

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Gwen's Canyon

Author: Connor, Ralph [Gordon, Charles William] (1860-1937)

Date of first publication: 1898

Edition used as base for this ebook: Toronto: The Westminster Company, 1898 [first edition]

Date first posted: 27 September 2010

Date last updated: 30 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20100916

This ebook was produced by: Barbara Watson, James Wright & the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by the Internet Archive/Canadiana.org

Gwen's Canyon

Ralph Connor



Toronto:
The Westminster Company
LIMITED.

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada,
in the year one thousand eight hundred and ninety-eight,
by THE WESTMINSTER COMPANY, at the Department of Agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

Few lives are lived altogether upon sunlit uplands; most have to dip down into valleys; but to some there comes a sudden cleaving, and there yawns forever after the ragged lips of a disfiguring canyon. That is no lovely thing, but black and bitter; and many a life has come to its ending there in those black depths. But to many others the canyon is an episode, and the life goes on richer, fuller, sweeter than before. How this may be is the secret the story of Gwen's Canyon holds.

Gwen needs little introduction. For fourteen years she lived with her father, the "Old Timer," as all called him, remote from the great world, untaught in its ways, unspoiled by its maxims. She had a dim memory of her mother's face, but no other white woman did she see during all those years; while as for education, this she had from old Ponka, her half-breed nurse, and from the Indians of the neighboring Blackfoot reserve. It was from them she learned the ways of all the beasts that haunt the coulees from the timber wolf to the jack-rabbit. These were her only comrades, till she began to ride after the cattle with her father, when she fell in with Bill and Hi, the cowboys from the Ashley Ranche. But Bill and Hi could never get beyond an adoring awe that kept them at too great a distance for comradeship. She had no friend till there came that young English free-lance rancher who, partly for his lordly ancestry, but more for his lordly ways, was called "the Duke." It was he who taught her the Queen's English and manners, and many things beside, and to him she gave a child's passionate love and trust.

But next to her father and the Duke Gwen loved the hills where she lived all day long, and to her they were indeed as a nurturing mother. No man of the Foothills country ever gets quite away from them. He may, when on a visit, forget them for a time amid the delights of his soft, sweet English home, or in the presence of the purple glory of the sloping moors of Scotland's heather; but the day comes when something in the sunlight, or in the sweep of the wind, reminds him of how the sunlight and the winds bathe and sweep the velvet-grey round-topped hills. That night he will see and feel the glory of them in his dreams, and before breakfast he will begin to pack his trunk. The Foothills were no small part of Gwen; only those who realize how great that part was can understand the passionate protest of her whole soul and the agony of despair that gathered about her when she found herself snatched for ever from all that open, free, beautiful life.

But were it not that before that black day she had come to know the Pilot and his Gospel story, then no one would dare to tell and none could bear to hear the story of Gwen's Canyon. It is only for canyon people.

C.W.G.

Winnipeg.

Gwen's Canyon



WEN was undoubtedly wild and, as the Sky Pilot said, wilful and wicked. Even Broncho Bill and Hi Kendal, the cowboys from the Ashley Ranche, would say so, without, of course, abating one jot of their admiration for her. For fourteen years she had lived chiefly with wild things. The cattle on the range, wild as deer, the coyotes, the jack-rabbits and the timber wolves were her mates and her instructors. From these she learned her wild ways. The prairie of the Foothill country was her home. She loved it and all things that moved upon it, with passionate love, the only kind she knew. And all summer long she spent her days riding up and down the range alone or with her father, or with Joe, or, best of all, with "the Duke," her hero and her friend. So she grew up strong, wholesome and self-reliant, fearing nothing alive, and as untamed as a yearling range colt.

She was not beautiful. The winds and sun had left her no complexion to speak of, but the glory of her red hair, gold-red, with purple sheen, nothing could tarnish. Her eyes, too, deep blue with rims of grey that flashed with the glint of steel, or shone with melting light as of the stars, according to her mood; those Irish, warm, deep eyes of hers were worth a man's looking at.

Of course, all spoiled her. Ponka and her son Joe grovelled in abjectest adoration, while her father and all who came within touch of her simply did her will. Even the Duke, who loved her better than anything else, yielded lazy, admiring homage to his "Little Princess," as he called her, and certainly when she stood up straight with her proud little gold-crowned head thrown back, flashing forth wrath or issuing imperious commands, she looked a princess, all of her.

