

A Lover in Homespun eBook

A Lover in Homespun

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CHAPTER I.

The Rift within the Lute.

“There is nothing but death
Our affections can sever,
And till life’s latest breath,
Love shall bind us forever.”

The words, as they flowed musically from the throat of the fair singer at the piano, were inflected with a subtle irony, which caused the frown to deepen upon the brow of the tall, scholarly, though somewhat morose-looking man who had entered the parlor soon after the singer had begun, and who, without glancing in her direction, had seated himself on one of the many luxurious chairs which strewed the room.

As he sat and listened to the song, sweet and simple in itself, but made with deft and almost imperceptible intonation on certain words, clearly for his ear, the stern lines about his mouth visibly deepened.

Finally the song ceased, and the singer swung slowly and noiselessly round and looked across at her husband, whose back was turned towards her. From the brilliant look in her eyes, it was evident she was laboring under suppressed excitement. She was a young woman of about twenty-six, singularly beautiful and with a fine intellectual cast of countenance. From her shoulders hung a richly-lined opera cloak, which, being fastened only at the throat, disclosed a figure of more than ordinary grace and symmetry.

As her husband continued silent, she presently arose, and with a peculiar smile playing about her mouth, walked calmly over to him, and laying her hand on the back of his chair, said, in a voice in which the same subtle tone was noticeable: “My lord, you see I have obeyed, and have not gone out without coming here, as commanded by you, to learn your pleasure regarding my coming in and going out.”

Harold Townsley arose hastily, and said sternly and angrily, as he faced her: “Was it necessary, Grace, to sing that song in such a manner? Did you wish me to understand through it the state of your present feelings toward me? I dislike to harbor the thought that you chose the song, and began to sing it in the manner you did, the moment you heard me coming.”

Had his tone been less angry and stern, her reply might not have been so bitterly cutting.

“Your questions, Harold, I must say, are pointed ones,” she answered, as, seating herself, she broke into a seemingly disingenuous smile, and shook her head



protestingly; “and it seems to me that they are utterly uncalled for, too. Our life for the past two years should have demonstrated that fact. However, to answer your questions: Your intuitions were correct; I did choose that song purposely for you, and only began to sing it when I heard you coming. As to the question of my sentiments toward you: When you remember that it is scarcely twenty minutes since you, once more, bitterly found fault with me, and that, too, almost before the servants, because I chose to go out again to-night, and angrily informed me that you would like to see me here before I left the house—surely you did not expect to find me trilling a love-song for you in heart-broken accents! Still, I must say that I wish you had not made it necessary for me to be so tryingly frank.”

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Her reply stung him deeply. With tightening lips he turned away, and muttered under his breath, "I am, indeed, right! She has not the slightest love left for me; it will delight her to be free."

"Grace," he said, a little sadly—but, unfortunately, also again sternly—as he halted by her side, "You and I, like so many others, evidently were not intended for each other."

Her clasped hands tightened, but he did not notice it; he was sure that he thoroughly understood her now.

"It is a pity," he went on, grimly, with his eyes fixed on the carpet, "that human nature is not gifted with the faculty of reading the future; so many mistakes and so much suffering would be prevented." He was thinking more of the unhappy days she must have spent with him, during the past two years, than of his own disappointment in her. But she did not understand the words in this way, and thinking he wanted her to know what a terrible mistake he had made when he married her, five years ago, her high-strung, nervous temperament was aroused still more, and rising quickly, she said, almost recklessly:

"I never knew before, Harold, that you were such a humanitarian and had such lofty longings to save others suffering; indeed, were you not evidently so much in earnest, I should certainly think that you were indulging in jests." Somehow her low laugh, this time, hardly rang true.

The cynical reply caused her husband's figure to straighten out stiffly—they both were now at dangerous cross purposes.

Meeting his gaze, she went on crisply: "And was it for the sake of expatiating on the general failure of marriage that you commanded me to meet you here before I could go out?" Without waiting for a reply, she drew out her gold watch, and after glancing at it, said carelessly, "I am afraid I shall not be able to listen to all the *pros* and *cons* of this vast question to-night, as I have, as you are aware, to be at the opera in a half-hour or so."

His face now lit up angrily, as he rejoined hotly, "Yes, it was to discuss this vast question that I wanted to see you alone; but not to discuss it in the abstract, as you evidently think, but as it concerns you and me, and to try to remedy, as far as possible, the mistake you evidently must have made when you thought you loved and married me."

As he ceased and turned away toward the piano, she almost sank on the chair at her side. "Where are we drifting?" she whispered; "surely it has not come to this between Harold and me!" His back was turned to her, and he was fingering the music restlessly, trying to get command of himself for what he had to say.

Turning, he leaned against the piano, and fixing his eyes on the comely head with its rich brown covering, he said firmly, but not without some emotion, "We have drifted, and drifted so, Grace, that there is nothing else left—we must part."

Her breath came quickly, but there was no other sign that she was agitated.

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He paused, in his heart hoping she would give some sign that the words meant something to her, and that he might, even yet, catch some evidence that her love for him was not utterly dead. During the pause which ensued, she turned her face away from him, and so he did not see the look almost of terror which it now wore.

Construing her silence into simple acquiescence, and thus angered the more, he went on in a hard voice: "During the past two years the change in you, Grace, has been incomprehensible to me. For my wishes you have not shown the slightest regard, while your home, as you know, has held no attractions for you—possibly because I am in it. You have persisted in going out alone to the opera, to parties and social attractions of a like nature, until you have almost become talked about." His voice grew more bitter as he continued to recall the past. "Had you been a plain woman you would likely have found some attractions at your home; but the love of adulation and the greed of excitement and false flattery seem now to be so necessary to you that your true womanliness has been killed."

He was now pacing the floor in deep agitation.

A transformation had crept over his wife's face. Her cheeks were no longer pale, but flushed with anger, while her head was thrown back defiantly and her hands tightly clenched.

"And has my lord finished the list of his wife's accomplishments?" she asked, smothering her anger by a strong effort, and speaking as though in jest.

Quietly walking over to where she was sitting, he said, in a tense voice: "No, not quite. The bitterest memory I have of my wife is her heartless conduct toward the memory of our poor dead boy. When he was alive I really believed that you loved him passionately; but scarcely had he been dead a year when this greed for gaiety and excitement took possession of you, and you began to go out everywhere. You knew he was dearer to me than life, and that his memory was with me every hour of the day. How little true sentiment, after all, there must have been in your professed idolization of him. With such a mother it is perhaps well that he is dead!" His voice broke for a moment as memories of the boy he had so idolized crowded back upon him. Looking into her now flashing eyes he continued bitterly: "I am weary of the bitter scenes between us, and of your heartlessness, Grace, and we must part. I shall leave the house to-night and live my life elsewhere. You can stay here and enjoy the frivolity which is dearer to you than your husband, the memory of your dead boy, or—"

"You are a coward, Harold Townsley!" As she faced him, her head thrown back, her opera cloak lying in artistic disorder at her feet, exposing the richly trimmed dress, and the soft outlines of her fine figure, her eyes flashing and her bosom rapidly heaving, she looked, indeed, ready to do and dare anything.

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Had he not been so wrought up himself he would have seen that he was goading her beyond endurance. When he mentioned their dead boy she had winced as though in bodily pain, but when he accused her of heartlessness towards his memory, she had grown so unstrung that she could scarcely contain herself. Never before in their differences had he accused her of faithlessness to the memory of their boy. The fear of having her husband leave her had now been swept away by the wave of indignation which possessed her.

He could not have started back in more surprise and dismay had she struck him, than when he heard her call him a coward and saw her intense anger.

With a great effort she mastered the wild rush of words that sprang to her lips, and bowing to him derisively said, as she looked into his face: "Truly a most gallant husband and a gentleman! And so, forsooth, you would desert your wife because she has forgotten the memory of her dead boy—whom she never truly loved—and because she thirsts after pleasure and excitement! What wondrous discernment! What a wise judge of human nature!" Her ironical laugh was now true in intonation.

"Utterly heartless," he whispered, almost wonderingly as he sank down on his chair.

She caught the words and said easily: "Yes, thanks to my husband, utterly heartless." Then calmly drawing a chair near to his, she said in an amused tone: "And let me tell you how this interesting metaphysical transformation was brought about."

His anger had died away and he looked at her pityingly.

"I shall have to go back to two years ago," she continued, "for up to that time you never doubted the existence of my heart—in fact, you will remember you more than once told me that I was too tender-hearted, and that you hoped deep sorrow would never come to me, because I had the capacity to suffer more than most women. The great change came with my boy's death."

For a brief space the mocking light died out of her face, while her voice grew deeply earnest. A rush of memories made her emotion so keen that she could not keep seated, and walking to and fro she talked rapidly, at times almost wildly.

"Your discernment for once was right; I had the capacity for suffering more than most women, and infinitely more than my husband, with all his worship of our boy. After his death my heart craved love and sympathy as it had never done before, and to whom but you was I to turn for it? And was it given? Let your conscience answer. With his death you shut me out of your heart, as I have said, when I most needed your sympathy. How many times before this passion for excitement, which you speak of, took possession of me, did I come to you in your study, in which you isolated yourself so, and tried, in

numberless little ways, to show you how sorely I needed you—tried to make our sorrow a common one, tried to make you realize that I needed your company and sympathy to

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save me from the thoughts which seemed to be wearing away my very life. A dog could not more mutely have shown its craving for pity and companionship than I did; but the more I sought you out the more the desire seemed to grow upon you to nurse your own sorrow alone. At last it got so (you *must* remember) that I saw you only at our meals, which you ate almost in silence. The continued quiet of the house, and the company of my own sad thoughts and longings for him, finally grew more than I could bear, and so, after a year of suffering and solitude in this house, I broke down and tried to forget by accepting social invitations. I had, of course, to go out alone; you refused to go with me. So now I have humiliated myself to tell you the truth, and you can judge whether I am heartless or not; whether I truly loved my boy or not; and who is to blame if I am now heartless."

She paused suddenly before him and said, in a firm, decisive voice: "Until I heard your words to-night, my heart had not wholly hardened toward you, but now the little affection I had left for you has entirely gone. Never could a woman have been more disappointed in a man than I have been in you; the idol I set up has been broken into a thousand fragments. In adversity, when your manliness should have stood out true and bright, it warped and has grown to be a pitiable thing. Your life is now so narrow and morbid that you have but little sense of justice left, as is shown by your throwing upon me all the blame for the trouble which has been growing up between us, and which has at last separated us. You have said, Harold, that we must part; you have spoken truly. You have said, to-night; again you have spoken truly, for on no consideration shall this roof shelter us again. If you do not leave to-night, I most surely shall."

Her mood again changed, and she said, with a low laugh, as she paced the floor with an amused air: "And so I, Mrs. Townsley, am to be a deserted wife, a 'grass widow,' and all as a punishment for being heartless, too fond of pleasure, and for not having had any real love for my only boy! What a dire, dire punishment, Harold!" She glanced mockingly down at the bowed head of her husband, which was now pillowed in his hands, and with another burst of musical laughter, swept gracefully over to the piano, seated herself at it, struck a few chords; and then, as if driven by sudden impulse, wheeled quickly round and said: "But the runaway husband shall have something pleasant to remember the poor deserted wife by in his wanderings. Be sure, Harold, and always think of me as singing this love-lorn ditty." Again she laughed, but this time there was a peculiar tremor in her voice which betrayed, better than anything else could have done, the great effort she was making to sustain her pride. "Now listen:

"Oh! leave not your Kathleen, there's no one can cheer her,
Alone in this wide world unpitied she'll sigh;
And the scenes that were loveliest when thou wert near her
Will—"

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“Grace! Grace!” His hands trembled with deep emotion, as he laid one on her shoulder, and with the other hushed the words that cut him so keenly.

As he had listened to her, and at last understood her overwhelming love for their boy—and had realized, too, that it was indeed he who was to blame for their estrangement—a look of deep surprise had gradually overspread his face. Twice he had tried to interrupt her, but in vain, until finally, almost convinced by her torrent of anger, contempt and derision, that he had indeed lost all hold upon her affections, he had sunk back bewildered in his chair, and covered his face with his hands. But the mocking refrain of the song was more than he could bear, and so he had sprung to his feet, gone to her side, and putting his hand over her scornful lips had hushed the song.

As she wheeled defiantly round and looked up at him, he said remorsefully, his face pale and haggard: “I see, at last, Grace; I have been very blind and narrow; it is I, and only I, who am to blame for this estrangement. Had I only understood earlier, and not have been so blinded with my own sorrow! How very deeply you must have suffered, dear, with no one to comfort the bereaved mother-heart. As I now look over the past I cannot think how ever I got to think that your nature was shallow, and that your affection for our boy was not deep and true. Ah, how much easier it would have been had we borne the sorrow together, instead of suffering alone; and it was my fault that we did not! Grace, I need your pardon to-night far more than ever you needed my help and sympathy; and I know, now, how great that was.”

He held out his arms pleadingly towards her: “Grace, try and forgive me!”

If he had humiliated her in any other way than by telling her he would desert her, her deeply wounded pride could not have held out, and she surely must have found refuge in his arms. But her humiliation had been so very deep, and her mood was now such that every nerve was quivering with indignation; so, subduing the pleading of her heart, she sprang away from the outstretched arms. As she faced him the angry color again stole into her cheeks, and she exclaimed, in a suppressed voice: “There are things, Harold, that a woman cannot forgive and retain her self-respect. Even had I been as fickle as you thought, that would not have been sufficient reason for you to make up your mind to desert me; and in deserting me, place me in a position for the world to suspect, wag its head at, and gossip over. You knew it would do this, and yet it did not alter your decision to throw me over. And now, after having renounced me, you ask me to forget and fly back to your arms.” She laughed bitterly, her manner growing cynical once more. “No, no, Harold,” she continued, “there can be no kissing, no making up and being good between us; the knife has cut too deep. I prefer facing the world, as you have decided, rather than trying to live down this humiliation with you, and being in constant dread of your threatening to desert me again, should any misunderstanding arise in the future.”

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She again paused for a brief space, and then went on, in a firm, quiet tone: "There is no use in prolonging this interview; nothing will alter my decision; we will both follow out the course you have mapped out. I repeat again, Harold, that if you do not leave the house, as intended, I certainly shall."

Again, seating herself at the piano, she ran her fingers restlessly over the keys, as though his presence were trying to her.

He stood by the side of the piano for a space and looked sadly and absently at her; but her set face gave him no encouragement. With a troubled air he turned and began to walk slowly and thoughtfully toward the door—when in deep distress he always grew strangely absent. When near the door his attention was attracted by a little book lying on a table. He picked it up, without appearing to be conscious of doing so, and opened it, but his eyes wandered far away from the open pages. He raised his hand thoughtfully to his face and said, ponderingly, to himself, in a low voice: "How—how could I have made such a mistake—such a frightful mistake? How changed she is, too!"

She now began to play a low, dreamy air, which stole into his heart and riveted his laggard feet still more to the room where she was.

As he slowly turned away, she partly turned her head, and with unmoved face watched his retreating figure. But when she noted his absent manner, which she recalled so well; saw the pondering look on his face when he picked up the book, which she knew he was not conscious of holding; caught the tired droop of his shoulders, and the glint of early grey hair at his temples, a pathetic expression stole about her mouth, and she made a motion as though she would cease playing and go over to him; but the bitterness was greater than the pity, and conquering the impulse, she kept her seat and played on.

As he was closing the book it fell on the table. His eyes followed it mechanically. "Yes," he went on presently, as though following out a deep train of thought, "a frightful mistake, how could I have made it?"

His restless fingers sought his watch-chain as he once more turned toward the door. The notes from the piano were now getting faint, low and irregular—her face was still turned in his direction.

As he was about to open the door, his attention was attracted by a thermometer which hung there in a prettily worked frame. Taking it down he looked at it for a space and then, unthinkingly, put it into his pocket. As the door was closing behind him his lips again moved: "Yes, a frightful, frightful mistake!"



She continued to play, her face turned toward the door; but the white fingers were now straying very waveringly over the keys. Suddenly the room was filled with a discordant jar—her arms were resting heavily on the keys, her face buried in them, and her shoulders were heaving in quick distress. If he had but come back then!

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CHAPTER II.

Arch-conspirators.

When Mary Tiffin, who had been in the employ of the Townsleys ever since their marriage, excitedly entered the parlor ten minutes after the events narrated, it was empty. Mary was a comely maiden of forty-three, of comfortable proportions and goodly to look upon. Her cheeks were still attractively round; her glossy black hair was, with much placidity, smoothed over her temples, cunningly brought above her ears, and twisted in an alluring knot at the back of her head. Her eyes were of that deep peculiar blue which generally is such a menace to the peace of the sterner sex, and over which lovers are wont to expatiate so tryingly to bosom friends.

Wringing her hands and ruefully shaking her head, Mary walked first to one end and then to the other of the long room. Finally she broke out in healthy Yorkshire dialect: "Wheere, oh, wheere can that lad John be? I'm crazed wi' all this trouble; nivver did I see the missus so worked up before, and she winna change her mind, no matter what is said. I'm just as sure as I can be that if they part now they'll nivver come together again. Who'd a thow't it 'ud ever come to this between 'em." She fairly panted with the burden of her feelings.

Just as she was about to break out into fresh lamentations, the door slowly opened, disclosing the sober face and lean figure of John Herbert Bedford Lawson, confidential servant to Mr. Townsley.

"Eh, lad, but I'm right glad to see thee!" exclaimed Mary, as she caught hold of John's meagre arm and unceremoniously hurried him into the room. For some reason or other, Mr. Lawson evinced no especial pleasure at seeing the comely Mary, as was clearly demonstrated by the ungallant manner in which he tried to brace himself back as she drew him forward.

When finally released, he said in a sceptical voice, as he indignantly put to rights his disturbed linen:

"Oh, thou art glad to see me, art thou? P'raps thou art; strange things happen in this world. Yet I'll be bound that it's not for myself thou art glad." While speaking, he knitted his eyebrows in a most menacing manner. He was a small, thin man, about forty-five years of age, and clean shaven. As he stood eyeing Mary through his glasses he looked a cruised character enough.

"Nay, lad," she said reproachfully, putting her hand on his arm, "don't thou talk in a tone like that and look so sour; it don't become thee; it's not natural, too, and thou knows it." Then she went on anxiously: "Thou knows what is troubling me; thou art the maister's private servant, and he must have told thee what has happened. Now we mun think o'

something, John, to stop 'em from breaking up in this way. We daren't go and tell anyone else about the trouble, so do, lad, do try and think o' something, for there's no time to be lost." In her excitement and distress she almost shook him.

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The repellent look was still on John's face as he replied more ungraciously than before: "Nay, I can think o' nowt. I can tell thee, though, that the maister's told me to have the carriage ready to catch the train that goes east at nine" (he turned and looked at the clock on the mantel—it was 8.15), "and, as thou sees, that'll be in forty-five minutes. Of course, thou knows that I shall go wi' him."

"Eh, but how the world will talk, and what she'll have to bear!" broke out Mary vehemently, as she sank back on a chair almost in tears. "And in my heart I believe that she loves him, too. And thou must believe that, too, and yet theere thou stands wi' that unnatural frown on thy face, and will do nowt at all, although in thy heart thou knows thou likes the missus as well as thou does the maister."

Suddenly springing to her feet, she caught him by the sleeve, and said desperately: "Could thou not manage, John, lad, for the maister to be just a little too late for the train?"

Without doubt John Herbert Bedford Lawson was in a most ill-conditioned mood, for instead of being moved by the palpable distress of the attractive suppliant, he turned his back ungraciously, thrust his hands viciously under his ample coat-tails, elevated his chin aggressively, and said airily, as he kept up a warlike tattoo on the carpet with one of his heels: "John Lawson, thou art reet; it's not the thow't o' thee going away that's causing her any trouble—thou canst go to the uttermost parts o' the earth for all she cares, lad."

Turning and facing her, he said grandly: "I say once more that I know o' nowt that can be done, Miss Mary Tiffin." He turned again, and this time pulled out his watch.

For a few moments Mary sat in deep thought, and then a smile broke over her face—she had realized where her base of operations had been weak. Banishing the smile from her lips, to find refuge in her twinkling eyes, she arose—to vanquish Mr. Lawson.

Quietly walking up behind him she gently laid one plump hand caressingly on his shoulder. Wondrous was the change that stole over his doughty face: the corrugated lines on his forehead gradually vanished, his eyebrows hovered no longer belligerently near the lids, while his chin—really a well-modelled one—receded slowly, but surely, back to its accustomed position, revealing a very pleasant mouth indeed. It could now be seen that the thin face of Mr. Lawson was a most kindly one.

"John," began Mary, in a dangerously soft tone: "I—I think more about thy going away than thou thinks. But thou knows how afeered I am that they'll nivver come together again, and so—and—so, just only for the moment, my thoughts had gone away from thee. And now thou knows this, lad, won't thou make some effort to save 'em from wrecking their lives? Maybe we can't do much, John, but we mun try and do something. Now, if we can prevent the maister from going away to-night, something



may turn up to-morrow that'll give 'em a chance to talk it over, and then it may come all reet between 'em once more. As for the train, lad, if the maister should miss it" (both hands were on his shoulders now, and her comely head was very near his), "he simply couldn't get away till to-morrow."

