

'Way Beyon' de Saskatchewan

By THERESE GUERIN RANDALL

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It was de end of de season, an' many of de trapper have come to de post to do deir tradin'. I was stan' by de lil' roun' window, where long ago de cannon peep out for Injun, an' read de letter. It was come from my sweetheart back in Quebec, an' have wait a long time for me here.

She say in de letter w'at fine time she has had at de weddin' of my ol' frien' Louis Baton, an' how dey tease her by say I was never goin' come back from de Nort' Wes'. Den she tol' me how cross was de ol' fadder, cause las' year he don't have so many shoe for mend. De odder cobbler come in de village, an' dat make it ver' bad. "Sometime de ol' fadder got mad," say dat nice letter, "an' tell me 'you is get old 'Toinnette; you mus' have twenty year now, an' dat Baptiste he don't never come marry wit you. Me, I tink you better get some odder garcon.' You know, Baptiste," she say den, "I will never have some odder garcon but you."

Dat letter make me tink ver' much. De great wish come in my heart to go back to dat village in Quebec an' marry wit my 'Toinnette. I was fill wit disgus' when I tink I mus' go hunt once more beyon' de Saskatchewan, so far Nort'. Dere de worl' is jus' as God have it when he stop makin' t'ings. Dere is no money but "skins"; dere is lil' to eat, on'y de dried meat an' fish, and even de high wine is not sell.

"Baugh," tink I, "why have not I 'nough money for go home?" My heart was sick with being lonesome when de loud voice fill my ear, an' its soun' bring once more de courage to my breas'.

"Sacre," say dat voice, "one letter for me from Quebec. Where is Baptiste? My eye is bad when I try read." "Ah," he say, as I come from de darkness of de store-room, where I sit an' tink, you is de great scholar; tell me w'at you see on dis piece of paper," and he han' me de letter.

Dis was Gregoire, de mans of all de trapper I like de bes'. He was de half-breed, an' many of our mans don't like him, cause dey tink de half-breed is ever treacherous. But to me he was de mos' fine fella in de whole worl'. He was born near dis post, where hees fadder have been trapper an' have marry de squaw. He have never go to school like me an' get such fine education—that is why he call me to read de letter.

It was from de Not-ry in de village far 'way in dat parish in Quebec where I was born. It tell how de gran'fadder of Gregoire have die an' leave him de lil' farm.

"Ma foi," cry Gregoire, an' he slap hees leg, "w'at can I do wit such place 'way off in Quebec? I tink my old gran'fadder ought better have die out here an' leave me de lil' place. If he had shown such sense I would now be ver' glad," an' he laugh hees big laugh. "By gar, I must go see dat farm. Dis not-ry offer sell it; but, me, I don't never trust de strange mans w'at can write such fine word; eh, Baptiste?"

Me, I cannot lis'en to all he say. I was pain in my heart wit tink how lil' he care for dat farm; but, me, if I had it I could marry wit dat 'Toinnette I love, an' be for ever happy.

Den mus' I tell him all 'bout dat fine girl; how fas' she can knit de sock, an' how fine she can fry de fish, an' w'at clean white floor are in de house, where she do all t'ings for her ol' fadder.

I can tell Gregoire all in my heart w'at I can never say to some odder mans, 'cause me I love him nex' to 'Toinnette. An' 'tis de hap-ness to praise someone we love, an' de hap-ness make de hour move way so easy as de beautiful sun.

I mus' have talk ver' much, but I don't know it till I was interrupt by a snore ver' loud, an' I see Gregoire, wit hees el' bow back 'gainst de wall behind de door fas' asleep. I say in my heart, w'at great fool was de man who snore while I tell 'bout dat fine 'Toinnette.

So soon as I stop talk he wake up, an' shake heeself an' stare at me. Me, I look ver' cross.

"Ah," he say, soon as he know where he is, an' he laugh hees loud laugh,



"I Have Foun' de Man W'at Try Kill Me."

"you is mad 'cause I has sleep while you preach more dan one hour on you' girl. By gar, Baptiste, if I have talk so long 'bout my girl, you would be so soun' sleep dat on'y de judgment-day would you wake."

"Ah, but you' girl is not 'Toinnette," say I, an' den he roar dat big laugh 'gain, an' slap hees knee, an' I mus' laugh, too—'tough I don't know why.

"Ah," he say, so soon as he can stop laugh, "ah, Baptiste, you is de vrai innocent."

Den he light hees pipe 'gainst mine, an' we is 'gain de bes' frien'.