It was a great day and a good day for her when she fished the Sky Pilot, as the missionary was called, out of the Swan and brought him home, and the night of Gwen's first "prayers," when she heard for the first time the story of the shepherds and the angels and the Babe, was the best of all her nights up to that time, and all through the winter, under the Pilot's guidance, she, with her father, the Old Timer, listening near, went over and over the story of the Man of Nazareth so old now to many, but ever becoming new, till a whole new world of mysterious Powers and Presences lay open to her imagination, and became the home of great realities. She was rich in imagination, and when the Pilot read Bunyan's immortal poem, her mother's old Pilgrim's Progress, she moved and lived beside the hero of that tale, backing him up in his fights and consumed with anxiety over his many impending perils, till she had him safely across the river and delivered into the charge of the shining ones.

The Pilot himself, too, was a new and wholesome experience. He was the first thing she had yet encountered that refused submission and the first human being that had failed to fall down and worship. There was something in him that would not *always* yield, and, indeed, her pride and her imperious tempers he met with surprise and even with a pity that verged toward contempt. With this she was not well pleased, and not infrequently she broke forth upon him. One of these outbursts is stamped upon my mind not only because of its unusual violence, but chiefly because of its following consequences. The original cause of her rage was some misdeed of the unfortunate Joe, but when I came upon the scene it was the Pilot who was occupying her attention. The expression of surprise and pity on his face appeared to stir her up.

"How dare you look at me like that?" she cried.

"How very extraordinary that you can't keep hold of yourself better," he answered.

"I can!" she stamped, "and I shall do as I like!"

"It is a great pity," he said with provoking calm, "and besides it is weak and silly." His words were unfortunate.

"Weak!" she gasped when her breath came back to her. "Weak!"

"Yes," he said, "very weak and childish."

Then she could have cheerfully put him to a slow and cruel death. When she had recovered a little she cried vehemently:

"I'm not weak! I'm strong! I'm stronger than you are! I'm as strong as—as—a man!"

I do not suppose she meant the insinuation; at any rate the Pilot ignored it and went on.

"You're not strong enough to keep your temper down." And then as she had no reply ready, he went on, "And really, Gwen, it is not right. You must not go on in this way."

Again his words were unfortunate.

"*Must not!*" she cried, adding an inch to her height, "Who says so?"

"God!" was the simple, short answer.

She was greatly taken aback, and gave a quick glance over her shoulder as if to see Him, who would dare to say *must not* to her; but, recovering, she answered sullenly:

"I don't care!"

"Don't care for God?" The Pilot's voice was quiet and solemn, but something in his manner angered her and she blazed forth again:

"I don't care for anyone and I *shall* do as I like."

The Pilot looked at her sadly for a moment, and then said slowly:

"Some day, Gwen, you will not be able to do as you like."

I remember well the settled defiance in her tone and manner as she took a step nearer him and answered in a voice trembling with passion:

"Listen! I have always done as I like, and I shall do as I like till I die!" And she rushed forth from the house and down toward the canyon, her refuge from all disturbing things and chiefly from herself.

I could not shake off the impression her words made upon me. "Pretty direct, that," I said to the Pilot as we rode away. "The declaration may be philosophically correct, but it rings uncommonly like a challenge to the Almighty. Throws down the gauntlet, so to speak."

But the Pilot only said in a wounded tone, "Don't! How can you?"

Within a week her challenge was accepted, and how fiercely and how gallantly did she struggle to make it good!

It was the Duke that brought me the news, and as he told me the story his gay, careless self-command for once was gone. For in the gloom of the canyon where he overtook me I could see his face gleaming out ghastly white, and even his iron nerve could not keep the tremor from his voice.

"I've just sent up the Doctor," was his answer to my greeting. "I looked for you last night, couldn't find you, and so rode off to the Fort."

"What's up?" I said with fear in my heart, for no light thing moved the Duke.

"Haven't you heard? It's Gwen," he said, and the next minute or two he gave to Jingo, who was indulging in a series of unexpected plunges. When Jingo was brought down the Duke was master of himself, and told his tale with careful self-control.

Gwen, on her father's buckskin broncho had gone with the Duke to the big plain above the cut-bank where Joe was herding the cattle. The day was hot and a storm was in the air. They found Joe riding up and down singing to keep the cattle quiet, but having a hard time to hold the bunch from breaking. While the Duke was riding around the far side of the bunch, a cry from Gwen arrested his attention. Joe was in trouble. His horse, a half-broken cayuse, had stumbled into a badger-hole and had bolted, leaving Joe to the mercy of the cattle. At once they began to sniff suspiciously at this phenomenon, a man on foot, and to follow cautiously on his track. Joe kept his head and walked slowly out, till all at once a young cow began to bawl and to paw the ground. In a minute, one and then another of the cattle began to toss their heads and bunch and bellow till the whole herd of two hundred were after Joe. Then Joe lost his head and ran. Immediately the whole herd broke into a thundering gallop with heads and tails aloft and horns rattling like the loading of a regiment of rifles.

