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THE HOMESTEADER

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From a painting by W. M. Farrow.

"SOMETHING HAPPENED AND I WAS STRANGELY GLAD AND CAME HERE BECAUSE I—I—JUST *HAD* TO SEE YOU, JEAN."

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THE HOMESTEADER

A NO

BY

OSCAR MICHEAUX

Author of "The Forged Note"

ILLUSTRATED BY W. H. LARSON

SIOUX CITY, IOWA

WESTERN BOOK SUPPLY COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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. . . AND I WAS STRANGELY GLAD
. . . AUSE I—I—JUST *HAD* TO SEE YOU,

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THE HOMESTEADER

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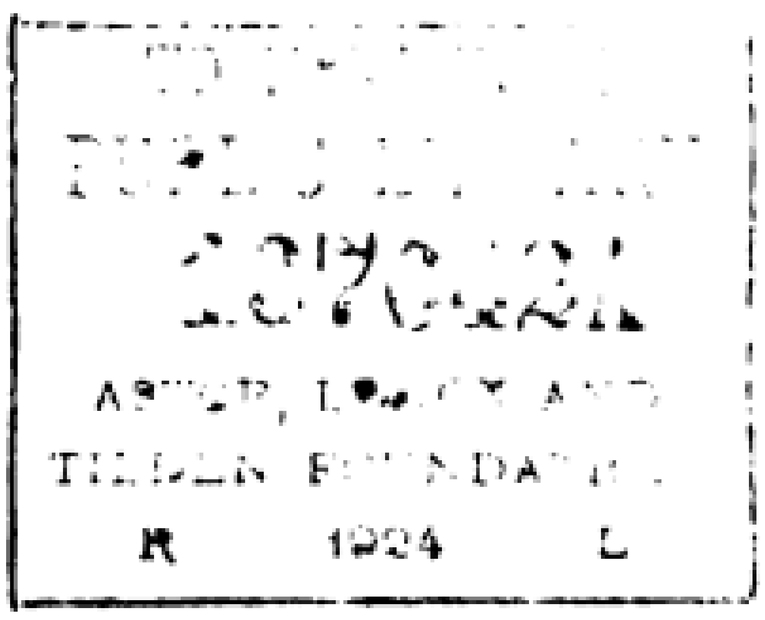
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BELOVED MOTHER

THIS

TO

YOU

TRANSFER FROM C.A. APR

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PUBLISHERS TO THE READER

How much of the story of Jean Baptiste is a work of the author's own imagination and how much comes from an authentic source we do not consider it necessary to say. But that he has in this instance drawn more largely and directly from fact than is the practice of the novelist is admitted, and we have his consent therefore, to make certain statements concerning himself that relate to the story, and why he has written it.

To begin with, that which any writer has been more closely associated with, are the things he can best portray. Wherefore, in "THE HOMESTEADER," Oscar Micheaux has written largely along the lines he has lived, and, naturally of what he best knows. His experience has been somewhat unusual; his association largely out of the ordinary. Born thirty-three years ago in Southern Illinois, he left those parts at an early age to come into his larger education in the years that followed through extensive traveling and a varied association. Purchasing a relinquishment on a homestead in South Dakota at the age of twenty; five years later he had succeeded and owned considerable lands in the country wherein he had settled. Always literarily inclined he wrote articles for newspapers and magazines as a beginner, and then during his twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh years occurred the conflicting incident that changed the whole course of his life, and gave him more than anything else, the subsequent material for the building of this story.

Shortly after this his first book appeared, and he at last had found his calling. He wrote his second book two years later. But the episode that had changed his life from ranching to writing was ever in his mind and always so forcibly until he was never a contented man until he had written it — and "The Homesteader" is the story.

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"Something happened and I was strangely glad and came here because I—I just *had* to see you, Jean" . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

He was young, The Homesteader—just passed twenty-two—and vigorous, strong, healthy and courageous 22

He raised on an elbow and looked into her face while she staggered forward in great surprise 35

"But, Jean, the cases are not parallel. What I did for you I would have done for anybody. It was merely an act of providence; but yours—oh, Jean, *can't you understand!*" . 138

"Miss Pitt was *so* anxious to meet you and I was, too, because I think you and her would like each other. She's an awfully good girl and willing to help a fellow" 159

"He's going to kill you out here to make him rich, and then when you are dead and—" "Please don't, father!" she almost screamed. She knew he was going to say: "in your grave, he will marry another woman to enjoy what you have died for," but she could not quite listen to that 245