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By this time John's face was gloriously radiant, and he was just about to turn around and promise her anything under the sun, when a shrewd expression flashed into his eyes, and composing his countenance, he said, in a somewhat independent, yet nervous tone, as he faced her and adjusted his now disturbing spectacles: "Er—er, Mary, think o' the trouble I'd likely get into if I intrigued for the maister to miss the train; and what should I get for all my trouble? But still, lass, I'm willing" (the glasses were needing no end of adjusting now) "to do what I can—that is, of course, on—on condeetions."

A somewhat embarrassed look came across Mary's face as she covertly glanced at the man of conditions, who was now looking anything but imposing.

"And what may the condeetions be, Mr. Lawson?" There was a touch of wonder in her tone.

Mr. Lawson looked past her, again thrust his hands under his coat-tails, which he waved slowly to and fro like signals of distress, and said, as he raised his eyebrows and tried to appear perfectly at ease, "I—I guess thou must remember, Mary."

Evidently Mary's memory was not all that could be desired, for she shook her head dubiously, and seemed more ill at ease than ever.

Being thus suddenly brought to bay, John did what men generally do when they are cornered—he rushed into the thick of the battle, regardless of consequences.

"I axed thee, as thou knows, a year ago," he broke out aggressively, as he gazed past her, "to have me. Thou didn't say much in reply; but what thou did say meant No, and now I ax thee once more, wilt thou have me? I had not meant to ax thee again—though I like thee just the same. A man like me, lass, has got a little pride, and I don't want to thrust myself upon any woman. But I mun say that, when I seed how worked up about the missus thou wert, and about the maister, too, going away—and hadn't a thow't for me—my feelings did get a little the best o' me, and I couldn't help exposing 'em again summat. So now thou knows the condeetions, Mary." The coat-tails by this time were simply acting in an unheard-of manner, while Mr. Lawson's not very stalwart back was strikingly erect—his whole manner, in brief, was that of a man determined to bear the worst, should it come, as becomes a man. As he was still looking over her head he did not see her look of admiration as she stood and surveyed his warlike figure.

"The condeetions are—are extraordinary ones, Mr. Lawson." She lowered her eyes so that he might not catch the light in them.

"Oh, are they indeed?"—the swing of the coat-tails was now nothing less than phenomenal—"then, Miss Mary Tiffin," he continued, as bravely as he could, throwing out his chin a little more as he continued to look past her, "that means, I suppose, that

thou doesn't agree to the condeetions, and that thy answer again to me is No?" Facing quickly about, he began to march independently to the door.

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“Eh, lad, but thou does take me up so, not giving me a chance to say—say—” She sank down distressfully on a chair.

The collapse of Mr. Lawson was amazingly sudden; his erect shoulders fell, his chin lost its lofty altitude; and facing suddenly about, his glasses all awry, he hurried to Mary’s side, and taking her hands from her face began a most treacherous tirade against himself, his master—yea, and even men in general—for their shameful treatment of the weaker sex. Presently his voice grew very low, and then their heads got dangerously close together. When at last they arose, after an eloquent pause, John’s spectacles were lying forlornly on the floor, his coat-tails once more were hanging in peace and quietness, his arm was around her, and he had the audacity to waggishly inform her that they were the best “condeetions” that he had made in his whole forty-five years of life.

Suddenly remembering her mistress’s troubles, the happy light died out of Mary’s face, and turning anxiously to her now contented lover she said eagerly, “And now, lad, do try and think o’ something to help them. If nothing else can be done, there is the train; if it is missed there will be so much more time.”

“Nay, lass,” John answered, as he sat down, “the train scheme is no good; for I’m sure the missus would, as she has threatened, leave the house if he didn’t go to-night.”

Picking up his glasses and slowly polishing them, John continued ruminatingly, “Like thee, Mary, I believe her heart’s warm towards him, but it’s her pride, and that can only be broken down by deeply moving her heart. Sure, sure, lass, there’s no other way.” He was silent for a brief space and then went on, quietly, speaking to himself, his eyes fixed steadfastly on the carpet. “And if the boots don’t reach her heart and soften it towards him, there’s nowt in this world that will, sure.”

“Now, John, lad, don’t ramble on like that; I’m right anxious. Tell me what’s in thy mind,” broke in Mary, restlessly, seating herself on a chair by his side.

“That I will, lass,” answered John, briskly, shaking off his contemplative mood, “for I believe we’ve now got the key to the sitiuation. Thou remembers,” he went on eagerly, “how, soon after their little lad’s death, the maister ordered that all his toys and clothing should be taken away from the house, as he couldn’t bear to see ’em around?”

“I do, lad, I do, and it went hard wi’ the missus to let ’em go; but she didn’t like to thwart the maister, he wur so restless and morbid. But it never should have been done, lad; it wer’n’t becoming like.”

“Thou art reet, Mary, it wer’n’t the thing to do; for in getting rid o’ the things nowt wur left to bring tender memories back to ’em o’ him, and so, having no common sorrow, their hearts grew narrow—as wur to be expected—and they began to misunderstand each

other and drift apart. Sure as thou lives, Mary, getting rid o' the little lad's things wur wheere the mistake came in, in their lives."

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Springing excitedly to his feet, he continued quickly, "Thou remembers the night, too, thou gave me the bundle wi' the little things in to take to the charitable institoote? Well, I didn't go straight theere wi' it; I took it first to my room and opened it, just to have one more look at 'em; and lass, the first thing my eyes fell on wur a little pair o' his boots—thou remembers the pair—the ones that had a little hole in one o' the toes. Well, Mary, that little hole staring me in the face touched my heart and melted it as few things in this world ever did, and so, lass, I just couldn't send 'em away, and I took 'em out and put 'em in my trunk, wheere they still are. Now, Mary, if those little worn boots could break down such a real worldly man as me—and when the lad wur not my own, too—does thou think for a moment that, if the maister and the missus could be got to come across 'em just about at the same time, sweet memories, that they've forgotten, would not rush over 'em, and that their hearts would not be moved to the very core, and that they would not just *have* to forgive each other? Why! I can fairly see 'em together now, lass, and it's going to be all reet, and—and—and—" He was actually too full for further utterance, and bending down clasped his equally moved listener in his arms, and just hugged her.

When Mary finally managed to extricate herself from his arms, he gave further vent to his feelings by cutting a series of remarkable capers, doubtless a species of ancient dance, in which (undignified as doubtless it would have been) Mary, who had caught the contagion of his happiness, would, I believe, eventually have joined, had he not suddenly hove to.

Hurrying to her side, he said, between his gasps for breath, "And now for the plot, lass. I'll go and get the boots, wrap 'em up, and put 'em on the table theere. Then thou must go and tell the missus that there's a parcel for her on the table. Thou wilt manage, of course, to get out o' the room before she can tell thee to fetch it. As for me, when I know that she's found it, I'll go to the maister and deliver a like message to him, and also get away before he can tell me to bring it. And then, lass, he'll catch her when her heart's full—and then we shall see!"

His genial old coat-tails were flashing out of the room before Mary could say a word in reply.

As she sank breathlessly down on her chair, she exclaimed: "Ah, but I am excited and moved!"

She had scarcely time to wipe her eyes when John flashed back again, his spectacles in one hand and a small parcel in the other. "Theere they are, lass," he almost shouted as he laid the parcel hurriedly on the table. "And now, Mary, quick, go and tell her, and as soon as she finds 'em I'll go and fix the maister."

Mary needed no second bidding, but hurried away, while John left by a door that led to his master's study.

CHAPTER III.

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Reconciled.

“But ties around this heart were spun
That could not, would not, be undone!”

When Mrs. Townsley entered the parlor her face was pale and careworn. As she seated herself some little distance from the table, bearing the precious parcel upon which so many hopes were now founded, she looked up at the clock.

“I could not go out to-night; he will be leaving soon”—there was a touch of wistfulness in her voice. She sat for a little time sadly turning round and round the plain gold ring on her left hand. “If he had threatened anything else but to desert me,” she went on again presently, “I could go to him; but it’s no use in trying, I cannot do it.”

She rose with a weary sigh and went over to the table and listlessly took up the parcel. She had no curiosity as to its contents, as was shown by her sitting down again without opening it. Resting her chin on her hand she drifted into thoughts that plainly were not happy ones. Finally she again sighed deeply and leaned back in her chair. Her eyes fell upon the parcel. Indifferently she slipped off the cord and began to unwrap the paper. Something slipped on her lap, and she looked mechanically down; the paper and string, which was still in her hand, fluttered to the floor, her lips parted, her eyes dilated and her face grew pitifully pale. As though fascinated, she continued to gaze at the poor soiled little boots. Her laboring heart at last threw off its torpor and drove the rich color once more back to her face, and then with a cry, full of unutterable love she caught up the precious little things, kissed, cooed, wept and fondled them passionately. “My dear, dead darling,” she sobbed. Sinking on her knees by the side of the chair, she fondled them afresh and pressed her lips hungrily to the spot where the inquisitive little toe had forced an opening.

Presently the sound of footsteps fell upon her ears. She sprang to her feet. “It is Harold!” she exclaimed excitedly. In her new tender mood she had almost forgotten her resentment toward him. Then an impulse flashed suddenly into her mind—happily she acted upon it. Hastily wrapping up the boots again, she hurriedly placed them on the table, in a position which she thought would attract her husband’s attention, and then she sped across the room and hid behind the heavy curtains which screened the deep bay window. She had not been mistaken—it was her husband.

He was wearing his great-coat and had evidently been preparing to go out. She could see from her hiding-place that his absent mood was still strong upon him.

“I—I wish,” he said, thoughtfully, to himself, as he entered the room, “that John had thought to bring the parcel; this room is filled with memories of her, and it makes it harder to go.” He stopped and looked regretfully around the room; then, noticing the parcel, he walked listlessly over to the table, took it up and ponderingly began to unfold

it; the secret the roughly folded paper held was quickly revealed. As he held out the wee boots in the palm of his strong hand, his lips moved for a few moments, but they gave forth no sound. When the words at last came they were pitifully broken: "His, *his* boots! My poor, poor darling!" Over and over again he repeated the words as he passionately stroked the frayed little toes.

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His strength seemed suddenly to desert him and he sank weakly on a chair, "How I loved him! My God!" Then there flashed back to him the memory of his wife's deep, true love, and sorrow for the lost one, and of how he had added to their sorrow, and how they were now about to separate, and the regret and pity of it all broke down all self-control and caused sobs to break from his lips, such as only strong men who seldom know what tears are, can ever utter.

When the storm had spent itself he rose and carefully wrapped up the boots. "I will take them with me," he said, "they will keep me from growing narrow and morose again. Ah, if I had but kept them when I was passing through the dark days! I should have had more sympathy with her, have understood myself and her better, and this never would have happened." He looked around the room for the last time: "No, she never was so dear to me as she is to-night; I never understood her so well."

As he was moving sadly toward the door some belated organ-grinder, in an adjacent street, began to play the weird refrain of that song which has touched the hearts of so many who have loved home:

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home—."

He stopped and listened to the music as it stole plaintively from the distance into the room. When he began to move toward the door again he was absently repeating the haunting refrain:

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home—."

The music, as well as his words, had floated to the deep bay window; the curtains had swiftly and noiselessly parted, and she was stealing after his retreating figure with an expression mantling her face which brought out every detail of its great beauty.

As he raised his hand to open the door the organ drifted from the refrain to the air.

He began sadly to repeat the pathetic words:

"An exile from home—."

Two warm, loving arms had stolen around his neck from behind and smothered the words on his lips: "Not an exile from home, Harold; no, no, not that, dear! The boots—we understand better now—forgive me, Harold. Don't go. I——."

Once more the organ had reached the refrain:

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home—."

As he folded her passionately in his arms she drew his face down to hers and said, with the happy light still glowing and beautifying her face: "We will take it as a good omen; to us, now, there shall be no place like home, shall there, dear?"

As he looked into her eyes he answered by lovingly repeating the refrain which was now dying softly away in the distance:

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home—."

* * * * *

A Prairie Episode.

The fierce rays of the sun, which had turned the prairie grass into a lifeless-looking dusty brown, continued to pour pitilessly down on the horde of perspiring workmen, exhausted Indian ponies, and long-eared morose mules.

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At intervals, gusts of hot parching winds bent the rank grass, which gave forth a dry, almost rasping sound, very different from its usual musical rustle.

"In ten minutes more it will be noon, and we can get out of this into the shade for an hour," said Joe Swan, a huge muscular laborer, as he pushed the nose of the steel scraper into the earth.

The words were addressed to a pale-faced young man who was driving the pair of mules hitched to the scraper. The only reply was a tired tug on the reins, and the next moment the scraper had torn up half a yard of the tenacious prairie sod and cast it to one side. As he turned the mules around to get them into position again, Joe glanced covertly at the weary face, shook his head in a troubled manner, and muttered, "It ain't the work that's breaking him up like this; it's her, and it's going to end in trouble long before we reach the Rockies."

It was a strange, almost fantastic life these two men, with hundreds of others, were leading away out here on the vast prairie, whose long solitude was now being broken by the babel that attends track-laying, and whose vast bosom, for the first time, was being girded with a band of steel which was to connect the Atlantic with the Pacific, and bring home most forcibly to the Mother Country the value of her great Canadian colony.

Stretching away in front of and behind the two men were hundreds of other scrapers, tearing up the sod, while closely following them came gangs of track-layers, who laid the ties and fastened the rails to them as quickly as the sod was removed. It was easy work track-laying on the flat expanse, where grading for hundreds of miles at a stretch was practically unnecessary. Such, indeed, was the rapidity with which the rails were laid that camp had to be moved from two to three miles westward every day, so that the men never knew what it was to sleep twice in the same place.

As Joe was about to scoop up another load, a gunshot echoed and re-echoed across the prairie. "Dinner time; just what we have been waiting for!" shouted Joe, as he let go the handles of the scraper, unhitched the mules, sprang on the back of one of them, and stooping, swung Harry Langdon, his delicate-looking driver, laughingly across the back of the other. The next moment they were dashing towards the camp half a mile away. Other laborers, similarly mounted, were straining every muscle to reach the same place, for they knew that the rule of "first come, first served," would be religiously adhered to.

A fast friendship had sprung up between the huge scraper-handler and his young driver. The very day the little fellow had wandered into camp, two months before, with his hands and face swollen with mosquito bites, and asked for a job, big-hearted Joe took a liking to him. It was owing to Joe's influence with the foremen that he was at last, grudgingly, given work, as his slim, girlish figure told strongly against him among such a crowd of sinewy, hardy men.

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Had he been put driving for any other scraper-handler than Joe he would never have succeeded; for before he had been in camp a week the thick tepid surface water, which they all had to drink, coupled with the intense heat, told on him, and for weeks he was so ill that he could scarcely drag his feet along.

Owing to the custom of each scraper being compelled to clear a certain distance every day, it was impossible—on account of the great stretch to be covered by all the scrapers—for the foremen to more than two or three times a day visit the works, and thus it was that Joe, unknown to the foremen, was able to let his little driver lie for hours, when he was at his weakest, in the thick grass, while he wrestled with the stubborn mules and the scraper at the same time.

At last the evening of the torrid day with which this story opens, had arrived. Those who had been fortunate enough to get to the surface holes first, and get a little water, were washing their shirts, while the less fortunate were lounging around the little tents—of which there were hundreds—welcoming the cool breeze which the dark, ominous clouds had brought up. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, followed by a loud report, and then from the warring clouds the longed-for rain began to pour in heavy sheets.

For some time before the storm broke, Joe had been standing in the opening of the tent, gazing with furrowed brow, through the gathering darkness, toward a tent much larger than those of the ordinary laborers, in the shadow of which was dimly outlined the forms of a man and a woman. He at once recognized the woman as Nellie Shuter (the only white woman in camp), daughter of Bill Shuter, a general storekeeper and purveyor of smuggled and doctored whiskey. The man with her he knew was his mate, Harry Langdon.

The moment the rain began to fall, Nellie ran into the large tent—her father's store—and left Harry, who, regardless of the storm, stood for fully a minute looking after her. As he was about to turn, a figure, muffled in a gaudy colored blanket, emerged from behind an adjacent tent and touched him, in a supplicating manner, on the shoulder. He turned hastily, and seeing who it was, pushed the intruding hand away. As he did so the blanket fell away from the head and shoulders of the figure, and there stood revealed a young Indian girl belonging to the Cree tribe, several of whom—both Indians and squaws—had for weeks been following the encampment.

Instead of leaving him, she raised her hands in an imploring manner, and her lips moved. Her pleading evidently had no effect upon Harry, as he turned and left her abruptly. With an angry gesture she turned and vanished in the direction of the Indian encampment.

After Harry had returned, Joe sat for quite a long time with a troubled look on his face, silently pulling at his pipe. Harry seemed too much engrossed in thought to be aware of his companion's unwonted silence.

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"I seed you again, to-night, with Bill Shuter's daughter," began Joe at last, breaking a silence that had begun to grow painful to him.

The reference to the girl caused a flush to steal over Harry's face, and he said, as he sat down by the big fellow's side, "You are very good, old fellow, to take the interest you do in me. I should have been in a queer way now had it not been for you; yet, old chap, I cannot bring myself to believe that Nellie Shuter and her father are as bad as you have hinted several times." As he concluded he walked to the opening of the tent and looked out: it was still raining heavily. "I guess, Joe," he went on awkwardly, without turning, "that I shall take a run over to Shuter's store for a little while."

"I'd like to say a few words to you before you go."

Harry turned good-humoredly, and sat down on the bench again.

Covering his companion's knee with his great hand, Joe said gravely, as he looked down into his face: "I've not had much edication, as you know, Harry; but I've larned a mighty lot that schools don't teach, and one thing that I've got a mighty good hold of is sizin' up people, and if ever I met a bad egg Bill Shuter's one. You must know something about him yourself by this time, for he got you to gamble, and he's well-nigh won all you've made since you came to camp. If he'd won it fairly it'd been bad enough—seein' you were a greenhorn—but in my heart I believe he cheats you. I've tried to catch him at it, but he's too mighty sharp."

Joe's sombre countenance and equally sombre words were more than Harry could stand, and leaning his head against the giant's shoulder, he laughed incredulously.

"I happen to know," Joe went on doggedly, when his companion's laughter had died away, "that you don't gamble because you love it; but to please his daughter Nellie, who"—his remarks were interrupted by Harry springing to his feet and nervously pacing the tent.

But Joe had warmed up to his subject, and was not to be stopped; "As I said," he went on, "you gamble only to please his daughter, who is in league with her father. I've heard that she's told others, that are as sweet on her as you, that the best way to keep the old wolf quiet, and allow her to be courted, is to gamble with him. I tell you, Harry, that she's foolin' you, and that in truth she's as bad as he is, and—"

The interruption this time was effective enough: "It's cowardly of you, Joe Swan, to speak of her like that." Harry's eyes were gleaming with anger. "You are presuming on the kindnesses you have done me," he went on, halting in front of him, "and if her father and a few of his friends had been here, you would not have dared to speak in that manner. You know I love Nellie Shuter, and nothing you can say will make me break with her."

With this he almost ran out of the tent, leaving Joe dragging at his heavy blonde moustache and gazing at the patches in the canvas tent.

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The minutes sped on, and still he continued to think. Finally he took the pipe out of his mouth, put it absently into his pocket and said to himself, as though he had solved a difficult problem, "The lad was right; I had no business to speak to him in that way, but what I said about them both I believe to be the truth, gospel truth, and sooner or later there's going to be trouble for him in Shuter's dive; and I'm going to be with him when it comes, although he did give me that hard rub about bein' afraid of Shuter and his friends."

He slowly picked up his hat, and was about to step out into the darkness when the Indian girl, whom he had seen accost Harry, noiselessly entered the tent, and drawing the wet blanket from her head, said passionately, in quaint broken English, as she pointed in the direction of Shuter's store, "He go dare again—Harry—for see de white girl, Nellie; I see him go, and she no love him."

As Joe looked at her he saw she was far more prepossessing than the other squaws; while against her character he had not heard a word. He had seen her for the first time about three months ago, when she came to camp with some old squaws, to sell prairie chickens and ducks, which the braves had shot, and Indian-like had sent them to sell.

Her acquaintance with Harry had not been of long duration. The first time she met him he was lying in the deep rich grass, for it was the time the fever was upon him. Joe was away in the distance taking care of both the mules and the scraper. So unexpectedly had she come across him, that her moccasined foot touched his hand before he was aware of her presence.

In his gentlemanly way he had risen and told her he was sorry he had been in her way, and then had sunk weakly back again. The suffering on his pinched boyish face went straight to her heart, which awoke to longings never known before.

Every day after this little adventure, on one pretext or another, she managed to encounter him. At first, he nodded and smiled and had a kindly word for her, but suddenly he ignored her altogether, for word of her infatuation had reached Nellie Shuter's ears, and she had acted as though she were displeased.

