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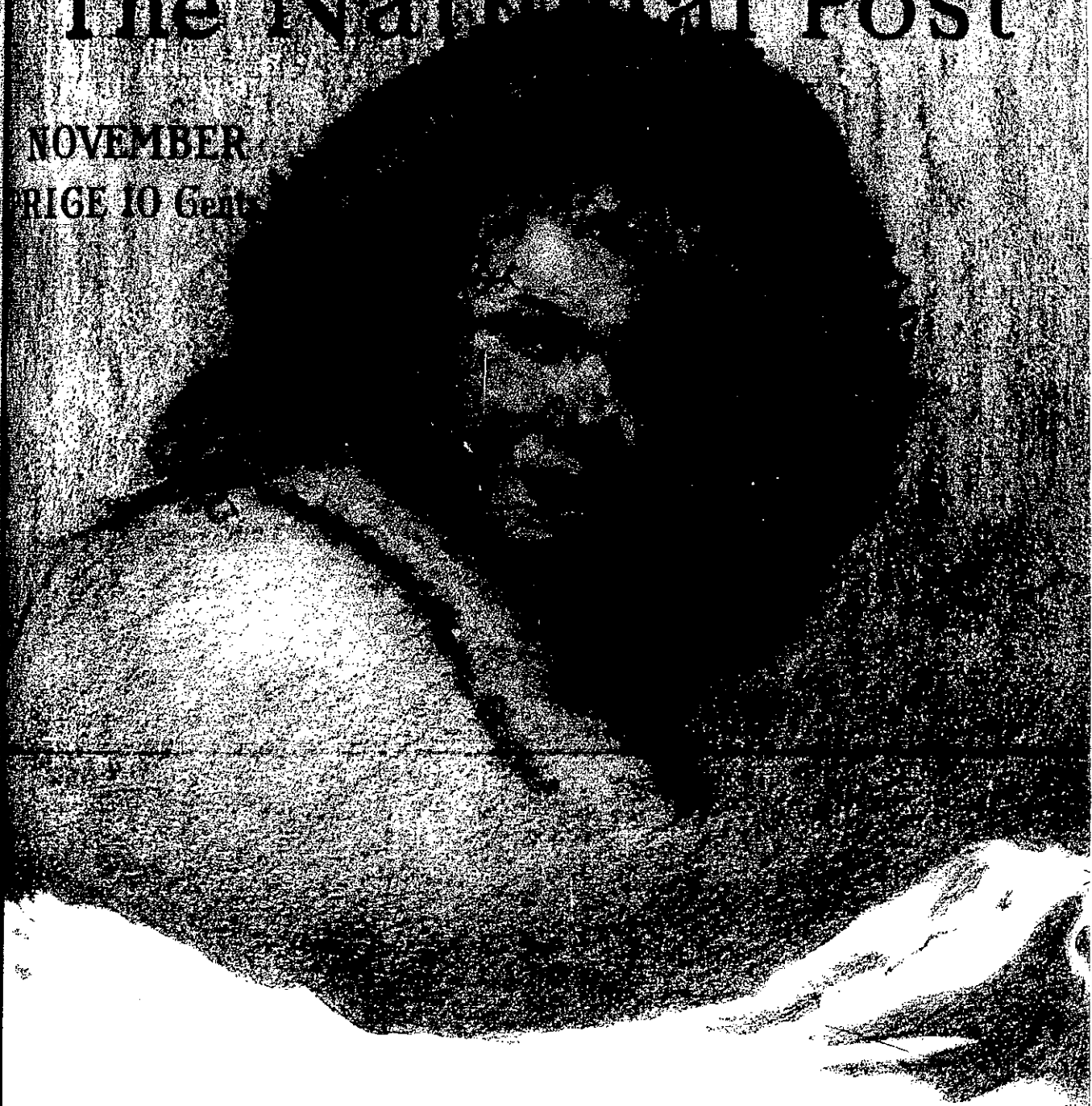
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MAGAZINE

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LITTLE MYSTERY
By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD



S U C C E S S

M A G A Z I N E

AND

The National Post



Little Mystery

BY JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

Author of THE VALLEY OF SILENT MEN, WORLD HUNTERS OF THE NORTH, ETC.

Illustrations by JOHN CECIL CLAY

PART I—THE MADNESS OF PRIVATE PELLETIER



PELLETIER, of the Royal Mounted, was sick. He believed that he was dying. He dragged himself from his bunk against the log wall of the cabin, and added two marks to the pencil scratches on the door that opened out upon the gray and purple desolation of the frozen Arctic seas. The day before he had been too weak to crawl to the door. He counted the marks, and found that there were sixteen. Just that many days ago his partner, Corporal MacVeigh, had set off with the dogs for Fort Churchill, four hundred miles down Hudson Bay, for the medicines and letters that might save his life. Pelletier's head was a little clearer to-day, and he leaned against the door after he had made the last pencil scratch, mentally figuring. MacVeigh had reached Churchill. If all had gone well he was a third of the way back, and within another week would be "home."

Pelletier's thin, fever-flushed face relaxed into a wan smile as he looked at the pencil marks again. Long before that week was ended he figured that he would be dead. The medicines—and the letters—would come too late, probably four or five days too late. Straight out from his last mark he drew a long line, and at the end of it added in a scrawling almost unintelligible hand: "Dear Mac, I guess this is going to be my last day."

Then he staggered from the door to the window.

Out there was what was killing him—loneliness, a maddening desolation, a lifeless world that reached for hundreds of miles farther than his eyes could see. To the north and east there was nothing but ice, piled-up masses and grinning mountains of it, white at first, of a sombre gray farther off, and then purple and almost black. There came to him now the low, never-ceasing thunder of the under-currents fighting their way down from the Arctic Ocean, broken now and then by a growling roar as the giant forces sent a crack, like a great knife, through one of the frozen mountains. He had listened to those sounds for five months, and in those five months he had heard no other voice but his own and MacVeigh's, and the babble of an Eskimo. Only once in four months had he seen the sun, and that was on the morning that MacVeigh went south. So he had gone half mad. Others had gone completely mad before him.



Through the window his eyes rested on the five rough wooden crosses that marked their graves. In the service of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police they were called heroes. And in a short time he, Constable Pelletier, would be numbered among them. MacVeigh would send the whole story down to her—the true little girl a thousand miles south, and she would always remember him—her hero—and his lonely grave at Point Fullerton, the northernmost point of the Law. But she would never see that grave. She could never come to put flowers on it, as she put flowers on the grave of his mother; she would never know the whole story—not a half of it; his terrible longing for a sound of her voice, a touch of her hand, a glimpse of her sweet blue eyes before he died. They were to be married in August, when his service in the Royal Mounted ended. She would be waiting for him. And in August—or July—word would reach her that he had died.

With a dry sob he turned from the window to the rough table that he had drawn close to his bunk, and for the thousandth time he held before his red and feverish eyes a photograph. It was a portrait of a girl, marvelously beautiful to Tommy Pelletier, with soft brown hair, and eyes that seemed always to talk to him and tell him how much she loved him. And for the thousandth time he turned

the picture over, and read the words she had written on the back:

My own dear Boy, remember that I am always with you, always thinking of you, always praying for you, and I know, dear, that you will always do what you would do if I were at your side.

"Good Lord," groaned Pelletier, "I can't die! I can't! I've got to live—to see her—"

He dropped back on his bunk, exhausted. The fires burned in his head again. He grew dizzy, and he talked to her, or thought he was talking—but it was only a babble of incoherent sound that made Kazan, the one-eyed old Eskimo dog, lift his shaggy head and sniff suspiciously. Kazan had listened to Pelletier's deliriums many times since MacVeigh had left them alone, and soon he dropped his muzzle between his forepaws and dozed again. A long time afterward he raised his head once more. Pelletier was quiet. But the dog sniffed, went to the door, whined softly, and nervously muzzled the sick man's thin hand. Then he settled back on his haunches, turned his nose straight up, and from his throat there came that wailing, mourning cry, long-drawn and terrible, with which Indian dogs lament before the tepees of masters who are newly dead. The sound aroused Pelletier. He sat up again, and he found that once more the fire and the pain had gone from his head.

"Kazan, Kazan," he pleaded weakly. "It isn't time—yet!"

Kazan had gone to the window that looked to the west, and stood with his forefeet on the sill. Pelletier shivered.

"Wolves again," he said, "or mebbly a fox."

He had grown into that habit of talking to himself, which is as common as human life itself in the Far North, where one's own voice is often the one thing that breaks a killing monotony. He edged his way to the window as he spoke, and looked out with Kazan. Westward there stretched the lifeless Barren, illimitable and void, without rock or bush, and overhung by a sky that always made Pelletier think of a terrible picture he had once seen of Doré's "Inferno." It was a low, thick sky, like purple and blue granite, always threatening to pitch itself down in terrific avalanches, and between the earth and this sky was the thin, smothered world which MacVeigh had once called God's Insane Asylum.

Through the gloom Kazan's one eye and Pelletier's feverish vision could not see far,

but at last the man made out an object toiling slowly toward the cabin. At first he thought it was a fox, and then a wolf, and then as it loomed larger, a straying caribou. Kazan whined. The bristles along his spine rose stiff and menacing. Pelletier stared harder and harder, with his face pressed close against the cold glass of the window, and suddenly he gave a gasping cry of excitement. It was a man who was toiling toward the cabin! He was bent almost double, and he staggered in a zig-zag fashion as he advanced. Pelletier made his way feebly to the door, unbarred it, and pushed it partly open. Overcome by weakness he fell back then on the edge of his bunk.

It seemed an age before he heard steps. They were slow and stumbling, and an instant later a face appeared at the door. It was a terrible face, overgrown with beard, with wild and staring eyes—but it was a white man's face. Pelletier had expected an Eskimo, and he sprang to his feet with sudden strength as the stranger came in.

"Something to eat, mate—for the love o' God give me something to eat!"

The stranger fell in a heap on the floor, and stared up at him with the ravenous expectancy of an animal. Pelletier's first move was to get whisky, and the other drank it in

minutes ate ravenously. Not until he was through, and seated opposite him at the table, did Pelletier speak.

"Who are you, and where in Heaven's name did you come from?" he asked.

"Blake—Jim Blake's my name, an' I come from what I call Starvation Igloo Inlet, thirty miles up the coast. Five months ago I was left a hundred miles farther up to take care of a cache for the whaler John B. Sidney, and the cache was swept away by an overflow of ice. Then we struck south—hunting and starving—me 'n' the woman—"

"The woman!" cried Pelletier.

"Eskimo squaw," said Blake, producing a black pipe. "The Cap'n bought her to keep me company—paid four sacks of flour an' a knife to her husband up at Wagner Inlet. Got any tobacco?"

Pelletier rose to get the tobacco. He was surprised to find that he was sturdier on his feet, and that Blake's words were clearing his brain. That had been his and MacVeigh's great fight—the fight to put an end to the white man's immoral trade in Eskimo women and girls, and Blake had already confessed himself a criminal. Promise of action, quick action, momentarily overcame his sickness. He went back with the tobacco, and sat down.

"Where's the woman?" he asked.

"See here," he said, "you're going back—now! Do you understand? You're going back!"