"Why don't you not buy my lil' farm?" he ask. "If you want marry wit you' 'Toinnette."

"I ain't got 'nough money yet," say I. "Las' year when de poor ol' modder was sick so long before she die, I mus' spen' ver' much—dat was de time I go home an' get engage to 'Toinnette. De ol' modder had no one else but me, an' I mus' be ver' good to such nice, kind modder as she was ever. You mus' know she has sent me four winter to school when she mus' work as cook in de tavern. Me, I can't never forget dat, an' by gar, after I was grow up she live like one real lady, do not-ting but on'y sew an' cook for she self. When she die, well, she have not be bury like one pauper, eh, Gregoire?"

"You is ver' lib'ral mans, Baptiste, ever" one say dat," answer Gregoire, "an' I suppose it is right be good to de parents, but me, I don't know 'cause I has none for so many year. But, we mus' talk bus-ness. Now, you is my frien', an' you know once you has save me when dat bear jus' refuse to get shoot, an' hees mate—"

"Baugh, Gregoire," say I, an' jump up to run 'way, "you ain't goin' tell dat ol' story 'gain—I ain't never goin' hear it no more."

"Sit down, mon camarade," say he; "since you like it more we talk bus-ness. I want say you an' me we mus' go to Quebec de firs' chance, an' if you

like my lil' farm I sell it to you ver' cheap. You can pay me w'atever you can, at firs', an' later, as you get it, de res'. Me, I don't care so much for de money."

"Ah!" say I; "you is de good frien', Gregoire, but my 'Toinnette has de ver' hard ol' fadder. He tell me never can I have hees daughter till I own my own farm, an' have pay ever' sou on it—not owe one York shillin'."

"Well," say he, "p'rhaps you have save 'nough, 'cause me, I don't ask my bes' frien' so much as de stranger."

We go back an' see de farm—p'rhaps you an' me can live on it togedder—but no, I don't want stay ever off dere in yon' Quebec so far from my peoples here. Anyway, you an' me, we fix dat all up—you has de farm, an' de ol' man needn't know everyting, eh?"

"Mille tonners!" say I, an' I shake hees hans; "you is de frien'! Dat lil' farm would jus' suit me, I know it well."

Before we lie down to sleep dat night we has agree to go to dat far-off Quebec togedder. Me, I was so excite I can on'y tink of all Gregoire have say. When we have had de high wine, he even offer sell de farm for w'at I have save; but me, I don't never take a 'vantage of de frien' like dat.

Of course, I know it might be long time before he can sell it where it is, t'ings go slow dere; but still, it is bes' he talk wit M'sieur de Not-ry 'bout it—an' besides, I want him to go see my 'Toinnette.

Well, ver' soon we has de fine chance to leave de post wit de ox teams dat mus' haul many load all de way to Fort Garry.

Ma foi, I was glad when we was start, but I was more glad when we was reach Winnipeg. You' M'sieur, don't know w'at it mean to travel over one thousand mile by ox team, eh! But even I can be gay dose long days, for I was come wit ever' sunrise nearer my 'Toinnette!

Well, it t'aint no use to try tell all dat girl she say to me when I come to her widout tell her. She laugh an' she cry, an' she hang on my neck, an' she say never, never more shall I leave her. Den I mus' tell her 'bout Gregoire an'

tooths' he had. He pat my back an' say I was one fine garcon, and me, I was de mos' happy man.

Nex' day him an' me we go see de farm of Gregoire. Dis ol' fadder of 'Toinnette is ver' shrewd mans, but me, I don't take him dere 'cause I want him see if t'ings is all right. No, I tink what Gregoire say an' w'at I see is 'nough. I jus' take dat ol' man for make him feel proud, 'cause ever dat make peoples happy an' in de good humor.

He like de farm, an' he offer Gregoire so lil' for it dat we was both laugh—me an' my frien'. But me, I wink de eye at Gregoire, which say: "You an' me we has settle de price—jus' pretend agree wit the ol' man," an' he did.

'Toinnette's fadder was ver' glad, an' boast a good deal as we go back to hees house, he say:

"I is on'y de ol' shoemaker, but me, I have make more good bargains for odder man's dan anyone else in de village. I is ver' smart 'cause I has offer dat Gregoire so much less dan de farm is worth, but you see he have agree. You mus' ever take me when you make de bargain, 'cause me, I know de worl'."