For a time the girl stayed away, and Harry thought she would not return; but one night, when he was walking alone on the prairie, she ran suddenly up to him, and pointing to the swiftly-flowing Red River, told him in the figurative language of her people, that because of him her heart was as troubled as the river was in the spring-time—when the melting snow vexed it so that it burst its barriers and flowed over the prairie. She went on in her childish, earnest way to tell him that she could not help loving him, and that if he would take her to be his wife she should work for him as long as she lived.

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As he did not reply, a gleam of hope crept into her heart, and baring her dark arm, she showed him how strong it was, how it never grew weary, and how, if he would throw in his lot with her people, he should never have to work, as the squaws always worked for the braves. It was no uncommon thing for French-Canadians to marry squaws, neither was it uncommon for squaws to offer themselves in marriage, and thus she did not know how strangely unnatural her proposition sounded to him. It never, in his inexperience, occurred to him to make any allowance for her on account of her life and environments, and he judged her as he would have judged a white girl.

As she looked up into his blue eyes and saw the look of dismay and contempt there, her intuitions told her her words had sounded unseemly to him, and that he abhorred her for them; and in her keen distress and anger she turned and fled.

Had he loved no other woman, it might have been the stoicism of her race would have saved her from further humiliation, but when she saw him walking with Nellie Shuter, saw the love-light in his eyes when he looked at her, and noted how flippantly, in return, Nellie treated him, her love swept away all feelings of pride, and she seized every opportunity of speaking to him. Naturally such a course only added to his distaste for her.

Joe had guessed that she had contracted a liking for Harry, but never until her visit to their tent had he imagined her falling so helplessly in love with him. And as he stood and looked into her dark, passionate face, this new complication of Harry's affairs made him feel more ill at ease than ever. "Well, and if he has gone to Shuter's tent to see Nellie, what business is that of yours?" he asked sharply. He would have liked to answer her kindly, and would have done so, had he not feared fanning into a keener flame her hopeless passion.

The bronzed cheeks of the Indian girl flamed into a still deeper hue as she heard his words. But conquering her passion, she told him again how dearly she loved Harry, while she was sure the white girl did not; and she had come to ask him to tell Harry this.

Joe, who could not trust himself to reply, pointed—with a sorry attempt at dignity—to the opening in the tent.

For a few moments she stood and looked at him with clenched hands and compressed lips, and then, without another word, turned and left, as he had silently ordered.

As Joe trudged through the darkness and rain in the direction of Shuter's store, he repeated several times, "It was pretty small to treat her like that; I never felt such a mean cuss before; but what in the world was I to do?"

As he finally entered Shuter's tent, which bore the dignified title of store, a scene that would have appeared strangely fantastic to dwellers in cities, presented itself.

Congregated together were about fifty sunburnt laborers, arrayed in coarse woollen shirts. To their despondent-looking trousers the blue tenacious prairie mud clung like glue. Several nationalities were represented in the motley assembly, for it was the time of the great North-West boom, and men had been drawn from far and near.

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In one corner of the tent was a quaint table or counter, constructed of three old boards and two trestles, upon which were deposited a lot of rolled Canadian smoking and chewing tobacco, clay pipes, and several long-necked bottles. Pinned to the tent, behind the counter, was a card, on which was scrawled, in characters which scorned all laws of proportion, "Mild Drinks." It was owing to the abhorred fashion of the North-West Mounted Police, of confiscating drinks that were not mild, that Shuter was led to display this prevaricating sign.

Behind the counter stood Nellie Shuter, a dashing, good-looking young woman of about twenty-three, while seated at a number of rude tables were laborers throwing dice and playing poker. Leaning nonchalantly on the counter were two or three young men, who were making themselves agreeable to the fair attendant behind it.

Joe quietly edged his way through the tent till he came to a table near the counter, at which were seated his mate, Harry Langdon, and Bill Shuter. Shuter was a tall, spare man, with a somewhat receding chin and small, very light-colored blue eyes, which had a habit of looking past one while their owner was speaking. A glance at Harry's face was sufficient to show that he had been drinking heavily. Although Shuter had drunk sparingly, there was a strange irritable expression about his face.

Seating himself some little distance from the two men, Joe covertly watched the play. He soon perceived that Harry was paying little or no attention to the game—although it was poker—his attention being almost entirely fixed on Nellie, who was flirting outrageously with her admirers. Every time her flippant laugh reached him a pained look crossed his sensitive face, but she pretended to be as unconscious of it as she appeared to be of his reproachful glances.

Despite his loose play, however, Harry drew a number of hands that a child could have won with. Finally he laid down his cards and said, "I guess I won't play any more to-night, Shuter."

"Bring us a drink, Nellie," was Shuter's response.

As Harry raised to his lips the glass of reddish-looking fluid which Nellie brought, Shuter said insolently, "It's not the custom of men in this country to run away when they are winning." His daughter heard the words—as he had intended—and looking Harry full in the face, shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. No plan of attack could have been more subtle. Harry's face flushed violently, and sitting down hastily, he said: "You know it would take me weeks to win back the money I have lost with you; but it's all right; deal the cards."

As Joe sat and watched this by-play, he was so enraged that he could scarcely keep from springing to his feet and laying his huge hands on Shuter.

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The biting insult appeared to somewhat sober Harry, and he watched his play more carefully. As his run of luck still continued, Shuter's ill-humor increased, till it was quite marked. After the fifth or sixth deal the crucial game arrived. Both players began to bet heavily on their hands. Harry met his opponent's bets without a tremor of excitement, and twice Shuter hesitated as though he would throw up the game—seeing he could not bluff Harry into doing so, and, consequently, forfeiting what was already on the table. Suddenly Shuter said, with an air of quiet confidence, "The stakes are pretty high now; what do you say to having only one raise more and then showing our hands? We evidently can't bluff each other, and the best hand will then have to win."

This subtle effort to discourage his opponent, and make him afraid of the next raise, failed, as Harry merely nodded and said, "Make your raise."

There was silence for a few seconds, and then Shuter said, "I will raise you thirty dollars better." Before this advance the stakes had run up to about forty dollars, so the raise, among such men, was a most unusual one. If Harry lost, it meant the forfeiture of his entire month's salary. Joe was now so intensely interested that he was leaning eagerly forward; he was suspicious of Shuter, and was watching him as a cat watches a mouse.

The heavy raise caused a slightly startled look to shoot into Harry's face; but he was now in it to the death and answered, "All right, I'll take you up; there's my cards" (four aces); "show me yours."

Joe saw a dangerous look leap into Shuter's eyes as Harry leaned forward, expectantly, to see what cards Shuter held.

Stretching out his hand, as if with the intention of also exposing his cards, Shuter deftly managed to knock off the table the remainder of the pack. As he did so he uttered an exclamation, as though his action had been accidental, and stooping began to gather up the cards; but while doing so dexterously dropped two of his own cards and replaced them with two others, thus giving himself a royal flush—a hand impossible to beat.

Quickly as the trick had been done it was detected by both Harry and Joe, and the next instant Harry was on his feet, his face convulsed with anger and his slight frame quivering with excitement.

Shuter also sprang to his feet, and as his thin lips parted into a forced, uncomprehending smile, Harry struck him with his fist, full in the face. Before Harry could draw back Shuter had seized him by the throat, and was fumbling in his pocket for an old sailor's knife which he was always known to carry; but before he could draw it he was swung violently off his feet and brought down with a thud on the table. He was little better than a child in Joe's grasp. The next instant the place was in an uproar, and a dozen men sprang on Joe; but it was only after a long struggle that they succeeded in drawing his terrified victim from his grasp.

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As Shuter at last staggered to his feet, his daughter ran to his side. The sight of the girl made Harry forget his resentment, and he walked toward her with the intention of apologizing; but the moment her eyes fell upon him she burst forth furiously, "Get out of this, you little fool; I am sick of making a fool of you. There's not a man in the tent but knows how I have been laughing at your attempts at love-making." Pointing her finger derisively at him she continued ironically, "What do you think, men, of *that thing* making love to me?"

All eyes were turned on her unhappy little lover, whose face was now pitifully white and drawn. The jeers which she expected, to her surprise did not come, for the little fellow's appreciation of his trying position was so painfully apparent in his drooping figure and pallid face, that there was not a man among them who did not feel more like gathering him in their strong arms than jeering at him. Never before had they realized what a weakly, effeminate little soul he was.

"It's all right, boys, you can let go." It was Joe who broke the silence. They had almost forgotten they were still holding him lest he should lay hands again on Shuter. Without a word they released him, for they knew by the tone of his voice, and from the pitiful look he gave his little driver, that he had forgotten all about his enemy. As Joe strode toward Harry, and the yellow glare from the coal lamps, fastened to posts behind the counter, fell athwart his powerful, weather-beaten face and massive figure, they realized as they had never done before the striking physical difference between the scraper-handler and his driver, and wondered vaguely how two such dissimilar characters could attract each other so powerfully.

"Don't mind her, Harry, don't mind her; she's not worthy of you. Let's go." As arm and arm they strode out of the tent the men quietly parted.

"I'll have a reckoning with that cub of yours some other time, Joe Swan," shouted Shuter, with an attempt of bravado, as they were disappearing. He had mistaken the humor of the men; one of them told him to shut his cursed mouth.

Before the two silent figures had taken a dozen steps in the thick darkness toward their own tent, the storm broke out afresh. The turbulent clouds, unobstructed for hundreds of miles by either hills or trees, were now hovering over the very sod, and at short intervals vivid, sinuous gleams broke from them, and, serpent-like, went writhing and glistening through the matted grass, while the roar of the thunder made the apprehensive earth tremble perceptibly.

Joe had seen two such dread storms before, and so paid but little attention to them. Thinking his companion might be afraid of the appalling sight, he said, as he glanced down at his drawn face, "It's only on the prairies one sees storms like these; and I've seen men as didn't fear a revolver get mighty scared at a sight like this. First time I saw it I felt queer enough."

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"No, Joe, you misunderstand; if my face is white it's not because I'm afraid of the lightning. I have been hurt to-night, Joe, worse than it could ever hurt me."

Utterly forgetful of the warring elements, Joe halted abruptly, and throwing his great arm around the slender shoulders of his companion, said fiercely, "For God's sake, Harry, don't talk like that; it makes me feel like going back and choking the life out of both of them." While he was speaking, a flash of lightning, more vivid than its fellows, shot across the prairie and revealed the two troubled figures to some of the laborers who were in the act of leaving Shuter's store, and their hearts—unluckily for Shuter—hardened against him for the part he that night had played.

The deep thrill in Joe's voice went to Harry's heart like a balm, and he said gratefully, "You're an awful decent fellow, Joe, and it's too bad of me bringing my troubles into your life in this way."

Joe's only reply, as they again hurried along, was to hug the little arm more closely. When they finally reached their tent Joe uttered an exclamation, for one of the flashes revealed that it was at least two feet deep in water. Groping his way into the tent, Joe lit a candle, and holding it high above his head, looked around. "This is hard luck," he said to his companion, who was standing in the opening; "we've pitched the tent in a little hollow, and the water's drained into it. There'll be no sleeping here for us to-night; we shall have to move the tent and stretchers to higher ground."

Half an hour later the tent was pitched several acres away. Had the lightning not died away, they would have seen that they were near two other tents of exactly the same size as their own.

It was about five o'clock when Joe awoke, and looking out of the tent saw the sun was already casting a warm glow in the east. Seeing Harry showed no signs of waking, he slipped quietly from his stretcher, dressed, and stealing past his mate, left the tent. Signs of life were already visible in camp. In another hour the entire camping outfit would be loaded on the waiting flat-cars and taken to the end of the track—which again stretched over two miles westward—and a new camping-ground found, after which breakfast would be served and the phenomenal track-laying be again continued.

"It's a great country," Joe muttered, as his gaze swept across the broad expanse, "and if it hadn't been for the trouble my little mate's had, I should have been happy out here."

Turning, he saw for the first time the two small tents, and at once recognized them as the ones Shuter and his daughter slept in. While he was thinking how queer it was that above all other spots they should have chosen this to pitch their tent, Shuter came out of one of the tents, and in a loud voice called to his daughter, in the other, to get up. Not wanting to speak to him, Joe hurried back into his own tent and began to wash.

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By some mischance the tin bowl upset and fell noisily to the ground. Expecting to see Harry start up, Joe looked across at him as he stooped to pick up the wayward bowl, but the quiet form did not move. "Sleeping mighty sound," Joe soliloquized, as he vigorously began to scour his face with a coarse, unsanitary-looking towel. Suddenly the towel fell from his hands, and a startled, curious look shot into his face; it had come to him that the scanty clothing which covered his little driver neither rose nor fell.

For a few moments he stood gazing at the dimly outlined figure in the yet uncertain light, a feeling of growing terror stealing over him. He tried to convince himself that his eyes were deceiving him, yet his laboring heart would not be comforted. Twice he opened his mouth to call Harry's name, but his parched throat refused to utter any sound. He could endure the growing horror no longer, and with set, terrified gaze began to move toward the stretcher. When at last his laggard steps reached it he had not the courage to shake the slim figure, but in a voice, which sounded strangely unnatural, called his mate's name. The quiet of the tent was broken by no response. With pitiful hesitancy he finally stretched out his hand till it rested on the wan face; then he uttered a great cry—it was as cold as the face of the dead!

In his terror and excitement he was about to snatch him up in his arms, when a sight, which made him start back with an exclamation of horror met his eyes: in the side of the tent against which the body rested was a sinister cut, stained with blood. Pushing the canvas back, the whole treacherous story stood out as clear as daylight; while sleeping, his companion had been stabbed through the folds of the tent.

"There's only one man under God's heaven, who'd do a deed like this, and that's Bill Shuter." There was something weirdly ominous in the tones in which he uttered the words; in his dogged manner as he strode out of the tent, cut several of the ropes that fastened it to the ground, pieced them together, tried them to see if the knots were firm—especially those which formed the noose at the end of the line—and then winding the rope around his huge arm, strode into Bill Shuter's tent.

Scarcely had he entered it when a man's cry of terror rang out on the quiet morning air, and roused the few who already had not risen. Before the echo had died away, Nellie Shuter ran out of her tent toward her father's; but before she could reach it Joe Swan emerged from it, his massive hands grasping the rope, which was now wound tightly around her father's throat. In vain Shuter struggled to utter another cry, and to thrust away the avenging hand which grasped the rope.

With a terrified scream Nellie sprang upon Joe and endeavored to stop his march toward the derrick in the near distance, the ponderous arm of which stretched enticingly out some nine feet above the ground. Without swerving an inch to the right or the left, Joe hurried on toward it, while with his disengaged hand, and without apparently using any force, he kept Nellie aside.

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Before he had got half-way to it, however, shouts fell upon his ears, and glancing hastily backward, he saw over a hundred laborers running toward him. For a brief space he stopped, measured with his eyes the distance he was from the arm of the derrick and his pursuers, then stooped, threw Shuter across his shoulder, and started off on a brisk run. Nellie made another desperate effort to stop him, but this time he pushed her to the earth and sped on.

Despite his great weight, and the burden which encumbered him, he was the first to reach the derrick—although the crowd had been close behind him when he began to run. He had deftly thrown the end of the rope over the arm of the derrick, and was about to hoist Shuter into mid-air, when the crowd was upon him. The rope was wrenched from his hands, and the noose unloosened from the man's throat. "For heaven's sake, what does all this mean?" asked a foreman, turning toward Joe.

Before he could reply Shuter gasped, "He's mad, he's mad; he ran into my tent, and without a word wound that rope about my neck and then tried to hang me." As he looked at his implacable enemy he edged towards the foreman.

"He pretends," began Joe, in a compressed voice, "that he don't know why I was going to hang him; he's a liar; yes, a million times worse than a liar—he's a murderer! I thought I'd save you the trouble of helping me to string him up, for when you hear what he's done you'll riddle him full of holes and string him up as well!"

The crowd had now gathered about the speaker, and were gazing at him with growing excitement. "There's a lot of you," Joe went on, "who saw him last night, in that gambling whiskey dive of his, try to draw his knife on Harry Langdon, and heard him shout after me that he'd have a reckoning some other time with that cub of mine; and, boys, he's kept his word, for Harry lies in his tent there, dead, stabbed to the heart, in the dead of night, through the folds of the tent, by that cuss there that you were so afraid I'd string up."

Angry exclamations followed this fierce tirade, and a rush was made for Shuter.

"It's a lie! I swear it's a lie! I never stabbed the lad!"

But his words were cut short by the rope, which was again being wound around his throat. As they dragged him towards the derrick Nellie once more threw herself across her father's body and begged piteously for mercy. The sight of the girl's intense grief somewhat cooled the unreasoning rage which had been kindled in their hearts by Joe's rude eloquence, and they hesitated as though they hardly knew what to do.

"Let's see the body before we string him up, anyway," cried a voice.

The fairness of the proposition appealed to the men—more especially as they had begun to realize that they had acted impulsively. There was a general move toward the tent where the body lay.

In the rush none of them noticed the rapid approach of the Indian girl, who so prodigally, and unasked, had given her heart to the murdered boy. As they entered the tent she was close behind Joe, whose huge body hid Shuter and his daughter, who were in front of him, from her view.

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As Joe stepped forward to remove the coat he had thrown across the dead face, a low cry, full of the keenest apprehension and fear, sounded behind him. Turning, his eyes fell upon the Indian girl, who was crouching close at his feet, her palsied hands raised as though to guard off some deadly apparition or danger, while her eyes, full of the most intense fear and horror, were fixed on Nellie Shuter.

Joe's temper had been sorely tried, and laying his hand heavily on her shoulder, he said fiercely, "What's the meaning of this?"

Instead of trying to escape from his grasp, she caught him hysterically by the arm, and pointing at Nellie, said wildly, in her queer broken English, "See, see, de Great Spirit send her back to me! She's dead."

As Nellie stood and continued to gaze in amazement at her, the insane terror of the Indian girl rose to an ungovernable height, and burying her face in the grass, she screamed to Joe to send her away. The deep superstition in her nature—bred by her people—had been stronger than the love of revenge or the fear of punishment. Joe was the first to read the meaning of her superstitious horror, knowing as he did her hatred of Nellie and her love for Harry. And suddenly pointing at the grovelling figure, he said in a shocked voice: "Boys, I see it all now; she's the murderer. She meant to stab Nellie, her rival, and would have done it if we hadn't in the darkness last night pitched our tent next to Nellie's. The tents are alike, and she mistook ours for hers."

The mention of Harry's name brought a gleam of reason to the distracted girl's face, and springing to her feet—apparently now forgetful of Nellie's presence—she begged Joe to take her from the tent to Harry. Not for a moment did she appear to realize the dreadful mistake she had made.

"He's there!" said Joe, pitilessly, pointing to the stretcher. Thinking in her half-crazed manner that he was sleeping through it all, she ran to the stretcher, and tore away the sheet that covered the face she loved. It was not till she had caught the dear head to her bosom and pressed her face to his, that the truth broke upon her clouded mind. They had been drawing near her; but as she let his head fall back, they all—except Joe—drew away from her; the heart-broken, insane look on her face was more than they could bear. As she stood, wildly pressing her hands to her forehead, Joe pointed at the gash in the tent and then at the blood-stained clothing at Harry's side. Then with fascinated gaze they watched the rapid changes which sped across her face, for reason had not yet altogether flown, and they saw that she was recalling the fearful mistake she had made. Suddenly her hands slid to her side, and in doing so encountered the handle of the knife which lay concealed beneath her blanket. That was the connecting link which brought home to her the whole truth of the tragedy, and with a cry that haunted many of them for years afterwards, she drew the knife, gave one glance at the stained blade that had robbed her of him for whom she would willingly have died, stabbed again and again the fatal gash in the canvas, and then throwing away the knife,

caught up the lifeless body in her arms and began madly to chant a wild, weird song which her people sang when they had triumphed over their enemies.

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She was so violently insane when she reached Winnipeg that they decided a trial was unnecessary, so she was placed at once in an asylum.

After they had buried his little mate on the great silent prairie, Joe tried to forget and to do his work as usual; but the odor of the newly-severed sod, the cracking of the drivers' whips, the shouting to the stubborn mules, the stampede over the prairie at noon, the hateful sight of Shuter and his daughter—in fact, everything around him—made the longing for the company of his little driver so keen that he could not bear it, and a week after his death he drew his wages and slipped away, none knew whither.

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A Daughter of the Church.

It had been a severe Canadian winter, but the bright spring sunshine was now honeycombing the great snow-heap, which all winter had beset farmer Frechette's farmhouse, and which, on this early March morning, was still banked almost as high as the kitchen window.

Glinting through the old-fashioned narrow panes, the generous rays fell upon the white bowed head of farmer Frechette, who sat warming himself at the square box wood-stove, gazing the while with furrowed brow at the roystering wood sparks, as at short intervals they shot aggressively from the partly open door.

