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Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche
Stockton Turgenev Balzac
Burroughs Vatsyayana Crane
Curtis Tocqueville Verne
Homer Tolstoy Gogol Busch
Darwin Thoreau Whitman Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Harte
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Annette, the Metis Spy

J. E. (Joseph Edmund) Collins

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: J. E. (Joseph Edmund) Collins

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-6391-2

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CHAPTER I.

LE CHEF FALLS IN LOVE WITH THE HALF-BREED MAIDEN.

The sun was hanging low in the clear blue over the prairie, as two riders hurried their ponies along a blind trail toward a distant range of purple hills that lay like sleepy watchers along the banks of the Red River.

The beasts must have ridden far, for their flanks were white with foam, and their riders were splashed with froth and mud,

"The day is nearly done, mon ami," said one, stretching out his arm and measuring the height of the sun from the horizon. "How red it is; and mark these blood-stains upon its face! It gives warning to the tyrants who oppress these fair plains; but they cannot read the signs."

There was not a motion anywhere in all the heavens, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the dull trample of the ponies' hoofs upon the sod. On either side was the wide level prairie, covered with thick, tall grass, through which blazed the purple, crimson and garnet blooms, of vetch and wild pease. The tiger lily, too, rose here and there like a sturdy queen of beauty with its great terra cotta petals, specked with umber-brown. Here and there, also, upon the mellow level, stood a clump of poplars or white oaks — prim like

virgins without suitors, with their robes drawn close about them; but when over the unmeasured plain the wind blew, they bowed their heads gracefully, as a company of eastern girls when the king commands.

As the two horsemen rode silently around one of these clumps, there suddenly came through the hush the sound of a girl's voice singing. The song was exquisitely worded and touching, and the singer's voice was sweet and limpid as the notes of a bobolink. They marvelled much who the singer might be, and proposed that both should leave the path and join the unknown fair one. Dismounting, they fastened their horses in the shelter of the poplars, and proceeded on foot toward the point whence the singing came. A few minutes walk brought the two beyond a small poplar grove, and there, upon a fallen tree-bole, in the delicious cool of the afternoon, they saw the songstress sitting. She was a maiden of about eighteen years, and her soft, silky, dark hair was over her shoulders. In girlish fancy she had woven for herself a crown of flowers out of marigolds and daisies, and put it upon her head.

She did not hear the footsteps of the men upon the soft prairie, and they did not at once reveal themselves, but stood a little way back listening to her. She had ceased her song, and was gazing beyond intently. On the naked limb of a desolate, thunder-riven tree that stood apart from its lush, green-boughed neighbours, sat a thrush in a most melancholy attitude. Every few seconds he would utter a note of song, sometimes low and sorrowful, then in a louder key, and more plaintive, as if he were calling for some responsive voice from far away over the prairie.

"Dear bird, you have lost your mate, and are crying for her," the girl said, stretching out her little brown hand compassionately toward the crouching songster. "Your companions have gone to the South, and you wait here, trusting that your mate will come back, and not journey to summer lands without you. Is not that so, my poor bird? Ah, would that I could go with you where there are always flowers, and ever can be heard the ripple of little brooks. Here the leaves will soon fall, ah, me! and the daisies wither; and, instead of the delight of summer, we shall have only the cry of hungry wolves, and the bellowing of bitter winds above the lonesome

plains. But could I go to the South, there is no one who would sing over my absence one lamenting note, as you sing, my bird, for the mate with whom you had so many hours of sweet love-making in these prairie thickets. Nobody loves me, woos me, cares for me, or sings about me. I am not even as the wild rose here, though it seems to be alone, and is forbidden to take its walk; for it holds up its bright face and can see its lover; and he breathes back upon the kind, willing, breeze-puffs, through all the summer, sweet-scented love messages, tidings of a matrimony as delicious as that of the angels."

She stood up, and raised her arms above her head yearningly. The autumn wind was cooing in her hair, and softly swaying its silken meshes.

"Farewell, my desolate one; may your poor little heart be gladder soon. Could I but be a bird, and you would have me for a companion, your lamenting should not be for long. We should journey, loitering and love-making all the long sweet way, from here to the South, and have no repining."

