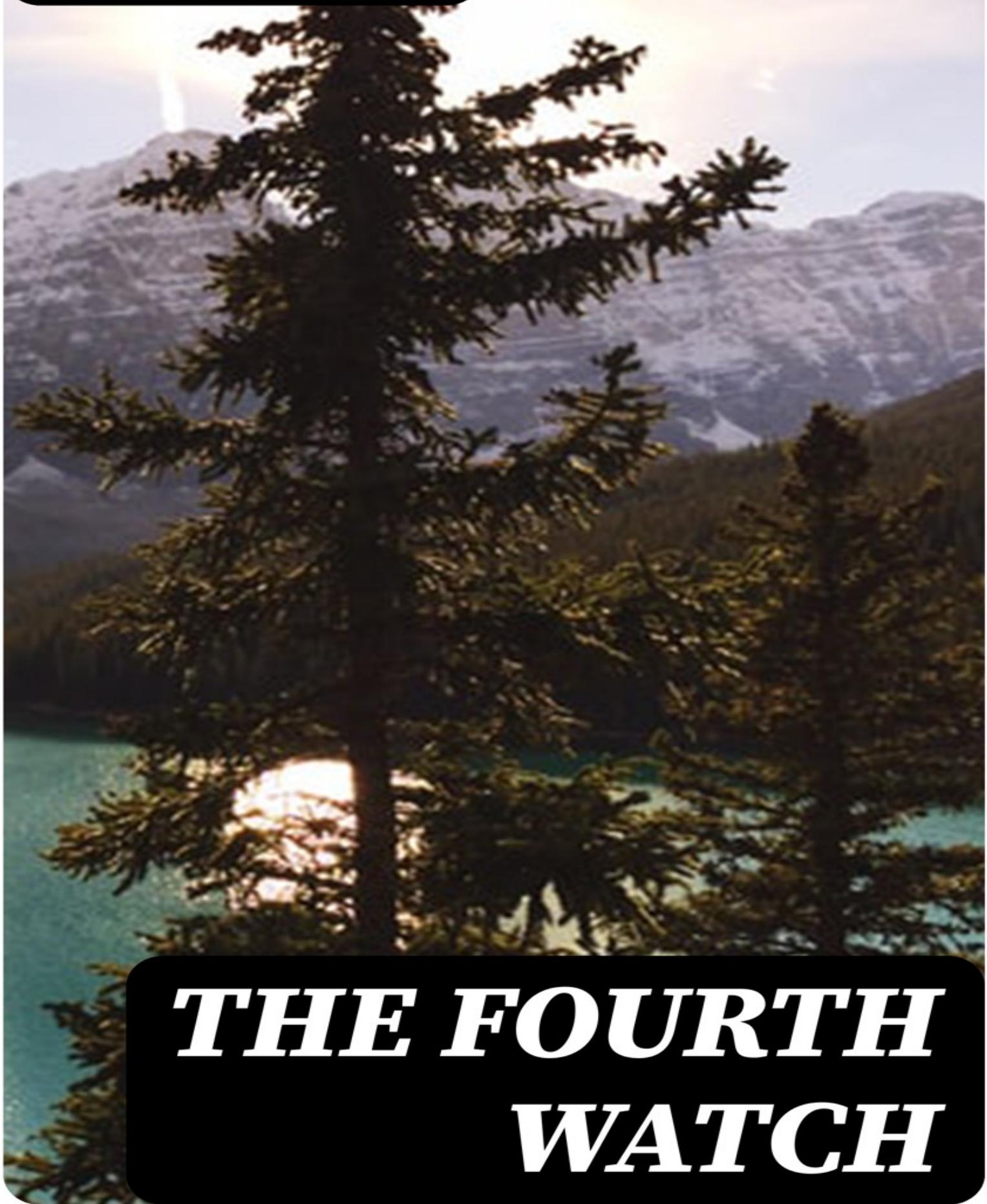


**H. A. CODY**



**THE FOURTH  
WATCH**

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# **The Fourth Watch**

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Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