He tried to throw off the uncanny feeling, but it seemed to hang on like grim death. And as he stood enmeshed in its sinister thraldom, he thought he saw her rise and point an accusing finger at him 518

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LEADING CHARACTERS

AGNES, *Whose Eyes Were Baffling*

JEAN BAPTISTE, *The Homesteader*

JACK STEWART, *Agnes' Father*

AUGUSTUS M. BARR, *an Infidel*

ISAAC SYFE, *a Jew*

PETER KADEN, *The Victim*

N. JUSTINE MCCARTHY, *a Preacher*

ORLEAN, *his Daughter, Without the Courage of Her Convictions*

ETHEL, *her Sister, Who Was Different*

GLAVIS, *Ethel's Husband*

EUGENE CROOK, *a Banker*

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THE HOMESTEADER

CHAPTER I

THEIR cognomen was Stewart, and three years had gone by since their return from Western Kansas where they had been on what they now chose to regard as a "Wild Goose Chase." The substance was, that as farmers they had failed to raise even one crop during the three years they spent there, so had in the end, therefore, returned broken and defeated to the rustic old district of Indiana where they had again taken up their residence on a rented farm.

Welcomed home like the "return of the prodigal," the age old gossip of "I told you so!" had been exchanged, and the episode was about forgotten.

But there was one in the family, the one with whom our story is largely concerned, who, although she had found little in Western Kansas to encourage her to stay there, had not, on the other hand, found much cheer back in old Indiana so long as they found no place to live but "Nubbin Ridge." Although but a girl, it so happened through circumstances over which she had no control, that whatever she thought or did, concerned largely the whole family's welfare or destiny.

Her father was a quaint old Scotchman, coming directly from Scotland to this country, a Highlander from the highest of the Highlands, and carried the accent still. But concerning her mother, she had never known her. Indeed, few

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had known her mother intimately; but it was generally understood that she had been the second wife of her father, and that she had died that Agnes might live. She was the only offspring by this marriage, although there were two boys by the first union. These lived at home with her and her father, but were, unfortunately, half-witted. Naturally Agnes was regarded as having been fortunate in being born of the second wife. But, what seemed rather singular, unlike her half brothers who were simple, she, on the other hand, appeared to be possessed with an unusual amount of wit; rare wit, extraordinary wit.

She was now twenty, and because she possessed such sweet ways, she was often referred to as beautiful, although, in truth she was not. Her face was somewhat square, and while there was a semblance of red roses in her cheeks when she smiled, her complexion was unusually white — almost pale. Her mouth, like her face, was also inclined to be square, while her lips were the reddest. She had a chin that was noticeable due to the fact that it was so prominent, and her nose was straight almost to the point where it took a slight turn upwards. It was her hair, however, that was her greatest attraction. Unusually long, it was thick and heavy, of a flaxen tint, and was her pride. Her eyes, however, were a mystery — baffling. Sometimes when they were observed by others they were called blue, but upon second notice they might be taken for brown. Few really knew their exact color, and to most they were a puzzle. There was a flash about them at times that moved people, a peculiarity withal that even her father had never been able to understand. At such times he was singularly frightened, frightened with what he saw, and what he didn't see but felt. Always she then reminded him of her mother whom he had known only briefly before taking her as his

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wife. He had loved her, this wife, and had also feared her as he now feared this daughter when her eyes flashed.

Her mother had kept a secret from him — and the world! In trust she left some papers. What they contained he did not know, and would not until the day before she, Agnes, was to marry; and should she not marry by the time she reached thirty, the papers were to be given her then anyhow.

And so Jack Stewart had resigned himself to the situation; had given her the best education possible, which had not been much. She had gone through the grade schools, however, and barely succeeded in completing two years of the high school course. The love that he had been deprived of giving her mother because of her early death he had given to Agnes; she was his joy, his pride. She read to him because his eyes were not the best; she wrote his letters, consulted with him, assisted and conducted what business he had, and had avoided the society of young men.

So we have met, and know some little of the girl we are to follow. In the beginning of our story, we find her anything but contented. Living in quaint old "Nubbin Ridge," could not, to say the most, be called illustrious. It was a small district where the soil was very poor — as poor, perhaps, as Indiana afforded. So poor indeed, that it was capable of producing nothing but nubbins (corn) from which it derived its name. When a man went to rent a farm in "Nubbin Ridge" he was considered all in, down and out. . . . To continue life there was to grow poorer. It was a part of the state wherein no one had ever been known to grow rich, and Stewarts had proven no exception to the rule. But this story is to be concerned only briefly with "Nubbin Ridge," so we will come back to the one around whom it will in a measure center.

