

# The Pioneers

BY KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

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## CHAPTER XLIV.—(Cont'd.)

Conal sank back against Deirdre's arm with a gasp of pain. She put the spirit to his lips.

"If only I'd choked—the life out of him, I could die easy. But the mare boited—I couldn't get her back to him. The lying cur! The bargain was made—I thought I'd got him—that he'd 've made over his last penny to me. Someone kept me talking outside the Bull—it was that kid minds his horses—saying that Ginger 'd gone lame—and the next thing was a shot from the creek and McNab scuttling among the trees. Paugh!" he moved impatiently. "Why didn't I do for him while I had the chance?"

Superhuman strength animated him for a moment he struggled up, his swart face stiffening, his eyes flashing.

"I can! I'm alive yet—I can, Deirdre."

He swayed and she caught him, breaking the shock of his fall backwards. Blood welled from the open wound; the wet pads had staunching the flow for a moment. Steve brought more water. She dipped fresh linen and rags in it and bound them into place. Conal lay heavy and still.

She bent over him; her eyes turned questioning to Steve.

She lifted Conal's head on to her knees. The silence was unbroken.

"Conal," she whispered as though she were calling him, "Conal!"

"That you, Deirdre?" he asked huskily, but he did not open his eyes.

"If—if you could—kiss me—it's so hard to go—feeling you near—and that you don't care for me at all. If only I hadn't failed you—this time! If only—But it was because of you I didn't want to—kill him—unless—unless it was necessary. It seemed all right—the other way—you won't think badly of me, Deirdre?"

"No, no, Conal dear, but don't try to talk now."

"I've been hard on you—Deirdre—But you won't think ill of me. It's the way men are made—and I didn't understand how it was with you—and

Deirdre knew that McNab would not come near Steve's while the dead body of Conal lay there. In the morning, she saddled the chestnut and rode into Wirreeford.

"It was you shot Conal and I'm going to let all the countryside know it," she said, facing McNab in the reeking parlor of the Black Bull.

"And who do you think will believe you?" McNab sidled up to her, his eyes kindling.

"Everybody who knows you."

"And they'll say to you: 'How do you know?' 'What proof have you got, Deirdre?' 'Nobody'll want to go agen Thad McNab lest they're sure—and nobody'll want to be gettin' up and givin' evidence agenst McNab lest they're sure they're comin' out on the right side of the business.'"

"Proof? there's proof enough!"

Deirdre's voice rang clear, though her heart was beginning to quail. She knew that what he said was true. She had come with the idea of using Conal's death as a weapon against McNab; but it had suddenly become useless in her hands.

"Now look here, my dear, it's no use bein' nasty," McNab said. "You know and I know, there's no man in the Wirree would go agenst me 'less he was pretty sure of getting somebody stronger than himself to back him. Well, he is going to get anybody! That's the question."

Deirdre thought of M'Laughlin, sodden with drink and as much McNab's creature as any other man in the Wirree.

McNab chuckled, though there was a nervous edge to his voice.

"There's Sergeant M'Laughlin, of course, he's police officer for the district. You can tell him your story if you like. But he's a hard-headed man, M'Laughlin. He'll want proofs. And then don't forget I've still the trump card up me sleeve."

Her immobility maddened him.

"See here, Deirdre," he said, shaking with rage, "I've been patient with you till now, and I'm not a patient man. You may not 've liked the ways of my love-makin', but they're my ways. Either you take my terms or you leave them. And if you send any more jackanapes to me you'll find them served as was Conal."

"Maybe you're waitin' and hopin' young Davey 'll come overland," he rasped on, "to—to help you. Don't let him get in my way again, Deirdre. Don't let him. If he gets in my way, he'll have to get out of it."

"Or you will have to get out of his way!"

Deirdre's eyes flashed into his. She saw the mean, cunning soul in them. She knew that it would be Davey who would get out, that there was no fighting McNab. Davey would die as Conal had died, of a shot in the dark, or a death-dealing stab in the back.

McNab realized that she had measured his chances against Davey Cameron. Davey's chances against him, in that moment, for all her proud look.

"There's a boat just in the Port—takin' on some cattle—brought news from Melbourne," he said. "Davey's acquitted. So is the Schoolmaster. Jury didn't find there was evidence enough to convict. They'll be coming along by the Albatross. She's due in a couple of days. Cameron's man, brought word. If you don't marry me—if you're not Mrs. McNab before that boat gets in—it can take you to your father and Steve along with it. It goes right on to Hobart Town after calling here."

Deirdre stumbled out of the room. McNab did not follow her. He knew that she would not fight any more. He watched her swing into her sad-

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And McNab chuckled softly, rubbing his hands together.