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# CHAPTER I

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## The Awakening

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The boy plied his hoe in a listless manner, for his thoughts were elsewhere. Several hundred yards to the right stood the forest, glorious in its brilliant autumn hues. There among those trees the wary partridges were feeding or perching temptingly upon bough, fallen log or ragged stump. To the left the waters of the noble River St. John rippled and sparkled beneath the glowing sun. Over there amidst that long stretch of marshland, in many a cove and reedy creek, the wild ducks were securely hidden. What connection had a rugged, stirring lad with a brown sombre potato patch when the strong insistent voice of the wild was calling him to fields afar? There was no inspiration here--among these straggling rows. Nothing to thrill a boy's heart, or to send the blood surging and tingling through his body. But there--! He sighed as he leaned upon his hoe and looked yearningly around. Down on the shore; in a sheltered cove among the trees, the *Scud*, a small boat, was idly flapping her dirty patched sail.

"Wonder what dad left it up for?" thought the boy.

"Maybe he's going after more ducks. Wish to goodness he'd help with these potatoes so I could get off, too."

Then his eyes roamed out over the water until they rested upon a white sail away in the distance, bearing

steadily down-stream. He watched it carelessly for some time, but noticing the manner in which it drooped under an occasional squall his interest became aroused.

"There's too much canvas, that's sure!" he ejaculated. "Some idiot, I s'pose, who doesn't know 'bout these squalls. Guess he'll learn soon if he isn't careful. Now the *Scud*, she's all right. I'd risk her any time--My--!" and he almost held his breath as the white sail, much nearer now, swooped to the water like the wing of a gigantic bird. The boat righted herself, however, and sped gracefully forward. Again and again she dipped and careened under each successive squall, winning the lad's unstinted admiration. But even as he looked and wondered, a furious gust caught the white sail as it listed heavily, and drove it with one sweep to the water, overturning the boat as it did so. With a cry of fear the boy dropped his hoe, stared for an instant at the overturned craft, and then sped across the potato field sloping to the shore. He did not wait to go by the path, which led straight up to a little cabin in the valley, but, making a short cut to the left, leaped into a tangled thicket beyond. He crashed his way through the branches and underbrush, not heeding the numerous scratches upon face and hands.

He reached the *Scud*, tore, rather than untied the painter from an old oak root, and sent the boat reeling backwards from its moorings. The sail flapped wildly in the breeze, which was now growing stronger, and the craft began to drift. Catching up the centre-board, lying near, the boy drove it down into its narrow groove with a resounding thud. Seizing the sheet-line with one hand, and squatting well

astern he grasped the tiller with the other. Nobly the boat obeyed her little determined commander. The sail filled, she listed to the left and darted forward, bearing bravely up the wind. Straight ahead the boy could see the distressed boat sinking lower and lower in the water, with a man and a woman clinging desperately to the upturned side. The wind was now whistling around him, and at times threatening to rip away the patched sail. The water was rough, and the angry white-caps were dashing their cold spray over his clothes. But not for an instant did he swerve from his course until quite near the wreck. Then letting go the sheet-line he permitted the boat to fall away a little to the left. In this manner he was able to swing gradually in a half-circle, and by the time he was up again to the teeth of the wind the *Scud* was lying close to the overturned boat.

So preoccupied had been the boy up to this moment that he had no time to observe closely the shipwrecked pair. Now, however, he cast a curious glance in their direction, as he let go the rudder and sheet-line, and threw out the painter to the man. Eagerly the latter seized the rope, and managed to hold the two boats together.

"Give us yer hand," shouted the boy, "and let her come out first. Be careful now," he continued as the crafts bumped against each other. "There, that's good."

With considerable difficulty the two strangers were rescued from their perilous position, and then the *Scud* dropped away from the wreck.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the boy, as once again he brought the boat to the wind.