Turning around, she perceived two men standing close beside her. She became very confused, and clutched for her robe to cover her face, but she had strayed away among the flowers without it. Very deeply she blushed that the strangers should have heard her; and she spake not.

"Bonjour, ma belle fille." It was the tall commanding one who had addressed her. He drew closer, and she, in a very low voice, her olive face stained with a faint flush of crimson, answered,

"Bonjour, Monsieur."

"Be not abashed. We heard what you were saying to the bird, and I think the sentiments were very pretty."

This but confused the little prairie beauty all the more. But the gallant stranger took no heed of her embarrassment.

"With part of your declaration I cannot agree. A maiden with such charms as yours is not left long to sigh for a lover. Believe me, I should like to be that bird, to whom you said you would, if you could, offer love and companionship."

The stranger made no disguise of his admiration for the beautiful girl of the plains. He stepped up by her side, and was about to take her hand after delivering himself of this gallant speech, but she quickly drew it away. Then, turning to his companion,

"We must sup before leaving this settlement, and we shall accompany this bonny maiden home. Go you and fetch the horses; Mademoiselle and myself shall walk together." The other did as he was directed, and the stranger and the songstress took their way along a little grassy path. The ravishing beauty of the girl was more than the amorously-disposed stranger could resist, and suddenly stretching out his arms, he sought to kiss her. But the soft-eyed fawn of the desert soon showed herself in the guise of a *petit bete sauvage*. With an angry scream, she bounded away from his grasp.

"How do you dare take this liberty with me, Monsieur," she said, her eyes kindled with anger and hurt pride. "You first meanly come and intrude upon my privacy; next you must turn what knowledge you gain by acting spy and eavesdropper, into a means of offering me insult. You have heard me say that I had no lover to sigh for me. I spoke the truth: I *have* no such lover. But you I will not accept as one." And turning with flushed cheek and gleaming eyes, she entered a cosy, clean-kept cottage. But she soon reflected that she had been guilty of an inhospitable act in not asking the strangers to enter. Suddenly turning, she walked rapidly back, and overtook the crest-fallen wooer and his companion, and said in a voice from which every trace of her late anger had disappeared.

"Entrez, Messieurs."

The man's countenance speedily lost its gloom, and, respectfully touching his hat, he said:

"Oui, Mademoiselle, avec le plus grand plaisir." Tripping lightly ahead she announced the two strangers, and then returned, going to the bars where the cows were lowing, waiting to be milked. The persistent stranger had not, by any means, made up his mind to desist in his wooing.

"The colt shies," he murmured, "when she first sees the halter. Presently, she becomes tractable enough." Then, while he sat waiting for the evening meal, blithely through the hush of the exquisite

evening came the voice of the girl. She was singing from *La Claire Fontaine*.

"A la claire fontaine
Je m'allais promener,
J'ai trouve l'eau si belle
Que je me suis baigne"

Her song ended with her work, and as she passed the strangers with her two flowing pails of yellow milk, Riel whispered softly, as he touched her sweet little hand:

"Ah, ma petite amie!"

The same flash came in her eyes, the same proud blood appeared red through the dusk of her cheek, but she restrained herself. He was a guest under her father's roof, and she would suffer the offence to pass. The persistent gallant was more crest-fallen by this last silent rebuke than by the first with its angry words. The first, in his vanity, he had deemed an outburst of petulance, instead of an expression of personal dislike, especially as the girl had so suddenly calmed herself, and extended hospitalities.

He gnashed his teeth that a half-breed girl, in an obscure village, should resent his advances; he for whom, if his own understanding was to be trusted, so many bright eyes were languishing. At the evening meal he received courteous, kindly attention from Annette; but this was all. He related with much eloquence all that he had seen in the big world in the East, during his school days, and took good care that his hosts should know how important a person he was in the colony of Red River. To his mortification, he frequently observed in the midst of one of his most self-glorifying speeches that the girl's eyes were abstracted. He was certain that she was not interested in him, or in his exploits.