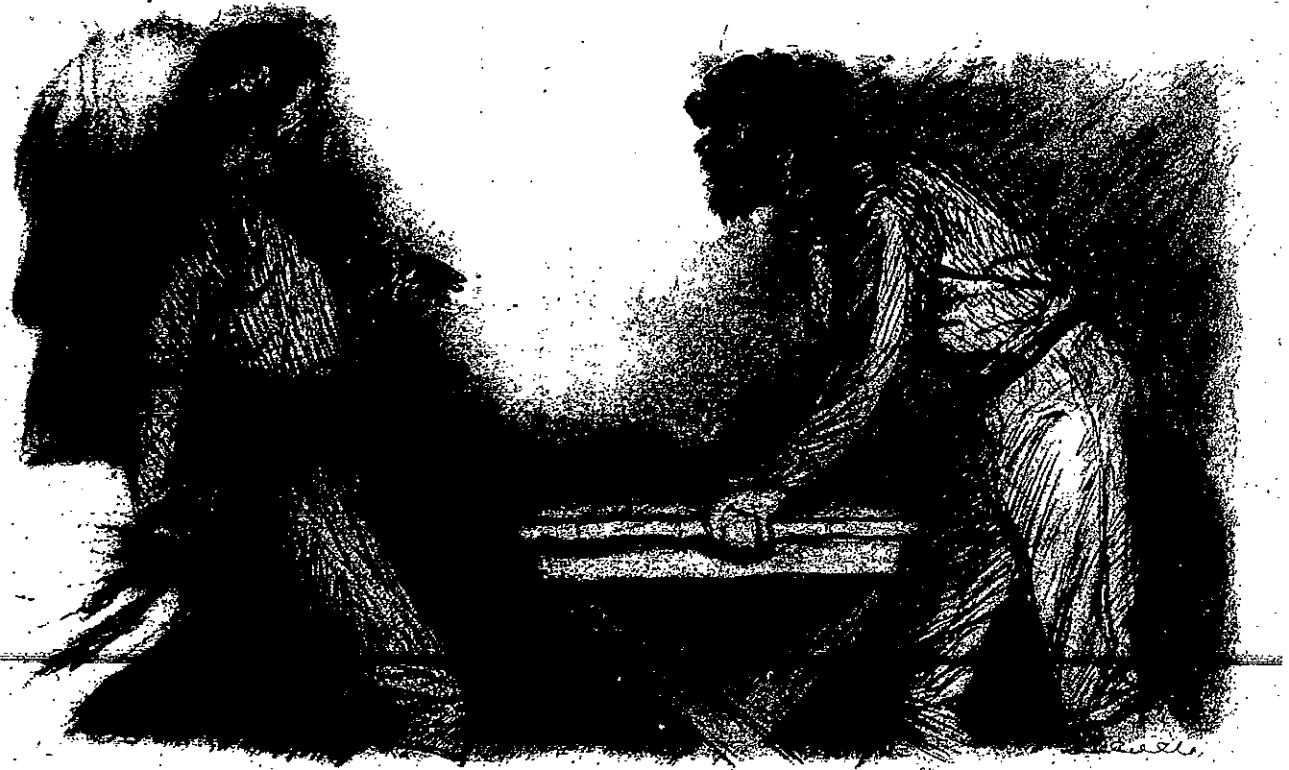
Suddenly he stopped. He stared at Blake's coat, and with a swiftness that took the other by surprise he reached across and picked something from it. A startled cry broke from his lips. Between his fingers he held a single filament of hair. It was nearly a foot long, and it was not an Eskimo woman's hair. It shone a dull gold in the gray light that came through the window. He raised his eyes, terrible in their accusation of the man opposite him.

"You lie!" he said. "She's not an Eskimo!"

Blake had half risen, his great hands clutching the ends of the table, his brutal face thrust forward, his whole body in an attitude that sent Pelletier back out of his reach. He was not an instant too soon. With an oath Blake sent the table crashing aside, and sprang upon the sick man.

"I'll kill you," he cried. "I'll kill you, an' put you where I've put her, 'n' when your pard comes back I'll—"

His hands caught Pelletier by the throat, but not before there had come from between the sick man's lips a cry of "Kazan! Kazan!" With a wolfish snarl the old one-eyed sledge



His whole body in an attitude that sent Pelletier back out of his reach

great gulps. Then he dragged himself to his feet, and Pelletier sank in a chair beside the table.

"I'm sick," he said. "Corporal MacVeigh has gone to Churchill, and I guess I'm in a bad way. You'll have to help yourself. There's meat—'n' bannock—"

Whisky had revived the newcomer. He stared at Pelletier, and as he stared he grinned, ugly yellow teeth leering from between his matted beard. The look cleared Pelletier's brain. For some reason which he could not explain his pistol hand fell to the place where he usually carried his holster. Then he remembered that his service revolver was under the pillow.

"Fever," said the sailor, for Pelletier knew that he was a sailor.

He took off his heavy coat and tossed it on the table. Then he followed Pelletier's instructions in quest of food, and for ten

"Back in the igloo," said Blake, filling his pipe. "We killed a walrus up there and built an ice house. The meat's gone. She's probably gone by this time." He laughed coarsely across at Pelletier as he lighted his pipe. "It seems good to get into a white man's shack again."

"She's not dead?" insisted Pelletier.

"Will be—shortly," replied Blake. "She was so weak she couldn't walk when I left. But them Eskimo animals die hard—specially the women."

"Of course you're going back for her?"

The other stared for a moment into Pelletier's flushed face, and then laughed as though he had just heard a good joke.

"Not on your life, my boy. I wouldn't hike that thirty miles again—an' thirty back—for all the Eskimo women up at Wagner."

The red in Pelletier's eyes grew redder as he leaned over the table.

dog sprang upon Blake, and the three fell with a crash upon Pelletier's bunk. For an instant Kazan's attack drew one of Blake's powerful hands from Pelletier's throat, and as he turned to strike off the dog Pelletier's hand groped out under his flattened pillow. Blake's murderous face was still turned when he drew out his heavy service revolver, and as Blake cut at Kazan with a long sheath knife which he had drawn from his belt, Pelletier fired. Blake's grip relaxed. Without a groan he slipped to the floor, and Pelletier staggered back to his feet. Kazan's teeth were buried in Blake's leg.

"There, there, boy," said Pelletier pulling him away. "That was a close one!"

He sat down and looked at Blake. He knew that the man was dead. Kazan was sniffing about the sailor's head, with stiffened spines. And then a ray of light flashed for an instant through the window. It was the

sun—the second time that Pelletier had seen it in four months. A cry of joy welled up from his heart. But it was stopped midway. On the floor, close beside Blake, something glittered in the fiery ray, and Pelletier was upon his knees in an instant. It was the short golden hair he had snatched from the dead man's coat, and partly covering it was the picture of his sweetheart, which had fallen when the table was overturned. With the photograph in one hand and that single thread of woman's hair between the fingers of his other, Pelletier rose slowly to his feet and faced the window. The sun was gone. But its coming had put a new life into him. He turned joyously to Kazan.

"That means something, boy," he said in a low, awed voice, "the sun, the picture, and this! She sent it, do you hear, boy? She sent it! I can almost hear her voice, an' she's telling me to go. 'Tommy,' she's saying, 'you wouldn't be a man if you didn't go, even though you know you're going to die on the way. You can take her something to eat,' she's saying, boy, 'an' you can just as well die in an igloo as here. You can leave word for Mac, an' you can take her grub enough to last until he comes, an' then he'll bring her down here, an' you'll be buried out there with the others—just the same.' That's what she's saying, Kazan, so we're going!"

He looked about him a little wildly.

"Straight up the coast," he mumbled. "Thirty miles. We might make it."

He began filling a pack with food. Outside the door there was a small sledge, and after he had bundled himself in his traveling clothes he dragged the pack to the sledge, and behind the pack tied on a bundle of firewood, a lantern, blankets and oil. After he had done this he wrote a few lines to MacVeigh, and pinned the paper to the door. Then he hitched old Kazan to the sledge, and started off, leaving the dead man where he had fallen.

"It's what she'd have us do," he said again to Kazan. "She sure would have us do this, Kazan—God bless her dear little heart!"

Pelletier hung close to the ice-bound coast. He traveled slowly, leading the way for Kazan, who strained every muscle in his aged body to drag the sledge. For a time the excitement of what had occurred gave Pelletier a strength which soon began to ebb. But his old weakness did not entirely return. He found that his worst trouble at first was in his eyes. Weeks of fever had enfeebled his vision until the world about him looked new and strange. He could see only a few hundred paces ahead, and beyond this little circle everything turned gray and black. Singularly enough it struck him that there was some humor as well as tragedy in the situation, that there was something to laugh at in the fact that Kazan had but one eye, and that he was nearly blind. He chuckled to himself, and spoke aloud to the dog.

"Makes me think of the games o' hide-'n-seek we used to play when we were kids, boy," he said. "She used to tie her handkerchief over my eyes, 'n' then I'd follow her all through the old orchard, and when I caught her it was a part of the game she'd have to let me kiss her. Once I bumped into an apple tree—"

The toe of his snowshoe caught in an ice-hummock and sent him face downward into the snow. He picked himself up and went on.



Pelletier

"We played that game till we was grown-ups, old man," he went on. "Last time we played it she was seventeen. Had her hair in a big brown braid, an' it all came undone so that when I caught her an' took off the handkerchief I could just see her eyes an' her mouth laughing at me, and it was that time I hugged her up closer than ever and told her I was going out to make a home for us. Then I came up here."

He stopped and rubbed his eyes, and for an hour after that, as he plodded onward, he mumbled things, which neither Kazan nor any other living thing could have understood. But whatever delirium found its way into his

voice, the fighting spark in his brain remained sane. The igloo and the starving woman whom Blake had abandoned formed the one living picture which he did not for a moment forget. He must find the igloo, and the igloo was close to the sea. He could not miss it—if he lived long enough to travel thirty miles. It did not occur to him that Blake might have lied—that the igloo was farther than he had said, or, perhaps, much nearer.

It was two o'clock when he stopped to make tea. He figured that he had traveled at least eighteen miles; the fact was, he had gone but a little over half that distance. He was not hungry, and ate nothing, but he fed Kazan heartily of meat. The hot tea, strengthened with a little whisky, revived him for the time more than food would have done.

"Twelve miles more, at the most," he said to Kazan. "We'll make it. Thank God, we'll make it!"

If his eyes had been better he would have seen and recognized the huge snow-covered rock called the Blind Eskimo, which was just nine miles from the cabin. As it was, he went on, filled with hope. There were sharper pains in his head now, and his legs, dragged wearily. Day ended at a little after two, but at this season there was not much change in light and darkness, and Pelletier scarcely noted the difference. At last the picture of the igloo and the dying woman came and went fitfully in his brain. There were dark spaces. The fighting spark was slowly giving way, and at last Pelletier dropped upon the sledge.

"Go on, Kazan," he cried weakly. "Mush it—go on!"

Kazan tugged, with gaping jaws, and Pelletier's head dropped upon the food-filled pack.

What Kazan, which means "The Faithful," heard was a groan. He stopped, and looked back, whining softly.

