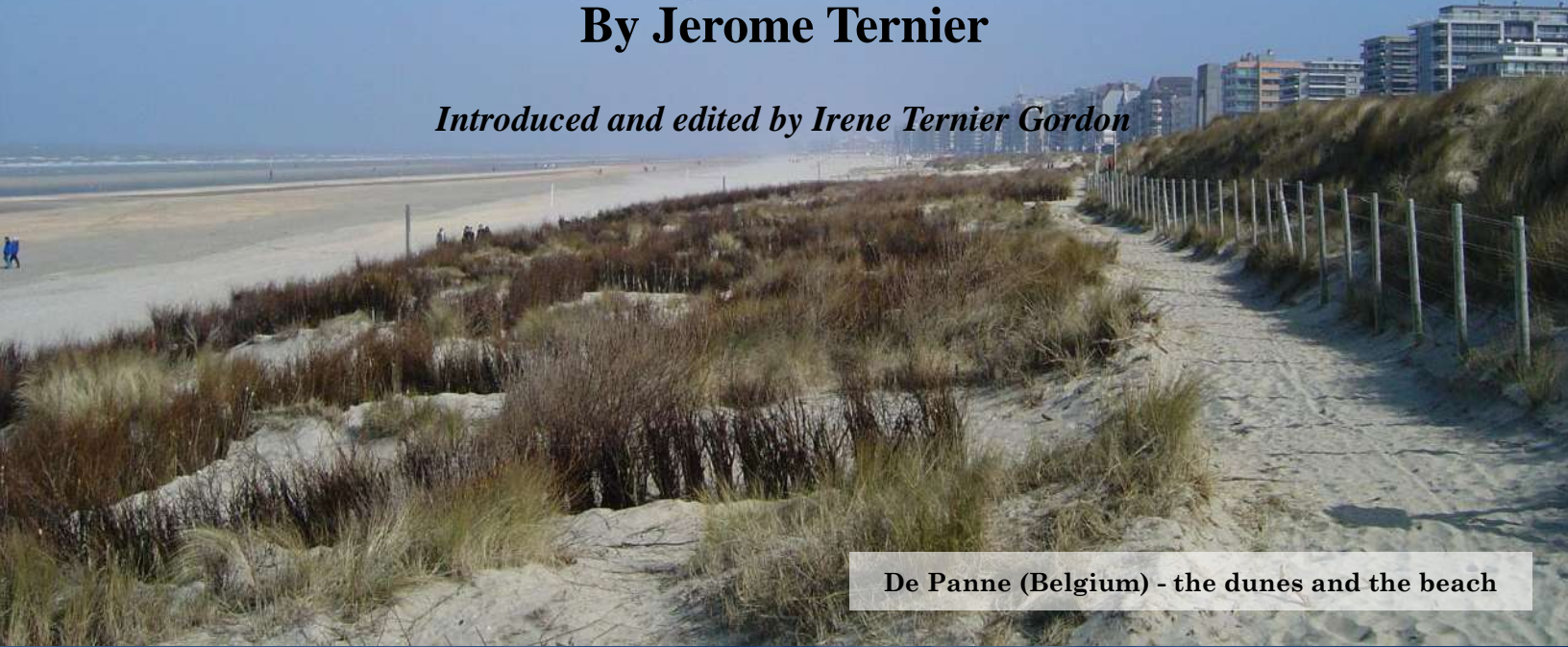


My Early Life: a Novel

By Jerome Ternier

Introduced and edited by Irene Ternier Gordon



De Panne (Belgium) - the dunes and the beach



Landhuis (with belfry) and St Walburga Church

My Early Life is dedicated with love to the memory of Jerome Gaston Ternier (July 12, 1877 - September 11, 1949) and to his nine children (pictured below):

Florimond John (Florie)	September 26, 1909 -- November 12, 1983
Gaston Jerome	September 11, 1911 -- October 10, 2003
Ann Gertrude	April 09, 1913 -- November 7, 2003
Sidonia Sophia (Sido)	September 24, 1914 -- October 14, 2004
Medard Hector	March 04, 1916 -- February 27, 1979
Albert	May 11, 1918 -- December 18, 1997
Victoria	May 24, 1920 -- March 28, 1929
Cornelia (Pinky)	June 16, 1922 -- March 09, 2000
Felicia Beatrice (Tarzan/Tarzie as child and Fay as adult)	January 06, 1936 -- February 11, 1970



Back row (from left) -- Sido, Medard, Gaston, Florie
Front row (from left) -- Albert, Pinky, Victoria, Ann
(Photo was taken around 1924 or 1925)
No picture available of Fay as a child

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Cover Page Photographs:

Top -- De Panne (Belgium) - the dunes and the beach; photograph taken in March 2006; permission granted from Wikipedia and Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 License; photographer unknown

Bottom -- Landhuis* (with belfry) and St Walburga Church - Veurne, Belgium; Taken by Geert Schneider on September 30, 2006; permission granted from Wikipedia and Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 License

Dedication Page Photograph:

Reproduced from family album; photograph taken in approximately 1924-1925; photographer unknown

**means "mansion" It often refers to a country house with a large property surrounding it -- which is not the case in this picture. It might mean that the house was originally in the country and the city of Veurne grew up around it.*

Prologue

Ponteix, Saskatchewan

February 26, 1924

Dear and Reverend Father Poirier,

Please do not be angry with me on account that I feel again an overwhelming impulse to correspond with you. There appears within me something invisible (maybe an unconscious power of observation) that frequently makes my life miserable. Only writing about it to people able to understand me, relaxes my over-strung nerves.

A week or so ago I walked over to one of the neighbours with my wife to indulge in an innocent game of cards. People almost always enjoy a party given by a French-Canadian family, so we were both pleased and surprised to find a large crowd gathered. There were quite a few married couples, who were veteran settlers, present. They were intermixed with few young men and attractive young women. The oldest of these young women, a teacher about 20 years old, took it upon herself to chaperone a younger girl of about 15. Towards one o'clock the card game broke up and several people began to sing vocal solos.

The law of prohibition, as any enlightened gentleman is aware, was placed in the statute books with the intent to make the country dry. Instead, it succeeded in making it exceedingly wet. People do not have to be surprised that some liquor was served at the party. According to the ever-increasing hilarity of some gentlemen, I may say a little too much of it was served. One gentleman commenced to urge an aged woman to sing some funny songs. I listened to her for a while and found that her songs were downright repulsive and suggestive. I glanced towards the two young ladies and found them actually repeating the refrain of one of these offensive songs, which brought on their features the very blush of shame. Apparently the poor kids declined to appear in the assembly as prudes. When I caught those young ladies repeating those offensive words, especially the delicate younger girl -- on whose lips undoubtedly never an indecent word has dwelt -- I was inspired with such a feeling of disgust that I jumped up with a nervous jerk and made myself ready to go home.

My wife, however, grabbed me by the arm; and, under the pressure of that sympathetic hand, I fell back on the chair exhausted. I was semi-conscious, as so often happens when I am in the clutches of high-strung nerves brought forth by my fatal power of too much observation and intensified a hundredfold by the painful remembrance of an event similar to the party I was actually witnessing.

Mentally I felt myself transported back again to Belgium, as if an electric wave carried me on its invisible wings back to that country of so many painful memories. On a day of June 1894, I was seated with my parents in the small garden in front of our town house. I was a young man of 18, just back from college a few months and assisting my father on his small farm while waiting for an opportunity to find a more lucrative position.

Presently the sound of a whistle announced the arrival of the two o'clock eastern train. Everyone knew that Augusta, daughter of our widowed neighbour, was returning home from school at the convent prematurely on account of ill health.

The next day, I was permitted to take Augusta to our recently established youth café chantant for amateur singers. It was an ordinary liquor-house, as found all over Belgium, which had been turned into a "den of vocal debauchery" by the young men and women of the town. It was, of course, financed by the profits of the sale of intoxicating liquor. In justice to my mother-country, I have to mention that very seldom were we subjected to the humiliation of perceiving a man unduly under the influence of intoxicating liquor. Consequently, I was not averse to escorting a pure-minded girl like Augusta to this café chantant.

The evening began with a couple of young fellows singing some solos that were extremely

annoying to listen to, although I have to admit that they were clean. When the time reached the advanced hour of half past ten, however, the crowd began to clamour for some funny songs. Indeed they were funny, but of such a degrading character and foul suggestive meaning that my whole being revolted.

I will never be able to forget the look of reproach that emanated from the wistful gray-blue eyes of my companion who was seated tremblingly beside me. It filled me with horror and mortification that I should have been instrumental in causing the agonizing humiliation and shame to which she was subjected. This proved beyond my endurance. I tried, furtively, to wipe away a few tears which were trickling from my eyes, but in vain. Augusta did perceive them, and I felt her little hands slip softly into mine. Her eyes no longer held that look of reproach. There was to be found in them again that glow of friendliness and sympathy when she begged me to escort her back home.

There was not a word spoken on the way back. I merely walked beside her humbly, my head averted. At the gate, again she slipped her hand into mine. "Thank-you, Jerome, for the entertainment. I can hardly be expected to admit that I did enjoy it." With these words, she was gone, and I felt that I had committed the greatest crime of my life.

A few days later, I was walking along the navigation canal near my home when I heard singing in the distance. It was a young shipper's boy who was seated on the stern of a merchant ship that was sailing on the canal. He was singing forth with remarkable ease a popular song from France called *L'Hirondelle qui vient de France*. I was astonished. How on earth was that shipper's boy able to master such a wonderful song and sing it by heart? My amazement was succeeded quickly by pain as the song reminded me of our amateur music club. In this attitude, I was found by my father. He, perceiving my grief-stricken and flushed face, asked me what was wrong. I told him about the musical entertainment at the *café-chantant* and about the shipper's boy and his singing. When I expressed the view that it was urgent to have the music club closed down, however, he vigorously shook his head and declared emphatically that it could not be done.

"No, my boy," he said sympathetically, "that will never do. Prohibiting to the public unclean and sensual songs and at the same time failing to substitute for them more uplifting selections will prove as unsuccessful and as disastrous as the unenforceable laws of prohibition which failed because of neglect to provide the people simultaneously with a non-intoxicating beverage of at least equal value."

"No, Jerome," continued my parent, "It is up to our educational institutions. Their continued failure to instruct their pupils with at least a few excellent songs means that there will be no alternative for our youths."

Shortly afterwards, Augusta went away for medical treatment. Tragically, the treatment was unsuccessful, and in late autumn her body was returned home by train. When I heard the train whistle, I was moved by a pang of pain and bitter thoughts. Oh cruel hand of Death, what was the reason for the perverted onslaught by which you slew unmercifully and prematurely that tender, exquisite flower Augusta. I felt an impelling desire to keep on wandering and vowed never to return to town. But this was not to be. My over-strung nerves snapped as if they had been hurled onto rocks, and I went into a state of semi-coma. Under its spell I felt as if a small pair of hands was gently and irresistibly drawing me back to town where Augusta's body was laid out in her front room.

I feared breaking down when I entered the death-chamber, but I did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I felt a creeping sensation of joy which animated my whole being. It was produced by a sudden thought that convinced me that I should never have taken upon myself to approach Augusta with the intent to make love to her. I could not visualize the possibility that a child as pure-minded as Augusta would ever have been subjected to the humiliations and hardships which ordinary married life does entail. The first of the sad lament of chimes announcing the premature demise of Augusta were reverberating over the town from the high tower of the church of St. Walburga when I left the house of mourning. Bing, bang, bong rang those discordant bells....

Bing, bang, bong... I heard my host's clock strike two o'clock, and I was suddenly brought

back to the present. At the same time, I felt the gentle pressure of my wife's fingers dig into my arm and heard her voice begging me to go home. We asked for our coats and hats. Before taking leave, I cast a last look in the direction of the two dear young ladies. My eyes met theirs. My ears heard the sordid refrain of the song uttered by their unwilling lips. With a pang and a troubled eye, I found that the poor kids were still objecting to appear among the crowd as prudes.

Cordially yours,

Jerome Ternier

Introduction

The above letter describes the events that inspired the beginning of Jerome's novel.

My father Gaston (the second of Jerome's four sons) told me that all through his childhood in the 1920s he could recall his father spending winter evenings writing his story in exercise books. The manuscript was later typed – at least some of it by Ann Neville, mother-in-law of Jerome's youngest son Albert. Jerome had hoped to complete his book once he retired, but he died from cancer in 1949 before he could do so. Gaston says that Jerome was a great story teller. Naturally when they were young, his children believed their father when he told them that his stories were true. As adults, however, they were not so sure. Much of the manuscript is very obviously a product of Jerome's imagination – helped along by stories published in 1920s pulp fiction magazines. Gaston told me that he could remember reading stories with plots very similar to parts of the manuscript in those magazines. Then he laughed and said, "I wonder if they could still get him (Jerome) for plagiarism."

In effect Jerome cast himself as a super hero. He was more handsome, cleverer, and more resourceful than almost everyone else; and women of all ages (including nuns) fell in love with him. The problem is that he wrote the story in the first person. Thus, in some places he comes off as a conceited know-it-all. Because the manuscript is quite repetitious in places, I have chosen to omit many of the most unlikely events or modify them slightly. On the other hand, I do include what might be considered some rather unimportant episodes such as the detailed description of Jerome's garden work in Winnipeg and comments on various social issues because I feel that they give us some insight into his character and what he thought important. Otherwise he would hardly have inserted them in his highly fanciful adventure story.

Family lore has always said that Jerome was quite well-educated for his time. He apparently attended Collège Saint Stanislaus, a Jesuit secondary school in the city of Mons, Belgium, where he studied French and English. I found the Web site of the college, which has been in operation for nearly 400 years. Although Jerome's writing displays numerous examples of Victorian purple prose, he wrote English quite well. He had a large vocabulary, a good command of grammar, and spelled much better than some of his children and grandchildren did or do. Not surprisingly, because English was not his first language, he sometimes chose the wrong word or gave an English word a French spelling. In editing the manuscript, I have tried to keep the flavour of his writing as much as possible.

Chapter One: In Which I Commit the Greatest Crime of My Life

On a fair and glorious day of June 1894, my mother, who had been an invalid for the last 14 years since the birth of her last child, was seated in a hospital chair between my father and me in the small garden in front of our house in the town of Veurneⁱ in Belgium. I was a young man of 18, just back from college a few weeks ago. I was assisting my father in the daily work on his small farm situated barely outside of the town, and waiting for an opportunity to take up a more lucrative occupation.

Presently the sound of a whistle announced the arrival of the two o'clock eastern train. Of course people living in as small a town as ours could not be expected to keep even the most insignificant secret for long. Therefore, we all knew that Norma Fiorina, younger daughter of our widowed neighbour, would be on that train. Norma was returning home from the convent because of ill-health. We were not surprised, in consequence, shortly to acknowledge the friendly greetings of Mme. Fiorina and Norma returning from the station driven by a team of snow white mares. Because my mother and Norma had a special friendship, Norma had not been home very long before she came running over to our house. She stood just for an instant in front of us before throwing herself into my mother's arms.

Norma was an exceedingly pretty girl of 16. Her beauty was enhanced a hundredfold by her simplicity of character and her constant sympathy towards any living being (human or animal) she found suffering. As usual, she was dressed entirely in white. A wealth of blond hair curled luxuriously over her delicate shoulders and down to her slender waist. She had big gray-blue eyes, set deeply on either side of a finely-chiseled Greek nose. Furtively I observed her as she visited with my mother. Undoubtedly she was declining in health. She looked decidedly pale and was getting very thin. The luster of her glorious eyes had disappeared, and twice she gave a dry little cough. With a wild pang of pain, I suddenly realized why the sisters had sent her home from school.

The following day I was permitted by Mme. Fiorina to escort this exquisite flower of a girl to our recently-established club for amateur singers. It was an ordinary liquor-house, as found all over Belgium, which had been turned into a kind of *café-chantant* or music hall by the young men and women of the town. It was financed by the profits of the sale of beer and other intoxicating beverages. In justice to my mother-country, I have to mention that very seldom were we ever subjected to the humiliation of perceiving a man unduly under the influence of liquor. Consequently, I did not hesitate to escort a young girl like Norma to this *café-chantant*. At eight o'clock that Sunday evening, we were seated in the hall that was gaily decorated with flags, flowers, and a few pictures of our country's celebrated opera singers. At one end of the hall a temporary platform had been erected. A series of singers mounted the platform and endeavoured to entertain the audience with solos that were extremely annoying to listen to. The only thing that could be said for them was that they were clean. Finally at the advanced time of half past ten, the crowd had had enough and clamored for some funny songs.

Indeed they were funny, but of such a degrading character and foul suggestive meaning that my whole being revolted. But what about my companion who was seated tremblingly beside me? I will never be able to forget the look of reproach that emanated from those wistful gray-blue eyes. She was in the grip of an emotion which filled me with mortification. The shame of it -- that I should have been instrumental in causing her humiliation. This proved beyond my endurance. I tried, furtively, to wipe away the few tears that began trickling from my eyes. Norma caught me in the act, and she slipped one hand softly into mine. Her eyes no longer held a look of reproach. There was again in them a glow of friendliness and sympathy. "Please take me back home," she whispered.

There was not a word spoken on the way back. I merely walked beside her humbly with my head averted. At the gate, again she slipped her hand into mine. With her thin lips quivering tremulously, she said, "Jerome, I can hardly be expected to feel gratified by assisting at an entertainment as the one we have just witnessed. But I do thank you for your attempt to give me pleasure this evening."

ⁱ Jerome was born on July 12, 1877 in Coxyde near Veurne (Furnes in French) in the province of West Flanders, Belgium. Gaston believed that his grandmother was in a wheelchair.

She swiftly released my hands. Then, wringing her hands as if in despair, she disappeared through the gate into her beautiful front garden. I stood on the sidewalk until I saw Mme. Fiorina open the door to admit Norma to the house. Then I slowly turned to my own home, feeling that I had committed the greatest crime of my life, the inglorious crime of being instrumental in injuring the innocence of a delicate young girl.

A few monotonous days dragged by. During the last week of June, I was walking along the Dunkerque-Oostende-Bruges navigation canal. The day was hot, and the mid-afternoon sun shone unmercifully upon man and beast. On the left side of the macadam road along the canal stretched a double symmetrical line of the linden trees that are to be found planted everywhere along the government roads in Belgium. The lindens appeared likewise in the grip of that scorching heat. Their immense crowns of thick limbs and rich foliage drooped languidly, giving them the appearance of weeping willows. Only the chirping of birds seeking protection in the shade of the tree branches broke the silence of that blistering day.

Suddenly, I heard a boy's voice singing in the distance. In a few minutes, a 300-ton ship -- one of those inland merchant ships that sail all over the continent on internal navigation canals -- came into view. It was drawn by a team of horses hitched to a long hemp cable. A young shipper boy was seated on the stern. The heat apparently did not affect him in the least as his lungs poured out a popular song from France called *L'Hirondelle qui vient de la France* (*The Swallow Who Came Flying to France*).

I was astonished. How on earth was that boy able to master such a wonderful popular song? My amazement was succeeded quickly by pain as the song reminded me of our amateur music club. None of the club members were able to produce a song as well as that illiterate shipper's boy. Involuntarily my glance was drawn back to town. I longed to have Norma seated beside me once again, listening to that sweet French song. Exhausted physically by the heat and mentally by my experience at the club, I sat on the edge of the canal and continued to listen until the boy's voice was carried away on the invisible soft wings of distance.

In this attitude, I was found by my father who was walking through the blistering heat to our farm. I raised my head when I felt a friendly hand upon my shoulder and looked up at his dear manly face. He, perceiving my grief-stricken and flushed face, exclaimed with a tinge of concern in his voice, "Well, my boy, what is wrong? Are you stricken down by the heat? Why do you not go yonder and rest under the shade of the linden trees?"

Suddenly an idea seemed to strike him. "Could it be that you have already heard the regrettable news which a few minutes ago reached our town of the murder of the president of the French Republic, Mr. M.F. Sadi Carnot?ⁱⁱ It appears that an Italian anarchist named Caserio inflicted a mortal dagger wound in him at Lyons. But there is no occasion that the news should affect you with such emotion. The unfortunate gentleman was luckily not our leader."

I answered dully, "No, Father, I did not hear the news of France's new disaster. An Italian you say. It seems that these people have acquired the predilection for murdering rulers. Even the backs of their fellow countrymen are jeopardized by treacherous thrusts of daggers."

We dwelt further on the topic of France's steady stream of tribulations, its murdered president, and possible internal consequences. Then I told my father the genuine reason for my disturbance of mind. I drew him a picture of the experience Norma and I had at the café-chantant. I also mentioned the shipper's boy and his song.

My father was a good listener and refrained from interrupting me. When I said that it was urgent to have the music club closed down, however, he shook his head and declared emphatically that it could not be done. "No, my boy. That will never do. Prohibiting unclean and sensual songs without substituting higher quality selections for them will prove as unsuccessful and as disastrous as the unenforceable laws of prohibition. Prohibition has failed because of neglect to provide a non-intoxicating beverage of at least equal value for the people. It cannot be done. Youths will keep on singing to their heart's content. Our

ii M. F. Sadi Carnot was president of France from 1887 until he was stabbed to death by an Italian anarchist in June 1894.

educational institutions are the guilty ones to go after. Their continued failure to instruct their pupils with at least a few excellent songs means that there are no alternatives for our youths. They will continue to pick up songs out of the gutter and sing them everywhere at the expense of many a delicate, well-bred young lady such as your little friend Norma."

"By the way, talking about Norma," continued my parent, "I forgot to tell you the news. Mme. Fiorina's brother, who is an eminent physician at Notre-Dame Hospital in Bruges, arrived on the eight o'clock train this morning. He intends to take Norma to a health resort in the Alps of Switzerland. She is in bad shape, and it will require a great deal of medical science and care to successfully treat the dry cough that is affecting her lungs." My father didn't seem to expect a reply. He briefly touched my shoulder again and continued on to the farm. I lingered for a while on the edge of the canal before I felt ready to pick myself up and walk home.

The following morning Norma came to bid my family good-bye. My mother wept bitterly when Norma was gone, predicting that this was the last time she would see her in life. I admitted to myself that I also felt that disconsolate premonition.

The months went drearily by. The last traces of the golden autumn were fast fading away, and the low-lands (polders) of Flanders were dismal and barren. On a Sunday afternoon at the end of November, I was, as usual, wandering along the canal road. The low November sun provided little warmth as it shone uncertainly over the desolate fields and the red-tiled roofs of farm buildings. In the distance, I could discern the golden sand dunes that concealed the treacherous waters of the North Sea from view.

Dear old sand dunes! How many times did Norma, my sister Stephany, and I play in their wonderful reddish-golden sand, playfully rolling down from their heights. Stephany and I frequently had to assist Norma, giving her time to regain her breath when she precipitated herself down the dunes too quickly. Dear old dunes, how heroically have they for centuries resisted the fury of the sea's unruly waters and successfully prevented the tidal waters from invading the plains of the fertile polders.

And the strange North Sea...woe be to any man or beast found napping in the nearby sand hills because the treacherous North Sea waters can tear away their very lives. How intense and penetrating is the power of the northwestern wind. How immense is its capacity to drive waves of salty air and moisture-laden clouds as easily and nimbly as soap bubbles over the wet and dreary fields. The chill loneliness of the fields is broken only by the grinding, monotonous sound of the clutching, turbulent North Sea waves that is conveyed from beyond the dunes by the wind. The croaking of ravens perched high on the leafless limbs of the linden trees also breaks the silence occasionally. Wearily, with a nervous jerking gait, I walked with my head down to ward off the intense wind. I kept my glance averted from the northwest until the shrill blast of a train whistle reached my ear. Then I cast my troubled eyes on the track of the Dunkerque-Veurne-Oostende-Bruges railroad, part Belgium's extensive state railway. The three o'clock train was steaming to my home town, leaving a plume of white smoke behind.

But why the haste? Merciful Heaven, why do you permit that train to reach town at 60 miles an hour? Do, for the Lord's sake, delay for ever so little a while the arrival of that cruel train whose baggage wagon holds such a precious cargo. Why precipitate the dreadful moment upon which Mme. Fiorina will have to receive the remains of her beloved daughter Norma. Cruel hand of Death, was there neither health resort nor eminent physician able to stem that ever unfailing sword? What was her offense? Why did you slay unmercifully and prematurely that tender, exquisite flower Norma?

Moved by such pangs of pain and bitter thoughts, I vowed to keep wandering and never to return to town. Without warning, however, my overstretched nerves snapped. I felt as if I had been hurled onto some rocks. Then I went into a state of semi-coma. Under its spell, I felt a pleasing sensation as if a pair of small, soft hands was gently but irresistibly drawing me back to Mme. Fiorina's residence. By the time I arrived, the Fiorina house was full of people. Norma, who looked as if she were slumbering peacefully, was laid out in an ivory casket. I confess that my eyes were riveted too steadfastly on the remains of Norma, to give a thought to bending a knee or saying a prayer. A prayer, how preposterous! Positively there could have been no occasion that a girl as pure as Norma should have required one. As might have been

anticipated, she was reduced to a state of extreme emaciation. Nevertheless, the luster of her previous beauty remained. She was laid out in her usual white dress, and her long blond hair served as a cushion for her head and delicate shoulders. Her colourless lips, which failed to conceal her ivory teeth, gave the impression that the breath of life still lingered about her. Her hands were crossed over her bosom. She held a rosary from which nestled a small gold cross, a First Communion present to her from my mother.

I had feared breaking down when I entered the death-chamber, but I did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I felt a creeping sensation of joy animate my whole being. It was produced by the sudden thought that my relationship with Norma never should have resulted in my approaching her with the intent to make love to her. I could not visualize the possibility someone as pure-minded as Norma could ever have been destined to be subjected to the humiliations and hardships which ordinary married life does entail.

In the silence we heard the approach of steps to the front door, and (as if by sudden command) we turned our heads and our startled eyes met almost the exact image and likeness of Norma. It was Mme. Fiorina's older daughter Irma, a celebrated soprano, who had just arrived home upon hearing of Norma's death. Irma, who appeared at all the opera houses of Europe and in the capitals of the New World, was advertised as the queen of song. The assembly hardly dared to breathe for fear that the image of Irma might disappear as an apparition before their eyes. Irma approached Norma's casket. Instead of bending a knee or shedding a tear, she only cast a tender glance at her sister before embracing her mother. "Come, Mama, you must get some rest," she said, gently raising Mme. Fiorina to her feet and leading her from the room.

When the splendor of that young lady left the chamber, I felt as if the entire world was dwindling away. I slipped quietly out of the house and wandered aimlessly in the cold of the Flanders polder. It was the last thing I knew for three weeks.

Finally one afternoon my weary eyes opened and I saw a sleeping woman seated at the foot of my bed. Only when I noticed that she was sitting in a hospital chair did I realize that the woman was my mother. When I tried to turn my head, I found that I couldn't move. I wondered if I had gone mad and been restrained by a straight-jacket. A nun in nurse's dress entered the room. She smiled at me and said how happy she was to see that I was finally awake.

I tried to ask her what had happened to me, but I could only manage a weak croak. She patted my shoulder and said, "Don't try to talk. Your ultimate recovery depends on rest and tranquility." Then she left the room, only to return almost immediately with Father Alfred, one of my former college professors.

"Father Alfred," I whispered, making a desperate effort to be heard.

"Yes, my son," he said smiling. "At last the crisis has past. With a few weeks more of careful nursing, aided by youth and your good constitution, you will regain your natural strength and enjoy life again."

"How long have I been ill and what happened to me, Father Alfred? Why am I laying on this bed helpless? Look at my hands and arms. They are skin and bones."

The old Jesuit priest looked kindly at me and replied, "My son, you must rest and be satisfied for the present that your ultimate recovery is assured. Perhaps tomorrow your mind will be sufficiently rested for you to learn what has happened to you over the last three or four weeks. See, your mother is awake now, so I will leave you with my blessing."

Painfully, I succeeded in turning my head towards my mother, and her glad eyes met mine. The nurse wheeled her hospital chair to my bedside. Slowly my mother reached out and grasped my hand. "Dear boy," she whispered. "Norma's death was a great loss to us all, but I have borne it. Now you will get well and by and by you will be able to enjoy life again. Your life is dear to me, Jerome. The loss of your life would mean that my will would surely refuse to sustain my life."

The nurse interrupted, saying that I must rest. Then she wheeled my mother from the room, and softly closed the door.

“Norma lost to us all forever,” I repeated to myself. All the events and pain surrounding her death came rushing back to me with my mother’s words, and I gave an anguished cry. The doctor was summoned and administered an opiate to quiet me. The next few days dragged by painfully, but finally I improved sufficiently to remind Father Alfred of his promise to tell me what had happened and why he was in Veurne rather than at St. Stanislaus College in Mons.

