The Galaxy.

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A FLOWER OF THE SNOW.

A WOMAN stood on the high steps locking the school-house door, and as she dropped the clumsy iron key into her basket and turned to go away, mechanically her eyes wandered over the familiar scene, the frozen water and bleak islands in front, the icy cliffs behind, and on either side the houses of the little village, lifeless and buried in the snows of a six months' winter. "Desolation!" she murmured—"a land of desolation and death!" and descending the steps, she walked down the narrow path dug out between the snow drifts, unmelted month after month, and piled higher with each successive storm until they formed a wall even with her head. The school-house thus left to itself for a week, the Christmas vacation, was a three-story square frame house, with rows of blindless windows that seemed to gaze like staring eyes down on the village below, and spy out all its sins. It was originally built as a dormitory for the Indians when they assembled on Giant Island for the annual payment; but the sons of the forest persistently refused to occupy the abode made ready for them, and although they were repeatedly escorted thither by the United States Agent, and although they repeatedly expressed in flowery hyperbole their admiration for the white man's lodge, just as repeatedly were they found wrapped in their blankets on the beach, the dormitory tenantless on the hill behind them. "No wonder they could not sleep there," was Miss Moran's thought as the slow-speaking trustee told her the story while showing her the building where she was to rule; "ugly whitewashed piece of utility! An Indian brought up in the Gothic arches of the forest, with the free air of heaven to breathe, would stifle in those geometrically square rooms."

"And so they slept out doors, and were such fools that they never knew the comfort of a good warm house! But all Indians are born fools, you know, Miss Moran," concluded the trustee. And he but echoed the opinion of the whole frontier, and even expressed it mildly, as harsher epithets were generally used by the sailors and fishermen who formed the population of Giant Island.

The early autumn came; the maples turned red and gold among the faithful pines, and let fall their leaves one by one through the still Indian summer days; then one night a north wind came down upon the island and whirled them away, and at last even the juniper curled up, the larches ceased to beckon on the heights, and the gray moss shrank away from the pines. Winter began, the school opened, and Miss Moran found occupation for thoughts and hands in teaching and governing her motley throng of scholars, French-and-white, French-and-Indian quarter-breed, half-breed, and even pure undiluted Chippewa—sturdy little rascals who did not know what truth was; and how should they, since it formed no part of the Indian's code of morals? It was hard work, for the schoolmistress had a conscience, and tried each day to do each day's duty faithfully. It was a contest—a contest of will; the will of one slender woman against the will of fifty undisciplined, half-wild children. But the slender woman conquered.

The late spring came reluctantly up from the south and thawed the thick ice around the island; slowly the great blocks moved out to sea, and then a ship came round the point bringing news from "below," as the islanders called the outside world; the lights shone again in the deserted towers, and looking from her dormer windows the mistress saw in the east the gleam of Bois-Blanc, and far down in the west the flash of Waugoschance, showing the way through the straits. A green tinge came over the forests on the mainland, and the deep snows disappeared, not melting, as they do in warmer latitudes, but seeming to crumble into dust and blow away. More ships sailed through the south channel, the smoke of steamers was seen, and finally the juniper stretched out its fairy rings, and the larches held out their green hands again, and beckoned over

the cliffs, as if saying to the distant ships, "Friends, come up hither." The summer was short but vividly beautiful, and the mistress closed the school-house door, and spent the vacation abroad in the woods, among the dark pines, in the gay company of the water-maple, on the beach with the wash of little waves at her feet, or above on the bare cliffs with the golden sunshine warming her being into unwonted luxuriance. She blossomed, this pale bud, and one saw the unexpected bloom, and admired it, until in the warmth of admiration it opened into a red rose.

The fort on the height was garrisoned with the full complement of officers and the small number of men usually found at the Western lake posts. A major, captain, two lieutenants, a surgeon, and chaplain, lived close together within the little stone enclosure, and Miss Moran, who had made her home in the chaplain's house, found herself one of the military family whether she willed yes or no; but she willed yes. Originally coming to Giant Island for her health, alone in the world save some distant New England cousins, educated in books but ignorant of life, a self-repressed, self-contained, hard-working woman, the idea of spending a year or two in this remote, isolated place had pleased her fancy, wearied with the monotony of a city public school. So she staid, and began life and love together; for as for the first time she loved, she realized that for the first time, also, she lived.