By gar, dat firs' day Gregoire have see my 'Toinnette he don't fall 'sleep an' snore! I take him wit me to de maple grove, on de farm of M'sieur Perault, where mos' all de young peoples have gone to boil de syrup into sugar, an' after have de dance in de barn.

I have so often, ah, so ver' often, in de long lonely years dat follow, tink of dat day. How fine she look, my han'-some 'Toinnette, as we came 'mong dose trees. She was stan' in a lil' grove wit some odders, by one of de big iron kettle hung 'er de blazing fire, an' she have some ting in her hand to stir de sugar.

She was dressed in some pretty red wool skirt, an' her foots in tick shoe show so nice, an' her shiny black hair was braid so smooth an' roll roun' her head. Oh, how her big dark eye dance wit fun, as she pretend to t'row a ladle of de hot sugar at de schoolmaster, w'at tease her 'bout me. Ah, I smile, as I stop to look on. I ain't jealous, 'cause even dis mans, w'at knows so much he can teach de village school, an' have such fine whisker, have want marry wit my 'Toinnette, but 'Toinnette she love on'y me. Dat was before he marry wit de daughter of M'sieur de Not-ry.

I have forgot all about Gregoire, as I stan' back 'mong de tree, an' burn wit love for dat fine girl, but I can't not always remember such frien'. I turn to him after while an' say:

"Was I right when I tell you she was de mos' han'-some girl in Canada?" An' I laugh as I see hees seprise—hees mouth open, hees eye stare straight at 'Toinnette.

He start when I speak, an' say wit a lil' laugh, "Us dat you' 'Toinnette?" By gar, Baptiste, you was right. You is ver' lucky boy. Dere can be no odder girl so fine in de parish."

'Toinnette have see us den, an' she come to us wid a lil' more red in de cheek. I tell her de name of Gregoire—an' he looked 'shamed, as he scrape back hees foot, an' pull hees fron' piece of hair. Ah, I was ver' proud when I see how polite he can act—just like one vrai M'sieur—an' how beautiful look my 'Toinnette when she gave him her han' so shy.

Well, I can't not tell you w'at nice time we had dat evening. We dance in de barn till de oil was all burn out of de lamp, an' I was glad to see how Gregoire like my 'Toinnette. You see I has praise her so much I don't want him fin' her not so han'-some as I have say—dat don't go, eh M'sieur?

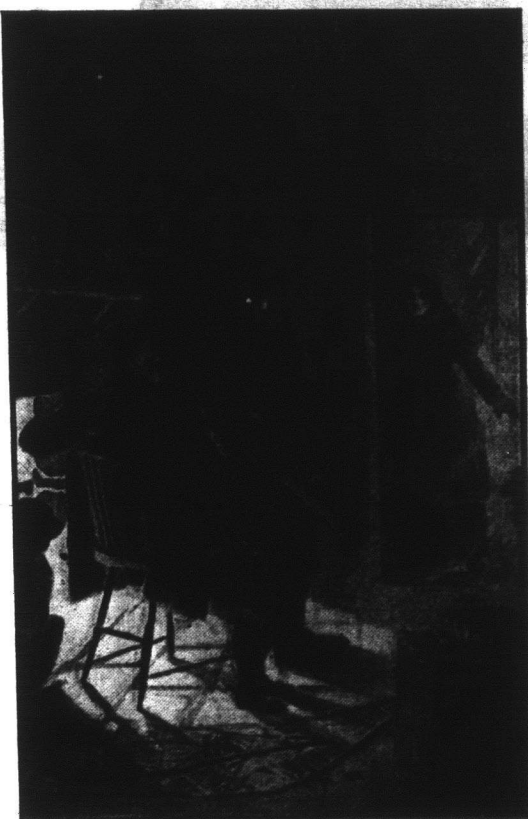
So many time he try make her dance wit him, and he gave her de molasses cake an' apple, but ever she keep by me an' say:

"Ah, I has not see Baptiste in so ver' long, an' we is ol' frien's."

But at las' I say in her ear:

"Come, ma belle 'Toinnette, you will dance a lil' wit my bes' frien' to please you' Baptiste, eh?" an' she do.

I was stay wit Gregoire on hees nice lil' farm an' work wit him, an' in de evenin' he come wit me to see 'Toinnette. Sometime I tink would 'Toin-



"A Woman Slaggered i..."

w'at he have say 'bout de lil' farm, an' oh, M'sieur, you should have see dat girl how happy she was.

Well, her ol' fadder was ver' kind to me, n' laugh at me t'rough de on'y two