“Your persistent calling for me while you were delirious caused the doctor to wire urgently for my presence in order to possibly save your life. Do you remember being at the Fiorina home the evening that Norma’s remains arrived? Your father, seeing your hat laying on a bench in the entrance hall and being aware of your sudden absence, became alarmed and went out in search of you. He found you wandering over the neighbouring fields and took you home. Already your flushed complexion and the dullness of your eyes showed that you were ill, stricken with brain fever. Also you repeated over and over again, ‘It was murder, plain murder. Norma was murdered.’ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Berthold, Norma’s uncle, was called immediately. He took the midnight train to Bruges and returned the next morning with one of the best nurses from the celebrated Notre Dame Hospital in Bruges. She was installed here immediately as your nurse.”

“But why was I calling for you?”

He ignored my question. “That night when I arrived at your bedside, I found you in extreme delirium, calling for my presence. When I laid my hand on your forehead, you half-opened your eyes and soon began to sleep peacefully. Do you remember that?”

“Yes, Father Alfred,” I answered reluctantly. “I recognized you distinctly but not at my sickbed.”

“And at which place did you recognize me?”

“It was in a strange land, somewhere across oceans. I saw you standing in a huge college playing field. And how grotesque you were, giggling like a school boy and screaming with enthusiasm as strange college boys were scoring with a ball. I saw two other people I knew in my vision or mirage. Dr. Berthold and Irma were crossing a steep-banked river and heading towards a large college building”

“What is troubling my mind is that when your delirium suddenly passed, you smiled happily and your half-open eyes seemed to project a strange light that illuminated your features. I wish you could explain that phenomenon in words.”

I felt a sudden pang of pain and turned to face the wall. “I beg of you to talk about other topics, Father Alfred,” I answered reluctantly. “Remember that twice already I have been expelled from your college because of theological controversy. I value your friendship towards me too highly to jeopardize it again. Please, let us forget about it. You told me once that my theological philosophy was wantonly conceived and that I was treading on dangerous ground.”

“That was an eternity ago,” he said. “Besides, now you are in your own home, not at Stanislaus College.”

“Very well then.” I turned to face him again. “You may recall our last dispute. I believe that two influences affect human beings.^{iv} We designate them as the negative influence, which tries to drag our moral activities down, and the positive influence by which our mind apparently has the power to elevate our moral character and to try to raise our mind into the realm of absolute truth (divinity itself). At the risk of running into your displeasure, I must narrate that twice already I have experienced the truth of the existence of that negative influence that seems to burden our minds like a terrible shadow. The first time I was definitely aware of that negative power was a year ago when Norma, my sister Stephany, and

iii A major theme of the story is solving the death of Norma, who was murdered rather than dying of tuberculosis. I have omitted this aspect because the mystery is so completely improbable.

iv Jerome, according to Gaston, had a number of ideas that might today be considered New Age. This is just one of the examples throughout his story. I have omitted many of the others.

I were wandering among the sand dunes. The weather was magnificent and the waves seemed to whisper and splash playfully on the sandy beach. Norma wanted to climb to the top of a sand dune and then roll down to the bottom. I had a premonition and tried to prevent her. When she came rolling down, we found her laying inert with foam rushing out her nostrils. Stephany revived her, but she was awfully sick and vomited most of the way back home. I tried not to yield to weak-mindedness, but when I reached home I fell swooning on my bed. My mother found me with a high fever and moaning about Norma. In my semi-conscious state, I was aware of the power of my negative mind and struggled against the feeling dragging me down. The feeling of my mother's loving hands on my forehead proved sufficient to banish my negative mind. My positive mind took over completely and I was suddenly conveyed into the presence of divinity. Unfortunately such ecstasy seldom lasts for more than a minute, but frequently a minute proves sufficiently long to enable our positive mind to appreciate the true state of our universe, especially about the things with which our mind is most preoccupied. I have no doubt, Father Alfred, that I was subjected to the same emotional spell when you entered my sickroom and your hand upon my forehead proved sufficiently strong to momentarily neutralize my negative mind and give my positive mind the upper hand."

The effort that it took for me to express in words my mind's phenomenal experience proved too much. I closed my eyes wearily. As Father Alfred turned to go, I cried, "Father Alfred, I beg of you not to leave me. I mean, please come back and fetch me away from here when I am well enough. I want to return to Stanislaus College and take advantage of its well-equipped gymnasium and Mr. Sturdy, the athletics professor to train as an athlete and become strong and well again."

"You do what is needed and rest. When I come back, say within three weeks, everything will be arranged according to your wish."

Chapter Two: St. Stanislaus College

Youth and an ardent desire to live worked wonders for my recovery and within a month I was pronounced fit and ready to return to Stanislaus College. My parents were reluctant to see me leave home, but I promised to return at the end of the school term in time to help with the summer work. At the college, I was installed in a small corner bedroom next door to Father Alfred's office and bedroom suite. The day after my arrival, I was formally introduced to Professor Sturdy. He was a small man with thick neck and heavily developed chest. People wondered how a slight man like the professor could develop his muscles to such an extent. He was not a handsome man; nevertheless many women looked at him a second time, admiring his well-muscled appearance. He was neatly dressed and very conscious of his astounding physical perfection and power.

After the formalities of our introduction, he ordered me to strip to the waist and said, "The muscles of your back and arms are wasted of course due to your illness, but you possess decided possibilities. I will be glad to work with you. How did you originally develop your muscles?"

"By swimming. You may not be aware, Professor Sturdy, that I live in Flanders on the polder lowlands. Many young men from Flanders use the navigation canals like swimming pools, and some of our best swimmers successfully challenge the French to swim across the Channel."

The next day I began work with Professor Sturdy. In the morning I received my first frictional exercise, what is called a Turkish bath in North America. The massage began with moderate pressure, gradually increased to such an extent that frequently I winced in pain; but I was amply rewarded for the discomfort. My muscles relaxed and the blood ran with renewed vigour through my veins. In the afternoon, Professor Sturdy took me over to the college gymnasium and introduced me to the trapeze.

"We'll begin with the low trapeze which is just above your natural reach and later you will graduate to the high trapeze which hangs 20 feet above the floor. At first you will reach the low one by jumping, but with practice your entire body will stretch out enabling you to reach it without jumping. Now, try to grab that cross-bar with both hands and lift your body by the strength of your arm muscles until your chin reaches the cross-bar. Do that repeatedly until you can do it with ease."

The next day I slipped out of bed very early and began practicing on the trapeze in earnest. At the beginning I thought that trapeze work was easy, but by the time the bell rang for breakfast I was absolutely exhausted. When I reluctantly returned to my exercises in the afternoon, my muscles seemed to obey more easily and my arms were strong enough to lift my body until my chin topped the trapeze's cross-bar. The idea then struck me that if I could stiffen my body, perhaps I could rest my chin on the cross-bar and suspend my body by the strength of my neck while resting my arms. Of course I failed at first, but I was elated by the assurance that it was possible. Day by day I learned to perform new tricks under Professor Sturdy's instruction. Finally I became agile and strong enough that I could swing my body in every direction from one trapeze to the other and catch hold of them both with my hands and my toes.

One day Professor Sturdy commented, "Prehistoric human forest-dwellers used to perform similar stunts as everyday necessities for survival. It never occurred to them that modern city dwellers would have to erect gymnasia in order to keep their muscles in trim. Now, what about those prehistoric humans and their swimming ability?"

I laughed. "I assure you that I have not forgotten about the Mons-Charleroi Canal. Whenever you are ready to grease my hide with axle grease, I am ready to try swimming in it. You can walk along the canal while I swim until we reach Charleroi."

"I hope your prowess is as great as you indicate," Professor Sturdy replied. "I have always nursed the ambition to be manager to a swimmer who could make a genuine challenge to swimming the Channel."

Easter holidays were fast approaching, and the increasingly long days of sunshine were warming

the countryside. I had only 10 weeks remaining at college before my stay there would be over. I loved the place and everything in it. The reserved, apparently cold Professor Sturdy took great pains with me, and I had become very fond of him. In regard to Father Alfred, director of Stanislaus College, I would rather have sustained death's torture than occasion him a moment's pain. He was a man gifted with a keen intelligence and a naturally affable personality. His authority over both professors and students was invisibly absolute.

One morning, I was summoned to Father Alfred's office. Before he could tell me what he wanted, a bell rang. "It is someone calling me to my confessional box in the college chapel. I must go immediately, but please remain here until I return," he said.

I sat quietly for a few minutes, but I suddenly became very restless and broke out in a sweat. Something was telling me to follow Father Alfred. I ran to the staircase and descended it three steps at a time. At the bottom I went outside and immediately reentered through the main doors of the chapel. I sat down in one of the pews and tried to calm my sudden panic. The chapel was empty except for a young woman kneeling beside the confessional and an older man seated nearby. Also I could see the legs of another man kneeling in the confessional itself where Father Alfred must be occupied in hearing his confession. A few minutes later, a young man came out of the confessional and the young lady prepared to enter. The older man grabbed her arm as if to prevent her from entering the confessional. She made a weak effort to free her arm. When the younger man snapped at the older one to leave her alone, the latter released her arm and she entered the confessional.

Suddenly I felt almost unbearably hot. I quietly left my seat to open a window. I had just reached the window closest to Father Alfred's confessional when the older man grabbed my arm and spun me around. "What is your game, fellow? Do you not see that we are in need of privacy? Get out of here."

I looked the man full in the face and saw that he was under the influence of either strong drink or narcotics. I realized that he could be dangerous if contradicted, so I snatched my arm away headed towards the chapel's inner door without a word. Just then the young woman left the confessional, weeping bitterly, and at the same time I saw the older man take out a revolver. I picked up the chair next to the confessional and slipped around behind the man who was watching the young woman rather than me. I swung the chair with all my strength at the back of his head. There was a sudden scream from the young woman. It caused the man to sidestep enough that he received only half of the blow, but it was enough to knock him to the floor and make him drop the gun. I quickly picked up the gun and held it in readiness to use if needed. The man groaned. He got to his feet and glared malevolently at me. Still keeping an eye on the man, I opened the confessional. Father Alfred, who appeared to be stunned, slowly got to his feet and stepped out of the confessional.

"Why would you want to hurt this priest?" I asked. "His whole life has been devoted to alleviating pain."

"It was our confessions that stunned him so. I would give my life to preserve him from pain," the woman said. Ask Emile. He will sustain me."

But the young man appeared to be a weakling. He rose from the pew and stood in an attitude of fear and despair with hands in his pockets and legs shaking so they could hardly hold him up.

Father Alfred shook himself several times and tried to look severely at the injured man. "I give you five minutes to leave this church. If you do not leave, I will have you arrested."

The young woman protested. "But Father, I am not one of them. I was only involved in their affairs by accident."

"Then I advise you to leave this place and have nothing more to do with these people. Good-bye. May the Lord help you." With these words, he turned and went out through the side door.

"You heard what he said. What is your choice?" I asked.

"I am in pain, young man. Your chair broke my shoulder. Permit my son to call for a cab and we will soon make ourselves scarce," said the wounded man.

I nodded to the younger man and he went out. While we waited for him to return, I addressed the woman. "You had better take Father Alfred's advice and leave these people."

"Last week I had 200 pounds, and I handed it over to this man, my future father-in-law. At present I have not a penny to go home, and I would like to return to my mother."

"Where is the money that this young lady gave you?" I asked the man.

"I put it the bank."

"That is not true. He has all the money in his right hip pocket."

"I will soon find out," I said as I put my hand in his pocket and pulled out a large roll of bank notes. "Quick now, take what belongs to you and make yourself scarce until the men are gone." I conducted her to a door leading to the vestry. "Go in here and lock it behind you. I'll let you know when it is safe to leave."

The younger man soon returned with a cab driver and they left without the woman. She said she would remain in the chapel until time to catch her train home. I hastened back to Father Alfred's office. He still seemed half-dazed and somewhat wobbly in the legs. Finally he said, "Those people in the chapel surprised me." He stopped, staring at me helplessly.

"That man was waiting for you to leave the confessional to shoot you down."

"Yes. The young woman was unwilling to go along with the older man in a life of crime and she convinced her fiancé to share the information by way of the confessional. I fear the son will not be strong enough to break away from his father, but we must hope that she safely returns home to her mother." He paused. "What moved you to follow me to the chapel and to save my life?"

"When you were called to your confessional by the electric bell, my mind followed you all the way, feeling that you were in danger. A sudden restlessness and sweating are the usual warning I have. They move me to take action. I believe that if you had reached the end of the life span that God had allotted you, I would have failed to feel the danger to your life."

"I am greatly obliged that you did yield to your impulse and followed me." He took a handsome carved hickory cane from his hat rack umbrella stand. "I want you to accept this cane as a gift from me, and this evening I want you to present yourself here in this office at seven sharp so I can introduce you to the art of self-defense by rapier duelling. I hope that six or eight weeks will prove a sufficient time to teach you the fundamentals of how to handle both a sword and this cane for personal defense"

There is only one episode worth recording during the few weeks which remained of my residence at the college. It happened on a Sunday morning right after church. Professor Sturdy and I were walking along the macadam highway which edged the Mons-Charleroi Canal. The weather was extremely hot for so early in the season, driving us to seek shelter on a bench in the shade of a linden tree. A coal freighter was tied up nearby, and across the canal in a beautiful green field a little girl played in front of a cottage with a pet lamb. A woman stood beside her. After watching this pleasant scene for a little while, we decided to go swimming. We went into a nearby tavern where we rented bathing suits and left our belongings to keep them safe from thieves. We swam along the canal for three miles at which point there was another tavern. We entered this tavern for a glass of beer. It was about three o'clock and the heat was becoming unbearable. Suddenly we noticed that the western horizon was dark with immense black clouds indicating the approach of a thunder storm. We quickly finished our drinks and began our return swim. We swam with ease for the first two miles, but then the wind came up causing the water to become very unruly and we found the last mile quite difficult. When at last we arrived in sight of the coal

freighter, the skipper was taking a cable across the canal with a small row boat. He then attached the cable to a tree in an attempt to steady his boat in the wind.

As we crawled out of the canal great drops of rain began to fall and almost continuous crashes of thunder and flashes of lightning commenced. We had just got back to the tavern in time. As we watched the storm, I cast a glance across the canal at the cottage. By lightning flashes I distinctly saw the pet lamb, which was in a pen a few steps from the house, rush out of the gate which had blown open. The wind blew the little animal towards the canal. A moment later, the child rushed out of the cottage to save her pet. She ran blindly after the lamb and straight into the canal. Her mother was only a few seconds behind the child, but she was unable to catch hold of her.

Professor Sturdy and I ran across the highway to see if we could rescue the child who was now struggling in the black water. When I did not immediately see the skipper's row boat, I tried to reach the child by going out on the mooring cable. I managed to travel almost half-way across the canal before I landed ingloriously in the water. It took me half a minute of treading water before I could breath properly again and I had regained my bearing. As luck would have it, I suddenly felt something bob up beside me. It was the child. I grabbed her with my left hand while I tried to swim with my right. I could not head straight for the child's mother on shore because the waves were against me, so I headed obliquely across to the opposite side.

When I neared shore, Professor Sturdy took the child from me and began to administer first aid. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that the child coughing up a great deal of water. We waved at the mother who was anxiously standing on the opposite side of the canal, so she could see that her daughter was not drowned. A barmaid came from the tavern carrying a blanket. Professor Sturdy wrapped the blanket about the child and carried her into the tavern.

The storm soon abated and we were able to return to the college. Exhausted by the day's events, I went directly to my room after supper and immediately fell soundly asleep. The next morning, as is usual after an electrical storm, nature was at its best. Great dew drops were suspended from leaves and delicious scents emanated from new spring blossoms. I decided to get up immediately so as not to waste a minute of the glorious day. Thus it was that at 7 o'clock I found myself in front of the tavern from which we began yesterday's swim and where we took the rescued child. Yesterday's barmaid came out of the front door carrying a broom.

"Please do not misunderstand me," she said, "but my mother was not at home yesterday, and when she heard about you saving the child of her friend across the canal, she said that she would so much like to meet you. Perhaps if you have not yet had breakfast, you would care to join my family for breakfast."

Having slipped away from college without breakfast, I gladly accepted her invitation. Soon I was partaking of a savory breakfast at a table with a fine view of the canal. After breakfast I saw the skipper on the deck of the coal freighter and went to greet him. "I wonder if I might try your cable again. Yesterday I succeeded in getting half way across it in a storm. This morning is calm and sunny so I ought to be able to walk all the way across without losing my balance."

The skipper readily agreed and tightened the cable for me. I picked up a boat hook for balance and sighted on a tree in an orchard across the canal. Of course every time I fell from the cable into the canal, peals of laughter were heard from everyone watching me; but I felt that no harm could come to me as long as I had the canal to fall into. This feeling of security steadied my nerves and stimulated my determination to master the art of tight rope walking.^v I practiced steadily all morning and by mid day I had succeeded in crossing the whole distance without falling.

^v Jerome told his children that he could walk a tight rope, but Gaston said that he never actually saw him do it. Gaston believed that Jerome actually was a poor swimmer, who once had to be assisted by eldest son Florie (Florimond) when he got into difficulty while crossing a creek. Jerome did have the reputation of being a very strong man who could carry heavy bundles on his head. One story was that he could carry a 100 pound sack of flour on his head while carrying a 45 pound anvil in each hand.

By this time, a considerable crowd had gathered. Suddenly I realized that the child I had rescued the previous day was there with her mother. The mother beckoned to me. Under the tree to which the cable was attached was spread a picnic dinner on a blanket. She thanked me profusely for saving her daughter and asked if I would join them for dinner. I naturally accepted with thanks, and she offered me a blanket to wrap around my wet shoulders.

After dinner, I practiced walking the cable a bit longer. Finally the skipper said that he had to leave. As I walked back to the college I thought things over. I had acted purely on impulse that morning when I asked the skipper for leave to walk his cable, but now I promised myself to continue practicing cable walking whenever I got the chance until I could walk easily without a balance pole.

Chapter Three: Summer Vacation and Visit to Dover

Soon it was end of term and I left St. Stanislaus to spend the summer with my family. I travelled on the international Berlin-Brussels-Oostende train. These trains, which are only permitted to cross Belgium during the night, travel between 60 and 90 miles an hour. Consequently it took only three hours to cross two-thirds the length of Belgium including 40 minutes for stops at Brussels, Ghent, and Bruges before the train finally stopped at the terminal in Oostende. Oostende is beautiful city that is justly famous for its excellent bathing facilities and paved seashore walkway. It was on this beach that my great-grandfather met an English woman and took her as his wife to the family farm.^{vi} From Oostende I took the coastal steam tramway to Nieuwpoort and from there on to De Panne Beach, an attractive summer resort near my home. I arrived at De Panne about two o'clock. Since the tramway across the sand dunes to my home did not leave until late in the evening, I had plenty of time to enjoy the beach. As I walked, I breathed deeply of the salt sea air which seemed to re-energize my very heart's blood. I walked miles in true military style along the De Panne beach, feeling happy with not a care in the world. I was carrying the hickory cane Father Alfred had given me – whirling it dexterously about or leaning on it when the going was harder. Barely three miles distant, I could discern the customs buildings on the French border. On my left, to the east, was the soft glow of the golden red sand dunes. To the right, along the seashore, were innumerable resort cottages and tents while higher up were many modern private castles. There was a lively crowd enjoying the seashore. Children's excited cries harmonized with young people's laughter, and romance was in the air. Finally I turned and began making my way back to De Panne. The sun was now travelling quickly towards the western horizon, reflecting its light mirror-like on the sea waves. A few shrimp boats which had been fishing off-shore were heading back home. It was at that time that I heard screams calling for help. At first I thought it must be a drowning accident, but then I saw a couple of boys rolling around on the sand. The one on top was smashing his fist repeatedly on the screaming face of the one below.

"Shame on you, you bully," I cried as I wrenched him loose and pulled him to a standing position.

He quickly freed himself from my grip and went into the stance of an expert boxer. He was about my age but smaller in stature. Almost immediately I felt a hail of blows on my face. It was only when I found myself on the brink of disaster that I remembered my cane.

"Why you infernal devil," I shouted as I stepped back from my antagonist and whirled my cane. As expected, he rushed towards me and continued to try to strike me; however, I soon held him off by a few well-measured cuts from my cane on knuckles and arms. To my astonishment, the fellow did not back down. He merely winced in pain and surprise. I looked to see what the fellow who had been getting the worst of the fight was doing. He had risen, but instead of helping me he was running away.

"What is going on?" I asked my antagonist.

"You might well ask," he answered in good, but heavily accented Flemish. "That fellow who is sneaking away was trying to beat up a crippled boy."

I tried to smile and replied, "I hope you will accept my apologies. I saw the crippled boy myself only a few minutes ago and he said someone had been beating him up. I am afraid that I have a bad habit of rushing in before I know what the problem is."

"Your apology is accepted. I am glad to meet you and to shake hands with you," he replied, managing a weak grin.

I grasped his hand, but when I saw him wince I quickly withdrew my hand. "Sorry, I forgot your knuckles. Here, take my cane and give me a beating. I certainly deserve a lesson for meddling in affairs not mine."

"There is no need. A look in the mirror will tell you why. I think a couple of steaks will be required

vi I assume that this is a made-up story since I have found no record of an English ancestor in the Ternier family. Oostende and De Panne Beach (see cover photo) are still popular resort areas on the North Sea.

for your eyes.”

We both laughed and introduced ourselves. He told me that his name was Ferdinand Furness of Dover, England, and that his family had a beach cottage nearby where they usually spent the whole summer.^{vii}

“Come along, my mother and two sisters will be enchanted to meet you,” he invited.

The fellow was so frank and genial, so straight to the point and incorrigibly cheerful that I felt powerless to resist. On our way to his cottage, my new-found friend suddenly cried out. “I have a good idea. You appear to possess the ability to use that cane and I know how to box. Why not swap abilities?”

I agreed and we shook hands enthusiastically, walking and talking the rest of the way to the cottage like old friends. Ferdinand’s mother met us at the door – her smile of welcome quickly turning into a frown when she saw our battered appearance. “Ferdinand, how did you encounter this young man and are you responsible for the deplorable condition of his face?” Then turning to me, she continued, “By your looks, it appears as if you got the worst of it, provided that we overlook Ferdinand’s severely bruised knuckles.”

“I am truly sorry, Mrs. Furness, that I caused such injuries to Ferdinand.”

Ferdinand grinned and extended his hands. “Forget it, Mother. I learned a lesson from a whirling cane, and Jerome learned one from my swinging fists.” He introduced me to Mrs. Furness and to his sisters Flora and Florence. He went on to explain how we met and about our agreement to exchange lessons in self-defense.

Mrs. Furness looked at my face more closely and ordered me to follow her into the kitchen where she tended to my face. She praised my command of English, asking me if I had been educated in England. I told her that I had been a student for four years at Stanislaus Jesuit College where I specialized in English and French. Mrs. Furness was a very beautiful lady in both face and figure with a friendly and sympathetic manner. Flora and Florence, who were about 13 and 15 years of age, promised to become fair duplicates of their mother. Ferdinand explained that his father, who was a captain in the Dover police force, normally spent his annual summer leave at De Panne with the rest of the family; but this year he had been unable to get away due to a serious outbreak of crime.

After patching up both Ferdinand and me, Mrs. Furness served tea. While we were eating, the wind began to rise. There was to be an eclipse of the moon that day so tide would be very high. Flora went to shut the door against the wind and called Ferdinand over. “Look, those shrimp boats that were on dry sand are already bobbing in the in-coming tide. I believe they are in danger of being smashed.”

Ferdinand and I decided to go out to re-secure the boats. We did so, but I then yielded to the temptation to show off my cable-walking abilities. Instead of jumping off the boat and swimming back to shore, I determined to walk the 30 feet of cable which was stretched between the two boats.

As soon as I stepped onto the cable, it stretched almost down to sea level. My feet began to slide. If ever a man felt distressed and wanted to save himself from humiliation, it was me. In vain I tried to regain a semblance of balance, but it was impossible due to the waves and the wobbling of the boat. I then attempted to jump into the water, but a great wave snatched the cable from under my feet and I very ungracefully tumbled into the sea. Even before touching the water, I heard shrieks of laughter from shore. And this was not the end of my misfortune. Instead of hitting the water head first, I landed on my side and kept whirling over and over towards the sea bottom until my lungs felt as if they would burst. Finally I managed to get my feet under me and made a desperate kick to the surface. I reached the surface without suffering any new physical injuries, but the salt water stung my existing ones unmercifully.

Ferdinand waded out to meet me, but he was no help as he was convulsed with laughter. In a fit of

vii Ferdinand is likely a made-up character. There is no record that Jerome had an English friend or that he ever visited England.

anger I grabbed him and gave him a dunking. Even that did not stop his laughter. I could swear that he continued to laugh under water. The two of us returned to the cottage. Discomfited, I fled to Ferdinand's bedroom to dress. When I reappeared, Mrs. Furness said, "Come here, Jerome, and sit beside me and let us finish our interrupted tea. And you, Flora, sit on his other side. This precaution will prevent our friend from escaping again before we are finished." The whole family then went into renewed peals of laughter.

Momentarily I was upset, but after a few seconds I decided to make the best of it. I had to admit that I had been showing off and that I must have looked ridiculous. "Mrs. Furness, if ever you need cheering up in the future, please call on me. In a moment I will be at your side, and I will plunge into the sea to perform that acrobatic stunt again."

"Thank-you. I will try to remember that."

I suggested that Ferdinand might come to visit me on the weekends. On Fridays he could help me with my farm work and on Saturdays and Sundays we would be free to enjoy our selves and trade lessons in self-defense. Ferdinand looked appealingly at his mother.

"I don't know," she said. "We barely know Jerome and have never met his parents. Perhaps they would not agree. I believe, however, that I know one other member of his family. Our neighbour Mrs. Beattie introduced me to a young dressmaker called Stephany who lives at Veurne. Mrs. Beattie is always raving about what a wonderful dressmaker Stephany is. I can see your likeness to her. Next Friday Mrs. Beattie and I are taking the tramway to see Stephany to order some dresses. We can all go to Veurne to meet Jerome's family at that time."

Veurne is a town of 6,000 inhabitants, important historically and a centre of extensive agricultural activity. It is situated seven miles north of the French border and only five miles from the turbulent waters of the North Sea. It enjoys the facilities of a network of railways and navigation canals along which most of our macadam highways are built. No wonder that our humble lowland town has prospered almost continuously since the fall of Bonaparte the First. In addition, tourists are invariably attracted by the scenic beauty of our town with its ancient architecture, including St. Walburga Cathedral.^{viii} Seafarers used to use the high black slate roof and elevated towers of the cathedral as a navigation marker, notwithstanding its distance from shore. Our canals are considered a sportsman's paradise. They are well-stocked with fresh-water fish and are excellent sites to train for international marathon swimming contests. In winter they afford hundreds of miles of clear ice suitable for skating.

On the evening of my return from college I was welcomed by my parents and my older sister Stephany.^{ix} From earliest childhood Stephany had a great talent for making clothing to dress her dolls. At age 14 she entered a dressmaking institution. The wonderful skills she had shown by the time she completed her course at 18 convinced my parents to help her to open her own dressmaking shop. Now, at twenty, she was enjoying an enviable success and already had a number of apprentice dressmakers working for her.

The following Friday the Furness family arrived about 11 o'clock. After introductions were over, my father said, "I have heard about Jerome's plan that you should spend some time with us, Ferdinand. Today is a holiday, but tomorrow you and Jerome can spend the morning hauling in the balance of alfalfa from the field. If you finish before dinner, the afternoon will be yours."

Just then Mme. Fiorina arrived from next door. She had obviously discussed our visitors with my mother because she invited the women of the party to spend the night at her house and invited all of us to dinner that evening. Immediately after lunch, I grabbed Ferdinand's arm and said, "Come along. This is a lady's party, and fishing will be a more interesting sport, I think."

As our house is on the edge of a canal, it only took a few minutes before we were out fishing in

viii See cover photo of St. Walburga Cathedral.

ix Records of Jerome's siblings are incomplete. He had at least one brother (Hector Medard) and three sisters named Stephany, Octavia, and Bella (nicknamed "Treksac" or "tea ball" because she was so fond of tea).

one of our family's rowboats. We caught several bass and carps. On our return trip, Ferdinand suddenly asked, "Jerome, are there many girls in town? Girls like your sister Stephany, I mean."

I laughed aloud. "I hope you are not smitten with Stephany already."

"Not at all; but she is a perfect beauty. If she smiles at me again, I will faint and prostrate myself at her feet."

Everyone noticed Ferdinand's interest in Stephany that evening at Mme. Fiorina's dinner party. My father commented, "I expect that you would very much appreciate having an older sister like Stephany."