Maxwell Ruger, Lieutenant Second Infantry, U. S. A., a stalwart young Saxon, with close-cut curly yellow hair, blue eyes with a steel glint in them, ruddy cheeks and fairy blue-veined temples like a child—this was the knight who "flashed into the crystal mirror" of our modern Lady of Shalott. But no weakness, no boyishness accompanied this Saxon beauty; the bold outline and resolute mouth showed a will, while the ease of manner always found a way. Evidently, here was an accomplished young society man exiled on a rock.

Coming and going, Max Ruger noticed, at last, the girl coming and going also; pacing up and down the parade-ground on bitter days, he saw on the opposite side a woman's figure wrapped in a gray cloak; reading by the window, the only reader in the garrison as he scornfully supposed, he observed some one at the opposite window bending over a book; chancing to call upon the chaplain one afternoon, he found George Eliot's "Mill on the Floss," Hawthorne's "Blithedale Romance," an abstract of Kant, and a book of Roman Catholic meditations piled together on a side table. "Your books, Dr. Burns?" he asked, idly opening one of them.

"Nay; they belong to the teacher, Mistress Moran," replied the old chaplain, taking a pinch of snuff.

"A sentimentalist, with ringlets, a drawl, and sighing allusion to her past, I'll be bound!" thought Max. The next morning he strolled over and found a pale dark-eyed woman, cold, silent, and uninteresting. "Why does she read such books?" he thought; and, having nothing better to do, he set to work to find out.

There is nothing more fascinating than discovery, and to ardent minds *terra incognita* is far more attractive than the home acres, however beautiful. Miss Moran proved to be totally without the usual feminine ways; free, frank, and honest in her conversation, what she said had the charm of novelty to the society adept, and he found himself starting all kinds of subjects just to hear her opinions, which were often very unlike the cut-and-dried opinions of the fashionable world.

There is nothing more agreeable than to feel one's self perfectly appreciated and understood in all one's various moods. Argumentative Max found here a mind that followed his subtlest windings; that comprehended his half-expressed fancies; that understood his lightest touches of humor, and was ready to plunge with him into those deep shadowed waters of feeling over which society talk usually glides hastily, half fearing, half ignoring their existence.

The first winter passed, and these two were much together; she, one of many to him; he, the only one of all the world to her. The summer brought its changes, gay company thronged the beautiful island, the maples saw city belles at their feet and no doubt wondered over them, the larches listened and heard sweet conversations, and the cliffs kept their own secrets. Then, who so gay as the handsome young officer? Who so much liked?

Who so much engrossed? And yet Mistress Moran, as the chaplain called her, refused to see the truth, excused it to herself, denied it, and resolutely held around her the old enchanted atmosphere, breaking away on every side in spite of her grasp. She lived on the garnered sweetness of the past, and revelled in a vague, indefinite poetry. Not that she made verses. Only the unsatisfied or unhappy women make verses. She lived her poetry instead of writing it, so that when, at last, the red and yellow came back to the maples, when the last summer visitor had fled away southward, when Maxwell Ruger returned to seek his fellow exile, he found her full of sweetness—that sweetness that belongs only to a woman loving and loved. Ignorant as a child of the world and the world's ways, the mistress trusted implicitly. She loved: therefore she was loved. This was her creed. One Indian summer Saturday, Miss Moran climbed the island's height and seated herself on the grassy mound of old Fort Holmes; idly she noted the ancient earthworks and tried to call up the combatants of a hundred years before; but the peace of the purple air filled her mind and drove away all thoughts save a warm, dreaming contentment, and when Max appeared through the vista of the colored maples, she scarcely stirred, so harmonious seemed his presence with the place and hour. "Of what are you thinking?" said the soldier, throwing himself down beside her, and taking off his cap. "Of you," she answered dreamily, turning her eyes toward him. The golden warmth lighted up her face, bringing the red to cheeks and lips, and a softness to those deep eyes. Her soul had come to the surface and was looking out, and Max felt a strange thrill as, for the first time, something penetrated to the depths of his being. It is but seldom that souls see each other face to face in this world of masks and armor; sometimes there is a glimpse, sometimes a recognition, but instantly the visor is down again, and all is blank. In this case, however, there was no armor, no mask; and so beautiful grew the face with this soul-light in the eyes that the young man involuntarily bent his head and pressed his lips upon the hand lying idle on a bunch of red leaves. "How beautiful you are!" he murmured. "What is your name, dear? You never told me."

