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THE LAKE BREED

BY J. OLIVIER CURWOOD

ILLUSTRATED BY HERMANN HEYER

CAPTAIN WIGGS'S girl arrived in Buffalo on the eight-fifteen train. Ten minutes later the excited captain was hurrying her down to the thick, coal-grimed darkness of the river, where the din of loading and emptying vessels, the glare of tug lights, and the signals of incoming and outbound ships filled the night with the light and life of the dirtiest and busiest port on the Lakes.

Captain Wiggs was overflowing with joy. Above the rattle of wheels on cobblestone pavements, the wheezing of innumerable exhaust pipes, and a hundred other noises, his voice rumbled cheerfully, while his daughter, panting and laughing, ran at times to keep pace with him. The skipper of the Jennie Cullom was short and thick; he stood five feet seven and weighed two hundred and eighty pounds. When he paused at last where a vista of ships' lights hung low, like a thousand varicolored stars, he was wheezing like a stranded fish, but still talking.

"There she is!" he announced, catching his breath in a staccato of gasps. "She's lit up—ready f'r you—ever'thing nach'r'l!"

He pointed to a rim of lights hung along the gangway of a freighter which, in the lantern-lit gloom, looked like its master, short and fat; then he whisked his girl over the plank and released the last volume of breath in him in a bellow for the mate.

"Ben—Ben, m' lad, where are y'?"

The mate had purposely lost himself in a group of men working about the windlass. For hours he had been preparing himself for the ordeal of meeting the captain's daughter. As he came slowly out into the light, struggling to

overcome the uncomfortable bigon that welled up into his throat, his heart beat like a drum and his face was red with hot blood. The girl saw him almost before he had detached himself from the darkness. She hurried to meet him.

"You don't seem to be a bit anxious to see me," she cried, an inflection of disappointment in her voice. "Are you glad, Ben?" She held out her two hands and Ben took them in his big, trembling fists.

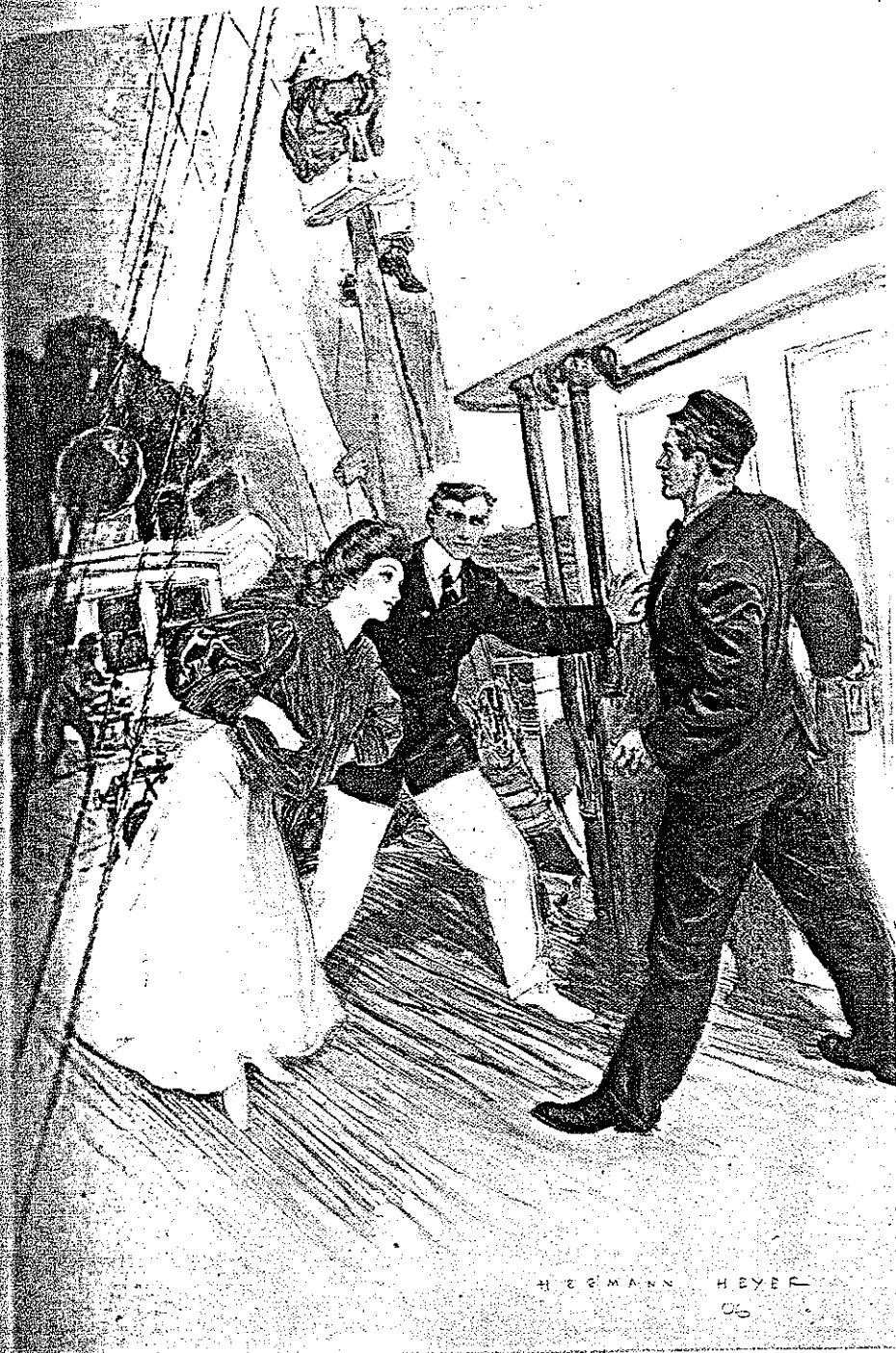
"I'm glad," he said. "I—I've been wanting to see you for a long time, Jean, ever since you——" He swallowed hard, and added: "I've been wanting to see you damned bad, Jean!"