Ferdinand blushed but he was quick to defend himself. "Stephany an older sister for me? Decidedly not! I already have two sisters. What on earth could I do with a third one? Besides she is not really much older. She is barely 20 and I will be 21 within three years, so in reality, I am 21 and she is 20."

"It is interesting the mathematics they practice in England, is it not?" my father observed as everyone laughed heartily, even Ferdinand and Stephany.

Ferdinand and I left Mme. Fiorina's immediately after dinner and retired about ten o'clock because we had to go to work very early the next morning if we hoped to have the afternoon free for enjoyment.

The days and weeks of the summer went by happily. Ferdinand came regularly every Friday to stay with us. We spent Friday working with my father on the farm, while Saturdays and Sunday afternoons we spent swimming, fishing, fencing and boxing. Finally, we stretched a heavy hemp rope across the canal and practiced cable-walking and trapeze tricks on it. Frequently Mrs. Furness, Flora, and Florence also spent part of the weekend in Veurne.

Towards the end of the summer, Ferdinand caused a great deal of excitement when he managed to completely disrupt a funeral procession. There is a string of seasonal hotels and public gambling houses along the North Sea coast from Havre-Bains to Dunkerque in France and across the Belgian border to De Panne, Oostende, and Blankenberge. In addition to holiday makers, these places attract the usual gathering of professional gamblers, confidence men and pickpockets. Often the confidence men pose as friends to innocent gamblers who have won big money and soon rob them of their winnings.

In one particular instance, a victim apparently chased some robbers by bicycle to Veurne one night. Early next morning, a milkman found the body of a well-known con man lying in the road with several stab wounds. When word of the murder came out by telephone and wire, a crowd of well-dressed gangsters soon arrived in town. They identified the murdered man as John "Irish Red" O'Brien, whose nickname well described the man with his astonishing red hair and complexion. The gangsters decided that they would treat their defunct comrade, who had no known relatives, with a splendid funeral. They had the local undertaker embalm the body and lay it out in an expensive coffin. Since the man had been a Catholic, they asked our parish priest to conduct the funeral. They paid in advance for a High Mass and a funeral procession to the cemetery. The town band and an official mourner were also engaged. In brief, my home town was in for the astounding sight of an elaborate gangster funeral.

The whole town was full of morbid curiosity and crowds of people lined the funeral procession route on the Saturday morning when the funeral was to be held. Ferdinand insisted that we ought to wait at the cemetery, which happened to be situated next door to Mme. Fiorina's though it was concealed from view by a double line of evergreen trees. Burial places all over Belgium are fronted with brick walls. Our local cemetery had a four-foot wall topped with a two-foot fence of iron spikes. We peeked between the iron spikes to see the grave diggers finishing off a grave in a corner immediately next to the wall and inserting the outer casing of the coffin into the hole.

Ferdinand looked puzzled. "I wonder why they chose this corner. There are no other graves near-

by.”

“That man was murdered and did not receive the last sacraments of the Church; therefore, he must not be buried next to the other bodies,” I explained.

Abruptly we heard the church bells peal, marking the beginning of the funeral procession. Soon we heard the band playing a tedious death march. The band came into view, followed by altar boys bearing a large cross and three priests who were reciting funeral psalms. Next came six pall bearers carrying the coffin, which rested on a funeral bier, on their shoulders. Immediately behind the coffin walked the official mourner with his face hidden in an enormous handkerchief, behind which he was howling something awful and supposedly shedding profuse tears.

Ferdinand exclaimed, “That is Jonah, the public drunk from De Panne Beach. What is he doing here? Was he a relative of this murdered man?”

“I don’t think so; but every time he gets drunk, he cries his eyes out and promises that it is the last time that he will ever indulge in strong beverages.”

“But what has that got to do with him weeping at this funeral?”

“A lot. Those gamblers all know him and his characteristics so they engaged him as official mourner.”

“You mean that those men engaged that drunk to weep over their friend’s demise?” Ferdinand asked incredulously.

“Yes. All they have to do is give him a drink at intervals and perhaps pay him a 20 frank banknote and he will cry all they wish.”

Ferdinand was scandalized. “I cannot stand hearing that fellow howl as if in pain. It is an insult to our intelligence and more so to death. It is a mockery that no modern priest should accept. I cannot stand it,” he repeated again. “I will stop his infernal howling.”

Before I could prevent him, Ferdinand jumped over the wall and halted in front of the drunken mourner. Ferdinand grabbed the man by the shoulder and walloped him on the chin, knocking him the ground. The band had just finished a piece and the sudden silencing of the mourner’s wailing caused the pallbearers to look back. When the three pallbearers on the left saw their paid mourner on the ground with Ferdinand standing over him, they forgot the presence of the bier and coffin they were carrying and rushed forward. The three pallbearers on the right could not see what was wrong, but feeling the sudden withdrawal of the supporting shoulders on the other side they smothered a few oaths while trying to keep the coffin balanced. It was in vain. The coffin slid from the bier and fell on the pavement with a sickening thud.

Ferdinand continued to stand over Jonah with incredible wrath on his face. The gangsters stood staring at him in dumb amazement. Finally one snarled, “Say kid, what do you think you are doing? Disturbing the solemnity of a funeral is a crime.”

Ferdinand withdrew a few steps and said, “You said it. What about this fellow disturbing the solemnity of a funeral with his howling?”

“That is none of your business, young fellow. That stiff in the coffin is a friend and we wanted to treat him to a first-class send-off. I have a notion to beat you up until you howl and engage you in his stead.”

By now I had joined Ferdinand. “You fellows are losing a lot of precious time,” I said. “See for yourself. The rest of the procession is almost at the cemetery gates. If you don’t hurry, all the solemnity of this funeral will go for naught.”

The pallbearers hesitated for a moment, decided I was right, and reluctantly prepared to pick up the bier and coffin. They succeeded in replacing the coffin on the bier but then discovered that two legs had been broken off the bier so the unfortunate casket slid off again. This time the gangsters swore aloud, and one, in his rage, picked up one of the bier's legs and rushed at Ferdinand.

Fortunately I had my cane in hand and I struck the man on the knuckles before he could hit Ferdinand. Ferdinand, fearing more for my safety than his own, rushed to my defense with his fists flying. The pallbearers all went after Ferdinand; but every time a knock-out blow came in his direction, he managed to step aside. I had never seen anyone so fast on his feet. Soon a large crowd had gathered, many of them encouraging Ferdinand with cries of enthusiasm.

Someone had called for the police and at this moment they appeared and ordered the pallbearers to proceed. The casket was coming apart due to its fall. To make matters worse, the body now began to leak embalming fluid. When the men tried to raise the coffin, the body fell through the bottom. Baffled with rage and uttering cries of horror and curses, the pall bearers picked up the broken-down casket and flung it over the wall. Then they picked up the body which was wrapped in white linen, put it back on the bier, lifted the bier to their shoulders and moved closer to the cemetery wall. Before the police could stop them, they had dumped the body over the wall after the casket. We heard an ominous thud. The pallbearers picked up the still unconscious mourner, flung him rudely onto the bier and hastened to the cemetery gate.

The excited crowd flung themselves at the cemetery wall to satisfy their morbid curiosity. By sheer accident, the body had been thrown over the wall just in line with the open grave and it rolled into the grave. The commanding police officer stood scratching his head. Ferdinand stood trembling beside me, and when the officer cast an interrogating glance at us, I decided to approach him.

"I have a suggestion as to how this mess can be somewhat corrected, sir. There is an opening just here inside the neighbouring garden where a fellow can creep through. If we hasten we can be at the grave before the procession reaches it."

Ferdinand and the two policemen followed me and we waited by the grave for the vanguard of the procession. Presently the band spread out about the grave and the church dignitaries halted, waiting for the body to arrive. The band finished another piece and we saw the pallbearers coming almost on the run with the other gangsters close on their heels. At the grave the pallbearers slid the fast-coming-to chief mourner from the bier. One of them kicked him in the loins and ordered him to start weeping. When he protested in a weak voice that he needed a drink, another gangster produced a half bottle of scotch.

In the meantime, the leader of the gang stared rudely at the priests and asked, "Hey there, sky-pilots, what are you waiting for? We paid you. Now do your work."

"But where," asked one of the priests, "is the body?"

"In the grave, of course. We put him over the wall. Why should we have carried him half a mile further than needed?"

The astonished clergymen looked into the grave, and the policeman stepped forward to explain what had happened. The priests seemed obdurate. They refused to complete the burial service, due to the disgraceful behaviour of the gangsters; but the police finally convinced them that it might be better for everyone concerned if they completed the service as quickly and respectfully as possible. Reluctantly the priests agreed and proceeded with the final prayers.

But that was not the end of the excitement. Just as the first shovel of earth was thrown onto the coffin, a young woman stepped forward. She had a highly painted face and her eyes were red from weeping. She burst into uncontrollable tears and wailed, "Red was my boyfriend, weak if you wish, but he knew how to treat a woman right." No one replied, and she slipped away a few minutes later.

The police gave Ferdinand a severe talking to, but they did not charge him with any crime. That

was a relief, but he still had to face our families. Not unlike two young pups who had gone out on a forbidden spree, we retreated back home that evening with our tails curled between our legs. Mrs. Furness was visiting that day. She, my mother, and Mme. Fiorina were sitting on a bench by the garden gate awaiting our inevitable appearance. There was decided anger in Mrs. Furness' eyes.

Ferdinand spoke respectfully but firmly to them. "Mrs. Fiorina, Mrs. Ternier, Mama, I am sure that you have heard by now what happened. I am not going to apologize. That drunken fellow had no call to disturb the funeral procession with his howling. It was an insult to any solemn ceremony. I am glad that I stopped him, and I fear that I would do the same if ever the occasion should present itself again."

"Do you not think that your behaviour disrupted the funeral procession at least as much as the drunken man did?" Mrs. Furness said severely.

Ferdinand sheepishly admitted that it had, then looked at his mother hesitantly. "Will you forgive me, Mama?" he asked

"Yes," she said reluctantly. "I know you thought you were acting for the best, but you must learn to curb your impetuous behaviour. We will say no more about it."

Despite Ferdinand's promise, the following week he got himself into trouble again.

Father Alfred had sent us a pair of swords earlier in the summer. He wrote, "These fencing swords are at least 50 years old. I assure you that none are presently manufactured which are as well-made as these. I wish you two young gentlemen to accept them as a gift from me."

Every Sunday afternoon since then Ferdinand and I had practiced our fencing in Mme. Fiorina's shady back garden. By late summer we were both getting quite skillful and family and friends often came to watch us. At three o'clock on the Sunday following the funeral fiasco everyone had gathered – all my family, Ferdinand's mother and sisters, Mme. Fiorina, Stephany's apprentices, and several other friends. Ferdinand and I were dressed in white flannel pants and white shirts with light athletic shoes. I defeated Ferdinand in the first match. After a brief rest, we were ready for a return match. This time we fenced at leisure – each of us studying and anticipating the other's thrusts. It was so quiet and still that I could almost hear the bystanders breathe.

Then a strange woman appeared around the corner of Mme. Fiorina's house. She carried the usual beach parasol in one white-gloved hand and was beautifully dressed in a white muslin gown.

"I beg your pardon for intruding, but I witnessed you young gentlemen fencing as I drove past in my carriage. Not since my early girlhood have I ever seen that move which won the last match. Where did you learn it?"

I bowed deeply and said, "Only last week I first executed that move, but I have no idea how I learned it. It just seemed to happen."

The lady obviously did not believe my story, and I could not really blame her. "You must have seen or learned that thrust somewhere, young man," she said severely. "Your manner of fencing is an exact duplicate of what I witnessed years ago at a public fencing festival."

"I realize that I must have learned that thrust by witnessing some fencing duel, but it was in a dream. I know that sounds silly, but I saw a young man travelling to foreign lands on a ship which was attacked by pirates. That young man helped to defend the ship by this fencing technique. I must have learned it by observing him."

Suddenly an extremely harsh and grating voice was heard calling, "Celina, quit that foolish errand of yours. It is getting late."

The lady turned and called out, "I am just coming." Ferdinand and I followed her into the front yard. A liveried coachman was having difficulty in controlling two high-blooded horses pulling the lady's

carriage. An older woman sat in the carriage. She shrieked again as she saw us. "Do hurry up."

Ferdinand winced in pain. "Perdition, that voice is the limit a person can endure. Listen to her voice and look at her gorgeous plumage. She imitates the male pheasant in both plumage and in voice. I will stop her if she utters another word."

"Don't do anything silly, Ferdinand," I warned him. "Remember what happened at the funeral."

The woman shrieked again and Ferdinand ran towards to carriage before I could stop him. Mme. Celina lightly laid a hand on my arm. "Hold your peace, young man. That impetuous boy will learn that my sister-in-law is well able to take care of herself."

The harsh voice shrieked again. "Celina, come here. This young cub is objecting to my voice being heard." Then she turned her attention to the coachman, "August, you hand over the lines to me and step down. Now take my cane and whip that impudent young pup. A sound trouncing is what he wants. Hurry up. The horses are getting impatient."

The woman, perceiving the evident reluctance of August to step in, then whirled her cane as if she would strike Ferdinand herself. Ferdinand responded by using his cane to send her cane splintering into the air. To add insult, he saluted her with an impudent grin. The woman screamed in rage and rose to her feet, but she obviously needed her cane for support. Mme. Celina gave me a soft push which I took as a command to rescue her sister-in-law before she tumbled from the carriage.

I leaped into the carriage, caught the woman and deposited her back on the seat. Rather than feel grateful, she appeared to feel that my action was an offence beyond forgiveness; and she commenced to shriek out her indignation. It was obvious that Mme. Celina was enjoying the scene, and she made no effort to assist her sister-in-law.

"Stop it," I commanded the woman. "Stop that screaming of yours. The horses are terror-stricken and the coachman can scarcely hold them. Do you want to break your infernal neck?" It was a disgraceful way to address a hysterical and frightened old woman, and I later deeply regretted it.

Ferdinand hurried to help the coachman by holding the horses' heads. They succeeded in preventing the horses from running away, but they jerked the carriage roughly. This proved too much for the woman inside. She had already shrunk away from me and was clinging to the edge of her seat. Thus when the carriage jerked, she tumbled off the seat and over the side -- still glaring at me and trying to shake off my restraining hand. There was an ominous thump and a splash as she landed on the edge of the roadway. I jumped down to assist her, but she shoved me out of the way and lifted herself by taking hold of the carriage wheel. She was not physically injured, but she was covered with mud because she had landed in a puddle left by the previous night's generous rainfall.

"This is your doing, Celina," she screamed. "I told you not to stop to talk to these people. Now see what has happened."

There was a world of hatred concentrated in that hideously ugly face. Instinctively I stepped forward as if to prevent the venom of her look from poisoning Mme. Celina. What a contrast between the two women -- one graceful and gentle with a pleasant and humorous manner; the other foul in expression and voice, obviously blindly jealous of her sister-in-law.

August came forward and assisted her back into the carriage. "Get into the carriage," she ordered Mme. Celina. "We will go to the police station and lay charges of assault against these two scoundrels."

I assisted Mme. Celina, who ignored her sister-in-law, to enter the carriage. "Good-bye for now. Don't worry about my sister-in-law. I will not let her contact the police."

The Furness family returned home during the last week of August. Then in late September I received a letter from Ferdinand overflowing with his usual enthusiasm. "You must come to visit us in Dover. All my friends want you to be their professor of athletics, and we will have a bully time. There is another reason why you must come. My father has accepted a position with the North-West Mounted Police in Canada. While the rest of our family won't leave for Canada immediately, you must come so that my father can meet you before he leaves."

My parents agreed that I could take a short vacation to Dover, an important seaport and the closest English port to France, since harvest was completed. I boarded the packet-boat that runs daily between Oostende and Dover the following week. The whole of Dover harbour was lined with warehouses and factory buildings. According to Ferdinand's directions, his home was along the river four blocks from the harbour. I didn't expect anyone to meet me as I had arrived a day earlier than planned. The streets were almost empty. Then I heard a factory whistle blow announcing noon. It was followed by the chimes of many tower clocks, each seemingly a few seconds slower or faster than its neighbour. Within minutes, the previously empty streets had been invaded by hordes of men and young women.

Immediately ahead of me I saw a group of girls singing and screaming at the top of their lungs, telling the world with unconcealed glee that they had the afternoon off from work and that they meant to make the most of it. Arm and arm they danced towards me, filling the whole street and both sidewalks. Soon they surrounded me like a swarm of bees and carried me along with them. At first I could not refrain from laughing, but soon they narrowed the circle about me and the most daring girls put their arms around me and even tried to kiss me. I knew that they were only indulging in innocent frolic and meant no harm, but it was decidedly vulgar and embarrassing. In my anxiety to disentangle myself, I lost my hat, and feared that the coat and vest of the dress suit I was wearing might be the next sacrifices. I implored them to desist and release me.

Then I heard a refined voice say sternly, "Margaret, how could you permit yourself to be mixed in this disgraceful behaviour. Help me to assist this young man to regain his freedom."

The girls closest to me stepped back upon hearing these words and I was able to break free. The crowd surged onward, leaving me facing an exquisite young lady. I bowed and said, "Who am I that a young lady like you should expose herself to the crowds on this street to save a stranger from momentary embarrassment?"

She smiled, "It was chivalry in reverse with a lady rescuing a gentleman in distress. I had to do something to redeem the reputation of my city." She handed me my hat.

After thanking her again I continued on my way and soon arrived at the Furness' house. Only Mrs. Furness was at home when I arrived, but Ferdinand and his sisters arrived back from school shortly afterwards. Captain Furness was at work of course. We were all sitting in the parlour late in the afternoon waiting for Captain Furness to return when Flora called our attention to a very pleasant scene at the house across the street. A small child sat beside a basket full of kittens on the front steps. The kittens were hopelessly entangling themselves in a ball of yarn, and the child was clapping her small hands with glee. "Isn't that just the most endearing picture you have ever seen?" Flora asked.

I noticed that there was a man reading a newspaper in front of a second floor window directly above the child on the steps. Suddenly I caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a rifle barrel behind the newspaper. "Who are your neighbours?" I asked.

"A very nice young couple with two small children," Mrs. Furness replied. "I believe that he works on the docks. An older man has also been boarding with them recently."

"May we go into another room? I don't want him to realize that we are watching him."

"What is wrong?" Mrs. Furness asked, leading us into the kitchen.

“I’m almost certain that man has a gun hidden behind his newspaper.”

“And you think that he is intending to shoot my husband as he arrives home?”

“I fear so. It is imperative that we flush out this gun man. Ferdinand, take a bicycle wrench and leave the house by the back alley on your bicycle. Ride down the alley for several blocks until you can cross the street without being seen by anyone in the yard across the street. Then turn down the alley behind the house across the street and ride until you are near to the house. I expect that the gunman has a bike. If you locate one, sabotage it by loosening some of the nuts holding it together. You will soon after hear a fearful commotion in the street, and a moment later you will see the man sneaking away. Follow after him at a distance without letting him see you. If he has a bicycle, overpower him as soon as it falls apart. Take no chances. You must knock him senseless and check his pockets for any documents.”

“But what if he has a saddle horse or a cab waiting for him?”

“He could hardly have a cab waiting for several hours, nor a horse. A bicycle is noiseless, quick and can be left for long periods without attracting attention.”

“Mrs. Furness, could Flora go in a cab to meet her father at the police station, tell him what has happened and what our plans are, and then come home with him in the cab. The commotion I mentioned will happen when I see the cab arriving. It will prevent the gun man from executing his plans, so Flora and the Captain will be quite safe.”

Mrs. Furness grudgingly gave her approval to my plan and Flora left immediately for the cab stand in the next street.

“Just one more thing before you leave, Ferdinand,” I said. “Do you know where you could get some firecrackers?”

“Yes, the store next to the cab stand sells them.”

“Good. Please get some firecrackers and bring them back to me. Just hurry because you still need time to get into position behind the house across the street before your father and Flora return.”

After Ferdinand returned with the firecrackers and left again, all Mrs. Furness, Florence and I could do was wait. I explained my part of the plan to them. “When we catch sight of the cab I will rush out of the house, setting off the firecrackers. I believe that the gunman will believe that he has been discovered and is being shot at so he will try to make his escape down the back alley where Ferdinand will hopefully overpower him.”

Finally we saw a cab coming. As soon as I was certain that it was Captain Furness and Flora, I ran shouting out of the house and began to throw the firecrackers. The horses plunged in fright at the sound, but the driver managed to bring them to a halt on in front of the Furness’ house. The cab thus protected Flora until she was safely in the house. I ran around the side of the house where the gunman was; and, sure enough, he was just getting on to a bicycle. I gave him a few second’s start before I ran down the alley after him with Captain Furness just behind me.

Ferdinand had done his work well. The man had scarcely gone 50 feet when he lost both his front wheel and his handlebars. As a result, he fell, hitting his head and left shoulder heavily on a stone in the alley. Ferdinand immediately appeared, brandishing a large wrench that he had evidently picked up at the same time as the bicycle wrench. He hit the prostrate gunman on the back of the head and laid him out cold.

“I am delighted to see that you boys have everything under control,” Captain Furness said. He strode over to the unconscious gunman, turned him over, and deftly went through his pockets. Officers will be coming shortly to arrest him, but I think we had better lock this man up in our basement until they arrive.”

Between the three of us, we half carried, half dragged the gunman across the street – giving the neighbours the impression that we were assisting a drunken man back home. In the basement, Captain Furness did a strip search of the gunman, going over his clothing with a fine-tooth comb. By this time several police officers had arrived and they took the prisoner away. It was not until then that Ferdinand formally introduced me to his father. We were naturally curious to learn why the man wished to kill Captain Furness, but all the Captain would tell us was that the man was a longtime criminal who had recently got out of prison. Then he told us to go upstairs to prepare for dinner.

By the end of my visit to Dover I had decided that I would go to Canada like the Furness family. My parents' farm was too small for me to earn an adequate income by working with my father. I also wanted to have some adventure and see the world. Finally, I wanted to avoid the military draft. Some teenaged boys may look upon an older brother in uniform as a hero; others look on the uniform as the emblem of battle preparedness, signifying that some day the wearer will be rushed on to the battlefield where the many will be killed off and the few return. Ever since I was a boy, I was animated by this feeling. I almost cried my eyes out when my own brother picked out the wrong number and was conscripted. In consequence, I vowed to immigrate to an independent nation where military service was not compulsory when I reached military age. I decided to go to Manitoba because that was where the Furness family was going and because Father Alfred gave me an introduction to his brother who was head of a college there.

Chapter Four: Winnipeg

In September 1901, Ferdinand and I left for Canada.^x It took us twelve days to cross the ocean – twelve long, dreary days and nights during which we heard and felt the constant throb of the ship's engines. The first three days were particularly difficult ones for the many people who suffered frightfully from seasickness, but the weather was extraordinarily rough during the whole passage. The ship heaved almost constantly, cries of distressed passengers were frequently heard, and the interior air daily became fouler.

I fortunately was not sick. I believe it was because I was able to relax my muscles and yield to the up and down movement of the sea. On the 29th of September our ship finally docked in Montreal and a great crowd of disheveled passengers thankfully disembarked. Our train to Winnipeg was almost ready to leave, so we had no time to see Montreal before departing.

It took us four days and nights to reach Winnipeg. We seemed to see nothing but rocks for most of that time, and our train rushed through tunnel after tunnel. Finally we found ourselves travelling on a track cut out of the rock on the shore of what seemed to be an inland sea. I looked at the map of Canada I had acquired and found that it was called Lake Superior and that the next day we would reach the towns of Port Arthur and Fort William.

Father Alfred's brother was head of St. Boniface College in St. Boniface (a city across the river from Winnipeg) and Ferdinand was going to study there. As a result, one of the students met us when we arrived at the Winnipeg train depot. He ushered us into a street car, which carried us across a broad river. "This is the Red River and yonder is St. Boniface," our guide said. "At the bend in the river is the City Bridge and to the north is the great CPR railway bridge. Both connect Winnipeg and St. Boniface together. Those imposing tall buildings are the St. Boniface Cathedral and the St. Boniface Jesuit College. Almost everyone in St. Boniface is a French Canadian and a Catholic."

The Jesuit College was a five-story red brick building in the centre of a large field facing north. The streetcar soon let us off on the street facing the college. I looked about eagerly. What I could see of the surroundings was so similar that I could have been at the college in Mons instead of in St. Boniface. Our guide rang a bell at the main doors of the college, and the door was answered by a young man in clerical garb. Ferdinand and I parted company then. The priest told our guide to take Ferdinand to the college office to register for his classes, and he ushered me into a large reception room and told me to wait there. I looked around. The room and its furnishings were very similar to those of Stanislaus College. Even more surprising, above a large fireplace was a portrait of Father Alfred. I moved over to the fireplace to more closely examine the portrait. Just then someone entered the room.

I turned. "Father Alfred," I whispered in awe. "How did you get here?" Immediately upon saying those words, however, I realized that he must be my Father Alfred's twin brother. I knew that the two men were twins, but I had not ever considered that they would be so identical in appearance. "I beg your pardon," I stammered. "You must be the brother of Father Alfred from Stanislaus College."

He smiled. "Yes, I am. He asked me to make you welcome and to take care of you upon your arrival here. Here is his last letter which he asked me to let you read.

I began to read the letter:

"My dear brother Benedict," it began. "I warn you to be prepared for the arrival of the young man Jerome Ternier who will be disembarking at Winnipeg about the same time that you receive this letter. In recent letters, I must have mentioned his name quite frequently. To make a long story short, he is the most meddlesome individual I have ever had the pleasure to meet. He was my pupil for three troublesome years – or rather for two, as the last one, in truth, was a great pleasure to me as I became closely acquainted with

x It is unknown what Jerome did between the time he left school and his arrival in Canada if he didn't go to Canada until 1901, when he would have been about 23. If he wanted to avoid the draft, he likely would have had to leave the country immediately upon completing his education.

him. There was never to be found his equal in making reckless utterances; however, he has a very able, if restless, mind. He will bear watching, but he is honest right through in both words and deeds.

“Despite his age he makes statements with consummate sharpness and accuracy that frequently have put me on the defensive, wondering how on earth I could ever after feel comfortable wearing the ecclesiastical garb of our beloved Church. He was expelled twice from college in his first two years and each time I longed to have him back. In fact, the second time I interceded in his behalf, pleading with the professor of theology who threatened to resign if Jerome’s heretical views were not smothered. I do recommend him to your care with my whole heart. He is worth it.

“I must end here by mentioning that although Jerome has received what is likely the equivalent of a high school diploma in Canada, I strongly advise that you refrain from encouraging him to go on to higher education at this time. I believe that he needs a mental rest and to be kept physically active. He is the son of a farmer and not a stranger to using a plough or spade or to the cultivation of a garden.”

There was a long silence when I had finished reading the letter. At last I raised my eyes to meet the smiling and friendly old eyes of Father Benedict Alfred. I handed the letter back to him, and suddenly I felt the presence of my Father Alfred. I extended my hand and said, “I will be glad to have you as my friend and to accept your guidance and advice, if that is acceptable to you.”

“Very well, my friend. Let me offer you some refreshments and you can give me all the news from Belgium. Then tomorrow I will take you to visit my friend Father Cherrier, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church. At present all the men, young and old, have gone to the Dakotas to work in the harvest, so there is a tremendous scarcity of labour and I am certain he will find you some work to do.”

The next morning, Father Alfred and I travelled by buggy to the parish church of the Immaculate Conception situated three blocks north of the CPR depot from which I had disembarked the previous day. The church fronted on Main Street on the west and was surrounded by attractive gardens. Nearby was the rectory, a square two-story building, and beyond that was the parish school directed by nuns. I later learned that Father Cherrier had founded the parish as a mission and that it had developed into a parish of 150 French and Irish families.

We arrived at the rectory about 10 o’clock to be greeted warmly by Father Cherrier.^{xi} “This is a rare treat,” he said to Father Alfred. “And you,” he turned to me, “must be the young man from Belgium. As Father Alfred undoubtedly explained, we presently have a severe labour shortage and this parish has need of a man immediately.”

Father Cherrier ordered coffee and the two priests enjoyed a pleasant visit together. After we had finished our coffee, Father Cherrier explained what work he wished to hire me to do. “We need some one to look after our garden. We have many flowers presently outdoors in pots that must be moved indoors for the winter, the fruit and vegetable harvests must be completed, and the garden be cleaned up for the winter.

I readily agreed to undertake the work, and Father Cherrier then took me to meet his mother who shared the rectory with him. She was far advanced in years and her wrinkled face was not easy to look at; however, her eyes looked kindly at me and put me at ease. Mme. Cherrier then introduced me to Mme. Louise, the housekeeper, who showed me to the room off the kitchen where I would sleep.

