**Nobody’s Victim**

A television pilot

By Kevin Barker

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Based on the true story of a Victorian era prostitute in Winnipeg known as *Madeline Blair.* Published anonymously under that title in 1919, the book is out of print and the story in the public domain.

1895...

A round, elderly man sits behind a curtain of royal blue, in the midst of a fabulous Emerald city, at the end of a yellow brick road, inhabited by impossibly small citizens, and beset on all sides by terrible witches, The city and the man do not exist. At least not literally. However, in the metaphorical sense it is all terribly, terribly real.

1895...

It is the height of the so-called *progressive era*, though for millions it is the absolute worst of times. Jack London publishes *People of the Abyss*, chronicling the desperate plight of London’s working poor. Traditional families are ruined by the relentless efficiency of mechanization. Cottage industries are wiped out, farms are foreclosed on, banks are enriched, and a short fairy tale called the Wizard of Oz chronicles it all as a fantastic *roman a clef*; symbolizing the economic villains of the times and their victims as tin men, scarecrows, cowardly lions, and emerald cities peopled by munchkins and governed by wizards.

1895 ...

The moral debate rages over the poor, the unemployed, the drunken, and the countless farm girls pressed into prostitution in America’s industrialized cities. Women’s temperance and social “uplift” movements crowd the public stage, while he poor crowd the workhouses. Dickens’ terrible predictions about the inhumanity of the industrial age and *the vested interests* has become startling true.

*Meanwhile, on the Canadian prairie ...*

A young, attractive woman, fresh from the rust belt in Illinois, disembarks from a train in Winnipeg. Well groomed and dressed, only the lines on her face and the bit of French lace protruding from her sleeve betray her profession. She is too young to be this weary, or to have such a languid gaze and walk. Lured to the Canadian West by an immigration poster in Chicago, she is soon mesmerized by the golden sunsets of the Canadian west, the waving fields of wheat which stretch to the horizon and beyond, the fresh air and clean lakes and rivers. The men too are different from their counterparts in her native Chicago; rough yet courteous, and gallant to a fault. Friendly, even playful, and open minded, what they lack in manners is more than compensated by their earnestness and honesty. Here on the Canadian prairies, a different sort of boom is occurring. Canada is becoming a nation. The Settlers’ Train brings an ever swelling stream of hopeful easterners to Manitoba and Alberta. The west is filling up, and fortunes are being made; though not all of them from ‘respectable’ businesses.

The woman is Madeline Blair, the eponymous author of a shocking autobiography published in 1919, and now deemed a controversial but essential part of the early feminist literary canon. The book is a fascinating still point in Canadian legal history; part tell-all biography, and part polemic against what the author viewed as the misguided encroachment of respectable society on the rights of working girls. (Indeed, the main body of Canada’s prostitution and vice laws were written around this time, and remained in effect until struck down by the Canadian Supreme Court in 2013.) Orphaned at a tender age when her family fell on hard times, Madeline drifted in and out of workhouses in the American Midwest and finally into prostitution in Chicago, a fate only slightly worse than the toil and drudgery she’d already experienced. Yet somewhere within she found the strength to make a success of her life, in her chosen profession, at a time when women weren’t expected to have either, and armed only with this resolve and her natural curiosity she boarded the train to Winnipeg.

Characters

Madeline Blair

… is intelligent, determined, even cunning … and young, still in her late 20s. She is attractive, though not in an obviously sexy way. She counts her smile and hair among her most attractive features. She can be indiscreet and abrasive; even antagonizing her clients on occasion by returning their habitual prying into her private life with sullen silence, or a curt “none of your business”. Though brisk in a business sense, she is a fine and enjoyable companion, an excellent conversationalist, self educated and curious about everything. She enjoys the men on the Canadian frontier, finding them genuine and gallant, far above their “jaded” American counterparts. Above all, she has a keen determination to not just survive, but to thrive, in spite of the odds.

*Sgt. Mullins*, Head of the Northwest Mounted Police Detachment, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

… is clean, unbribeable, and highly territorial. Sgt Mullins is not keen on sharing his charge with the local chief of police, which he is forced to do. This is made tolerable by the self-centred though ultimately mistaken idea that he is Madeline’s protector and law enforcement officer of choice. Mullins understands that prostitution is tolerated on the frontier as long as it keeps its place; and for him the bawdy house has always been an excellent source of off the record information on criminality within the community. Sgt. Mullins thinks himself broadminded, and in the vanguard of a new age in policing, based on solid community relations, tolerance, and a healthy respect for those plain clothes Pinkertons who always seem to know everything about everybody. Moreover, his respect and genuine affection for Madeline is aided in equal measure by disdain for the Women’s Christian Movement and its fruitless efforts to get women such as Madeline out of the brothels and into respectable households. Mullins is a man of the new century. Progressive to a fault.

The house is at the end of single, lonely street just outside the city center of Winnipeg, but ironically within the city limits, and bordering the limitless prairie.