"It is an odd name—Flower; my mother was named so. Most people suppose it is Flora, and I never correct them. But I should like *you* to know and use the name."

Neither spoke again; speech was not needed, but through the golden noon they sat there together in the half-sweet, half-sad atmosphere of the Indian summer, and Max read a whole heart-history in those deep eyes surrendered so fearlessly to his gaze. Some eyes are like oceans, and Flower's eyes had an ocean's depth.

Winter came; the last schooner with ice-coated rigging sailed round Bois-Blanc, the last steamer hurried through the western gate past Waugoschance, leaving the island alone in the freezing straits. The village sank into its winter lethargy, the villagers plodded on their little rounds wrapped in skins, the Indians slept through the twenty-four hours like their friends the bears, and the officers at the fort began to sweep the ice with spy-glasses in search of the welcome black speck, the dog-train that brought the mails from the outside world.

The schoolmistress attended to her daily duties, but she did not find them dull; an inspiration filled her life, in her heart was entire confidence, and she asked nothing more from her Creator. She was entirely content. A more practical mind or a mind more experienced in life would have questioned or planned. She did neither. She merely enjoyed her new happiness, and gave no thought to the morrow. And yet, if any one had questioned her and pressed the subject upon her, no doubt the questioner would have found at the bottom the certainty that one day she should be Max's wife; this seemed to her as certain as the coming morrow.

One day, early in December, she lingered in the school-room after her scholars, with many shouts and rough struggles on the stairs, had finally dispersed; the great stove, taking in long logs of wood, still glowed hot in the cold twilight, and the mistress sat by the hearth musing. At length a desire seized her—a desire to look off over the icy straits toward the south; and taking a key, she climbed up to the loft and out on to the roof of the high building, where, stand-

ing in the shadow of the chimney, she gazed over the frozen water and the blue mainland, and, in imagination, further still—on to the land of the orange and palm. Over the ice moved a black speck, the dog-train bearing the mails. She knew the carrier well, a sturdy Canadian Frenchman, whose boys were among her brightest scholars; this man came and went through the winter, and to many island exiles he and his leader dog, Pierre, were the heroes of the year. The mistress, although she cared little for her few letters, appreciated the great dog who brought them, and often stopped to pat his shaggy head when he was off duty.

At length, dreamily as she had ascended, dreamily she went down, and made her way through the dusky hall to the school-room below. The sound of voices roused her, and through the half-open door she saw two persons, Max Ruger and pretty Jennie Brown, the old sergeant's daughter, a young girl whom she was teaching in her leisure hours. What they said she did not hear, but her eyes took in Max's half-caress, the girl's evident pleasure, the hands clasped as though accustomed to each other; this she took in, and saw but one interpretation to the scene: "Max loved Jennie; Jennie loved Max." After an instant which seemed an hour, the pallid mistress turned away noiselessly and mechanically retraced her steps to the roof. There amid the icicles she sat with uncovered head like a snow image until the night came. The feeling in her heart was like death; she seemed to be on the edge of a bottomless pit, and dark shapes with rustling wings mocked at her as they flew by. She never doubted the interpretation she had put upon that scene, any more than she had doubted that other interpretation of the Indian summer idyl; she could not doubt; her mind was not of the analytical order. She could only feel, and feel intensely. The greatness of her love made the greatness of her despair; there was nothing half-way or conditional in either. Such natures are rare; but of such are the great ones of the earth made. Great for good, and, when blighted, great for evil also. Heaven help them!

As for comprehending what it really was, an idle flirtation brought about by propinquity and habit, that would have been impossible even had it been explained to her; for the schoolmistress knew nothing of the ways of the world, and she could only judge others by her own intense self.

At length, frozen in soul and body, she slowly left the snowy roof, passed down through the dark halls, and climbed the hill toward the fort. Seeking the sergeant's quarters, she entered without knocking, and found Jennie alone in the little room. Surprised and abashed at the sight of this unwonted visitor, the girl rose; but before she could put her words together, the mistress spoke, and strangely gentle was her voice. "Tell me, Jennie," she said, "does Lieutenant Ruger love you?" Ah! how that title sounded in the poor speaker's ears; to her, he had ever been Max. The young girl blushed as with downcast eyes she replied, "Yes'm; at least he says so." Ten times more knowledge of the world, twenty times more coquetry dwelt in this child's heart—an islander born and bred—than in the educated woman of twenty-six who stood before her.

"And do you love him, Jennie?"