"Two more minutes," said the Duke, "would have done for Joe, for I could never have reached him, but in spite of my most frantic warnings and signalings, right into the face of that mad, bellowing, thundering mass of steers rode that little girl. Nerve! I have some myself, but I couldn't have done it. She swung her horse round Joe and sailed out with him with

the herd bellowing at the tail of her broncho. I've seen some cavalry things in my day, but for sheer cool bravery nothing touches that."

"How did it end? Did they run them down?" I asked with horror at such a result.

"No, they crowded her toward the cut-bank, and she was edging them off and was almost past, when they came to a place where the bank bit in, and her iron-mouthed brute wouldn't swerve, but went pounding on, broke through, plunged; she couldn't spring free because of Joe, and pitched headlong over the bank, while the cattle went thundering past. I flung myself off Jingo and slid down somehow into the sand, thirty feet below. Here was Joe safe enough, but the broncho lay with a broken leg, and half under him was Gwen. She hardly knew she was hurt, but waved her hand to me and cried out, 'Wasn't that a race? I couldn't swing this hard-headed brute. Get me out.' But even as she spoke the light faded from her eyes, she stretched out her hands to me, saying faintly, 'Oh, Duke,' and lay back white and still. We put a bullet into the buckskin's head, and carried her home in our jackets and there she lies without a sound from her poor white lips."

The Duke was badly cut up. I had never seen him show any sign of pain before, but as he finished the story he stood ghastly and shaking. He read my surprise in my face and said:

"Look here, old chap, don't think me quite a fool. You can't know what that little girl has done for me these years. Her trust in me—it is extraordinary how utterly she trusts me—somehow held me up to my best and back from perdition. It is the one bright spot in my life in this blessed country. Everyone else thinks me a pleasant or unpleasant kind of fiend."

I protested rather faintly.

"Oh, don't worry your conscience," he answered with a slight return of his old smile, "a fuller knowledge would only justify the opinion." Then after a pause he added, "But if Gwen goes I must pull out, I could not stand it."

As we rode up the Doctor came out.

"Well, what do you think?" asked the Duke.

"Can't say yet," replied the old Doctor, gruff with long army practice, "bad enough; good night."

But the Duke's hand fell upon his shoulder with a grip that must have got to the bone, and in a husky voice he asked:

"Will she live?"

The Doctor squirmed, but could not shake off that crushing grip.

"Here, you young tiger, let go! what do you think I am made of?" he cried angrily. "I didn't suppose I was coming to a bear's den, or I should have brought a gun."

It was only by the most complete apology that the Duke could mollify the old Doctor sufficiently to get his opinion.

"No, she will not die! Great bit of stuff! Better she should die perhaps! But can't say yet for two weeks. Now remember," he added sharply, looking into the Duke's woe-stricken face, "her spirits must be kept up. I have lied most fully and cheerfully to them inside, you must do the same," and the Doctor strode away calling out:

"Joe! Here Joe! Where is he gone? Joe, I say! Extraordinary selection Providence makes at times; we could have spared that lazy half-breed with pleasure! Joe! Oh, here you are! Where in thunder——" But here the Doctor stopped abruptly. The agony in the dark face before him was too much even for the bluff doctor. Straight and stiff Joe stood by the horse's head till the Doctor had mounted, then with a great effort he said:

"Little miss, she go dead?"

"Dead!" called out the Doctor, glancing at the open window, "Why, bless your old copper carcass, no! Gwen will show you yet how to rope a steer."

Joe took a step nearer, and lowering his tone said:

"You speak me true? me man me, no papoose." The piercing black eyes searched the Doctor's face. The Doctor hesitated a moment and then with an air of great candor said cheerily:

"That's all right, Joe! Miss Gwen will cut circles round your old cayuse yet. But remember," and the Doctor was very impressive, "you must make her laugh every day."

Joe folded his arms across his breast and stood like a statue till the Doctor rode away, then turning to us he grunted out:

"Him good man, eh?"

"Good man," answered the Duke, adding "but remember, Joe, what he told you to do. Must make her laugh every day."

Poor Joe! Humor was not his *forte*, and his attempts in this direction in the weeks that followed would have been humorous were they not so pathetic. How I did my part I cannot tell. Those weeks are to me now like the memory of an ugly nightmare. The ghostly old man? moving in and out of his little daughter's room in useless dumb agony; Ponka's woe-stricken Indian face; Joe's extraordinary and unusual but loyal attempts at fun-making grotesquely sad, and the Duke's unvarying and invincible cheeriness; these furnish light and shade for the picture my memory brings me of Gwen in those days.