For a time he sat on his haunches, sniffing a strange thing which had come to him in the air. Then he went on, straining a little faster at the sledge, and still whining. If Pelletier had been conscious he would have urged him straight ahead. But old Kazan

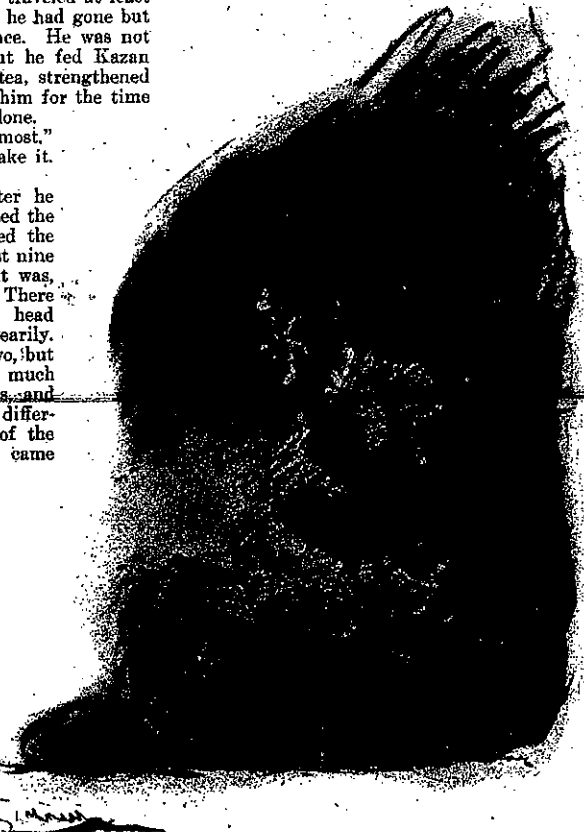
turned away from the sea. Twice in the next ten minutes he stopped, and sniffed the air, and each time he changed his course a little. Half an hour later he came to a white mound that rose up out of the level waste of snow, and then he settled himself back on his haunches, lifted his shaggy head to the dark night sky, and for the second time that day he sent forth the weird, wailing, mourning death howl.

It aroused Pelletier. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, staggered to his feet, and saw the mound a dozen paces away. Rest had cleared his brain again. He knew that it was an igloo. He could make out the door, and he caught up his lantern and stumbled toward it. He wasted half a dozen matches before he could make a light. Then he crawled in, with Kazan, still in his traces, close at his heels.

There was a musty, uncomfortable odor in the snow-house. And there was no sound, no movement. The lantern lighted up the small interior, and on the floor Pelletier made out a heap of blankets and a bear skin. There was no life, and instinctively he turned his eyes down to Kazan. The dog's head was stretched out toward the blankets, his ears were alert, his eyes burned fiercely, and a low, whining growl rumbled in his throat.

He looked at the blankets again—moved slowly toward them. He pulled back the bear skin and found what Blake had told him he would find—a woman. For a moment he stared, and then a low cry broke from his lips as he fell upon his knees. Blake had not lied—for it was an Eskimo woman; she was dead. She had not died of starvation. Blake had killed her!

He rose to his feet again, and looked about him. After all did that golden hair—that white woman's hair, mean nothing? What was that? He sprang back toward Kazan, his weakened nerves shattered by a sound and a



A long time Pelletier sat rocking gently back and forth

movement from the farthest and darkest part of the igloo. Kazan tugged at his traces, panting and whining, held back by the sledge

[Continued on page 60]

dark, frightened eyes of the woman and the long, narrow box on the sledge, the body, she said, of her husband.

He would tell how he made a camp for her that night and, because there can be no secrets between partners in an Arctic cabin, how he told this woman that he loved her and begged one kiss. And then the disclosures of the morning, her deserted camp, the empty box, the little note of thanks from the woman and the revelation that the box had contained the living body of Scattie Dean, the murderer, the man for whom Pelletier and he had patrolled this desolate country for two thousand miles!

He quickened his tired pace as they climbed up from the ice of the bay to the sloping ridge, and stared hard ahead of him. The dogs tugged harder as the smell of home entered their nostrils. The roof of the cabin came in view. MacVeigh's bloodshot eyes were like an animal's.

"Pelly, old boy," he gasped to himself. "Pelly—"

He stared harder. And then he spoke a low word to the dogs, and stopped. He wiped his face. A groaning sob of relief fell from his lips.

Straight up from the chimney of the cabin there rose a thick column of smoke!

He came up to the cabin door quietly, wondering why Pelletier had not seen him. He twisted off his snowshoes, throbbing as he thought of the surprise he would give his mate. Then he opened the door without a sound, and looked in. A wonderful sight greeted him. Pelletier was on his knees, with his back to him, tousing something on the floor. Then he saw.

An hour later MacVeigh sat with Little Mystery huddled up close in his great arms when Pelletier looked up from the reading of his last letter. Pelletier's face was radiant with joy.

"God bless the sweetest little girl in the world," he said. "She's lonely for me, Mac. She tells me to hurry—hurry down there to her. She says that if I don't come soon she'll come up to me!"

Pelletier stared at the laughing Little Mystery, and then at MacVeigh, and with a tremble in his voice, he said:

"Mac, a little while ago I thought I was dying, I thought I was alone in the world—alone—alone. But, Mac, I've got a family!"

(To be continued.)

Continued from page 28

Travels with a Junk-Man in Arcadia

gin with the formula, "At a meeting of the inhabitants of — being legally warned." In the second earliest entry of all, dated "December the 11th day, 1792," the tragic wrestler with the pen has no less savage tussles with his spelling, and having done quite tolerably with "inhabetence," spells the word "moderator" as "modderrettar" and desperately lets it go at that. In the earliest entries, the times of day of the meetings quaintly ignore mechanical clocks, and usually go "sun one hour high at night"—a phrase which used in so merely a business connection, makes us feel with an imaginative thrill, not without pathos, that those long-dead men were somehow nearer to the great elemental things, and lived lives more nearly a part of nature's own times and seasons than we, or perhaps than men, will ever live again. Whether or not they were nearer to God who shall say, but this old book shows how practically, if not vitally, interwoven with the every-day life of those old farmers were questions, at all events, of religious observance. Men might not lightly stay away from church in those days, and if they chose to dissociate themselves from one church, they had to bring certificates to show that it was only to associate themselves with another. In our old book there are many pages of such certificates, throwing also a lively light on the denominational rivalries of the times, of which these are sufficient examples:

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"This may certify that Shaddeus Disbrow of — attends public worship with the Methodists at Hickory Hill, and freely contributes to the support of their minister. Sept. 30, 1791 (signed) Aaron Hunt, Preacher. (Received to record 3, Nov. 1791) Phineas Chapman."

"These certify I the subscriber do soberly dissent and differ from the worship and ministry of the ecclesiastical society in the Town known by the name of Presbyterian Society and have chosen and do choose to join and have joined myself to the Methodist Episcopal Society in the town, and desire to manifest this my choice according to the Laws of this state. May 10, 1803. Zophar Smith."

Among the ever-recurring entries through the years are two that naturally never fail, entries referring to the salary of the minister, and to a functionary whose work was to summon the folk to church, and keep clean the meeting-house. Here is an entry in which we get a picturesque glimpse of the way men were hailed to church in 1731:

"Voted that John Blackman shall have thirty shillings to beat ye drum on Sabbath days on Clabbord Hill and to sweep ye meeting-house for the yr. ensuing."

In the entries regarding the salaries to ministers we are driven to the conclusion that, much as these old Puritans valued religion and respected their ministers they did not allow sentiment to regulate their salaries. These salaries vacillated strangely, as I shall have occasion to note in the hinted stories of two of the parsons, and when the hard times of the Revolution came, they seem to have been paid perforce with irregularity and frequently in kind instead of money, as witness this entry:

"Voted that the Revd. Hezekiah Ripley shall have One hundred pounds paid in the following articles of produce, viz:—Wheat at 6/., Corn at 3/., Beef at 24/ per hundred. Pork at 30/ per hundred. Wool at 2/. Rye at 4/ per bushel. Oats at 1/10, flax fit for spinning 9/. Barley at 4/."

In connection with this entry it is "voted that if any pates in hard money they must add twenty-five per cent to the above-named articles." And it is interesting to note in regard to "hard money" that in 1798 the accounts are still kept in "pounds and shillings," but in 1797 we read of "a tax of 2 cents and five mills on a dollar," whereas, again, in 1798, we find dollars and shillings in the same entry. Back again in 1769, we come upon another ancient method of paying bills in reference to "John Couche's note for 14 ounces of coined silver," and "Nathaniel Hubbard's bond for 8 ounces and 15 penny weight of good silver Troy weight." These ancient methods of exchange in kind have a poetic value that reminds one of the purchase of the site of Carthage for a bull's hide, and indeed some of these old farmers were reading of were likely well within memory of the time when the land they were tilling had been bought from the Indians in like Homeric fashion. It all sounds very scriptural. Here, by the way, is a good place to introduce a letter we found set on record among dry columns of pew rents and so forth, a letter which suddenly illuminated the page with the deep pathos of a human story long since folded away and forgotten. It is a letter from the Rev. Hezekiah Ripley, the computation of whose salary into various articles of produce was quoted above. The old man had been a faithful minister of his parish for nearly half a century, had been with it through good times and ill, braved with it the inclemencies of the Revolution, and now, in the year 1817, was very old and; one cannot but feel, venerable. But for some little time the parish had had to call in a younger man to help him with his duties, and now, at last, was apparently beginning to feel, as the world is apt to feel toward old and faithful servants, that the good old doc-

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tor was becoming a burden, and had offered him some pitiable pension concerning which he thus with touching pathos and dignity, and a fine Old Testament ring in his voice, breaks his mind:

"October 1, 1817.

"GENTLEMEN: I am very sensible that my original salary was one hundred pounds and you must also be very sensible that for five years last past I have not received from the society, with the addition of wood more than one half the value of that sum. I have been crowded hard and should have been much more so, had not particular friends relieved me. What you now propose for my support (if the prices of the articles of life continue and increase as they have done) will not more than supply me with wood and bread. I can sincerely say that I have never sought yours but you. I hope still to live in peace and harmony with the society and, as Job said, to die in my nest; and when you shall have performed the last office of respect by laying my withered limbs under the cold clods of the valley, you will return to your respective places of abode with deep contemplations on your own mortality. Permit me on this occasion to commend to your friendship my aged companion, if she should survive me, for that will be to her a day of affliction. She has been for more than half a century my helper in the Lord. I subscribe myself your servant in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"HEZERIKI RIPLEY."

Such is the story of a good shepherd of his flock; but we came upon the story of a shepherd of a different kind no less human if not so edifying. Two short extracts will tell it, without the need of comment save that the Rev. Mr. Chapman's day of tribulation was as far back as 1741, nearly eighty years before poor old Dr. Ripley wrote so movingly about "the cold clods of the valley."

"Put to vote," runs the first entry, "whether or not that the Reverend Mr. Chapman hath for several years past led an irregular life and conversation in many things but more especially for being sundry times overtaken in Drinking to excess, and are not willing ye said Mr. Chapman should continue for woe of the ministry any longer. Passed in the affirmative."