Suddenly there floated through the raised window the joyous chimes of church bells. With an angry exclamation the old man sprang to his feet, hurried to the window, and violently drew it down. His extreme weakness made the anger that convulsed his thin, wrinkled face painful to see. Straightening up his bent frame, he shook his hand at the church, which he could see in the distance, and uttered anathemas against it. As he did so, the door leading from the little bedroom at the back of the kitchen was burst open, and his wife, a woman many years younger than he, ran over to his side, dragged down his still uplifted arm, and led him over to his seat. She then sat down beside him, and burying her face in her hands, began to cry.

Her distress moved him and he told her somewhat doggedly, but not unkindly, to cease. "Do you know what the bells are ringing for?" he asked cynically, after a short pause.

"Why worry about it? We must submit," she answered, trying to keep out of her voice the discontent that assailed her.

"They are ringing," he went on in a hard voice, "for farmer Cadieux's daughter, who is to take her life vows to-day. Already he has one daughter a nun, and his honor among French-Canadians will increase. I have lived in St. Jerome all my life, and have neither



daughter nor son in the Church; they pity me. It was only yesterday we received the letter from Quebec telling us of the honor that had come to my brother through his daughter taking the veil. None of our neighbors were more passionately attached to their children than we; yet death passed by their doors, came to ours, and took them all. Continued disappointment has made me weary of life. The sound of the church bells, which I have heard so often sing honor for others, drives me to outbursts of shameful anger. At times I think I shall go mad. As for the Church, I have nearly lost all faith in it."

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As he ceased, his wife rose, kissed his cheek and said, with a little break in her voice, "We have suffered much, Hormisdas; would to the Virgin we had not been so sorely afflicted."

"Such affliction is nothing but cruelty," he went on, scornfully. "It was cruel when death took all our little ones in childhood. But it was still more cruel, when we had grown old and were striving to be content and kiss the rod, for the Virgin to give us another daughter; to let us keep her till she had grown into womanhood; till we had given her an education which would have fitted her to be the superioress of a convent, and then strike her with a fatal illness just as she was about to take the veil, and once more ruthlessly crush out all our hopes."

"So long as Adele lives there is hope," said his wife, trying to be brave.

"Doctor Prenoveau says she will die," he answered fiercely.

"She was resting easier when I came down to you. I cannot get the idea out of my mind, that if we got Doctor Chalmers from Montreal, he would cure her. They say, although he is young, he is very clever. As for Doctor Prenoveau, you know people say he is too old to practise now."

"When Doctor Prenoveau said the others would die, they died," he replied, looking at her as though he feared she would no longer argue with him.

With a hopeful ring in her voice the brave mother said, "That is true, but this time he may be mistaken; Doctor Chalmers would know."

"If we only dared hope," he said under his breath.

"Doctor Chalmers would know," she repeated eagerly.

"Send for him," he replied, turning his face away.

The sun had hardly sunk behind the Laurentian range of mountains, which for hundreds of miles towers above the great St. Lawrence River, and dictates its course to the Gulf, when the wind from the north, bringing with it flurries of fine snow, began to blow cold and strong. Doctor Chalmers drew the buffalo robes tighter about him, and settled back in a corner of the sleigh; he had three miles yet to drive before he reached farmer Frechette's house. "Had I known it was going to be this cold I would have arranged for some other doctor to take up the case," he muttered. Had he only done so, how different his life would have been!

"We were afraid you would not come to-day," said Madame Frechette as she led him into the kitchen, where the stove was throwing out a genial heat.

“Had the message been less urgent, I should not have done so,” he replied, stooping and warming his benumbed hands. Farmer Frechette sat facing the doctor at the opposite side of the stove, furtively glancing at the young physician, dissatisfaction imprinted on every line of his face; he was bitterly disappointed. “He is little better than a boy,” the old man repeated to himself, over and over again.

“This is the doctor from Montreal, Adele,” said the mother, bending over her sick daughter. Doctor Chalmers drew near the bed, and as the light from the coal-oil lamp fell across Adele’s face, he could not help but think how beautiful she was even in her illness.

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For a long time nothing could be heard in the kitchen but the loud ticking of the yellow-faced clock, hung high above the old deal table, and the occasional murmur of voices in the sick girl's room. Unable any longer to sit and endure the suspense, the farmer rose, and began, fretfully, to walk to and fro. Finally he stopped at the window, and his gaze travelled across the great expanse of white, beautified by the pale light of the early moon, to the tin-clad church tower in the distance, which shone like burnished silver as the moon's rays fell upon it.

"If she dies there is no Virgin and the priests have deceived us," he said, looking steadily at the tower; "but if she lives"—and he straightened out his bent figure—"I shall die happy in the faith. I will leave money to help build the new church which Father Sauvalle so long has wished to have built." Hearing a slight noise behind him, he turned quickly. His wife, followed by the doctor, was entering the room.

"Well?" he queried, in a peculiar tone, looking at the doctor as though he knew he would tell him there was no hope.

"She certainly is very ill, but I cannot agree with Doctor Prenoveau, if he says there is no hope." The words were kindly spoken, for he had noticed how the old man trembled and how poorly assumed was his air of defiance.

"You really think she may not die, doctor?" he asked, almost incredulously.

"I really think not."

Farmer Frechette sank heavily on his chair. "I am beginning to feel old, very old, doctor," he said weakly.

Never before had Doctor Chalmers taken so keen an interest in a case. Inch by inch he contested with death for the life of the young girl upon whose recovery was founded so many hopes.

It was a beautiful June day when, for the first time since Adele's illness, she ventured out of the house, supported on the young doctor's arm, and walked as far as the little garden at the back of the house. Very lovely she looked in her light-colored, soft, clinging dress, large brimmed straw hat, the health color struggling back to her cheeks, her sweet lips parted, and her heavily fringed dark eyes lighted up with hope and happiness.

Among his friends, Doctor Chalmers was known as a man not prone to many words. Could they but have heard him this afternoon as he sat by her side on the quaint garden seat, they simply would have been astounded.

It had come so gradually, this love of his, that before he was quite aware, it had taken possession of his heart so that no reasoning could have forced it to withdraw. He saw

no reason, indeed, why he should wish to banish it; besides being beautiful and winning, she had received an excellent education, and was in every way fitted to be his wife. Of Adele's dedication to the Church from her birth, he knew nothing, so that no misgivings assailed him. Little wonder then that his heart should be light, and that the primitive garden should appear to him the most beautiful spot he had ever seen.

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After this little walk and chat in the garden, life seemed to come back to her with strides. By the end of August Adele was quite strong again. The change in her health made a new man of her father; from the day Doctor Prenoveau had said she would not recover, until the day Doctor Chalmers had pronounced her out of danger, he had not entered the doors of the church. Now all was different; twice a week he went to confession, and almost every day knelt before the altar and asked forgiveness for the dreadful sins of the past. It had never struck him as being strange that Doctor Chalmers should continue to visit his house after she had recovered. He had a hazy idea that the doctor's triumph over his daughter's disease was the cause of the interest he took in her. The preposterous thought that anyone should want to marry Adele no more entered his imagination than would the idea of anyone wanting to marry one of the dark-robed nuns at the convent.

Everyone in St. Jerome knew that she was to take the veil. If his wife at times had fears, she never mentioned them to him.

And Adele? She was very happy. Like most French-Canadian women, she was passionately attached to the Church. At times her happiness was dimmed by the thought that she was not looking forward to taking the veil with that eagerness that she had felt before her illness. She comforted herself with the thought that the change, somehow, was the result of her illness, and that by and by the old longings would surely return. Why her heart should beat so when Doctor Chalmers called, and what the meaning was of her looking so eagerly forward to his visiting days, she never stopped to think.

The time of her awakening was at hand!

Had Adele's thoughts been less engrossed one afternoon, as she sat on the porch, she would have noticed approaching the house, in the middle of the narrow, dusty road that ran to the church, Father Sauvalle, with his arm linked in that of her father's, both talking eagerly. The priest's hand was on the latch of the gate before she raised her head; her face lighted up, and she ran to meet them. The aged priest had known her all her life, and patted her head with fatherly affection. As they walked toward the house, he told her, impressively, that his visit this time was solely on her account.

"Yes, solely on your account, solely on your account, blessed be the Virgin!" broke in her father with strange ecstasy. She could not account for the unhappy feeling which swept over her.

They went into the little parlor, where hung the great carved wooden crucifix, which was said to be the most costly in the town, with the exception of the one in the church.

Scarcely were they seated, when her father began to tell her the great news. With eyes beaming with religious enthusiasm and pride, he told her how Father Sauvalle had

received a letter from the bishop, stating that when the daughter of Hormisdas Frechette had taken the veil at the convent at St. Jerome, the honor should be bestowed upon her of being removed to the convent of the Sacred Heart at Montreal. Father Sauvalle was to be thanked for this.

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Very proudly and with much solemnity the priest took a letter from the folds of his robe, and as he opened it, impressively told her the letter he held was the very one which had brought the great news. As he read it to her, his face beamed with smiles. Little wonder they were pleased, for it was an honor indeed to the little town of St. Jerome to be able to say that one of its daughters had been admitted to this convent, noted as it was for its exclusiveness and the severity of its discipline.

"The convent!" she exclaimed falteringly.

They noticed how pale her face had suddenly grown. They were not surprised; it was meet that the sudden news of the honor in store for her should cause some emotion.

"We have talked the matter over," continued the priest, graciously, "and have decided that, as you already have served your novitiate, you may as well return to the convent in a few days. In a month or so later you will be ready to take your final vows. Your father is an old man now and has been sorely tried, and has sinned deeply—yea, even uttered anathemas against the Church. But the Blessed Mother heard the prayers of the Church for your recovery, and so his soul was saved from—"

"He anathematised the Church because of me?" Adele interrupted, fear gleaming in her eyes.

For a few moments no one spoke. The painful silence was broken by her father struggling to his feet. Beseechingly he looked at the great crucifix, made the sign of the cross on his bosom, and then turned his wavering gaze on his daughter, who had shrunk back in her chair and covered her eyes, as though she dared not look at him.

"I had not meant you to know this," he said, tightly clutching the arm of his chair for support. "I think I must have been mad when I did it; I had set my heart so on having a daughter in the Church, and had been disappointed so often. When they said your illness was fatal, I said, in my misery, that there was no Virgin, or she would not let such suffering fall upon me. Even now, wrong as I know it to be, I fear if anything should happen that you did not take the veil, I should drift back again into unbelief."

"Cease, cease! Hormisdas," cried the priest, raising his hand authoritatively.

The old man walked weakly over to his wife. The priest turned his attention to Adele, and said to her soothingly, "There is nothing to fear now; all will be well with him. It is a great honor to you that your life was spared in order that your father's soul might be saved. The bishop knows of this, and is greatly pleased. Already many of the parish priests have been told of your miraculous recovery, and have repeated it to those whose faith was weak, and they have been blessed. You have been honored above most women. In time, I believe you will rise to be the superioress of a convent."

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As he turned from her, Adele rose and left the room. As the door was closing behind her she turned and looked back. Before the crucifix, on their knees, were her aged father and mother, while towering above them, with hands outstretched toward the cross, was the white-haired priest, invoking blessings on those bowed at his feet. She knew it was her duty to be by their side. Stifling the choking tears, she was about to re-enter the room, when the haunting refrain of a song that she had heard Doctor Chalmers sing, rang in her ears:

“To prevail in the cause that is dearer than life,
Or be crushed in its ruins to die.”

The words seemed sacrilegious to her, when compared with the supplicating tone of the priest's voice. With all her might she strove to banish them. Twice she stretched out her hand to turn the handle of the door, but the sound of the voice that had sung the words seemed to grow more distinct instead of vanishing, and her hand fell to her side. At last, with a stifled cry of despair, she fled from the house into the little garden, shocked at the wickedness of her heart.

For a long time she sat with closed eyes, her little ivory prayer-beads in her hands. She pleaded for pardon for not being able to fix her attention on holy things, and asked grace to cease thinking of him who had taken from her the love for the life of seclusion to which she had been taught to look forward.

At last she heard the clang of the garden gate, and knew the priest had gone. She did not return to the house, but continued battling with her sins. Suddenly her supplications ceased; she sprang to her feet and looked along the road. She had not been mistaken; away in the distance was a light buggy, rapidly approaching. Doctor Chalmers had said he might be down that day! Her heart seemed to stop beating; she would have run into the house had not her strength failed. Had the evil one been approaching, she could not have begun to pray more earnestly for aid.

When the vehicle, covered with dust, reached farmer Frechette's house, the rattle of wheels ceased.

“To prevail in the cause that is dearer than life.”

She heard him whistling his favorite refrain as he swung up the gravel walk. He had seen her white dress, and was walking straight toward her. She heard him coming, and her treacherous heart began to beat joyously. With an exclamation of despair, she sank to her knees by the side of the garden seat, deeming herself the very chief of sinners.

For a few moments he stood and looked down at her in utter amazement, then stooped quickly and raised her. When he saw how white her face was, he was sure she was seriously ill, and held out his arm to support her to the house.

With averted face, Adele told him that she was only a little nervous and unstrung, but she would be herself again. Her pathetic face and helplessness appealed strongly to him, and his heart went out to her, as a man's will to the woman he loves, and whose sufferings are his. As he sat down by her side, he could scarcely refrain from gathering her in his arms and comforting her.

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Her clamoring conscience caused her involuntarily to draw away from him to the end of the seat. Her strange manner caused an uneasy feeling to sweep over him, yet accentuated the keen longing to win her. Almost before he was aware of it, he was by her side again, and was telling her the story that is ever new, though so very old. She would have given the world to have let her heart run riot, as the loving words came pouring from his lips. She learned how she had first grown dear to him, as he had fought with the great reaper for her life, and how the sight of health returning to her dear face had been sweeter to him than he could ever tell her. He told her, too, he was positive that he would never have been called to play the important part in her life which he had done, had it not been ordained from the beginning that his life was to be knit with hers.

“To prevail in the cause that is dearer than life.”

The haunting words were still ringing in Adele’s ears, and made it ten-fold harder for her to tell him that he was not to prevail in the cause dearer than life, as it was to him.

As she sat, with face buried in her cold hands, and listened and tried to fight down the singing of her heart, she knew that nothing he could say could make her deny the Church and imperil the soul of her father once more.

“Or be crushed in its ruins to die.”

“Marie, pity us! for that is the answer I have for him,” she whispered. Ah! how she wished Doctor Prenoveau had been a true prophet, and that she had died.

As he ceased, she took the little silver crucifix which hung around her neck, pressed it tightly to her bosom, and turning her woe-begone face to him, said, as she rose, “You do not know, or you would not say such things to me.”

He had expected something so different. “I—I do not understand,” he said, wonderingly, rising and walking toward her.

She clutched the cross tighter and stepped back as he approached. He was sorely perplexed and apprehensive, and she saw it, and her heart ached for him.

“I am going,” she began weakly, “to be a nun. I have been in the convent before, and shall return in a few days. In less than two months I shall take the veil.”

Dear heart! Fight as she would for conscience’ sake, she could not keep out of her eyes the pity and love for him, as she saw the look of amazement and misery which flashed into his face, and noted how unsteadily his hand sought the back of the garden bench.



Suddenly their eyes met, and then he knew, and hope flew back, and with a glad ring in his voice he said, "You love me, Adele!" He started forward and imprisoned the hand with the crucifix in his own. His apprehension had all vanished now, and boldly he told her that if she loved him she had no right to sacrifice their happiness. Then his tone changed, and he pleaded with her; and as she looked into his eager eyes, listened, and saw how dear she was to him, her rejoicing heart deadened the lashings of her conscience; she forgot all about her promise to Father Sauvalle and to her parents; forgot all about the convent of the Sacred Heart; yea, even forgot the anathemas uttered by her father against the Church, in this, the first great happiness of her life.

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He thought he had won her, and raising her head, looked teasingly into her face and said softly, yet triumphantly:

“To prevail in the cause that is dearer than life,
Or—”

Adele wrenched her hand from him and started back. Her face was ghastly pale, while her eyes dilated and shone with terror. “If I do not enter the convent,” she said fearfully, “I shall be responsible for the loss of my father’s soul!”

For a space he looked at her as though he thought her mind was affected. She read his look, and remembering that he did not understand, told him all her father’s dread story, how he had told her, not an hour ago, that if anything should happen that she did not take the veil, it would be impossible for him to believe.

She told him, too, that even were her parents willing she should marry him, she could never be perfectly happy. Her conscience would never cease to upbraid her; from her childhood she had been taught to look forward to being a nun. She kissed the cross passionately as she ceased.

He noted the religious light in her eyes, and something told him that it was useless to argue; that nothing he could say would break down her strong religious convictions. The sudden revulsion from great happiness to despair was bitter indeed, and sitting down he buried his face in his hands.

Adele walked rapidly away a few steps, then turned and looked back. His dejected attitude smote her sorely. Again she turned, as though she would leave him, but turned again and looked at him pityingly. Well she knew that in the long quiet years which were to come, that lonely figure in the quaint garden would haunt her, and that the memory of his great sorrow would be the heavy cross she would have to bear as long as life lasted.

So quietly did she steal behind him, that he was not aware she had returned. Her lips moved as though she were about to speak to him, but no sound came from them. It was so hard not to lean forward and rest her hand on the thick dark hair, and tell him how much easier it would be for her to bear her lot if he would only say he forgave her and would try and think kindly of her. It came to her at last how, perhaps, she might ease his sorrows. She unclasped the little silver crucifix from around her neck, kissed it, and then gently slipped it into the pocket of his coat, which hung over the side of the bench. She then turned and fled along the grass to the house.

* * * * *

Once more the sound of church bells floated into the little cottage and fell upon the expectant ears of farmer Frechette and his wife, while a proud look lit up their faces.

“At last!” said the old man, exultantly, going to the window and looking at the church and the convent nestling at its side. The bells no longer mocked him, and he had ceased to hate them. Once more he stretched his gaunt arm toward the glistening tower. “The Church has not deceived us,” he said humbly. Then he turned to his wife, who was waiting for him at the door.

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Very slowly, arm in arm, with heads erect and graciously acknowledging the bows of the neighbors, Hormisdas Frechette and his wife walked down the narrow crooked road leading to the church.

The overcast sky looked burdened with snow, and the leaves rustled complainingly as they were ground beneath the feet of those hurrying to witness the honor about to fall upon the house of Hormisdas Frechette. Sweet to the old man was the moaning of the wind as it jostled the barren trees, while the ungarnished landscape seemed fairer to him this day than ever before even in harvest time.

As the aged couple entered the church, with its many pictures of saints and its gorgeous towering altar, the organ began to play softly. Presently the narrow door near the altar slowly opened, and four nuns, in black array, with clasped hands and bowed heads, repeating a psalm of renunciation, entered the church. Following them, arrayed in a spotless white veil which fell to her feet, came she who had saved a soul from unbelief. Eagerly the congregation bent forward, anxious to catch a glimpse of her whom the bishop had promised to honor. To be a sister of the convent of the Sacred Heart! She knew not how many envied her.

With closed eyes and radiant face sat farmer Frechette, repeating prayers of thanksgiving. She who had given birth to such a daughter praised the Virgin that she had known the pangs of motherhood.

The sweet face had lost all its roses. Her eyes were downcast as she walked up to the altar; but that was as it should be, with one who was about to renounce the pleasures of the world, and whose eyes evermore must humbly seek the earth.

Just as she was repeating her final vows, one who had told himself a thousand times that he would not witness the ceremony, drove rapidly down the road, and halted some little distance from the church near the convent. Just as he reached the door of the church he saw Father Sauvalle solemnly raise both hands and bless her.

With set lips he went back to the buggy, and stood behind the horse in a position which he thought would prevent him from being seen. Eagerly he watched the door, and his heart beat furiously as he saw the four dark-robed nuns step from the church and wait for their new sister. At last she came, with hands clasped and head bowed so very, very low. The nuns divided, formed around her, and then began the walk to the convent, near where the silent figure still waited, screened by the horse.

Just as she was about to enter the convent yard, her attention was attracted by the white feet of the horse, and instantly she knew to whom it belonged. Wrong as she knew it to be, she could not help raising her head. Their eyes met:

“Or be crush’d in its ruins to die!”



The words came to them both at the same moment. One of the nuns put out her hand as she saw her falter; but she recovered herself and entered the yard. The rusty hinges creaked weirdly as the door closed behind her. A moment later, he heard the metallic click of the lock.

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The snow began to fall in great flakes, and the boisterous wind drove them violently into the faces of the sightseers as they hurried from the church. None of them saw the horse on the far side of the road; the snow was blinding.

As he heard their voices die away in the distance, Dr. Chalmers' head drooped till it rested on the animal's mane. Patiently the beast whisked away the snow and tried to hide its head from the vicious wind.

It was growing rapidly dark, but he did not notice it: he was thinking of the fight he had made for her life, and of the love that had come to him in the summer days when health came back to her to make amends.

"To prevail in the cause that is dearer than life!"

The mocking refrain seemed to have been shouted into his ears; he started as though he had been struck, seized the reins, and dashed into the gathering storm.

* * * * *

A Perilous Encounter.