"I think he's very nice and handsome-like, of course," began Jennie, puckering the hem of her apron, and wondering what the mistress could know about her little secrets; to Jennie, Miss Moran seemed, as she expressed it, "old as the hills."

"Answer me, girl!" cried the mistress, blazing into sudden excitement as Jennie hesitated. "Maxwell Ruger loves you. Do you love him?"

"Yes'm, please, that is, I——" faltered Jennie, beginning to cry; certainly this part of her flirtation was a most unexpected addition.

"That is enough!" interrupted Miss Moran sternly; then placing her hand under the dimpled chin, she raised the frightened face and looked long into the blue eyes. "It is a fair face," she murmured; "God bless you, child!" and was gone before the startled girl had recovered from her surprise.

"What a queer woman the mistress is!" she thought as she braided her hair. "I don't suppose she has any idea how many lovers I have had. Max Ruger makes eight, I do declare, and I am only just sixteen. Do I love him? she wanted

to know—of course I do. I love them all. But, on the whole, I think I like Moses best."

Eight lovers! No, the mistress did not know it. She knew nothing of the versatile fancies of a village flirt, nothing of the inveterate habit of love-making which haunts young officers in times of peace (not in times of war, however; those late fiery years showed us the iron under the gilt); she only knew herself, and all night she wrestled with her love. The next day she went through her school duties in a state of torpor, but the evening brought again its agony; why is it that all pain is ever worst at night? A week passed, and then she came forth a changed woman, the bloom gone, the light gone, and a veil let down over those deep eyes. When she came to Giant Island she was a statue, and now she was a statue again; but in the mean time she had known what it was to be alive.

It is probable that Pygmalion's goddess found it very hard to go back into the marble again!

And Maxwell Ruger? Perplexity, astonishment, and anger succeeded each other in his mind; it was with great difficulty he could find Miss Moran, and when he found her she was not there. That is, the open gaze was veiled, the sweet intentness had grown chilled, the earnest manner had turned repellant. He could not find in this closed, faded bud the rose that had opened under his gaze, red and fragrant. "It is a whim," he thought at first; "she will change soon." But Mistress Moran had no whims. "She is angry; that will pass before the week is out," was the next idea. But Mistress Moran felt no anger. Then he sought her out, and tried the old fascinating subjects of conversation; but although he did his best, he elicited only a few unresponsive words in reply. He knew, then, how much he had depended upon that earnest answering mind that seemed but another self, only sweeter and more gentle. At length, baffled, disappointed, and depressed, he left the statue to itself, and idly took up his little romance with the sergeant's daughter. To do him justice, he knew well that he had his full match in the village coquette, and also that she would probably end the game by marrying one of the storekeepers of the town. He had no suspicion that Miss Moran had discovered this pastime of his. Jennie had come to the schoolhouse for a book, he had come to walk back with the mistress; they met by accident, and both supposed Miss Moran had gone home; if Jennie afterwards suspected that her penchant had been discovered, she took care to keep her suspicion to herself, flirting, meanwhile, as much as she could with the handsome young officer, and keeping at the same time a quiet Scotch eye upon the village suitor whom she intended to accept in her own good time.

Another week passed, and, tired of his pastime, longing for the old look, the old voice, Max returned to his old habits; he followed the mistress to and from the school, he met her on her solitary walks, he called persistently at the chaplain's cottage. But she took to going to school by way of the icy cliffs, she changed her wonted routes, and finally refused to see him altogether. On Saturday, a clear, cold, dazzling day, Miss Moran slipped away from the fort, and turning into the snowy woods, made her way up to old Fort Holmes; here there was a firm ice-crust, and she paced to and fro in the cruelly cold sunshine, pursuing her constant labor of self-repression, educating herself to her future life with stern determination. Suddenly Maxwell Ruger stood before her. They had not met before for days, and the color surged into her face, as, taken by surprise, her eyes wore for a moment their old look. Then the red faded, the lids dropped. "He loves her; she loves him," she repeated to herself, as if the words were a formula against evil. She knew but one kind of love, poor ardent heart!

"Flower, where have you been all these days? What have you been doing?" said Max with a long look of his blue eyes; some eyes make one moment seem like five.

"Lieutenant Ruger, I have been learning a new life."

"Why new, Flower?"

"It must be so."

"Are you then tired of the old?"

"No; but it has forsaken me."