The second entry grimly runs:

"Put to vote whether or not that Simon Couch, Samuel Sherwood, and Samuell Couch be a committee to prosecute the Reverend Mr. Chapman for the crimes said against him, at a meeting of the parish bearing date July 1, 1741, according to the constitution of the churches in this government. Passed in the affirmative."

Verily the way of the transgressor was hard in this stern green country in 1741. They called poor Mr. Chapman's genial weakness "crimes" in those days. Yet there are various entries to hint that previously he had been quite a popular person in his parish. As to how he fared under the no doubt zealous prosecution of Messrs. Couch, Sherwood, and Couch, we have no clue. All we can be happily sure of is that his "crimes" and good old Dr. Ripley's sorrows are long since side by side in peace. As it used to be fashion to quote:

"No farther seek his merits to disclose,
 Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
 (There they alike in trembling hope repose)
 The bosom of his Father and his God."

In fact, those very lines came to Old John's lips and mine at the same moment as we closed our old book, agreeing together how much we would like to have known both those old persons, each, in his different way, springing so humanly from a mere record of church expenses long ago.

(To be concluded.)

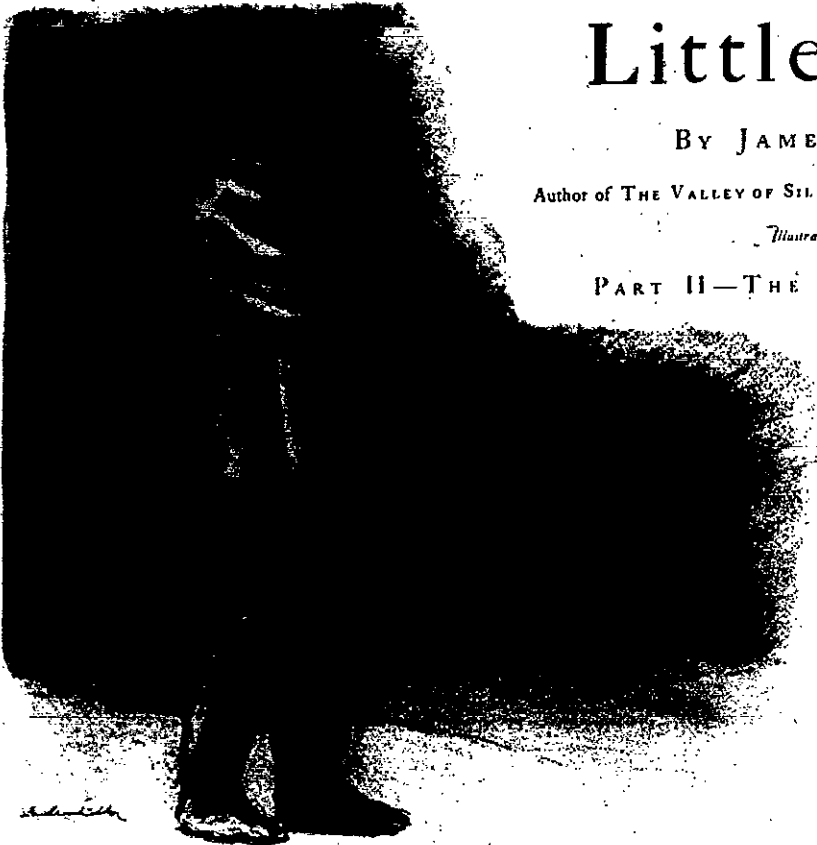
Little Mystery

BY JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

Author of THE VALLEY OF SILENT MEN, WORLD HUNTERS OF THE NORTH, etc.

Illustrations by JOHN CECIL CLAY

PART II—THE LAW AT FULLERTON POINT



JUST six hundred miles north of civilization Corporal MacVeigh stood watching the thunderous movement of Arctic ice out in the Roes Welcome. Standing motionless a dozen paces from the little storm-beaten cabin which represented law at this loneliest outpost on the American continent, he looked like a carved thing of dun-gray rock, with a dun-gray world over his head and on all sides of him, broken only in its terrific monotony of deathlike sameness by the darker gloom of the sky and the whiter and ghostlier gloom that hung over the ice fields. It was spring

at the top of the world, but the wind was bitter, and the vision shut in by a near horizon which MacVeigh described as the rim of hell. Just now MacVeigh's heart was as leaden as the day. Under his feet the frozen earth shivered with the rumbling reverberations of the crashing and breaking mountains of ice. His ears were filled with a dull and steady roar, like the echoes of distant thunder, broken now and then—when an ice mountain split asunder—with a report like that of a thirteen-inch gun. There were curious wailings, strange screeching sounds, and heart-breaking moanings in the air. From the farther north the powerful Arctic currents were sending down their countless billions of tons of ice in the annual "break-up" flow that swept south into Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait. Two days before MacVeigh had heard its roar twenty miles inland. It had frightened back the wolves and caribou. Even the foxes hunted inland.

But MacVeigh scarcely heard the rumbling roar. He was looking toward the warring fields of ice, but he did not see them. It was not the dead gloom and the gray monotony that weighted his heart, but strange sounds that came from the cabin—the laughter of a man, the shrieking merriment of a child's voice. The man was Private Pelletier, his one companion at this fag-end of the earth, and Pelletier was happy. His service was almost at an end, and in a few weeks more he would be going down to the Girl. The Girl—MacVeigh's pulse beat a little faster.

He knew how Pelletier loved her, he knew how the Girl loved Pelletier. They would be happy, while he, MacVeigh—

He pulled himself together with a low laugh. He was not superstitious, but things had happened strangely during the past two months. He wondered what would come of it all. In a flash his mind traveled back, as it had done a hundred times before. He saw Pelletier again, almost dying of fever and loneliness. He went over his own wild dash to Fort Churchill, more than four hundred miles away, where he had raced for the medicines and the letters from the Girl, which he thought would save him. Then his mind traveled more slowly, for after that had come the great joy and the great pain into his life. He had come upon the murderer, Scottie

Deane, and his wife. He had let the man escape—for the woman's sake. She had come to him like an angel from out of a world that had always been an empty and loveless one for him. He had let the man go because in those hours of storm and flight he loved the wife. He loved her now. He loved the memory of the one and only reward she had given him—a kiss of her sweet lips.

The little girl's voice came to him now, laughing and screaming as she romped with Pelletier inside, and MacVeigh laughed softly, and smiled, as he filled his pipe. Then he turned with a new sense of duty. He had been digging, and beside the shallow hole he had made there lay the stiff and frozen corpse of a man. It was a terrible picture that the dead man made, with his coarse bearded face turned up to the sky and his teeth still snarling, as they had snarled on the day he died. He had been under that shallow covering of ice and earth for nearly two months, but he was unchanged. MacVeigh shivered. He had been through the dead man's pockets, had searched him thoroughly, and the few things he had found lay on the snow. There was nothing among them that might solve the mystery of the miracle that had descended upon them. He rolled the man into the grave, covered him over, and went into the cabin.

Pelletier was in his usual place—on his hands and knees—with Little Mystery astride his back. He paused in a mad race across

the cabin floor and looked up with inquiring eyes. The little girl held up her arms, and MacVeigh tossed her half-way to the ceiling, and then hugged her golden head close up to his chilled face. Pelletier jumped to his feet; his face grew serious as MacVeigh looked at him over the child's tousled curls.

"I found nothing—absolutely nothing of any account," he said. "I didn't call you out when I got him above ground for I didn't think it would be pleasant for you to see the man you killed. But there was nothing on him—nothing." He placed Little Mystery on one of the bunks, and faced the other with a puzzled look in his eyes. "I wish you hadn't been in a fever on that day of the fight, Pelly," he said. "He must have said something—something that would give us a clue."

"Mebby he did, Mac," said Pelletier, looking with a shiver at the few things which MacVeigh had placed on the cabin table. But there's no use worrying any more, Mac. It ain't in reason that she's got any people up here—six hundred miles from the shack of a white man that'd own a little beauty like her. She's mine. I found her. She's mine to keep."

He sat down at the table, and MacVeigh seated himself opposite him, smiling sympathetically into Pelletier's eyes.

"I know—you want her—want her bad, Pelly," he said. "And I know the Girl would love her. But she's got people—some-where, and it's our duty to find 'em. She didn't drop out of a balloon, Pelly. Do you suppose—the dead man—might be her father?"

It was the first time he had asked this question, and he noted the other's sudden shudder of revulsion.

"I've thought of that, Mac. But it can't be. He was a beast, and she—she's a little angel. Mac, her mother must have been beautiful. And that's what made me guess—fear."

Pelletier wiped his face uneasily, and the two young men stared into each other's eyes. MacVeigh leaned forward, waiting.

"I figured it all out—last night, lying awake there in my bunk," continued Pelletier, "and as the second best friend I have on earth I want to ask you not to go any farther, Mac. She's mine. My Jeanne, down there, will love her like a real mother, and we'll bring her up right. But if you go on, Mac, you'll find something unpleasant—I—I swear you will!"

"You know—"

"I've guessed," interrupted the other. "Mac, sometimes a beast—a man beast—holds an attraction for a woman, and Blake was that sort of a beast. You remember—two years ago—a sailor ran away with the wife of a whaler's captain away up at Narwhale Inlet. Well—"

Again the two men stared silently at each other. MacVeigh turned slowly toward the child. She had fallen asleep, and he could see the dull shimmer of her golden curls as they lay scattered over Pelletier's pillow.

"Poor little devil," he exclaimed softly.

"I believe that woman was Little Mystery's mother, Mac," Pelletier went on. "She couldn't bear to leave the little kid when she went with Blake, so she took her along. Some women do that. And after a time she died. Then Blake took up with an Eskimo

woman. You know what happened after that. We don't want Little Mystery to know all this when she grows up. It's better not. She's too little to remember, ain't she? She won't ever know."

"I remember the ship," said MacVeigh, not taking his eyes off Little Mystery. "She was the *Silver Seal*. Her captain's name was Thompson."

He did not look at Pelletier, but he could feel the quick, tense stiffening of the other's body. There was a moment's silence. Then Pelletier spoke, in a low, unnatural voice.

"Mac, you ain't going to hunt him up, are you? That wouldn't be fair to me, or to the kid. My Jeanne'll love her, an' mebbe—mebbe some day your kid'll come along an' marry her—"

MacVeigh rose to his feet and walked softly toward the door. Pelletier did not see the strange look that had come into his face.

"What do you say, Mac?"

"Think it over, Pelly," came back MacVeigh's voice huskily. "Think it over. I don't want to hurt you, 'n' I know you think a lot of her, but—think it over. You wouldn't rob her father—"

He opened the door quietly and went out. *His kid!* He gritted his teeth as he faced the cold wind from the north. The sting of that wind was like the mocking ghost of his own past life. He was thirty-two, and he had suffered the stings of pain and of loneliness since he could remember. Down south, where Pelletier was soon going to happiness and love, he had no soul that thought of him or cared for him. That world he had left behind him many years ago. He knew only the wilderness and his service. *His kid!* A flood of warmth swept through his veins, and in that moment of forgetfulness and hope he turned his eyes into the south and west, and saw again the sweet face and up-turned lips of Isobel Deane.

