

attached to supplying it and the Blackfeet on the reserves with liquor were heavy.

"Business this way?" said Witham.

Courthorne appeared to consider a moment, and there was a curious little glint which did not escape his companion's attention in his eyes but he laughed.

"Yes, we're making a big run," he said, then stopped and looked straight at the rancher. "Did it ever strike you, Witham, that you were not unlike me?"

Witham smiled, but made a little gesture of dissent as he returned the other's gaze. They were about the same height and had the same English type of face, while Witham's eyes were grey and his companion's an indefinite blue that approached the former colour, but there the resemblance, which was not more than discernible, ended. Witham was quietly-spoken and somewhat grim, a plain prairie farmer in appearance, while a vague but recognizable stamp of breeding and distinction still clung to Courthorne. He would have appeared more in place in the States upon the southern Atlantic seaboard, where the characteristics the Cavalier settlers brought with them are not extinct, than he did upon the Canadian prairie. His voice had even in his merriment a little imperious ring, his face was refined as well as sensual, and there was a languid gracefulness in his movements and a hint of pride in his eyes. They, however, lacked the steadiness of Witham's, and there were men who had seen the wild devil that was born in Courthorne look out of them. Witham knew him as a pleasant companion, but surmised from stories he had heard that there were men, and more women, who bitterly rued the trust they had placed in him.

"No," he said dryly. "I scarcely think I am like you, although only last night Nettie at the settlement took me for you. You see, the kind of life I've led out here has set its mark on me, and my folks in the old country were distinctly middle-class people. There is something in heredity."

Courthorne did not parry the unexpressed question. "Oh, yes," he said, with a little sardonic smile. "I know. The backbone of the nation—solemn, virtuous, and slow. You're like them, but my folks were different, as you surmise. I don't think they had many estimable qualities from your point of view, but if they all didn't go quite straight they never went slow, and they had a few prejudices, which is why I found it advisable to leave the old country. Still, I've had my fill of all that life can offer most folks out here, while you scarcely seem to have found virtue pay you. They told me at the settlement things were bad with you."

Witham, who was usually correct in his deductions, surmised that his companion had an object, and expected something in return for this confidence. There was also no need for reticence when every farmer in the district knew all about his affairs, while something urged him to follow Courthorne's lead.

"Yes," he said quietly. "They are. You see, when I lost my cattle in the blizzard, I had to sell out or mortgage the place to the hilt, and during the last two years I haven't made the interest. The loan falls due in August, and they're going to foreclose on me."

"Then," said Courthorne, "what is keeping you here when the result of every hour's work you put in will go straight into another man's pocket?"

Witham smiled a little. "In the first place, I've nowhere else to go, and there's something in the feeling that one has held on to the end. Besides, until a few days ago I had a vague hope that by working double tides, I might get another crop in. Somebody might have advanced me a little on it because the mortgage only claims the house and land."

Courthorne looked at him curiously. "No. We are not alike," he said. "There's a slow stubborn devil in you, Witham, and I think I'd be afraid of you if I ever did you an injury. But go on."

"There's very little more. My team ran away down the ravine, and I had to put one beast out of its misery. I can't do my ploughing with one horse, and that leaves me stranded for the want of the dollars to buy another with. It's usually a very little thing that



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