The girl was laughing before she realized what he had said. Then she became very sober. As the captain came puffing up over the deck she drew her hands from the mate's grasp and said, with a touch of piquant naïveté: "You're the same old Ben, always bashful—*dreadfully* bashful!"

She turned away with a laughing good night and Ben went back among the men, dully wondering if he knew what she had meant, and with a new and growing happiness in him.

"Heave up, boys!" he cried. "Let's get under way before that big fellow signaling out there comes in and blocks us. Ho, there, Cap'n Stevens!" He shouted down into the blackness alongside, where for half an hour a tug had been lying. "We're ready, Cap'n Stevens. Pay out your line!"

He went forward, lighted his pipe, and watched the dock lights as the freighter slipped out slowly and bowed her way between giant



THE FIRST PERSONS THE MATE ENCOUNTERED AS HE CAME FROM HIS CABIN WERE JEAN AND THE MAN FROM BOSTON

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ships into the thousand-mile highway that led to Duluth. When the thin, white breakwaters were left behind, like ghost-lines edging the city, the tug dropped off and drifted back, and with cheerful good-bys of the crews the Jennie Cullom began pounding her way into the Upper Lakes.

II

A MILE or more over the starboard occasional lights shone faintly along the New York shore. The mate always watched these when going out. He knew that where the edge of the night-glow melted away into gloom there were two little cottages, side by side, hidden behind a great apple orchard that was there before he was born.

In those cottages, years before, he and the captain's girl had lived; in the orchard and along the beach they had passed their childhood days together, he the son of a fisherman's widow, she the daughter of a schooner's master. Every time the Jennie Cullom left Buffalo his retrospection ended with the scene of a summer morning when little Jean, crying as though her heart would break, had joined him in the old orchard with the terrible news that her father was going to send her away. He remembered how he had blubbered then, and how he had gone to Captain Wiggs and begged of him not to make the girl go. But it had long been the skipper's dream to make a lady of his motherless child, so she was sent to an aunt in Boston, and for many months the boy was alone and miserable.