Then he faced the breaking seas of ice, and the north. The gloom of early night had drawn the horizon nearer. The rumble and thunder of the crumbling floes came from out of a purple chaos that was growing blue-black in the distance. For several minutes MacVeigh stood listening, and looking into nothingness. The breaking of the ice, the moaning discontent in the air and the

before. His body became suddenly tense and alert as he faced squarely to the north. For a full minute he listened, and then turned and ran to the cabin.

Pelletier had lighted a lamp, and in its glow MacVeigh's face shone white with excitement and a strange fear.

"Good God, Pelly, come here!" he cried from the door.

As Pelletier ran out he gripped him by the shoulders.

"Listen!" he commanded. "Listen to that!"

"Wolves!" said Pelletier.

The wind was rising, and sent a whistling blast through the open door of the cabin. It awakened Little Mystery who sat up with frightened cries.

"No, it's not wolves," cried MacVeigh, and it did not sound like MacVeigh's voice that spoke. "I never heard wolves like that. Listen."

He clutched Pelletier's arm as on a fresh burst of the wind there came the strange and terrible sound from out of the night. It was rapidly drawing nearer—a wailing burst of savage voice, as if a great wolf pack had struck the fresh and blood-stained trail of game. But with this there was the other and more fearful sound, a shrieking and yelping as if half-human creatures were being torn by the fangs of beasts. As Pelletier and MacVeigh stood waiting for something to appear out of the gray-and-black mystery of the night they heard a sound that was like the slow tolling of a thing that was half hell and half drum.

"It's not wolves," shouted MacVeigh. "Whatever it is there's men with it! Hurry, Pelly—into the cabin with our dogs and sledge. Those are dogs we hear—dogs who are howling because they smell us—and there are hundreds of 'em! Where there's dogs there's men—but who in Heaven's name can they be?"

He dragged the sledge into the cabin while Pelletier unleashed the huskies from the lean-to. When he came in with the dogs Pelletier locked and bolted the door.

MacVeigh slipped a clipful of cartridges into his big game Remington. His carbine was already on the table, and as Pelletier stood staring at him in indecision he pulled out two Savage automatics from under his bunk and gave one of them to his companion. His face was white and set.

"Better get ready, Pelly," he said quietly. "I've been in this country a long time—seven years or more—and I tell you they're dogs and men. Did you hear the drum? It's made of seal belly, and there's a bell on each side of it. They're Eskimos, and there isn't an Eskimo village within two hundred miles of us this winter. They're Eskimos—and they're not on a hunt—unless it's for us!"

In an instant Pelletier was buckling on his revolver and cartridge belt. He grinned as he looked at the wicked little blue-stepped Savage.

"I hope you ain't mistaken, Mac," he said, "for it'll be the first excitement we've had in a year."

None of his enthusiasm revealed itself in MacVeigh's face.

"The Eskimo never fights until he's gone mad, Pelly," he said, "and you know what madmen are. I can't guess what they've got to fight over, unless they want our grub. But if they do—" He moved toward the door, his swift-firing Remington in his hand. "Be ready to cover me, Pelly. I'm going out. Don't fire until you hear me shoot."

He opened the door and stepped out. The howling had ceased now, but there came in its place strange barking voices and a crackling which MacVeigh knew was made by the long Eskimo whips. He advanced to meet many dim forms which he saw breaking out of the wall of gloom, raising his voice in a loud halloo. From the doorway Pelletier saw him suddenly lost in a mass of dogs and men, and half flung his carbine to his shoulder. But there was no shooting from MacVeigh. A score of sledges had drawn up about him and the whips of dozens of little black men

cracked viciously as their dogs sank upon their bellies in the snow. Both men and dogs were tired, and MacVeigh saw that they had been running long and hard. Still as quick as animals the little men gathered about him, their white-and-black eyes staring at him out of round, thick, dumb-looking faces. MacVeigh noted that they were half a hundred strong, and that all were armed—many with



"MacVeigh"

their little javelinlike narwhal harpoons, some with spears, and others with rifles. From the circle of strangely dressed and hideously visaged beings that had gathered about him one advanced and began talking to MacVeigh in a language that was like the rapid clack of knuckle-bones.

"Kognollocks!" MacVeigh groaned, and he lifted both hands to show that he did not understand. Then he raised his voice: "Nuna-talmute," he cried. "Nuna-talmute—Nuna-talmute! Ain't there one of that lingo among you?"

He spoke directly to the chief man, who stared at him in silence for a moment, and then pointed both short arms toward the lighted cabin.

"Come on!" said MacVeigh. He caught the little Eskimo by one of his thick arms and led him boldly through the breach that was made for them in the circle. The chief man's voice broke out in a few words of command, like a dozen quick, sharp yelps of a dog, and six other Eskimos dropped in behind them.

"Kognollocks—the blackest-hearted little devils alive when it comes to trading wives and fighting," said MacVeigh to Pelletier as he came up at the head of the seven little black men. "Watch the door, Pelly. They're coming in."

He stepped into the cabin, and the Eskimo followed. From Pelletier's bunk Little Mystery looked at the strange visitors with eyes which suddenly widened with surprise and joy, and in another moment she had given the strangest cry that Pelletier or MacVeigh had ever heard her utter. Scarcely had that cry fallen from her lips than one of the Eskimos sprang toward her. His black hands were already upon her, dragging the frightened child from the bunk, when with a warning yell of rage Pelletier leaped from the door and sent him crashing back among his companions. In another instant both men were facing the seven Eskimos with leveled automatics.

"If you fire don't shoot to kill!" commanded MacVeigh.

The chief man was pointing to Little Mystery, his weird voice rising until it was almost a scream. Suddenly he doubled himself back and raised his javelin. Simultaneously two streams of fire leaped from the automatics. The javelin dropped to the floor, and with a shrill cry which was half pain



"Kazan"

growling monotone of the giant currents had driven other men mad; but they held a fascination for him. He knew what was happening, and he could almost measure the strength of the unseen hands of nature. No sound was new or strange to him. But now—as he stood there—there rose above all the other tumult a sound that he had not heard

and half command the leader staggered back to the door, a stream of blood running from his wounded hand. The others sprang out ahead of him, and Pelletier closed and bolted the door. When he turned MacVeigh was closing and slipping the bolts to the heavy barricades of the two windows. From Pelletier's bunk Little Mystery looked at them and laughed.

"So it's you?" said MacVeigh, coming to her, and breathing hard. "It's you they want, eh? Now—I wonder why?"

Pelletier's face was flushed with excitement. He was reloading his automatic. There was almost a triumph in his eyes as he met MacVeigh's questioning gaze.

They stood and listened, heard only the rumbling monotone of the drifting ice—not the breath of a sound from the scores of men and dogs.

"We've given them a lesson," said Pelletier at last, smiling with the confidence of a man who was half a tenderfoot among the little brown men.

MacVeigh pointed to the door.

"That door is about the only place vulnerable to their bullets," he said, as though he had not heard Pelletier. "Keep out of its range. I don't believe what guns they've got are heavy enough to penetrate the logs. Your bunk is out of line, and safe."

He went to Little Mystery, and his stern face relaxed into a smile as she put up her arms to greet him.

"So it's YOU, is it?" he asked again, taking her warm little face and soft curls between his two hands. "They want you, an' they want you bad. Well, they can't have grub, an' they can have ME, but—" he looked up to meet Pelletier's eyes—"I'm d—d if they can have you," he finished.

Suddenly the night was broken by another sound, the sharp, explosive crack of rifles. They could hear the beat of bullets against the log wall of the cabin. One crashed through the door, tearing away a splinter as wide as a man's arm, and as MacVeigh nodded to the path of the bullet he laughed. Pelletier had heard that laugh before. He knew what it meant. He knew what the death whiteness of MacVeigh's face meant. It was not fear, but something more terrible than fear. His own face was flushed. That is the difference in men.

MacVeigh suddenly darted across the danger zone to the opposite half of the cabin.

"If that's your game, here goes," he cried. "Now, d—n y', you're so anxious to fight—get at it 'n' fight!"

He spoke the last words to Pelletier. MacVeigh always swore when he went into action.

On his own side Pelletier began tugging at a small, thin block laid between two of the logs. The shooting outside had ceased when the two men opened up the loopholes that commanded a range seaward. Almost immediately it began again, the dull, red flashes showing the location of the Eskimos, who had drawn back to the ridge that sloped down to the bay. As the last of five shots left his Remington MacVeigh pulled in his gun and faced across to Pelletier, who was already reloading.

"Pelly, I don't want to croak," he said, "but this is the last of law at Fullerton Point—for you and me. Look at that!"

He raised the muzzle of his rifle to one of the logs over his head. Pelletier could see the fresh splinters sticking out.

"They've got some heavy calibers," continued MacVeigh, "and they're hidden behind the slope, where they're safe from us for a thousand years. As soon as it grows light enough to see they'll fill this shack as full of holes as an old cheese."

As if to verify his words a single shot rang out and a bullet plowed through a log so close to Pelletier that the splinters flew into his face.

"I know these little devils, Pelly," went on MacVeigh. "If they were Numa-talmutes you could scare 'em with a sky-rocket. But they're Kogmollocks. They've murdered the crews of half a dozen whalers, and I shouldn't

wonder if they'd got the kid in some such way. They wouldn't let us off now—even if we gave her up. It wouldn't do. They know better than to let the law get any evidence against them. If we're killed, and the cabin burned, who's going to say what happened to us? There's just two things for us to do—"

Another fusillade of shots came from the snow ridge, and a third bullet crashed into the cabin.

"Just two things," MacVeigh went on, as he completely shaded the dimly burning lamp. "We can stay here 'n' die—or run."

"Run!"

This was an unknown word in the Service, and in Pelletier's voice there were both amazement and contempt.

"Yes, run," said MacVeigh quietly. "Run—for the kid's sake."

It was almost dark in the cabin, and Pelletier came close to his companion.

"You mean—"

"That it's the only way to save the kid," said MacVeigh. "We might give her up, and then fight it out—but that means she'd go back to the Eskimos, 'n' mebbe never be found again. The men and dogs out there are bushed. We are fresh. If we can get away from the cabin we can beat 'em out."

"We'll run then," said Pelletier. He went to Little Mystery, who sat stunned into silence by the strange things that were happening, and hugged her up in his arms, his back turned to the possible bullet that might come through the wall—"We're going to run, little sweetheart," he mumbled half laughingly in her curls.

MacVeigh began to pack, and Pelletier put Little Mystery down on the bunk and started to harness the six dogs, ranging them close along the wall, with old one-eyed Kazan, the hero who had saved him from Blake, in the



The figure was climbing to its feet for the fifth time

lead. Outside the firing had ceased. It was evident that the Eskimos had made up their minds to save their ammunition until dawn.

Fifteen minutes sufficed to load the sledge, and while Pelletier was fastening the sledge traces MacVeigh bundled Little Mystery into her thick fur coat. The sleeve caught, and he turned it back, exposing the white edge of the lining. On that lining was something which drew him down close, and when the strange cry that fell from his lips drew Pelletier's eyes toward him he was staring down into Little Mystery's upturned face with the look of one who saw a vision.

"Mother of Heaven," he gasped, "she's—" He caught himself, and smothered Little Mystery up close to him for a moment be-

fore he brought her to the sledge. "She's the bravest little kid in the world," he finished, and Pelletier wondered at the strangeness of his voice. They tucked her into a nest made of blankets and then tied her in securely with babiche rope. Pelletier stood up first and saw the hungry, staring look in MacVeigh's face as he kept his eyes steadily upon Little Mystery.

