jim. You've broken me up." He was ashamed of his tears, but he could not wipe them away.

"Father, dear old man!" said Jim, and put his hands on the broad shoulders.

Sally knelt down beside him, took both the great hands from the tear-stained face, and laid them against her cheek. But presently she put Nancy on his knees.

"I don't like you to cry," the child said softly; "but to-day I cried too, 'cause my Indian man is dead."

The old man could not speak, but he put his cheek down to hers. After a minute, "Oh, but she's worth ten times that!" he said as Sally came close to him with the bundle he had thrust into her hands.

"What is it?" said Jim.

"It's five million dollars--for Nancy," she said. "Five-million--what?"

"The stake, Jim," said Sally. "If you did not drink for four years--never touched a drop--we were to have five million dollars."

"You never told him, then--you never told him that?" asked the old man.

"I wanted him to win without it," she said. "If he won, he would be the stronger; if he lost, it would not be so hard for him to bear."

The old man drew her down and kissed her cheek. He chuckled, though the tears were still in his eyes. "You are a wonder--the tenth wonder of the

world!" he declared.

Jim stood staring at the bundle in Nancy's hands. "Five millions--five million dollars!"--he kept saying to himself.

"I said Nancy's worth ten times that, Jim." The old man caught his hand and pressed it. "But it was a damned near thing, I tell you," he added. "They tried to break me and my railways and my bank. I had to fight the combination, and there was one day when I hadn't that five million dollars there, nor five. Jim, they tried to break the old man. And if they'd broken me, they'd have made me out a scoundrel to her--to this wife of yours who risked everything for both of us, for both of us, Jim; for she'd given up the world to save you, and she was playing like a soul in Hell for Heaven. If they'd broken me, I'd never have lifted my head again. When things were at their worst I played to save that five millions,--her stake and mine,--I played for that. I fought for it as a man fights his way out of a burning house. And I won--I won. And it was by fighting for that five millions I saved fifty--fifty millions, son. They didn't break the old man, Jim. They didn't break him--not much."

"There are giants in the world still," said Jim, his own eyes full. He knew now his father and himself, and he knew the meaning of all the bitter and misspent life of the old days. He and his father were on a level of understanding at last.

"Are you a giant?" asked Nancy, peering up into her grandfather's eyes.

The old man laughed, then sighed. "Perhaps I was once, more or less, my dear--" saying to her what he meant for the other two. "Perhaps I was; but I've finished. I'm through. I've had my last fight."

He looked at his son. "I pass the game on to you, Jim. You can do it. I knew you could do it as the reports came in this year. I've had a detective up here for four years. I had to do it. It was the devil in me.

"You've got to carry on the game, Jim; I'm done. I'll stay home and potter about. I want to go back to Kentucky, and build up the old place, and take care of it a bit--your mother always loved it. I'd like to have it as it was when she was there long ago. But I'll be ready to help you when I'm wanted, understand."

"You want me to run things--your colossal schemes? You think--?"

"I don't think. I'm old enough to know."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

I don't think. I'm old enough to know
Knew when to shut his eyes, and when to keep them open

Nothing so popular for the moment as the fall of a favourite
That he will find the room empty where I am not
The temerity and nonchalance of despair

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