Mme. Louise subjected me to an intense scrutiny, which made me feel very uncomfortable. Finally she said, “You must pardon me, M. Ternier,” she said, “but you look -- how difficult it is to find words to express it -- too well-dressed and perhaps not strong enough to do the work. We are used to hiring rough, strong men to do the garden and chores. At any rate, please make yourself at home.”

At 12 noon Father Cherrier showed me how to toll the Angelus and told me that it would be one of my jobs to ring the bell for the Angelus every day at six, noon and six. In the afternoon Father Cherrier took me through the garden and I checked out the tools in the shed. Father Cherrier then phoned to the

depot for my heavy luggage, which I had put into storage there until I knew where I would be. I also went down town to purchase work boots, gloves, overalls and a few tools.

The following morning I arose at 10 minutes to 6 o'clock, ready to ring the Angelus at six, and then cared for the cow. At seven I had breakfast. At a quarter to eight I rang the bell again, announcing eight o'clock Mass. Then I took up the new digging fork which had been among my purchases the previous day and commenced to dig potatoes and spread them out to dry before putting them down the cellar. It was getting late in the year so there was no time to be lost.

Mme. Cherrier, who had expected me to hear Mass, was slightly annoyed that I did not do so. She also was very surprised when she saw how many potatoes I had dug by the time Mass was over. "I expected that it would take you three or four days to complete digging this field of potatoes. Now it seems that you might do it in two days."

Soon after Father Cherrier came out to see how I was doing. "I am doing famously," I replied. "The soil is not hard to dig, and I think I can complete the job by tomorrow night."

Father Cherrier frowned slightly. "Jerome, why did you not attend Mass this morning?"

"Because Father Alfred once told me that work conscientiously done constitutes an eternal prayer, and I am fully determined that no man or woman will snatch that prayer away from me. I want to earn it."

Father nodded and returned to the house. I worked steadily until it was time to ring the noon Angelus. Then I retired to the kitchen where I was to take my meals with Mme. Louise. I asked her if she would hold open the sacks as I filled them with potatoes that afternoon. She agreed, but protested that we could not possibly pick all the potatoes I had dug that morning and store them away before evening.

Despite Mme. Louise's prediction, we bagged all of the potatoes by three o'clock. Then I loaded the bags into a wheelbarrow and wheeled them to the cellar which had an outside entrance. I found two large planks which I used to slide the bags of potatoes through the entrance and onto the cellar floor. By the time I had to ring the evening Angelus, all of the potatoes were safely into the cellar and the bags had been emptied out into a pile in the corner.

The next day I again hastened to dig potatoes as soon as I had rung the bell for morning Mass. By dinner time I was finished the field. By this time Mme. Louise had a respect for my abilities and I was learning to appreciate her qualities; thus beginning the development of a durable friendship between us. I soon came to bear the love for her that I might bestow on my mother or sister. Within a short time, as a result of our friendship, she insisted on doing my washing and mending and I, in return, assisted her in taking care of the church.

I was responsible for taking care of the cow while Mme. Louise did the milking. In the garden there was a patch of mangels so large that they protruded 6 inches above the ground. I turned my attention to pulling them once I was done with the potatoes. I piled them up and covered them with masses of their own leaves. I next harvested the winter cabbages, and before my first week of work was complete, the entire garden was secured in the vegetable cellar.

I quickly learned -- both from my own observations and from the comments of people around me -- that Father Cherrier was a man of rare talent with a consummate genius for organizing people and gathering them into a contented community. He was a tall, handsome man in his forties, renowned as a preacher and as a teacher of theology. He held the latter position at the University of Manitoba, and was loved and respected by both Catholic and Protestant.

On the first and third Sundays of the month the parishioners of Immaculate Conception Church were privileged to have Father Alfred preach the sermon at High Mass and also to give a sermon at vespers which were at 7:15 in the evening. In consequence, Father Alfred had Sunday dinner with Father Cherrier, and I was very pleased to be invited to join them on my first Sunday in Winnipeg.

"Jerome, you and your friend Ferdinand can have the freedom of our college gymnasium every

Sunday afternoon from two to four. I have already told him so he will be waiting for you at the gym.”

When I arrived, Ferdinand was already on hand, but otherwise the gym was empty. The resident students and professors regularly went on excursions away from the college on Sundays from two to four I learned.

“How do you like this college so far?” I asked Ferdinand who greeted me with his usual broad grin, showing his great set of white teeth.

“I do not know, Jerome. Of course everything is strange to me, and it will take time to get acquainted. The boys are friendly enough, but they seem rather a bunch of roughnecks. Then it is hard having to speak French all the time, but it won’t be that many months until my family arrives. But enough talking for now. We came here to work.”

The two hours went by very quickly, and I soon found myself walking back towards Immaculate Conception where I arrived back in good time to ring the six o’clock Angelus.

The following morning I met Mme. Cherrier coming out of the church. The cow was lying in a low spot in the middle of the completely harvested garden. “It is very distressing to me that we have never been able to find a hired hand who would spade over the garden so that it was level,” she said to me.

I promised to level it for her, and I worked most of that day on it when I had no other duties. It was fortunate that I worked so quickly because the following day we were surprised by a heavy snow storm and that snow remained the rest of the winter. Also fortunately, Father Cherrier had already arranged for the delivery of 20 tons of coal to operate the two hot water furnaces which heated the church. On the night after the snowstorm, Mme. Louise and I were seated as usual by the kitchen table at which I liked to read and write while she occupied herself with needle work.

“You know that I am an active fellow, and I perceive that I will have a great deal of leisure time over the winter. I wonder if it would be possible to flood the garden which I have just levelled and make a skating rink for the boys and girls of the parish school. Father Cherrier told me that the fire department will flood skating rinks gratis on request.”

“You don’t know how much work an outdoor skating rink will entail,” she replied. Almost every week we have a fresh fall of snow. Then there is another reason against it. From the moment that the sisters at the school suspect that you might offer your services to them, there would be no end of requests from them. Then too, you are a young man of very attractive features, and it might not be desirable for the female students if you were to spend a lot of time about the school.”

“Oh, nonsense, Mme. Louise. Consider for example our relationship. Is there any danger of impropriety in it? Besides the students surely are only children.”

“None whatever,” she said flushing painfully, “because I constantly remind myself that I am almost old enough to be your mother. Nevertheless, I know that many a women would allow herself to be lured in the silly old way.”

“Mme. Louise, I would be very unhappy were you ever to be lured in the silly old way, as you put it. You are my ideal of womanhood, and I could not bear to lose my respect for you. You remind me too much of my mother, only a great deal younger.”

“I am greatly honoured by your words, Jerome,” she replied very formally.

The clock struck 10 at that moment; and, as was customary, the lights were switched off and everyone in the rectory went to their rest.

During the early part of that night, which I remember so well, there was not a bit of sound to disturb our sleep and nothing to indicate a coming disaster. Then, suddenly I was awakened by a terrific crack from the roof close beside my bedroom. The main part of the rectory had a flat roof, while the

kitchen and my bedroom were in an addition with a roof which sloped sharply down from the flat main roof. I looked out of the window and could see nothing. I struck a match to light a candle. When I held it up to the window, I could see nothing but a solid wall of white. Terrified, I withdrew from the window and rushed into the kitchen, calling out to raise the rest of the household.

A few seconds later Father Cherrier opened the door into the kitchen.

“Father we have been buried in snow,” I said. “I can’t see out of my window and the roof sounds as if it is falling in. Are we going to be smothered under a falling roof?”

Just then a second crack sounded. “Jerome, get dressed immediately. We must climb up onto the rectory roof to shovel off the snow. In ordinary snowstorms the wind blows much of the snow off the roof, but there is no wind tonight.”

Hastily donning our warmest clothing, we hurried into the attic. Outside the attic window there was a short ladder which allowed access to the roof. We worked for almost an hour before we succeeded in clearing the bulk of the snow from the roof, but still the quiet snow gave no sign of abating. In my anxiety, I appealed to Father Cherrier to phone for help, but he declined.

“Jerome, I fear many other people in the city are in danger of having their roofs cave in. It would be cruel to expect them to leave their families to help us.

As soon as we had removed the worst of the snow from the rectory, we went over to the convent and rang the bell. Evidently the storm had not wakened them, as it took some time for someone to answer the door. We explained how we had been awakened by the weight of snow cracking the roof of the rectory kitchen and had shoveled the roof. We feared that the convent roof, being flat, might suffer the same fate and had come to shovel it off.

We went up onto the roof. It was about 120 by 30 feet, so it would be a much larger job than the rectory. A slight breeze had arisen from the northwest, but the snow was so heavy that the breeze did little to move it. Suddenly I saw a shadow moving towards us. Then a soft voice called out that she was coming to help.

“Go back, Sister,” Father Cherrier called back. “It is dangerous and cold up here. You might fall. Please do go back down, and if you must be of some assistance, have a hot drink ready for us when we are finished.”

“No, Father,” she replied. “We cannot permit you and Mr. Ternier to work the rest of the night for us without help. I am young and strong and Mother Superior has sent me. She says that we must take some responsibility for ourselves and must not be considered as helpless creatures.”

“I bow to the will of Mother Superior,” Father Cherrier replied. “Perhaps you could begin shoveling just to your right.”

The three of us worked steadily most of the rest of the night until the snow gradually ceased and the clouds broke up, at which point we wearily made our way through the attic window and down into the convent where we were served coffee and sandwiches before retiring home to our beds. It was mid-morning before I awoke. The aftermath of the storm was made worse by the strong winds that had arisen when the sky cleared in the early morning. The streets were blocked with four feet of snow so transportation was at a standstill. Finally in mid afternoon a special edition of the paper appeared, advising that the streetcars were not running and warning the travelling public that trains would be delayed for days to come.

Thus the month of October ended. November was likewise accompanied by several severe snow storms. There was little snow in December, but it was mostly cloudy and bitterly cold with temperatures reaching down to 40 degrees below and even on occasion to 60 below. It was especially hard on people who had to work outdoors, such as drivers for the local coal dealers. December was also remembered for the warmth and fragrance of Yuletide festivities. It was not until the first week of January that the sun

finally shed its light over the snow-laden streets of the city, but it offered little warmth.

Just after New Year's I was greatly excited upon reading this brief paragraph in the local newspaper: "*Miss Irma Fiorina, the celebrated Belgian soprano, will arrive in Winnipeg on Saturday January 8 to perform five concerts at the Winnipeg Theatre. She will entertain all lovers of music by singing ballads from the old country with her celebrated nightingale voice which has been heard and recorded the world over.*"

The following day Father Alfred came to visit Father Cherrier and asked to see me. Father Alfred had been in communication with Irma's uncle, Dr. Berthold, who was travelling with her. They had decided that Father Alfred would meet Irma and Dr. Berthold's train Saturday evening and take them to the St. Boniface Cathedral where Irma could familiarize herself with the church before she sang *Ave Maria* at Mass the next morning. Dr. Berthold told Father Alfred that Irma especially wanted to see me so he invited me to accompany him to meet the train.

Irma, queen-like as always, looked at me with friendly eyes as she stepped off the train. I tried to speak, but my voice failed me and I simply raised her hand to my lips. After Irma had visited the cathedral, Father Alfred invited us over to the college for a light lunch and a glass of wine. Irma had received a letter from her mother quite recently, so she was able to give me some news from home. I felt tears blind my eyes as I thought of my own poor ill mother. Would I ever see her again in this life? All too soon, it was 10 o'clock and time for Irma and her uncle to go to their hotel.

St. Boniface Cathedral was filled to capacity next morning with a crowd eager to hear Irma sing the *Ave Maria*. When she had finished, the congregation gave her a tremendous ovation, regardless of the fact that they were interrupting a High Mass. Then an old lady, seated in the front pew, called upon Irma to come down from the choir and sing another hymn. "This time," the woman continued, "face the congregation from the altar rail so that everyone can see your sweet features. I am an old woman and very near to the grave, and it might be the last time I will have the pleasure to hear someone sing with such feeling and such inspiring words."

Father Alfred rose and made his way up to the choir where Irma, facing the altar, was quietly praying after her song. He took her hand and led her down the stairs and up the centre aisle to the communion rail – despite the fact that he was setting an absolutely unheard of precedent that might create later difficulties in church matters. She began, unaccompanied, to sing a hymn in both French and Flemish. How the Mass ended, to this day I do not know.

Irma's first regular performance was at the Winnipeg Theatre at 8 o'clock on Monday evening, and we were all going to attend the concert at her special invitation. Ferdinand and I arrived early at the concert hall and were among the first to enter when the doors opened at 7:30. A small orchestra sat in the space between the stage and the first row of seats. On both sides of the stage were balconies built into the theatre walls. The first balcony almost overhung the stage and was so constructed that it appeared to be part of the stage itself. It was not until we heard the announcement that it was five minutes to curtain time that Fathers Alfred and Cherrier finally arrived to take their places beside us. The opening acts of the concert, two local singers who sang some popular songs, were received with a great deal of applause. Then Irma was conducted to the stage and introduced. She was dressed in an unadorned snow white dress such as Norma used to wear which enhanced her almost perfect figure. With infinite grace, Irma acknowledged the applause of the crowd and began her opening song, an operatic aria. More quickly than I could have imagined, the concert was over, ending with wave after wave of applause. It was certainly the highlight of the winter for me.^{xii}

Father Cherrier had horse and buggy, along with a cutter for winter use. On the days that he did not use his horse, I took it out for exercise. The horse was a swell, high-strung beast with a powerful and quick gait, so I thoroughly enjoyed my jaunts about the city with him. I would go down Main Street to the Fort Rouge Bridge, cross the bridge into St. Boniface and return home by way of the Louise Bridge. One calm, frosty afternoon I went out as usual. The horse was trotting at a good clip, without restraint from me. We passed through St. Boniface to the open fields beyond. Around 3 o'clock I turned at a crossroad and headed back towards the city. There were a lot of jack rabbits that winter, and several times one leapt out in front of my horse when it was disturbed in its shallow den beside the road by our passing. Invariably these lovely animals leapt ahead of the cutter for several hundred yards before they finally stopped to sit on their hind legs and look back with indignation at us because we had disturbed them. Apparently they trusted that their white winter coats rendered them invisible against the snow. They made their displeasure known by kicking the snow with resounding blows of their huge hind feet.

My horse had become a bit nervous after rabbits jumped onto the road several times that afternoon. Likely he had disturbed other rabbits which my eye did not even detect. He had quieted somewhat by the time we passed by St. Boniface College -- I suppose because there were fewer rabbits in the city. Soon we started across the Louise Bridge that stretched a quarter of a mile over the river. Looking down, as we reached the western end of the bridge, I realized how high I was over the frozen river. I noticed two men far to my right occupied in cutting ice to be preserved for summer use. From these men, my eyes followed the riverbank to where the Assiniboine River met the Red River. Both sides of the river bank were heavily treed and presented a beautiful scene with the tree branches covered with hoarfrost, not unlike glorious Christmas trees. It was quite unlike anything I was used to in Belgium, and in contemplating it, I neglected somewhat to mind my horse.

A square wooden dwelling stood on the river bank near the end of the bridge. As I drove by, two big black spotted dogs leapt out at my horse's head from behind the building. The horse staggered back from the attack and came perilously close to the steep embankment. Then, taking his bridle between his teeth, he reversed himself and ran towards the attacking dogs. Fortunately I did not have the lines wrapped around my hands because I suddenly was pitched out of the cutter and sent whirling down the embankment towards the river.

The masses of snow cushioned my fall, but I felt as though I had been shot out of a mortar cannon. I continued to roll and tumble until my flight was briefly arrested when I landed headfirst in a pile of snow covering something protruding out from the river bank. The next moment, I began to move again and, to my amazement, I found myself plunged into dirty warm water. I was only slightly bruised and would have been saved from further harm if I had not slipped while trying to stand erect and fell heavily striking my side on a big boulder under the water. The crushing pain made me feel as though my side was caved in. I struggled desperately to keep from fainting with the pain and to try to keep my head above water. "My God," I cried out in terror. "Save me from drowning. I don't want to die in this filthy water. Oh! God...have mercy."

The next thing I knew, I was lying on a bed with a woman in nun's habit standing beside it.

"You are in the Grey Nun's Hospital," the nun said in reply to my question. "Two men who were cutting ice on the river fortunately heard you calling for help, rescued you, and brought you here to the hospital."

I moved gingerly and was surprised that the effort caused no pain. "Am I badly hurt?" I asked.

"You have three cracked ribs. The doctor has bandaged them up and given you something for the pain. And now I believe you have a visitor."

I looked towards the door where Father Alfred stood.

"How did you know that I was here?" I asked in surprise.

“The hospital called me. They said a young man who had been rescued from the river and brought to the hospital was calling for me.”

He came over to my bed and took my hand. “What happened, Jerome?”

“Two big black spotted dogs jumped out at my horse just as we were coming off of the Louise Bridge. The horse ran away and I fell out of the cutter and rolled down the river bank. I hit something -- I suppose it was a sewer pipe -- and then I was in some dirty water. I called for help and two ice cutters rescued me and brought me to the hospital. I don’t know what happened to the horse.”

“That is all right. I called Father Cherrier as soon as the hospital called me. He was very worried because the horse and cutter had arrived home without you. The poor horse was covered with foam and still frightened, but one of the school boys found him standing at the gate. He immediately called both hospitals but neither of them knew of anyone injured in a runaway.”

Just then Father Cherrier arrived, but the nurse told me that I must not talk any more, so I lay quietly while Father Alfred recounted my accident to Father Cherrier. They then promised to tell the police about my accident, and said they would return the next day. The following day I was allowed to return home. Something had been bothering me ever since I woke up in the hospital, and I asked Father Cherrier if I could tell him about it.

“When I was about 12 years of age I was walking in my home town through a playground when I saw a crippled boy who was playing with some marbles. For some reason, I feared that a bully might come along and try to steal his marbles, but I did not stop to talk to him. I had passed the Cathedral and the cemetery when I heard a voice screaming for help. I felt that it must be the crippled boy calling for help, so I rushed back the way I had come and was able to drive away a bully who was threatening the boy. A few weeks later, I was walking the same way with my father and I told him what had happened. He said, ‘Your story is hard to believe because you could not have heard that boy cry for help if he was in the playground and you were here. Even someone with a powerful voice could scarcely be heard at that distance, and the boy has a very weak voice.’ I admitted that my father was right, but I definitely did hear a voice call for help.”

“The reason I tell you this story,” I continued, “is that the same thing happened the other day when I fell into the river. Before my accident I noticed the men cutting ice and they were definitely too far away to hear me unless I shouted. I know that I prayed to God to help me, but I was moaning rather than shouting. Father, we have to find those men so that I can thank them and also to ask them what caused them to come to my aid.”

I learned that Father Alfred knew who the men were, but he had been called to Montreal. As a result, I did not see him for almost a month. In the meantime, my ribs gradually healed and I was able to return to my full employment. As the winter dragged on, however, I became increasingly restless.

One day I decided to climb to the top of the church bell tower to look out over the panorama of the city. In the days that followed, I found myself frequently returning to the tower. I had lost interest in the city and found my eyes invariably drawn towards the open fields to the west or northwest. One afternoon Father Cherrier, moved by curiosity, climbed up the tower after me. He found me looking eagerly to the west and about to climb onto the balustrade. Conscious of my danger, he grabbed me around the waist and very likely saved my life.

“Jerome, what is this nonsense? You of all people committing suicide.”

I put my hand to my face and massaged it vigorously. “Thank-you, Father. You likely saved my life, but I assure you that I was not trying to commit suicide. I have been coming up here to dream about the West and to listen. Today my mind was singularly disturbed, and I rushed up here in response to a woman’s call for help. I did not listen with my ears but rather through my mind.”

“But the fact remains that you were ready to jump over the balustrade.”

“No, Father, but I felt the appeal for help so strongly that I was about to go to her aid over a tight rope cable which my mind saw stretched out from the tower to the Pacific Coast.”

“And as a somnambulist you would have stepped off the balustrade to your death. What I want from you, Jerome, is the solemn promise that you will not set foot in this tower again unless you have permission. In the mean time, I will keep the key.”

The same day, we received word that Father Alfred had returned from Montreal, and he asked that I meet him the following afternoon and take him for a sleigh ride. As it was mid March, it might well be the final sleigh ride of the year.

It was very pleasant with an azure sky dotted with a few white clouds gathered at the horizon. The wind held a promise of warmth after a long, cold winter. We said little until we had travelled out into the country. Then suddenly Father Alfred turned to me.

“I am sorry that I was called away before I had a chance to tell you what I learned from the men who saved you from drowning. They showed me the very place where they stood when they first heard the cry for help. Then we walked along the bank to where they heard the second call just as they reached the last bridge pier. It was only about a minute later before they found you lying unconscious on the boulder with the water just about to cover your mouth.”

“Did they see anyone else around who could have been calling?”

“They said there was absolutely no one else to be seen, and they believe that you must have lost consciousness just as they arrived.”

“In that case, I was rewarded for the help the crippled boy received from me. In both cases it was impossible to have heard the call for help.”

“I understand. The ways of Providence are often not the ways of Man. Also, I must tell you that the police checked the building around which the dogs that attacked your horse appeared. The dogs belong to the man living in that house. The man, who claimed to be at work when the accident happened, said that his dogs were chained out in the yard and accidentally broke loose.”

“Father Alfred, your words about Providence relieve me from a heavy burden of worry. Unhesitatingly I will pursue the destiny that I feel has been chosen for me. I am confident that I will be able to overcome any possible enemies.”

“That is well; however, youth is apt to overdo things. Keep in mind that Providence only assists the helpless, not those who deliberately throw themselves into unnecessary dangers. But there is another matter of which I wish to speak. Father Cherrier told me about the incident in the church tower and your restlessness. I do not believe that you were attempting to commit suicide, but I have a proposal to make to you. Between Portage la Prairie and Brandon is a large ranching area along the Assiniboine River. Part of it is a ranch which was bequeathed to St. Boniface College.^{xiii} A French Canadian couple named Violet runs the ranch, which is used as a vacation home for college students who have no family or who wish summer employment. I believe that ranch life would be very good for you.”

“When do you want me to go?”

“I am an old man who feels the need for rest, and I am fortunate to have an excellent assistant so I can retire to my beloved ranch at will. I propose that we both retire to the ranch almost immediately for a month. At the end of that time, you can choose either to return to Winnipeg or to remain at the ranch for the whole summer.”

“With Father Cherrier’s consent, I will happily accept your offer as it has always been my ambition to learn how to ride and to handle fire arms.”

^{xiii} Apparently St. Boniface College did own a ranch near Portage la Prairie at one time, but I have been unable to learn anything about it or find evidence that Jerome ever spent any time on a ranch in Manitoba.

Chapter Five: Introduction to Ranch Life

At 2 o'clock the following afternoon, Father Alfred and I left on the CPR continental train which carried us out of Winnipeg at 60 miles an hour towards Portage la Prairie. As I gazed out of the window, I saw that the past winter's extraordinary snowfall had left the flat prairies inundated by the waters of the snow.

As must be expected, I was excited by my upcoming adventure; but I still felt somewhat sad to leave Immaculate Conception and the dear people it contained. Even Madame Cherrier, seldom subject to emotion, wept in farewell. Finally Father Alfred pushed me into the waiting cab and we were on our way.

We reached Portage la Prairie in late afternoon and were met at the station by a smiling youth near my own age. "Hello, Father Alfred. Welcome to Portage la Prairie," he said. "It is a fine day and we will easily make the ranch before sundown."

Father Alfred replied, "Well Joe, I am glad to see you again," and shook hands cordially. "This is Jerome Ternier from Belgium. Jerome, this is Joe Violet. I hope you two will become good friends."

We shook hands. Joe said, "My father and I will be glad to have you. There is an awful lot of work on hand at the ranch." He eyed me for a moment and concluded, "And my mother will be glad to board and lodge a real swell from the city."

Father Alfred smiled. "In that cowboy outfit you look almost a man and able to ride as well as your excellent father. By the way, how are he and your mother? I hope she is as well and bright as ever. And are we going to have your mother's famous pancakes, despite it being supper instead of breakfast?"

"You bet, Father Alfred. My mother already had the batter started when I was leaving. Come along, Father and what's your name?—oh yes, Mr. Ternier."

"My name is Jerome," I said with a smile.

Joe looked at me, hesitating slightly. "Keep that smile for yourself, will you Jerome? It will certainly raise hell with my sister."

We loaded our luggage into the ranch buggy and we started out with Joe leading the way riding a snow white colt. When Joe and his horse met the ranch fence, composed of three strands of barbed wire, Joe simply rode towards the gate at a gallop and the horse jumped over. A short distance beyond the fence, he let the lines drop and came back to open the gate for us. Once we had passed through, he remounted and galloped on ahead and then back to us again. Joe could certainly ride and his colt could apparently take it. There was not a particle of sweat on his gleaming hide. Their pleasure in roaming over the prairie appeared mutual. They were friends, rider and beast. I began to admire the boy immensely.

I realized that my heart was beating very strongly, even exultantly. The virgin prairie was casting its spell on me. A sudden feeling of happiness came over me. I attempted to convey this feeling to Father Alfred who drove the buggy with a steady hand.

He smiled. "I am glad, my friend. No youth gifted with a heart could resist enthusiasm for prairie life unless corrupted by city life. Within six months you will thank me for giving you the opportunity to become a genuine gentleman of the prairies."

"Do you think it possible for me to learn to ride as well as Joe? What will my work on the ranch be, and do you think that they will let me ride with him sometimes?" I asked eagerly. Father seemed much occupied with driving the horses and didn't answer immediately. Finally, he replied. "You bet, Jerome, you will ride. As a matter of fact, you often will have to sleep in the saddle. There are 40 miles of fence to be repaired and constantly checked. Tomorrow at sunrise you will be in the saddle where you will remain for the whole day and perhaps for weeks. You often will wish to be in Winnipeg sleeping in a comfortable bed and being cared for by Madame Louise."

He paused and turned towards me with a mysterious air. "If you prove to be a good rider, I may intercede on your behalf. There is on the ranch another horse – a snow-white mare, sister to and exactly the match of Joe's stallion. I may get you that beast for your own use. It belongs to Joe's sister Marguerite, but since she is now at school at the convent I am sure that I can arrange things so that she will let you ride her horse while she is away from home."

The sun was sinking fast, and the western horizon glowed with a shimmering red. We heard the occasional howl of a prairie wolf in the distance. Father Alfred suddenly became alert and abruptly brought the team to a standstill. I looked about, wondering what the trouble was.

"Watch Joe," Father Alfred said. "Do you see that bit of dry cow manure on his left? There is a rabbit behind it. You can see both his ears. Joe will try to lasso him."

I held my breath. Joe suddenly twisted in his saddle and his lasso whirled through the air, catching the rabbit just as it realized the danger and tried to leap away. Triumphant Joe returned at a gallop, the dead rabbit suspended on the end of his rope.

"I got him. Nelly just had four pups and she is getting hungry for meat. Boy, oh, boy! Will she have a treat!"

"Joe, if you teach me to ride a horse and to rope game, I will teach you the tricks I know in exchange. I can do trapeze tricks, walk tightropes, and fence."

"You don't need to teach me how to fence. I bet I've built or repaired more miles of fence than you have ever seen."

When Father Alfred finally had stopped laughing, he said, "Wipe that disgusted look off your face, Joe. Jerome wasn't offering to teach you how to build a fence; he was offering to teach you how to fence with a sword." Without waiting for an answer, he continued. "Look, we have almost reached the ranch, Jerome."

The ranch buildings were situated in a steep ravine. A small creek, swollen with spring runoff, ran along the roadway. The creek, dammed with an earth dam built across the ravine, created a fine artificial lake right beside the log ranch house. Below the lake were the stables and corrals for cattle and horse. A second dam was constructed there to form another pond to water the livestock.

M. and Mme. Violet met us at the front door of the ranch house. At first glance, there could not have been more dissimilar couple. Mme. Violet, who was short and fair-haired, met us with voluble cordiality. In contrast, M. Violet, who was tall and dark-complexioned, gave the impression of quiet reserve and looked quite austere. He greeted us politely, but with a minimum of words.

Mme. Violet led us straight into the dining room and begged us to be seated while she brought the first platter of pancakes to the table.

"Excellent, Yvonne," Father Alfred said between gulps of coffee and of hot cakes. "I have always wondered why on earth I became a Jesuit. Why could it not have been my fate to have met a fair woman like you, gifted by the science of good cooking, fifty years ago? If I had, I would certainly have married."

Mme. Violet blushed and laughed heartily. The pancakes truly were delectable and literally melted in our mouths. Finally, when we were half-finished our supper, Joe appeared. It had taken him quite a while to take care of the horses.

"Hurry," ordered his mother. "We have again that gluttonous Father Alfred with us. If you don't hurry there will be no pancakes left."