"Over there," responded the man, pointing to the opposite shore. "We can land on that point and get driven home."

Almost mechanically the boy swung the *Scud* around, and headed her for the place indicated. From the moment he had caught a glimpse of the woman clinging to the boat he had found it hard to turn away his eyes. Her hat was gone, and the wind was blowing her dark-brown hair about her face, which was white as death. But when she turned her large blue eyes filled with gratitude and fear upon her rescuer, a strange feeling of embarrassment swept suddenly over him. Women he had seen before, but none such as this. How quiet she was, too--not a cry or complaint did she make. Her clothes were wet; the water cold, and the wind raw. But she sat there in the boat watching him with those big eyes as he guided the *Scud* steadily forward.

He looked at her dress, how neat and clean it was. Then he glanced at his own rough togs. How coarse, worn and dirty were they, while his shoes were heavy grey brogans. A flush mantled his sun-browned face. He shifted uneasily, gripped the tiller more firmly, and drove the *Scud* a point nearer to the wind. What must she think of him? he wondered. Was she comparing him with the well-dressed man at her side, who was looking thoughtfully out over the blue water? A feeling of jealousy stole into his heart. He had never known such a thing before. He knew what it was to be angry--to stamp and shout in his rage. He had engaged in several pitched battles with the boys in the neighbourhood who had made fun of him. But his life--a life of freedom--had satisfied him. To hunt, to trap, to wander over hill, valley and

forest was all that he asked for. He had never thought of anything higher, never dreamed of any life but the one his father led, hunting, and trapping in season and making a slight pretence of farming. Now, however, something was stirring within him. He longed to show this woman that though his clothes and shoes were rough, he was almost a man and could do great things.

"What is your name, my boy?"

The words startled him, and he glanced quickly up. The woman was looking at him still, but now she was smiling. Was she laughing at him?

"My name's Dan," was the reply.

"Dan, Dan what?"

"Oh, just old Jim's boy."

"Old Jim, Old Jim!" repeated the woman. "Do you mean Jim Flitter, the trapper?"

"Yep, that's him."

"And do you live over there?"

"Yep. In that shanty up the valley, Dad and I live there alone."

"Have you no mother, Dan?" and the woman's voice was soft and low.

"None now."

She was about to question further, but noticing the look upon the boy's face she desisted.

"Do you know you've saved our lives?" she remarked after a short silence. "I can never thank you enough for what you have done for us to-day. I don't think I could have clung to that boat much longer."

"I ain't done nuthin'," Dan replied. "But next time you go out don't carry so much sail, specially when it's squally. I mayn't always be handy like I was to-day. But come, we're at the pint, so I'll land you here." Saying which, Dan let the sail go free, and ran the boat gently up the pebbly shore.

"Now, my boy," asked the man, "how much do I owe you?" Dan had stooped and was about to push the *Scud* from the beach. He looked up quickly at the question, but made no reply.

"How much?" demanded the man, somewhat impatiently.

"What do you mean?" asked the boy.

"What do I mean? Simply this. You've done us a great service, saved us from death, and how much money do you want? How much shall I pay you?"

"Nuthin'."

Dan was standing erect now. His dark eyes fixed full upon the man's face, flashed with anger, while his heart thumped tumultuously beneath his little checkered shirt.

"What! won't take any pay!"

"No!"

"And why not?"

"Cause I won't. You've no right to ask me. It ain't fair!"

That was all Dan could utter. He could not express his feelings; repugnance filled his heart at the thought of taking money for what he had done. He felt the woman's eyes fixed upon him. What would she think, of him, Dan Flitter, taking money for saving people's lives? He gave one quick glance in her direction, turned, and pushing the boat from the shore, sprang in, leaving the man and the woman upon the beach gazing wonderingly after him.

# CHAPTER II

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## The Vision

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"Danny, what's the meaning of this?"

Mr. Flitter laid down his paper, took his pipe from his mouth, and looked inquiringly at his son.