To-night he went over those days again in his memory. He smiled, and his heart warmed throbbingly, as he thought of the letters they wrote—letters in which Jean called him "Dear Benny," and in which they both said things which made him flush now as he recalled them. Jean came home once or twice during the first year, but after that her visits were few. The letters became more and more infrequent until at last the boy was ashamed of the scrawls he wrote. Then he went to sea, and while he matured among the rough breed of the Lakes, Captain Wiggs's girl became a lady. The

Jean he had known seven years before had returned, more beautiful than he had ever dreamed she would be, and he knew that their chumship lay only in the old memories of the orchard.

The mate watched the fading shores until a mist came into his eyes. Jean was with him again, but it was not the Jean of his boyhood, the little girl of the old cottage and the big orchard. He stood thinking of these things until there was nothing but the darkness of the lake about him, except where a glow hovered over the receding city. Then he went to his cabin and lay awake until midnight, thinking of Jean.

The Jennie Cullom was a wooden freighter, and slow. A thousand times the mate had regretted this fact, but during the following three days and nights he wished that she sailed under canvas instead of steam. They were the happiest days he had ever lived, and most of his time, even when he was on watch, was spent in Jean's company.

The first morning out from Buffalo she appeared on deck with her hair in a long braid, and Ben smiled in honest joy. In the afternoon she discarded her yachting suit for an old dress belonging to the cook, and began to take a keen interest in the running parts of the ship. She made friends with the stokers, ate supper with the hands aft, won the heart of old Robbins, the wheelman, by raising blisters on her pretty hands at the wheel, and lifted the mate into a seventh heaven by insisting that he should accompany her in all of her explorations and assist her in her experiments.

Once, when Jean smiled up into his face, her eyes filled with sparkling happiness, he caught one of her hands in his own and held it for a full half minute while his clumsy tongue struggled to say what was burning in his soul. But the words failed to come.

At another time, during a blow off Saginaw Bay, when the girl was leaning over to see the rush of waves under the vessel's bow, he dared to put a supporting arm partly around her waist. Jean turned her tempting face up to him and laughed, and the mate felt himself blushing so furiously that he was glad when she looked into the sea

again. He knew that he was a coward in her presence. At times he cursed himself roundly for it, at others he reasoned that it was his better sense which had prevailed.

As the days and evenings passed, days and evenings when he was almost constantly in Jean's company, the mate found that in spite of his battle against it the spark of hope was beginning to burn in his breast. He could not but see that Jean was sometimes more than kind to him. Her smiles, the little pressures she gave his arm, and the occasional touches of her soft hands against his own consumed him with the thought that he might still be something to her. He imagined at times that her voice was almost tender as she talked of the days they had spent together in the little cottages back of the old orchard; and once, when they were sitting in the soft moonlight, he could have sworn that there were tears in her eyes as she recalled memories of the old home. He had taken her hand for a moment then, but in his nervousness and his fear he had remained silent.

That was the evening they were approaching the Soo. Jean had gone to her cabin early, with the promise that she would come on deck again before retiring for the night. The mate took advantage of this interval by reviewing the events of the past three days. As he went over them one by one, from the day Jean had chided him for not greeting her more warmly, he became more and more convinced that she had encouraged him to speak. For the time, what he considered to be his own unworthiness was forgotten, and Jean's actions, her smiles, and her gently spoken memories of the past bore a new and potent meaning for him. He was filled with a throbbing, overmastering hope, and when at last he saw Jean come out of the cabin and walk to the side of the ship he came quietly up behind her, his love burning on his lips. The girl heard him and turned, and the words he was about to speak were interrupted by her own.

"I was thinking of you, Ben," she said softly. "I've wanted to tell you something all day, but—I haven't. Will you do something for me?"

"Anything, Jean!"