It is not because I am unduly sensitive of my altered appearance that I have told so few the story of the ugly scar that disfigures my face, but on account of the horror that I yet experience when recalling the terrible incidents that led to my receiving it. How many lives were saved by that wound I shall never know.

The great Canadian Pacific Railway, which to-day connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific, was in the year 1882 built only about two hundred miles west of Winnipeg, leaving a huge gap of several hundred miles of untouched prairie before one of the world's wonders, the famed Rocky Mountains of British Columbia, was reached.

Such was the rapidity with which the rails were laid and telegraph offices erected, that when winter set in, fifty telegraph operators were needed to take charge of the empty stations.

The management found it hard to induce men to go out and bury themselves for the winter in the vast prairie, which was only then being opened up. To-day, men are only too happy to make homes in this wonderful country, which has very aptly been termed the future granary of the world.

Money is a loadstone that few men can resist, and when I heard that \$80 a month was being paid out there for operators, I resigned my position in Montreal, and with \$20 and a pass in my pocket started for Manitoba.

On reaching Winnipeg, I was at once sent out to Elkhorn, a bit of a station 150 miles farther west. When I took charge, in November, four inches of snow already hid the earth, which did not see the sun again till March.

Two passenger trains a day, and an occasional construction train, formed the only break in the monotonous life which I led. It was a dreadfully solitary existence. I was alone in the station, and as December began to wane, and the dread blizzards commenced their wild revelry, heaping the snow into such huge mounds on the tracks that the trains were delayed for days, I got as homesick and nervous as a girl of fourteen instead of a young man of twenty.

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Christmas eve ushered in bitter weather. All day it had been snowing and storming. At 1 a.m. the glass showed twenty-two below zero. The storm had risen and risen until it was blowing a perfect blizzard from the west. The riotous wind, as it swept along the vast prairie, unobstructed for scores of miles by houses or trees, caught up the newly-fallen snow in its mad embrace, and drove it with amazing force against the little telegraph office which sheltered me from its deathly embrace, as though enraged against this earnest of approaching civilization. So fierce, at times, was the onslaught that the tense telegraph wires could be heard humming even above the demoniacal glee of the storm.

I knew it was unmanly, but I could not help it: the tears would start to my eyes. It was Christmas, and I was spending it in such a queer manner! My thoughts had been with mother and dear old London, where I had left her two years before to try my fortune in Montreal. I knew she was thinking of her eldest born.

“Christians, awake, salute the happy morn.”

All I had to do was to close my eyes, and I could hear my companions singing that grand old hymn in the greatest city in the world.

It was a relief to hear the telegraph instrument, which had been quiet for hours, call my office. Both passenger trains were nearly ten hours late, and were slowly struggling towards my station. It was just 2 a.m. when I received the order from the dispatcher at Winnipeg to detain the east-bound train at my station when she arrived, till the west-bound express crossed her—double tracks are yet unknown out there.

I replied back that I understood the order, and was just about to let the red lantern swing round from the station and face the track, when I was startled by hearing a tremendous kicking and howling at the door. In my surprise, I forgot to turn the lamp which was to signal the engineer to stop at the station for orders.

Little wonder I was agitated. The nearest house was seven miles away, and no white man could have walked a tenth of that distance in such a blizzard and have lived. Had the shouting and kicking been less imperative, I might have been superstitious. With trembling hands I drew the bolt. Before I could step aside the door was thrown violently open, and to my dismay two stalwart Cree Indians burst into the little office. It was the manner of the savages in entering that made me feel nervous. It was no uncommon thing for me to have Indians drop into the station at night, and to see roaming bands of them pass the station at all hours; but two drunken Cree Indians, even a native scout might have been pardoned for fearing had he been unarmed and placed in my position.

Without appearing to notice me, the braves walked over to the glowing wood stove and began to warm themselves. I wanted to show that I trusted them, and brought two chairs and asked them to be seated. As I spoke they both turned their wicked, black

eyes on me, but did not deign to speak. Kicking the chairs to one side they began taking off their great skin-coats and caps and red-and-white blankets.

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As the taller of the two petulantly threw his wraps down, something hard struck the floor heavily. He gave a cry of greedy exultation, felt in the pocket of the coat, drew out a bottle of whiskey, and proceeded without delay to break off the neck on the stove. It was contrary to the law to sell liquor to Indians, but that did not matter much, they always managed to get it.

Just as he was about to raise the ragged mouth of the bottle to his lips, the telegraph instrument began to work. It had the effect that I feared. Both the Indians, with superstitious dread in their eyes, involuntarily took a couple of steps back toward the wall, where I was sitting, devoutly hoping they would wrap themselves up in their blankets and go off to sleep. No such good fortune.

The room was about ten feet wide and fifteen feet long. In the centre was the stove, and near the door, about six feet to the right, was the instrument. I was sitting facing the door at the opposite side of the room. Pretending that I thought they were going to back up against me, I rose and calmly began to walk toward the instrument.

I had not passed them two feet when they both caught me violently by the shoulders, and in excited, guttural tones, began in a threatening manner to say something to me. Seeing that I did not understand, the tall brave, pointing the bottle, which he still tightly clutched in his left hand, at the talkative instrument, said fiercely, "No go there! no go there!"

I quickly understood what they meant; the Indian's fear of telegraph instruments, and his inability to understand electricity, were known to every operator west of Winnipeg.

In their drunken fear they imagined that if I got possession of the wires I would have it in my power to do them an injury.

As easily as I could have lifted an infant, the great savage with his unengaged hand swung me from my feet, and contemptuously dropped me on my chair again, after which he took a long draught out of the bottle, and then handed it to his companion. The effect of the liquor upon their savage natures showed itself almost immediately; they began to yell and shout, and putting their hands around their mouths uttered cries like prairie wolves. I shrank closer to the wall.

In ten minutes they had finished the bottle, and were become nothing better than howling maniacs. They joined hands and capered round the stove, stamping the floor viciously with their moccasined feet. Again, they would wave their long arms about their heads in the most grotesque manner, uttering at the same time the most blood-curdling war-whoops.

In their eyes was the baleful light of the wild beast. The coal-oil light, which but dimly lit up the room, threw a yellow shade upon their dark, brutal faces, making them look like

emissaries from the evil one, dancing in fiendish glee over some evil deed. The storm, as though in sympathy with the savage scene, had risen to a hurricane, shrieking like a mad thing, and through the casement and ill-constructed door piled up miniature snow-banks.

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Every moment I expected my unwelcome visitors would seize me, and in their insane glee practise upon me some savage torture. Would they never cease? For nearly thirty minutes I sat still as death, where they had flung me. Safety lay in not attracting their attention; but a dreadful ordeal was in store for me.

The instrument, which had been silent for a time, again awoke to life. The dispatcher was calling my office. Like a flash the order to detain the down express that he had sent came back to my memory, and with a thrill of horror I remembered that I had omitted to turn the red lamp. The dispatcher, I knew, wanted to ask me if the train had arrived. Involuntarily I started to my feet.

The only sounds now to be heard were the ticking of the instrument and the ceaseless cries of the storm. The Indians, the instant they heard the former, ceased their uncivilized mirth, again looked apprehensively at the mysterious instrument, and hurriedly glanced at me. Their treacherous, suspicious natures were thoroughly aroused on seeing me looking eagerly toward the instrument. I knew not how near the train might be; act I must. I thought of the fearful loss of life which would surely occur unless I could reach the cord that hung above the instrument, and with one pull swing round the red lamp and let it beam across the track. I had received the order to expose the light, and unless I did so I knew full well the Company would hold me responsible for any accident that might occur. I had written the order in the order-book when receiving it.

All this passed through my mind like a flash. I did not dread the Company, but I could not let scores of lives be sacrificed in order to save my own. I had always thought I was not the stuff brave men are made of, but when put to the test I gloried in finding that I was not a coward.

I was quite calm as I began carelessly to walk over to the instrument. The drunken savages were upon me almost immediately. As they felled me to the floor, my ears caught the distant rumbling of the east-bound locomotive. The Indians also had heard the noise, and as they turned to listen I once more sprang to my feet and dashed past them. One of them I passed in safety, but as I dodged the big brave he struck viciously at me with the broken bottle.

His aim was but too true; the ragged mouth of the bottle opened my face like a conical bullet. I had only a few more steps to go. Before I fell I knew that I had turned the light.

* * * * *

The conductor put me on the train and took me to Winnipeg, where I remained in the hospital for three weeks.

The Indians had gone when he entered the station. He had seen the order in the book, and had waited the arrival of the west-bound express, which arrived five minutes later. Had he not seen the red light he would have gone on, and the trains would have met about two miles east of the station.

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The detectives tried to trace the two brutal savages, but did not succeed.

Yes, as long as I live I shall remember that Christmas when I was employed in the far west by the great Canadian Pacific Railway.

* * * * *

Le Loup-Garou.

The fear of it is killing me, Baptiste, for it is on my mind all the time. Think of it: for seven long years he has neither been to confession nor partaken of the blessed sacrament, and he is drinking and growing wickeder every day. This is the last night of the seventh year, and the curse may fall upon him now at any moment. She buried her wrinkled, fear-stricken face in her thin trembling hands, and wept as though her heart was breaking. "O Marie, blessed Virgin!" she whispered, "save our son, our Pierre; let not the fate of the loup-garou fall upon him." A thin stream of light shone through an ancient crack in the old-fashioned box-stove, and fell caressingly across the bowed head, making its silvery hair look pathetically thin. The bent shoulders of the sorrowing mother shook convulsively.

Baptiste gazed with a troubled look at the bar of light on his wife's head, and his heart went out to her as only a husband's can to a wife who for half a century has borne with him the joys and trials of the passing years. As he looked at the thin white hair, memory drifted back to the time when it was as black as a raven's wing, and fell in great glossy folds far below her waist. A tender smile stole into his face as he remembered how, on account of the waywardness of the beautiful hair and its rebellion against imprisonment, he had more than once heard her chide it; yes, and at times when more than usually arrogant, threaten to use the shears upon it. He observed, too, how round her shoulders had grown, and noted many other signs of old age which the glow from the stove made so cruelly apparent. It had taken sixty years of life just to streak her hair with grey; but the past seven years had remorselessly thinned and whitened it, and now not even one black hair was to be seen. All these things and many more he thought of as he gazed upon his sorrowing wife.

Distressfully the old man put his hand to his forehead, and then thought reverted to himself, and he recalled the days when his head was subject to his will and did not, with painful persistency, nod and tremble the long day through. The infirmity of age was strong upon him; seventy years is a long time to have lived and toiled as French-Canadian farmers toil in eastern Canada. He thought, too, how much he had aged the last seven years, and of the one who had caused those years to be fraught with so much suffering to them both. He realized, indeed, that sorrow ages more quickly than years!

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"Pierre, Pierre, my son!" he muttered brokenly, "better that you had never been born, than after reaching manhood's estate to have forgotten all our teachings and become a drunkard and an outcast from the Church." A stifled sob from his wife again changed his rambling thoughts, and painfully rising he walked over to her side. Gently he laid his hand on the hair that he so dearly loved, although so much changed, and bending tenderly down said, bravely, trying to check the tremor in his voice, "There, wife, don't fret." And then he drew her head to his shoulder in a way he used to do when they were both in the noonday of life. She remembered, and her grief grew less. "The Virgin is good, wife, and we have prayed so much to Her about him. Surely She will hear us, and not let what you fear fall upon our Pierre. Father Benoit has been praying to Her all these years, and we are told that the Virgin sooner or later answers the prayers of the priests of our Church. Then special prayers will be offered for our son to-night by the priest, for he knows how you feared for him because this was the last night of the seventh year."

A shudder ran through her frame as the anxious mother started to her feet and said fearfully:

"Yes, in another hour a new day will dawn, and then seven years will have passed since our son went to confession, and then the curse may fall at any time."

Dropping his voice almost to a whisper, and looking with superstitious dread out of the window into the moonlight, which made the newly fallen snow glisten on the road with almost supernatural whiteness, and trying to speak in a tone of conviction, her husband said:

"Perhaps the priest may be right, wife, and this about loup-garou may not be true. He told us that he did not believe in it, and that the Church had uttered no such curse against those who for seven years did not confess; although if they died in that sinful state there was no hope of salvation for them. As for the devil, you remember the priest said that he had not the power to change a man into a wolf or an animal of any kind, and—"

"Speak not like that, Baptiste," broke in his wife with fear in her eyes; "the evil one may hear what you say, and out of mockery to the Church, cause the evil to fall upon him." With piteous haste she made the sign of the cross on her bosom, and instinctively her husband did the same.

Although it was near midnight they had not lit the lamp, for the moon that poured in at the window made the cottage almost as light as noonday.

"Husband," she went on in a tone of conviction, "why should we try to deceive ourselves? for we know that it is true. Father Benoit is sorry for us and would give us comfort. It may be that the curse is not from the Church, but the devil knows when

human beings are forsaken by the blessed Church, and if he can change them into animals and keep them so till death, then he is sure of their souls; even the blessed Mother then can do nothing for them.”

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Baptiste raised his hand beseechingly, as though he would fain have her cease, but she only drew still closer to him and continued quickly:

“Have we not known it since we were children? Did not our parents believe in it? Even if we had not been told these things, we know it is true. Have you forgotten Arsene Bolduc, Baptiste?”

Again he raised his hand, mutely protesting, but she did not heed him.

“It is only three years ago that it happened to Arsene. He, like our boy, had not partaken of the blessed sacrament for seven years. You know how he blasphemed and drank, and grew wickeder every year, till finally the very last night of the seventh year came, and just a few minutes before twelve he became possessed of the devil, and beat his mother, and then ran out of the house and was never seen again. And why was he never seen again, Baptiste?” She was getting strangely excited, and her voice was rising.

“For the love of the Virgin, cease, wife?”

But she was now far too excited for him to have control over her, and went on:

“When Arsene did not come back, his father thought the evil one had turned him into a wolf; but his mother said she believed he had been changed into a bull, and we know she was right, for a few days later you helped, with the other men, to drag out of the river the bull that was found drowned. Did not all the village folk talk about it, and regret that someone had not met the beast before it was drowned, and drawn blood from it so as to release Arsene? Has he ever been seen since? We have known of others like him who have disappeared and have never been seen again. How can we deceive ourselves and say there is no loup-garou? There is; and we must not sleep this night till our son returns. This night above all others he should not have been out late. He must be drinking heavily in the village. We do not know what may happen, Baptiste. I fear some evil is about to befall him, for my heart is full of fear.”

Her voice had a pitiful break in it as she concluded.

“Let us pray the good God to protect him this night, wife,” answered Baptiste, no longer pretending that he did not believe in this strange legend, in which nearly all his race in his station in life have faith.

While they were on their knees praying, the yellow-faced clock behind the stove struck the hour of midnight.

“*Mon Dieu!* twelve o’clock!”

The anxious mother sprang to her feet, ran to the door, opened it, and standing on the steps shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked earnestly down the long snow-clad road in the direction of the little village of St. Pascal. Behind her stood Baptiste, also shading his weak eyes and looking. Not a human being was in sight. The zinc-covered spire of the little village church, nearly half a mile away, glittered and shone in the fairy light like burnished silver. The quaint whitewashed cottages that dotted the road to the village looked far different from what they did in the daytime; somehow the charitable moon had forgotten to reveal the cracks and stains that time in its relentless march had made. The lines, too, that age and care had made on the two eager watching faces were also, by the great ruler of the night, tenderly smoothed out.

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"I cannot see him, Baptiste," she said presently, lowering her hand from her eyes.

"Neither can I, wife; neither can I. Let us go into the house and wait." He laid his hand persuasively on her shoulder. As she turned the moon shone full in her face. She stopped and looked at it for a few moments like one fascinated, then slowly raised her hand and pointed at it.

"Baptiste," she said in an awed voice, with the superstitious light again in her eyes, "do you remember once before when it was as bright as this?"

He tried to draw her toward the door, but she resisted, and looking hurriedly up into his face, said:

"Ah; I see you, too, remember! It was the night Arsene Bolduc went out never to return. The devil is surely abroad this night, and our Pierre is not yet home."

"Talk not of the evil one while the moon shines full in your face, wife, for it is an evil omen."

Quickly he drew down her hand, which was still pointing upward, then put his hand over her eyes to shut out the sight of the moon, made the sign of the cross, drew her into the house and shut the door.

Once more they seated themselves near the stove and began their anxious wait for the erring one. For nearly half an hour they sat without speaking, but at short intervals glanced at the clock, whose loud ticking broke the stillness of the night with painful distinctness. Every relentless tick jarred on the nerves of the aged watchers. Suddenly they started to their feet with blanched faces, looked at each other, and apprehensively bent their heads in a listening attitude. Again there came floating on the still air the mournful sound that had startled them—the weird wail of a dog! A marvellous change came over the mother as she listened; the look of fear vanished and was succeeded by one of intense determination. The change in her was so great that one would surely have thought that she had partaken of the fabled elixir of life; her bent shoulders seemed to grow straight once more, while her steps, as she ran to the door and wrenched it open, were as firm and elastic as those of a young woman. For a moment she stood in the open door and looked: One glance was sufficient—coming toward the house across the field was a large hound, which was baying the moon. Firmly she picked up a knife from the kitchen table, thrust another into the hand of Baptiste, and drew him to the door.

"See, Baptiste!" she said, standing erect and pointing the knife at the dog, "I am right; the curse has fallen, as I feared it would. The devil has turned our Pierre into a hound, and the beast is coming this way. Even a scratch, if it draws blood, will be sufficient to

release him from the curse and restore him to us again. The dog must not escape us; if it does, our son is lost to us forever. Pray the holy Mother to help us now, husband.”

She made a weird picture as she stood in the open door, with her thin white hair streaming about her face, grasping the knife, which glittered ominously in the moonlight.

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The huge hound, which was still coming direct toward the house, was now only a field away. Separating the field from the road was a stone wall about three and a half feet in height. Anyone crouching behind it, on the side of the road, could not be seen from the field. The one, and only chance of intercepting the animal, flashed across her mind, and calling Baptiste to follow her she ran across the road and crouched behind the portion of the wall over which the animal must jump, unless it quickly altered its course. Baptiste made a pitiful effort to follow her, but his weary limbs were unable to bear the strain any longer, and he fell unconscious to the floor.

As she ran across the road, had she glanced down it toward the village she would have seen a man, only a few rods distant, walking somewhat unsteadily toward the house. He stopped abruptly and raised his hand in amazement as he saw the woman, knife in hand, hurry across the road and crouch behind the wall. He ran toward her calling "Mother!" but the baying of the hound drowned his voice. Before he could reach her she sprang to her feet just as the dog rose into the air from the opposite side of the wall. She was exactly in front of it. The beast uttered a howl of terror as the strange apparition so unexpectedly rose up before it. Bravely she seized with her left hand one of the paws of the animal, and as it fell, the knife in her right hand gleamed again and was buried deep in the shoulder of the dog. As she fell, the enraged animal turned upon her and buried its teeth in her arm. She did not feel the bite; the crisis had passed—the unnatural strength born of intense excitement had now deserted her. Just as unconsciousness was dimming her eyes, she saw a man towering above her; she saw the stick in his hand fall with fearful force on the head of the animal, which rolled over on its side without uttering a sound. Then the figure, which was growing more and more indistinct, caught her up in his arms, and a voice that she knew and loved so well called "Mother, mother!" She opened her eyes wearily and looked into the face of the man, and a smile, very beautiful to see, passed over her face.

"My Pierre; my son," she murmured. "I said I would release you. I saw the blood on the knife, then I saw you spring up before me, and now I am in your arms."

Her lips grew very white and her head fell back on his shoulder. As he ran into the house with her he saw his father lying near the door, and he uttered a cry so full of remorse and sorrow that it entered the dulled ears of Baptiste and restored him to consciousness, and he followed his son into the little bedroom, where Pierre laid the brave little mother on the bed. Tenderly the old man put his arms around his son's neck and kissed him, and then the wayward one knew that he was once more forgiven, and that the past would be remembered against him by his father no more.

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They thought she had only fainted, and while Baptiste administered simple remedies to her, Pierre, the erring one, knelt by the bedside with his face buried in the hand that had held the knife so firmly and that had struck the brute, lying so quietly out there in the moonlight, so fierce a blow. Tears, the first that had fallen from his eyes since he was a boy, fell and trickled through the fingers that were now so wan and thin and that had toiled so hard for him. How she had longed to see tears in his eyes and hear penitent words from his lips, and now his tears were drenching her fingers, and he was telling her in a choked voice how bitterly he repented of his drunkenness and his disregard of the Church, and all his evil ways, and how he would reform and be a son to her indeed; yet she heard him not.

So deep was his grief that he did not raise his head, or he would have noticed how deathly pale her face was and how very light her breathing had become. Suddenly his grief ceased; a great fear had entered his heart—What caused the hand that his face was hid in to be so clammy and cold? It had not been so when he first pressed it to his face. “She is dead,” whispered his heart brutally. “It is a lie, a wicked lie! she is not dead,” he muttered. “Raise your head and see, raise your head and see,” reiterated his heart monotonously. He had no reply to make to such an answer as this. Slowly he raised his shaking hands to his face, still not daring to look up, and again took her hand in his. A chill seemed to emanate from it which reached his very heart. Slowly his head began to rise. From the foot of the bed his eyes gradually crept up and up, past her feet, past her knees, past the bosom that had nourished him; inch by inch, higher and higher, till at last they rested on her face, and then he uttered a great cry and started to his feet.