For the first two weeks she was simply heroic. She bore her pain without a groan, submitted to the imprisonment which was harder than pain with angelic patience. Joe, the Duke and I carried out our instructions with careful exactness to the letter. She never doubted, and we never let her doubt, but in a few weeks she would be on the pinto's back again and after the cattle. She made us pass our word for this till it seemed as if she must have read the falsehoods on our brows.

"To lie cheerfully with her eyes upon one's face calls for more than I possess," said the Duke one day. "The Doctor should supply us tonics. It is an arduous task."

And she believed us absolutely, and made plans for the fall "round-up," and for hunts and rides till one's heart grew sick. As to the ethical problem involved I decline to express an opinion, but we had no need to wait for our punishment. Her trust in us, her eager and confident expectation of the return of her happy, free, outdoor life; these brought to us, who knew how vain they were, their own adequate punishment for every false assurance we gave. And how bright and brave she was those first days, and how resolute to get back to the world of air and light outside!

But all this cheery hope and courage and patience was snuffed out as a candle, leaving noisome darkness to settle down in that sick room from the day of the doctors' consultation.

The verdict was clear and final. The old Doctor, who loved Gwen as his own, was inclined to hope against hope, but Fawcett, the clever young doctor from the distant town, was positive in his opinion. The scene is clear to me now, after many years. We three stood in the outer room; the Duke and her father were with Gwen. So earnest was the discussion that none of us heard the door open just as young Fawcett was saying in his incisive tones—

"No! I can see no hope. The child can never walk again."

There was a cry behind us.

"What! Never walk again! It's a lie!" There stood the Old Timer, white, fierce, shaking.

"Hush!" said the old Doctor, pointing at the open door. He was too late. Even as he spoke, there came from the inner room a wild unearthly cry as of some dying thing, and as we stood gazing at one another with awe-stricken faces we heard Gwen's voice as in quick sharp pain:

"Daddy! daddy! come! What do they say? Tell me, daddy. It is not true! It is not true! Look at me, daddy!"

She pulled up her father's haggard face from the bed.

"Oh, daddy, daddy, you know it's true. Never walk again!"

She turned with a pitiful cry to the Duke who stood white and stiff with arms drawn tight across his breast on the other side of the bed.

"Oh, Duke, did you hear them? You told me to be brave, and I tried not to cry when they hurt me. But I can't be brave. Can I, Duke? Oh, Duke! never to ride again!"

She stretched out her hands to him. But the Duke, leaning over her and holding her hands fast in his, could only say

brokenly over and over: "Don't, Gwen! Don't, Gwen dear!"

But the pitiful pleading voice went on.

"Oh, Duke! must I always lie here? must I? why must I?"

"God knows," answered the Duke bitterly under his breath, "I don't!"

She caught at the word.

"Does He?" she cried eagerly. Then she paused suddenly, turned to me and said: "Do you remember he said some day I could not do as I liked."

I was puzzled.

"The Pilot," she cried impatiently, "don't you remember? and I said I should do as I liked till I died."

I nodded my head and said, "But you know you didn't mean it."

"But I did and I do," she cried with passionate vehemence, "and I will do as I like! I will not lie here! I will ride! I will! I will! I will!" and she struggled up and clenched her fists. It was no pleasant sight, but gruesome. Her rage against that Unseen Omnipotence was so defiant and so helpless.

Those were dreadful weeks to Gwen and to all about her. The constant pain could not break her proud spirit, she shed no tears but she fretted and chafed and grew more imperiously exacting every day. Ponka and Joe she drove like a slave master, and even her father, when he could not understand her wishes, she impatiently banished from her room. Only the Duke could please or bring her any cheer, but even the Duke began to feel that the day was not far off when he too would fail, and the thought made him despair. Her pain was hard to bear, but harder than the pain was her longing for the open air and the free life upon the prairie. But most pitiful of all were the days when in her utter weariness and uncontrollable unrest she would pray to be taken down into the canyon.

"Oh, it is so cool and shady," she would plead, "and the flowers up in the rocks and the vines and things are all so lovely. I am always better there. I know I should be better," till the Duke would be distracted and would come to me and wonder what the end would be.

One day when the strain had been more terrible than usual, the Duke rode down to me and said:

"Look here, this thing can't go on. Where is the Pilot gone? Why doesn't he stay where he belongs? I wish to Heaven he would get through with his absurd rambling."