"Can she have a lover?" he asked himself, a keen arrow of jealousy entering at his heart, and vibrating through his veins. "No, this cannot be. She said in her musings on the prairie, that she had nobody who would sing a sad song if she were to go to the South. Stop! She may love, and not find her passion requited. I shall stay

here until the morrow, and let the great cause wait. Through the evening I shall reveal who I am, and then see what is in the wind."

During the course of the evening the audacious stranger was somewhat confounded to learn that the father of his fair hostess was none other than Colonel Marton, an ex-officer of the Hudson Bay Company, a man of wide influence among all the Metis people, and one of the most sturdy champions of the half-breed cause. Indeed he was aware that Colonel Marton was at this very time about preaching resistance to the people, organising forces, and preparing to strike a blow at the authority of the Government in the North-West.

"It is discourteous, perhaps, Mademoiselle, that I should not disclose to you who I am, even though the safety of my present undertaking demands that I should remain unknown."

"If Monsieur has good reasons, or any reasons, for withholding his name, I pray that he will not consider himself under any obligation to reveal it."

"It would be absurd to keep such a secret, Ma petite Brighteye, from the beautiful daughter of a man so prominent in our holy cause as Colonel Marton. You this evening entertain, Mademoiselle, none other than Louis Riel, the Metis chief."

"Monsieur Riel," exclaimed the girl in astonishment, and somewhat in awe. "Why, we thought that Monsieur was far beyond the prairie, providing ammunition for the troops."

"I have been there Mademoiselle, and seen every trusty Metis armed, and ready to follow when the leaders cry Allons!"

Paul, the girl's brother, believed that there had never lived a hero so brave and so mighty as the man now under his father's roof. As for poor Annette, she bethought of her outburst of temper and lack of respect toward the chief; and she trembled to think that she might have given offense to a man so illustrious, and one who was the head of the sacred cause of her father and of her people.

"But why should he address a poor simple girl like me?" she mused; and then as she reflected that the leader had a wife and children in Montana, and if report spoke true, a half-breed bride in

a prairie village besides, a round red spot came into each cheek and burned there like a little fire.

The chief watched the changing colour in the maiden's face, and saw also in the great dark, velvety eyes, the reflection of her thoughts as they came and went, plainly as you may see the shadows upon an autumn day chase each other over the prairie meadows.

Paul went out for a little; the chief's companion had retired to his couch; and Riel was left alone with the girl.

"Mademoiselle must not shrink from me; she is too beautiful to be unkind. Ah ma petite Amie, those adorable lips of yours are made to kiss and kiss, not to pout and cry a lover nay. Through this wide land there is many a maid who would glory in the love, my beautiful girl, that I offer you." He advanced towards the maid, trembling with his passion, and dropped upon his knee.

"You would not let me kiss your lovely lips; pray sweet lady of my heart, let me take your sweet little hand."

The girl was trembling like a bird when the eagle's wings hover over its nest. "O, why does a great hero like Monsieur address such words to me? I am only a simple girl, living here upon the plains; besides, if I could give the brave leader my heart, it would be wrong to do so, for he is already wedded."

"Do not speak of the ceremonies which men have muttered, binding man and woman, when the *heart* cries out. Do not deny me your love my sweet girl," and the villain once more seized the maiden's waist, and sought to kiss her lips. But she screamed, and struggled from his embrace.

"Paul, Paul, mon frere, come to me." Her cries speedily brought her brother. But Monsieur Riel had taken his seat, and he lowered upon the girl who sat like a frightened fawn upon her chair, her great eyes glimmering with starting tears.

"What is wrong Annette?" the boy asked, leaning affectionately over his sister.

"She is not brave Paul. A shadow passed the window which was nothing more than my own, and she believed it to be that of a hostile Indian."

"What a silly girl you are, Annette," her brother said, softly smiting her cheek with his finger-tips.

The maiden did not make any explanation, but in a very wretched and embarrassed way arose and said, "Good night."

Nothing was said about the matter in the morning, and as the girl passed on her way to milk the cows Riel murmured,

"Mademoiselle will not say anything of the cause of her out-cry last night?"