As he stood and looked, his father entered the room, in one hand a medicine bottle, in the other a bowl of water. He, too, saw the change that had come over her since he had left the room to get the simple remedies, and forgetting all about the things he was carrying, opened his hands and stretched them out toward her, and would have fallen had not Pierre caught him and led him over to the bed.

“Wife, wife!” he cried; but the quiet expression of her face did not change.

The sight of his father’s sorrow recalled Pierre out of the dazed condition into which he had fallen.

“She is dead, father,” he whispered falteringly.

“No, no, Pierre, she has only fainted!” he shouted fiercely. “You do not know what death is. Quick, Pierre; quick, son, bring me the medicine, the hot water; quick, quick, the—the—”



Poor old Baptiste! he could go no further. He ceased rubbing her hands, staggered over to Pierre, who was standing with averted face in the middle of the room, buried his head in his bosom and said brokenly:

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"No, Pierre, don't go for the medicine, nor for the water, nor for anything now, for what you said is true. *Mon Dieu*, true, too true!" And Pierre, erring Pierre, folded his arms around his father and tried to comfort him like one would a sorrowing child. It was while his arms were yet around him that her eyes slowly opened, and she saw the precious sight. The dying embers of life, which so often flash up before they expire forever, were burning in her now.

"Pierre, *mon garcon*; Baptiste, husband," she whispered.

For a moment they hesitated as though one from the dead had spoken to them, then with glad cries they hurried to her side. With infinite tenderness Pierre put his strong arms around her and bent his head to catch the last words her lips would ever form. Baptiste, prayer-beads in hand, knelt by his son's side, saying prayers for the dying.

"My son; my Pierre."

"Mother!"

"Oh, I am so happy that I released you from the spell the evil one threw over you. For my sake, Pierre, return to the Church and be forgiven."

"Before the sun sets, mother, I will go to confession and partake of the blessed sacrament; and I will cease my evil ways and be a son to my father. It was so noble of you, mother, to release me from the spell as you did."

He would rather have had his tongue cut out than to let her know that the great sacrifice she had made for him had been a sad, sad mistake.

And now the end was very near. "Baptiste?" she asked faintly.

He laid her in his father's arms and turned away. He did not hear what she said to his father, but he heard him reply in a voice that sounded strangely far away and weak, "Yes, soon; very soon, wife."

Then all was silent. With his back still turned to them he waited for his father to call him; but the seconds sped on and the silence continued. At last he turned. His father was kneeling on the floor with his arms around her and his head lying on the pillow close to hers.

"Come, father," he said softly, as he tried to raise him. There was no reply. He bent over and peered into the two quiet faces. The legend of the loup-garou had no place in the land they had entered.

* * * * *

A Christmas Adventure.

How vividly do I remember the Christmas eve and Christmas day of 1882! Ten years make great changes in our lives. To-day I am a well-to-do business man, and expect to spend Christmas in my cozy home, with wife and family, and not on the wild, bleak prairies, expecting every moment a dreadful railway catastrophe.

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But I had better tell my story from the beginning. Back in 1882 the liberal pay offered by the Canadian Pacific Railway to telegraph operators induced a friend of mine and myself—as I have related elsewhere—to leave Montreal and try our fortunes in the great North-West. We were given free passes as far as Winnipeg. There was a station which needed two operators, some fifty miles up the line, and we were both sent there, arriving on Christmas eve. The train stopped just long enough for us to jump on the platform, and then sped on. There was not a human being to meet us. The station had been without operators for three days, and was bitterly cold. We soon had a big fire started in the telegraph room, and were sitting beside it, discussing the loneliness of the place and the wildness of the night.

While we were talking, the busy little telegraph instrument began busily ticking for our station. The call was answered and a message received, saying that a weather report received by the dispatcher stated that the night would likely be stormy, and my friend was asked to stay up till about one o'clock in the morning, as he might be needed to take a crossing order for two trains at his station. We did not mind staying up, and whiled away the hours in pleasant conversation as we sat as near as we could get to the glowing coal fire. The storm increased and finally settled down into a blizzard. By midnight it was something appalling. There was not a hill, nor even a tree, for scores of miles, to break its force as it dashed against our lonely station. The telegraph wires along the track hummed at intervals loudly enough to be distinctly heard above the shrieks of the wind which buffeted and held high carnival along them.

Frozen particles of snow rattled fiercely against the window panes, carried by the relentless wind, which seemed to me to have conceived the demoniacal intention of wrecking our not very stalwart but exceedingly lonely home, out of revenge for daring to break even one jot of its fury as it hurried madly on. We both lapsed into silence. A feeling of isolation crept over me despite my efforts to fight it off. How separated from the world I felt. It seemed to me to have been years since I had mingled with a crowd. A great longing possessed me to be away from this lonely spot, and walk the streets of some of the large cities I had lived in. Unable longer to bear these thoughts, I rose to go out on to the platform for a moment. No sooner, however, had I raised the latch of the waiting-room door than the fierce wind dashed it against me with great force, while the huge snow-drift which had gathered against it fell upon me, almost burying me out of sight. Laughingly my companion pulled me from under the chilly and unwelcome covering.

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I returned once more to the operating room, in a more contented frame of mind, and with a keener appreciation of the comfortable temperature within. A few minutes after one o'clock, the telegraph instrument, which had been silent for some time, suddenly woke to life and commenced imperiously ticking the call of our station. My friend answered, and received from the dispatcher at Winnipeg a crossing order for a west-bound passenger train and an east-bound engine. Our station signal was displayed, and once more we commenced our weary wait for the two iron horses, which were ploughing their way across the wild prairie to meet and cross each other at our station, and then continue their wild journey.

Two o'clock. Still no sign of the trains. We both fell asleep in our chairs.

I seemed scarcely to have closed my eyes when I was startled by the shriek of the east-bound locomotive. I glanced at the clock; it was 3.30. I looked at my companion. He seemed frozen with deadly fear. The next instant he jumped wildly to his feet, rushed to the door, and gazed out into the blinding storm after the engine. It was nowhere in sight. I looked anxiously at him as he tore back into the room, and with trembling hands called the dispatcher's office.

Perspiration was pouring down his face. He could hardly stand. Promptly the instrument ticked back the return call.

"Where is the passenger train?" queried our office. The reply was terrible. "Left for your station three minutes ago. Have you put the engine on the side track?" Back went the answer: "The engine has rushed past the station and has not waited for her crossing."

"My God!" replied the dispatcher, "the two trains will meet."

My companion sank on the chair. His face was ghostly.

"It will be a terrible accident," he said aloud, but to himself—he seemed to have forgotten me in his great terror.

"God help them! God help them!" he reiterated. The situation was so fearful to me that I could only sit and look spell-bound at my friend. The furious storm made the horror of the situation tenfold more unendurable.

It seemed to me that I had been sitting in this trance-like condition for hours, when I was roused by hearing an engine give a certain number of whistles, which indicated it wanted the switch opened. The next moment a man rushed into the office. "Open the switch quick!" he shouted, "the passenger train will be here in two minutes." It was the driver of the engine! My companion sprang joyously to his feet. Without asking a question he ran out into the yard, followed by the engineer.



A few minutes later they both returned. The mystery was soon explained by the driver. He had forgotten the order which had been wired to him, and which he had put in his pocket when he received it, over two hours before, away up the line. He probably would have remembered it when he passed our station had he seen any signal displayed, but he had rushed past. He must have been two miles past the station when, putting his hand into his coat pocket to get his pipe, he felt the peculiar paper upon which crossing orders are written. Like a flash the order to cross with the passenger train at our station came back to his memory.

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He could not see a yard ahead of him for the storm, and knew not but the next instant he would be dashing into the passenger train with its burden of precious lives—his heart seemed to cease beating. The engine was instantly reversed, the sudden revulsion nearly tearing the locomotive to pieces. She ran on for fifty yards or more rocking like a ship in a storm. He had hurried back as fast as a full head of steam could bring him, and thus averted a dreadful accident.

We found that our station signal light had been blown out.

Five minutes later both trains had departed, and we went to bed with happy hearts, thankful for the almost miraculous prevention of a dire calamity.

Christmas day, an incident occurred at the station which went a considerable way toward settling our somewhat shattered nerves. The station had not been scrubbed for quite a long time, and was beginning to have anything but an inviting appearance.

After no end of inquiries as to where a washerwoman could be got, we located one at the far end of the village. She was a full-blooded squaw, and one of the most ill-favored specimens of the female sex I had ever set eyes upon.

Two dollars a day was the price agreed upon. She must have made five dollars every day she was at the station. She was a most industrious thief; we could keep nothing in the place from her. Not only would she unblushingly steal our groceries, but under the big loose blanket that hung in folds around her tall, gaunt figure, she actually spirited away our pots, kettles and pans.

She worked just as she pleased. Every half-hour or so she would squat on the floor, pull out an intensely black clay pipe, and indulge in a smoke. I love smoking, but I never failed to put as much distance as possible between myself and the rank black fumes which poured with so much gusto from her mouth. The last place she had to clean was the telegraph office. She entered the office very reluctantly, and furtively glanced at the telegraph instruments. "Me no like great spirit," she said fearfully, pointing to the mass of wires under the table. We talked to her for a long time and finally got her started working. The instruments were cut out so as to make no noise.

Slowly the squaw drew nearer the table where the instruments were. As she did so her coal-black eyes were actually glittering with nervous dread. Just as she was stretching her long arm under the table, a train steamed into the station. The conductor wanted orders. My companion, forgetting the poor squaw, pulled out the switch and turned on the current. Her arm must have been just touching the wires under the table at that instant.

The next moment a terrific yell was uttered by our frantic washerwoman, as she sprang to her feet and rushed for the door, upsetting the bucket of dirty water in her meteor-like

progress. Out of the station, across the tracks, and away out on to the open prairie she fled, never pausing till she reached the village, where she turned into an Indian's house and was lost from view. The next morning her son came to get the few articles belonging to her. He would not come any nearer the station than the side-track, and we were compelled to carry her belongings to him.

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Narcisse's Friend.

Narcisse Lafontaine and Charlie Saunders became acquainted on their way to the lumbering camp, which was situated some fifteen miles back of St. John's. Charlie had only recently arrived from England, and knew practically nothing about lumbering, while Narcisse had been born in Canada, and felt as much at home in the woods as Charlie would have done in London. Charlie took a liking to Narcisse the moment he saw him, and Narcisse was not slow in responding to the friendly advances of the young Englishman.

In appearance they were strikingly different. Narcisse was a typical French-Canadian lumberman; he was about five feet eleven inches in height, dark-skinned, dark-eyed, broad-shouldered, powerful and good-natured. Not even the most imaginative, had they seen him in the woods dressed in nondescript Canadian home-spun and swinging an axe, would have associated him with anything but what was commonplace and uninteresting; yet the great powerful, rough-looking fellow had a disposition that was as sympathetic as a woman's. The weather never affected him. With Charlie it was different. He was not accustomed to Canadian winters, and the rough unvarying food that was daily dealt out in the camp. He got to dread the sight of pork, which was the staple article of diet the week round. His health at times was so poor that he could not do heavy work, and it was then that the generous disposition of the young French-Canadian showed itself. Narcisse was a great favorite with the foreman, and by a series of adroit schemes always managed to get Charlie put at easy work, although at times his scheming resulted in his having to do far more than his own share of the sawing and chopping.

Charlie was below the average stature, yet he was broad-shouldered and looked strong. He had blue eyes, fair curly hair, a ruddy skin, and a laugh that was most pleasant to hear. If they differed outwardly, they were remarkably alike in disposition. Like Narcisse, Charlie was light-hearted and sympathetic. All through the long winter they were inseparable.

The warm, inquisitive sun had so discomfited the snow that for five months had determinedly hid the earth, that it had begun to lose its attractive whiteness and to assume a jaundiced hue, and, finally succumbing to its ancient foe, was gradually retreating into the earth—the vanishing of the snow meant the breaking up of the camp, for without it the logs could not be hauled to the river.

It was a beautiful day at the latter end of March when Narcisse and Charlie, with their winter's earnings in their pockets, left camp and happily trudged off to the railway station, four miles away. They had agreed to spend a month at St. John's, where Narcisse lived, before going out to the North-West for the summer. Charlie had

suggested that they should go out west at once, but Narcisse somehow never took kindly to the proposition, and had offered several excuses for not hurrying away that seemed to Charlie to be a little hazy and certainly not very weighty. One reason Narcisse dwelt upon for not going was the good fishing there was at St. John's. Prior to this suggestion Narcisse had never mentioned fishing; consequently the sudden outbreak of this new passion in his friend provided Charlie, on more than one occasion, with ample food for reflection.

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Town life was wonderfully bright and attractive to them after the long quiet of the woods. Narcisse knew many people in the pretty little town, and wherever he went Charlie was always sure to be seen. Rev. Father Pelletiere, the parish priest, who had christened Narcisse and buried his parents, called the young men David and Jonathan. The reverend father was a man thoroughly opposed to race prejudices, and there could be no doubt but that the friendship between the two young men had entirely bridged the artificial barriers so often raised between men of different races and creeds.

The very day they arrived in town, Narcisse, in an off-hand manner, told Charlie that they would go and call at a cottage that he had occasionally visited before he went to the woods. There was something in the tone in which Narcisse said this that gave Charlie the impression that the house must be one of more than ordinary size and importance. The more than usual time that Narcisse took in dressing that day increased this impression. When finally, after wandering down a series of little streets, Narcisse stopped at a small whitewashed cottage with a slanting roof, and knocked at the door with a certain amount of nervousness, Charlie's astonishment fairly overcame him, and he was just going to ask Narcisse if he had not made a mistake in the house, when the door opened. Then he was sure Narcisse had not made a mistake. Never had he seen a more attractive girlish face. Her eyes were deep blue, and were tenanted with such a merry, roguish gleam, that Charlie's hitherto well-regulated heart beat in a most unruly manner when she fixed her eyes upon his. Her brown, round, vivacious face took on a deeper hue, as Narcisse eagerly shook hands with her and introduced her to Charlie. "Jessie Cunningham is a very pretty name," mused Charlie, as they followed her into the quaint little kitchen, in the middle of which glowed an old-fashioned wood-burner.

On the long deal table, just behind the stove, were several loaves, which evidently had just been taken out of the oven. Jessie's sleeves were rolled up to the elbow, and her well-rounded arms were covered with flour. She blushed and gave a nervous little laugh, as she hurriedly pulled down her sleeves and explained that she had been baking. Both Narcisse and Charlie hurried over to where the tempting, warm, browned loaves were, and, after hurriedly glancing at them, looked at each other in open-eyed wonder, and declared that never in their lives had they seen finer loaves. After that all awkwardness was swept away, and Jessie would not be content until they both accepted a generous slice of the admired bread. The day was a little chilly, so they drew their chairs near the stove, and Narcisse told Jessie, in his quaint broken English, how he and Charlie had spent the winter in the woods, how they had eaten and slept together, and how they had taken a liking to each other the very moment they met.

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Charlie was a good talker, too, and told her how they had felled some wonderfully long trees, and how Narcisse was considered the best chopper in the camp, and could make a tree fall within an inch of where he wanted it.

As she listened, her eyes glowed and danced with excitement so as to make them dangerously attractive. Little wonder indeed that both the young men found them very pleasant to look into. To Charlie's intense satisfaction, he decided, after shaking hands with her at the door, that she had seemed just as anxious that he should come and see her again as she did that Narcisse should. Narcisse took the invitation in the most matter-of-fact manner, which created an impression in Charlie's mind that Narcisse, perhaps, after all, only cared for Jessie in a brotherly way.

Both Charlie and Narcisse soon got the reputation of being devoted disciples of Izaak Walton. They were to be seen every day wandering down to the river with divers devices to allure and entrap unsuspecting fish. Their success in being able to catch little or nothing soon caused much merriment among the boarders where they stayed. Of course, none of the scoffers knew that a very generous portion of the time that these ardent fishermen were supposed to be employing in catching fish, was spent lying on the broad of their backs on the fresh green grass discussing the virtues of the blue-eyed, vivacious young woman with whom the reader is already acquainted. Very naturally the young fishermen did not deem it their duty to enlighten the boarders as to how they spent their time.

Three evenings a week, no matter what the weather was, they dressed up in their best suits and visited the little whitewashed cottage. It would have taken a very keen observer to decide which of the young men she cared the most for, or whether, indeed, she had any tender feeling for either of them. Both were always given a most cordial welcome. If, however, Charlie had been a very close observer—which was unfair to expect at such a time—he might, perhaps, have noticed that at long intervals she stole a rapid glance at Narcisse when she knew his head was turned away from her—a gentle, caressing look that either of them would have been delighted to intercept.

The weeks fled rapidly by, and the month's vacation drew to a close. Strange to say, for over a week neither of them had mentioned the trip to the west. They went fishing together as usual, but her name very rarely passed their lips now. Just exactly how the change had come about neither of them could tell, but something had come between them. The little cloud at first was promptly banished, and they tried to be friendlier than ever. But the cloud was persistent, and returned again and again, and each time it was harder to overthrow. At first it was not larger than a man's hand, but before the month had elapsed it had grown so that it had well-nigh separated them. They both secretly mourned over

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the estrangement. They both well knew the birthplace of the cloud—the little whitewashed cottage. Several times Charlie generously made excuses for not wanting to go to the cottage, not because he thought Jessie did not like him as well as Narcisse, but because he was willing to sacrifice his interest in her on the altar of pure friendship. He called to memory the numberless acts of kindness he had received from Narcisse in the camp, and how he had been introduced to her by Narcisse, who he now felt sure sincerely liked Jessie.

Instinctively Narcisse knew why Charlie desired to cease his visits to the cottage, and it made his heart sore. He decided that he would not go and see her unless Charlie was with him. When Charlie would complain of feeling tired, off would come Narcisse's coat, and he would declare that he was feeling completely done up, too, and would not bother going down to the cottage. No amount of persuasion would make him alter his decision.

After they had a pipe of tobacco, Charlie would generally, in a most matter-of-fact manner, suggest that they both take a walk. Right well did Narcisse know where the walk would be to, and always acquiesced in such an unconcerned manner that no one would ever have imagined that they had fully made up their minds a few minutes previously not to go out.

One day more, and the month's vacation would be gone. Charlie and Narcisse had been indoors all day, to escape the rain that had been falling in great sheets since early morning. An ill-disposed wind was buffeting the rain in such a fierce, malignant manner as to make one's room a most desirable place to be in. Charlie and Narcisse had sat and smoked until their tongues were dry and sore. It was a relief for them to smoke; not so much to kill time as to break the long awkward pauses in their conversation. Inwardly they had both decided that it was impossible any longer to bear the constraint that had come between them.

During the long day neither of them had been able to muster courage to refer to the proposed trip to the west, although the day set for it was so close at hand. They had both decided that day, however, that they would right themselves in each other's eyes. Narcisse believed Charlie loved Jessie; Charlie felt sure Narcisse loved her. Charlie was not sure whether Jessie loved him or Narcisse the better. Narcisse had, however, a pretty good idea who Jessie had taken a liking to.

When ten o'clock came, Charlie knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and said he was going to bed, and would have a long sleep, as he was played out. Narcisse glanced sleepily at his own bed in the corner of the room, stretched out his long legs and arms, opened his mouth alarmingly wide, yawned vociferously, and declared that he was so sleepy that he could hardly keep his eyes open. Before leaving the room to go to his own, which was next to Narcisse's, Charlie pulled off his coat and threw it over his

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arm. If Narcisse had entertained any doubts as to whether or not Charlie was really as sleepy as he had intimated, this partial unrobing must surely have dispelled it. Notwithstanding his haste to get to bed, Charlie fumbled at the latch an unusually long time before he succeeded in opening the door. And finally, when it did swing open, his coat, without any apparent provocation, perversely slipped from his arm and fell to the floor. Charlie found it necessary, before he put it across his arm again, to carefully dust and fold it.

Turning round as the door was closing behind him, he said, in a voice that seemed a little strained, "Yes, we will go to bed and dream of camp days, eh, Narcisse?" Then he was gone.

Narcisse walked over to the window, stood for a few moments with folded arms, gazing out into the darkness, and then said softly, "Yes, dream of de camp days."

When Charlie reached his room, he acted in a most peculiar manner; he put his ear to the partition that separated his room from Narcisse's, and listened intently; then walked over to his bed, sat on the edge of it, took off his boots, held them aloof, and then let them fall on the floor; laid his coat across the foot of the bed, stood still for a few minutes, and then threw himself so heavily across the bed that it groaned loudly enough to be distinctly heard by Narcisse, who nodded his head in a satisfied manner.