Her chief accomplishments since their disastrous con-

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quest of Western Kansas had been the simple detail of keeping a diary. But at other times she had attempted musical composition and had even sent the same to publishers, one after another. Of course all she sent had duly come back, and she had by this time grown to expect the returned manuscripts as the inevitable. But since sending the same gave her a diversion, she had kept it up — and had today received a letter! A letter, that was all, and a short one at that; but even a letter in view of her previous experiences was highly appreciated. It stated briefly that her composition had been carefully examined — studied, but had, they very much regretted to inform her, been found unavailable for their needs. Although they had returned the same, they wished to say that she had shown some merit — "symptoms" she thought would have sounded better — and that they would always be patient and glad to examine anything she might be so kind as to submit!

She read the letter over many times. Not that she hoped that doing so would bring her anything, but because in her little life in "Nubbin Ridge" there was so little to break the usual monotonous routine. When she had read and studied it until she knew every letter by heart, she sighed, picked up her diary, and wrote therein:

(

There is little to record tonight. Today just passed was like yesterday, and yesterday was like the day before that, except it rained yesterday, and it didn't the day before. Papa and Bill and George have just completed picking corn — nubbins, the kind and only thing that grows in Nubbin Ridge. Verily does the name fit the production! We will perhaps have enough when it is sold to pay the rent, send to Sears & Roebuck for a few things, and that's all. George wants a gun and thinks he's worked hard enough

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this summer to earn one. He has found one in the catalogue that can be had for $4.85 and is all heart that papa will get it for him; along with four boxes of shells that will, all told, reach $6.00. Little enough, to say the least, for a summer's work! Bill has his mind set on a watch, but papa bought him a suit of clothes that cost $5.89 two months ago when we sold the hogs, so I don't think Bill will get in on anything this fall or winter. As for me, I would like to have a dress that I see can be had through a catalogue for a reasonable sum; but if it will crowd papa I will say nothing about it. He has the mortgage on the horses to pay, and by the time we get the few other necessities, it will not leave much, if anything.

LATER — Papa has been growing very restless of late. I don't wonder, either. Any one that had any energy, any spark of ambition, would grow restless or crazy in Nubbin Ridge! The very name smacks of poverty, ignorance and degeneration! But a real estate man from South Dakota has been in the neighborhood for a week, and has told some wonderful tales of opportunities out there. He has made it plain to papa that Western Kansas has been a failure to thousands of people for forty years; that South Dakota is different; that the rainfall is abundant; the climate is the best, and that every renter in Indiana should there proceed forthwith. I'm surprised that he should waste his time talking with papa who has no money, but he seems to be just as anxious for him to go as he is for others. Perhaps it's because he wishes a crowd. A crowd even though some are poor would, I imagine, appear more like business.

Bill and George are full for going, and papa has hinted to me as to whether I would like it. How should I know? It couldn't be worse than this place even if it was the jumping off place of all creation! I have about come to the

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place where I am willing to try anywhere once. There surely must be some place in this wide world where people have a chance to rise. Of course, with us — poor Bill and George, and papa's getting old, I don't suppose we will ever get hold of much anywhere. But the real estate man says we could all take homesteads; that in those parts—I cannot quite call the name, I'll study a while. . . . The Rosebud Country, is what he called it — there had been a great land opening, and there would be another in a few years. That we could go out now and rent on a place, raise big crops and get in good financial circumstances by the time the opening comes, go forth then and all take homesteads and grow rich! It sounds fishy — us growing rich; but since we have nothing we couldn't lose.

He says that people have grown wealthy in two years; that among the successful men — those who have made it quickly — is a colored man out there who came from — he couldn't say just where; but that if a colored man could make it, and get money together, surely any one else should. I will close this now because it is late, the light is low; besides I'm sleepy, and since that is surely one thing a person can do with success in "Nubbin Ridge," I will retire and have my share of it.

A MONTH LATER — It has happened! We are going West! The real estate man has gone back, and papa has been out there. He is carried away with the country. Says it is the greatest place on earth. I won't attempt to put down the wonders he has told of. Rich land to be rented for one-third of the crops — and we pay two-fifths in Nubbin Ridge where there is no soil, just a sprinkling of dust over the surface. Has rented a place already, and has made arrangements with the man that we owe to give him a year's time to pay the two hundred dollars. So

