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A Flower of the Prairies

(Continued from page 11.)

savage guarding its young. "I only meant that I have often seen babies as young before, and I know they are all red and squirmy-looking at first."

"Oh!" Tannis lay back in her chair. "So mayn't I see baby?" persisted Marian.

"No, no." Tannis looked round like a hunted thing. "It's—it's—unlucky," she gasped, at length.

"Unlucky? Why I never heard that it was unlucky to see a young baby before. Is it an Indian superstition? Do you know," Marian leant forward and dropped her voice to a whisper; "I hear that there is going to be trouble with the Indians?"

"Trouble with the Indians?" "Yes, Jack doesn't think there will be; but Mr. Courtney—I met him when I was riding here—warned me to go back; that it was not safe to be alone and unarmed. But I don't believe there is any danger, do you? Besides, they never dare to attack English men."

"Wouldn't they?" Tannis's lips curled slightly.

"No, they'd be punished if they did. Do you think England will stand by and allow us to be massacred?"

"England is a long way off," replied Tannis, "and I am afraid if the Indians were to rise nothing would stop them; did Rafe say soon?"

"No, he just spoke in a general way; but he looked awfully haggard and upset."

"Oh," answered Tannis. "But do you think—a—h!" Marian sprang to her feet with a shriek. "Look! Look! Look!" She pointed out of the window with a hand that trembled violently.

TANNIS'S eyes followed Marian. Her face blanched. She sprang to her feet. "The Indians! Pull in the shutters while I bar the doors."

"I daren't," shrieked Marian. "I daren't open the window with those dreadful people outside."

"Your life depends on it. Bar the doors, then, I'll attend to the window." Tannis threw open the window and drew in the heavy shutters, closed and locked the window. Then she flew to the kitchen and did the same, Marian following her. The two women stood clinging together in the dark kitchen listening to the yells of the Indians outside. The old Indian, Marie, crept down the stairs, the baby in her arms, and squatted on the floor at Tannis's feet. The cries of the Indians increased in volume.

"Oh! oh! oh!" shrieked Marian, wringing her hands, "how can you stand quiet like that? Isn't there anything we can do; send Marie out to stop them?"

"Marie couldn't stop them. She could go if she liked, they wouldn't hurt her, she is one of them, but that wouldn't help us."

"Then I am going upstairs to shoot some of them." She made a grab at a rifle that hung on the wall, but Tannis caught her arm. "Stay where you are. If you shot any of them, they would tear the place down about our ears in a moment. Our only hope is to stay quiet. Maybe Mr. Wilson will hear and come. Listen, they are beginning their war dance; they won't attack till they have finished."

"Listen!" Tannis clutched Marian's arm tightly. An agonizing shriek of an animal in torture rose clear above the clamour, died, and rose again and again; "it's your horse."

With a loud, piercing shriek, Marian threw herself on the floor, and lay there a shuddering, sobbing heap. So the three women waited in the darkness; the Indian woman, squatting on the floor, grunting over the baby in her arms; Tannis, standing a white, motionless statue; while the terrible din went on outside. At last there came a silence that lasted longer. Tannis moved restlessly and addressed the Indian in her native

tongue, who grunted once or twice by way of reply; again Tannis spoke; again the Indian grunted. Tannis gave a little sobbing cry, and Marian raised her head slightly. "Do you think they have gone?" she asked, hopefully.

"No," answered Tannis, "they are going to burn the house."

"Burn the house! Burn the house! And you stand there doing nothing!" Marian sprang to her feet and rushed to the door, battering on it with her hands. "Let me out, I say!"

Tannis turned the key and opened the door. "Go, then," she said quietly.

Marian took a step forward, then fell an inert mass on the steps, as an Indian with a wild warhoop rushed toward her. Tannis dragged Marian in, and locked the door, then she walked over to the wall and took down the rifle.

Marian's eyes followed her, an added horror growing in them as she watched. "What are you going to do?"

"Kill you, and then Marie can kill me, she will be all right." She raised the rifle as she spoke.

"Don't, don't!" shrieked Marian, covering her face with her hands. "What about your baby?"

"Baby!" The rifle dropped from Tannis's hands, and clattered to the floor. "I had forgotten all about my son." She walked over to the Indian woman and took the baby from her arms. Then she walked to the door at the front of the house and opened it.

Marian gave a little gasp of horror and fainted dead away.

Tannis stood on the threshold, her baby in her arms. All around the house branches of trees were piled nearly to the lower windows, and the Indians were still bringing more. "My fathers, and my brothers"—she spoke in their native tongue—"your sister brings you her son, little Owl Face, that you may make of him a mighty warrior and chief."

Fearlessly she held the child toward them. The Indians stood motionless, looking at her. They didn't know what to make of it. No white woman had faced them like this before. What did it mean? Was it a ruse to get them in to the white man's power?

"MY fathers, my brothers." Tannis held the baby out at arm's length.

Finally a young Indian brave stepped forward and looked at the baby. Then he drew back and spoke to the others. Their grunts bespoke their feeling as plainly as words would have done. Tannis scanned their faces anxiously, but they were blank.

"They think I am cheating them," she thought hopelessly. A young Indian, lighted torch in his hand, rushed forward. With a cry Tannis stepped back and locked the door behind her. She leant back against the door and strained her ears. An ominous crackling sounded through the silence. She stepped back into the kitchen and looked at the Indian woman.

"You'd better go, Marie," she said. The Indian only grunted. She bent down till she lay with her ear flat on the floor; then she lifted her head slightly. "Listen," she chanted more than spoke the words, "I hear the hoofs of the white man's horses riding on the plains; they come, many of them, they draw nearer and nearer. I can hear the wind whispering of the far-off Happy Hunting Ground. I can hear the feet of many braves on the journey. I can hear the voices of the fathers greeting their sons. I can hear the wailings of the mothers and the wives. Oh, my fathers! Oh, my brothers!"

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried Tannis, "I can't hear anything but the crackling of the fire. Yes, oh, yes, I can hear them galloping up. Listen, they are shouting. Take my son, I will attend to the English woman."

Tannis rushed across the room and raised the prostrate form of Marian. She slowly opened her eyes. The