Charlie lay on the top of the clothes, dressed, with the exception of his boots, hat, and coat, with his eyes wide open and his head bent in a listening attitude. Presently the sound of falling boots in Narcisse's room also brought a look of relief to Charlie's face. After hearing Narcisse blow out the light and get into bed, Charlie lay perfectly still. An hour sped by; the only sounds to be heard were the cries of the wind as it tore through the branches of the tree whose long well-clad arms in summer protected Charlie's room from the fierce rays of the sun. At short intervals, the branches tapped on the window panes, as though craving protection from the storm. Inside the house quietness reigned supreme. From a distance one would have been sure Charlie was sleeping, but a closer inspection would have shown that his eyes were wide open. It was 11.30. Charlie quietly raised himself, pulled his coat to him, and took a railway time-table from it, then ran his finger down a portion of it. The express left for the west at 12.05 a.m. He drew a line around the figures, and put the table back into his pocket again. Then he got out of bed, on tip-toe stole to his carpet-bag, which hung near the door, and quietly began to stow away in it his modest belongings. So quietly did he gather up his things that not a mouse, except by sight, could have known that he was in the room. Every now and then he would pause, with his face turned toward Narcisse's room, and listen. Twice a slight noise, which seemed to emanate from Narcisse's

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room, disturbed him, and with contracted brow he paused and listened longer than usual. The branches smote the window, and he smiled at his folly. He was positive that Narcisse was sound asleep. When the valise was packed, he cautiously turned the light a little higher, got a sheet of paper and a pencil, and wrote in a straggling hand: "Dear friend Narcisse,—I thought it better if I went alone. I know you like her. You knew her before I did, and you brought me here. I think she likes you better than me, too. She ought to. That which has come between us has made me feel very bad. When I am away I will try and think only of the camp days. She will make you a good wife, Narcisse. Some day I will write and let you know how I am getting along in the North-West.—CHARLIE."

He doubled the note carefully and addressed it to Narcisse. Then he rolled some silver up in a paper and addressed it to his landlady. Silently he put on his coat and hat, picked up his boots, seized his carpet-bag, blew out the light, and in his stocking feet stole to the door. "I will put on my boots at the bottom of the stairs," he muttered absently.

He was half-way out of the door, when he stopped suddenly. Again that slight noise which seemed to come from Narcisse's room! Could it be possible that Narcisse was not in bed? Again the branches rattled on the panes, and again he chided himself for his fancy. He softly closed the door behind him, flitted along the narrow passage and began to descend the stairs leading to the street. Reaching the bottom of the stairs, he was just in the act of pulling on his boots, when the door at the top of the stairs was pulled slowly open. There was no mistake this time; someone was stealing down the stairs. The darkness was too great to allow him to see who it was. There was no escape for him; his boots were off, and his latch-key was in his pocket. Long before he could open the door he who was descending would be with him at the bottom of the stairs. Quickly he pulled a match from his pocket and struck it. Instantly the dark stairway was made light. The sight he saw fairly stunned him. Standing in the middle of the stairs was Narcisse, his canvas valise in one hand and his boots in the other.

"Narcisse!" gasped Charlie.

"Charlie!" cried Narcisse, letting his boots and bag fall. The match went out. For a few moments there was silence; then Narcisse descended the remainder of the stairs. Without a word they both pulled on their boots. They both understood now.

Charlie lit a match while Narcisse unfastened the door. As they stepped out into the street Narcisse drew Charlie's arm through his.

"De train don't leave for twenty minutes yet," he said calmly, "no need for hurry; eh, Charlie?"

Charlie halted. “No, no, Narcisse,” he said with a little break in his voice. “She likes you; you must not leave.”

Narcisse was big and strong; he drew Charlie’s arm again through his, and again they began slowly to walk toward the station.



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"So you try to leave me, Charlie?"

"I could bear that which came between us no longer, Narcisse. Then, I thought you liked her."

"So you would go, because of friendship for me, Charlie?" They were walking very close to each other now.

"And why are you here, Narcisse?"

"I know you liked her, Charlie." The great fellow's voice was very sweet at times.

The weather was clearing. Through great rifts in the clouds, every few minutes, the moon poured great floods of light.

"The clouds are going away, Narcisse."

"Dat so, Charlie." He looked up at the moon, which at that moment broke through the clouds again. "And de cloud dat came between me and you has now gone away, Charlie."

In the distance could be seen the headlight of the approaching express.

"Yes, all gone, Narcisse; we shall have the camp days over again, now."

They were just in time to get their tickets to Manitoba and get on board. They sat up the remainder of the night, and smoked and talked and made plans for the future. Never once did they speak of *her*, although she was often in their thoughts. In Narcisse's pocket was a note he had received from her a few days ago, which hinted that, if he desired, he might call sometimes—alone. He was so afraid that Charlie some day might find this note, that he had no peace until he had torn it into numberless fragments, and when Charlie was not looking, he covertly raised the car window and saw the mad wind carry the pieces in a hundred different directions.

* * * * *

Another spring had come. Charlie and Narcisse were sitting in a smoking-room in a small hotel in Winnipeg. Placidly Narcisse was leaning back reading a paper that he had just got from St. John's. They were better dressed and looked more prosperous than in the old days. Occasionally they talked about her now. To Narcisse she seemed but a dream, and he had no regrets. To Charlie it was different; to him she was still very real.

Suddenly Narcisse uttered an exclamation of surprise, and let the paper fall. Charlie, who had his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the floor, looked up in surprise and asked what was the matter.

"Oh, dare is noting de matter," answered Narcisse, trying to look unconcerned. "I tink I must have been asleep."

He gathered up the paper, and said he would go and stand at the door for a few minutes.

As soon as the door closed behind him, he opened the paper again and read the following in the marriage notices: "Married May 13th, 18—, at St. John's, Miss Jessie Cunningham, to John White, farmer, of St. John's."

Narcisse ran up to his room, tore out the notice and burned it. "Dare," he said to himself, with a satisfied look on his face, "Charlie won't know anything about dat now. No use for open de old wound again. Well, she wait about a year. Dat pretty good," he said, with a good-natured smile.

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"Well, do you feel any better?" asked Charlie, as Narcisse entered the room again.

"Oh, yes," replied Narcisse, puffing out his chest. "Dat fresh air do me all de good in de world." And Charlie never guessed!

* * * * *

A Strange Presentiment.

While this strange story is fresh in my memory, I am writing it, just as it was told me by my friend George B——, who a few years ago was general manager of a well-known Canadian railroad. I had known George for years, and had been superintendent of the same road. He told me the history of his life one beautiful night in June as we were seated in a sleeping car *en route* for Montreal. For the first time I knew why he had never married, a problem that had cost me many conjectures. The story is founded on a presentiment. Presentiments are difficult things to analyze, but for my part I believe the tale, and am content to let the reader use his own judgment in the matter.

"I began my railway career," commenced George, "on the Old Colony R.R., as operator at Shirley Junction, which at that time was one of the most important crossing points on the whole road. Poor Herbert Lawrence, who plays such a tragic part in this story, was the day operator. It was at Shirley Junction that I met Julia Waine, the station agent's niece. She was a singularly beautiful girl, and naturally it was her beauty that first attracted me; but her intelligence and sympathetic nature were the loadstones that drew my heart to her as I came to know her better. A week after I arrived at the Junction, the agent gave a party in honor of Julia's birthday, and Herbert and I were among the invited guests. Julia looked very beautiful and sweet, as she welcomed us in the quaint little parlor over the telegraph office. I had not been in the room ten minutes before I discovered that Herbert Lawrence loved Julia as unselfishly as I did. Herbert, who was a gentlemanly fellow, was, on account of his intensely nervous disposition, ill-adapted to the work of an operator. He was extremely sensitive, and had a painful habit of blushing that at times made him look almost ridiculous. He knew his failing, and it was pitiful to see his struggles for self-command. All the evening he sat in a corner of the parlor, like a faithful dog, content to watch the being he so dearly loved. Once or twice during the party I saw Julia go over to where he was sitting and speak to him, and from her manner I knew his love was not returned. When shaking hands with her at the close of the party I heard him say, 'I hope I may be at your next birthday party.'

"I hope so; I shall then be twenty-one, and I am beginning to feel quite old already,' she replied brightly.

"Her next birthday party! God wisely hides the future from us! I had been at the station a little over six months when the adventure that I am about to relate occurred. November, 1873, ushered in weather that railway men heartily dislike. All day a cold

rain had fallen, coating the rails with a thin layer of ice. Drivers of express trains had their work cut out to keep on time, while freight trains straggled in at all hours.

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“When I came on duty that night, at seven o’clock, I saw that I was going to have a busy time of it. Until that evening I can truthfully say that I never knew what nervousness was; but scarcely had I entered the station when I felt suddenly depressed. I attributed the feeling to heat, and tried to pull myself together by poking fun at Herbert, whom I accused of wilfully keeping the trains late in order to shirk handling them. Every night Herbert gave me a written account of the trains handled during the day, and especially drew my attention to any crossing orders that had to be attended to. As Herbert was leaving the room I glanced at the book and saw there were no orders on hand. This should have satisfied me that everything was all right; but it did not, and I called out to him and asked if there were any train orders. He replied in a low, absent voice that there were none. I could not help but notice his dejection, and a feeling of pity filled my heart for him. The evening previous Julia had promised to be my wife. Herbert did not know this, but I knew he had a presentiment that the girl he so dearly loved cared more for me than she did for him. He did not, however, show any resentment, but appeared strangely depressed. After he had left the station, I tried to drive away from my mind the foreboding of ill by reading; but, like Banquo’s ghost, it would not down. I began to think I was going to be seriously ill. Restlessly I paced the floor, longing for, yet dreading, the approach of the express train which was due at the station at 9 p.m. The wind had risen and was buffeting the telegraph wires, making them hum in an exasperating manner.

“As the minutes slowly wore away, my disquietude alarmingly increased. I was charged with a nervous dread, for which I could not find the slightest excuse; I knew, however, that in some strange way the approaching express was the cause of it. I thought of Julia; surely the demon of unrest would be banished if I saw her. With an almost childish impulse I sought her presence. Before I had time to seat myself, Julia, with a woman’s keen perception, noticed my nervousness and asked the cause of it. Man-like I laughed at her anxiety, and tried to deceive her by being boisterously happy, but of course this failed to allay her fears. Before five minutes had elapsed I was madly anxious to get back to the operating room again, although I knew perfectly well there was nothing for me to do. To this day I cannot understand what power, despite all my common-sense, made me hurry back, and again begin to hunt through the book for an order, which in my heart of hearts I knew perfectly well was not there. After all, how little we know of the great other world and the influences that may be there at work!

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"It was now 8.45. In fifteen minutes more the express would be in. I was actually unable to endure the dreadful suspense, and had just made up my mind to go and see Herbert, who boarded across the road from the station, when the waiting-room door opened and he entered. Without speaking to me he walked dejectedly over to the station agent's door, and was just going to knock at it, when I reached his side and said to him in deep agitation, 'Tell me, Herbert, are you quite sure you received no orders to hold the express? she will soon be here now.' My voice trembled with anxiety. Without looking at me or appearing to notice my strange manner, he replied, 'No orders, if you received none.' As the door closed behind him I could have cried out, so keen was the feeling of dread that again swept over me. Just then I heard the whistle of the locomotive, which seemed to stop my very heart from beating. Like one bereft I ran back into the telegraph office, and began to call the dispatcher's office. There was one more chance of saving the express if it was in danger, and that was by asking if an order had been sent to hold it for a crossing. I had waited until the last minute before I could make up my mind to do this: because, if the dispatcher had telegraphed an order, he would know by repeating it that Herbert had forgotten to book it and turn the red light facing the station on to the track. Such a grave omission would mean sure dismissal. If he had not sent one he would want to know what made me ask him such a strange question, and would at once get an inkling that something was wrong. True it is that troubles never come singly! For a full minute I stood desperately calling the dispatcher's office, but got no answer. Either the wires had been crossed or the man had for a few minutes left his post. I closed the key and sank weakly back on my chair.

"As the door opened and old Conductor Rawlings, with the typical railway man's good-natured bustle, entered the room and noisily banged his lamp down on the desk, I buried my face in my hands, completely prostrated by contending emotions. The feeling that the train should not be allowed to proceed burned in me more fiercely than ever.

"'Here, there!' yelled Rawlings, 'hurry up and trot out that clearance order.' If I had been chained to the chair I could not have been more unable to move. Getting no answer from me, Rawlings walked quickly into the telegraph office, and catching me unceremoniously by the arm, said impatiently, 'Come, now, wake up and give me that order; what do you mean by keeping me like this?'

"With a dazed feeling I staggered to my feet and took up a pad of orders. If I signed and gave him one of them, I was responsible for the safety of the train until it reached the next station. The orders read that the track was clear of all trains, and that no instructions had been received by the operator to detain trains for crossings. The forms were printed. All the operators had to do was to sign them. With averted face I seized the pen and tried to sign my name to one of the slips, but so fearfully were my nerves unstrung that the pen fell twice from my hand to the floor. The next thing I knew, Rawlings had turned me round and was letting the glare of the lantern fall full on my face.

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"I will report you for this detention. What is the matter with you? You look wild enough to be put in an asylum."

"Mechanically I completed the signature and handed him the order. Just as he was about to step from the station to the platform, he suddenly turned round, and said somewhat apprehensively, 'Of course you have received no orders to detain me?' 'No,' I replied, in a voice that did not sound like my own.

"As the train began to move slowly out of the station I sprang to my feet, ran to the window, and gazed in terror at it.

"Just as Rawlings was about to jump on one of the cars, some impulse made him pause and glance at the window where I was standing. Something in my face must have strangely affected him, as he allowed the car on which he was about to jump to go by, and without apparently seeming to know what he was doing, swung his lantern from right to left. If the engineer had seen this signal he would have stopped the train. With an impatient shake of his head Rawlings jumped on to the step of the next car. He stood on the step as he passed, and with contracted brow again fixed his eyes on mine. The moment I lost sight of the train the spell that bound me to the window was broken. An involuntary cry came from my dry lips, and I dashed my hand through the glass with the imbecile impulse of stopping the train. The remarkable presentiment that the train should not go on had full possession of me now.

"Like one possessed I ran out of the office, burst open the door leading to the agent's house, mounted in bounds the stairs leading to it, and ran through the sitting-room into the parlor, where I knew I should find Herbert. Just before I entered the room I heard Herbert say in a broken voice, 'Then there is no hope for me?'

"No," replied a choked voice, which I recognized as Julia's. An embarrassing scene met my gaze; kneeling at Julia's feet with a look of keen disappointment on his face was Herbert.

"As I rushed into the room he sprang to his feet with an exclamation of anger and amazement. But when he saw my face, an expression of deadly fear passed over his. Without stopping to think, I caught him by the coat-collar with my wounded hand; instantly his white shirt was stained with blood. 'Herbert,' I cried desperately, 'the express has just left! For heaven's sake tell me that you are quite sure you got no order to hold her. I am certain something is going to happen, something dread—'

"I never finished the sentence. I pray that I never again may see such a look of mortal agony on any face as passed over his, or again hear such a scream as he uttered, when he rushed past me with uplifted arms, and ran downstairs crying at the top of his voice, 'Stop her! stop her!' This terrible scene had all been acted in less than a minute. I

bounded after him. Someone was following me, but I never thought of stopping to see who. My mind was now quite clear. If the express had

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not passed the semaphore she might yet be stopped. The semaphore was nearly a quarter of a mile from the station, and the arm was down. If the engine had passed it by a hair's breadth, ninety-nine chances out of a hundred the engineer would go on. If I could let up the arm before the engine reached it, all might be well. My main hope was in the icy condition of the track; I knew it would take her much longer than usual to get under way on such rails.

"As Herbert dashed out of the station I was not two feet behind him. With naked head, and hands outstretched toward the rapidly departing train, and still uttering impotent cries, ran the demented fellow, his reason for the time being entirely gone. The rampant wind blew the half-frozen rain in my face with such force that I could scarcely breathe, while my eyes smarted so under the onslaught that I could see only with great difficulty. With what wonderful velocity the mind works in moments of great danger! Even before I had left the station, my alert brain had weighed and reweighed the chances of the plans it had with such marvellous rapidity given birth to. As I ran, the quick panting of the locomotive was borne to my strained ears with great distinctness by the hurrying wind. The ear is easily deceived as to sounds; whether the train was fifty yards or half a mile away I could not tell. A few more steps and the lever that worked the semaphore was in my hands. I quickly released the wire which held down the distant semaphore arm. Just as I did so I saw Herbert jump from the platform on to the track, along which he ran, still calling in piteous tones for the express to stop.

"Then followed an experience so fearful that I wonder my mind, too, did not lose its balance. Regardless of wind and rain I stood clutching the lever, waiting for the engine to whistle the station to lower the arm. If no whistle came, I was too late! My very heart seemed to stop and listen, while my nerves seemed as if they must surely snap, so overwrought were they. To my excited imagination every second seemed an hour. Still the dreadful suspense went on, while the panting of the engine grew quicker and quicker. The suspense was actually too great to bear, and I weakly sank on to the platform. A moment later there came floating a sound sweeter to my ears than the triumphant song of the nightingale; yet it was only the deep discordant whistle of the fleeing locomotive calling for the semaphore arm to be lowered.

"Saved! I sprang to my feet, sobbing like a child. As I turned to go back to the station, a startling apparition met my eyes; standing ten paces from me and waving a red lamp was Julia. Her white clothing and the fitful glare of the red light made her look like something supernatural. The fierce wind tossed the hair in sweet disorder about her refined delicate face, while the cold rain made the clothing cling to her slender figure like a shroud. 'Julia!' I exclaimed aghast, advancing toward her with faltering

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steps. Then the lantern fell, and I caught her as she was about to fall. I carried her back to the station, with the strength born in me by the continued angry whistling of the engine, and by the final cessation of its violent breathing. As I laid her on one of the benches in the waiting-room, I heard the driver whistle 'brakes off.' I knew the train would now soon be back to the station again with its precious load!

"Hardly had Julia recovered before the light on the rear car of the express backed past the station. Standing on the platform of the car was old Rawlings. With an imprecation he ran into the station and laid his hand heavily on my shoulder. 'What does all this mean? why did you throw up the semaphore and wave the red light for us to return?' he demanded, his face all aglow with passion. 'Don't talk like that,' I replied; 'thank God for the red lamp and the semaphore! You likely now would have been a corpse were it not for them. There is a crossing order to hold you here. Herbert got it and forgot to enter it in the book and turn the lamp. He will soon be back and tell you whether the crossing is with a freight or passenger special.'

"'Bless me, what an escape!' burst out Rawlings. 'There will be a mighty big row about this. Where is that ass of a fellow?' The question was soon answered. Slowly walking backward, with bent shoulders and arms wrapped around some dark object, entered the driver of the express, while following him and bent in a like manner came the fireman. With a dull foreboding of evil I took a step forward. They were carrying Herbert, all torn and mangled! 'We must have backed over him,' said the driver, quietly as he laid the poor battered burden down. 'There is just a spark of life left in him, nothing more.' I saw the pallid lips move, and kneeling, bent my ear to them. The last words they ever formed came very slow and faint, yet faint as they were I heard them: 'The express must—cross—the—passenger—special. I—loved—her—so.' Then the weary lips were at peace—lasting peace. As I rose, my eyes fell on Julia; she was crouching at the feet of the poor fellow whom, but a few moments ago she had refused to marry. As the driver threw a sheet over the remains he said, 'Poor fellow, his mistake cost him dear.' Then turning to me: 'What a blessing it was that you kept your head and signalled us with the red light; for I had just passed under the semaphore when the arm rose. Consequently I thought nothing of the matter; but the fireman at that moment ran up the back of the tender to throw down some coal near the fire-box, and while doing so he noticed the light. He at once called to me to look behind. The signal, coupled with the arm being thrown up before the whole train had passed under it, made me think something was wrong, so I reversed the engine and came back.'

"It was Julia, then, and not I, who had saved the express!

"On reaching the operating room I found the conductor of the passenger special waiting. He had heard of the forgotten order, and said, 'That is the closest call I have

had for years. We should have met about the trestle bridge over the ravine. It would have been a terrible pitch-in, as I have eight cars of excursionists.'

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"A few moments later both trains had departed, and the only sounds to be heard were the ticking of the busy instrument and the monotonous hum of the wires. I looked at the clock. It was 9.09—just nine minutes since the regular express had steamed into the station. It seemed impossible to me that so much could have happened in so short a time. Had each minute been a week it could not have seemed longer."

George paused as though his story was done. "And Julia?" I asked, laying my hand lightly on his knee. Without replying, he drew out of his pocket an old frayed pocket-book, took out of it a slip of faded newspaper, and silently handed it to me. The words printed on it were very few; simply these: "Died March 8th, 1874, of rapid consumption, Julia Waive, aged twenty years and five months."

As I raised my head and looked at him, he said as he looked out of the low window, "The cold she took that fearful night killed her."

* * * * *

A Memorable Dinner.

As I often have wondered whether a Christmas dinner ever was so fearfully and wonderfully constructed, and under such novel circumstances, as the one to which I sat down on Christmas Day, 1879, I have decided to relate—in the truthful, unvarnished style that one always looks for in the old railway man—the incidents in which I was fortunate enough to participate on that occasion.