"What's the matter, Mac?" he asked. "Are you very much afraid—for her?"

"No," said MacVeigh, without lifting his head. "If you're ready, Pelly, open the door." He rose to his feet and picked up his rifle. He did not seem like the old MacVeigh, but the dogs were nipping and whining and there was no time for Pelletier's questions.

"I'm going out first, Mac," he said. "You can make up your mind they're watching the cabin pretty close, and as soon as the dogs nose the open air they'll begin yapping, 'n' let 'em on to us. We can't risk her under fire. So I'm going to back along the edge of the ridge and give it to 'em as fast as I can work the gun. They'll all turn to me, and that's the time for you to open the door and make your get-away. I'll be with you inside of five minutes."

He turned out the light as he spoke. Then he opened the door and slipped out into the darkness, without a protesting word from MacVeigh. Hardly had he gone when the latter fell upon his knees beside Little Mystery and in the deep gloom crushed his rough face down against her soft, warm little body. "So it's you, is it?" he cried softly, and then he mumbled things which the little girl could not possibly have understood.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet and ran to the door with a word to faithful old Kazan, the leader.

From far down the snow ridge there came the rapid firing of Pelletier's rifle.

For a moment MacVeigh waited, his hand on the door, to give the watching Eskimos time to turn their attention toward Pelletier. He could perhaps have counted fifty before he gave Kazan the leash, and the six dogs dragged the sledge out into the night. With his humanlike intelligence old Kazan swung quickly after his master, and the team darted like a streak into the south and west, giving tongue to that first sharp, yapping voice which it is impossible to beat or train out of a band of huskies. As he ran, MacVeigh looked back over his shoulder. In the hundred-yard stretch of gray gloom between the cabin and the snow ridge he saw three figures speeding like wolves. In a flash the meaning of this unexpected move of the Eskimos dawned upon him. They were cutting Pelletier off from the cabin and his course of flight.

"Go it, Kazan!" he cried fiercely, bending low over the leader. "Moo-hoosh—moo-hoosh—moo-hoosh, 'old man!" and Kazan leaped into a swift run, nipping and whining at the empty air.

MacVeigh stopped and whirled about. Two other figures had joined the first three, and MacVeigh opened fire. One of the running Eskimos pitched forward with a cry that rose shrill and scarcely human above the moaning and roar of the ice fields, and the other four fell flat upon the snow to escape the hail of lead that sang close over their heads. From the snow ridge there came a fusillade of shots, and a single figure darted like a streak in MacVeigh's direction. He knew that it was Pelletier, and running slowly after Kazan and the sledge he rammed a fresh clipful of cartridges into the chamber of his rifle. The figures in the open had risen again, and Pelletier's automatic Savage trailed out a stream of fire as he ran. He was breathing heavily when he reached MacVeigh.

"Kazan has got the kid well in the lead," shouted the latter. "God bless that old scoundrel. I believe he's human."

They set off swiftly, and the thick night soon engulfed all signs of the Eskimos. Ahead of them the sledge loomed up slowly, and when they reached it both men thrust



"You've got to lie still, Pelly," he warned, arranging the blankets so that the wounded man could rest comfortably

their rifles under the blanket straps. Thus relieved of their weight they forged ahead of Kazan.

"Moo-hoosh—moo-hoosh!" cried MacVeigh. He glanced at Pelletier on the opposite side. His comrade was running with one arm raised at the proper angle to reserve breath and endurance; the other hung straight and limp at his side. A sudden fear shot through MacVeigh and he darted ahead of the lead dog to Pelletier's side. He did not speak, but touched the other's arm.

"One of the little devils winged me," gasped Pelletier. "It's not bad."

He was breathing as though the short run was already winding him, and without a word MacVeigh ran up to Kazan's head and stopped the team within twenty paces. The open blade of his knife was ripping up Pelletier's sleeve before his comrade could find words to object. Pelletier was bleeding, and bleeding hard. His face was shot with pain. The bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his forearm, but had fortunately missed the main artery. With the quick deftness of the wilderness-trained surgeon MacVeigh drew the wound close and bound it tightly with his own and Pelletier's handkerchiefs. Then he thrust Pelletier toward the sledge.

"You've got to ride, Pelly," he said. "If you don't you'll go under, and that means all of us."

Far behind them there rose the yapping and howling of dogs.

"They're after us with the dogs!" groaned Pelletier. "I can't ride, Mac. I've got to run—and fight!"

"You get on the sledge or I'll stave your head in!" commanded MacVeigh. "Face the enemy, Pelly—and give 'em h—l. You've got three rifles there. You can do the shooting while I hustle on the dogs. And keep yourself in front of her," he added, pointing to the almost completely buried Little Mystery.

He ran on ahead, and the dogs started with their heavier load.

"Now for the timber-line," he called down to Kazan. "It's fifty miles, old boy, and you've got to make it by dawn. If we don't—"

He left the words unfinished, but Kazan tugged harder, as if he had heard and understood. The sledge had reached the unbroken sweep of the barren now, and MacVeigh felt the wind in his face. It was blowing from the north and west, and with it came sudden gusts filled with fine particles of snow. After a few moments he fell back to see that Little Mystery's face was completely covered. Pelletier was crouching low on the sledge, his feet braced in the blanket straps. His wound, and the uncomfortable sensation of riding backward on a swaying sledge, were making him dizzy, and he wondered if what he saw creeping up out of the night was a result of this dizziness, or a reality. There was no sound from behind. But a darker spot had grown within his vision, at times becoming larger, then almost disappearing. Twice he raised his rifle.

Twice he lowered it again, convinced that the thing behind was only a shadowy fabric of his imagination. It was possible that their pursuers would lose trace of them in the darkness, and so he held his fire.

He was staring at the shadow when from out of it there leaped a little spurt of flame, and a bullet sang past the sledge, a yard to the right. It was a splendid shot. There was a marksman with the shadow, and Pelletier replied so quickly that the first shot had not died away before there followed the second. Five times his automatic sent its leaden messengers back into the night, and at the fifth shot there came a wild outburst of pain from one of the Eskimo dogs.

"Hurrah!" shouted MacVeigh. "That's one team out of business, Pelly. We can beat 'em in a running fight!"

He heard the quick metallic snap of fresh cartridges as Pelletier slipped them into the chamber of his rifle, but beyond that sound, the wind, and the straining of the huskies, there was no other. A grim silence fell behind. The roar of the distant ice grew less. The earth no longer seemed to shudder under their feet at the terrific explosions of the crumbling bergs. But in place of these the wind was rising, and the fine snow was thickening. MacVeigh no longer turned to look behind. He stared ahead, and as far as he could see on each side of them. At the end

of half an hour the panting dogs dropped into a walk, and MacVeigh walked close beside his comrade.

"They've given it up," groaned Pelletier weakly. "I'm glad of it, Mac, for I'm—I'm—dizzy." He was lying on the sledge now, with his head bolstered up on a pile of blankets.

"You know how the wolves hunt, Pelly," said MacVeigh, "in a moon-shape, half circle, you know, that closes in on the running game from IN FRONT? Well, that's how the Eskimos hunt, and I'm wondering if they're trying to get ahead of us—off there, and off there." He motioned to the north and the south.

"They can't," replied Pelletier, raising himself to his elbow with an effort. "Their dogs are bushed. Let me walk, Mac. I can—"

He fell back with a sudden low cry. "Gawd, but I'm dizzy—"

MacVeigh halted the dogs, and while they dropped upon their bellies, panting and licking up the snow, he knelt beside Pelletier. Darkness concealed the fear in his eyes and face. His voice was strong and cheerful.

"You've got to lie still, Pelly," he warned, arranging the blankets so that the wounded man could rest comfortably. "You've got a pretty bad nip, and it's best for all of us that you don't make a move. You're right about the Eskimos, and their dogs. They're bushed and they've given the chase up as a bad job, so what's the use of making a fool of yourself? Hide it out, Pelly. Go to sleep with Little Mystery if you can. She thinks she's in a cradle."

He got up, and started the dogs. For a long time he was alone. Little Mystery was sleeping, and Pelletier was quiet. Now and then he dropped his mittened hand on Kazan's head, and the faithful old leader whined softly at his touch. With the others it was different. They snapped viciously, and MacVeigh kept his distance. He went on for hours, halting the team now and then for a few minutes' rest. He struck a match each time and looked at Pelletier. His comrade breathed heavily, with his eyes closed. Once, long after midnight, he opened them and

(Continued on page 46)

With one sweep Jimmie caught her to him. But he didn't go on. "Oh, Sue! Sue!" was all he said as he held her close. "What's the use? We can't."

But he had admitted all she wanted him to. With a determined little movement she extricated herself.

"Jimmie Carson," she tapped him authoritatively on the chest, "how much do you earn? Quick!"

"Twenty-five a week." His answer was prompt, if a little tremulous.

"And I have a hundred a month which grandmother left me. Two hundred a month," she added musingly. "I presume there are people who even do it on less."

"Sue! Sue!" he shook his head.

"Jimmie! Jimmie!" she mimicked his tone. Then with an unexpected little gesture of abandon: "Why are you punishing me so, Jimmie? For the past? Can I throw myself at you any harder?"

Just for a moment the man put his hands over his eyes.

"You're crazy, Sue," he said from behind the barricade. But the next moment he caught her to him. And she clung to him, crying. Even Jimmie made a few dabs at his eyes. Later on they planned everything.

"And for the three hundred and sixty-fifth time—'not will you, but—when will you marry me, Sue?" he asked at last.

She looked at him for a little silent moment.

"I'll leave it to you, Jimmie, to decide. Any—any day but to-day. I was going to come prepared, but—but I thought it a little too—too brazen."

Jimmie looked dizzily at her, too happy for words. And suddenly she flashed the sweetest smile at him.

"Here's your dollar, Jimmie," she said, and from an inner pocket of her tailored coat she brought forth the purse which was not lost.

Continued from page 27

LITTLE MYSTERY

stared at the flare of the match, and into MacVeigh's white face.

"I'm all right, Mac," he said. "Let me walk—"

MacVeigh forced him back gently, and went on. He was alone until the first, cold, gray break of dawn. Then he stopped, gave each of the dogs a frozen fish, and with the fuel on the sledge built a small fire. He scraped up snow for tea, and hung the pail over the fire. He was frying bacon and toasting hard bannock biscuits when Pelletier aroused himself and sat up. MacVeigh did not see him until he faced about.

"Good morning, Pelly," he grinned. "Have a good nap?"

Pelletier groped about on the sledge. "Wish I could find a club, Mac," he said. "I'd—I'd brain you! You let me sleep!"

He thrust out his uninjured arm and the two shook hands. Once or twice before they had done this, after hours of great peril. It was not an ordinary handshake.

MacVeigh rose to his feet. Half a mile away the edge of the big forest for which they had been fighting rose out of the dawn gloom.

"If I'd known that," said MacVeigh, pointing, "we'd have camped in shelter. "Fifty miles, Pelly. Not so bad, was it?"