Dan was seated at the farther end of the table, cleaning his beloved shot-gun. It had done good work that day, and a fine string of partridges hung in an outer room, ready to go to the store early the next morning. A week had now passed since the rescue on the river, and during the whole of that time he had said nothing about it to his father. There was a reason for this. The latter had been much away from home during the day, only coming in late at night when his son was in bed, so they had little chance for conversation. It was a busy season, and they must make the most of it. So while the one scoured the forest for partridges, the other searched the river for ducks and geese. But Dan did not feel inclined to say anything to his father about what he had done. To him it was not worth mentioning. That he had picked up two shipwrecked people, and set them ashore, in his eyes was a very simple thing. It was made less so by the thought of that woman with the large eyes, beautiful face and sunny smile. How could he describe to his father the new feeling which had come into his breast, the longing for

something more than the life he was leading, and the desire to show that woman what he really could do?

His father's sudden question startled him. The mail was carried but once a week to this place, and by the time the paper arrived from the post office it was several days old. Mr. Flitter had come home earlier than usual, having had a fine day's shooting on the river, and was in excellent spirits. Game was in great demand, and he looked hopefully for good sales on the morrow. After their scanty meal he picked up the paper and began to read. Silence reigned in the little dingy shanty for some time, broken only by the short, sharp question.

"Don't you know anything about it, Danny?" insisted Mr. Flitter, noticing the startled and puzzled look upon his son's face.

"What do you mean, dad?"

"Why, about that wreck on the river. This paper says that you saved two people from drowning right off here over a week ago."

Dan's face flushed and his heart beat fast. What! was his name in the paper? Would the people in the big city see it? What would the boys in the neighbourhood think? Would they make fun of him any more? He could show them now that he was somebody, for his name was in the paper! These thoughts drove surgingly through his brain. He rose from his place and stood by his father's side.

"Show me, dad," he whispered; "let me see it."

"There, Danny, look at the heading:--

""A Boy's Brave Deed.""

"And is that long piece all about me, dad?"

"Yes, and it states what you did. Why didn't you tell me about it, son?"

"Where's my name, dad?" asked Dan, unheeding his father's question.

"There," and Mr. Flitter, pointing with his finger, spelled out the words, "Daniel Flitter."

"Does it say, dad, who those people were that got swamped?"

"No, their names are not given. It only says that the young man lives in the city. But why didn't you tell me about it, Dan?"

"Thought it wasn't worth while," replied the boy. "But I don't see how they know about it down there to put it in the paper."

"How did it happen, son. Let's have the whole story." Mr. Flitter pulled off his boots, lighted his pipe afresh, and leaned back to listen.

"I wonder who that woman is," he remarked, when Dan had finished his brief account. "I know most people for miles around, and it's strange I don't know her from your description. However, I shall make inquiries and find out."

During the days that followed, Dan lived in a new world. His feet trod the earth, and he trudged for miles the woodland ways. But his mind was in fairyland.

It was an enchanted world through which he moved, and he was master of all. The trees on every side were crowds of admiring people, and the branches were so many outstretched hands pointing to him. His breast swelled with pride. He walked erect, his head held high, while his eyes flashed with a triumphant light. The birds sang his praises;

the squirrels chattered one to another, and every brook babbled "Daniel Flitter, Daniel Flitter." His name had appeared in the paper! He was no longer an obscure person, but a hero--a wonder! He kept the clipping carefully wrapped up in his pocket. Often he would sit down in some quiet forest spot, unfold his treasure and look long and proudly upon those two magic words. One day as he sat studying the paper a desire came into his heart to know all of those wonderful words before and after his name. He could not read, never having gone to school. In fact he never wanted to do so. His one aim was to be a mighty hunter and trapper like his father. But now, a longing had entered his soul; a spark from the mysterious fire of life had found a lodging which needed only a little fanning to produce a bright and fervent flame.

"Dad," said he, that night, while eating his supper, "I wish I knew how to read. All the boys in this settlement can read and write. Ain't I old enough to begin?"