"I will not Monsieur; if you will promise not to address any words of love-making to me again."

"I promise nothing, foolish maiden; but I have to ask that you will not make of Louis Riel an enemy."

When breakfast was ended he perceived Annette rush to the window, and then hastily and with a dainty coyness withdraw her head from the pane; and at the same moment he heard a sprightly tune whistle'd. Looking down the meadow he saw a tall, well-formed young white man, a gun on his back, and a dog at his heels, walking along the little path toward the cottage,

"This is the lover," he muttered; "curses upon him." From that moment he hated with all the bitterness of his nature the man now striding carelessly up towards the cottage door.

"Bonjour, mademoiselle et messieurs" the newcomer said in cheery tones, as he entered, making a low bow.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Stephens, was the reply. Louis Riel, intently watching, saw the girl's colour come and go as she spoke to the visitor. The young man stayed only for a few moments, and the chief observed that everybody in the house treated him as if in some way he had been the benefactor of all. When he arose to go, Paul, who knew of every widgeon in the mere beyond the cottonwood grove, and where the last flock of quail had been seen to alight, followed him out of the door, and very secretly communicated his knowledge. Annette had seen a large flock of turkeys upon the prai-

rie a few moments walk south of the poplar grove, and perhaps they had not yet gone away.

"When did you see them, ma chere demoiselle?" enquired Stephens. You know turkeys do not settle down like immigrants on one spot, and wait till we inhabitants of the plains come out and shoot them. Was it last week, or only the day before yesterday?" There was a very merry twinkle in his eye as he went on with this banter. Annette affected to pout, but she answered.

"This morning, while the dew was shining upon the grass, and you, I doubt not, were sleeping soundly, I was abroad on the plains for the cows. It was then I saw them. I am glad, however, that you have pointed out the difference between turkeys and immigrants. I did not know it before." He handed her a sun-flower which he had plucked on the way, saying,

"There, for your valuable information, I give you that. Next time I come, if you are able to tell me where I can find several flocks, I shall bring you some coppers." With a world of mischief in his eyes, he disappeared, and Annette, in spite of herself, could not conceal from everybody in the house a quick little sigh at his departure.

"It seems to me this Monsieur Stephens is a great favourite with you folk?" said M. Riel, when the young man had left the cottage. "Now had I come for sport, no pretty eyes would have seen any flocks to reserve for me." And he gave a somewhat sneering glance at poor Annette, who was pretending to be engaged in examining the petals of the sun-flower, although she was all the while thinking of the mischievous, manly, sunny-hearted lad who had given it to her. M. Riel's words and the sneer were lost, so far as she was concerned. Her ears were where her heart was, out on the plain beyond the cottonwood, where she could see the tall, straight, lithe figure of young Stephens, and his dog at his heels.

"Oui, Monsieur," returned Paul, "Monsieur Stephens is a very great favourite with our family. We are under an obligation to him that it will be difficult ever to repay."

"Whence comes this benefactor," queried M. Riel, with an ugly sneer, "and how has he placed you under such an obligation?" Then,

reflecting that he was showing a bitterness respecting the young man which he could neither explain nor justify, he said:

"Mais, pardonnez-moi. Think me not rude for asking these questions. When pretty eyes are employed to see, and pretty lips to tell of, game for one sportsman in preference to another, the neglected one might be excused for seeking to know in what way fortune has been kind with his rival."

"Shall I tell the whole story, Annette" enquired Paul, or will you do so?"

"O, I know that you will not leave anything out that can show the bravery of Mr. Stephens," replied the girl.

"Well, last spring, Annette was spending some days with her aunt, a few miles up Red River. It was the flood time, and as you remember, the river was swollen to a point higher than it had ever reached within the memory of any body in the settlement. Annette is venturesome, and since a child has shown a keen delight in going upon boats, or paddling a canoe; so, one day, during the visit which I have mentioned, she went into a birch that swung in a little pond, formed behind her uncle's premises by the over-flowing of the stream's channel. Untying the canoe, she seized the blade and began to paddle about in the lazy water. Presently she reached the eddies, which, since a child, she has always called the 'rings of the water-witches,' wherever she learned that term. Her cousin Violette was standing in the doorway as she saw Annette move off, and she cried out to her to beware of the eddies; but my sister, wayward and reckless as it is her habit to be in such matters, merely replied with a laugh; and then as the canoe began to turn round and round in the gurgling circles she cried out.