Behind them the gray barren was lifting itself into the light of day. The two men ate, and drank tea. During those few minutes neither gave attention to the forest or the barren. MacVeigh was ravenously hungry. Pelletier could not get enough of the tea. And then their attention went to Little Mystery, who awoke with a wailing protest at the smothering cover of blankets over her face. MacVeigh dug her out, and held her up to view the strange change since yesterday. It was then that Kazan stopped licking his fishy chops to send up a strange, wailing howl.

Both men turned their eyes toward the forest. Half-way between a figure was toiling

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slowly toward them. It was a man, and MacVeigh gave a low cry of astonishment.

But Kazan was facing the gray barren, and he howled again, long and menacingly. The other dogs took up the cry, and when Pelletier and MacVeigh followed the direction of their warning they stood for a full half minute as if turned into stone.

More than a mile away the barren was dotted with a dozen swiftly moving sledges and a score of running men!

After all, their last stand was to be made at the edge of the timber-line!

In such situations men like MacVeigh and Pelletier do not waste precious moments in prearranging actions in words. Their mental processes are instantaneous and correlative—and they act. Without a word MacVeigh replaced Little Mystery in her nest, without even placing a sip of the warm tea to her lips, and by the time the dogs were straightened in their traces Pelletier was handing him his Remington.

"I've ranged it for three hundred and fifty yards," he said. "We won't want to waste our fire until they come that near."

They set out at a trot, Pelletier running with his wounded arm down at his side. Suddenly the lone figure between them and the forest disappeared. It had fallen flat in the snow, where it lay only a black speck. In a moment it rose again, and advanced. Both Pelletier and MacVeigh were looking when it fell for a second time.

An unpleasant laugh came from MacVeigh's lips.

"No help there," he said. "Whoever he is, he's half dead!"

The figure was climbing to its feet for the fifth time, and was only on its hands and knees, when the sledge drew up. It was a white man. His head was bare, his face deathlike. His neck was open to the cold wind, and to the others' astonishment he wore no heavier garment over his dark flannel shirt. The man's eyes burned wildly from out of a growth of shaggy beard and hair, and he was panting like one who had traveled miles instead of a few hundred yards.

"Cabin—back there—in edge—woods," he explained, as he saw the effect his appearance was making on the newcomers. "Saw you—coming. I'm dying—no hope—know it. Name's—Scottie Deane."

An amazed cry broke from Pelletier. He looked at MacVeigh, his chief. Here was the murderer for whom a half of the whole northern force had been searching for a year! He made an involuntary movement forward, but MacVeigh was ahead of him. He raised the outlaw to his feet, and the two stared at each other for a space, while from three-quarters of a mile away came the first faint howling of the Eskimo dogs.

"Don't you know me?" asked MacVeigh, so low that Pelletier did not hear. "I'm MacVeigh, of the Royal Northwest Mounted. It was I who helped your wife over the barren, and who—who—"

A little wailing cry came from the sledge. With a gasp Scottie Deane turned his eyes toward that cry.

"My God!" he screamed.

In an instant he was upon his knees beside Little Mystery, and the little girl's arms were around his neck, and he was sobbing and talking like a madman.

"She's mine—mine!" he cried, leaping to his feet with new strength. "Where—did you get her? How—?"

The Eskimos were only half a mile away. MacVeigh turned the dying outlaw so that his face was in their direction. Quickly, without a waste of words, he told Scottie Deane all that happened. And when he had done, Scottie ran out in the face of the army of little black men, with Little Mystery in his arms, and strange shouting cries on his lips. Pelletier and MacVeigh were in the edge of the forest when Deane met his Eskimos. There was a long wait out there, and then Scottie and Little Mystery came back—on a sledge drawn by Eskimo dogs, and beside the sledge walked the chief who had been wounded in the cabin at Fullerton

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Point. Scottie Deane was swaying, his head was bowed half upon his breast, and the chief and another Eskimo were supporting him. He nodded to the right, and a hundred yards away they found a cabin. The powerful little Northerners carried him in, still clutching Little Mystery in his arms, and he made a motion for MacVeigh to follow him—alone. Inside the cabin they placed him on a low bunk and with a weak but terrible cough the outlaw beckoned MacVeigh to his side. MacVeigh knew what the cough meant. The sick man had suffered terrible cold—and the tissue of his lungs was sloughing away. It was death. The most terrible death of the North. He spoke quite steadily.

"I'm dying," he said again. "Have been—four days. You must understand—before I go. I killed a man—but it was—right. He tried to insult her—my wife—an' you—you people hunted me. For safety we went far north—among the Eskimos—an' lived there—long time. The Eskimos—they loved the little girl and wife, 'specially little Isobel. Thought them angels—some sort. Then we heard you were going to hunt for me—among Eskimos. So we set out with box. Box was for her—to keep her from fearful cold—but when we saw your fire on edge of barren she made me get in it—an' so—you found us. You know—after that. You thought it was—coffin—an' she told you I was dead. You were good—good to her—an' you mus' go down where she is—take little Isobel—"

He stopped, panting and coughing. MacVeigh was crushing both his thin, cold hands in his own.

"You was good—good—good—to her," repeated Scottie Deane weakly. "You loved her—an' it was a right—because you thought I was dead—an' she was alone—needed help—love—an' you must go down to her—Pierre Couchee's cabin—on the Little Beaver—an'—"

He suddenly wrenched his hands free and took MacVeigh's tense face between them, staring straight and silently into his eyes.

"An—an—I give her to you," he said. "She's an angel, and she's alone—needs some one—love—a good man—an' you—you'll be good to her."

"I will go to her," said MacVeigh softly. "and I swear here on my knees, before the great and good God, that I will do what an honorable man should do."

Scottie Deane's rigid body relaxed and he sank back on his blankets with a sigh of relief.

"I worried—for her," he said. "I've always believed in a God—though I killed a man—an' He sent you here—in time."

A sudden questioning light came into Scottie Deane's eyes.

"The man—who stole little Isobel," he breathed. "Who was he?"

"Pelletier—the man out there—killed him when he came to the cabin," said MacVeigh. "He said his name was Blake."

"BLAKE—BLAKE—BLAKE!" Again Scottie Deane's voice rose from the edge of death to a shriek. "Blake, you say? A great coarse sailor man, with red hair—red beard—yellow teeth like a walrus? Blake—BLAKE—"

Scottie Deane sank back again, with a thrilling, half-mad laugh.

"Then—then it's all been a mistake—a funny mistake," he said, and his eyes closed, and his voice spoke the words as though he were uttering them from out of a dream. MacVeigh saw that the end was near. He bent down to catch the dying man's last words. "We fought—I thought I killed him—an' threw him into the sea. So—so—I'm not a murderer—after all. And he—he came back for revenge—and stole—little—Isobel. I'm—I'm—not—a—murderer. You—you—will—tell—her. You will—you'll tell her—I didn't kill him—after all. You'll tell her—an' be good—good—"

A shudder passed through him. It was the last sign of life. MacVeigh continued to kneel at his side for a long time, and held his hands until they were as cold as ice in his own.

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Then he went out to make friends with the faithful Eskimos who had fought for the woman's sake and little Isobel, and to tell the wonderful story of death, and of new life for him, to Roscoe Pelletier. And as he went he thanked Heaven for the coming of the sunny-haired baby, Little Mystery, now Little Isobel!

In the edge of the timber-line it was black—black not only with the gloom of night, but with the concentrated darkness of spruce and balsam and a sky so low and thick that one could almost hear the wailing swish of it overhead, like the steady sobbing of surf on a seashore. It was black—save for the small circles of light made by the Eskimo fires, around which a score of little brown men sat or crouched. The masters of the camp were still awake, but twice as many dogs, exhausted and footsore, lay curled into heaps, as inanimate as if dead. There was present a strange silence and a strange and unnatural gloom that was not of the night alone—a silence broken only by the low moaning of the wind out on the barren, the restlessness in the air above the tree tops, and the crackling of the fires. The Eskimos were as motionless as so many dead men. They were not asleep. Their round, expressionless eyes were wide open. They sat or crouched with their backs to the barren, their faces turned into the still deeper blackness of the forest. Some distance away, like a star, there gleamed a light, a small light and a steady light—in a cabin window.—The eyes of those about the fires were fixed on this light. For two hours they had been staring at it. And at intervals there rose from among the stony-faced watchers a man who was chief of the tribe, and whose lacking voice joined for a few moments each time the wailing of the wind, the swish of the low-hanging sky, and the crackling of the fires. But there was sound of no other voice or movement. He alone moved and spoke—for to the others the clacking sounds he made was speech, words spoken for a man who was dead. The man lay in the cabin. He was covered over with a blanket.

At a crudely made table, with a tin lamp between them, sat MacVeigh and Pelletier. Pelletier's arm was in a sling. His face was drawn—and haggard and blackened by powder smoke. MacVeigh was writing, slowly and laboriously, with the stub of a pencil so short that he could scarcely hold it between his thumb and forefinger. He had been writing for three-quarters of an hour, and now he straightened himself with a groan of relief.

"I'd rather fight—fight seven days in the week, than write these confounded reports," he exclaimed. "I always think of that job ahead of me when anything big is happening. Pelly, I thought of it back there in the barren. At the first durned shot I knew I'd have to write it all out for Headquarters."

Pelletier went to the one window of the cabin. He could see the Eskimo fires and the motionless figures crouching in the circles of light.

"Wish they'd move," he said. "They make me nervous. Hello, there's that O-gluck-gluck, or whatever you call 'im, giving 'em another dance and spiel. By thunder, they are moving! They're jumping to their feet and coming this way!"

MacVeigh looked at his watch.

"They're mighty good guessers, Pelly. It's a quarter after twelve. When a chief or a big man dies the tribe buries him in the first hour of the new day. They're coming after Scottie Deane."

He opened the door and stepped out into the night. Pelletier joined him. The Eskimos advanced without a sound and stopped in a shadowy group twenty paces from the cabin. Five of the little fur-clad men detached themselves from the others and filed into the cabin, with the chief man at their head. As they bent over Scottie Deane they began to chant a low monotone which awakened little Isobel, who sat up and stared sleepily at the strange scene. MacVeigh went to her and gathered her close in his arms. She was sleeping again when he put her down among the blankets. The Eskimos were gone

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THE CRITIC

with their burden. He could hear the low chanting of the tribe.

"I found her, and I thought she was mine," said Pelletier's low voice at his side. "But she ain't, Mac. She's yours."

"You're going to take her down to the woman, and after that—?"

MacVeigh broke in on him, as though he had not heard.

"You'd better get to bed, Pelly," he warned. "That arm needs rest. I'm going out to see where they bury him."

He put on his cap and heavy coat and went as far as the door, then turned back. From his kit he took a belt ax and nails.

The wind was blowing more strongly over the barren, and MacVeigh could no longer hear the low lament of the Eskimos. He moved toward their fires, and found them deserted of men, only the dogs remaining in their deathlike sleep. And then, far down the edge of the timber, he saw a flare of light. Five minutes later he stood hidden in a deep shadow, a few paces from the Eskimos. They had dug the grave early in the evening, out on the great snow plain, free of the trees; and as the fire they had built lighted up their dark, round faces MacVeigh saw the five little black men who had borne forth Scottie Deane leaning over the shallow hole in the frozen earth. Scottie was already gone. The earth and ice and frozen moss were falling in upon him, and not a sound fell now from the thick lips of his savage mourners. In a few minutes the crude work was done, and like a thin black shadow the natives filed back to their camp. Only one remained, sitting cross-legged at the head of the grave, his long narwhal spear across his knees, the wild north wind beating at his back. It was O-gluck-gluck, the Eskimo chief, guarding the dead man from the devils who come to steal body and soul during the first few hours of burial.

