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"You will not ask any questions, but if ever Colonel Barrington is not kind to you, you can show him that," he said.

He had gone in another moment, but the girl, comprehending dimly what he had done, stood still, staring at the paper with a warmth in her cheeks and a mistiness in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXII.

Sergeant Stimson Confirms His Suspicions.

IT was late in the afternoon when Colonel Barrington drove up to Witham's homestead. He had his niece and sister with him, and when he pulled up his team, all three were glad of the little breeze that came down from the blueness of the north and rippled the whitened grass. It had blown over leagues of sun-bleached prairie, and the great desolation beyond the pines of the Saskatchewan, but had not wholly lost the faint wholesome chill it brought from the Pole.

There was no cloud in the vault of ether, and slanting sunrays beat fiercely down upon the prairie, until the fibrous dust grew fiery, and the eyes ached from the glare of the vast stretch of silvery grey. The latter was, however, relieved by stronger colour in front of the party, for, blazing gold on the dazzling stubble, the oat sheaves rolled away in long rows that diminished and melted into each other, until they cut the blue of the sky in a delicate filigree. Oats had moved up in value in sympathy with wheat, and the good soil had most abundantly redeemed its promise that year. Colonel Barrington, however, sighed a little as he looked at them, and remembered that such a harvest might have been his.

"We will get down and walk towards the wheat," he said. "It is a good crop, and Lance is to be envied." "Still," said Miss Barrington, "he deserved it, and those sheaves stand for more than the toil that brought them there."


"Of course!" said the Colonel with a curious little smile. "For rashness, I fancied, when they showed the first blade above the clod, but I am less sure of it now. Well, the wheat is even finer."

A man who came up took charge of the horses, and the party walked in silence towards the wheat. It stretched before them in a vast parallelogram, and while the oats were the pale gold of the austral, there was the tint of the ruddier metal of their own North-West in this. It stood tall and stately, murmuring as the sea does, until it rolled before a stronger puff of breeze in waves of ochre, through which the warm bronze gleamed when its rhythmic patten swelled into deeper-toned harmonies. There was that in the elfin music and blaze of colour which appealed to sensual ear and eye, and something which struck deeper still, as it did in the days men poured libations on the fruitful soil, and white-robed priest blessed it, when the world was young.

Maud Barrington felt it vaguely, but she recognized more clearly, as her aunt had done, the faith and daring of the sower. The earth was very bountiful, but that wheat had not come there of itself; and she knew the man who had called it up had done more than bear his share of the primeval curse which, however, was apparently more or less evaded at Silverdale. Even when the issue appeared hopeless, the courage that held him resolute in face of others' fears, and the greatness of his projects, had appealed to her, and it almost counted for less that he had achieved success. Then, glancing further across the billowing grain she saw him—still, as it seemed it had always been with him, amidst the stress and dust of strenuous endeavour.

Once more, as she had seen them when the furrows were bare at seed time, and there was apparently only ruin in store for those who raised the Eastern people's bread, lines of dusty teams came plodding down the rise. They advanced in echelon, keeping their time and distance with a military precision; but in place of the harrows the tossing arms of the binders flashed and swung. The wheat went down before them, their wake was strewn with gleaming sheaves, and one man came foremost, swaying in the driving-seat of a rattling machine.

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