"*You* have forsaken it and me, Flower; and oh, how lonely I have been!" said Max, speaking the truth with the impulse of a boy; the frank honesty of this woman seemed to draw out the truth

even when buried under mountains of conventionalities.

Again came the color, and the depth in the eyes; but she did not speak.

"Why have you changed so, Flower? You have made me suffer—suffer keenly," pursued the young man, watching her changing face.

"Suffer!" she answered, turning toward him with all her heart in her voice; "*I* make *you* suffer!" And tenderly she took his hand in both her own, while the tears rose in her eyes.

"Yes; I have suffered, but not now," replied Max, irresistibly drawn toward her. "You are more to me than any one else, Flower."

"That is false. You are a liar!" cried the mistress, springing away from him as the bitter thought of Jennie came into her mind. Strong words, perhaps; but they simply expressed her plain meaning.

"Miss Moran, I never forgive such accusations from man or woman," replied Max, pale with anger. He never so much as thought of Jennie; he had allowed himself to be carried on to an expression of real feeling; that was a great deal for him; and to be met in this way!

"Do I ask your forgiveness, Lieutenant Ruger? It is you who should ask—you who should suffer! Ah, you little know how I could love you. And you have chosen *her!* Do you, then, like dolls? Jennie is but a doll. No, no. I am all wrong. I am always wrong. What am I but a poor unlovely, unlovable woman, while you——Oh, leave me to myself, or I shall die!" And as she uttered these wild words, with a cry of anguish Flower Moran turned and fled down the slope, disappearing in the snow-covered underbrush.

Maxwell Ruger made no attempt to follow her; with whirling thoughts he continued pacing up and down on the crust for hours. Like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, these words had pierced through all his coverings of worldliness, all his armor of pride, all his network of etiquette, and reached his heart. Flower loved him! This pale, silent woman loved him! This deep-blooming ardent girl loved him! And how did she love him? An instantaneous conviction filled his mind that such a love is never given but once to any man.

But did he love her? Did he love this strange, poor, plain schoolmistress, no longer young, ignorant of the world, without friends or fortune? Quick thronging came objections, came obstacles, came the habits of a lifetime, came the great voice of society. "No, no, no," they cried; "a hundred times no!" And the thinker quailed before these voices, and resolved to wait a while. "At any rate, there need be no hurry, whatever I decide," he said to himself, stifling the inward conviction of his heart. And the voices accepted this compromise, and let him go home, finally, to a restless afternoon and sleepless night.

The mistress lived through the last three days of school in alternating hope and despair; faint hope, fierce despair. Perhaps, after all, there was a shade of interest in her, poor and plain as she was; she said over and over to herself Max's half-tender words, and tried to make of them a hope. But her old habit of reliance on fact brought back Jennie's image; her uncompromising honesty showed her that she had no ground for hope, and she felt that she must flee. It was not pride. Poor girl! she had no pride. It was the instinctive feeling that sends the wounded hart into the thickest shade to die. "I must go," she thought through the short sad day; "I must go," she moaned through the long wild night. The last hour of school came; she locked the door, and gave one last look at the scene before her; it was then that she murmured, "Desolation! a land of desolation and death!"

The next day, the eve of Christmas, the fires were not lighted in the school-house, for the week's vacation had begun. Maxwell Ruger noted the absence of smoke from the chimney, and his thoughts turned to the upper room with the dormer windows across the parade-ground. Then, angry with himself, he started off across the island with a party of soldier woodcutters for the day. "I am bewitched!" he thought. "I will see what hard work can do to break through the web."

And while he was working with all his might in the snowy forests toward the north, over the frozen straits toward the south went Flower Moran walking by the side of the dog-train, fleeing from him as he fled from her, the long journey in the bitter weather seeming as nothing to a longer endurance of her bitter sorrow.

Toward night Max Ruger returned through the forest to the fort, half blinded by driving snow. A norther had come sweeping down from the eternal ice-fields, bringing with it one of those raging storms which are dreaded even in the semi-arctic latitude of Giant Island. Half frozen and breathless, Max reached the garrison enclosure at last. The day had been spent in vain warfare; neither the work nor the weather had been able to drive out the image of that one woman, and now, weary and child-like, he turned where his heart led him, to the chaplain's cottage. Here he found the old man alone by the fire. "It is a wildering evening," he said after some conversation; "and sad am I, Lieutenant Ruger, to think of the mistress out in this storm of Satan's devising. She may perish; and doubtless she had her good points—her good points."