"He's gone where he was sent," I replied shortly. "You don't set much store by him when he does come round. He is gone on an exploring trip through the Dog Lake country. He'll be back by the end of next week."

"I say, bring him up for Heaven's sake," said the Duke, "he may be of some use, and anyway it will be a new face for her, poor child." Then he added rather penitently, "I fear this thing is getting on to my nerves. Don't lay it up against me, old chap!" It was a new thing to hear the Duke confess his need of any man, much less penitence for a fault. I felt my eyes growing dim, but I said roughly:

"You be hanged! I'll bring the Pilot up when he comes."

It was wonderful how we had all come to confide in the Pilot during his year of missionary work among us. Somehow the cowboys' name of "Sky Pilot" seemed to express better than anything else the place he held with us. Certain it is that when in their dark hours any of the fellows felt in need of help to strike the "upward trail," they went to the Pilot; and so the name first given in chaff came to be the name that expressed most truly the deep and tender feeling these rough, big-hearted men cherished for him.

When the Pilot came home I carefully prepared him for his trial, telling all that Gwen had suffered, and striving to make him feel how desperate was her case, when even the Duke had to confess himself beaten. He did not seem sufficiently impressed. Then I pictured for him all her fierce wilfulness and her fretful humors, her impatience with those who loved her and were wearing out their souls and bodies for her. "In short," I ended up by saying, "she doesn't care a rush for

anything in Heaven or earth and will yield to neither man nor God."

The Pilot's eye had been kindling as I talked, but he only answered quietly:

"What should you expect?"

"Well, I do think she might show some signs of gratitude and some gentleness towards those ready to die for her."

"Oh, you do," said he with high scorn. "You all combine to ruin her temper and disposition with foolish flattery and weak yielding to her whims, right or wrong; you smile at her imperious pride and encourage her wilfulness, and then not only wonder at the results, but blame her, poor child, for all. Oh, you are a fine lot, the Duke and all of you!"

He had a most exasperating ability for putting one in the wrong, and I could only think of the proper and sufficient reply long after the opportunity for making it had passed. I wondered what the Duke would say to this doctrine. All the following day, which was Sunday, I could see that Gwen was on his mind. He was struggling with the problem of pain. Monday morning found us on the way to the Old Timer's ranche. And what a morning it was! And how beautiful our world seemed to us. About us rolled the round-topped velvet hills, brown and yellow or faintly green, spreading out behind us to the broad prairie, and before clambering up and up to meet the purple bases of the great mountains that lay their mighty length along the horizon and thrust up white sunlit peaks into the blue sky. On the hillsides and down in the sheltering hollows we could see the bunches of cattle and horses feeding upon the rich grasses. Above all the sky, cloudless and blue, arched its great kindly roof from prairie to mountain peaks, and over all, above, below, on prairie, hillsides and mountains, the sun poured his floods of radiant yellow light.

As we followed the trail that wound up and into the heart of these rounded hills and ever nearer to the purple mountains, the morning breeze swept down to meet us, bearing a thousand scents and filling us with its own fresh life. One can know the quickening joyousness of these Foothill breezes only after he has with wide open mouth drunk deep and full of them.

Through all this mingling radiant beauty of sunlit hills and shady hollows and purple snow-peaked mountains we rode with hardly a word, every minute adding to our heart-filling delight, but ever with the thought of the little room where, shut in from all this outside glory, lay Gwen, heart-sore with fretting and longing. This must have been in the Pilot's mind, for he suddenly held up his horse and burst out:

"Poor Gwen, how she loves all this—it is her very life. How can she help fretting the heart out of her? To see this no more!" He flung himself off his broncho and said, as if thinking aloud: "It is too awful! Oh, it is cruel! I don't wonder at her! God help me what can I say to her?"

He threw himself down upon the grass and turned over on his face. After a few minutes he appealed to me, and his face was sorely troubled.

"How can one go to her? It seems to me sheerest mockery to speak of patience and submission to a wild young thing from whom all this is suddenly snatched forever; and this was very life to her, too, remember."