"You're old enough, lad, but we live a long way from the schoolhouse, and when you were little it was too far for you to walk. You might go this winter, when there's spare time, if you don't mind the distance."

"I don't mind that, dad, but all the rest will know so much that they'll make fun of me. I only know a few of my letters, and mother taught me them before she died."

"She did, lad, she did, God bless her," and a huskiness came into Mr. Flitter's voice as he spoke. "If she were alive now you would know as much as any boy of your age, for your mother was a smart one, and I guess you take after her, Dan.

"I wish I had her now," and the boy gave a deep sigh. "She'd help me every night, and I wouldn't be stupid any more."

Mr. Flitter made no reply to these words. He finished his supper in silence, and while Dan washed the few dishes he sat thoughtfully smoking his old clay pipe.

"Laddie," he remarked as they were preparing for bed, "I've been having deep thoughts to-night, and I've come to the conclusion that I haven't done right by you. I've neglected you too much."

"In what way, dad?" questioned the boy.

"Oh, in many ways. I've fed and clothed you, though I guess you've earned it all. But I've not thought enough about your mind--your education, I mean. Besides, there are deeper and more serious things in life of which I've told you nothing. I do feel mighty guilty when I think about it all."

"You've been good to me, though," and Dan looked inquiringly into his father's face.

"Yes, in a way. But, then, haven't I been good to our old mare, Queen? I feed and blanket her. But what more have I done for you--and you are my own son? Now look here," he added, after a pause, "I'm willing to teach you at nights how to read, and see if we can't make up for my past neglect."

"Dad! D'you mean it?"

"There now, that'll do. No more talking. Let's off to bed, and we'll have the first lesson to-morrow night."

The days that followed were busy ones for Dan. The shooting season closed, but there was other work to do. The rabbits had to be snared and his regular rounds made to the traps set for the wiry mink, lumbering raccoon, and the wily

fox. Each night, the animals brought in during the day had to be skinned, and the pelts carefully stretched. Then when this had been accomplished to his satisfaction he would turn his attention to his studies.

His father was cutting cord-wood for a neighbour, and was able to get home at night. Then the two pored over the mysterious letters and words in the little cabin, the elder doing his best to impart his scanty knowledge to the younger. They were happy times for Dan. He had something to live for now, and throughout the day, as he wandered from trap to trap, the words he had studied the night before kept ringing in his ears.

But, alas! such scenes were to be dispelled all too soon. They were too good to last long. One evening Dan returned home to find an unusual commotion about the place. Men and women were there who had never before entered the building. And the doctor, whom he had often met on the road, what was he doing there? What were they whispering about? and why did they look at him in that way, when he entered the house? Where was his father? Who was that lying on the bed so very still? Could it be dad? He had never seen him like that before. Then the thought flashed upon him: something was wrong! His father was hurt! and with a cry he rushed forward, and bent over the prostrate form. But no word of welcome, no sign of recognition did he receive. Nothing but that vacant stare met his ardent gaze.

Slowly, very slowly, he grasped the meaning of it all, as the sympathetic watchers told the brief story. His father had met with a serious accident. A large birch tree in falling had lodged against another, a sturdy maple. While cutting at the

latter the birch had suddenly turned over and swooping to the ground with a resounding crash had buried Mr. Flitter beneath the branches ere he had had time to escape. He had been carried home bruised, broken, and unconscious. The doctor had been hurriedly summoned, and had done all in his power for the injured man. But in vain, for in a short time he had breathed his last.

Dan uttered not a word when the tale had been told. He asked no questions, neither did he make any outcry. He stood like one stricken dumb, dry-eyed and motionless, gazing upon that quiet form lying upon the bed. Gently they led him away, and tried to speak to him. He did not heed them. A weight such as he had never known before pressed upon his heart. He wished to be alone, somewhere in the woods, out there where no one could gaze upon him. His father was dead! For him there was no consolation from the words of the Man of Sorrows. The life beyond had no meaning for him. His mother had taught him to say the little prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep," but that seemed so long ago, and he had not repeated it after her death. He had seen the birds and animals lying dead, but had thought nothing about it then. Now his father was just like them, would never look at him again, would never speak to him any more.