"What!" cried Max springing to his feet with a chill rushing to his heart.

"Didn't you know she had gone, man? She went this noon with Antoine and the mail-train. She set her face like a flint—nothing would stop her. She gave me her books—much good they are, too—and she left her love for you."

"Her love for me!" repeated Max with the sound of tears in his voice as a gust shook the house. "Which route did they take?"

"To the mainland first; then she will go across the country to the first railroad; further than that she would not tell, but I suspect she will travel to Maine, where she has relatives."

In fifteen minutes Max Ruger was out on the ice, an old half-breed, and Jaune, a veteran dog, the best pilot on the island, with him. "It is certain death," said the villagers peeping through round holes made in the frost that covered their small windows by means of hot cents. But Max paid no attention to these prophecies. Combated long, wounded at every point, repressed, stifled, and chained, love had at last broken its bonds and conquered. Now that she was gone, he knew that he loved this woman; now that she had fled, he must follow; he realized that life was a blank without her. The old doubts, determinations, and obstacles seemed so much chaff in the face of the overwhelming feeling that had at last risen to the surface. In forsaking, she had triumphed; in despairing, she had conquered. Though death itself lay in the path, reach her he must. "She left her love for me!" he thought as the fierce wind struck him in the open straits; "while I have that, I have all."

The late afternoon found the dog-train steadily pushing southward; part of the way the mistress had ridden on the little sledge, but most of the time she preferred walking, unmindful of the fatigue. The carrier had expected to reach the first station early in the evening, but when the driving snow came down upon them he grew anxious; cold and colder blew the biting wind and icy grew the flakes, until each one stung like a missile. The air was dark with the storm, the cold benumbed the man's senses, he grew confused and lost his bearings; but the faithful dogs went steadily on, and the higher intellects humbly followed them. Bent by the force of the wind, blinded, chilled, stumbling over the hummocks, the two pushed on, hoping each moment to see the lights of the station, until suddenly one of the dogs faltered and seemed at fault, turning in his tracks as if trying to draw his companions in the opposite direction.

"It is Pierre, the wisest dog of all," said the carrier despairingly; "now may the Holy Virgin help us, for we are lost!" And falling upon his knees in the snow, he began to mutter incoherent prayers.

"Get up, Antoine; you will freeze to death!" cried the mistress, shaking his arm with all her strength as she saw the fatal lethargy creeping over him. "See, are not those the lights?" And thus incited, the man struggled on a while longer; it was a contest of will. The will of the spirited woman kept the drowsy man from utterly failing. The strange glamour of freezing came over him, and he longed to lie down in the soft, beautiful snow. The thought of his position as mail-carrier kept him up for a time; then home, wife, and children served to excite his waning courage; and last the maxims of his religion. All these ideas were vividly kept before him by the mistress, but at last even these failed; and as the darkness came, with that gentle obstinacy peculiar to such cases, he laid himself down and fell asleep, a sleep which, if unbroken, before many hours must end in death.

Thus was Flower left alone with the dogs. Lifting the unconscious man by slow degrees on to the sledge, she covered him with furs, and then she went to Pierre, and bending down put her arms around his neck. She was so utterly desolate, so utterly alone, that the great dog was like a friend. He seemed to understand, too—that wise old Pierre!—for after replying as well as he could to her caresses, he barked sharply at his cowering companions as if to rouse them to a sense of duty, and turning led the way backward, going steadily on as if sure of his direction. Thus they journeyed, the dogs, the sleeping man, and the lonely woman, on, on, over the ice.

Hours passed; the snow clouds blew away and the stars came out, each one bright as a new moon in the clear air; the cold grew more intense, and striking a match the mistress saw that it was midnight. How many long hours were still before her! To stop was death, and mechanically she walked on. She began repeating to herself all the poetry she knew, verse after verse, with painful effort; anything to keep herself awake. Tennyson's lines seemed to chime in with the night, and over and over she said them:

Deep on the convent roof the snows
  Are sparkling to the moon;
My breath to heaven like vapor goes;
  May my soul follow soon!
Break up the heavens, O Lord! and far
  Through all yon starlight keen
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
  In raiment white and clean.
He lifts me to the golden doors;
  The flashes come and go;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
  And strows her lights below,
And deepens on and up! the gates
  Roll back, and far within
For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
  To make me pure of sin.
The Sabbaths of eternity
  One Sabbath deep and wide;
A light upon the shining sea—
  The Bridegroom with his Bride!