"I am in the rings of the water-witches. C'est bon! bon! C'est magnifique! O I wish you were with me, Violette, ma chere. It is so delightful to go round and round." A little way beyond, not more than twice the canoe's length, rushed by roaring, the full tide of the river.

"Beware, Annette, beware, for the love of heaven, of the river. If you get a little further out, and these eddies must drag you out, you will be in the mad current, and no arm can paddle the canoe to land out of the flood. Then, dear, there is the fall below, and the fans of

the mill. Come back, won't you! But my sister heeded not the words. She only laughed, and began dipping water from the eddies with the paddle-blade, as if it were a spoon she had in her hand. 'I am dipping water from the witches-rings,' she cried. 'How the drops sparkle! Every one is a glittering jewel. I wish you were here with me, Violette!' Suddenly and in an altered tone, she cried, 'Mon Dieu! My paddle is gone.' The paddle had no sooner glided out into the rushing, turbulent waters than the canoe followed it, and Annette saw herself drifting on to her doom. Half a mile below was the fall, and at the side of the fall, went ever and ever around with tremendous violence, the rending fans of the water-mill. Annette knew full well that any drift boat, or log, or raft, carried down the river at freshet-flow, was always swept into the toils of the inexorable wheels. Yet, if she were reckless and without heed a few minutes before, I am told that now she was calm. Violette gave the alarm that Annette was adrift in the river without a paddle, and in a few seconds every body living near had turned out, and was running down the shore. Several brought paddies, but it took hard running to keep up with the canoe, for the flood was racing at a speed of eight miles an hour. When they did get up in line each one flung out a paddle. But one fell too far out, and another not far enough. About fifteen men were along the banks in violent excitement, and every one of them saw nothing but doom for Annette. As the canoe neared a point about two hundred yards above the falls, a young white-man—all the rest were bois-brules—rushed out upon the bank, with a paddle in his hand, and without a word sprang into the mad waters. With a few strokes he was at the side of the canoe, and put the paddle into Annette's hand. 'Here;' he said, 'Keep away from the mill; that is your only danger; and steer sheer over the falls, getting as close as possible to the left bank.' The height of the fall, as you are aware, was not more than fifteen or eighteen feet, and there was plenty of water below, with not very much danger from rocks. 'Go you on shore now and I will meet my doom, or achieve my safety,' my sister said; but the young man answered, 'Nay, I will go over the fall too: I can then be of some service to you.' So he swam along by the canoe's side directing my sister, and shaping the course of the prow on the very brink of the fall. Then all shot over together. The canoe and Annette, and the young man were buried far under the terrible mass of water, but they soon came to

the surface again, when the heroic stranger seized my sister, and through the fury of the mad churning flood, landed her unhurt upon the bank. That young man was Philip Edmund Stephens, whom you saw here this morning. Is it any wonder, think you, Monsieur, that when Annette sees wild turkeys upon the prairie, she keeps the knowledge of it to herself till she gets the ear of her deliverer?

"A very brave act, indeed, on the part of this young man," replied the swarthy M. Riel. "He has excellent judgment, I perceive, or he would not so readily have calculated that no harm could come to any one who could swim well, by being carried over the Falls."

Annette's eyes flashed a little at this cold blooded discounting of the generous, uncalculating bravery of her young preserver; but she made no reply.

"This Monsieur Stephens is, if I mistake not, Mademoiselle, a very zealous servant of Government, and his chief duty now is to keep watch over the assemblies held by the Half-breed people. I cannot suppose that Colonel Marton is aware of the intimacy between a deadly enemy of our cause and the members of his household."