Joe smiled, winked at Father Alfred, and sat down while his mother produced yet another platter of steaming pancakes. We all laughed, and M. Violet commented quietly, "It seems that your mother is unduly excited, Joe. I wonder if those people in Winnipeg, especially Father Alfred, ever receive sufficient to eat."

After supper Mme. Violet invited us into the enormous parlour next to the dining room. The spring night had turned cool, and a log fire burned briskly in the massive rock and masonry fire place which dominated one wall.

M. Violet soon came to the point. "What is your intention with this city feller here?" he asked Father Alfred, indicating me. "There is a lot of work on hand – fences to repair, soon calves to be branded and castrated. I hope he learns quickly. Since my brother's son Harry left, we have got horribly behind with our work."

Father Alfred replied, "I will let him speak for himself, but among his qualities as a hired man are the following. He can ring church bells marvelously. He is an excellent gardener – so excellent that many a quarrel exploded between Monsignor Langevin and me. Monsignor Langevin wished to kidnap my young friend and have him work at the cathedral. That is mostly the reason I wanted Jerome to be hidden on this ranch."

"I hope you will have no occasion to be unsatisfied with my work, M. Violet," I said. "I am strong and can learn quickly. I grew up on a farm where my father always had horses, and I learned to work hard. Naturally there are things I must learn; but learning will be agreeable, especially if Joe is my teacher."

"In that case you will do all right because you will find a good teacher in Joe. Tomorrow he will saddle you up on the old mare, and you will both spend the next few days repairing fences. Of course, if you become a good enough rider, we will find a better and younger saddle horse for you."

Although it was late before Joe took me to his room, which we were to share, at 4:30 the next morning M. Violet called us to get up to begin the day's work. I followed Joe's lead in dressing in overalls, riding boots with spurs, and an 8 gallon hat. Despite my efforts to hurry, Joe went downstairs about 10 minutes before I did.

I asked Mme. Violet, who was setting the kitchen table, whether I should go out to the stables where I assumed Joe had gone.

"No. Just wait and have your breakfast."

I protested, "There must be something that I can do. Do you have any cows that need milking? I looked after Father Cherrier's cow."

"Thank-you. You will find two milk pails on the fence outside, and Joe will show you the milk cows."

I found Joe in the stable. He pointed out two short-horned cows. "They are both quiet and easy milkers. I am certainly glad you will take over the milking. Mother will especially appreciate it now that Marguerite is gone to the convent, and father and I are too busy to help at this time of the year with calves and colts coming."

When we re-entered the kitchen after completing our chores, Mme. Violet had an abundant breakfast of bacon and eggs and steaming coffee ready for us. After breakfast Joe and I returned to the stable. While I was familiar with horses because my father always had a team on our small farm, I had never had a saddle horse. I admitted this to Joe who showed me how to saddle and properly mount the horse I was to use.

It was about 6 a.m. when we finally reached the top of a side hill from which we could view an immense plain covered with the rich grass known as prairie wool. In the distance a great chain of rugged rock and sand ridges were seen just beginning to be illuminated by the sunrise. It was spring time on the plains of Manitoba which stretched from the Red River Valley to Portage la Prairie and thence westward where there were thousands upon thousands of acres of fertile, arable land waiting for ambitious settlers to develop it into cattle ranches or farms. It promised to be a glorious day. Birds were already serenading us as they built nests in which to raise new generations. Prairie chickens quarreled over the selection of mates, the males fearing that there were insufficient wives for them all.

In the distance could be seen a herd of antelope, running gracefully over the prairie. Also in the distance, we heard the ghostly howl of the common prairie wolf. And of course there were thousands of gophers. The northwest wind was cool, however, as there was still some snow on the north sides of popular bluffs. Melting snow water rushed down ravines and temporarily transformed creeks into immense, swift-running rivers.

I was sitting in the saddle for the first time as a cowboy, trying to drench my lungs with fresh prairie air, feast my eyes on the plains, and enjoy nature's serenade. I decided then and there that my destiny was closely attached to virgin land. I was never cut out for city life, but rather for life on the Western Prairies or amidst the big game of the Rocky Mountains.

Joe dismounted and sat down on the grass. I joined him. It was as if he knew what I was thinking because the first thing he said was, "How do you like a country like this? Winnipeg is good for an occasional visit, but life on the ranch is my life."

I agreed enthusiastically. "Only two days separate me from Winnipeg, but I feel as if I had been born on the plains. Joe, I like this life immensely. You must teach me cowboy life from the ground up."

We soon were in the saddle again, and two miles along we reached the ranch limits where we found the fence down for several miles. Joe groaned. We went to a nearby willow bluff where we proceeded to cut about 100 fence posts from the straightest and thickest willows. Joe was much handier with an axe than I was, so I was kept busy gathering the posts and stacking them on the edge of the bluff. I then roped the bundles of posts together and had my horse haul them to where they were needed to rebuild the fence.

At dinner time we quickly ate the lunch Mme. Violet had packed for us. Afterwards Joe showed me how to handle the ten-pound crowbar to make holes for the fence posts which were about 3 inches in diameter. It was astonishing to see Joe dig the holes simply by setting the crowbar where he wanted the hole and then wiggling the bar slightly so that its sharpened end began to dig into the soil by its own weight. I caught on fairly soon, and we succeeded in repairing about two miles of barbed wire fence that afternoon. As the ranch encompassed a whole township, it would take us about two weeks to complete the fence repairs Joe estimated.

We returned to the ranch about 6 o'clock and immediately had supper. Afterwards, Joe went to the train to meet his sister, who was coming home from the convent for the weekend. Meanwhile, I milked the two cows and separated the milk while Mme. Violet finished the supper dishes. Father Alfred sat lazily in an armchair reading his breviary. M. Violet had gone out immediately after supper, but I didn't know where he was.

When I returned from feeding the skim milk to the pigs, Mme. Violet told me that it was customary on the ranch for everyone to wash and dress up somewhat for the evening. I retired to the room I was sharing with Joe and soon returned wearing lightweight pants and shirt with low shoes and a light woolen sweater.

"I promise you good meals whenever time permits," Mme. Violet replied when I told her how much I enjoyed her cooking. "And your help in milking morning and evening will leave me more time to attend to the kitchen." Then she cast a mischievous look at Father Alfred. "By the way, I am surprised that you did not complain, Father. There were no pancakes either this morning or tonight."

Just then M. Violet reentered the house and announced, "We had 16 new calves today. They are all strong and healthy but two of the cows had a hard time delivering." He sat down wearily, turned to me and asked how I had got along for the day.

"Very well, thank-you, but it took all my energy to keep up with Joe."

"And how do you like riding? Did that mare give you any trouble?"

"No, sir. In Belgium we have no cowboys, but some people are good riders, especially those in the army. I hope that I will learn to ride as well as Joe."

“I’m sure you will. Maybe you will be able to ride so well by the time of the Brandon stampede in August that you might be able to go and compete with Joe and win some prizes.”

Soon we heard a buggy drive into the yard. Mme. Violet rushed outside and threw her arms about her daughter as she got down from the buggy. M. Violet waited patiently until Mme. Violet and Marguerite had entered the house. Then he simply said, “How do you do, Marguerite. Welcome home. Look what we have here, Father Alfred and his protégé.”

Mme. Violet set out an abundant lunch and we again gathered around the dining room table. I tried to engage M. Violet in conversation about the heavy winter snow and the resulting inundation of part of the Red River Valley by flood water. At the same time, I furtively cast many a glance at Marguerite who sat next to her mother and talked to her with true French-Canadian vivacity.

Presently Joe broke in and asked point-blank what I thought of his sister.

“You’ve got me,” I answered, blushing hotly. “I have hardly had a chance to say a word to her. However, she is fair to look at with a striking resemblance to your mother. Her hands, though snow-white and well-kept, look very strong for their size. I think she must enjoy living here on the ranch and that she is anxious to sit in the saddle and roam the prairie. I actually feel as if she wants to ride right now as she is clenching her hands as if holding reins. I admit my opinion is a premature one, but under pressure there it is.”

Marguerite, who had been bent over her lunch, raised her head. Eyes gleaming, she scowled at Joe and said, “Joe, you go to bed. Where are your manners, asking a stranger for his opinion of me? Well, I will tell him the rest. I am a good cowgirl with my own horse which no one else will ride. My nose is straight and Greek-like and my mouth conceals a double line of ivory teeth.”

Mme. Violet interrupted. “Please, Marguerite. That will do. And Joe, you owe Jerome an apology.”

Joe mumbled something about it being a joke, and we both retired to bed. Joe fell asleep immediately; but I lay awake for some time, despite my long, tiring day. Marguerite Violet disturbed me. Undoubtedly she was high-strung. Her deep brown eyes and hair produced a vivid contrast to her fair complexion. Her finely-molded mouth looked ready to be kissed. Also, she had already twice mentioned her snow-white mare. I wondered if Father Alfred would manage to persuade her to let me ride it. Then I must have fallen asleep because the next I knew, my sleep was disturbed by a nightmare with Marguerite in it. She was teasing me, leading me towards the river, pretending that she wanted to commit suicide. Finally I fell asleep again, but I was glad to be wakened by Mme. Violet calling up from the kitchen that it was time to get up.

When I sat down to breakfast, the thought of Marguerite so distracted me that I ate almost nothing. Joe asked what the matter was. Mme. Violet smiled and looked through the window. We followed her glance and saw Marguerite gallop into the yard on her white mare. I was astonished to feel relieved when she entered the kitchen with her face aglow from exercise and pleasure.

“I had a wonderful ride, maman,” she cried exultantly. “I would have been back on time to help you with breakfast, but I caught a coyote chasing a rabbit right into the gully where two other coyotes were lying in wait to jump on it. I frustrated the brutes by outdistancing the first and chasing the two others. I’m sorry...but how hungry I am.”

Mme. Violet looked at me. “You had better take your seat again, Jerome, and finish your breakfast. It is a long time until dinner.”

That morning we were at the fencing again, but M. Violet had declared the afternoon a holiday since it was a Saturday and Marguerite was home.

It soon became routine to get up at four o'clock in the morning, do the chores, eat breakfast, and head out to begin the day's work between 6 and 6:30. I had asked Joe why so much of the fence was down, and he had explained that it was mainly because big game had tried to walk over snow banks hiding the fence. When they sank in the deep snow, they became entangled in the fence and tore it down while trying to free themselves. The long stretches we had to ride gave me an excellent opportunity to learn and practice cowboy style riding. At night I was tired from work and stiff from riding, but it soon disappeared. Finally Joe declared me to have passed the first stage in becoming a real cowboy, and the next morning he saddled up a livelier horse for me in place of the old mare.

A few days later on a Saturday afternoon we saw a storm brewing in the northwest. The rising wind was heavily laden with moisture, and the clouds were ominously black. Joe decided that we should head home immediately to help M. Violet drive the cows into the ravine where they could shelter from the coming storm in the brush. "We will either have rain or sleet before nightfall, and I would not be surprised if there are a couple of feet of snow by morning," he said.

We arrived home before the rain started. M. Violet asked me to do the chores while he and Joe went after the cattle. When I came in for supper, Father Alfred was slowly and painfully making his way down the stairs. He almost literally crawled into his armchair which sat beside the fire.

"Drat this weather," he grumbled. "I wanted to take the train home after Mass tomorrow, but I am afraid that you will have an invalid on your hands, Yvonne, if this weather persists."

When I went out to do the milking after supper, the ground was covered with sleet. After I finished separating the milk, I asked Mme. Violet if I could go to help Joe and his father. She said that I did not ride well enough, nor did I know the ranch well enough to be a real help. I was disappointed, but acknowledged the truth of what she said.

Father Alfred asked me if I could help him up the stairs as he wanted to go to bed. When I returned to the parlour, Marguerite was sitting by the fire doing some mending. It was only the second weekend that she had been home since I arrived at the ranch and it was the first time I had ever been alone with her. We talked quietly for a little while. Then she gave me such a look that I could not help but embrace her warm body and kiss her somewhat passionately upon her lips. She did not say anything but immediately fled upstairs.

Fearing that I had offended Marguerite, I found it difficult to get to sleep that night. Even so, Joe had not yet returned home when I finally did fall asleep. The next morning (Sunday) there was about six inches of snow on the ground, and the temperature was well below freezing. Because of Father Alfred's illness and the weather, we did not go to Portage la Prairie as planned to attend Mass and take Marguerite back to the convent.

Towards dinner time the wind changed from the northwest to the southwest, and the weather suddenly warmed. The warm breeze, known as a chinook, melted the snow like magic so that it was all gone by Monday morning. At dinner time M. Violet told Joe and me to ride over to the ravine to check if the overflowing creek might have endangered any stray calves. Marguerite, who had not yet returned to school, insisted on going along.

"Go first to that narrow gulch," M. Violet ordered. "Floating debris might block the natural flow of the creek there, forming a dam like two years ago. Remember how the water flooded to a height of 20 feet. Then when the debris let loose more than 20 cows and their calves were swept down the ravine."

Marguerite and I rode side by side. "What I wouldn't give for a swell mount like yours!" I said.

Her eyes glowed. "I'm glad you appreciate my mare. Father Alfred has already insinuated that I should let you ride her once in a while when I return to the convent. I flatly refused, but I have changed my mind now. I am going to tell him tonight that you may." Abruptly she gave her mare the spurs and sped towards the ravine, leaving me to follow as best I could.

M. Violet was right. The melting snow and ice had formed lakes of water which rushed turbulently

into the ravines, carrying stray brush and wood with them. The branches were becoming entangled and debris was piling up. As we watched, we heard a loud cracking noise and a fairly large poplar tree came into sight a few moments later. It turned about several times until it came to rest against the debris at right angles to the flow of water. Within minutes there was a solid wall through which scarcely a drop of water could pass. The water immediately began to rise behind the dam thus formed. We had to detour around the thick poplar bluffs growing on either side of the gulch before we could look into the actual gulch and beyond to the west. There everything looked peaceful. There was a panorama of ravines branching into the plains with grass just beginning to turn green. From where we sat on our horses on the east side of the gulch we were unable to ride down the steep side to where the swollen creek overflowed its banks. Looking across the creek we could see nearly 50 cows. Some grazed contentedly; others chewed their cuds and watched their calves jumping and running about. A few others were lying down in travail, expecting their calves at any moment.

Joe and Marguerite discussed what to do. Joe finally summed up their deliberations. "We can't possibly cross the creek to get to the cattle. The water is too wide and turbulent for even the horses to cross over. The only road to reach them is by way of the ranch which is 14 miles from here, and the dam won't hold that long."

I had been looking about while they talked. "Perhaps there is help possible if we go back to the other side of the dam. The gulch is only about 50 or 60 feet across there and its sides are almost straight with the high stumps of poplars cut over the winter on along the top. If you can lasso one of the stumps, Joe, I think I can cross over on the rope and chase the cattle onto higher land."

Joe hesitated. "It is too dangerous. Your life is more important than a herd of cows."

"Joe, either you throw that rope or I will try to cross over on the dam."

"Alright. The rope is definitely safer than the dam."

I looked for a pole while Joe threw his lasso over a sturdy stump on the opposite side of the gulch and secured the free end. Then I took the pole and commenced to twist it into the lasso until the rope was as tight as a violin string. Without looking at either Marguerite or Joe, I look off my riding boots, tied them to my belt, and stepped onto the rope. When I felt the rope bite into my feet, I dropped down so that my body was under the rope. Then, holding onto the rope with both my hands and legs, I then commenced to crawl across the gulch. Though it was not easy, I made it across without too much difficulty.

As soon as I had put my boots on, I picked up a stick and began to chase groups of cattle uphill from the creek. When I came upon a newly-born calf, I lifted it up onto my shoulders and its mother came running at my heels. As soon as I felt that we were sufficiently high above the creek, I dropped the calf unceremoniously onto the ground and went after two other cows which were lying down, apparently about to give birth. I drove them without mercy until they too were on high ground.

Finally, I had done all I could do. I was exhausted and laid down on the ground, wiping sweat from my face. I closed my eyes for only a moment. When I opened them, I was amazed to see that the land closest to the creek was already inundated. I had not even been aware when the dam broke loose.

I felt so exultantly happy over my success that I felt no harm would come to me and I proceeded to walk over the tight rope instead of crawling.

"That was slick. How do you do it," Joe asked as I stepped onto solid land.

"The same way as you are able to throw a lasso across a gulch and over a stump."

I looked at Marguerite. She sat on the ground, looking as though she might faint. I walked over to her, knelt down, and took her hand. "No, you don't," I said severely. "A girl like you must never faint."

She held her face averted from me, but when I took her hand she jumped up like a gazelle and

replied, "No, I will not faint. I will ride ahead and tell maman and papa what has happened."

I helped her into the saddle and she galloped off. Joe and I followed at a more leisurely pace as we had to check for cattle in several other places on our return to the ranch. It was almost supper time when we finally got back. Joe, sent me into the house while he took care of our horses, saying he owed me that much.

When I entered the kitchen, Mme. Violet was busy at the stove while M. Violet and Father Alfred sat on either side of it. M. Violet rose and shook hands with me.

"According to Marguerite you are quite the feller to look after things. I don't have to tell you what a loss it would have been to this family if those cattle had drowned. I thank-you sincerely for what you have done for us this afternoon."

I blushed with pleasure. "I only did what I could to help after Joe and Marguerite told me what had to be done."

When I had finished separating the milk that evening, I was called into the parlor where the Violets and Father Alfred were already sitting. I wondered what was coming. It was Mme. Violet who first spoke.

"Jerome, what we feared has happened."

Father Alfred promptly interrupted, "What I wished has happened."

I was confused and was on the point of asking what it was that they feared or wished, but Mme. Violet went on, "Jerome, look at me. You are among friends. Tell us truly. Do you love Marguerite?"

"That is a delicate question. I do feel that it was love that animated me to try to save your cattle. Without Marguerite's desperate concern for them, I would not likely have risked what I did."

"You dear boy," Mme. Violet said, tears springing to her eyes. "Yes, that is love. But with regard to marriage, both of you are so young."

"Marriage!" I cried in astonishment. "I honour Marguerite and I am very fond of her, but I assure you that marriage has not once entered my mind."

"Perhaps you do not realize the possible consequences, Jerome, of you and Marguerite being as constantly together as you have been since she arrived home. When she comes home for the summer holidays it will certainly be imprudent and awkward for you to be so much together."

I looked at Father Alfred, silently begging him to intercede. Finally he stood up and walked over to Mme. Violet.

"Sit down, Yvonne. I wish to confess a crime. It was my intention to throw these two young people together. I know Marguerite well. She is a high-strung young woman, worth her weight in gold. I feared that she might meet and fall in love with the wrong man. My friend Jerome would be an excellent match for her. I know that he is very young, but I believe that he is a natural gentleman and protector of women and that no harm will come to your daughter if you let them be together as they have recently been. Let us not talk about marriage for two years. If they love each other in the right way, their love will wait until then and will last into eternity."

I could see that Marguerite's parents received this proposal with relief as did I myself. I excused myself and went to bed. The emotional upheaval of the day could not override the exhaustion I felt from the day's work, and I almost immediately fell into a deep slumber.

The next day Marguerite had to return to the convent at Portage la Prairie, and I was permitted to drive her there. We arrived about midday. Portage la Prairie was only a cowboy town at the time, but

many people living in the area were devout Catholics so there was a small church and a convent on the main street near the railway station. I tied the horse and buggy to the rail in front of the hotel beside a magnificent palomino saddle horse. We admired the horse and its saddle.

“I wish that I could buy a horse like that. I wonder how much it is worth,” I said.

“Look at the saddle, Jerome. I bet the saddle alone is worth \$150,” Marguerite replied. “I wonder who owns this outfit. It is likely someone from one of the wealthy ranches south of here.”

We did not have to wait long to find the answer to Marguerite’s question, as just then a half-drunk cowboy about my age came out of the bar. He wobbled towards us and asked how much his saddle horse was worth to us.

“A hundred dollars,” Marguerite replied promptly. “You are Mr. Peter Brown’s son, aren’t you? I remember meeting you at the Brandon Stampede last summer. You certainly could ride.”

The young cowboy promptly took off his ten gallon hat. “I’m glad to meet you, lovely lady, and glad that you remember me. Yes, I am Peter Brown Junior,” he stammered. Then he turned to me. “Well, feller, how much do you want to pay for my horse and saddle?”

I considered. “\$150.”

“155.75 and the whole outfit is yours,” Peter Junior responded.

A bystander came up to me and said quietly, “Young feller, you better stick to your price. If you don’t buy his horse, Junior will sell it for half the money to the next man to come along. The saddle alone is worth your price.”

The drunken young man stood by. Finally he queried, “Are you game, feller, and do you have the cash on you? I am broke and owe the hotel \$20. Let us have a drink together and close the deal at your price.”

I excused myself to Marguerite and she nodded. We Belgians have never considered it a crime to drink a glass of beer, so I followed him into the bar. The hotel keeper himself was tending the bar. After a couple of drinks, I introduced myself to him and asked if he would accept my cheque.

“I would be glad to, only I must have someone I know to vouch for you since you are a stranger,” he replied.

I excused myself and went out to where Marguerite was sitting in the buggy. “The hotel keeper will not cash my cheque to pay for the horse because he doesn’t know me. Do you think that your father would guarantee the cheque until my money arrives from the bank in Winnipeg?”

“We don’t have to wait for my father. I know the hotel keeper’s wife quite well. I’m sure that he will let you have the money on my assurance.”

Marguerite was not mistaken. Mr. Blythe was only too happy to cash my cheque on her word, and the whole transaction was completed within a few minutes. Marguerite beamed with happiness, congratulated me several times, and asked if she might try out my new horse.

“You bet. You can take your choice – either this palomino or your white mare.”

The horse was magnificent, but Marguerite and I both feared that it was used to abuse and would need gentle handling to get used to us. I took it by the bridle and stroked its neck. Marguerite caressed its neck also and moved down its front legs, all the while speaking softly. It was beautiful to see how that girl could handle horses.

Soon the horse seemed much more relaxed and Marguerite mounted. For the next half hour she rode proudly around town and a little way out into the country. Soon many of her fellow convent students

were gathered around to admire the horse. Finally she halted beside the buggy.

“Jerome, what a lovely horse and what a lovely ride I have had.”

I helped her to dismount and she introduced me to her classmates. Then we walked along the street, feeling immensely happy in each other’s company.

Suddenly we heard a girl’s voice crying out, “There Sister, there she is with that fellow.

Instinctively we turned around and stood facing a nun accompanied by one of the girls.

“Marguerite,” the nun scolded, “what will your parents think if they learn that you are promenading the streets of Portage la Prairie with a young man and going horseback riding when you are supposed to be at the convent in our care?”

Suddenly she took a good look at me and stopped in confusion. At the same moment I recognized her. It was Sister Alphonse who had worked with Father Cherrier and me to clear the convent roof the night of the heavy snow.

“How do you do, Sister,” I said politely, offering my hand.

“Why, Mr. Ternier. How do you come to know Marguerite?” she asked.

“I came with Father Alfred to the ranch where her family lives, and I am now working for her father and learning to be a cowboy. Her parents asked me to convey Marguerite back to school today. She is not late for classes yet, is she?”

“No. Mother Superior was scandalized when Beatrice came running with a story about Marguerite and a young man. I will tell Mother that I know you from Immaculate Conception and that the Violets know you and it will be all right.”

“Sister, may I treat Marguerite and her friends to ice cream at the hotel? And you must come with us to be your pupils’ chaperone.”

“That is very generous of you, but I must return to the convent immediately to tell Mother what has happened.”

“But you will come right back and join us for ice cream, won’t you, Sister?” Marguerite said.

To my pleased surprise, Sister Alphonse agreed. I felt that it was a pity if a young nun would not be able to leave the confines of her convent to indulge in an innocent bit of fun with her students. Marguerite ran back to the hotel and asked if we could have an ice cream party in the parlour. Mr. and Mrs. Blythe agreed readily, and Mrs. Blythe offered also to be a chaperone. I paid for two gallons of ice cream and we had a merry party seated in a circle around the parlour. Finally it was time for the girls to return to the convent.

Everyone back at the ranch was suitably impressed with my new horse and saddle and how I had only paid \$150 for them.

Chapter Six: Summer on the Ranch

The month of May passed quickly. Around the first week of June the spring work of branding and castrating colts and calves and repairing fences was over. Every other day, Joe and I rode across the ranch checking on the cattle. Joe was also instructing me how to ride and how to throw a lasso about a young calf until I could do both as easily as he did himself. I finally was able to lasso a gopher sitting upright by his hole. These almost tame, streamlined and beautiful prairie rodents were very numerous. When on the lookout, they appeared in the distance like survey stakes set upright in the prairie wool.

One evening M. Violet asked Joe and I to join him on the ranch house veranda, which faced the beautiful artificial lake and the ravine. "I have been thinking that we should break 50 acres of prairie this summer and seed it to oats next summer," M. Violet said after we had sat in silence for a few minutes. "The problem is that we don't have sufficient horsepower to do the job. What do you make of it?"

Joe spoke up eagerly. "I think we ought to train those six two-year-old steers that we raised in the stable. They are already half halter-broken."

After some discussion, M. Violet agreed, and early next morning we rode out to where the cattle were grazing. Joe soon found the halter and stable-trained steers or oxen. "See, Jerome, they are the ones that keep on grazing as we ride up instead of moving away from us."

Within the hour, we had successfully roped the six oxen and tied them in a bluff. In the afternoon we hitched up a team of horses and drove back to get the oxen. We tied one ox along side each horse and the remaining four behind the wagon. With little difficulty, we managed to get them back to the ranch before supper.

The next day, without any ceremony, we hitched two of the oxen onto the wagon. They refused at first to make one step ahead, but Joe on horseback and I in the wagon holding the lines (both of us with whips) soon made them move. Then Joe kept them on the run until they were played out. The following day we hitched those two oxen on the walking plow and commenced to break land. Three days later we had two other oxen trained, and we hitched the four in line to a 14-inch sulky plow with a riding seat on it. Six days later, we finished training the last two animals and hitched the six of them in a full line on a 14-inch gang plow.

We decided that Joe would plow with the oxen from half past 3 in the morning until 8 a.m., leaving them to graze until 4 in the afternoon. Then I would work until half past 8.

It was a tedious job driving the plodding oxen but we did splendid plowing with them. At first we had to use the whip quite a bit, but the oxen soon understood that we were not out to abuse them and never made them plow more than six turns a half mile long each in the morning and the afternoon (or about four acres). These so-called lazy, slow-walking beasts became brightly intelligent. They commenced to pull the gang plow faster and faster – always trusting that we would not force them to make more than the usual six turns. One day Joe made the mistake of trying to make them do more. They figured it out. They hardly did the seventh turn, and Joe was flabbergasted when they went on strike and refused to begin the eighth turn by simply lying down in the field.

Joe had said nothing to me about it, but that afternoon I found the steers hiding in the bluff and experienced uncommon difficulty when I went to hitch them up. Then they walked more slowly than usual. That night I narrated my experience and Joe burst into laughter. "I know what the problem was. I tried to make them do eight turns this morning."

Every day after that we plowed the usual four acres, but the oxen never forgave Joe. They refused to walk any more with their usual pep, and I suspected that Joe commenced to drive them with the whip again.

One hot evening as I was plowing close to a bluff, I heard the howl of a wolf nearby. I halted my

oxen and went to see what was happening. A big male wolf had his front paw caught in a trap. He was ferocious, showing a double line of sharp teeth, so I could not approach him. I cut a green willow branch with my knife. In my haste to finish off that wolf, my foot caught on another willow and I fell headlong to the ground with my willow stick bent bow-like under my breast. When I lifted myself up, the willow stick straightened like a spring releasing. It grazed my chin and struck the howling wolf between the legs, breaking one of the beast's hind legs. The wolf, now realizing his hopeless situation, began to whine pitifully before I finished him off.

After that I decided that I would use a green willow stick instead of a whip if my oxen didn't want to go. On the second round the next evening, I tried it on an ox who wanted to lie down instead of work and that ox never played the lazy steer again. From that moment, I practiced shooting bowed willow sticks at various targets and became very dexterous with my new weapon of defense. The next time I was in town, I purchased a new pressure-drill spring from the local implement dealer. I also acquired six ropes of raw hide belting string which I literally embroidered around the steel spring, making what proved a dangerous weapon, especially when it was handled by experienced hands.

One day, Joe said to me, "Those oxen are half crazy in fear of something. In the mornings, they used to hide themselves in the ravine when they saw me coming. Now they come out of the ravine and walk quietly to the plow as if they wanted to hitch themselves up. It takes me hardly half the time to do my six rounds with them. Have you done anything to them?"

I smiled but did not explain my secret weapon. Two days later, however, Joe caught me in the act of killing a jack rabbit with it.