"O St. Agnes, help me!" she murmured. "If you can hear me (who knows? perhaps you can), have pity upon me." Then came dark thoughts tempting her to death. "Why not lie down and die?" said a voice at her ear. "Death will be easy and sweet."

"I will not be a coward," she answered mutely.

"What have *you* to live for?" pursued the voice.

"To conquer myself."

"You cannot do it."

"I can!"

"Life will be long and lonely."

"I know it."

"He will marry."

"Yes; Jennie, or some one like her."

"After all, his is but a shallow soul."

"Not so; his heart is noble, his soul is deep."

"Why, then, did he not love you?"

"Thou mocking spirit, leave me! Do I not know that I am unlovely and unlovable? Am I not trying to do right? Have I not left all that is dear to me in life to follow my wretched, lonely way through the world? Get thee behind me, Satan!" and with an incoherent prayer the tempted soul struggled on in the torpid body.

A clear sky is ever the most pitiless. The bitter cold brought suffering, pain, and torture to the wearied limbs, sounds in the ears, and lights dancing before the eyes. The mistress had but one thought, to walk on. Once she faltered, but Pierre turned back and rubbed his shaggy head against her hand, with a dog's sagacity foreseeing the danger. Roused, she went on, moved by machinery, and a verse came to her, as if written in letters of fire in the air:

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain. . . . He that overcometh shall inherit all things."

Over the ice came the pursuing party. They too had suffered in the blinding snow and freezing cold that followed; they too had lost the track and were following a dog, old Jaune, who stalked on steadily with three legs and capered with the fourth after a fashion of his own. But they had brandy to aid them and five hours less of the cold, since they had not started until twilight. About midnight the brandy gave out, and the sensation of freezing seemed to creep through every vein; even Jaune lagged behind, and scarcely noticed his master's voice.

Then the higher intellect assumed the sway. Max encouraged the drooping dog, spoke sharply to the failing half-breed, and kept his little band on and together.

But not without effort. His own brain seemed to wander; he saw palm trees and great lilies floating on still rivers; perfumes came to him and the sounds of distant music, voices calling his name and beautiful faces smiling upon him. "I am freezing," he thought, "and if *I* feel the cold, where is Flower?"

Something seemed to answer, "She is dying. Save her." A few drops remained in the flask; calling the dog, he poured the liquor into his mouth, hoping to stimulate the failing instinct which was their only dependence. Old Jaune coughed over the new sensation, stood awhile in doubt, and then stalked on; the half-breed followed in dazed obedience, and Ruger, who had not prayed for years, prayed now. It was a strange prayer. "If I can but save her, Lord, I will not mind dying," he said; and then he uttered those words which young and old turn to in times of trouble—the Lord's Prayer.

In the course of another hour Jaune suddenly gave a sharp bark, and started off furiously toward the left. The men, startled into consciousness, followed with difficulty. Presently they heard a distant sound.

The mistress, walking in a dream, became vaguely conscious that Pierre was growling a long, low growl; the other dogs, his abject slaves, stood still, but the mistress walked on; she seemed to have lost the power of stopping.

Then came a rush: old Jaune and Pierre had met, and Max held Flower in his arms.

The first gray light of dawn was rising in the east; soon they could look into each other's eyes, and what they saw there warmed their chilled blood and drove away the shadow of death. Not far to the south the outline of land could be traced, and thither they went, a happy party. "'Twas there the dogs were going," said the half-breed; "they can always find the way to St. Jean, trust them for that. But I never thought of the island, it lies so far out of our course."

Soon a light gleamed before them in the dusk; the dogs saw it too; Pierre barked, and his slaves took up the chorus. Jaune, untrammelled by harness, started off on a voyage of discovery, and came back to execute a series of wild circles around the two lovers, while the other dogs looked over their shoulders in admiration and drew the sledge in jerks, venting their envy in short yelps. A few moments more, and the party arrived at an island on whose bank stood a long log house with one lighted window. The door yielded to Max's push, and in they burst, dogs, sledge, and all, upon Père Ronan, the recluse of St. Jean Mission. "May the saints defend us!" ejaculated the astonished old man.

"Oh, Flower, my darling, I love you—love you with all my soul," said Max, as the ruddy fire-light shining on the mistress's pallid, shrunken face showed him how near she had been to death. And for answer, Flower threw her arms around his neck and hid her poor face—her poor happy face—on his breast.