"Well——" The girl slipped a hand through his arm. "Well—you see," she continued, "I've got a friend coming aboard at the Soo." She shot a glance into her companion's face, then gazed demurely at a schooner fading away in the moonlight. "It's a man." She felt a sudden tremor in the arm she held. "A young man from Boston," she added, "who has come almost two thousand miles to take this trip across Superior in my company. He's rather foolish, don't you think?" She did not wait for a reply. "I want you to help make it pleasant for him. Will you, Ben?"

As the meaning of Jean's words came to him the young mate straightened. Through him went a shudder which the girl did not feel, for he had dropped her hand. It was like an electric shock, something fatal to all that had risen in him, something which destroyed in an instant every vestige of those things which had lifted him for a brief time above his own level. When it had passed away it left behind the ugly truth that he was his old, clumsy self again, an uncultured, cross-grained specimen of the Lakes. Once more Jean was the lady. But the revulsion had come with more than ordinary force. In his own respect it left him little more than a wreck of what he had been when the girl came aboard at Buffalo. He had made a fool of himself—the biggest fool in the whole world, so far as he knew. A moment more and he would have brought upon himself Jean's pity, or her contempt.

He realized the narrowness of his escape. But with the knowledge of his own stupidity came the thought that Jean—not the old Jean, but the new Jean from Boston, the Jean who had been made into a lady, and in whom he would have placed his honest confidence beyond all others—had been playing with him. She had allowed him to place his arm around her, she had let him hold her hand; he knew that he might have kissed her, if he had dared. Yet she had known that her lover from the East would be with her within a few hours.

To the mate, strong in the honor of

a simple Lake mother the ways of women, came crimes. Unseeing gazed steadily for a into the darkness, the a word and walked a heard Jean call him a followed him a few deck, he did not part yet despising what crushed but cured, h men aft, while Jean, with sudden tumult, hotly, hurried to her For a long time s the partly opened listening for footsteps those of the mate.

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EARLY the
Jennie Cullom

a simple Lake mother and ignorant of the ways of women, these things became crimes. Unseeing, unhearing, he gazed steadily for a few moments out into the darkness, then turned without a word and walked away. Though he heard Jean call him and knew that she followed him a few steps across the deck, he did not pause. Loving her, yet despising what she had done; crushed but cured, he went among the men aft, while Jean, her heart beating with sudden tumult, her face flushing hotly, hurried to her cabin.

For a long time she sat quietly near the partly opened door of her room, listening for footsteps which might be those of the mate. She realized, slowly at first, the significance of Ben's actions, and knew that she had wounded him bitterly, though unintentionally.

In the silent darkness of her room she condemned herself for what she had said. Why had she hinted that the man from Boston was her lover? Why, instead of playing the hypocrite with Ben, had she not told him the truth—that the man at the Soo was a brother of her dearest girl chum, doomed by a malady which it was hoped a Lake trip might retard? She had pitied the man, and, for her chum's sake as well as for his own, had invited him to the hospitality of her father's ship. Why had she not told Ben this? If she could see him now—to-night—she would explain, she would tell him that she had lied—yes, *lied*—and that she was sorry.

For more than an hour she watched for Ben, but he did not go to his cabin. She walked forward and aft. If the mate was on either deck, he kept out of her sight. This was like a touch of fire to the girl's spirit. She regretted what she had done, but if the mate was not inclined to be even courteous, she would postpone the explanation she had intended to make. And why should she explain to Ben, after all? He had been disagreeable, he did not return when she called to him; anyway, morning would do. So she went to bed, uneasy, a trifle angry.

III

EARLY the following morning the Jennie Cullom entered the Soo locks.

At dawn, two hours before the watch was up, Ben aroused the second mate and went to his cabin without waiting for breakfast. He knew that, according to the precedent she had established, Jean would come on deck with the break of day, and he did not care to meet her, much less his rival from the East, who would probably come aboard before the freighter started on her lifts into Superior.

Smoking incessantly, he counted the hours in his cabin. He figured by the position of the ship that the man from Boston came aboard between eight o'clock and eight-thirty. He tried to work himself into the belief that now he cared nothing about his presence, or that of the girl, but failed dismally, and finally fell asleep fighting against his jealousy and his love—the best thing that could have happened to a man who had slept less than one hour out of ten in a period of three days and four nights. From his slumber he was aroused by a knocking at the door which called him to dinner.