We worked exactly three weeks to do the plowing and one more week to disc it over twice. M. and Mme.Violet were so pleased with our work that they decided to celebrate. They invited M. Violet's brother, commonly known as Arsenal Bill, to come for a visit.

Joe laughed when he described his uncle. "He is quite funny, although he can be nasty at times. He was born 50 years too late. He should have lived in the American West during the heyday of cowboys on the open range. He looks like a cattle rustler. In his belt he carries half a dozen revolvers of all makes and on his saddle he carries two rifles. He is a good shot. I have never seen him miss a silver dollar tossed into the air. Actually his ambition is to join the circus."

I was very excited to meet Joe's uncle. When I was introduced to him the next Sunday, I soon discovered that Joe's description was accurate. Arsenal Bill was a stout middle-aged man, sitting in the saddle as if nailed to it. He was broad-shouldered and looked people straight in the eye. He sported a small, well-kept mustache and smiled easily.

Before entering the house, Bill toured the stables. He looked at my palomino. "Young fellow, I will give you \$300 for that horse and saddle." When I declined, he added eagerly, "And I have something else. I will teach you to shoot – first with a shot gun, then with a rifle, and finally with a revolver -- so you will never miss."

Not taking him seriously, I accepted his offer with a smile. The next day, however, I realized that he was serious when he commenced to set up an impressive shooting gallery in the yard before breakfast. After breakfast he handed me a shotgun and we went rabbit hunting. He proclaimed me a good shot. "Only you shouldn't hold that gun so hard on your shoulder. It will not explode or run away from you."

After supper we went out to the shooting gallery he had set up, and after an hour of practicing I succeeded in hitting the bull's eye a few times. Arsenal Bill had an excellent eye, his hand was steady on the trigger, and he seldom missed a shot. I began to worry that I would lose my palomino to him.

When I admitted this to Joe, he grinned. "For a long time, my uncle has wanted to give a gift to Marguerite. I bet you that your palomino will never leave the stables. Marguerite would certainly love it."

From that time on, I spent every free hour practicing my shooting with Arsenal Bill. The next Friday afternoon he quietly saddled up my palomino and tied it behind the buggy when he and M. Violet

drove to fetch Marguerite home from the convent. I was waiting on the porch when they arrived home. I could see that Marguerite was in unusual good humour as she came running towards me.

“Jerome, Uncle Bill has promised me your palomino if I pass my exams. It is as good as mine now.” She paused. “Why did you sell it? Did you know he was going to buy it for me?”

“Only indirectly. Joe told me that your uncle once told him that he wanted to buy a swell saddle horse for you, so Joe naturally thought the palomino was for you. There is no one but you that I would rather have my palomino.”

I smiled at her, and only her mother coming to call us in for supper prevented me from taking her in my arms.

“Well, well, must I see history repeat itself,” Arsenal Bill said after supper. “Marguerite will bear watching, Victor. This confounded fellow with his million dollar smile will have stolen her heart.” Bill then winked at me and handed me a cheque for \$300.

I protested, but he said, “Take it before I regret my offer. You are the only fellow I have met who is willing and eager to learn to shoot. Confound it; you will soon beat me at my own game.”

When Arsenal Bill next went to town he returned with 300 feet of 3-inch hemp rope. He called Joe and said, “I want you to help me to stretch this cable across the lake here. Get a ladder and select a suitable large tree on each side to secure the cable. Then we will use the threshing machine steam engine to stretch the cable tight.”

Then Bill looked at me and said, “I have heard from my brother Victor about how you saved the cattle from drowning. Now I want you to show me how you did it.”

I helped Joe and Bill to stretch the cable across the lake eight feet above the water. Then 12 feet from shore on each side of the lake we constructed a platform so that we could reach the cable. The cable also rested on the platforms for added support.

When we had finished all these preparations, Arsenal Bill said to me, “Now young feller, I will give you my two best and infallibly-accurate revolvers if you can walk over that cable.”

I smiled and said, “Just hand over those revolvers to Marguerite, and she will soon hand them over to me.”

I retired to my room to put on my bathing suit and my light rubber-soled shoes while Joe found me a long pole to use for balance. I climbed the platform and in a moment stepped onto the cable which dipped down to within four feet of the water. Then, holding my eyes on the opposite end of the cable, I walked steadily across. There was hearty applause from the watchers as I gained the far platform. Then I turned and walked the return trip, feeling so steady that I dropped my balance pole and completed most of the return trip without it.

I explained how it was easy to learn how to rope walk if you practiced over water so you had no fear of injury when you fell. Joe was all excited and immediately wanted to try, so I lent him my rubber-soled shoes.

“Now Joe, you just try to feel that cable with your feet. Just hold your eyes steadfastly on your goal across the lake and never look down at your feet. If you feel unbalanced, cast your pole to one side while you lean to the other.”

Before night, Joe had succeeded in taking ten steps on the cable before falling. The next day he was at it again, and soon he came running into the kitchen with his face flushed with wonder.

“I have done it. I got my balance suddenly. I feel sure that I will soon walk over that cable as easily as walking over a bridge.”

Only two evenings later Joe announced that he was ready to cross the lake. He climbed the tower and with unfailing steps felt his way across the cable to the opposite platform. We all applauded. I felt sure that Joe would never lose his nerve. He was as secure on the rope as he was sitting in the saddle.

On Sunday I remained at the ranch while M. and Mme. Violet, Arsenal Bill, Marguerite and Joe went to church at Portage la Prairie. I remained behind because Joe and Marguerite planned to invite their friends to come for the afternoon so I wanted to take care of all the little chores that ought to be done. About one o'clock I saw a cloud of dust in the south. Soon I saw that there were at least a dozen riders on horseback. I was already wearing my best cowboy dress and ran to saddle Marguerite's white mare so as to ride out to meet them. Marguerite introduced me to everyone.

Among the group, my attention was attracted to an elegant rider of about 19. He was tall and black-eyed with a weak mouth. He was the last to greet me and continuously struck his steed with his riding spurs. I did not like the fellow on sight.

Joe had told everyone how he had walked the cable over the lake, and the girls urged him to give them a demonstration. He started out very well but was too excited and lost his balance half way across, falling into the lake amidst peals of laughter. I felt sorry for Joe and Marguerite was close to tears. I went to Joe and quietly urged him to try again. He did, and this time he did it perfectly. Everyone gave him a salvo of hurrahs, which echoed the entire ravine.

After a cold picnic lunch for dinner, everyone donned their bathing suits and went back to the lake. It is impossible to describe the fun we all had. Around 4 o'clock we all insisted that Arsenal Bill should try the cable. He protested in vain and I got him at last onto the platform.

Bill was no coward and was always ready to try everything once, so when he finally stepped onto the platform he was determined to take at least a few steps. He made more than that. He actually got about a quarter of the way across (some 15 steps) before falling into the lake. His reaction was to swear that before he left for home he would master that confounded cable. He climbed the platform again. "Where is that balance stick? I am going to get across the lake even if I have to crawl over the cable."

We all watched him silently. He looked ridiculous staggering on the rope, but he reached almost the half-way point before he had serious difficulty. Then he struggled desperately to regain his balance. Finally, he let himself fall on the rope as I had done when going after the cattle and crawled to the other side. Joe swam out to meet him, and they swam back across the lake. Great was the enthusiasm with which everyone greeted Bill. The girls literally lifted him out of the water and kissed him. By this time it was late afternoon. Everyone went to get dressed, and Mme. Violet served a light supper. Usually I sat between Joe and Marguerite at the table, but this time the handsome young man with the weak mouth quickly sat beside me in Marguerite's place.

"Excuse me," he said with a sneer.

Joe and I immediately moved a little to the left and right to make space for Marguerite. Without a word, she slipped in between us instead of sitting next to the young man. He flushed angrily, but there was nothing he could do without creating a scene.

Under cover of the general conversation, Marguerite whispered to me, "You must not be angry, Jerome. Joseph is spoiled and headstrong. He took a fancy to me last year and he takes it for granted that I fell for him as well. He is extremely jealous and I think he will pick a quarrel with you after supper."

"I will not disgrace myself. He is a guest and as such I will respect him."

When Joseph saw Marguerite take my arm as we went down the porch steps after supper, he went into a frenzy of rage, shouting, "Marguerite is my girl and I order you to leave her alone."

I ignored him, releasing Marguerite's arm and moving away from the rest of the group. I heard him following me. I looked at the lake with the cable stretched across. Then I turned to face the young

man. "Joseph," I said, smiling at him. "Fighting like thugs has never brought people far, especially not invited guests."

That seemed to hit home and he hesitated, but he was still blinded by jealousy and suddenly he struck out at me. I was watching him and moved so that he missed me. The force of his blow nearly lost him his balance, but he quickly regained it.

"I won't miss this time," he cried passionately and struck out again.

Again I evaded his fist, but I intentionally fell flat, causing him to trip over my outstretched feet and knocking the wind out of him. I appealed to M. Violet and Arsenal Bill, expecting that they would step in to stop the fight, but they refused. Bill said. "This quarrel must be fought out to a finish and you shake hands afterwards."

"Look out, Jerome," the crowd suddenly yelled. Joseph had regained his feet. I whirled in time to avert another punch.

Joseph's black eyes glared hatred. "Marguerite is mine and I will thank you to keep away from her."

"You had better behave as a gentleman and not mention the name of our hostess in that way," I retorted.

It was no use to appeal to him. Rage and the disappointment took away any gentleman-like qualities that he may have had. I suspected that he might attempt some treacherous tricks. Involuntarily I put my hand to my waist and felt my 12-foot whip which encircled my body by way of a belt. I was relieved also to feel my spring-billy attached by a small snap to the end of the whip.

"Joseph, I do not want to harm you, but neither will I suffer humiliation from you. Let us quit and shake hands or you must fight me squarely."

"I will fight you any the way I want." He danced in from of me, trying to land an upper cut.

I caught him one on the face and we clinched. I got loose by a sudden twist and flung him onto the ground where he rolled towards the lake. He groaned and tried to get up. Suddenly he made a furtive movement towards a five-pound rock. The bystanders cried out to warn me; but before he could pick up the rock, I had unsnapped my billy. I snapped it at his ankles just as he was about to drive the rock full into my face. When the billy recoiled, he jumped into the air and fell back onto the ground, screaming with agony.

"I can't get up," Joseph cried. "I don't know what happened to my legs. They are paralyzed."

When he saw me walking towards him, he covered his face with his arms. "Don't hit me again. I am all in. What did you do to me?"

I bent down and felt his lower legs, relieved that he did not have a broken ankle. "Get up and we will help you back to the house. You are not seriously injured."

Marguerite and I got Joseph into the house and seated him in an armchair while Marguerite administered first-aid. There were no open wounds on his legs, but they were covered with bruises and he winced in pain when they were touched. "Believe me, I would never have used my billy on you if you had not taken up that rock to throw at me," I said.

Finally Joseph extended his hand to me. "I know that I deserved what I got," he admitted.

When I returned to the yard, Joe was explaining about my spring billy club to the rest of the group. Uncle Bill was in ill-humour because he hadn't been shown the club earlier. "Young fellow, I have met

some strange men in my life, but you beat them all," he said to me.

The cattle and young colts were doing extraordinarily well that summer. We had drenching rains when we needed them, making the livestock easy to look after since there was plenty of tender grass covering the plains. Haying time was fast approaching so we hurried to make certain that hay racks and mower were in good order. M. Violet was in continuous good humour as he loved haying time. We certainly did not want to miss the long-promised Brandon Stampede, and haying had to be completed beforehand.

Haying began with ideal weather. Finally one day M. Violet announced that we would be done haying in three more days if there was no rain. It looked doubtful, however, as masses of moisture-laden clouds began to darken the western horizon early that evening. Fortunately the wind picked up, scattering the clouds. As a result, we only had scattered showers, which missed our hay fields.

We finished haying on a Thursday afternoon, 10 days before the Stampede was to begin. The next morning we commenced to practice. Customarily each ranching district performed stunts at the exhibition, and Joe and Marguerite had been selected to represent their district. We practiced from morning to night -- Joe on his white stallion, Marguerite on the palomino, and me on her white mare. As well as riding, we practiced pistol and rifle shooting, and roping. Marguerite became so skilled with her lasso that she could inscribe her initials in the air with it.

We selected the palomino and the white mare to perform a rope walking stunt because they were both such powerful, steady horses. At the beginning, they invariably moved when we tried to walk on the rope stretched between their two saddles. Finally Marguerite succeeded in making her horse understand what was expected from him. From that moment, he held his ground and soon the mare did as well, as if not wanting to be humiliated.

The day before we were to leave for Brandon, we all laboured feverishly to be ready on time. It was arranged that Joe should ride over to fetch Marguerite's friend Hilda who had been invited to go with us. It was no secret that Joe was sweet on Hilda. I helped M. Violet to outfit the ranch democrat wagon with a canvas cover and to install two spring-mounted benches which could be quickly converted into double beds.

At four o'clock the next morning we were on the road. From Portage la Prairie to Brandon was a full two-day trip. The first night we camped along a creek branching from the Souris River where we met several outfits from other ranches already in camp. It was a glorious night. The moon was almost full, and the air was so still and clear that with our naked eyes were able to see the mountain ranges and extinct volcanic craters on the moon.

The men bedded down in a tent while the women slept in the democrat. Next morning everyone was up very early to eat a breakfast of bacon and eggs. Joe, Marguerite, Arsenal Bill and I rode our horses while M. and Mme. Violet and Hilda followed in democrat. Hilda had her horse with her, but she had been ill so she agreed to ride in the democrat most of the way -- only riding fresh and triumphant the last stretch into Brandon.

M. Violet had reserved hotel rooms in Brandon, but not stable place for our horses. As a result, about 10 miles out of Brandon those of us on horseback rode ahead of the democrat to find a place. As we arrived at the edge of town we were accosted by a young man who looked with equal admiration at Marguerite and at her palomino. He asked us if we needed a place to stable our horses and someone to look after them overnight.

I saw Bill measure the young man carefully with his eyes. "What are you doing here without a horse?" he asked.

"I had a few days off coming to me and asked my boss if I could borrow a horse to come to the stampede. He refused and fired me when I said that I would go anyway. I rode the rails on a freight to get here. I know a widow woman named Mrs. McKay who wants to rent out her stable during the stampede. I can

take you to her if you like. Your horses are too valuable to be left alone. I would be very honoured if you would trust me to guard them overnight. I will sleep in the stable with them.”

The stable was clean and tidy with a supply of good hay and close to a stream. Bill had known Mrs. McKay’s husband, so he quickly agreed to rent the stable. He also agreed to hire the young man Tom, when Mrs. McKay said that she had known him and his parents for many years and that he was a good worker.

By the time we had finished our arrangements and returned to the edge of town, the rest of our party in the democrat was just arriving. The Violets told us young people to go off and enjoy ourselves while they got settled at the hotel and had supper. Joe and Marguerite had explained to me that today was known as “Scotchman’s Day.” Admission to the grounds was free and everyone turned out to watch preparations for the grand opening, which would take place the next morning.^{xiv}

The four of us walked around the bustling stampede and fair grounds arm and arm, excited and happy to be alive. Most exciting was to see men erecting the gigantic big top tent where the circus would take place. Men and women were also preparing the church booths that would serve hundreds of meals throughout the stampede. Men were setting up tables and chairs and hauling stove wood, while women were covering the tables with cloths and dishes and mixing batches of bread. Lineups of people were waiting at the exhibition building door to register their entries of livestock, grain, garden produce, and home crafts. Also, merchants were setting up their displays of the latest farm machinery and household goods. We ended the evening by stopping at a restaurant for dishes of ice cream.

At 10 o’clock the next morning we entered the stampede grounds. We registered, giving our names and the number of our district to the officials, and proceeded to parade our horses up and down so that the crowds could look them over. Everyone watched Marguerite and her horse with admiring eyes. They made a glamorous pair indeed. Marguerite wore a beautiful riding costume made by her mother and glittering cowboy boots with gold and silver spurs.

By this time it was noon so we went to have dinner. Then we spent the afternoon on the stampede grounds where an immense crowd gathered to watch the events. Joe was successful in bronco riding, and Marguerite placed second in calf roping. At five o’clock the stampede events were over for the day. The manager of the circus arrived just before five to say that all the local riders and their horses were invited to take part in the circus parade that would start at eight o’clock that evening.

Joe, Marguerite, and I all wanted to be in the circus parade, so we hurried to eat supper and get ready. Bill looked at the western horizon and shook his head. “I don’t like the looks of those clouds or the feel of that wind. We could be in for a bad storm.” We were far too excited to worry about a storm though. By a quarter to eight the parade was forming up behind the main circus tent. The circus performers came first, followed by the local cowboys and cowgirls. The parade began promptly at eight o’clock. We entered the big top and slowly marched around. The tent was so tightly packed with people sitting on benches encircling the outer walls that the parade almost brushed the audience. After the parade was over, all the local participants were led to a reserved bench to watch the rest of the circus performance.

The circus had no elephants or lions, but they did have trained horses and dogs. The performance began with a splendid display of horsemanship. Even over the sound of music and applause, however, we could hear the sounds of wind and thunder from the approaching storm. M. Violet and Bill got up and slipped outside. A few minutes later they returned and Bill approached the ringmaster who stood in the centre ring with whip in hand and high hat on his head.

The ringmaster looked annoyed to be interrupted, but he listened as Bill spoke quietly to him. Then he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, attention please. I am sorry to say that we will have to interrupt the show briefly. There is a thunderstorm outside as you can hear and possibly a tornado coming. Please remain seated. I want all the male performers to go out and check that the tent pegs are secure and to weight down the edges of the tent with any heavy wagons or whatever they can find.” He turned to Uncle Bill. “Now this gentleman has something he wants to say.”

xiv The first Brandon Fair was held in 1882 and “Scotchman’s Day” was a feature of it.

Bill stepped forward. "All men who have horses and ropes just outside the tent go and bring your horses inside. Everybody else please stay put."^{xv}

A group of us rushed outside to fetch our horses. There were three main poles supporting the tent's roof. Bill ordered three of us to secure our lassos about the top of each pole and to secure the free ends to our saddle horns. The wind was rapidly increasing in strength and almost certainly would have toppled the tent within a few minutes without our efforts. The rain began coming down in floods and began seeping under the tent, but the walls held steady.

Everyone sat perfectly still in the bleachers except for Bill, the ringmaster and the nine riders holding down the tent poles. The storm only lasted about half an hour but it seemed an eternity. When the storm was over, the ring master announced that the show would continue after a few minutes delay while they covered the wet ground with more sawdust. Then the circus ponies and riders began their performance. The ponies acted almost human in understanding what was expected of them. Seeing them, it is hard to deny that these intelligent animals possess a soul. While they were performing, the circus hands checked that the high wires were secure.

Soon a beautiful young lady with snow white arms and legs and clad in colourful tights appeared. There was a murmur of admiration from the crowd when she climbed a platform almost 20 feet above the ground and began swinging from the cable from which she was to do high wire walking. The band broke into a lively march and the young lady began her performance. At first she held an umbrella for balance, but she soon discarded it. When she crossed over the wire the second time, I smiled with the sheer joy of seeing such a wonderful performance. Then she hesitated and appeared to be panic-stricken. A young man, who had been gazing intently at her throughout her whole performance, spoke words of encouragement to her and she completed her third crossing. A moment later, she slid down to the ground where the young man threw his arms around her and hugged her tightly. Moments later, she turned and bowed to the audience and left the ring with the young man. The band continued to play and the trapeze artists began to perform admirably. When the last act was over, the ringmaster announced that a public reception would be held at the Manor Hotel to introduce the principal performers.

The next morning's stampede events were slightly delayed by the heavy rain of the previous night, but by the afternoon the ground was dry enough to continue because most of the rain had run off instead of soaking into the ground. Joe and Marguerite both performed their roping tricks very well. Then Marguerite, Joe and I performed together. My horse and Marguerite's held a lasso stretched tightly between them while Joe and his horse stood under the middle of the span formed by the 150-foot lasso. I mounted Joe's horse behind him. Then I stood up and began walking over the rope I loved so well. I felt so happy and secure that I used my hat to salute the audience. Marguerite clapped her hands and I threw her a kiss as I reached her end of the tight rope. Then I turned back to Joe and slipped down behind him on his horse while he took my place on the tight rope. He walked across and we traded places again for me to walk across a second time.

By five o'clock the next morning, we were at the stable getting our horses and democrat rig ready to leave for home. We had an enjoyable trip back to the ranch with everyone talking over their experiences. I had decided while I was in Brandon that I wished to see more of Canada, so I told the Violets that I planned to catch the transcontinental train for Vancouver right after harvest. The next day, Marguerite told me that she was going to boarding school at St. Mary's Academy in Winnipeg in September instead of returning to the convent at Portage la Prairie. "You are not the only one who can travel," she said.

The night before Marguerite was to leave for Winnipeg, Mme. Violet made a very special supper. I noticed, however, that Marguerite was very quiet and did not eat very much. Then, just after dark I saw her slip out the back door of the house. I waited a few minutes and slipped out after her. I could see her walking slowly down the road and soon caught up with her. "Marguerite, what is the matter? Don't you

xv In Jerome's manuscript, he is the one who hears the approaching storm, asks the ringmaster to stop the performance, and directs operations to secure the tent. Also, when the trapeze artist loses her nerve and can't complete her act, Jerome, Joe, and Marguerite save the day with a performance of their trick riding.

want to go to school?”

“Yes, but I will miss my family and you. I will be true for your sake, Jerome, but I didn’t expect that we would be separated so soon” she said. “I understand well that we are both too young, but I will always be glad that we met. Oh, I do love you so.”

“Marguerite, dear, I will never forget you. If Providence wills that we were born for each other, then all the powers in the universe will not keep us apart in the future. I promise that if I ever marry anyone but you it will only be because I know that you are already happily married.” We kissed tenderly, and then Marguerite quickly broke away and ran back to the house. Next morning I saw her briefly over breakfast before her parents drove her to catch the train into Winnipeg. We were kept so busy with harvesting for the month after Marguerite left that I scarcely had time to miss her, but finally we were finished in the last week of September. I made arrangements to leave for Vancouver on the transcontinental train on October 1. I had spent much of my summer’s earnings buying an entire new outfit for the trip – a western-style suit, a hat between a derby and a Mexican in style, and expensive new cowboy boots. My precious spring sling was wrapped around my waist without betraying its function as a weapon, and Arsenal Bill had taught me how to carry a revolver secreted in an inner pocket.

Joe had promised to drive me to catch the train, and we left promptly at six o’clock on October 1. I cast a last look at the ranch as we reached the top of the hill and said a silent farewell to it and the dear people who lived there. I was excited about leaving and anxious to see the rest of Canada, but I would miss all the Violet family.

Joe and I didn’t speak until we had almost reached town. Then he suddenly burst out. “I thought you liked ranch life. I don’t understand why you want to leave.”

“I love ranch life, but I want to see more of the world before I settle down. I will be back. Perhaps Marguerite and I will even marry some day and settle down on a ranch nearby.”

A few minutes later we pulled up at the station. By the time I had bought my ticket, we heard the whistle announcing that the train was coming.

Chapter Seven: By Train to Vancouver

The train boasted four express and mail cars, dining and observation cars, two sleepers, two first-class and four tourist coaches, and a caboose. The conductor found me a seat in the last tourist coach. We arrived in Brandon, where there was a 40 minute stop, in mid morning. It was a long time since I had had breakfast, so I went into a nearby restaurant for coffee and pancakes. It was crowded so I had leisure to look about while I waited for my meal. I noticed two big men seating themselves at a table by the kitchen. While they were dressed well enough, I concluded at first glance that they were ruffians. It was written on every line of their features. Two young women entered just after the men and were rudely rebuffed when they tried to join the men. The women headed directly to my table and asked if they could share it. I did not like their looks any better than that of the men, but I could hardly refuse since the café was so crowded and I was alone at my table. A young man at the next table was already measuring my new breakfast partners, and he had the nerve to smile at me and give me a wink.

At last I was served. I drank the coffee but scarcely touched the hot cakes because it was getting close to time for the train to leave and I did not relish spending any more time than necessary with the women. When I had regained my seat, I was annoyed to find that they, along with the two ruffians, were coming into my coach. Even worse, the women appeared to be heading straight for the seat facing me. The young man who had winked at me in the restaurant had also entered the coach and smiled sardonically when he saw what was happening.

One of the women was pretty, but she was dressed almost in rags. She kept her eyes averted almost as if she were ashamed. The other was a bold, staring creature. She was so close to me that I could smell the nauseating odour of stale gin. She grinned at me. I felt a sudden loathing which must have been expressed on my face and blushed furiously. Without thinking, I jumped up, grabbed my hand bag from the overhead rack, and walked away. It was not until then that I looked about to see if there was another place for me to sit. The only empty seat was opposite the young man from the restaurant, but anything would be better than sharing a seat with those women. Sitting next to the young man was a middle-aged man. The two were very different in appearance. The younger, possibly in his mid-twenties, was handsome with very intense blue eyes. But no one would have described the older man as handsome. He was tall and wiry in build with a lantern jaw and a severe expression. I apologized for disturbing them and asked if I could sit with them.

The younger replied, "Not at all. Make yourself comfortable. I take it you do not find the society of those young ladies congenial."

"Ladies my eye! What can a fellow do when he is confronted by the presence of beauty trampled by neglect and chaperoned by brazen effrontery and downright ugliness?" I was so incensed that my voice carried farther than it should have. Many people looked curiously towards me, and the brazen woman was flushed with rage. She half rose from her seat and appeared about ready to strike me with her umbrella.

The older man looked at her and said, "Lady, you had better keep that umbrella home. We don't appreciate any disturbances on this train."

"That fellow insulted me," she replied indignantly.

"The truth is often a bitter pill to swallow," the older man replied. Then he turned to me, "Sir, I think you owe that lady an apology no matter what you may think of her."

Everyone in the coach was now staring at me and the woman. I realized that I had gone too far and drawn unwelcome attention to myself, so I grudgingly said, "I am sorry. My remarks were uncalled for."

The woman glared at me but said nothing.

Both of my seat mates handed business cards to me. The older man's card identified him as Inspector William Robertson of the NWMP while the younger man was Constable Harry Mackenzie. Somehow it

did not surprise me that these men were police officers, but I wondered why they were telling me because it appeared that they were travelling under cover. I introduced myself and was shocked when Constable Mackenzie asked if I had been in any scrapes since my accident on the Louise Bridge the previous winter.

“How do you know about that?” I asked in amazement.

“I know Father Alfred, so he asked me to look into your accident. I located the dogs and their master, who is a respectable working man. He claimed that either his dogs had broken loose by accident or that some stranger had freed them. There was no evidence against him and no apparent reason why he should have wanted to attack you.”

“Thank-you for your help,” I answered. “May I ask where you are travelling to?”

“We are being transferred to Dawson City,” Constable Mackenzie explained. “It is quite a place. It has been booming since the recent Klondike gold rush. They are finishing the 120 mile White Pass and Yukon Railway, and already three coastal boats are plying between Seattle, Vancouver and Skagway.”

The train was speeding along at 40 miles an hour. The day was bright and unusually hot and sultry for early October. We opened our window and felt the breeze with relief. As our train neared the town of Virden, Inspector Robertson left his seat. Constable Mackenzie handed me a deck of playing cards. “The inspector is a good hand at cards,” he said.

I looked puzzled.

“As I say, the inspector is a good card player,” he repeated, laughing.

I frowned, “A card shark?” I suggested.

“Hardly that. I’ll explain. On these transcontinental trains you often find card sharks travelling. In order to stop the practice, the police have scattered a few members who can out-slick the card sharks. Inspector Robertson is one of the best. Before we reach Vancouver, I expect that we will be invited to play. Then you watch and keep your mouth shut.”

Shortly after stopping to take on water at Virden, two well-dressed swells entered our coach. They smiled in a friendly manner. “Gentlemen,” they said, “we won’t be in Regina for several hours yet. Would anyone like to join us in a game of cards?”

Inspector Robertson and Constable Mackenzie said that they wouldn’t mind and introduced themselves as a couple of real estate men. The porter, always on the watch for extra tips, appeared with a small card table and set it up. Robertson expertly shuffled the cards and cut them. The four men commenced to play. At first they played cautiously and the pot remained small. Soon, however, I noticed that our inspector was a very nervous player. It was incredible how his hands shook. Even his cigar seemed nervous. It was constantly going out and being relit as well as moving from one corner to the other of his mouth. Two pencils, a red one and a white one, protruded from his coat pocket; and even they seemed to shake. I noticed that he had moved his cigar to the left corner of his mouth and that the red pencil was now in his left pocket instead of his right. I suddenly realized that the location of the cigar and pencils must be some sort of signal. Gradually the inspector raised his bids. Finally Harry Mackenzie and one of the swells dropped out.