"The saints defend us!" said Père Ronan again.

In the mean time Jaune had dragged from the table a platter of meat, broken the dish, and set to work on his stolen dainty with much snapping of jaws and eager gulping, which enjoyment Pierre and his satellites, still tugging to get the sledge through the door, saw with rage, and howled their disapproval in chorus, at the same time tangling themselves hopelessly in their harness, and at last rolling on the floor together, a biting, snarling heap.

"The saints defend us!" said poor Père Ronan for the third time. Devoutly engaged in his Christmas matins, alone as he supposed with his conscience and the angels, he was suddenly overwhelmed by a crowd of men, women, and dogs, coming from no one knew where; some embracing each other before his very priestly eyes, some apparently dead in sledges at the door, others stealing his only roast, and still others howling, growling, fighting, and biting on his floor. He might well ask to be defended!

But the old priest had a kind heart, and when he had recovered his senses and comprehended the meaning of the scene before him, he set to work so actively that soon the half-frozen visitors were made comfortable with warmth, food, drink, and kind words. With the aid of the half-breed who served him as cook and acolyte, he succeeded in restoring the lethargic mail-carrier, still asleep in the sledge; the voyageurs and Indians will

come back from death's very door, like their friends the bears.

At eleven o'clock the company assembled in the loghouse parlor, rested, warmed, and refreshed. It was a long, low room, with a great fireplace at one end, where whole logs blazed. Red calico curtains hung over the small windows, buffalo and bear skins lay over the uneven floor, and the log walls were made warm with Indian blankets hung from roof to floor; rough shelves held some rare and costly books, and one glowing picture in a gilt frame hung on a background of blanket, where the light could strike across it. It was a young girl in a French court dress—a lovely, piquant face. "St. Thérèse" the acolyte called it; but Flower saw no signs of saintship.

The mistress had heard vague stories of this recluse of St. Jean Mission. It was said on Giant Island that he had been a man of mark in France, but for some unknown cause he had suddenly entered the priesthood, sailed for America, and shut himself up in that lonely, remote spot, St. Jean Mission. He would not even come to visit the good Catholics of St. Denis; St. Denis was the parish church of Giant Island. Nearly forty years had Père Ronan lived at the Mission. At first packages containing books and other rarities came to him from France, but gradually all communication between the exile and the outside world ceased, and he was left alone with his little flock of Indian converts. It was said he was by no means a bigot; that he was Catholic in the broadest sense of the word, and had even been heard to say of a Presbyterian, "Eh, what does it matter? Worship we not the same God?"

This successor to Père Marquette still lives, a hale old man, whose courtly manners vouch for the truth of his Parisian origin; he still lives up in the northern straits, for this story is founded upon fact, and its descriptions are taken from real life.

"My friends and children," began Père Ronan, "before we enjoy our Christmas meal, shall we not celebrate a little Christmas service of praise and thanksgiving for your escape from death?"

Flower rose from her seat by the hearth. "Yes, father," she said earnestly; "we are not of your faith, but we can offer up our prayers together. And first, give me your blessing; I feel that it will be blessing indeed."

So saying, she knelt before him, and the old man gave the blessing with earnest solemnity. "Amen," said the Indian acolyte.

The "little service" began; the Canadian mail-carrier joined in devoutly, the half-breed followed as well as he could, and the mistress knelt by the bench and poured out her thankful heart in silent prayer. Max moved nearer to her and took her hand; he was jealous even of heaven.

Oh, the scales of compensation are balanced better than we know! Her great love had gained a great love in return.

When the last amen had been said, Maxwell Ruger rose; a gravity that was almost solemnity rested upon him, as, with military brevity, he said, "Father Ronan, will you marry us now—Miss Moran and myself? We are quite ready."

A cry burst from the mistress's lips; it was the involuntary protest of the feminine nature against that masculine, masterful assumption, which nevertheless it secretly loves. "You do not object, Flower?" said Max, taking her hand tenderly.

"Oh, Max, I am so—so—so plain!" whispered the mistress, breaking down in her speech, and at last bringing out the thorn that rankled deepest in her heart.

"You are not plain to me, darling," said Max; nor was she to any one else. From that moment a beauty came to her, the beauty of perfect happiness. The flower had bloomed into a perfect rose.

And thus they were married, on Christmas morning, in that old log house at St. Jean Mission, with a Canadian mail-carrier, a half-breed, and five dogs for witnesses.

CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON.