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## THE BARRIER

By Rex Beach

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(Continued.)

added that the Burrells were known as "divils among the weemen."

Resting thus on the steps of Old Man Gale's store, the two talked on till they were disturbed by the sound of shrill voices approaching, at which the man looked up. Coming down the trail from the town were a squaw and two children. At sight of Necla the little one shouted gleefully and scampered forward, climbing over her like half grown puppies. They were boy and girl, both brown as Siwashes, with eyes like jet beads and hair that was straight and coarse and black. At a glance Burrell knew them for "breeds," and evidently the darker half was closer to the surface now, for they choked, gurgled, stammered and coughed in their Indian tongue, while Necla answered them likewise. At a word from her they turned and saw him, then, abashed at the strange splendor of his uniform, fell silent, pressing close to her. The squaw also seemed to resent his presence, for after a lowering glance she drew the shawl closer about her head and, leaving the trail, stunk out of sight around the corner of the store.

Burrell looked up at his companion's clear cut, delicate face, at the wind tanned cheeks, against which her long braids lay like the blue black locks of an Egyptian maid, then at her warm, dark eyes, in which was a hint of the golden light of the afternoon sun. The bitter revolt that had burned in him at the prospect of a long exile died out suddenly. How fresh and flowerlike she looked, and yet the wisdom of her! He spoke impulsively: "I am glad you are here, Miss Necla. I have had the moment I saw you, and I have been growing gladder ever since, for I never imagined there would be anybody in this place but men and squaws—men who hate the law and squaws who slink about—like that." He nodded in the direction of the Indian woman's disappearance. She looked at him quickly. "Well, what difference would that make?"

"Ugh! Squaws and half breeds!" His tone conveyed in full his utter contempt.

A curiously startled look lay in her eyes, and an inquiring, plaintive wrinkle came between her brows. "I don't believe you understand," she said. "Lieutenant Burrell, this is my sister, Molly Gale, and this is my little brother, John." Both round eyed elf made a ducking courtesy and blinked at the soldier, who gained his feet awkwardly, a flush rising into his cheeks.

From the regions at the rear of the store came the voice of an Indian woman calling: "Necla! Necla!"

"Coming in a moment!" the girl called back; then, turning to the young officer, she added quietly: "Mother needs me now. Goodby."

### CHAPTER II.

POLEON DORET'S HAND IS QUICKER THAN HIS TONGUE.

THE trader's house sat back of the post, farther up on the hill. It was a large, sleepy house, sprawling against the

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Gale's squaw came in.

different from us people. He's—he's"—Gale paused, at a loss for words to convey his meaning. "Well, he ain't the kind that would marry a half breed."

Evidently Alluna read some hidden meaning back of these words, for she spoke quickly, but in her own tongue now, as she was accustomed to do when excited or alarmed.

"Then this thing must cease at once. The risk is too great. Better that you kill him before it is too late."

Gale rose and laid his big hand firmly on her shoulder.

"Don't talk like that. There has been too much blood let already. There's time enough to worry."

He rose; but, instead of going to his room, he strode out of the house and walked northward up the trail. Alluna sat huddled up in the doorway, her shawl drawn close about her head, and waited for him until the late sun dipped down below the distant mountains for the midnight hour, then rolled slanting out again a few points farther north, to begin its long journey anew, but he did not return. At last she crept stiffly indoors, the look of fright staring in her eyes.

About 9 o'clock the next morning a faint and long drawn cry came from the farthest limits of the little camp. An instant later it was echoed closer, and then a dog began to howl. Before its voice had died away another took it up sadly, and within three breaths from up and down the half mile of scanty water front came the cry of "Steam-bo-a-t!" Cabin doors opened and men came out, glanced up the stream and echoed the call, while from sleepy nooks and sun warmed roofs wolf dogs arose, yawning and stretching.

Downstream came the faint sighing whoof-whoof of a steamer, and then out from behind the bend she burst. Her cabin deck was lined with passengers, most of whom were bound for the "outside," although still clad in mackinaw and overalls. They all gazed silently at the hundred men of Flambeau, who stared back at them till the gangplank was placed, when they came ashore to stretch their legs. One of them, however, made sufficient noise to make up for the silence of the others. Before the steamer had grounded he appeared among the Siwash deck hands, his head and shoulders towering above them, his white teeth gleaming from a face as dark as theirs, shouting to his friends ashore and pantomiming his delight to the two Gale children, who had come with Alluna to welcome him.

"Who's dose beeg, tall people w'at stan' longside of you, Mis Gale?" he called to her; then, shading his eyes elaborately, he cried in a great voice: "Waal, waal, I b'lieve dat's M'sieu Jean an' Man'selle Mollee! Ba gar! Bey get so beeg w'ile I'm gone I don' know dem no more!"

The youthful Gales wriggled at this delicious flattery and dug their tiny moccasined toes into the sand.

Lieutenant Burrell had come with the others, for the arrival of a steamboat called for the presence of every soul in camp, and, springing Necla in the outskirts of the crowd, he took his place beside her. He had lain awake for hours thinking of her and had fallen asleep with her still in his mind, for the revelation of her blood had come as a shock to him.

He had sprung from a race of slaveholders, from a land where birth and breed are more than any other thing, where a drop of impure blood effects an ineradicable stain. Therefore the thought of this girl's ignoble parentage was so repugnant to him that the more he pondered it the more pitiful it seemed, the more monstrous. Lying awake and thinking of her in the stillness of his quarters, it had seemed a

very unfortunate and a very terrible thing. During his morning duties the vision of her had been fresh before him again, and his constant contemplation of the matter had wrought a change in his attitude toward the girl, of which he was uncomfortably conscious and which he was glad to see she did not perceive.