That year, I was Assistant-Superintendent of the St. — R.R., and was returning on Christmas eve from the annual inspection of the line, in company with the General Manager of the road, in the private car "St. Paul," when one of the worst blizzards I ever experienced, even in that prairie country, burst upon us, and in less than an hour, had buried the track so deeply that further progress was impossible.

It was about midnight when the engine, fully five miles distant from a human habitation, and two hundred miles from our home, sulkily admitted the superior power of nature's forces and hove to.

Fortunately, for humanity's sake, there were on our special—which consisted of the engine, the baggage car, and our private car—only five souls: Charles Fielding, the manager; myself, William Thurlow; Fred Swan, the conductor; Joe Robbins, the driver; and the hero of this history, Ovide Tetreault, the French-Canadian fireman.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when we finally gave up all hope of getting along any farther, at least for some hours, and Fielding and I lay down in our berths with the hope that the storm would abate before daybreak, so that a snow-plough might reach us and clear the line, in time to enable us to reach our homes for the Christmas dinner.

But as I lay awake and listened to the shrieks of the storm, the presentiment grew upon me that the chances of our spending the best part of Christmas Day in our contracted abode were depressingly promising. These thoughts, coupled with the knowledge that our car was but poorly provisioned, and that we were without a cook—having let that functionary stop off for Christmas Day at the station beyond which we were stranded—were in nowise conducive to my falling asleep more readily than was my wont.

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I awoke a little after eight o'clock, and was just about to hurry into my clothes to see what the weather was like, when I suddenly decided there was no need of any undue haste—the roar of that festive wind could have been heard a mile away.

When I did reach the body of the car and looked out of the window, a sight met my gaze that might have made a less sinful man, than one who had spent the best part of his life on railways, give vent to comments that I am persuaded would not appear quite seemly in print. Our car was wedged well-nigh up to the windows in a huge drift, while the wind, which had whipped the harassed snow into fragments as fine as dust, caught up great clouds of the dismembered flakes, and with triumphant shrieks drove them against the panes of glass. As I stood glaring at this inspiring picture, Fielding joined me and said, as he, too, feasted his eyes on the scene: "A villainous day! we shall be lucky if we get home by midnight. A lovely way to spend Christmas shut in like rats in a trap! If we only had our cook to do up the little food we have, it would not be so hard on us."

This last reflection was uttered in such a doleful key that I had considerable difficulty in not laughing outright, for my superior officer was a man of imposing breadth, and I knew his one weakness was the love of a good meal. The contemplation of the loss of his Christmas dinner had made him forget his usual blunt, hopeful tone of speech, and adopt this dismal strain.

During the long pause which followed, I knew that he was casting anxious glances at me. Finally he said, insinuatingly: "Er—er—William, during all the years that I have known you, it never occurred to me to ask you if you knew anything about cooking. But, of course, it is a foolish question to put to the assistant-superintendent of a railroad," he added deprecatingly.

I was sorry to have to admit that my education in the culinary art had been sorely neglected.

It must have been about two hours after partaking of our Christmas breakfast, which consisted of bread and butter, cheese and tea, that we had managed somehow to scrape together, that Fielding said to me: "Why, William, there is the conductor, and the driver, and the fireman—perhaps one of them knows enough to roast that beef in the larder. Suppose you go and interview them. There is enough meat there to make a dinner for the lot of us."

The suggestion struck me as being a good one, and I wondered that I had not thought of questioning them about the matter earlier in the morning. I soon had the trio marching behind me into our car, to be examined as to what they knew of the now much-to-be-desired art of cooking.

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With divers sincere regrets, the conductor protested that he had not the slightest knowledge of this housewifely accomplishment. But old Joe Robbins, the driver, a sterling, dogged Yorkshire man, and one of our oldest employes to whose speech still clung a goodly smattering of the Yorkshire dialect, raised Fielding's sinking hopes by saying that although he did not know how to roast, he was pretty well posted in the art of frying. He further explained, and this time to the gratification of us all, that he had in a box, on the tender of the engine, a ten-pound turkey that he had bought up the line to take home for Christmas, and which we were quite welcome to. The only drawback to the bird was that it was frozen as hard as a rock, and would probably take a lot of thawing out. If we wished, however, he would do his best to thaw it and give us fried turkey for dinner.

Fielding, after declaring that he would not forget to give the man who acted as cook that day a souvenir when he got back to town, was just about to accept the kind offer, when Ovide Tetreault, the French-Canadian fireman, a dark-skinned, comical-looking little fellow, pushed past Robbins, and said eagerly to Fielding and myself, in amusing broken English: "Messieurs, I'm know how for mak de rost turkey, and rost turkey she's goodder dan de fry turkey. And I'm know, too, how for mak—how for mak—" He rubbed his pointed little chin vigorously to jog his laggard memory, and then continued, triumphantly: "*Ah, oui! ah, oui!* how for mak what de English call de Creesmis plum-puddin', and if you lak I will do de cookin' for you."

Turning to me, Fielding said in a low voice: "Do you really think that queer-looking specimen knows more about cooking than old Robbins? Would it be safe to let him try and roast the turkey? It would never do to have it spoiled, you know."

Now, from the eager manner in which the little chap had spoken, he impressed me, in spite of his insignificant appearance, with being less commonplace than he looked, and believing that our dinner, under his generalship, would be a much better one than old Robbins would be likely to provide, I strongly urged Fielding to bestow the commission of cook upon my favorite. "What possible reason can he have for saying he can roast turkeys and boil plum-puddings if he cannot?" I urged as a clincher. Of course he had no good argument to meet such a question, and so, turning to Ovide, he said: "All right, my good fellow, go ahead, and give us roast turkey and plum-pudding. I am glad that after all we shall not be without a Christmas dinner."

During this conference Robbins had been eyeing his fireman with growing disfavor, and as Fielding ceased, he strode suddenly up to Ovide and said to him with ill-suppressed wrath: "Before thou begins thy duties as cook, it is only right that thou shouldst say how thou larned to cook, and just how much thou knows about it. For my part, I believe thou knows nought about it; I know thee and thy foolish way of thinking that thou canst do anything thou hast seen anyone else do."

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Now, as I knew the old driver heartily disliked his little fireman—whom he always dubbed an intruding foreigner—and had more than once reported him to me on the ground of incompetency, I concluded his remarks were not wholly disinterested, and was about to reprove him, when Ovide, with much heartiness, replied: “Dat’s not your bizness to ax me question lak dat; I’m not on de engine now.” He then raised his shoulders commiseratingly and continued: “You not be ’fraid, Monsieur Robbin; for when I rost dat turkey and boil dat puddin’ you will find her so good dat you will eat more dan de odders.”

The dogged old driver was now too angry to be influenced by our amused smiles, and turning contemptuously away from Ovide, he looked to us to press his demand for our cook’s credentials.

“Oh, I am sure, Robbins, he will cook the dinner all right. And then you know,” I added reprovingly, “this is Christmas Day, and there should be no hard feeling among us.”

My reply only the more incensed our doughty old engineer. He pointed prophetically at the now thoroughly defiant Ovide, and said, “I suppose I’m interfering; but, mark my words, that foreigner there’ll make you before the day’s out forget all about that motto of peace and good-will.” His prophetic arm fell to his side, and he seated himself in a position from which he could command a good view of the little kitchen at the end of the passage, where his watchful eyes never failed to fasten on Ovide as he swaggered about, arrayed in our regular cook’s long, white apron.

For the next two hours I thought very little of Ovide, my attention being occupied by a game in which Fielding, the conductor and I were engaged.

Suddenly Fielding exclaimed, “Gracious, William, but this car is hot!” I myself had been uncomfortably warm for some time, and had been dimly conscious, too, of the conductor frequently wiping his face, and casting anxious glances in the direction of the kitchen, whence came blasts of hot air heavily laden with the appetizing odor of roast turkey.

Involuntarily I glanced over at Robbins, who was still on guard, although pretending to read a newspaper, and as I caught the grim look of satisfaction on his profile, doubts as to the ability of our new cook for the first time stole over me, and I made my way out to the kitchen.

The moment I opened the door, and stepped into Ovide’s new sanctum, I thought the last great day of conflagration had surely come, and that the elements were melting with fervent heat. Never before had I experienced such withering heat and choking smoke as proceeded from that little range, nor such dense vapor as came from the mouth of the boisterous kettle upon it—many a locomotive would have been proud to spout forth such a body of steam!

Finally my half-blinded eyes found out Ovide, who looked truly like an emissary of the evil one among it all, as he stood with his wet scarlet face, his feet buried in turkey feathers, and his arms up to the elbows in a bowl of flour.

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“Ovide!” I called, faintly.

When he saw me, a pleased, triumphant look lit up his face.

“Do you want to burn down the car?” I asked, shortly, when I got him into the passage.

“Oh, no fear for dat,” he answered in a somewhat patronizing tone. “You know,” he went on, good-naturedly, “big turkey can’t be cook if not have pretty good fire. But I’ll open de window and den de fire she’ll all go out. For me, you know I’m not mind de heat, for I’m used to dat when I fire de engine.”

“But surely, Ovide, you will burn the turkey all up,” I insisted, in a milder tone—for, as I have already stated, I was in no wise an authority on cooking, and from the patronizing way in which he spoke, I began to feel that I had been interfering unnecessarily.

“Well,” he replied ponderingly, “p’rhaps she do a little too quick, and I’ll tak her out; aldo she’s only be in a few minute.”

As I glanced at his flour-bedecked arms, he said, “Oh, yes, I’m find de raisin, and de curran, and de peel, and lots powder, dat makes de flour come big, and I’m mix dem all together when you come in, and we going to have fine Creesmis puddin’ sure. It’s too bad, do, dat I find a hole she’s born in de bottom of de sospan, so dat I must put de puddin’ in de kettle, which has not got big mouth; but she’s pretty big around de middle, so I suppose de puddin’ she’s cook just as well dare.”

I was too bewildered by all this detail to pay much attention to what he was saying about the smallness of the kettle’s mouth; but I remembered it vividly afterwards.

Nodding gaily to me, he hurried back to the oven, from which the blue odorous smoke was still pouring. I lingered long enough to see him take the turkey out of it, stand it on the shelf in the corner, and then open the window.

As I passed Robbins, he let his paper flutter to his knee, and said, meaningly: “I hope yon chap, sir, don’t think he’s still firing on the engine.”

As I smilingly shook my head and passed on, a presentiment of approaching disaster took possession of me—so that the recollection of the speaker’s prophecies of evil regarding our cook did not come back with that keen sense of humor one would have expected.

When I reached Fielding’s side, he said anxiously, “I hope he is getting along all right, William.” As I noted his anxiety, and the hungry expression of his face, I answered with a glibness which I was far from feeling, that things were getting along swimmingly. I was now beginning to feel such a weight of responsibility in the success of the dinner

that I sincerely wished I had not taken such an active interest in the appointment of the cook.

About an hour later, when we ceased our game, I noticed the odor of roast turkey was no longer prevalent; so with apprehensive heart, though nonchalant air, I made my way over to the kitchen again, and was just in time to see Ovide snatch the turkey—which now looked cold and forlorn enough—from the shelf and shove it into the still fervent oven, and to hear him mutter, “Dat’s too bad I’m forgot to put you back for so long.”

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He did not see me until he had closed the oven door, and then he said, joyously, pointing to the kettle: "De puddin' she's in dare, and she's nearly all done now, and in fifteen or twenty minute more de dinner she's all be ready."

I suppose if I had not seen the bird's entrance into the oven for the second time, the announcement of the early approach of the festivities would have allayed some of my apprehensions, and perhaps have afforded me a little of the satisfaction Fielding and the conductor experienced when they heard the news. The effect of the tidings upon old Robbins, however, was tantalizing in the extreme. He threw his paper to one side, rested his elbows on his knees, and holding up his grizzly chin with his hands, began softly to whistle a monotonous, soul-disturbing air.

Ovide was true to his word, for scarcely had the twenty minutes elapsed, when in he bustled, pulled the table into the centre of the car, set it fairly well, after a number of amusing blunders, and then drawing up the chairs, said, with great gusto: "Now, Messieurs, I'm go and get de dinner."

As we seated ourselves, Fielding said, with a satisfaction that comes back to me vividly as I pen these words: "Well, William, I am glad it is ready; I never remember being so hungry." The kindly look which he bestowed on Ovide as he came in with the smoking turkey will also never be difficult to conjure up. But the moment my eyes fell upon that unfortunate bird, my heart began to beat with renewed apprehensions. Never before had I seen such an ill-favored, uninviting-looking fowl placed upon a table; its naturally white, smooth skin was now as seamy, black and arid-looking as the mouth of an ancient crater.

Covertly I glanced at Fielding to see what effect this steaming, yet mummified-looking object had upon him. My worst fears were verified: the complacent expression had fled, and was succeeded by a look in which consternation, anger and amazement were all blended.

The short, trying silence was broken by a rasping cough from Robbins, and then Fielding said, in a constrained tone, as he whetted his knife: "Well, this animal looks as though it had been through the fiery furnace created by Nebuchadnezzar for the undoing of the three Israelites."

Ovide, who was standing complacently behind Fielding's chair, not understanding the allusion, and thinking that he was called upon to say something, said brightly, "Oh, yes, sir, dat turkey is de finest turkey I never see."

Now, I had known Fielding, on numerous occasions, to laugh heartily at a much less amusing blunder, but on this occasion I sought his usually expressive face in vain for even the ghost of a smile. To add to my annoyance and the constraint of the situation, old Robbins found it necessary to again loudly clear his troublesome throat.

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To save himself from making an angry reply, Fielding somewhat viciously commenced operations on the turkey, and attempted to carve off a leg; but in some unaccountable manner the knife came to a sudden halt as soon as it had pierced the dark skin. This unlooked-for interruption brought a puzzled look into Fielding's face; but he was a man not easily daunted by anything, and thinking that he had somehow come across a bone hitherto unknown to him in a turkey's anatomy, he twisted the bird round and confidently began the dissection of the other leg. The result was equally disheartening; the blade went a little below the skin, and then refused to budge.

Poor Fielding! His patience was by this time pretty well exhausted, and turning to the now anything but jubilant Ovide, said grimly: "In the name of all that is good, man, what is the matter with this turkey?"

He had gone however, to the wrong fount, for information this time, as Ovide wonderingly shook his head, and said, "Dat is de queerest ting I'm never see, sir."

The angry words on Fielding's lips were prevented by a low comprehensive laugh from old Robbins, who said, as he pointed satirically at his fireman, "Oh, aye; oh, aye; thou knows how to cook; thou does, of course thou does." Then turning to Fielding he said, with a side glance at me: "That bird, sir, has nobbut had its hide cooked, and all beneath it is frozen."

Even before Fielding, to verify this startling statement, had seized the knife, and, laying open the skin, exposed to view the partly frozen flesh, the whole miserable catastrophe was clear to my mind. I recalled how I had borne down on Ovide soon after he had put the bird for the first time into the blazing oven; how, in deference to my fears, he had taken it out and stood it on the shelf—when its skin, of course, could only have been scorched—where it had remained over an hour while he was superintending the construction and cooking of the pudding; and, finally, how the prevaricating fellow—whom I knew understood little more about cooking than I did—must have concluded, from the cinder-like appearance of the skin when he took it out of the oven the second time, after another twenty minutes' scorching, that it was cooked to the very marrow.

"Well!" ejaculated Fielding, letting his knife and fork fall noisily on the table, and turning to our guilty-looking cook, "of all the pure—"

But I am sure, the reader will agree with me that under such trying circumstances, my friend should not now have recorded against him, in cold print, every word he uttered on that occasion.

When Fielding had somewhat relieved his feelings and sat down again, Ovide, in his ludicrous English, tried to throw the blame for what had happened upon the stove, which, he explained, burned much more zealously than he wanted it to; but his lame excuses were cut short by Fielding telling him to take the thing away.

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Ovide, however, was a difficult subject to silence, and said apologetically, as he took up the platter: "It's vary much too bad, sir, dat I'm forgot to mak her freeze out before I'm put her in de oven. But de puddin', sir,"—with a sudden revival of his old self-confidence—"no danger of de same trouble with her; I'm sure she's cook vary well all de way over."

Somewhat mollified by the outlook of getting a little of something to eat, Fielding replied somewhat less shortly, "Well, hurry up and bring it along."

As we silently waited for him to return, we heard him noisily lift the kettle containing the now doubly precious pudding off the stove; but scarcely had he done so when he uttered an amazed cry, and a few moments later hurried up to the table again, the big kettle in his hand and his eyes fairly bulging with excitement.

"See! Monsieur," he exclaimed, almost superstitiously, as he halted at my side and pointed to the mouth of the kettle, "see de size dat puddin' she's now! When I'm put her in she's so small dat she's go in easy; but now look! she's swell, and swell, and swell till she's fill all de kettle inside, and now she's tree times too big for de mouth, and she won't come out."

I glanced down, and true enough, the pudding had assumed alarming proportions. Little wonder the problem of getting the thing intact out of the kettle's small mouth had caused him such woful distress.

"Well," I said impatiently, "go pour off the water and take it out in sections; if there is more pudding than you expected, so much the better; there seems little chance of us getting anything else to eat."

As he was scudding away to carry out my instructions, Robbins, whose sharp eyes had seen the freak in the kettle, said to Ovide in an undertone, "Thou hast not forgotten, lad, to take the frost out of that, anyway."

After a very brief absence, Ovide hurried back again, bearing aloft the most marvellous pudding human eyes, I am persuaded, ever rested upon. Apart from the pitiful manner in which it had been rent and torn asunder, its complexion was such as to attract the most lively interest—no chronic sufferer from jaundice ever sported such a gorgeous yellow. The mystery of its unwonted complexion was solved the moment he laid it on the table: the car was permeated with the rank odor of baking powder.

Out of pure curiosity, I put a piece of the pudding into my mouth. It was something awful! A spoonful of pure baking powder could not have tasted much worse. It had been only partially cooked, too.

Fielding gave Ovide one look, and then, too full for speech, he pushed back his chair and strode to the other end of the car.

Slowly I leaned back in my chair and fixed my eyes on the face of the now thoroughly craven-looking Ovide. “What made you tell us you knew how to cook?” I asked, trying hard to speak without anger, but in utter failure. The cravings of the inner man, just then, were strong upon me.

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After all the fellow was not without some redeeming trait, for he made a clean breast of it. "It is dis way," he began remorsefully, "when I'm tak de job for cook to-day I'm tink, for sure, I know de way for do it. De reason I get idea like dat, is this way: When I'm be little boy and sit in de kitchen and see my mudder bake de bread, and boil de puddin', and rost de meat, I'm say to myself, many time, 'Ovide, you can do little easy ting like dat, just so well as she can.' I'm ax my mudder, too, many time to let me try and mak de dinner, but she laugh loud and say, 'Ovide, you just lak all de boys and lots of men too, for dey all tink dat it's just so easy for de woman to cook de food as it is for dem to eat it.' And den she laugh some more, and say dat all de men tink dat what de womans do is noting at all."

As he paused, I had no small difficulty in preserving the severity of my countenance, owing to certain recollections of thoughts I had indulged in when a boy—and, I must admit, a pretty big one, too—when I had sat and watched my mother cook. From the way Fielding, at the other end of the car, put his hands into his pockets, I got the impression that conscience was hard at work with him, too.

"Even after I'm be away from home all dese years," continued Ovide, "I'm still have dat feeling dat I can cook just so well as she can; and so when I'm come into de car to-day and hear Mr. Fielding say dat he want cook, and say dat he will give a souvenir, and when I'm see, too, dat engine-driver man Robbin, dare, dat I'm not lak at all, and who I tink not know how for cook and yet going for get de job—I'm just tink dat a good chance she's come for me to please de bosses and make somethin' good for myself, and so I'm come straight out, and say I'm de best man for de job. And dat's all de truth."

He had been slowly edging his way to the passage leading to the door, and as he reached it he continued regretfully, "If I'm only not forget to freeze out dat turkey before I'm put her in de oven, and tink too not to put nearly cupful bakin' powder in de puddin', everyting she's be all right den, sure." As he concluded he turned abruptly down the passage, and fled out of our car into the baggage-car, with Robbins' rasping cough in his ears.

* * * * *

Half an hour later, thanks to old Robbins' skill, we sat down to fried turkey, boiled potatoes, bread and butter, and tea.

The great French-Canadian cook gladly ate his portion of the banquet in the baggage-car, for no amount of persuasion could make him come to the table with us.

Twelve hours later we reached our homes.

On New Year's Day, a bulky blue envelope was handed to Ovide. As it bore the stamp of the General Manager's office, he opened it with fear and trembling, for he was sure

that it contained his dismissal. I shall not attempt to describe his gratification when he found it contained a handsome silver watch, on the inside of which was neatly engraved a belligerent-looking turkey. The note from Fielding, accompanying the gift, read as follows: "May the souvenir bring as many pleasant memories to the receiver as the memory of Christmas Day, 1879, is sure to bring the donor."

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