Then he sprang up and we rode hard for an hour till we came to the mouth of the canyon. Here the trail grew difficult and we came to a walk, and as we went down into the cool depths the spirit of the canyon came to meet us and took the Pilot in its grip. He rode in front, feasting his eyes on all the wonders in that storehouse of beauty. Trees of many kinds deepened the shadows of the canyon. Over us waved the big elms that grew up here and there out of the bottom, and around their feet clustered low cedars and hemlocks and balsams, while the sturdy rugged oaks and delicate trembling poplars clung to the rocky sides and clambered up and out to the canyon's sunny lips. Back of all, the great black rocks, decked with mossy bits and clinging things, glistened cool and moist between the parting trees. From many an oozy nook the dainty clematis and columbine shook out their bells, and lower down, from beds of many colored moss, the late wind-flower and maiden-hair and tiny violet lifted up brave sweet faces, and through the canyon the Little Swan sang its song to rocks and flowers and overhanging trees, a song of many tones, deep booming where it took its first sheer plunge, gay chattering where it threw itself down the ragged rocks, and soft murmuring where it lingered about the roots of the loving, listening elms. A cool, sweet, soothing place it was, with all its shades and sounds and silences, and, lest it should be sad to any, the sharp quick sunbeams danced and laughed down through all its leaves upon mosses, flowers and rocks. No wonder that the Pilot, drawing a deep breath as he touched the prairie sod again, said:

"That does me good. It is better at times even than the sunny hills. This was Gwen's best spot."

I saw that the canyon had done its work with him. His face was strong and calm as the hills on a summer morning, and with this face he looked in upon Gwen. It was one of her bad days and one of her bad moods, but like a summer breeze he burst into the little room.

"Oh, Gwen!" he cried, without a word of greeting, much less of commiseration, "we have had such a ride." And he spread out the sunlit, round-topped hills before her, till I could feel their very breezes in my face. This the Duke had never dared to do, fearing to grieve her with pictures of what she should look upon no more. But as the Pilot talked, before she knew, Gwen was out again upon her beloved hills, breathing their fresh sunny air, filling her heart with their multitudinous delights, till her eyes grew bright and the lines of fretting smoothed out of her face and she forgot her pain. Then, before she could remember, he had her down into the canyon, feasting her heart with its airs and sights and sounds. The black glistening rocks, tricked out with moss and trailing vines, the great elms and low green cedars, the oaks and shivering poplars, the clematis and columbine hanging from the rocky nooks, and the violets and maiden-hair deep bedded in their mosses. All this and far more he showed her with a touch so light as not to shake the morning dew from bell or leaf or frond, and with a voice so soft and full of music as to fill our hearts with the canyon's mingling sounds, and as I looked upon her face I said to myself, "Dear old Pilot, for this I shall always love you well," but as poor Gwen listened the rapture of it drew the big tears down her cheeks, alas, no longer brown, but white; and for that day at least the dull dead weariness was lifted from her heart.

But none knew better than the Pilot that the fight was still to come, for deep in Gwen's heart were thoughts whose pain made her forget all other.

"Was it God let me fall?" she asked abruptly one day, and the Pilot knew the fight was on, but he only answered, looking fearlessly into her eyes:

"Yes, Gwen dear."

"Why did He let me fall?" and her voice was very deliberate.

"I don't know, Gwen dear," said the Pilot steadily, "He knows."

"And does He know I shall never ride again? Does He know how long the days are, and the nights when I can't sleep? Does He know?"

"Yes, Gwen dear," said the Pilot, and the tears were standing in his eyes though his voice was still steady enough.

"Are you sure He knows?" The voice was painfully intense.

"Listen to me, Gwen," began the Pilot in great distress, but she cut him short.

"Are you quite sure He knows? Answer me," she cried with her old imperiousness.

"Yes, Gwen, He knows all about you."

"Then what do you think of Him, just because He's big and strong, treating a little girl that way?" Then she added viciously, "I hate Him! I don't care, I hate Him!"

But the Pilot did not wince. I wondered how he would solve that problem that was puzzling not only Gwen, but her father and the Duke and all of us—the why of human pain.

"Gwen," said the Pilot, as if changing the subject, "did it hurt to put on the plaster jacket?"

"You just bet," said Gwen lapsing in her English as the Duke was not present, "it was worse than anything, awful. They had to straighten me out, you know," and she shuddered at the memory of that pain.

"What a pity your father or the Duke was not here," said the Pilot earnestly.

"Why! they were both here."

"What a cruel shame!" burst out the Pilot, "don't they care for you any more?"

"Of course they do," said Gwen indignantly.

"Why didn't they stop the doctors from hurting you so cruelly?"

"Why, they let the doctors. It is going to help me to sit up and perhaps to walk about a little," answered Gwen, with blue-gray eyes open wide.

"Oh," said the Pilot, "it was very mean to stand by and see you hurt like that."

"Why, you silly," replied Gwen impatiently, "they want my back to get straight and strong."

"Oh, then they didn't do it just for fun or for nothing?" said the Pilot innocently.

Gwen gazed at him in amazed and speechless wrath, and he went on:

"I mean they love you though they let you be hurt, or rather they let the doctors hurt you because they loved you and wanted to make you better."