The first persons the mate encountered as he came from his cabin were Jean and the man from Boston. In a single glance Ben measured his rival, a thin, pale young man, stoop-shouldered and with eyes that had the light of a fever in them. He was not good-looking; but there was something likable about him, something that unconsciously and instantly appealed to one, even to the mate, who was prepared to hate him. But the knowledge that he was Jean's lover and that he was taking Jean from him kept back the greeting that the sailor would otherwise have given. As the girl smiled Ben touched his hat stiffly; as she advanced a step to meet him, her eyes questioning, her lips framed to words, he bowed slightly and passed within a dozen feet of her on his way to the mess-room.

During the remainder of the day he managed to keep out of Jean's presence. Several times during the afternoon the girl sought a reconciliation. Twice she waved her hand at the mate and smilingly beckoned. Once she left the Boston man's side and approached him, but the sailor went among the men aft as though he had not seen her. At this

the girl tossed her head, and deigned no more glances or smiles or friendly beckonings in Ben's direction. This was what the mate desired. He felt relieved, for he was still buried deep in his conviction of Jean's hypocrisy and was determined not to lend himself again to her amusement. He was even more relieved when later in the afternoon a light gale sprang up and Jean and the stranger sought the shelter of their cabins.

As the afternoon advanced the gale increased. When the second mate came to relieve Ben at six o'clock the waves were beginning to roll against the Jennie Cullom with thundering force and the sky was filled with the peculiar slate-gray thickness that presages riotous storm on Superior. Ben knew the signs and smiled grimly as he went down among the men to eat at mess. He wondered if the man from Boston was accustomed to the sea. If not—he chuckled inwardly as he pictured results, and when he came out of the dining-room, where dishes were beginning to slide about a little, he steadied himself in the sweeping wind and regarded with pleasure the thousand choppy billows that plunged up as black as ink on all sides of the Jennie Cullom.

After a little he went to his cabin, divested himself of his clothing and crawled into his bunk, comfortably satisfied that a beautiful storm was brewing, that the Boston man had already collapsed, and that Jean would be compelled to amuse herself alone during the remainder of the trip. Then he fell asleep and dreamed of hoisting the Boston man to the top of a mainmast, whence he dropped him to the deck.

When his rival struck there came a concussion that sounded like the explosion of a cannon. There followed a dull, rending crash, and the vessel shuddered. From his dream the mate was hurled into wakefulness—a wakefulness that brought into him the great dread of all men, the dread of death.

In the first seconds of consciousness he realized what had happened, and, with a shout of warning to those who might hear him on the other side of the cabin walls, he hurried into a part

of his clothing and dashed out upon the freighter's deck, where the loud cries of men forward and aft mingled with the terrifying clanging of the great gong which called upon every man aboard ship to fight for his life.

A hundred tons of water were running off the decks of the Jennie Cullom. Most of her deck-lights were shattered, and she pitched in the heavy seas with reverberating booms that told she was driving broadside in their troughs. As the mate ran forward the second officer met him.

"We're stove in!" he shouted. He waved his hand around the blackness of the sea. "God knows what—mebby a derelict—a rock—and we're taking in a lot of water under the for'ard chains!"

From the bridge Ben could hear the booming of the captain's voice. Down in the engine-room tinkling bells set the pumps at work and men's faces went pallid under their coats of grime. Cassidy, the engineer, stood with courage mapped in his face, a heavy wrench gripped in his hand as he shouted curses at his assistant, who had bolted for the stairway. From the lower landing the mate came and roared down words of courage to him.

"Give 'er all she'll take, Cassidy!" he shouted. "Don't let the old tub rest for a minute, or we'll sink. We'll let you know if it comes to the worst!"