## CHAPTER XLV.

The Albatross was in. Just before midday, carts and carry-alls had clattered along the road to the Port. Deirdre, riding down from the hills at dawn, had seen the schooner on the dim shining screen of sea and sky. There was no wind, and like a great white bird she hovered outside the bar, waiting for the wind and tide to carry her into the quiet waters of the inlet.

It was not until midday that a breeze sprang up, sending white, curled breakers high over the bar, and the Albatross on the crest of them came sailing into the harbor. She rode, furling her sails, to the log-wood wharf on its further side. A crowd had gathered to meet her, and it was early afternoon before the vehicles began to rattle back along the road to the hills and Wirreeford. Deirdre stood at the window of McNab's parlor, behind the curtains that had been hung up in her honor, watching them.

She saw none of the curious looks and gestures that went her way, the pitiful glances that covered her. For the news of the Port that morning beat any the boat had brought. Those who saw the dim white face of the girl at the window, and her shadowy eyes, knew that she was Thad McNab's wife. They knew that McNab had driven Deirdre Farrell into the Port before any of them were astir and that a clergyman had married them in the church there.

"Why did she do it? What could have made her," they asked each other.

"It wasn't for love of his beautiful face, be sure," snarled Salt Watson. "It's hard on the Schoolmaster. He'll not know of it yet," somebody else said.

Deirdre neither heard nor saw them. She was watching for Davey and Dan to pass. She had seen Mrs. Ross and Jessie go by to the Port in Cameron's double-seated buggy. She thought they would ride together to the hills in that, Davey and her father.

If they knew, they would stop at the Black Bull; if no one had told them they would go on, she had decided. They would wonder why she was not on the wharf when the boat got in, to meet them. But McNab would not have that. He would not lose sight of her. Besides she did not want to meet the eyes of the men and women who would be there, and hear what they had to say.

She was cut off from the world as she stood at the window of McNab's house. Her mind was too utterly weary to reason further. As she watched and waited a sense of bleak desolation closed in on her. Her eyes ached for sight of the Schoolmaster's form against the clear sky, although she knew she would hardly see it above the buggy and among other people.

She asked herself what he would do when he found that she was not waiting for him at Steve's—what he would think when he found the letter that was lying for him there.

Steve would have to read it for him. It would break his heart, the letter that she had wept and prayed over; but it was better that his heart should break than that he should go to the Island again. And Steve, poor old Steve, would die in peace some day and be put to rest where they had put Conal. A magistrate—assisted in a fashion by M'Laughlin and a jury—had duly investigated and found that his tragic death was an impenetrable mystery. An "open verdict," they called the finding.

(To be continued.)

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A Pretty Style for Spring.

Knitted sports suits promise to be popular in the Dominion for spring and summer wear, partly because they are youthful and informal. The girl in the picture wears a white costume brightened with a conventional block design.

## About the House

### SHORT CUTS TO BEAUTY.

Here's a quick salt rub to the rescue of your winter skin. Ten chances to one it's been deadened and dulled by long days indoors and too much rich food. And this month, with the garden, the eggs hatching, and summer sewing to do, one hardly has a minute for complicated treatments.

Take a handful of table salt and rub it over your face and neck. Don't skimp at the corners of the nose, the ends of the mouth, or where the hair-line meets the forehead. Blackheads and a shine always choose those places. When the salt is absorbed, rinse it off in warm water. If you like your toilet articles all prepared, you can buy, in an attractive box, a special face salt that contains other wholesome ingredients and may wake up your skin a little quicker.

The salt rub is especially good for the thick, oily, sallow skin. If yours is thin and dry and irritates easily, substitute finely ground corn meal. After a treatment your skin should feel satin smooth to the fingers and look firm and rosy.

Another quick beautifier is the two-soap method. Here are just two cakes of soap—one flesh-colored, the other creamy-white. Whether your skin is oily, dry, oily and dry together, old, young, or fading, the lather of these two soaps can be varied in quantity to

fit your needs. First you wash with the antiseptic flesh-colored soap, then you rinse it off and wash with the nourishing and protecting creamy-white cake. It takes only half a minute longer than washing the one-soap way, but when you're through with your washing you're through with your beauty treatments, for with these you won't need a whole boxful of other preparations.

When I was a little girl my mother always made me take sulphur and molasses in the spring. This was supposed to tone up the system and relieve the skin of winter blotches. But nowadays we take our spring sulphur in more pleasant forms. Internally we substitute plenty of water and spring greens. Externally we use a sulphur soap and a cream.

For the hair that needs spring toning-up there is a sulphur tonic as clear as crystal and as fragrant as a pine forest. This takes away the dandruff and leaves the hair fluffy and pretty, but not so soft that you "can't do a thing with it." It's useful for the woman who ought to massage her scalp every night and doesn't.

The English language contains about twenty thousand words which are of French origin.

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