Gwen kept her eyes fixed with curious earnestness upon his face till the light began to dawn.

"Do you mean," she began slowly, "that though God let me fall He loves me?"

The Pilot nodded, he could not trust his voice.

"I wonder if that can be true." she said as if to herself, and soon we said good-bye and came away, the Pilot limp and voiceless, but I triumphant, for I began to see a little light for Gwen.

But the fight was by no means over, indeed, it was hardly well begun—and when the autumn came with its misty purple days, most glorious of all days in the cattle country, the old restlessness came back and the fierce refusal of her lot. Then came the day of the round-up. Why should she have to stay while all went after the cattle? The Duke would have remained, but she impatiently sent him away. She was weary and heartsick, and, worst of all, she began to feel that most terrible of burdens, the burden of her life to others. I was much relieved when the Pilot came in fresh and bright, waving a bunch of wild-flowers in his hand.

"I thought they were all gone," he cried. "Where do you think I found them? Right down by the big elm root," and though he saw by the settled gloom of her face that the storm was coming, he went bravely on picturing the canyon in all the splendour of its autumn dress. But the spell would not work. Her heart was out on the sloping hills, where the cattle were bunching and crowding with tossing heads and rattling horns, and it was in a voice very bitter and impatient that she cried:

"Oh, I am sick of all this. I want to ride. I want to see the birds and the cattle." The Pilot was cowboy enough to know the longing that tugged at her heart for one wild race after the calves or stags, but he could only say:

"Wait, Gwen! try to be patient."

"I am patient, at least I have been patient for two whole months, and it's no use, and I don't believe God cares one bit!"

"Yes he does, Gwen, more than any of us," replied the Pilot earnestly.

"No! He does not care," she answered with angry emphasis, and the Pilot made no reply.

"Perhaps," she went on hesitatingly, "He's angry because I said I didn't care for Him, you remember? That was very wicked. But don't you think I'm punished nearly enough now? You made me very angry and I didn't really mean it."

Poor Gwen, God had grown to be very real to her during these weeks of pain, and very terrible. The Pilot looked down a moment into the grey-blue eyes grown so big and so pitiful, and hurriedly dropping on his knees beside the bed he said in a very unsteady voice:

"Oh, Gwen, Gwen, He's not like that. Don't you remember how Jesus was with the poor sick people? That's what He's like."

"Could Jesus make me well?"

"Yes, Gwen."

"Then why doesn't He," she asked, and there was no impatience now, but only trembling anxiety as she went on in a timid voice, "I asked Him to, over and over, and said I would wait two months, and now it's more than three. Are you quite sure He hears now?" She raised herself on her elbow and gazed searchingly into the Pilot's face. I was glad it was not into mine. As she uttered the words "are you quite sure?" one felt that things were in the balance. I could not help looking at the Pilot with intense anxiety. What would he answer? The Pilot gazed out of the window upon the hills for a few moments. How long the silence seemed! Then turning, looked into the eyes that searched his so steadily and answered simply:

"Yes, Gwen, I am quite sure!" Then with quick inspiration he got her mother's Bible and said "now Gwen try to see it as I read." But before he read, with the true artist's instinct he created the proper atmosphere. By a few vivid words he made us feel the pathetic loneliness of the Man of Sorrows in His last sad days. Then he read that masterpiece of all tragic picturing, the story of Gethsemane. As he read we saw it all, the Garden and the trees and the sorrow-stricken Man alone with His mysterious agony. We heard the prayer so pathetically submissive and then, for answer, the rabble and the traitor.

Gwen was far too quick to need explanation, and the Pilot only said, "You see, Gwen God gives nothing but the best—to His own Son only the best."

"The best? They took Him away, didn't they?" She knew the story well.

"Yes, but listen," he turned the leaves rapidly and read, "We see Jesus for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor. That is how He got His Kingdom."

Gwen listened silent but unconvinced, and then said slowly:

"But how can this be best for me? I am no use to anyone. It can't be best to just lie here and make them all wait on me and—and—I did want to help daddy—and—oh—I know they will all get tired of me! They are getting tired already—I! I! can't help being hateful."

She was by this time sobbing as I had never heard before, deep passionate sobs. Then again the Pilot had an inspiration.

"Now Gwen," he said severely, "you know we're not as mean as that, and that you are just talking nonsense every word. Now I'm going to smooth out your red hair and tell you a story."

"It's *not* red," she cried between her sobs. This was her sore point.

"It *is* red, as red as can be, a beautiful shining purple *red*," said the Pilot emphatically, beginning to brush.