He shot back and slammed the door behind him. The jarring of the pumps sucking on vacuum sounded beneath his feet, and he turned back to listen. Then came the heavy, choking run of water, and his heart sank. He hurried on deck, and a moment later the second officer came out of the forward way and coolly informed him that the ship was sinking.

"Little need of sounding or pumping," he said. "We're filling like a tin can with the bottom out!"

The mate repeated the words to the captain and ran down to verify. He could hear water pouring into the hold with the noise of a small cataract. After he returned, the signal-call to boats was sent down into the engine-room and stoke-hole. Captain Wiggs descended the pilot-house stair to the first and second officers, who stood close as he shouted his commands.

"Firemen an' starboard boat, V into the second south by a little charge of Jean!" screamed the last cer, then rushed gathering men.

Ben hurried to He did not think until he reached it flashed into his too, had come for alone. As the m the waist and stood holding to beautiful hair loo her face white b She was waiting, burst through th gladness and held then she wanted the breach betw hour of danger t ness in Ben's ma ing, he fastened around her and his own shoulder understood, that explanation.

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"He slipped pointing at his ing upon him lik the fall, curse fiercely and the the blow. "Ho

"Firemen an' deckhands into the starboard boat, Wilkins!" he boomed into the second officer's ears. "Head south by a little east! Ben, you'll take charge of Jean!" The captain almost screamed the last words at his first officer, then rushed amidships among the gathering men.

Ben hurried toward the girl's cabin. He did not think of the Boston man until he reached Jean's door, and then it flashed into his head that perhaps he, too, had come for her. But Jean was alone. As the mate came in, naked to the waist and breathing deeply, she stood holding to the cabin-table, her beautiful hair loose about her shoulders, her face white but filled with courage. She was waiting, bravely, and as Ben burst through the door she smiled her gladness and held out her hands. Even then she wanted to tell him—to close the breach between them, but in this hour of danger there was still a coldness in Ben's manner. Without speaking, he fastened a couple of life-belts around her and then slipped one over his own shoulders. He knew that Jean understood, that there was no need of explanation.

"I've been waiting for you, Ben," said the girl as the mate hurried her to the door. "I knew you'd come—you or——" She meant to say her father, but the sentence was not completed. As she passed out of the cabin the wind smothered what she would have said, and the mate heard only that which reminded him of the man from the East.

He made no reply, but half dragged her along the deck to where lanterns were flitting around the boat davits. As they came amidships a faint cheer sounded above the noise of the sea, which was battling less noisily now against the sinking vessel, and Ben knew that the second officer's boat was launched. In an instant the cheers gave place to curses as two men rushed across from the starboard davits, one of them shrieking maledictions.

"He slipped the fall!" he shouted, pointing at his companion; then, turning upon him like a beast: "You slipped the fall, curse you!" He struck out fiercely and the other staggered under the blow. "He slipped the fall!" he

shrieked again. "They've gone 'n' left us."

A cry of anger and despair went up from the men, and Jean, trembling with fear and horror, clung tightly to the mate.

"Ten of us!" boomed the captain. "Make the best of it, men—make the best of it—one at a time!" He crowded among them, a great fist raised threateningly, and the mate sprang to his side.

"One at a time!" he shouted after the captain. "One at a time—and to name!"

Those of the men who had gone into a panic at the thought of crowding ten men into a boat that should hold but eight began to recover their reason. One after another Captain Wiggs called out their names and they lowered themselves into the blackness of the sea. When four had gone below the captain turned to his daughter.

"Jean," he shouted, "Jean, girl, you next!"

The mate led her to the side. "I'll hold you," he cried in her ear. "I'll hold you—safe!" He took her in his strong arms and lifted her over the rail; and for a single moment in that passage his lips were pressed against those of the girl.

"Jean, I love you—I love you——"

The girl heard him, and in the darkness she put up her hands, but other hands reached up and pulled her down. Ben fell back as another figure, reeling as if drunk, staggered up among the men. It was the Boston man, his thin face deathly white in the light of the lanterns, a deep sickness showing in his bloodshot eyes. The fifth and the sixth man were climbing over, and did not see; the seventh, who stood with the captain and the mate, was Cassidy, and though despair came into his face he did not speak.