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we have enough to get out there and buy seed next spring! Everybody says we are going on another "Wild Goose Chase," but they would say that if we were going into the next county. It would seem better, however, if we would wait until spring, but Papa is getting ready to go right after Xmas. That settles it! I will make no more notes in this diary until we have reached the "promised land." In the meantime I am full of dreams, dreams, dreams! I had a strange dream last night; a real dream in which things happened! Always I have those day dreams, but last night I had a real dream. I dreamed that we went out to this country and that we rented and lived on a farm near the colored man the real estate man spoke of. I dreamed that he was an unusual man, a wonderful personality, and that we — he and I — became very close friends! That a strange murder occurred near where we went; a murder that no one could ever understand; but that in after years it was all made plain — and I was involved! Think of such a dream! Me being involved in anything; I, of "Nubbin Ridge!" I am sure that if I told out there the name of the place from where we came they would think we were crazy! But that was not all the dream — and it was all so plain! It frightens me when I think of it. I cannot realize how I could have had such a strange dream. I dreamed after we had been there a while that I fell in love — but it's the man I fell in love with which makes the dream so unusual, and — impossible! Yet there is a saying that nothing is impossible!

I will not record here or describe the one with whom I fell in love. Strangely I feel that I should wait. I cannot say why, but something seems to caution me; to tell me not to say more now.

There remains but one thing more. Yesterday I hap-

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pened to glance at myself in the mirror. As if by magic I was drawn closer and studied myself, studied something in my features I had never seen before — at least not in that way. I observed then my hands. They, too, appeared unlike they had been before. It seems to have been the dream that prompted me to look — and the dream that revealed this about myself that I cannot understand. My eyes did not appear the same; they were as if — as if, they belonged to some other! My lips were red as usual; but there was about them something too I had not seen before: they appeared thicker, and as I studied them in the mirror more closely, I couldn't resist that singularity in my eyes. They became large and then small; they were blue, so blue, and then they were brown. It was when they appeared brown that I could not understand. I will close now for I wish to think. My brain is afire, I must think, think, think!

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CHAPTER II

THE HOMESTEADER

THE DAY was cold and dark and dreary. A storm raged over the prairie,— a storm of the kind that seem to come only over the northwest. Over the wide, unbroken country of our story, the wind screamed as if terribly angry. It raced across the level stretches, swept down into the draws, where draws were, tumbled against the hillsides, regained its equilibrium and tore madly down the other side, as if to destroy all in its path. A heavy snow had fallen all the morning, but about noon it had changed to fine grainy missiles that cut the face like cinders and made going against it very difficult. Notwithstanding, through it — directly against it at most times, The Homesteader struggled resolutely forward. He was shielded in a measure by the horses he was driving, whose bulks prevented the wind from striking him in the face, and on the body at all times. At other times — and especially when following a level stretch — he got close to the side of the front wagon with its large box loaded with coal, which towered above his head and shoulders.

Before him, but not always, the dim line of the trail, despite the heavy snow that had fallen that morning, was outlined. Perhaps it was because he had followed it — he and his horses — so often before in the two years since he had been West, that he was able to keep to its narrow way without difficulty today. And still, following it was not as difficult as following other trails, for it was an old, old

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trail. So old indeed was it, that nobody knew just how old it was, nor how far it reached. It was said that Custer had gone that way to meet his massacre; that Sitting Bull knew it best; but to The Homesteader, he hoped to be able to follow it only as long as the light of day pointed the way. When night came — but upon that he had not reckoned! To be caught upon it by darkness was certain death, and he didn't want to die.

He was young, The Homesteader — just passed twenty-two — and vigorous, strong, healthy and courageous. His height was over six feet and while he was slender he was not too much so. His shoulders were slightly round but not stooped. His great height gave him an advantage now. He followed his horses with long, rangy strides, turning his head frequently as if to give the blood a chance to circulate about and under the skin of his wide forehead. The fury of the storm appeared to grow worse, judging from the way the horses shook their bridled heads; or perhaps it was growing colder. Almost continually some of the horses were striking the ice from their nosepoints; while very often The Homesteader had to rest the lines he held while he forced the blood to his finger tips with long swings of his arms back and forth across his breast.

His claim lay many miles yet before him, and his continual gaze toward the west was to ascertain how long the light of day was likely to hold out. Behind, far to the rear, lay the little town of Bonesteel which he had left that morning, and now regretted having done so. But the storm had not been so bad then, and because the snow was falling he had conjectured it would be better to reach home before it became too deep or badly drifted. As it was now he was encountering all this and some more

"Damn!" he cried as they passed down a slope to where

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From a painting by W. M. Farrow.

HE WAS YOUNG, THE HOMESTEADER—JUST PASSED TWENTY-TWO—AND VIGOROUS, STRONG, HEALTHY AND COURAGEOUS.