He watched in a dazed manner what took place on the two following days. Neighbours came, spoke to him, stayed awhile and then departed. The day of the funeral arrived. He stood with the rest at the graveside. It was cold, and the wind laden with snow whistled about him. He heard the grey-headed, white-bearded clergyman read the Burial

Service. The words of hope had no meaning for him. An awful feeling of desolation filled his heart as he watched the earth thrown into the grave. A shiver passed through his body, caused not by the coldness alone. Several came to speak to him. He did not want to see them. He turned and fled down across the field over the fence to the humble cabin in the valley. This he entered, now so quiet and desolate. He reached the bed--his father's bed--and throwing himself upon it gave vent to his grief. His pent-up feelings at last found an outlet and tears coursed down his tanned cheeks, moistening the pillow beneath his little curly head.

# CHAPTER III

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## Glendow Rectory

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"Are you cold, lad?"

"No," was the brief reply.

Parson John, Rector of Glendow, glanced down at the little muffled figure at his side. He reached over, tucked in the robes more closely about their feet, and spoke one word to Midnight. The horse, noble animal that she was, bounded forward. The ice, glassy and firm, stretched out far ahead. It was a raw, midwinter day and the wind drifting in from the north-east presaged a storm. But the magnificent beast, black as a raven's wing, did not mind it. With head low, tail almost touching the dash-board, and eyes sparkling with animation, she clipped along with great strides.

The parson gave a half-audible chuckle as he settled back in the seat and gripped the reins more firmly.

"What will Nellie say," he thought, "when she sees the lad? Won't she be surprised! She's never tired of talking about that rescue on the river."

Dan thoroughly enjoyed the drive as he nestled by the parson's side. It was very strange to be speeding along in such a luxurious manner, with a horse travelling like the wind, and a big jolly man holding the reins. He said nothing, but kept his eye fixed upon Midnight, his admiration steadily increasing. He would like to own a horse like that, and down

in his heart he determined to have one some day--his very own. "What do you think of *Midnight*, lad?" asked the parson, noticing Dan's admiring gaze.

"Great!" was the reply.

"Wish to have one like her, eh?"

"Y'bet."

"You will some day, boy; you will. But get a good one or none at all, and here's a safe rule:

"Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,  
Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostrils wide,  
High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing strong.  
Thin, mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide.

"Now the man who said that, knew what he was talking about."

"What's his name?" asked Dan. "Does he live here?"

"Ho, ho!" and the parson's hearty laugh rang out over the snow. "'Does he live here?' I'm afraid not. Very few in Glendow know old Will Shakespeare, more's the pity."

"I should like to meet him, though," remarked Dan. "He must know a lot about horses."

"Ay, ay, lad, he knows a lot about most things, and you shall know him some day, Dan, when you get older. But here we are right at home. We've made great time."

After *Midnight* had been carefully stabled and fed, Parson John led his little charge into the Rectory. Scarcely had they crossed the threshold into a brightly-lighted room ere the sound of a sweet voice humming an old familiar tune fell gently upon their ears. Then a heavy tapestry curtain was drawn aside, and a slender girlish form stood before them.

Beholding the lad, she gave a start of surprise, while her face, of more than ordinary beauty, flushed with pleasure.

"Ha, ha, Nellie," laughed her father, giving her an affectionate kiss, "I have captured your young hero at last, and I'm glad you recognize him. He's to live with us, to be your honourable bodyguard, your Fidus Achates, in fact."

What a picture this venerable man presented as he stood there. Wrapped in a great-coat, with fur mittens in his hands; a long grey beard sweeping his breast; hair abundant and white, crowning a face of singular strength and refinement, he seemed the very embodiment of health and hearty cheer. No ascetic this, but a man in whose veins flowed the fire of youth, and whose eyes twinkled with quiet, honest laughter as they looked into his daughter's puzzled face.