The men were pouring off the boat now, and through the crowd came the tall Frenchman, bearing in the hollow of each arm a child who clasped a bundle to its breast. His eyes grew brighter at sight of Necla, and he broke into a flood of patois. They fairly bombarded each other with quick questions and fragmentary answers till she remembered her companion.

"Oh, I forgot my manners! Lieutenant Burrell, this is Napoleon Doret—our Poleon!" she added, with proud emphasis.

Doret checked his volubility and stared at the soldier, whom he appeared to see for the first time. The little brown people in his arms stared likewise, and it seemed to Burrell that a certain distrust was in each of the three pairs of eyes, only in those of the man there was no shyness. Instead, the Canadian looked him over gravely from head to heel, seeming to note each point of the unfamiliar attire; then he inquired without removing his glance:

"Were'bouts you live, eh?"

"I live at the post yonder," said the lieutenant.

"W'at business you work at?"

"The lieutenant has been stationed here, foolish," said Necla. "Come up to the store quick and tell me what it's like at Dawson."

In spite of the man's unfriendliness, Burrell watched him with admiration. There were no heels to his tufted fur boots, and yet he stood a good six feet two, as straight as a pine sapling, and it needed no second glance to tell of what metal he was made. His spirit showed in his whole body, in the set of his head and, above all, in his dark, warm face, which glowed with eagerness when he talked, and that was ever—when he was not slinging.

"I never see so many people since I left Quebec," he was saying. "She's jus' lak beeg city—mus' be tree, four t'ousan' people. Every day some more dey come, an' all night dey dance an' sing an' drink w'iskee. Ba gosh, dat's fine place!"

"Are there lots of white women?" asked the girl.

"Yes; two, 'tree hundred. Mos' of dem is work in dance halls. Dere's one fine gal I see, name' Marie Bourgette. I tell you 'bout her by an' by."

"Oh, Poleon, you're in love!" cried Necla.

"No, s'ree," he denied. "Dere's nose of dem gal look half so purty lak you. He would have said more; but, spying the trader at the entrance of the store, he went to him, straightway launching into the details of their commercial enterprise, which, happily, had been most successful.

Among the merchandise of the post there were for sale a scanty assortment of firearms, cheap shotguns and a Winchester or two, displayed in a rack behind the counter in a manner to attract the eye of such native hunters as might need them, and with the rest hung a pair of Colt's revolvers. One of the new arrivals, who had separated from the others at the front, now called to Gale:

"Are those Colts for sale? Mine was stolen the other day." Evidently he was accustomed to Yukon prices, for he showed no surprise at the figure the trader named, but took the guns and tested each of them, whereupon the old man knew that here was no "Cheechako," as tenderfeet are known in the north, although the man's garb had deceived him at first glance. The stranger balanced the weapons, one in either hand; then he did the "double roll" neatly, following which he executed a move that Gale had not witnessed for many years. He extended one of the guns, butt foremost, as if surrendering it, the action being free and open, save for the fact that his forefinger was crooked and thrust through the trigger guard; then, with the slightest jerk of the wrist, the gun spun about, the handle jumped into his palm, and instantly there was a click as his thumb slipped the hammer. It was the old "road agent spin," which Gale as a boy had practiced hours at a time. But that this man was in earnest he showed by glancing upward sharply when the trader laughed.

"This one hangs all right," he said; "give me a box of cartridges." He emptied his gold sack in payment for the gun and ammunition, then remarked: "That pretty nearly cleans me. If I had the price I'd take them both." Gale wondered what need induced this fellow to spend his last few dollars on a firearm. Then he inquired: "Bound for the outside?" "No, I'm beating here."

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The trader darted a quick glance at him. He did not like this man. "There ain't much doing in this camp. It's a pretty poor place," he said guardedly.

"I'll put in with you, from its looks," agreed the other. "It's got too many

soldiers to be worth a d—n." He snarled this bitterly, with a peculiar leering lift of his lip, as if his words tasted bad.

"Most of the boys are going up river," said Gale.

"Well, those hills look as if they had gold in them," said the stranger, pointing vaguely. "I'm going to prospect."

Gale knew instinctively that the fellow was lying, for his hands were not those of a miner, but there was nothing to be said. His judgment was verified, however, when Poleon drew him aside later and said: "He's bad man."

"How do you know?" "She's leava Dawson d—n queeck. Dose mounted police 'row 'im on de boat jus' before we left." Then he told a story that he had heard. The man, it seemed, had left Skagway between two suns, upon the disruption of Soapy Smith's band of desperadoes, and had made for the interior, but had been intercepted at the pass by two members of the citizens' committee who came upon him suddenly. Pretending to yield, he had executed some unexpected coup as he delivered his gun, for both men fell, shot through the body. No one knew just what it was he did nor cared to question him overmuch. The next heard of him was at Lake Bennett, over the line, where the mounted police recognized him and sent him on. They marked him well, however, and passed him on from post to post as they had driven others whose records were known, but he had lost himself in the confusion at Dawson for a few weeks until the scarlet coated rangers searched him out, disarmed him and forced him sullenly aboard this steamer.

(To be continued.)



"Napoleon Doret—our Poleon!"

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