MacVeigh went deeper into the forest until he found a thin, straight sapling, which he cut down with half a dozen strokes of his belt ax. From the sapling he stripped the bark, and then he chopped off a third of its length and nailed it crosswise to what remained. After that he sharpened the bottom end, and returned to the grave, carrying the cross over his shoulder. Stripped to whiteness it gleamed in the firelight. The Eskimo watcher stared at it for a moment, his dull eyes burning darker in the night, for he knew that after this two gods, and not one, were to guard the grave. MacVeigh drove the cross deep, and as the blows of his ax fell upon it the Eskimo slunk back until he was swallowed in the gloom. When MacVeigh was done he pulled off his cap. But it was not to pray.

"I'm sorry, old man," he said to what was under the cross. "God knows I'm sorry. I wish you was alive. I wish you was going back to her—with the kid—instid o' me. But I'll keep that promise. I swear it. I'll do—what's right—by her."

From the forest he looked back. The Eskimo chief had returned to his somber watch. The cross gleamed a ghostly white against the thick blackness of the barren. He turned his face away for the last time, and there filled him the oppression of a leaden hand, a thing that was both dread and fear. Scottie Deane was dead—dead and in his grave, and yet he walked with him now, at his side. He could feel the presence, and that presence was like a warning, stirring strange thoughts within him. He turned back to the cabin, and entered softly. Pelletier was asleep. Little Isabel was breathing the sweet forgetfulness of childhood. He stooped and kissed her, silken curls, and for a long time he stood with one of those soft curls between his fingers. In a few years more, he thought, it would be the darker gold and brown of the woman's hair—of the woman he loved. Slowly a great peace entered into him. After all, there was more than hope ahead for him. She—the older Isabel—knew that he loved her as no other man in the world could love her. He had given proof of that. And now she was free, and he was going to her.

(To be continued)

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mountain top, out of this smothered hole in the ground. Her figure, glimmering white in a window light as she came up the pathway, made the only point of hope and interest for him in the whole night of gloom.

She said at once, as she sat down beside him: "Well, I'm leaving. She told Mrs. Slauber what she overheard me saying to you last night. The doctor notified me that he can't have me stealing his patients."

"You're leaving?"

"I'm turned out."

"Then," he said, even gaily, "so am I."

"Where are you going?"

"I'll carry my distinguished patronage to whatever sanitarium, you—"

"But you see," she cut in, "Dr. Slauber's angry. He won't give me a reference. I'll probably not be able to get anything around here. I may have to go back to New York. I can always get private nursing in town."

"Ah," he said, "I'm forbidden New York."

"Or perhaps I'll just retire to my bungalow. I have some money saved up."

There was plain desertion of him in her worried "Only I don't like to leave you."

His silence seemed to accuse her. She explained hurriedly: "If I had enough money to build, I might start a little place up there myself. That was my idea in buying it. Then you could be my first patient. Or you could come along now if we had anyone else to come, but the shack's so small—it's really only one big room with a little lean-to on one end for a kitchen. So that's out of the question. Haven't you any of your own people anywhere? It seems a shame that you should be here alone."

He studied the darkness. "No one that I should care to impose on. I have a sister in Brookline, but she has a husband and three young children. I haven't even let her know I'm ill. It would only annoy her."

"Well," she summed it up—with what he felt was a smile though he could not see it—"we're a pair of poor homeless orphans, sure enough." She added, in another voice: "I feel sometimes the way you said you did—'empty-handed.' I'm nearly thirty-two, and I haven't a thing to show for it."

"You have your wonderful health—and you are just beginning life."

"That's just like a man," she replied, almost contemptuously. "With a woman, at thirty-five, things begin to go from her instead of coming to her—if she hasn't put her youth into a home and a husband and children. I didn't take my chance when I had it."

"You couldn't," he said gently. "You couldn't have taken him."

"No," she cried, "so I turned him over to the women who would! I cheated myself of all that life had to offer—trouble mostly, I suppose, but even trouble's better than nothing at all."

"What a waste! . . . If he could have behaved himself, you would have made him a very happy man."

"Do you really think so?"

He patted her on the shoulder, paternally. "My dear girl," he said, "I know it from experience. You have all sorts of character. Pardon it from an incurable wreck, but I shall miss you more than I can tell you."

"I hate to leave you in this hole," she sighed.

"Oh, what matter! What matter!" He leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees. "I'll get through with it fast enough."

"You'd be so much better in the bungalow. It's right in the pine woods—up high. And it seems so perfectly absurd," she broke out, "that we can live together under one roof here and can't there—two elderly, grown-up, sensible people!"

He allowed himself to sink into the depths, with a sort of weary contentment that the struggle was over. Her voice continued above him, all but unregarded: "If it could

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only be arranged some way I'd be so glad to have some one to take care of—some one that I had some interest in. I've lost heart lately. I haven't even been doing my work here. And now I'm up against a blank wall. I simply can't face New York. I can't stand it. I'd go mad for the hills, cooped up in their cramped little flats. . . . If we could arrange it, you could pay me whatever you pay here. That part of it would be easy. And I'll bet I could put you on your feet, too. And if I couldn't, you'd be kept comfortable and happy anyway. That's the great thing, isn't it?"

He replied, in an indifferent mumble: "I couldn't think of imposing myself on anyone to that extent."

She put her hand on his arm. "Now, listen," she said determinedly. "It would be no imposition at all. It would be a godsend to me. I'd be tickled to death to have you. If I were a man I could simply invite you to spend the summer with me and let you pay your part of the expenses, and if you liked me I suppose you'd come. Wouldn't you? If I were a man?"

He rubbed his forehead, worried by this insistent discussion of the impossible. "There's nothing I'd like better—"

"Well, then," she faltered, "that's the way I feel, too. We have the thing in our own hands. I think we ought to be able to find some way—"

It was the trembling note in her voice, rather than her words, that roused him. "Don't humiliate me," he said. "You know I can't accept any such—"

"It isn't," she protested. "It isn't. I need you, I guess, as much as you need me. I don't care a cent about people, and I haven't any that care about me—nor what I do, either. I think we're old enough to do as we please anyway. We—"

"Don't!" he almost groaned. "You know that's—"

"Well, then," she flamed up, angrily, "will you do this? Will you go down to Clareyville and get—" she choked on it—"a license or something, and then we can do as we please."

He had covered his face with his hands. She hesitated for one horrible moment of conventional pride, and then, slipping her arms about his shoulders, she began, in a hurried, whispering rush of words: "I couldn't go away and leave you here. I haven't had anyone I could even talk to. I've enjoyed it so much. It would make me so happy. I just wanted to have some one that—that meant something to me. . . . I—I've never done anything in all my life that you'd need to be ashamed of, and I know you haven't. Maybe you think, because Corky was so wild—but he was never anything but just boyish and sweet with me. . . . You need some one to take care of you. Don't you? I know I'm not like the people you've been used to, but you bet I can learn anything that's going, and I don't have to be told, either. And listen. It isn't as if we'd only known each other two or three days: both knowing Corky that way it's as if we were old acquaintances."

She understood at last that he was trying to hide tears—the tears of weakness, of a gratitude that was pathetic to itself, of an abject relief that suffered from a wounded pride—and she caught his hand and pressed it against her cheek in a mothering tenderness that did not express itself in words, patting his shoulder when she could not speak.

"I'll bet I'll make you well, too. I can cook like a nigger mammy. I'd die up there alone. I just had to come back to nursing. I couldn't stand it. . . . There! Be a good boy, now. Don't make me feel that you don't want to come." He kissed her hand dumbly. She clung to him, with a little gulping, strangled laugh. "I'm awful. . . . but I don't care. I'm going to make you happy, too. . . . Say—say you're not ashamed of me."

IV

One evening toward the end of July, Kirkwood and his wife sat on the veranda of their bungalow enjoying the last splendors of a

sunset that had been burning down the sky for half an hour in one of those great professional effects of cloud and color that are so magnificent it seems as if the sky thought this was to be the final sunset of all time and crowded the flaming highways of heaven with a marching pageant of universal regret and glory. Kirkwood had been up on the topmost rocks of the hill behind their cottage and had called to her to come; and they had stood, bareheaded, like a pair of children in a cyclorama, pointing and applauding and crying out upon the gorgeously that spread from horizon to horizon, on all sides and overhead, in a continual changing splendor. When the color had faded from all but the western clouds, they came back to their cottage and sat in their "hickory" rockers, a little breathless and satiated, smiling at the cool green radiance of the afterglow where an evening star was already glimmering.

He was roughly dressed in a costume that might have served either for a lumberman or for a hunter's guide—bearded, sun-burned, and, if not robust-looking, at least weather-hardened. The hollows had filled in his cheeks, and the wrinkles around his eyes had an expression of whimsicality. She looked the contented young housewife. They rocked their chairs, side by side, in the silence of complete understanding.

It was a strange thing, but he felt that he had not begun to live until he had been condemned to death. His world had gone down in shipwreck under him. He had been cast on the bare rocks and basic elements of existence—freed from the conventions, from the claims of family, from the determining expectations of friends, as if he were marooned on a Crusoe Island—and he felt that he had found, at last, the real values in life. He was even happy.

A hermit thrush had begun to sing in the woods behind them, slowly turning its round notes as if in a meditative virtuosity. "What are you smiling at?" she asked.

It had struck him that those sunset hills were eternal, imperishable, undying; doltish! He had smiled at them in a mood of superior mortality!

He turned to her and stretched out a lazy, affectionate hand. "I'm smiling because I'm happy. Whose fault is that?"

She slapped gaily at his fingers. "Old Softy," she teased. "Do you think I have nothing to do but sit and hold hands in the twilight? I'm hungry." She rose to lean down over the back of his chair, cuddling against his neck. "Perch and broiled bacon and potato cakes and tea," she promised him.

"Ten!"

"To keep you awake, sleepyhead. I want to finish reading 'Foma' to you to-night, so you can begin dictating to-morrow."

"Do you think I'm strong enough to work?" he asked, with mock anxiety.

She shook his head from side to side. "Fatty!"

When she had left him, he looked out at the mountains again and the same superior smile as before settled slowly around his eyes.

Continued from page 12

THE CHANGING YEARS

the floor; he turned clumsily around; it was Mrs. Brooker.

"Here's a hunk of gingerbread—hot—right out of the pan—for your supper," she said. "And I wanted to tell you when it comes to buyin' stores, I'll come over and make out a list such as a woman 'd want."

"It's sure kind o' ye," said the old man letting his ham smoke, as he received the plate and carefully set it on the table. "Won't ye set down, Mrs. Brooker?"

"I d' know but I will; you see how 'tis with us old 'uns, Mr. Croary, specially when besides fat, there's rheumatism; it's been workin' on me for seven years, now—gets a little worse every winter. Now, Elly, I s'pose, couldn't have rheumatism?"