"Eleven!" groaned the captain in his beard. "My God!" He motioned to the engineer, but Cassidy remained at the fall, with the boat's rope wound tightly around his waist.

"Somebody's got to stay!" he growled. "I ain't afraid!"

Ben sprang to the Boston man's side and caught him under the arms.

"You're next!" he shouted. "Quick——"

He dragged his rival to the side of the ship and almost threw him over. Cassidy had kicked off his shoes and was tightening his life-belt with one hand while he held to the fall with the other.

"Cassidy!" thundered the captain. The engineer hunched his naked shoulders with dogged determination. "There ain't room f'r all," he growled. "I'm going to stay!"

The mate caught the engineer by the shoulders. "Quick, Cassidy," he urged. "We're all going!" He caught the fall in his own hand and pulled the engineer to the rail. "For God's sake go down!" he cried in his ear. "Go down and shout up there's plenty of room, or Cap'n Wiggs 'll never leave the ship! Roar it out, Cassidy, roar it out!"

The engineer climbed over, and Ben, leaning far out, looked down into the boat. He could see by the light of the lanterns in it that it was already dangerously overloaded. Jean was in the bottom amidships, and the men had pulled the Boston man over beside her. Soon Cassidy's voice came up in a trumpet-like roar.

"Plenty o' room, Cap'n Wiggs, plenty o' room!" he shouted. "We'll ride five hundred pounds more!"

"Hear that?" yelled the mate cheerfully. "Over the side with you, Cap'n Wiggs! I know you want to go last—but you can't. You're too heavy. I've got to give you a powerful lift or you'll swamp the boat!"

He pulled the captain to the side, as he had urged Cassidy, and crowded him over the rail. As the master of the ship slipped heavily down among his men the engineer stood erect and stretched up one great arm imploringly, but instead of reaching for it the mate tossed the loose rope in Cassidy's face, and the small boat shot away from the sinking vessel.

For an instant Ben caught a glimpse of ten white, horror-filled faces looking up at him. Then, above the first outburst of men's voices there came a piercing cry from Jean, and as the boat was swept out into the night he saw

her standing with outstretched arms. But he made no response. Silently he leaned over the rail and watched the flashes of the lanterns in the small boat as it was lifted on the crests of the waves. He knew that Captain Wiggs would attempt to return for him, and he knew, too, how futile his efforts would be in the heavy roll of the sea. At first he heard men's shouts, more and more indistinct with growing distance, but after a little these last human sounds failed to reach him.

IV

DURING the few moments that followed, moments which he realized were closely preceding death, there came contentment into his heart. He did not fear the end which he knew was fast approaching; he had told Jean of his love and had taken her in his arms and kissed her, and he was now giving up his life for her. After this Jean could never forget him.

Soon there came from beneath him a barely perceptible shock. It was followed by another, a shuddering, noiseless throb, as if a charge of dynamite had exploded in the hold without making a noise. Where two or three lights were burning aft the mate could see the black tops of the seas coming higher and higher until they broke in a roar over the Jennie Cullom's deck. Suddenly they crowded forward, and like a thing fighting inch by inch against her doom the wooden ship was submerged until only her lighted peaks stood for a moment triumphant in the center of a whirling maelstrom. In another moment they, too, had disappeared.

Where for a brief spell a hundred different currents shot up bursting tons of water the mate was tossed like a piece of water-logged wood. He was twisted this way and that, now entirely submerged, now buoyed to the surface of the buffeting seas by the cork belt under his arms. Instinctively he husbanded the breath that was in him; and when at last the place where the freighter had sunk ran once more in the regular sweep of the waves, he floated with his head above them, exhausted, almost dead, but still possessed of that unconquerable last spark which

calls upon every man to save his own preservation. He responded, until they obeyed the will of the man whom at the moment he loved with a great love of his life.