“I double you,” the remaining gambler said to Robertson and threw a 20 spot into the pot. Promptly Robertson added \$40 and the other doubled it yet again.

The gambler laid his cards down. He had four kings and a ten. Robertson calmly laid down four queens and two aces. Several onlookers gasped in awe. A deadly silence followed.

Finally Robertson said calmly, “Gentlemen, the train is due in Regina in a few minutes, so I am afraid that our game must come to an end for the moment. Any time you want to renew the game, however, I am at your service.” He then pocketed more than \$250.

The swells glared at him, but responded that they would gladly challenge him to another game. The brakeman entered to announce that there would be an hour's stop in Regina. Most passengers prepared to leave the train. I observed the ugly girl follow the swells. On the instant Inspector Robertson went over to speak to the younger girl.

After learning that her name was Lizzie Bergrote and that she was travelling to Vancouver to meet her aunt and look for work, Robertson said, "Miss, that girlfriend of yours is bad company. I just won over \$200 in that card game. What do you say to accepting a loan of \$100 so you can get away and start a new life?"

She looked suspiciously at Robertson.

"I don't want anything for the money. All you have to do is pay it back when you can by assisting another woman in need. My young friend here will help you find a department store where you can buy some new clothes when the train stops."

The girl looked at me, and I smiled encouragingly at her. Suddenly she seemed to make up her mind and jumped to her feet. "I accept, but we must hurry before Henrietta gets back."

Robertson handed me \$100 and we quickly made our way off the train, through the station and onto the street. Fortunately there was a big department store across the street.

We entered and made our way to the ladies department where a middle-aged sales clerk came to assist us. I explained that the young lady had lost her luggage and required a complete new set of clothing before the train left in an hour's time. The clerk took her in hand and I sat down on a bench to wait.^{xvi} A half hour later she reappeared. I gasped in astonishment. Lizzie had washed her face and combed her hair, and she was dressed in a neat green dress, a small matching hat, and shining brown shoes. In her hands she carried several small packages, an umbrella and a handbag.

As we left the store, we saw Harry beckoning to us from a nearby restaurant. When we entered Inspector Robertson was finishing his dinner. He looked as surprised as I did by the transformation Lizzie had undergone, but he only said, "Hurry and eat. The train leaves in 20 minutes, and your dinner is getting cold."

We didn't see Henrietta until we had returned to our coach. "Oh there you are. What are you doing with these men? Did they kidnap you? ...and those new clothes. Where did you get them? ...Oh, I know it all. These men gave you the dough....but at what price?" She gave an extremely vulgar laugh as she said this.

Lizzie said nothing but looked at us pleadingly. Robertson took charge.

"Lady, if you could convince me that a tinge of decency was left in you, I might have been tempted to loan you some of my poker winnings too. I have no doubt that Lizzie will put it to good use in starting a new life. There was no price. All I ask is that she pays me back by loaning the money to another woman who needs help some time in the future."

Henrietta laughed sardonically. "And you expect me to believe a story like that? Men don't pick up girls and give them money and expect nothing else."

"I don't care what you believe," he said, looking at her with steely eyes. "If Lizzie wishes it, she will remain under our protection until we arrive in Vancouver. I will deliver her to my mother's home in Vancouver, and she can stay there until she finds suitable employment."

"Lizzie, don't let these men take advantage of you. Come back with me. We'll have a good time," Henrietta said, looking greedily at her.

"You must decide, young lady," Robertson said.

xvi In the manuscript Jerome assists Lizzie in her shopping, acting like a fashion consultant.

Lizzie stood up, "You deceived me, Henrietta. I am through with you. I will trust these gentlemen a thousand times more than you."

"We will see about that," Henrietta said angrily and stalked out of the coach, leaving her meager hand baggage behind in the overhead rack. Just after the train started to move we heard a commotion and saw Henrietta walking towards us followed by the two card sharks.

Robertson said, with cold politeness, "So we meet again, gentlemen. Would you like to squander some more money at cards?"

"No, we want that girl."

"I am afraid that question has already been settled. Just ask her."

Lizzie spoke up. "I do not know you. Henrietta lied to me. I do not want to go with you."

"There, gentlemen, you have your answer," Robertson said.

"Answer, my eye. This girl is Henrietta's kid sister. Henrietta is responsible for her, and she is coming with us."

There was a short struggle, punctuated by a lot of cussing. Then, before the men knew what was happening, Robertson had both of the men manacled. From my seat I watched while Lizzie clutched my arm in fear. The younger man also looked fearful, but the older one arrogantly asked, "On what grounds can you arrest us and by what authority?"

"For white slavery, of course, and on this authority," Robertson said showing his identification both to the card sharks and to the porter who had come to see what the commotion was.

"White slavery! You will have the devil of a time proving that."

"I presume that a wire to the Winnipeg police department will bear me out. On the other hand, if you promise to leave this young lady alone, I might let you go. I suggest that you not show your face in this coach the remainder of this trip."

The card sharks and Henrietta had no choice but to give in, and they all left the coach.

The afternoon got hotter and hotter as we passed through Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Maple Creek and Medicine Hat. People started talking about the likelihood of an electrical storm because it was so hot and humid. The temperature had reached 98 degrees. Medicine Hat, I was told, was a city of 4,000 inhabitants, centre of rich clay and coal deposits and on the brink of industrial development, especially in pottery manufacturing. We had a 10 minute stop at Medicine Hat, only long enough to allow the trans-continental travelling east to go past us.

In late afternoon we arrived in Calgary where we had a light lunch. It was regrettable that our train would pass through the Rocky Mountains during the night. I had been looking forward to seeing them. When the train left Calgary, I felt strangely unwell. It was not just the heat. My mind was uncommonly restless, and I felt that I was being warned of some approaching danger. I gazed out of the window at the distant panorama of the mountains. Black clouds travelled rapidly towards us and almost continuous lightning flashed from the northwest. Suddenly clouds rendered the mountains invisible. A few minutes later the mountains and sky were again visible through broken clouds. Now the rain began to fall in torrents. After about 20 minutes, the train crossed a low vale on tracks elevated on an earthen dike. The whole vale was flooded with two or three feet of muddy water which poured in from ravines and gullies on all sides. When I saw some huge floating timbers, which looked as if they could have come from a bridge, I panicked. Without reflecting about the consequences, I jerked the brake signal cord twice. The train stopped so suddenly that astonished passengers were rudely thrown to the floor or into each other's arms.

The conductor appeared almost at once, and I called him to look out of the window. "Look at that

timber,” I said. “It looks like it might come from a bridge.”

“There are no bridges for 20 miles at least,” the conductor said severely.

The engineer and the brakeman had appeared by this time. The conductor explained that I had stopped the train because I saw a floating timber and thought there was a bridge out. Like the conductor, they said that there was no bridge for miles and that I should not worry. I was not satisfied. As the train picked up speed again, I anxiously kept watching the flood waters for more timbers. The next thing that I saw, however, was an animal climbing onto the elevated track some distance ahead. I took out my binoculars and saw that the animal was an antelope followed by two coyotes. The antelope soon out-distanced the coyotes by running easily along on the hard-packed verge. Suddenly, however, the antelope skidded to a halt and looked around wildly before jumping down on the opposite side of the embankment from that which he had come.

I was amazed. The track embankment had certainly seemed a life-saver to the antelope. Why would he leap back down into the mud? Suddenly it hit me. I leapt to the signal cord and pulled it again. There was the sizzle of compressed air and the train came to a halt. I looked wildly around, expecting our train to plunge down into disaster.

The passengers all looked angrily at me as the conductor, the brakeman, the engineer and the fireman all burst into our coach. They rushed at me, looking as if they would beat me up and put me in chains.

“Please believe me,” I pleaded. “Did you see the antelope on the track? It gained the track to get away from two coyotes that were chasing it, but then suddenly it jumped back into the mud and water. That must mean that there is some obstacle on the track that it could not jump over. You have to check the track before we go any further.”

“Nonsense,” the conductor said. “The antelope, if that is what you saw, likely jumped off the tracks because he heard the train coming.”

Inspector Robertson saw my agitation. He showed his identification to the conductor, and said, “I think that we should take a look.”

The train crew yielded. The brakeman, Harry Mackenzie, and I walked to where the antelope had disappeared. There was a 60 foot gap in the track. A washout had left rails suspended 30 feet above the ground.^{xvii}

The brakeman signalled to the train to move up to us. The telegrapher sent a message back to Calgary warning that the track was washed out, but he was unable to get through to Ellwood, the small station about 9 miles west – likely because the washout had taken down the telegraph line to the west. The conductor looked worried because the transcontinental from Vancouver was expected within the next few hours. I noticed that there were a lot of horses grazing in the area. Surely among them there would be at least one quiet old saddle mare which I would be able to catch and ride to the station.

I volunteered my services, saying that all I needed was that Inspector Robertson prevent an angry rancher from riding in pursuit of me if he saw me steal his horse. They agreed because there did not seem any alternative, and the conductor wrote me a note for the station master at Ellwood. I crossed gingerly over the suspended rails and headed towards the herd of horses. When I came near enough, I commenced to whistle softly and then a little louder, coaxing them in the manner I learned from Joe. I spied an old mare and took my hat off. She nickered and came closer, obviously expected to get some oats out of my hat. As she put her nose into my hat, I caught her by the mane and soon was astride her back, using my whip as bridle and lines. The old mare moved off in a slow, steady trot towards the station. It took me 1½ hours to reach Ellwood where I found the station master and a few loafers wondering what had happened to our train. The station master immediately telegraphed Golden to warn trains coming from the west.

xvii Such a bridge washout happened at Ponteix.

“We are in luck,” he said. “There is a section crew working two miles north of here repairing a bridge. They can construct a temporary bridge on the main line first thing tomorrow morning.”

The station master lent me another horse and sent me to take a message to the section crew that they were needed on the main line as soon as possible. The section crew fed me and gave me a bed for the night. First thing the next day, we headed back to the washout. The CPR repair crew with their pile driver must have made some sort of a record. Before supper the track was repaired and we were on our way westward again.

The remainder of my trip to Vancouver was uneventful. At the Vancouver station we were met by Superintendent Beauregard of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The conductor had telegraphed Vancouver about the track wash-out, and the superintendent had expressed a desire to meet me. After shaking hands with him and thanking him for his kind words, I asked leave to introduce Inspector Robertson and Harry. “Without Inspector Robertson’s support when I stopped the train, I never would have been allowed to investigate. He really is the hero.”

The superintendent invited the three of us to dine with him, and we told him all about our trip over an excellent dinner at the very glamorous CNR hotel. As a further reward, Superintendent Beauregard offered me two night’s free lodging at the hotel.

“My friends won’t believe it when I tell them that I am staying in such luxury,” I thought as I crawled into bed that night. I was tired, played out from my long train trip and soon slumbered; but I was troubled by amazing dreams which I only vaguely remembered in the morning. Not surprisingly, because it was six o’clock Prairie time, I was wide awake at four o’clock Vancouver time next morning. I got up and enjoyed a leisurely bath in my private attached bathroom.

At five I emerged, trimmed and dressed, from my room in a happy mood. As I stepped into the thickly-carpeted hallway, the creaking of my new boots broke the silence with each footstep. There was nothing I could do but take them off. It was beginning to get light and promised to be a fine day, so I decided to take a walk around the area until nine o’clock when the superintendent was expecting me for breakfast.

Leaving the hotel, I proceeded in the direction of the CPR docks. The entire city seemed to be criss-crossed by bays and docks, reminding me of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. When I reached the docks, I found my sight of the horizon obstructed by a forest of tall masts. Hundreds of ocean and coastal vessels lined the docks, many of them being either loaded or unloaded with aid of powerful mobile cranes.

I moved on to where an ever-increasing crowd was gathering in front of an immense advertising bill board. They eagerly read its clamorous message enticing them to join the throngs of gold-seekers. The bill board also stated that the Princess Charlotte would be arriving later that day and would sail for Skagway on the morrow, loaded with passengers and a cargo of supplies for the Klondike miners. A group of gold-seekers were already lined up, trying to book tickets on her. Their ultimate destination of course was Dawson City, capital of the Yukon Territory.

Presently the town-hall clock was heard chiming 8 o’clock, the time at which white collar workers began their daily activities. I retraced my steps to the barber and manicurist shop I had noticed on my way to the harbour. After a summer on the ranch, I felt the need of some sprucing up now that I was in the big city, so I was pleased that the barber was able to give me a hair trim and a manicure immediately.

It was almost 9 o’clock when I arrived back at the hotel, so I immediately entered the dining room and told the waiter that I was supposed to meet Superintendent Beauregard. He showed me to a table set for three, and a few minutes later the superintendent and a very attractive young lady arrived. The superintendent introduced her as his secretary and special assistant Miss Grace Neville. I had already seen Miss Neville in the hotel lobby when I checked into the hotel the previous day and was pleased with the prospect of getting to know her better. We enjoyed a breakfast such as only the CPR kitchens could provide. Superintendent Beauregard asked if I would like to go on a tour of the city and attend “The Barber of Seville” at the opera house that evening. Naturally I said that I would like nothing better.

“Miss Neville has today off from work, and she has agreed to spend it showing you the city and taking you to the opera,” Superintendent Beauregard replied.

Miss Neville and I, who were soon calling each other by our first names, had a wonderful day. I told her that the first thing I wanted to do was to book passage for Skagway on the Princess Charlotte. After that we spent the rest of the day at Stanley Park, only returning to the hotel (where Grace had a small suite) in time to change before having dinner at six thirty. We met in the lounge. Grace looked wonderful. Her eyes sparkled, and she was beautifully dressed in a white evening gown with a very small hat over her curls.

“Grace, you look so wonderful and glamorous. People will wonder to see you at the opera with a Prairie rustic like myself. Are you certain you want me to be your escort?”

My little address was received with soft laughter, and we went into the dining room where we enjoyed a leisurely dinner. We then hired a cab and arrived at the opera house in good time. I was surprised to find that Inspector Robertson and Superintendent Beauregard were sitting right behind us. The orchestra was good. It played the overture of a Beethoven symphony before the curtain rose on the first act of the opera “The Barber of Seville”, which proved excellent.

Following the opera, Inspector Robertson invited us to join him for a light lunch. He led us to a busy restaurant overlooking the waterfront where we were seated in a cozy niche under a stairway. He insisted on ordering champagne and paying the bill. Grace seemed concerned, but I laughingly said, “The Inspector is quite a card player. It provides him with lots of extra funds.” I went on to tell her the story of the card game I had witnessed on the transcontinental.

Grace laughed and said, “Under those circumstances, Inspector, I will happily accept lunch and even a glass of champagne from you.”

It was after midnight by the time we arrived back at the hotel and I had seen Grace back to her suite. As Grace was not yet about when I was ready to go out the next morning, I left a note for her with the desk clerk. I thanked her for the wonderful day we had spent together. I also said that I would wait at the lunch room near the big bill board on the waterfront between 12 and 12:30 in case she was available to have lunch with me before I left on the Princess Charlotte.

An astonishing spectacle met me at the docks. Occupying an entire dock by herself was the Princess Charlotte, a 1500-ton CP coastal steamer that regularly plied the Seattle-Vancouver-Skagway route carrying a mixture of freight and passengers. Skagway was the gateway to the Klondike via the recently-constructed White Pass and Yukon Railway. Huge steam cranes hoisted freight into the Princess Charlotte’s holds, dockhands trundled trunks and other luggage up some gangplanks, and assorted passengers forced their way on board via other gangplanks. I watched with interest. At the same time, I also kept an eye out for my luggage, which the hotel express service was to deliver to the dock. By the time my luggage had arrived and I had got it stowed on board, it was getting close to noon.

I walked over to the lunch room I had suggested to Grace. I found a window table for two and sat down to wait. By 25 after 12 I was convinced that she was not going to come, but about 10 minutes later she arrived. She said that she had received the afternoon off from work, so we ate our lunch slowly and then walked about until nearly three o’clock. Then we returned to the Princess Charlotte’s dock. I kissed Grace good-bye and got in line behind the large group of passengers who were waiting impatiently to go on board. Just as I was about to step off the gangplank onto the deck of the Princess Charlotte, I heard a cry of alarm behind me. I turned. Two young women were immediately behind me, and a man behind them was trying to snatch a handbag from one of the women. I stepped aside, permitting the two women to go ahead of me. Then as the man came abreast of me, I deliberately stepped down on his left foot as hard as I could. He howled in pain and stepped out of the line long enough for several other passengers to push past him. By the time I was on board the steamer, the two young women had disappeared, so I felt that the man would no longer be a danger to them.

Chapter Eight: To the Klondike

I made my way to a spot by the railing where I could look down on the gangplank. I caught sight of Grace waving a handkerchief and waved in return. The long line of passengers dwindled to a few, many who were none too sober. At last the captain ordered the gangplank raised and the mooring lines released, and the Princess Charlotte backed away from the dock to steam majestically into the great waters of the Georgia Straits and across to Nanaimo where she was to take on coal. There were 24 staterooms with steward service on the upper deck, plus a line of second-class cabins almost surrounding the second deck. There were two dining rooms -- the upper one reserved for stateroom and second-class passengers and the lower one for the more than 200 third-class passengers who slept in the centre of the hold. On both the upper and second decks at the bow, there were salons used for social gatherings. Both were fronted by windows that provided panoramic observation points. The captain's turret protruded immediately over these windows. The Princess Charlotte possessed one immense smokestack. In front and behind that stack were numerous ventilation stacks. She also sported one centre mast and two unloading masts with block-and-tackle cables. During the day, passengers could use the cargo stairways to visit the ship's hold and view the steam turbines at work.

There were two bunks in my cabin on the second deck, and I was pleased to find that I would be sharing the room with Constable Harry. Inspector Robertson had his own private stateroom on the top deck. Despite the engine noise, I had a good night's sleep and was up at six o'clock next morning. When I heard that the Princess Charlotte had made a stop during the night to take on some more passengers and cargo, I was amazed that I had not awakened during the stop. It was the effect of getting three hours of sleep the previous night I supposed.

The landscape, as one sails the Georgia Straits between Vancouver Island and the rest of the continent, is splendid. As I briskly walked the deck, inhaling the fresh morning air moistened by salt spray, the sun was just beginning to show behind the mountains and to reflect its light across the Straits to the dense forest on the island. I felt singularly happy and leaned over the railing to watch some dolphins which appeared nearby. Some of them did not appear to be disturbed by the steamer. Others leapt at it and began to beat the steel plates of its hull with their monstrous tails.

When the bell rang announcing the first call for breakfast, I returned to my cabin where I found Harry still fast asleep. When I called him, he opened his eyes reluctantly, cursed, and threw his pillow at me. A minute later, however, he got out of bed. By the time we entered the dining room 30 minutes later, it was nearly full of people. A few minutes later the two young women I had seen on the gangplank the previous day came in. They looked around for a table, so Harry and I invited them to join us at our table.

They agreed and thanked me profusely for saving them from the purse snatcher. They introduced themselves as Rosaline LeBlanc and Celina Gambo and said that they were returning to their home northwest of Dawson City from Seattle where they had been attending boarding school. Before the meal was over we had learned that Celina was the daughter of a chief and that Rosaline's parents were French Canadians who had travelled to the Northwest after their marriage.

Breakfast being over, Harry said that he had the morning free and suggested that we go down to the lower passenger deck and mingle with the crowd. A cacophony of speech in a Babylon of various tongues met our ears. A few women of varying ages mingled with men of coarse appearance. On the women's features were written expressions varying from eager excitement to the weary acceptance of whatever life had in store for them. Greed was the prime motive for many of the men. Others were gifted with energy and an honest endeavor to make something of their life. In the North they opined, money and prestige could neither make nor frustrate their individual endeavors. In the North physical and brain power would be equal.

I expressed something of my thoughts to Harry who laughed. "Yes, a swell greedy lot, a crowd of future empire builders. Few will succeed, while the many will return home thwarted in their hopes."

I looked towards the upper deck. "And what about those fellows?"

Harry followed my glance. "I suspect more than one belongs down here in third class instead of up there."

The Princess Charlotte was now approaching her name sake, the Queen Charlotte Straits. A strong northwest wind impeded our speed somewhat and rocked the boat, but the sun shed its warmth and brilliance over the water. The shore was densely forested with black spruce and elm. Harry asked me to join him in the smoking room for a cigar, but I decided to go for a walk on the upper deck where I could enjoy the scenery and the fine weather. I noticed Celina and Rosaline sitting in deck chairs in the shade of the smoke funnel. Two rough-looking men were sitting on the other side of the funnel. They appeared to be spying on the girls, who seemed completely unaware both of me and of the other men. I glared at the men who turned upon their heels and disappeared.

I walked around the funnel. "Excuse me for intruding on your privacy, but were you aware that two men on the other side of the funnel seemed to be trying to listen to what you were saying? They disappeared when they saw me."

"No, we weren't. Thank-you for your concern," Rosaline replied.

Just then Harry reappeared and we asked the girls if they would care to go for a walk. As we walked, Rosaline explained how she and Celina had met. Her father Jean LeBlanc took part in the Riel Rebellion. Afterwards he and her mother followed the Saskatchewan River, hunting and trapping for a living. Finally they reached the Peace River and spent a season there before heading still farther north until they reached the delta of the Mackenzie River, where they finally decided to settle. They built a log house in a deep valley where the trapping was good. One day the chief of the local tribe arrived with his wife. He told the LeBlancs that they were trespassing and must leave, but while the chief and his wife were still at the LeBlanc cabin, Celina was born and a few days later her mother died. The chief was so grateful for Mme. LeBlanc's help that he invited the family to stay. Rosaline, who was only three months old when Celina was born, and Celina were raised as sisters.

Just then we heard the bell announcing the noon hour, and the four of us enjoyed dinner together. After dinner Inspector Robertson, who was sharing his table with a priest and two nuns, called us over and introduced us.

"This is Father Vaillancourt and Sisters Marie Joseph and Anne Elisabeth. They are also traveling to the Mackenzie delta because the Oblates are planning to open a new mission along the Mackenzie. Perhaps you can travel together and introduce them to your people," he said to Celina.

Celina appeared upset. "It is an honour, I am sure. My father will be at the boat to meet us and you can meet him then," she replied in a voice so chilly that an awkward silence followed her words.

We all looked at Father Vaillancourt. After a moment he replied. "I will be very happy to meet your father. I understand he is a chief and that he might have some concerns about the establishment of a Christian mission among your people."

Celina and Rosaline soon after excused themselves and left the dining room. A few minutes later, the priest and nuns did likewise.

About mid afternoon, the first officer announced that we might expect to see a large group of sea lions on and around a small island that we would soon be passing. Almost everyone went out on deck, including Harry and me. We caught sight of Celina and Rosaline and went to join them. The steamer slowed almost to a standstill while the passengers craned their necks to see the sea lions. Suddenly one of the passengers raised a revolver and shot at a group of animals playing on one tiny rock island. A surprised and angry murmur went up from the watchers. All of the animals, except a pup, precipitated themselves into the sea. Blood poured from the pup's side. Celina and Rosaline began to cry.

The first mate ordered a life boat to be lowered while Harry collared the man with the revolver.

Celina insisted on boarding the life boat, so she and I joined the first mate and were soon on the rock. Celina refused to leave without the sea lion, so we loaded it into the boat and were soon back on board the steamer. For the first time in my life I paid some attention to the famous fables of La Fontaine and seriously considered that mankind possessed the power to communicate with animals. Celina constantly spoke to the sea lion, attempting to soothe it as it lay with its head in her lap. Father Vaillancourt, carrying a small case, pushed forward, saying that he had a bit of medical experience. Sadly the sea lion was too badly wounded and after a short time it died. Celina, with tears streaming down her face, moaning that some day the white man would pay for his unprovoked slaughter of animals.

The brute who shot the sea lion did not escape justice, although Harry had limited himself with confiscating the man's revolver. Back on deck, after conducting Celina to her stateroom, I saw an angry young man accost the culprit at the head of the stairs into the hold. With an upper-cut and then hook a right under his chin, the young man floored the culprit. Then, before the brute could rise to his feet again, the young man pushed him down the stairs. "That coward deserved all that he got," seemed the most common reaction when people learned that he had broken his wrist in the fall.

"I wonder if the sea lion attack might have been a diversion in an attempt to snatch Celina's handbag," I suggested to Harry later. "I just realized that the man who shot at the sea lions was one of the two men who were spying on Celina and Rosaline this morning and that he was also the same man who tried to steal Celina's handbag when they were boarding the Princess Charlotte."

"What would a couple of school girls have in their handbags that anyone would want to steal?" Harry asked, seating himself on a deck chair and lighting a cigar. "It is the men carrying large amounts of money to buy supplies when they reach the Klondike who are in danger of theft or robbery."

"I know," I conceded, "but somehow I have the feeling that both Celina and Rosaline are afraid of something. Perhaps we can find out what it is if we invite them to have supper with us this evening."

I could tell that Harry didn't really believe my theory about Celina and Rosaline, but he was happy to invite the girls to eat supper with us. They agreed. We didn't learn anything of interest until we were eating our dessert, and I asked Celina if it was common for girls of her tribe to go away to school in Seattle. "Were there not closer schools where you could have gone?" I asked, thinking how much money it must have cost their families to send them to Seattle.

"Yes, but we knew someone who had gone to live in Seattle. I'm sure that you are thinking that our families would be too poor to send us to school, but a few years ago my father discovered gold on our reserve. There is much more gold there than there is in the Klondike he believes. I would not be telling you this except that you have both been so kind and Constable Mackenzie is a police officer. My father is trying to keep his find a secret because he does not want the white gold seekers to disturb the local tribes as they have done in the Klondike."

"Is that why you don't want the missionaries to visit you?" I asked.

"Partially," Celina replied. "I know that I sounded rude and that some missionaries do very good work, but when strangers come among us they alter our ordinary way of life to such an extent as to menace our very tribal existence."

"In what way?" I asked.

"Our people hunt or trap over the winter and then travel to the trading posts with their furs. Much of the summer is taken up with fishing."

"I don't see why the missionaries would prevent that."

"Missionaries would insist our people not work on Sundays, but during our short summer season it is necessary to catch fish whatever day they arrive. Likewise with sea lions. Also, missionaries write detailed accounts about their work and the places they visit. These accounts are often made available to

the public. As a result, if minerals or fertile lands are discovered, hordes of adventurers soon come seeking them. And finally," here she hesitated, "our people always inherit more of the vices of the white man than his virtues."

Harry and I acknowledged that what she said might be true and promised we would not tell anyone about the gold unless they were in real trouble and we needed help from the Inspector.

At that Celina told us the rest of her story. "A few months ago I sold a gold nugget to pay our expenses. Foolishly I sold it to a jeweller instead of at a bank, and the jeweller put the nugget on display in his show window. This naturally attracted much attention. Some people tried to learn where the nugget came from and who the original owner was. I don't know for certain that the jeweller told anyone, but I have been followed ever since then."

"Why do you not put the nugget in the boat's strongbox? It is not safe to carry it in your handbag," Harry scolded her.

She shook her head. "My father advised me never to let my final nugget out of my sight. He warned me that my very existence depended on it."

"Yes, but surely he meant that you should hide it upon your person, not that you should be so imprudent as to carry it openly in your handbag."

Just after noon, the following day we were scheduled to reach the southern tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands where the steamer would stop for one hour at a salmon cannery station and passengers would be permitted to go ashore. The morning dawned hot and sultry. The passengers were restless, especially those from the overcrowded area below decks who fled outdoors to escape the hot and foul air below. By 8 a.m. dark clouds had emerged in the west.

I felt apprehensive of a coming storm and feared that it would hit before we reached the relative safety of the salmon cannery. Harry and I were out on deck before breakfast and became aware of crew men moving rapidly about the deck, securing or stowing away anything that was not already firmly secured. Curious, we went inside and discovered that stewards were also fastening down everything moveable in all of the public rooms. We looked down into the cargo area and saw similar actions being taken there. By the time we had finished breakfast, the western sky was noticeably darker. The captain announced that we were facing a severe storm and that no one should go out on deck.

I went to the wheel house to offer my services. "Excuse me for troubling you, but I have sailed on the North Sea many times while living in my home country of Belgium and have never been seasick. I have heard that you are shorthanded and wondered if you could use my help."

"It is rather unusual, but I fear we may need all the help we can get before this storm is over. You are only to act under orders from the first officer or myself, however," the captain replied.

The wind suddenly stood still. Utter silence reigned over the ship and the strait. It lasted for only a moment before an enormous squall rushed in from the west. The boat faced into the wind and stood the shock, though it vibrated all over. The first officer handed me a set of oilskins. "All right, you can keep lookout in the bow. Come along and I will secure you so you can't be washed overboard. Be on alert and signal if you see danger from these quarters."

