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PIANO.**



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There's music in the gushing of a rill;
There's music in all things, if men had ears,
Their earth is but an echo of the spheres."—Byron.

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BOWMANVILLE, CANADA

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2A

Natacha
By Max. McD.

IT was broken health that brought Nellie Bartlett to the West. She was an only child. Her father at the time of her mother's death, left her with an aunt and migrated to the land of the red men and buffalo. He was an illiterate fellow, Tom Bartlett, and his cow-puncher life developed in him a recklessness and daring seldom found in men of his age. But withal Tom was respected, and when his daughter, Nellie, came to spend a summer at the ranch, the place was just plagued with cowboys from the outfits for one hundred miles around.

Dick Crosby had been wrangler at the Bar U, and when things got dull at mid-summer he went over to help Tom Bartlett's men put up hay. Dick was handy with a towel, and it was not long till helping dry dishes in the kitchen fell oftener to Dick than to the other cowboys at the ranch; and to wield the dish towel for the only white girl in a hundred miles, was considered no small honor.

The change of climate did not work for Nellie Bartlett all that her friends in the East had hoped, and with the approach of fall she grew weaker and a total collapse threatened. To her father, then, fell the care of his daughter and the work at the ranch house.

Dick Crosby saw that something must be done to ensure better care for the little sick girl, for whom he had begun to feel so strong an attachment. Her father could not be persuaded to get a white nurse from the East, believing that he was doing for his daughter all that could be done. Dick knew that a woman's hand on the hot forehead was needed and he set out to hunt one.

The Indian reserve was thirty miles distant, and thither the lean-shanked man turned his wiry sorrel, leading a colt of four years, just halter-broken.

The return journey was not a long one, but for one of the two who rode the trail that day it meant a transition from the old life of the teepee to the new one in white surroundings.

A plainsman's instinct told the man it was noon time, and looking up at the sun, he signalled a halt.

"Better grub, Natacha!"

The Indian girl dismounted and in the stolid fashion of her race set herself to the preparation of the crude meal.

The man picketed his horse in the rank grass beside the lake where they had halted and hobbled the cayuse the girl was riding; then sat himself cross-legged before the small fire and began rolling a cigarette.

"Now, look here, Natacha," said he in a drawl that proclaimed his Southern birth, "we might as well have a sort o' final chin-chin while there's still time. Of course your old buck father is willin' enough and all that, for that there hoss I gave him was a shore beauty; but this here goin' and livin' in a white family and a stickin' to their white ways ain't goin' to come any too easy, 'specially at first."

The girl straightened herself to her full height from her crouch over the frying pan. And, looking at Dick Crosby, she inquired with a touch of scorn in her voice, "Lots to do?"

Dick underscored his former rating of her as the best he could possibly have gotten. Here, indeed, was one who could lift the burden of household cares from Nellie Bartlett, for Nellie was but now recovering from an illness that had nearly taken her away from him. He eyed the little lithe muscular figure before him—a figure whose proportions revealed a strength many a good man, even on that range, might well have envied. Then he chuckled.

"Well, no, hardly that, girl. You ain't goin' to wear out, as it were. I was just speakin' about the difference in the kind of livin' you was arumin' into. Still, I reckon you'll flop right

into the thing quick enough. I just thought I'd have this here little final powwow with you, 'cause, somehow or other, this tradin' game I worked with your old man kind o' weighed on my mind as bein' mighty near buyin' and sellin' a human. And now, hoss or no hoss, I'm givin' you a chance to choose for yourself. Fact is, I'm willin' to lose the hoss altogether; and," he went on reflectively, "it shore was a fine colt, that."

The Indian maid listened with rapt attention to all the big cow-puncher had to say and broke in suddenly with:

"You be there?"

"Well, no," he answered with a grin to himself. "The work is done at Bartlett's; but I do reckon I'll be there off and on, so it would only be a pibald lie to say I'll be there mighty often."

Then he went on chuckling to himself; for he had really been talking more to himself than to the Indian girl. Dick's mind was running back to the sick girl at Bartlett's to see whom his sorrel would soon wear a foot-deep path from his own lonely shack to old Bartlett's outfit.

Even a man accustomed to read the stolid faces of her tribe would have found it difficult to trace the slightest semblance of a problem being solved in the mind and heart of the Indian girl. But when she had tossed the two tin plates and granite cups into the saddle bags after they had finished their trail lunch and Dick had rolled another cigarette preparatory to mounting, she said, "I go."

The Bartlett ranch house lay in a valley between great hills. It was nightfall when the Indian girl and her white escort spied the frail form of Nellie Bartlett leaning on the corral gate.

"Howdo, Nellie," sang out Dick as he flung his long leg over the sorrel's back and dismounted to throw open the gate, "this here servant rustlin' o' mine has turned out some productive. This here's

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