

The Silent Witness

By S. Galbraith

JOAN Gregory, the teacher of the foreign settlement at Volsk, in northern Alberta, was eating her solitary dinner in her shack. Without, the September day was shortening to dusk. The one roomed frame shack, though small, was cozy and comfortable, and for two years Joan had lived alone in it.

The free unconventional life had a charm of its own, and Joan seldom grew lonely, though her only associates were other teachers thinly scattered over the vast prairie.

Through the window Joan could see the schoolhouse, some fifty yards away, and across the road the thatched house and barn of her nearest neighbor, Dmitri Boiejuk. There were other thatched roofs to be seen farther off on the prairie, but the nearest was a mile away.

A sound of horse's hoofs, clattering down the long hill to the north, took Joan to the door. On the summit of the hill, a mile away, the Russian Orthodox church, with its gilded domes, stood out clearly in the sunset glow, but it was too dark to distinguish clearly the approaching rider. Joan wondered who could be so reckless as to ride at such a pace down the hilly road, since it was in very bad repair, and was full of stumps and badger holes. The rider swept round the corner of the fence, and stopped at the school gate, only a few yards away. Joan, as he approached, was surprised to recognize Alan Forbes, who taught the school at Sheremeta, some ten miles distant. He often came over for Sunday dinner, but this was the first time he had called on a week evening. Joan hastily considered the resources of her larder.

"This is a pleasant surprise," she said. "You are just in time for dinner. But what is the matter?" she broke off, noticing now that he was coatless, hatless, and generally dishevelled.

"Miss Gregory," he said, striving to master his excitement, "I am in trouble. The police may be here any moment. I stopped to ask if you could give me some food?"

"The police? But why?"

"You may as well hear the truth now as later," Forbes said. "I am wanted for murder."

"Murder!" Joan fell back a step, but immediately recovered. "But you are not guilty?"

"No. But I dare not give myself up. You know how these Ruthenians stick together. The murderer himself will swear away my life, and he can get dozens of his countrymen to perjure themselves. And what witnesses have I?"

"Who has been murdered?" the girl asked.

"Domka Fedorovitch, old Tedor Fedorovitch's daughter. They live near the school. The girl sometimes came to that church on the hill; you may have seen her."

"Yes, I knew her," Joan murmured.

"I went over there after school to get some eggs. I took my .22 along, thinking I might get a prairie chicken on the way. I took my camera, too, since Domka had asked me to take her photograph. We were talking and laughing, and I had just taken a snapshot, when suddenly I saw Tonasco Pugachev standing a few yards behind the girl, covering her with my .22, which I had left leaning against the fence. Before I could move he fired. She screamed and fell. I ran to her, but she was already dead. The shot brought her father from the stable. Tonasco called out in Russian, which I understand fairly well, 'This cursed Englishman has killed your daughter. I will go for the police.' He jumped on a horse, and was off before I could find breath to deny his accusation. But in any case talk was of no use. Old Fedorovitch understands no English, and though I understand Russian, I can't speak it much."

"But why did you run away? People will say your flight proves you guilty, and you know there is no escape from the Riders of the Plains."

"I can't give myself up—I can't. There is not a scrap of evidence in my favor. Tonasco will swear that he saw me shoot the girl, and he will have witnesses ready to swear to it also. If I can only get fifty miles south, among English settlers, I may escape. Up here, of course, anyone speaking English is a

marked man. What's that?" he ended sharply.

The last rays of the sun showed a gleam of metal on the road from the north.

"Spurs," he muttered. "That means the mounted police. I must be off."

"I will get you some food," Joan said, running towards the shack. Then she stopped. The police were riding fast.

"You haven't time to get away," she said. "Untie your horse, quick. Hit him with the whip, so that he will gallop off to the south. Now, drop to the ground, and crawl to the shack. I'll hide you there. Don't stand up; drop to the

ground, I say. My neighbors have eyes like hawks."

As soon as they reached the shack, Joan threw back the couch cover, the fringed edges of which touched the floor.

"Roll under the couch, quick," she said. "I must light the lamp, and be quietly eating my dinner when the police stop."

In a moment all was arranged. Joan resumed her interrupted dinner just as two riders turned the corner. One dismounted and came towards the shack.

Joan rose at his knock, and went to the door. "Good evening, sergeant," she said, remembering the officer whom she had met several times in the past year.

"You are just in time for dinner, though I'm afraid everything's rather cold. I have been dawdling over my newspaper."

"Sorry, Miss Gregory, but I'm on official business, and can't stop. Have you seen anybody ride past within the hour?"

"Ruthenians?"

"Anybody."

"Half an hour ago my neighbor, Boiejuk, went past on his way to the post office, and a few minutes after Mr. Forbes, who teaches near here, rode past."

"Did you speak to him? Which way did he go?"

"He was going south. I asked him to come in and have dinner, but he said he was in a hurry. Is anything wrong?"

It had not escaped Joan then when the sergeant first came to the door his glance had swept every corner of the shack. But he did not seem suspicious.

On the pages of the Empire's own history are written the reasons for YOUR buying a



Studebaker

Lord Roberts wrote—
— in expressing his opinion of Studebaker products that were purchased for service in the Boer War:

On the Fields of France and Flanders

Many hundreds of Studebaker cars purchased by the English and Russian Governments are now giving service on the battlefields of Europe. This proves that Studebaker cars are built to withstand the most rigid tests of service imaginable, and that no motor cars are better fitted for the use of motorists throughout the British Empire than those bearing the Studebaker name.

A Tribute to Quality

The Royal Flying Corps of Canada, after a thorough and rigid investigation, purchased a fleet of 110 Studebaker automobiles.

At the aviation camps of the Dominion, where dependability is a prime requisite, these Studebaker cars are rendering prompt, efficient service.

ALL Studebaker motor cars for Canada and the overseas market are manufactured at the Canadian Studebaker factory, Walkerville, Ontario.

The latest Studebaker models are now on display. Go and inspect them—ride in them—drive them yourself. Know why they are the choice of Government experts—and the ultimate choice of discriminating motorists everywhere.

STUDEBAKER
Walkerville Ontario