"I don't exactly understand," Nellie remarked, glancing first at her father and then at Dan.

"No, I know you don't, dear, but I'll tell you all about it later. It's enough now to know that I found him, and we are to give him a home here. So if you'll let us have something to eat, we'll be very glad, won't we, laddie?"

Dan stood as if in a dream during this conversation. His eyes remained fixed upon Nellie's face. Could it be possible that this was the woman he had rescued, and who had spoken so kindly to him? It was the same, there could be no mistake, only now she seemed more beautiful than ever. He felt her soft hand pressing his rough, brown one, and heard her hearty welcome. Words would not come to his lips. He was like a dumb person. But his eyes noted much, especially the dining-room, with the table spread, the white

cloth and wonderful dishes. He had never seen anything like them before.

And good reason was there for Dan's wonder. Others too would have looked with admiration upon that scene had they been present. Everything in the room bespoke Nellie's gentle care, from the spotless table-linen to the well-polished, old-fashioned sideboard, a relic of the stirring Loyalist days. Several portraits of distinguished divines adorned the walls, while here and there nature scenes, done in water-colours, by whose hand it was easy to guess, were artistically arranged.

Nellie's devotion to her father was beautiful to behold. Her eyes sparkled with delight as he related several amusing incidents of his visit to a sick parishioner in an outlying district. "And how did you find Mr. Stickles?" she inquired.

"'Simply joggin', parson, simply joggin,'" came the reply, at which the fair hostess laughed heartily.

"And I suppose Mrs. Stickles is as jolly as ever?"

"Oh, yes. She is just the same. Poor soul! she has her hands full with her sick husband, and a houseful of little ones. Yet she keeps remarkably bright and cheerful. She was much concerned about my welfare, and while she sent Sammy to look after Midnight she bustled around to make me as comfortable as possible."

"'Poor dear man,' she said, 'ye ain't as young as ye used to be, an' I often say to John that the work's tellin' on ye. Ye've got too large a circus, parson, too large a circus.'"

"Dear soul," laughed Nellie. "There isn't a more real person in Glendow than Mrs. Stickles. She's a friend to

everyone, and knows everybody's business for miles around."

"Indeed, she does," replied her father. "It was she who told me about our young friend here, and I started off post-haste to capture him. So we have to thank Mrs. Stickles for it all."

Supper ended, Parson John and Dan went into the study, while Nellie cleared away the dishes. A bright fire burned in the large fire-place, giving the room a most genial appearance. The parson brought down a long church-warden pipe, filled and lighted it. Next he drew up a comfortable chair and proceeded to read his mail which had arrived during his absence. Dan, in the meantime, had taken up his position in a cosy-corner nearby. A large picture-book had been given to him, and eagerly his eyes wandered over the wonderful things he found therein. After a while he closed the book and leaned back against the cushions. How comfortable it was. What luxury! He had never experienced anything like it in his life. It seemed like a dream. He watched Parson John for a time as he read his letters and papers. Then he looked about the room, admiring the many things he there beheld. Gradually his eyes closed. He forgot his surroundings, and was soon fast asleep, far away in dreamland.

When Nellie had finished with the dishes, she came into the study, and, seeing Dan, she paused to look upon him. Then she crossed to where her father was sitting, and touched him gently on the shoulder and pointed to the sleeping lad. Together they watched him and in their hearts there welled up a deep love for the orphan boy.

"Poor little fellow," remarked Nellie, in a low voice, taking a seat by her father's side. "I am so glad he is with us tonight. He seemed to be tired out."

"Yes, dear," her father replied, laying down the paper. "We are fortunate in getting him. I wanted a boy for some time. I understand he has a fine character."

"And you said that Mrs. Stickles told you about him?"

