

The Story on the Factor's Book

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him a girl, in whose still face there was no sign of life except the horrible light in the glinting eyes, knelt and drove into the ground with ringing strokes a strong stake. A gun leaned against her knee as she worked. She drove four stakes, their heads pointing outward. In silence she rolled the man between them and began attaching a rawhide thong to his moccasined feet above the ankle. In a flash he understood and made a mighty spring with the length of his whole body, but the girl was upon him like a panther, and he stumbled down with the chill of steel against his throat.

"Perhaps M'sieu Le Moyne, the traitor, would prefer the knife?" she said. With watching eyes and ready blade, she tied him hand and foot, then rose and looked down at him.

"So it was to have been Marie Le Bault who lived in the new cabin—Marie whose face in the gold frame cost M'sieu Le Moyne so many furs. A quaint conceit, m'sieu, and how the bride would have laughed at it on the walls of the house built—for me. But the bride will wait, and the factor will wait for the return of the trapper from the Windage Flats, and Father Tenau will wait for the gift of the ceremony."

The man's eyes begged wildly for speech, but with a bow and a cold smile Oleo turned toward the forest. A dozen steps away she looked back.

"Pardon, m'sieu, but I will console Marie."

And so she left him, staked out beneath the hazy sky, in the silence of the great woods and the barren reaches of the Ragged Lands beyond.

III

Father Tenau had come up from Henriette for the confession. The trappers and half-breeds were gathering in for the remission of sins, before the long journeys into the wilderness, and there was much gaiety in Fort Du Cerne. Oleo had been back two days, silent, triumphant, inscrutable, and none knew where she had been.

But the end of the story was nearer than she knew, and it came with the usual suddenness of such things. She had passed the laughing Marie before the house of the factor, and her fingers curled to the hilt of a knife in the folds of her skirt; but the long revenge was best, after all, when she should see the color fade from the bright cheeks and the light from the eyes with the shame of waiting for the lover who never came. It would be—

"My daughter," said the good father, and his gentle face was before her. She bowed her regal head for his blessing and dropped her burning eyes. Thoughts of her revenge ran thru her mind, drowning out his soft voice. She waited, not knowing that he had blessed her, lost in her unholy dream. Suddenly, mon dieu, what was he saying? Thru a maze of incomprehension came the words: "It is vanity, the painting of your face, my daughter, for the beauty must be of the soul; but there is nothing like a headstrong lover. And it is a good likeness, made, too, from the painter's memory of you, and Polier—"

The father stopped breathless with the impact of her body. She had sprung upon him, and clutched him with fingers that drew blood.

"I? I?" she gasped. "My face?"

At his answer, out upon the crisp air rang a cry that reached every corner of the post, a scream of anguish, the voice of a strong soul in hell. She stood one moment as stone, and a forecast of the vacant look of the old Oleo came into the young eyes for whose sake so many men would have given their hearts' blood. One moment, and then she was away, running like a hound, low to earth, guarding strength for the long trail. Father Tenau watched her go and wondered. But she was ever a strange, lawless being, eerie and not to be understood. The father sighed and went among his people.

With long, crouching strides Oleo leaped like a panther thru the dim woods, under the low-hanging branches. It was the impossible, men might say, that she accomplished that day. To the cabin on the Black Lakes and the thing

she had left there it was a two day's journey, and she made it a matter of hours. At noon she might have been seen, had there been any to see, skirting the Windage Flats, and two hours later she was far among the pot-holes, running still with long, low leaps.

The sun was dropping toward the rim of the forest, sending over all the North Land great flaming bands of fire, turning to deepest red the waters of the still lakes, when she stood, wide-eyed and silent, at the edge of the small clearing. Her eyes, burning and flashing, traveled round the circle to the space before the door. Some lingering hope of the strength of the splendid arms of Polier Le Moyne, or of the unsoundness of the thongs, had sustained her and lent her speed in her race over the wild trail. With a savage snap of her beautiful teeth she sprang forward. A heaving cloud of vultures rose, spreading like the smoke when the Devil's Hole burns in the Red Hills. Down on her knees between the stakes, her body swaying drunkenly, she thrust her hands among the tattered rags. Over the side where his proud heart had beaten, she found it and brought it up—a bit of ivory in a quaint gold frame. She held it a moment in her hands, then turned it upward toward the fading light. Her own fair face, haughty, cold, insolent in its marvelous beauty and inscrutable eyes.

A band of the Blackfeet came into Fort Du Cerne in the early spring, and brought a woman, tall, beautiful, silent, with a face like a queen of heaven, but with great eyes that saw not and long braids of snowy hair. But months before that the factor had married Marie Le Bault.

WAYSIDE APPLES

By Peter McArthur

Why should the apples be wasted? Even tho the market price of other country products—such as grains, butter, meat, etc.—may be low, they will be cared for and little allowed to go to waste. The necessary machinery for marketing them has been perfected, tho the price may fluctuate, but with apples and other fruits the case is entirely different. This department of trade has been almost entirely speculative and unless the dealers have seen a chance to make a large profit, much good fruit has been allowed to go to waste. But even if a market were established and properly organized, there would still be a waste, because of the attitude of the public. Everybody wants No. 1 apples of the choicest varieties, and there is no market for culls. It is quite true that many of the culls are used in evaporating factories to make dried apples and also to make cider and vinegar. But the country is full of uncared for orchards that yield a large supply of excellent apples that cannot be graded. It is a shame that these should be allowed to waste. The cost of production being practically nothing beyond the rent of the land on which the orchard stands, a very small price would move the farmers together and save these apples, if there was a market for them. They are good enough, not only for the poor, but for anyone with a sense of economy.

Let me remind those who insist on nothing but the choicest apples, which are always bound to be more or less expensive, that the most delightful appreciation of apples in the language was not written about any of the well-known varieties, but about the windfalls in neglected corners of New England. Speaking of some of his apple-eating revels, Thoreau says:

"You would not suppose that there was any fruit left there on the first survey, but you must look according to system. Those which lie exposed are quite brown and rotten now, or perchance a few still show one blooming cheek here and there in the wet leaves. Nevertheless, with experienced eyes I explore under the bare alders, and the huckleberry bushes, and the withered sedge, and in the crevices of the rocks which are full of leaves, and pry under the fallen and decayed ferns which with apple and alder leaves, thickly strew the ground. For I know that they lie concealed, fallen into hollows long since, and covered up by the leaves of the tree itself—a proper kind of packing. From these lurking places, everywhere within the circumference of the tree, I draw forth the fruit all wet and glossy, may be



-- umm!

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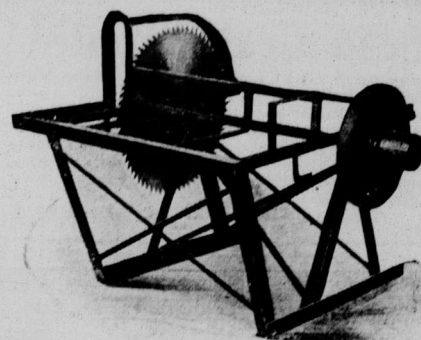
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