In the first hour of the storm the sea the mate had never seen before. Unfortunately for him the hour the Jennie Cullom had passed was the hour he had possessed of his distance. It could not be said possibly it was never heard of to swim thirty miles in the chilling water—ten—he might have begun to feel the summer ice-dogs sailors call them hard to keep.

All would have been well if the shore had not been so near. The early day of the lumber-camp was over. The lake, and the crumpled up glorious last of the burning feet thought him taken up and back in the unintelligible lips.

On the tenth day of the reason fought head, and, as at a time, he story of the time the s brighter each good, wholes that, still too he would pass ing what had Jennie Cullom that they had upon his would come

He prayed regain his feet in the woods for the twenty miles brought back camp-supply

calls upon every man to struggle for his own preservation. Slowly his limbs responded, until strongly and regularly they obeyed the instinct of the man into whom at the last moment had come the great love of life.

In the first half hour of his fight in the sea the mate figured out his chances. Unfortunately he did not know at what hour the Jennie Cullom had struck. If he had possessed this knowledge he might have estimated pretty accurately his distance from the Michigan shore. It could not be more than thirty miles; possibly it was less than ten. Ben had never heard of a man who had lived to swim thirty miles, or even twenty, in the chilling water of Superior. But ten—he might do that. Already he began to feel the chills, the bites of the summer ice-devils of Kitchi Gummi, as sailors call them, and he worked doubly hard to keep the warmth in his body.

All would have ended soon if the shore had not been very near. But in the early dawn two teamsters from a lumber-camp came down to the edge of the lake, and there they found Ben, crumpled up in the sand, with that glorious last spark still live in him, but burning feebly—so feebly that they thought him dead at first. He was taken up and carried to the big cabins back in the woods, and for days only unintelligible mutterings fell from his lips.

On the tenth day something like reason fought its way back into his head, and, as the facts came to him one at a time, he revealed disjointedly the story of the Jennie Cullom. After a time the spark that was burning brighter each day brought him out into good, wholesome life again; and after that, still too weak to leave his bunk, he would pass wearisome hours wondering what had become of Jean and the Jennie Cullom's crew. The thought that they had drowned began working upon his mind. Horrible pictures would come to him even in his sleep.

He prayed for the day when he could regain his feet and start through the woods for the nearest town, which was twenty miles away; but his worry brought back the fever, and so when the camp-supply wagon left on its monthly

trip to the station he could only sit up and watch it as it rattled off over the logging trail. But in the driver's care was a slip of paper upon which he had scribbled a few words, addressed to Captain Edward Wiggs, Buffalo, and which were to be sent by telegraph. In the message he did not speak of Jean, nor did he say that he was sick.

Two days and nights passed. Early in the morning of the third day, while the camp was still asleep, Ben knew that he heard the distant, hailing cry of the returning driver. Like a shadow he slipped from his bunk and stole half naked out into the grayness of the dawn. When four tired and dripping horses came out into the edge of the clearing, they stopped suddenly as the man stumbled up to them, almost falling under their feet in his weakness. His words came hysterically, sobbingly, as he stretched up his naked arms.

"Anything for me—for me——?"

The driver fumbled for a moment under his seat as he recognized the sailor, then gave him a little yellow envelope and lowered his lantern. The mate snatched the light from him and crouched beside it upon the ground, with the precious little envelope.

There was not much to read, but when he was done the light of reason was almost gone from Ben's feverish eyes, and he fell face downward in the road with a cry that brought the driver to his side. As the lumberman raised Ben in his arms his eyes fell upon the little slip of paper and he reached out for it. He could see nothing in it that should cause a man to act as the sailor had done. He spelled it out twice, but he was not enlightened, for he saw only these plain, simple words, not knowing that they would change the course of a life:

My life went out when I thought that my Ben had died. In the little old cottage behind the orchard I am waiting for you, praying as I have prayed each night and day, that my beloved will come to me soon.
JEAN.

And even as the lumberman read, Ben saw in his delirious half-consciousness a picture of the old orchard, a picture with Jean in it—the old Jean—his Jean, forever and forever!