"Yes. And what she said was quite true. I found Dan living with the Tragen family. Mr. Tragen has seven children of his own, and could not very well keep another for any length of time. He told me that the day of the funeral he went to the Flitter house, and found Dan all alone, lying on his father's bed, weeping as if his heart would break. With difficulty he had persuaded him to leave and go with him. That was over a week ago and Dan has been with him ever since. Mrs. Tragen, worthy woman that she is, took good care of him and treated him like one of her own. Truly the Lord will reward her. By the way, she told me an interesting thing about the boy."

"What is it?" questioned Nellie.

"It seems he has never been at school, and cannot read or write. He is very anxious to learn, and his father, before his death, was giving him some lessons. We must see that he has every chance to learn while with us."

"But, father, there's no school in the district this winter, a most unusual thing."

"Why not teach him at home, dearie?" and the parson looked into his daughter's face. "Why not have a school here? We can give him a start anyway, and he will not be too far behind the rest when next the public school opens."

"Oh, that will be splendid!" exclaimed Nellie, "and may I be the teacher? I always wanted to do something in that line, and may we begin to-morrow?"

"Any time you like, dearie, and may God bless you, child, for your interest in the boy. You remind me more and more of your dear mother."

"And why should I not take an interest in him, father? He saved my life, and, though I can never repay him, I should like to feel that I am doing something. You know I read to Nora whenever I can, but this need not interfere with that. And, oh, father, Stephen was here this afternoon, and he's in great trouble."

"What's wrong, dearie?" questioned the parson, as Nellie paused and a deep flush suffused her face.

"The Frenelle homestead is to be sold."

"What! do I understand you aright? Peter Frenelle's farm, that fine property which he left free of debt when he died?"

"Yes, it's only too true. You know there has been a heavy mortgage on it for several years, and as the interest has not been paid for some time the mortgage has been foreclosed, and the place is to be sold."

"Dear me, dear me," and the parson leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, as he always did when in deep thought. "It's bad management, that's what it is. Stephen has had a splendid start, and through carelessness he has let everything go to ruin."

"Father, don't blame Stephen too much. He's only young, and had a great responsibility placed upon his shoulders after his father's death."

"Blame him! Blame him! Why should I blame anyone?" and the parson placed his hand to his forehead. "Stephen is as dear to me as my own son--and I love him. But, oh, it is hard to see my old friend's farm go to others. I have talked with Stephen time and time again. But he has not taken the right grip of life. Poor Mrs. Frenelle, her heart must be broken. And Nora, that dear invalid girl, how hard for her."

Nellie made no reply to her father's words. She sat looking into the fire. Tears were in her eyes and her heart was heavy. Everything had seemed so bright but a short time before, and now this dark cloud had arisen. Oh, if Stephen would only bestir himself. They had known each other from childhood. He had always been her hero. As a child her day-dreams and fancies were woven about him. And as years advanced their love for each other had increased. It was the natural blending of two souls which had gradually and silently grown together in the bright sunshine of happy youth.

A knock upon the door at the side of the house startled her. At once she arose to ascertain its meaning, and shortly returned.

"Father," she said, "Billy Fletcher is very sick, and wishes to see you."

"Who brought word, my dear?"

"Hugh Peters. He called to see the old man as he was coming down the road, and found him quite ill."

The effect of this message was quite magical. No longer was Parson John the quiet fireside reader, but the true sympathetic pastor. He laid aside his pipe, and at once arose from his comfortable chair. An expression of loving

concern overspread Nellie's face as she assisted him on with his storm coat, and procured his cap, mittens and overshoes. But no word of remonstrance came from her lips, no urging him to put off his visit until the morning. From a child she had been accustomed to these sudden calls to the side of departing parishioners, to read the Word of life and at times to administer the Holy Communion.

Her father's step was slow as of one much wearied, though his voice was cheery and strong as he bade his daughter good-bye, seized the small lantern she had lighted for him, and stepped out into the cold night on his mission of love.