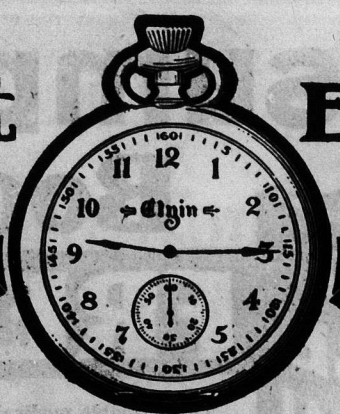


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WINNIPEG

MANITOBA

The salary was not a large one, but as the position enabled her to be with her child all the time, she was willing to risk any possible trouble the cowboys might give her.

There were two neat, cosy rooms at one end of the station, and these Mrs. Hartman fitted up for her own use, and they were the prettiest and brightest rooms in Cochrane when her bright-colored carpets were down, her pictures on the walls and her books and bits of bric-a-brac on the shelves. She had brought her small upright piano, and it was the only piano in Cochrane. Her canary bird, and even Dandy, her cat, came with her.

Then there was Cecil, one of the merriest and prettiest of little girls.

"I never get lonesome for a single moment," Mrs. Hartman said to Kearney one day after she had been two weeks at Cochrane. "Isn't it about time those cowboys were paying me a visit?"

"Oh, they'll come," replied Kearney, whose mind had been filled with many gloomy forebodings ever since the arrival of "that woman agent"; and they came that very night, six or eight of them, headed by Big Jake, one of the most dangerous and reckless cowboys in Bad Lands Country.

They had not heard of the arrival of the new agent, and, contrary to their usual custom, stopped at the little station on their way up to the town.

"We'll jes skeer the tenderfoot out

"My 'what?"

"Yer daddy, er—yer pa?"

"Oh, my papa? Why, don't you know? He's up in the 'ky—with God."

A solemn look came into her pretty face, and her voice faltered as she spoke, with one little round white arm lifted upward, a finger pointing towards the sky.

A rear door of the sitting-room opened as the child spoke, and, a few seconds later, the amazed cowboys saw a little woman dressed in black, with a face slightly pale, standing beside the little girl.

"Good evening, gentlemen," she said, a little nervously, at once recognizing the character of her visitors. "Did you want tickets? There will be no more trains to-night."

"We didn't want no tickets," replied Big Jake, evidently somewhat nonplussed. "We jest dropped in to make a sorter frien'ly call on the new agent, an' git acquainted."

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Hartman, recovering her self-possession and speaking in the most cordial tone. "If you will come in I will make you a cup of coffee, after your cold ride. I am the new agent."

"What?" said Big Jake, "you the new agent?" Then, giving his shoulders a suggestive shrug, he turned to his followers and said, briefly:

"Well, boys, we'd better git!"

"And they immediately got," said Mrs. Hartman, leaning back in her



She held out her hand, saying, "I'm the new agent and telegraph operator."

of a year's growth," said Big Jake, dismounting at the depot door, while his companions followed him.

It was after dark, but bright lights shone through the white-curtained windows of Mrs. Hartman's rooms. All was still within when the men flung open the door of the waiting-room and marched in hooting and yelling like Sioux Indians.

One of them was about to kick open the door leading into Mrs. Hartman's sitting-room, when it slowly opened, a flood of light streamed into the dark waiting-room, and in its yellow glow there stood a sober-faced little girl of four years, with her bare feet peeping out from beneath a trailing white nightgown, and a tangle of yellow curls hanging down to a scarlet knitted shawl thrown hastily around her shoulders. Her face wore a look of wonder more than of affright as she said:

"What you want mens?"

No one made reply, and the childish voice was heard again.

"My mamma's gone to the 'tore. You want a wailwode ticket? Or do you want to see my kitty? She won't squatch, not a bit."

Dandy, the big fourteen-pound Maltese cat, seldom failed to attract attention, to the great delight of little Cecil, to whom "my kitty" was dearer than "my best dolly."

"Where's yer—yer—daddy?" asked one of the men.

rocking-chair and laughing heartily, as she told the incident to Mrs. Dilly and Mrs. Ferguson, who had so far overcome their prejudice against the "female agent" as to spend one or two evenings a week in her cheery little sitting-room.

There had been few religious services held in Cochrane. There was no church in the town, and but one or two ministers had visited the place in a missionary spirit, and they had been so unfortunate as to offend the cowboys by making them the object of special sermons, and speaking some plain truths, in a way that was instantly resented by the cowboy element, and future meetings gave rise to such disturbances that it was advisable to discontinue them.

Soon after her arrival, Mrs. Hartman gathered a number of the children and their mothers, with three or four men, into the depot one afternoon and organized a Sabbath school, and a little later Mrs. Dilly went around among her neighbors with this surprising news:

"There's going to be meetin' in the hall over the postoffice Sunday night."

"What kind of meeting?"

"Preachin' meetin', I reckon; but I don't know who's goin' to preach, onless she does it herself, an' I ain't a mite o' doubt but she kin do it."

"Why, Mis' Hartman, she's the one that's cal'ed the meetin'. They're goin' to take her pianner up to the hall, an'