"Indeed, Monsieur, there is no intimacy more than what you have seen," the girl replied, the roses now out of her cheek. "Thrice, since rescuing me, Mr. Stephens has been at our home, and I believe that, henceforth, his duty will take him to a distant part of the territory." As she said these words her eyes fell, and her bosom heaved a little.

Riel was upon his feet. "If I find this young spy anywhere about this settlement again, I shall see that he is cared for." Then as Paul and his companion went out, he drew himself to his full height and continued:

"Annette, get your heart away from this young man; such love can only bring you ruin. From me you shall hear again, and hear soon. Farewell." As the girl put out her hand, he drew her suddenly into his arms, and before she could cry or struggle, kissed her upon the mouth.

Then he was gone.

CHAPTER II

ANNETTE FORMS AN HEROIC RESOLVE.

All day long Annette was in sore trouble, for she felt that the words of the rebel chief boded no good to herself or to her deliverer.

"Why should he think that I loved Captain Stephens?" the girl murmured, as a soft tinge of crimson stole into her cheek. "I am sure that I behaved in no way to him, that a girl should not act towards the man who had risked his life to save hers."

With the dusk came her father, his horse covered with foam; for he had ridden fast and far.

"Why is my daughter's cheek so pale?" he asked as he came into the sweet, tidy cottage, with its trailing morning glories, and bunches of mignonette.

"I have been a little disturbed, papa. The Metis chief and one of his friends stayed here last night. O, I do fear that we are now very near an outbreak. Is it not so, my father? Will you not tell me?"

"It is even so, child. Already nearly a thousand men, including Bois-Brule's and Indians have arms in their hands, and await the words of their leaders."

"But, papa, can good really come of this insurrection which you propose? I mean, mon pere, can you and Monsieur Riel, with your scattered followers, who have no money, no garrisons, no means of holding out in a long struggle, hope to overcome the numerous trained soldiers of the Government, with the money and the enthusiasm of a nation at their back?"

"You talk, my daughter, as if some friend of Government had been pouring his tale into your ear. Now, Annette, child, I love you very dearly, and I am grateful to this young man who has saved your life; but as the opinions which you have expressed could only have come from him I must ask that further intercourse between you and him ceases till this great issue has been fought out and settled."

"Captain Stephens, mon pere, has never uttered a word to me about these matters; and the opinions which I have, worthless though they be, are my own. Ah, papa, you surely have not forgotten the last struggle. Monsieur Riel, then, had some sort of right to set up his authority in a province which for a time came not under the jurisdiction of the Company or of the Dominion; the clergy were at his back; he had possession of the strongest Fort in the North-West Territories, and provisions enough to supply his forces for a year. Yet, at the very beating of the soldiers' drums he fled like a felon, and was obliged to beg a mouthful of food in his flight to exile. The circumstances now are not nearly so auspicious. How, then, can you hope to succeed?"

"You are not familiar, child, with affairs in these territories; and you neither know the extent of the discontent, nor the causes which have led to it. The Half-Breed people and the Indian tribes have been treated by government and their agents, worse than we would use our dogs. Instead of sending honest and capable men to rule here, they appoint adventurers whose only object is to make money during their residence, at the expense of the people. You are not wholly ignorant of the conduct of Lieutenant-Governor Tewtney. Since his arrival in the territories he has never been known to give a patient hour to hearing the grievances of the half-breed people; but he is forever abroad grabbing up plots of choice land, and securing timber and mineral leases; or furthering the schemes of knots of friends and advisers gathered about him. I shall relate one instance which has just come to light, and it will serve as an example of this man's career. Some time ago a friend of his imported a large quantity of meat, but upon arrival it was found to be unwholesome and foul. This man went to Governor Tewtney and he said.

"All my consignment of meat is spoilt. Isn't that a great loss?"

"No loss at all my dear friend,' replied the Governor: 'give it to the Indians and half-breeds.' Now you are aware that government had undertaken to give relief to the Indians and to the Metis, with employment that would bring them food. Well, this meat was given to both, and for every pound of the foul meat the wretched Breed or Indian was charged fifteen, cents. One of the chief's and also a