"Purple!" cried Gwen scornfully.

"Yes, I've seen it in the sun, purple. Haven't you?" said the Pilot appealing to me. "And my story is about the canyon, our canyon, your canyon down there."

"Is it true?" asked Gwen, already soothed by the cool quick-moving hands.

"True? It's as true as—as—," he glanced round the room "as the Pilgrim's Progress." This was satisfactory, and the story went on.

"At first there were no canyons, but only the broad open Prairie. One day the Master of the Prairie, walking out over his great lawns, where were only grasses, asked the Prairie, 'Where are your flowers?' and the Prairie said, 'Master I have no seeds.' Then he spoke to the birds, and they carried seeds of every kind of flower and strewed them far and wide, and soon the Prairie bloomed with crocuses, and roses, and buffalo-beans, and the yellow crowfoot, and the wild sunflowers, and the red lilies, all the summer long. Then the Master came and was well pleased, but he missed the flowers he loved best of all, and he said to the Prairie, 'Where are the clematis and the columbine, the sweet violets and wind-flowers, flowers, and all the ferns and flowering shrubs?' And again he spoke to the birds, and again they carried all the seeds and strewed them far and wide. But, again, when the Master came, he could not find the flowers he loved best of all, and he said, 'Where are those my sweetest flowers,' and the Prairie cried sorrowfully, 'Oh, Master, I cannot keep the flowers, for the winds sweep fiercely, and the sun beats upon my breast, and they wither up and fly away.' Then the Master spoke to the Lightning, and with one swift blow the Lightning cleft the Prairie to the heart. And the Prairie

rocked and groaned in agony, and for many a day mourned bitterly over its black, jagged, gaping wound. But the Little Swan poured its waters through the cleft, and carried down deep black mould, and once more the birds carried seeds and strewed them in the canyon. And, after a long time, the rough rocks were decked out with soft mosses and trailing vines, and all the nooks were hung with clematis and columbine; and great elms lifted their huge tops high up into the sunlight, and down about their feet clustered the low cedars and balsams, and everywhere the violets, and wind-flower flower and maiden-hair grew and bloomed, till the canyon became the Master's place for rest, and peace, and joy."

The quaint tale was ended, and Gwen lay quiet for some moments, then said gently:

"Yes! the canyon flowers are much the best. Tell me what it means."

Then the Pilot read to her "The fruits—I'll read 'flowers'—of the spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self control. And some of these grow only in the canyon."

"Which are the canyon flowers?" asked Gwen softly, and the Pilot answered:

"Gentleness, meekness, self-control; but though the others, love, joy, peace, bloom in the open, yet never with so rich a bloom and so sweet a perfume as in the canyon."

For a long time Gwen lay quite still, then said wistfully, while her lip trembled:

"There are no flowers in my canyon, but only ragged rocks."

"Some day they will bloom, Gwen dear; He will find them, and we too shall see them."

Then he said good-bye and took me away. He had done his work that day.

We rode through the big gate, down the sloping hill, past the smiling, twinkling little lake, and down again out of the broad sunshine into the shadows and soft lights of the canyon. As we followed the trail that wound among the elms and cedars, the very air was full of gentle stillness and as we moved we seemed to feel the touch of loving hands that lingered while they left us, and every flower and tree and vine and shrub and the soft mosses and deep bedded ferns whispered, as we passed, of love and peace and joy.

To the Duke it was all a wonder, for as the days shortened outside they brightened inside, and every day and more and more Gwen's room became the brightest spot in all the house, and when he asked the Pilot:

"What did you do to the little Princess, and what's all this about the canyon and its flowers?"

The Pilot said, looking wistfully into the Duke's eyes:

"The fruits of the Spirit are love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; and some of these are found only in the canyon."

And the Duke, standing up straight, handsome and strong, looked back at the Pilot and said, putting out his hand:

"Do you know, I believe you're right."

"Yes, I'm quite sure," answered the Pilot simply. Then holding the Duke's hand as long as one man dare hold another's, he added, "When you come to your canyon, remember."

"When I come!" said the Duke, and a quick spasm of pain passed over his handsome face—"God help me, it's not too far away now." Then he smiled again his old sweet smile and said:

"Yes, you are all right, for of all flowers I have seen none are fairer or sweeter than those that are waving in Gwen's Canyon."



Transcriber's Note

The following changes were made to the original text:

Page 14: changed 'm n' to 'man'. "The ghostly old man moving in and out"

Page 19: changed 'to to' to 'to'. "found us on the way to the Old Timer's ranche."

[End of *Gwen's Canyon* by Ralph Connor]