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the land divided, and where the wind seemed to hit hardest. His course lay directly northwest, straight against the wind which he could only avoid by hanging the lines over the lever of the brake and fall in behind the trail wagon. But this, unfortunately, placed him too far away from the horses. He had walked all the way, for to walk was apparently the only way to keep from freezing. He soon reached the other side of the draw, and when he had come to the summit beyond, he groaned. Ahead of him just above the dark horizon the sun came suddenly from beneath the clouds. On either side of it, great, gasping sun-dogs struggled. They seemed to vie with the red sinking orbit; and as he continued his anxious gazing in that direction they seemed to have triumphed, for as the sun sank lower and lower, they appeared suddenly empowered with a mighty force for only a few minutes later the sun had fallen into the great abyss below and the night was on!

"We can make it yet, boys," he cried to his horses as if to cheer them. And as if they understood, they crashed forward with such vigor that he was thrown almost into a trot to keep up.

As to how long it went on thus, or as to how far they had gone, he was not able to reckon; but out of the now pitch darkness he became conscious of a peculiar longing. He had a vision of his sod house that stood on the claim, and he saw the small barn with its shed and the stalls for four. He saw the little house again with its one room, the little monkey stove with an oven on the chimney, and imagined himself putting a pan of baking powder bread therein. He saw his bed, a large, wide, dirty —'tis true — but a warm bed, nevertheless. He fancied himself creeping under the covers and sleeping the sound way he always did. He could not understand his prolific thoughts that followed.

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He thought of his boyhood back in old Illinois; he took stock of the surroundings he had left there; he lived briefly through the discontentment that had ultimately inspired him to come West. And then he had again those dreams. Regardless of where his train of wandering thoughts began or of where they followed, always they were sure to end upon this given point, the girl. The girl of his dreams — for he had no real girl. There had never been a real girl for Jean Baptiste, for this was his name. In the years that had preceded his coming hither, it had been one relentless effort to get the few thousands together with which to start when he finally came West. At that he had been called lucky. He had no heritage, had Jean Baptiste. His father had given him only the French name that was his, for his father had been poor — but this instant belongs elsewhere. His heritage, then, had been his indefatigable will; his firm determination to make his way; his great desire to make good. But we follow Jean Baptiste and the girl.

Only a myth was she. She had come in a day dream when he came West, but strangely she had stayed. And, singularly as it may seem, he was confident she would come in person some day. He talked with her when he was lonely, and that was almost every day. He told her why he had come West, because he felt it was the place for young manhood. Here with the unbroken prairie all about him; with its virgin soil and undeveloped resources; and the fact that all the east, that part of the east that was Iowa and Illinois had once been as this now was, had once been as wild and undeveloped and had not then been worth any more — indeed, not so much. Here could a young man work out his own destiny. As Iowa and Illinois had been developed, so could this — so *would* this also be developed.

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And as railways had formed a network of those states, so in time would they reach this territory as well. In fact it was inevitable what was to come, the prime essential, therefore, for his youth, was to begin with the beginning — and so he had done.

So he had come, had Jean Baptiste, and was living alone with a great hope; with a great hope for the future of this little empire out there in the hollow of God's hand; with a great love, too, for her, his dream girl. So in his prolific visions he talked on with her. He told her that it was a long way to the railroad now — thirty-two miles. He had that far to haul the coal he and others burned. There were yet no fences, and while there were section lines, they were rarely followed. It was nearer by trail. But he was patient, he was perseverant. Time would bring all else — and her. He had visions of her, she was not beautiful; she might not be vivacious, for that belonged to the city; but she was good. Always he understood everything that was hers, and he was confident she would understand him. Her name was sweet and easily pronounced. How he loved to call it!

He staggered at times now and didn't know why. He had wanted to be home and in his bed where he could sleep; but home as he now regarded it was too far. He couldn't make it, and didn't need to. Why should they blunder and pull so hard to get home when all about them was a place where they could rest. The prairie was all about; and he had slept on the ground before with only the soft grass beneath him. Why, then, must he continue on and on! The air was pleasant — warm and luxuriant, and he, Jean Baptiste, was very tired — oh, how tired he really was!

It was settled! He had gone far enough. He would

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make his bed right where he was. He called to the horses. But somehow they didn't seem to hear. He called again then, he thought, louder, and still they failed to hear. He wondered at their stubbornness. They were good horses and had never disobeyed before. He called now again at the top of his voice, but they heeded him not; in the meantime forging onward, onward and onward! It occurred to him to drop the reins, but such had never been a custom. Within his tired, freezing and brain-fagged mind, there was a resolution that made him cling to them, but struggling to pull them down to a stop he continued.