The air was so sodden with salt spray that at first it was difficult to tell whether or not it was raining. Forks of lightning flashed across the night-dark sky and thunder rumbled almost constantly. It seemed as if sky and sea wanted to melt into a single unit and to engulf everything they came in contact with. Then the rain started in earnest with the sound of great drops hitting the boat, adding to the sounds of the wind and the thunder.

I peered into the darkness ahead through eyes filled with seawater. The boat was travelling north-

west, veering away from the coast. The sea took on the features of a tidal wave. Our boat seemed to be suddenly sucked downward. Then thousands of tons of seawater rolled over us, pressing us downward. After agonizing seconds, we emerged. My eyes, ears, and nose were all full of saltwater.

“Are you all right?” someone screamed.

“Yes,” I howled back, “only half-drowned.”

I heard a smothered laugh. “Nothing goes by halves on this ship.”

Our ship, because it was facing into the wind, was barely moving forward. Some of the crashes of thunder were so close that they sounded like explosions trying to split our ship in two. Once the boat was knocked sideways and rolled almost to the water line. I feared that this time it would not come back up, but after agonizing moments it did. During the interval, the only thing I could do was close my eyes and mouth and hold my nose to keep water out of it until my lungs were near bursting.

Give me the dear, unruly waters of the North Sea any time. I say emphatically that the name of the Pacific Ocean is a down right lie. Fortunately the first officer had fastened me securely enough that I was safe from being washed overboard, but the force of the waves frequently overwhelmed me, flattening me to the deck or knocking me against a capstan. My eyes were swollen and sore and I didn't believe that a fellow could swallow so much salt water without drowning. It was mostly in vain that I tried to gaze ahead of me.

Dear readers, have you ever witnessed a ship jump out of the water into the air? Our ship did this again and again that day. First she would rise up on an enormous mountain of water. Then the water as suddenly was withdrawn from under her. As consequence the Princess Charlotte would remain momentarily suspended in the air before plunging down into a deep sea cavity. It was as if the ocean was alternately trying to sink us and to eject us from its furious waters. By a particularly brilliant flash of lightning, I suddenly caught a glimpse of something about a hundred yards directly ahead of our ship. It was a ship that appeared completely helpless in the storm – a dangerous derelict directly in our path. I screamed, “Ship dead ahead. Ship dead ahead. Steer starboard. Steer starboard.”

I heard an answering voice, sounding as if it came from a very long distance, but I could not make out the words. Our boat soon appeared to be turning slightly to the right, however, so my message was evidently understood. Five minutes later we passed within feet of the other ship. I could see no signs of life on it, but there was no time to think about that because just at that moment we were subjected to a particularly violent onslaught of the storm – one which almost proved my undoing. I was jerked off of my feet and my body dangled helplessly over the railing. My lifeline still held, but I felt that master Neptune might do what he liked with me. My struggle was over. When I opened my eyes a moment later, however, I noticed that the western sky seemed to be clearing slightly. It also seemed that hurricane wind was calming.

Then I heard the captain shouting, “Where are you, Mr. Ternier?”

“Here on the other side of the railing,” I answered in such a feeble voice that I doubted he would hear me.

Happily he did. “How the devil did you get entangled like that?” he asked as a seaman pulled me back onto the deck and cut me free with a knife.

I tried to stand upright, but my legs buckled under me and I would have fallen to the deck had the seaman not held me up. I felt as though all my ribs were cracked. The captain ordered the seaman to help me to my stateroom. The rain had stopped and the wind had dropped sufficiently to allow the crew to open the doors onto the deck to clear the fetid air inside the Princess Charlotte. It was a pity to see the passengers. Almost all had been stricken by seasickness, and I was not the only one to be battered and bruised. Utter misery was imprinted on the features of everyone I saw.

We finally reached my stateroom, and I rapped on the door. Harry let me in. "You look done in," he observed. "Get yourself some dry clothes and come with me."

I followed him into the nearby bathroom. Surprisingly, it was empty and had a supply of hot water. I felt much better after soaking in the tub. When I returned to my cabin, I immediately crawled into my berth and fell into a deep sleep.

I was awakened abruptly by Harry's voice. "Get up Jerome."

"What is it? Is there another storm brewing?" I asked peevishly. "I've just got to sleep."

"No. You've been asleep since late morning. It is 6 o'clock now and we are nearing the salmon cannery. The storm has devastated the community."

I threw on my clothes and followed Harry out onto the deck. "You see those buildings? They are the new mining settlement," Harry said, pointing to a cluster of buildings set well back from a rocky plateau overlooking the harbour. "The store, the hotel, and perhaps 50 dwellings were between the harbour and those buildings."

Nothing was left on the plateau. Not even scraps of lumber had been spared by the force of the storm. The crew were anchoring the boat well out from the harbour, undoubtedly fearing that the harbour was clogged with debris. Then we saw a boat set off from the Princess Charlotte for shore.

At that moment we were all called into the dining room for an announcement. The captain spoke to us while we ate a light supper. "I have sent some men to determine whether we can safely enter the harbour and to find out how the residents are. About 50 houses, the store and the hotel were destroyed as well as the cannery. It would be a miracle I fear if no lives were lost. The people were mainly fishermen who sold their catch to the cannery. The buildings still standing were built for miners who have just begun preliminary work to open a copper mine."

Before we had finished eating, the small boat was back and the captain spoke to us again. "The news is as bad as we feared," he said. "About 15 people have been lost, and the manager of the cannery has asked us to send a wire to Vancouver asking for help. We had better check on the neighbouring community on the north end of the island as well. We cannot safely take on more passengers, and everyone will have a roof over their heads in the mining town. Also, we cannot enter the harbour until it has been dredged out."

Silently we finished eating and went out on deck. It was such a beautiful evening that it was hard to believe that earlier in the day we had been in the midst of such a devastating storm. Although I was black and blue all over and still felt stiff and sore, I had not broken any bones. The rays of the sunset struck our boat and planed over the now placid waters along the Queen Charlotte Islands. We were steering as near to the Islands as safety warranted, allowing lovers of nature to view a beautiful panorama. A dense forest of black spruce covered the slopes of the Islands, but we could see an occasional deer peering at us with their big eyes as we passed by. Seagulls, as usual, were flying overhead, crying with their frightful voices for food. There were thousands of them, watching the doors leading from the kitchen to the deck, waiting hungrily for the cook's helper to throw scraps of food to them.

I don't know how long I had sat on deck when I heard the sudden sharp cry of a woman calling for help. Immediately afterwards a rough male voice said, "Far from it. I have orders to get those nuggets before dinner time tomorrow and to dispose of you as soon as we arrive. The chief thinks that once he has the nuggets in his possession it will prove easy to trace the mine."

I leapt to my feet and quickly discovered the source of the voices. Celina and Rosaline, who were sitting on the deck not far away, were being attacked by a man who was trying to snatch Celina's purse. Rosaline had thrown herself at the ruffian. She had hold of him around the knees and was trying to drag him away from Celina while he tried to pry her loose by digging his elbow hard into her face. Rosaline

held on desperately.

“I am here, Rosaline,” I shouted, unbuckling my whip belt. “Just hang on.”

When the ruffian saw me with my whip, he wrenched himself free from Rosaline and fled towards the entrance to the stairway leading to the third-class quarters before I could make use of my whip. Just as he rushed through the open door, Rosaline, fully determined to prevent his escape with Celina’s purse, managed to grasp one of his pant legs. In attempting to break free, he lost his balance and fell headlong down the stairs.

I pushed by Rosaline who had fallen to the deck and went down the stairs. There was no need to grapple with the man. He lay unconscious at the bottom of the steps, his neck ominously twisted. He still clutched the purse. I took possession of it and fled back up the stairs to the deck. In the meantime, Celina had gathered her wits about her and helped Rosaline to her feet. “It is all my fault; forgive me,” Celina said, kissing Rosaline’s cheek.

I suggested that the two girls should return to their cabin and lock themselves in until I got back with help. I found Harry and Inspector Robertson with the captain and told them what had happened. The Inspector shook his head with annoyance. “After what you have told me about the gold nugget, I can’t believe she would be so foolish as to continue carrying it around.”

Inspector Robertson ordered Harry to go down to third-class quarters to take care of things there while he and I went to Celina and Rosaline’s cabin. When we arrived, Celina was quietly lying on her bunk. The Inspector was about to scold her, but kept his peace when he saw the expression on her face. Wordlessly she held out her purse to him. He opened it and drew out a high caret gold nugget. Then he turned to Rosaline.

“Don’t worry. You won’t be charged with injuring the man who tried to steal this nugget. It is a clear case of self-defence. Now I will take charge of this nugget until we land; and I want both of you to stay in your cabin with the door locked unless Mr. Ternier, Corporal Mackenzie, or I am with you.”

Celina and Rosaline both promised that they would do so, and the remainder of the trip to Juneau was uneventful. Because of the threat that the man who tried to steal Celina’s purse had made, we feared that an attempt would be made against her upon our arrival at Juneau. Inspector Robertson detailed Harry to guard them, and I convinced the two police officers to allow me to assist Harry.

We didn’t arrive at Juneau, a town of about 800 inhabitants, until close to dark. It had an excellent harbour with a very long pier. The American government had paid for the pier which stretched half a mile into the Strait. The pier ended in a square with a large warehouse. Here passengers and freight were loaded and unloaded. There was a large hotel next to a short pier at the western edge of the harbour. The only other buildings in town, except for private dwellings, were two churches, a bank, and a few small businesses.

Harry and I escorted Celina and Rosaline off the boat. Celina, who expected to see her father among the crowd that had gathered to meet the boat, scanned the crowd eagerly as we walked along the pier. When we reached the end of pier, she turned a disappointed and anxious face towards us. “My father is not here. He promised that he would be. I hope nothing has happened to him.”

Harry and I hastily consulted. “Unless you have some friends or family that you can stay with, I suggest that you should remain on the boat overnight,” Harry finally said. “Lock yourselves in and don’t leave until we come to take you to breakfast tomorrow morning.”

Celina, who appeared close to tears, and Rosaline agreed. We took them back to their cabin and waited outside until we heard them lock the door. I had breakfast with Celina and Rosaline the next morning. Afterwards we went out on deck and Rosaline let out a happy shriek. “There are my parents,” she said and ran down the gangplank.

Celina and I followed more slowly. Rosaline introduced me to her parents, who told us that Ce-

lina's father hadn't been able to come because he had sprained his ankle a few days earlier. We went to the police barracks to pick up Celina's nugget, and I regretfully said good-bye to Celina and Rosaline.

The Princess Charlotte left for Skagway in mid morning. It was less than 100 miles from Juneau to Skagway, and the trip was uneventful. As soon as the Princess Charlotte had unloaded all passengers and freight at Skagway, she commenced to take in new cargo. Harry and I stood on the end of the dock watching. First, barrels containing salted fish and quartz minerals, then passengers' luggage, were stowed deep down in the ship's hold. Just when I thought loading was complete, several wagons loaded with square wooden boxes arrived. The wagons were accompanied by armed guards, so I assumed that the boxes, which were so heavy that it took six men to carry each one, must contain gold dust or nuggets.

Just after the wagons left we heard a cry of alarm. Looking in the direction of the cry, we saw to our horror, that the dock was on fire and the flames were racing towards us. We were forced to jump into the water and swim to the beach. As I jumped, I distinctly saw two men cutting the two-inch cable that secured the ship to the dock. We reached shore safely and sat in drenched clothing watching the quick consummation of the pier by fire. Our minds were so occupied with that disaster that we momentarily forgot about the Princess Charlotte. When next we looked, she was just disappearing from sight. I told Harry what I had seen. I could have sworn that those two men were paid to cut the cables. They must have known to the exact minute the time of the fire.

Harry agreed. "We'll have to get to the White Pass and Yukon Railway office and cable the authorities in Juneau to intercept her. She is likely carrying millions worth of gold," Harry said.

There was only one old man the railway office, and he commenced to laugh when we told him what had happened. "Have a look," he said, drawing aside to allow us to look through the office window.

We did look and to our astonishment and embarrassment saw the Princess Charlotte. She appeared to be slowly backing up under her own steam. Stammering a hasty excuse, we soon were lost among the crowd and prospective passengers who stood near the burning docks. Within ten minutes we heard the whistle calling for passengers to board the Princess Charlotte. The crew understood their job. Lacking a dock, they manned Princess Charlotte's two sloops and quickly moved all the passengers on board. Soon we heard a second whistle announcing her departure for Juneau.

Skagway was an insignificant mining settlement in the early 1890s, but it came to public notice because of the Klondike Gold Rush. It was incorporated as a town in 1900 and proclaimed as the gateway to the gold fields by the construction of the White Pass and Yukon Railway. Across the Taiya Inlet, by which we had entered town, were the imposing outlines of the Coast Mountain Ranges. Virgin forest rose directly from the water's edge. Bare rock projected above the treeline, and above that glittered the mountain peaks which were permanently covered with snow that almost blinded my eyes as the brilliant sun shone on them. Skagway is exposed to the winds blowing down the mountain side and through the Inlet. In the sky I saw hundreds of seagulls and some black-winged Alaskan eagles which were soaring with their 8 to 12 foot wing span over the strait in search of food.^{xviii}

Skagway was peopled by folks of all nations gathered for one purpose -- to stake their very existence to their lust for gold. Many went there with the honest intention of making their fortune and returning home to settle down. Alas, only a few succeeded. The others nursed bitter disappointment and became easy prey to the human predators who sought to drag them to perdition. They included ambitious girls (many from excellent families) who gaily joined the trek, intending to stake mining claims and work them on an equal footing with the men. Skagway initially grew without any attempt at town planning because no one believed it would be a permanent community. Finally the railroad was hurriedly constructed as was a deepwater dock with warehouses. The town was not surveyed, and all the buildings were scattered

haphazardly -- about a hundred framed dwellings, two general stores, three churches, hotels, honky-tonks, and gambling dens.

As soon as the Princess Charlotte left for Juneau, Harry and I made our way to a hotel sitting on a plateau to the right of the dock. Imagine our surprise when we went inside to discover that Lizzie, the girl who Inspector Robertson had helped on the transcontinental train in Manitoba, was working in the hotel. She greeted us with enthusiasm and introduced us to her aunt, Mrs. Bergrote. "I told you that I was meeting my aunt in Vancouver," Lizzie said, "That was true, but I didn't mention that she ran a hotel in Skagway and that I was coming to work for her. I thought you might try to prevent me from coming here if you knew."

Mrs. Bergrote greeted us warmly. "We see the worse of mankind so often up here in the goldfields, that it is a real pleasure to meet two gentlemen like you. I am eternally grateful for the help you gave Lizzie. You are welcome to stay here in the hotel as long as you wish and no charge for your rooms."

She looked questioningly at our clothing which was still very wet, and we explained what had happened. "The dining room is not open now, but come back down to the kitchen as soon as you have changed and have some lunch," she said. Lizzie took us upstairs and showed us two comfortable rooms and the shared bathroom where there was lots of hot water.

After we had got cleaned up, Mrs. Bergrote served us two bottles of Pilsner beer, bread, ham, and cheese followed by coffee with a sprinkling of brown sugar and a generous shot of rum at the kitchen table. Lizzie arrived back in the kitchen while we were eating. She had changed her clothes. I looked at her in amazement. Was this the poor draggled creature we had met only weeks before on the train? She was dressed in a neat evening gown, customary garb for a woman in charge of a saloon or gambling den. Her skirt fell half way between her knees and her ankles and she wore flesh-coloured silk stockings and high heeled shoes.

"I want to talk to you before we open at 4 o'clock," she said.

"Just one question. Did you ever meet those two gamblers again that Inspector Robertson trimmed on the Transcontinental?"

"Yes. One of them is here in Skagway. He visits our establishment regularly to gamble. Usually he comes out ahead. I'm sure he cheats. But one night last week he lost a fortune. Now he wants to drag me down. Last week he told me that if I didn't agree to marry him in ten days he would tell the man I am going to marry about my past. He is coming the day after tomorrow for my answer."

I was surprised. "I beg pardon, but is this marriage not very sudden?"

"Not really. I knew this man back in Manitoba before he came here last year. His name is Alex and he works as a section foreman for the first 10 miles of the railroad out of Skagway."

"Just arrange a meeting between us and Alex for tonight and we will take care of things," we assured Lizzie."

Lizzie knew that we did not really approve of gambling, and she admitted that Alex shared our views. "We have agreed to marry within two months, and my aunt wants to sell the hotel at the first opportunity. She wants to go into the bakery business with a friend of hers."

Mrs. Bergrote nodded. "I am tired of the hotel business and the things we have to do. There is a man named Fargo who is the real boss of this town. All of the hotels have to pay him protection in order to stay open, and the local officials can do nothing against him. I myself pay him \$100 per month"

Lizzie and Mrs. Bergrote left to get ready to open their establishment. Since we didn't want anyone to know that we were in town, we returned to our rooms. About 7 o'clock there was a knock on my door. It was Harry with Lizzie and her fiancé. She was wheeling a cart covered with a white cloth. Lizzie

introduced us and served us supper from the cart. "I wish that I could spend the evening with you, but I must get back to work," she said.

After supper we discussed the problem of Hank, the gambler who was trying to blackmail Lizzie, and made our plans. As we suspected, Mrs. Bergrote's hotel was very profitable and Hank wanted to marry Lizzie in order to get control of the hotel. Harry and I had decided that we would try to make everyone believe that we had just returned from the goldfields after making a lucky strike. Alex, as a section man, had an excellent plan to help us do that.

He explained, "I can attach a jigger on behind the railway caboose and can sneak you into the jigger before I leave tomorrow morning. When we reach the spot where I'm going to work, you get off and wait for the train coming the other way. The conductor will charge you each a dollar for the trip into Skagway. You will find lots of discarded claim tickets on the coach floor. Just pick one up and pin it to your hat."

Alex agreed to advise Lizzie to tolerate the blackmailer for one more week so that he would not get suspicious of our plans.

Next day we successfully made our trip out of town and returned according to plan. A large crowd was waiting at the station. They measured us with greedy eyes. We asked where the best hotel in town was, and one determined ruffian snatched our bags and proceeded to show us to the White Pass Hotel. We hurried after him, afraid that he might take a notion to steal our bags and learn that they were filled with worthless rocks. The White Pass, in contrast to the neat and clean appearance of the Bergrote Hotel, was dilapidated and undoubtedly a place of ill repute. The bartender sized us up when we entered and I handed him a couple of dollars to treat the half dozen men in the bar. Everyone, with the exception of one man, accepted a drink. It was one of the gamblers Inspector Robertson had beaten on the train. He fortunately did not recognize us since he had been too intent on his game to pay any attention to us.

"What's the matter, Hank? Are you still sore about the trimming you got at the Bergrote dames' place the other night?" someone asked.

"You'd better mind your own affairs. But if it gives you any pleasure to have advance knowledge, here it is. I am just on my way to meet Miss Bergrote and I expect that she will agree to marry me next week on this very day." Then he turned on his heel and left the hotel.

As soon as we could get away without attracting attention, we followed Hank. He was walking along with his head bowed as though deep in thought. Just ahead of him was a newspaper boy who was running towards us. As he passed, the boy cried out, "A paper, mister."

To my surprise, immediately afterwards Harry cried out in almost the same voice, "Hey Hank, why don't you lay off that lady? This time you have been warned, and you are going to get a beating if you don't listen."

Hank stopped dead in his tracks. Then he turned and ran past us after the boy. The boy innocently continued on his way until he was halted by a hand grasping his shoulder roughly. "Hey, what's the idea, mister? I haven't done anything to you," the boy protested angrily as he broke free.

"Why did you threaten me with a beating, you young varmint?"

"You're plum crazy. I only asked you if you wanted a paper. But if you lay another hand on me, my father will give you the beating of your life." At that, the boy ran off.

We turned and walked away slowly hoping that Hank would not pay any attention to us. "What was the idea of that stunt?" I asked Harry.

"That guy is yellow. I figure that warning will put the fear of God into him and make him be careful how he treats Lizzie."

When we finally reached the Bergrote Hotel, Lizzie greeted us as if we were strangers. We followed

her into the combined bar and dance hall, where we were soon surrounded by swarms of dancing girls and women of indefinite age. I smiled winningly at them and ordered a round of beer by tossing a \$20 gold coin on the bar, and inviting the bar tender to keep the change.

“Bartender,” Lizzie ordered, “make that \$20 last for three rounds. These gentlemen are the first of a batch of miners who apparently struck it rich, so we must treat them well.” She turned to us, “I would like to invite you upstairs for lunch and to introduce you to our gaming tables after you have had your drink.”

We could see that the ladies in the bar were far from happy with Lizzie’s proposal. They preferred that we remain in the bar where they could enjoy our company while picking our pockets. There was nothing they could do, however, as Lizzie was their boss. A few minutes later we followed Lizzie upstairs. Half of the upper room was filled by a long bar, which served food and drink, and numerous small tables. The other half was devoted to tables for playing cards and roulette.

I looked down at the couples dancing below. Off the dance floor men of all nations were drinking liquor served indiscriminately at exorbitant prices. Dancing girls snuggled on the laps of many of the men. “There is not one of those men that I would wish to see dance with my sisters, nor look into their eyes in such a way. It is downright bestiality. I have no desire to see you subjected to such humiliation,” I said to Lizzie.

She reminded me that she would soon be leaving the business and said that I should not worry about her though she admitted that her customers were “a swell gathering of ruffians.”

The main entrance opened. All eyes looked that way, and we heard a gasp of astonishment – or was it fear? A large man about 45 years old entered. “That is Mr. Fargo, the man we told you about. The one to whom we pay protection,” Lizzie whispered. He walked up to the bar and ordered a round of drinks for everyone. The bartender shot a quick glance up at Lizzie and hastened to comply.

A hulking miner dancing with one of the girls now attracted our attention. He appeared to be very drunk. According to the rules of the house, men must refrain from taking liberties with women on the dance floor. We watched this man as his hand crept up from his partner’s waist to where he attempted to tear the flimsy gown from her breast. The dancer tried to free herself. Lizzie clapped her hands to attract the bartender’s attention. He immediately advanced on the couple and ordered the man to leave. When the miner refused, the bartender planted several well-aimed punches on his face. The miner tried to draw a gun, which the bartender struck out of his hand. Then grabbing the miner by the collar he marched him out of the bar.

“But come, we have been standing here long enough,” Lizzie said. “I want to introduce you to the roulette tables.”

The tables were now almost completely full. Mr. Fargo sat playing poker at one table with two other well-dressed men his age and one younger man. As many others stood watching behind the chairs. The game continued until the pot reached \$10,000. At that point Lizzie moved up to the table and motioned me to do the same. The other watchers moved back until Lizzie and I were left alone. The stakes now rose to \$20,000. I saw that Fargo had three jacks and two tens in his hand. A moment later his hand had changed to four queens and one ace. Fargo was so intent on the game that I was able to remove the revolver he had tucked into waistband without his noticing. The younger man laid down his hand of three kings and two tens. Fargo turned up his cards and prepared to snatch up the pot.

I stepped in front of Fargo. “Just one moment,” I said. “A few minutes ago I saw your hand. Then you had three jacks and two tens. I believe that if we frisk you we will find the extra cards either on your person or on the floor.”

Fargo made a move for his revolver. “I believe that this is what you are looking for,” I said, waving his gun menacingly at him. Then I nodded at Lizzie. “Perhaps you will keep the pot until you can hand it over to the rightful owner.”

Many of the watching men were only too happy to prove Fargo a cheat, and he was forced to leave empty-handed. In the meantime, Lizzie told the young man that he should keep hidden until he could catch tomorrow's boat out of town. I watched the gambling a while longer. By that time it was well after midnight and I decided it was time to retire for the night. I had just reached my room when Mrs. Bergrote appeared.

"Lizzie tells me that you have exposed Fargo as a cheat and caused him to lose \$20,000. How could you be such a fool? No one in the universe can save your life now."

"I had to do it," I responded. "Don't be so sure that Fargo is invincible."

Before Mrs. Bergrote could respond, there was another rap at the door. It was Harry.

"I was down on the dance floor when I heard the commotion upstairs and learned how you had thwarted Fargo. He stormed down the stairs a few minutes later and yelled at another man who was drinking at the bar. The two of them left the hotel. Obviously they were up to no good, so I followed them. After some grumbling about how you had stolen his \$20,000, Fargo finally told his buddy that there were half a dozen idlers on the docks who would murder half the town for \$10 a piece and that he planned to arrange something first thing tomorrow. I decided that the only way to prevent this plan was to put Fargo out of action since the local authorities were afraid to arrest him. I caught up to Fargo and his henchman and asked if they had a light. I was carrying a heavy purse full of silver dollars, which I immediately swung around my head, knocking both men down. Before they could get up, I commenced to give them a terrific beating, using both my boots and a rock. Fargo won't be in a position to hire anyone to do anything for some time to come."

As Harry finished his story, there was still another tap on the door. This time it was Lizzie, who was trembling with fear or excitement. "They just dragged two men into the bar room downstairs. Their faces are horribly beaten, but I recognize them as Mr. Fargo and Bill Dohan." She looked from me to Harry and then back at me. "No, it couldn't be. You can't think that you will be able to get away with this."

Although curious to know what was going on downstairs, Harry and I decided that it would be wise for us to go to bed and rely on Lizzie and Mrs. Bergrote to tell us what had happened in the morning — which they did. The doctor, who had been summoned to the hotel, had his two patients carried to Fargo's house. Mrs. Bergrote, who was a friend of Fargo's housekeeper decided to pay her friend a visit early that morning. The doctor told his housekeeper that the men both had concussions and would have to remain in bed for several days.

A tall handsome man and his painted moll of a wife or girlfriend arrived at the hotel that evening. They ordered drinks and asked the bartender if they could rent a room for the night. Just then Lizzie came into the bar. When Lizzie saw the couple, her face crimsoned with either anger or embarrassment. Puzzled, we hastened to the kitchen to tell Mrs. Bergrote what had happened.

She sighed wearily. "I will be glad to see the day that Lizzie is settled down with a good man and we are away from this place. The money is not worth it."

The door opened and Lizzie came in. She looked furious. "Do you know who that is? It is Hank's brother Tom Parker and his wife. He says that he has come specially to be best man at my wedding to his brother. Then he handed me a valuable gold nugget as a wedding present and kissed me. Now I have to go back to work. There is a huge crowd at the roulette tables."

Harry and I decided that we would go to mingle with the gambling crowd and keep an eye on things. Around midnight we noticed a poker table with five players -- Tom Parker and his woman, a handsome young man, and two older men. The game started for small stakes, but Mrs. Parker frequently called the bartender over to order more drinks. Finally she began to get the beers herself, offering them to the young man with a pleasing smile. The two older men dropped out of the game, and it was clear that the young man was quickly becoming very intoxicated while Parker and his woman were scarcely drinking anything. I decided that it was time to summon Lizzie.

The game started again with the three players. Parker seemed less assured now and cast furtive looks at his moll. She inclined her head towards the young man and smiled so engagingly that he pressed his lips to her hand. Then she turned to offer her cheek to him. As she turned, her chair slipped. In order to prevent her falling, she thrust out her left leg, exposing a great deal of flesh. Her husband, in a sudden rage, yelled, "Topsy again are you. Leave that young fellow alone and pay attention to the game."

Fascinated, I watched what was going on under the table while he yelled. He substituted cards that his wife had tucked in her stocking for some in his hand. The young miner flung a second purse of gold dust on the table and dared his opponents to match his bet. The woman pulled some bank certificates from her stocking. The house verified the value of the two bets, and the two hands were uncovered. The young miner had four queens and a jack. Parker had three aces and two kings.

"I'm done for," the young miner said. "I've never gambled for high stakes before or drank more than an odd glass of beer. I suppose it is all in the game. Now here is an end to it."

On saying this, he snatched a gun from his pocket and raised it to his head. Before he had a chance to fire, I had knocked the gun from his hand with my cane. "It is a crime to take your own life," I said, "but it is also a crime to cheat as this man and woman have done." I explained how he had been duped. He said that he would simply take his share of the money and leave if I would return his gun. There seemed no reason not to believe him, so (to my eternal regret) I returned it. He hesitated only a moment before firing two shots which left the Parkers dead on the floor. Before anyone could react, he was bounding down the stairs and a few seconds later we heard a third shot.

Finally something had happened which caused the people of Skagway to change their ways at least for a short time. Hank took his brother and sister-in-law's bodies to Vancouver on the next boat without saying anything more about marrying Lizzie. Mr. Fargo agreed to pay Mrs. Bergrote enough for the hotel so that she could go into a bakery partnership with her friend and to provide a nice dowry for Lizzie. I decided to return to the Prairies rather than continue on to White Horse with Harry and Inspector Robertson. I was sure now that the Prairies were my true home and I had done enough travelling to satisfy me for some time to come.