And as he followed them now onward toward the sod house that stood on the claim, all realism seemed to desert him; he became a chilled mechanician; he seemed to have passed into the infinite where all was vague; where turmoil and peculiar strife only abided. . . . For Jean Baptiste did not understand that he was on the verge of freezing.

Stewarts were pleased with the country. They had arrived in early January. The weather had not been bad, although the wind blew much stronger here than it did in Indiana. However, they had not forgotten how it blew in Western Kansas and were therefore accustomed to it. The house upon the place they had rented was small, just four rooms, but it was well built and was warm. A village was not far. The people in it called it a town, but you see they were enthusiastic. To be more amply provided they could get what they needed at Gregory which was seven miles. Seven miles was not far to one who could ride horseback, and this Agnes had learned in Western Kansas.

"You had best not go to town today, my girl," cautioned Jack Stewart, her father, as she made ready to ride to

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Gregory after ordering Bill to saddle Dolly, the gray mare that was their best.

"Tut, tut, papa," she chided. "This is a day to take the benefit of this wonderful air. The low altitude of Nubbin Ridge made me sallow; there was no blood in my cheeks. Here — ah, a nice horseback ride to Gregory will be the best yet for me!"

"I don't like the wind — and so much snow with it," he muttered, looking out with a frown upon his face.

"But the snow is not like it was," she argued, almost ready. "It's letting up."

"It's growing finer, which is evidence that it is growing colder."

"Better still," she cried, jumping about frolickingly, her lithe young body as agile as an athlete's. "Now, dada," she let out winsomely, "I shall dash up to Gregory, get all we need, and be back before the sun goes down!" And with that she kissed away further protest, swung open wide the door, stepped out and vaulted lightly into the saddle. A moment later she was gone, but not before her father cried:

"If you should be delayed, stay the night in town. Above all things, don't let the darkness catch you upon the prairie!"

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CHAPTER III

AT THE SOD HOUSE

SHE enjoyed the horseback ride to Gregory. Although she trembled at times from the sting of the intense cold, the exercise the riding gave her body kept the blood circulating freely, and she made the trip to the little town without event.

Once there, after thawing the cold out of her face and eyes, she proceeded to do her trading, filling the saddle-bags to their fullest.

"Which way do you live from town?" inquired the elderly man who waited upon her at the general store where she was doing her trading.

"Seven miles southeast," she replied.

"Indeed!" he cried as if surprised. "But you didn't come from there today — this afternoon? That would be directly against this storm!"

She nodded.

"Well, now, who would have thought you could have made it! 'Tis an awful day without," he cried as he regarded her in wonder.

"It *wasn't* warm, I admit," she agreed; "but I didn't seem to mind it so much!"

"You will not go back today — rather tonight?"

"Oh, yes."

"But it would be very risky. Look! It's grown dark already!" She looked out and observed that it had really

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grown almost pitch dark during the few minutes she had lingered inside. She was for a moment at a loss for a reply, then, conscious that the wind would be to her back, she laughed lightly as she said:

"Oh, I shan't mind. It will take me less than forty minutes, and then it'll all be over," and she laughed low and easily again. The man frowned as he pursued:

"I don't like to see you start, a stranger in such a night as this. Since settlement following a trail is rather treacherous. One may leave town on one, but be on some other before they have gone two miles. And while the wind will be to your back, the uncertainty of direction, should you happen to look back or even around, is confusing. One loses sense of the way they are going. I'd suggest that you stick over until morning. It would be safer," he concluded, shaking his head dubiously.

"Oh, I am not afraid," she cried cheerfully. She was ready then, and with her usual dash, she crossed the short board walk, vaulted into the saddle, and a few minutes later the dull clatter of her horse's hoofs died in the distance.

With the wind to her back she rode easily. She enjoyed the exercise the riding gave her, and was thrilled instead of being frightened over what was before her. She followed quite easily the trail that had taken her into the village. In due time she passed a house that she had observed when going in that stood to one side of the trail, and then suddenly the mare came to an abrupt halt. She peered into the darkness before her. A barbwire fence was across the trail. She could not seem to recall it being there on her way in. Yet she argued with herself that she might have come around and not noticed it. For a moment she was in doubt as to which way to go to get around it. As she viewed it, it did not extend perhaps more than a quarter mile or a half at

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the most, after which she could come around to the other side and strike the trail again. She gave the ever faithful mare rein and they sailed down the fence line to where she estimated it must shortly end.

She did not know that this was the old U-Cross fence, and that because it stood on Indian land, it had not been taken up when the great ranch had been moved into the next county when giving up to the settler. In truth only a few steps to her right she had left the trail she had followed into town. The old trail had been cut off when The Homesteader in whose house she had seen the light, had laid out his claim, and it was this which caused the confusion. She did not know that one could go to town, or to the railroad today and returning on the morrow, find the route changed. Homesteaders were without scruples very often in such matters. The law of the state was that before a followed trail was cut off, it should be advertised for five weeks in advance to that effect; but not one in twenty of the settlers knew that such a law existed.

So Agnes Stewart had ridden fully two miles before she became apprehensive of the fact that she had lost her way. Now the most practical plan for her would been to have turned directly about and gone back to where she had started down the fence. But, charged with impatient youth, she sought what she felt to be the quickest way about. Now upon looking closely she could see that wires hung down in places and that a post here and there had sagged. She urged the mare over a place and then, once over, went in the direction she felt was home. The stiff, zero night air had somewhat dulled her, and she made the mistake of looking back, thereby confusing her direction to the point where after a few minutes she could not have sworn in what direction she was going, except that the wind was still at her back.

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She peered into the darkness before her. She thought there would be lights of homesteaders about, and while there was, the storm made it impossible for her to see them. After a time she became alarmed, and recalled her father's warning, also the store-keeper's. But her natural determination was to go on, that she would get her bearings, presently. So, with a jerking of her body as if to stimulate circulation of the blood, she bent in the saddle and rode another mile or more. She had crossed draws, ascended hills, had stumbled over trails that always appeared to lead in the wrong direction, and at last gave up for lost at a summit where the wind and fine snow chilled her to the marrow. She was thoroughly frightened now. She thought to return to Gregory, but when she turned her eyes against the wind, she could catch no sight of anything. She was sure then that she could not make it back there had she wished to. Not knowing what to do she allowed the mare to trot ahead without any effort to direct her. She had not gone far before she realized that they were following a level stretch. And because she seemed to keep warm when the horse moved, she allowed the mare to continue. A half mile she estimated had been covered when out of the darkness some dark shape took outline. She peered ahead; the mare was ambling gently toward it, and she saw after a time that it was a quaint, oblong structure, a sod house apparently, many of which she had observed since coming West into the new country. She was relieved. At least she was not to freeze to death upon the prairie, a fact that she had begun to regard as a possibility a few minutes before. The mare fell into a walk and presently came up to a low, square house, built of sod, with its odd hip roof reposing darkly in the outline. She called, "Hello," and was patient. The wind bit into her, and she was conscious of

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the bitter cold, and that she was beginning to feel its severe effects. There was no response, and she called again, dismounting in the meantime. When she saw no one she went around to where she observed a low door at which she knocked vigorously. From all appearances the place was occupied, but no one was at home. She tried the knob. It gave, and she pushed the door open cautiously. All was darkness within. Then, dropping the bridle reins she ventured inside. She could not understand why her feet made no sound upon the floor, but in truth there was no floor except the earth. She felt in her coat pocket and presently produced a match. When the flaring light illuminated the surroundings, she gazed about. It was, she quickly observed, a one room house. There was at her side a monkey stove with an oven on the pipe; while at her left stood a table with dishes piled thereupon. There was also a lantern on the table and this she adjusted and lighted before the blaze died. She swung this about, and saw there was a bed with dirty bed clothing, also a trunk, some boxes and what nots.

"A bachelor, I'd wager," she muttered, and then blushed when she considered her position. She looked about further, and upon seeing fuel, proceeded to build a fire. This done, she passed outside, found a path that extended northwest, and, leading the horse, soon came to a small barn. Here she saw two stalls with a manger filled with hay. She had to push the mare back to keep her from entering and making herself at home. She passed around the barn and entered the door of a small shed, for cattle obviously, but empty. Hay was in the manger, and, taking the bits from the mare's mouth, she tied the reins to the manger, unsaddled, and, leaving the shed after fastening the door, she carried the saddle with her to the house.

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The little stove was roaring from the fire she had started, and she was surprised to find the room becoming warm. She placed the saddle in a convenient position and lifted her cap, whereupon her heavy hair fell over her shoulders. She caught it up and wound it into a braid quickly, guiltily. . . . She unbuttoned her coat then, and took a seat.

"There is no one here," she muttered to herself. "So since I don't know the way home, and there's no one here to tell me, guess I'll have to give it up until morning." She was thoughtful then. This *was* something of an adventure. Lost upon the prairie: a bachelor's homestead: there alone. Then suddenly she started. From the storm swept outside she thought she caught a sound, and thereupon became quickly alert, but the next moment her tension relaxed. It was only the wind at the corner of the house. The room had become warm, she was uncomfortable with the heavy coat about her. She was conscious, moreover, that her eyes were heavy, sleep was knocking at her door. She shook off the depression and fell again to thinking. She wondered who could live there and she continued in her random thinking until shortly, unconsciously, she fell into a doze.

She could not recall whether she had dozed an hour or a minute, but she was awakened suddenly and jumped to her feet; for, from the storm she had caught the sound of horses and wagons passing the house at only a short distance. She stood terrified. Her eyes were wide, her lips were apart as she listened to the grinding of the wagon wheels — and they went directly toward the barn. Then all was silent, and she placed her hand to her heart, to still the frightened beating there. She heard the horses shake in their harness, and came to herself. The man of the place had returned; she had taken charge of his house, he a bachelor and she a maid. She felt embarrassed. She got into her coat

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and buttoned it about her hurriedly; and then drawing the cap over her head, she waited, expectantly, although she was sure that time sufficient had expired, whoever drove the teams had not come toward the house. She could hear the horses, but she could not ascertain that they were being unhitched. She was undecided for a moment, then, catching up the lantern, she quickly went outside. Two wagons loaded heavily with coal greeted her. She passed to the front and found four horses, white with the frost from perspiration, standing hitched to the loads. She passed to their heads. No one was about, and she was puzzled. She passed around to the other side, and as she did so, stumbled over something. With the lantern raised, she peered down and then suddenly screamed when she discovered it was a man. Then, on second thought, fearing he had fallen from the wagon and become injured, she put her arm through the bail of the lantern, reached down, caught him by the shoulders and shook him. He was not injured, she was relieved to see; but *what was* the matter? In the next moment she gave a quick start. She realized in a twinkling then, that the man was freezing — perhaps already frozen!

With quick intuition she reached and caught him beneath the arms, and turning, dragged him to the house. She opened the door, and lifting his body, carried him in her arms across the room and laid him upon the bed. Then, realizing that the night was severely cold, she rushed out, closing the door behind her, and a half hour later had the horses unhitched, unharnessed and tied in their stalls. This done she returned hurriedly to the house to find the man still unconscious, but breathing heavily. She did not know at once what to do, but going to his feet, took off his shoes. This was rather difficult, and she feared that from the way they felt, his feet were frozen. She rubbed them vigor-

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From a painting by W. M. Farrow.

HE RAISED ON AN ELBOW AND LOOKED INTO HER FACE WHILE SHE STAGGERED IN GREAT SURPRISE.

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ously, and was relieved after a time to feel the blood circulating and the same giving forth warmth. She sighed with relief and then pulling off the heavy gloves, she exercised the same proceeding with the hands, and was cheered to feel them give forth warmth after a time. She unbuttoned the coat at his throat, and rolling him over, managed to get it off of him. Next she unbuttoned the collar, drew off the cap, and for the first time saw his face. It was swollen and very dark, she thought. She brought the lantern closer and looked again. She gave a start then and opened her mouth in surprise. Then she fell to thinking. She went back to the chair beside the fire and reflected.

"It is all the same, of course," she said to herself. "But I was just surprised. It all seems rather singular," she mused, and tried to compose herself. The surprise she had just experienced, had, notwithstanding her effort at self possession, disconcerted her. She turned suddenly, for she had caught the sound of a noise from the bed. She got up quickly and went to him. He had turned from his side to his back. She stood over him with the lantern raised. To see him better she leaned over, holding the lantern so that her face was full in the light. She had unbuttoned her coat at the throat, and seeking more comfort, had also removed the cap she wore. She had, however, forgotten her hair which had been held about her head by the cap and it now fell in braids over her slender shoulders. On the instant the man's eyes opened. He raised on an elbow, looked into her face, smiled wanly, and murmured:

"It is you, Agnes. You have come and oh, I am glad, for I have waited for you so long." In the next breath he had fallen back upon the bed and was sleeping again, while she staggered in great surprise. *Who was this man* that he should call her name and say that *he* had waited?

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But with Jean Baptiste, he snored in peace. His dream had come true; the one of his vision had come as he had hoped she would. But Jean Baptiste was not aware of the debt he owed her; that through strange providence in getting lost she had come into his sod house and saved his life. But what he was yet to know, and which is the great problem of our story, the girl, his dream girl, Agnes Stewart, happened to be white, while he, Jean Baptiste, The Homesteader, was a Negro.

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