

WHEN THE SEA RAN DRY

A SHORT STORY

BY JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD



FATHER CHARLES called himself one of the hard little knots of humanity. He loved the storming elements.

He loved the bitterness and the hardship of perilous achievement; he loved fighting men and fighting things—not fisticuffs and war-play, but fighting of a chivalric if at times a somewhat barbaric sort.

Twenty of his forty-odd years had been spent in the wilderness, following men's souls into the vast and empty spaces. His Te Deums were filled with the solemn voices of a world where he had found God as he could have found Him in no other world; his prayers were savage in their fight for humanity; his heart was bigger than the man.

For years he had beaten paths over the great northland, founding a mission here, preaching a little there—traveling from place to place in his shiny black coat, praying, burying, saving, and destroying.

He was intensely human, and a living sacrilege to orthodoxy, for he fought like a man, and he took pleasure like a man; and because of this he accomplished what ten other men could never have done.

He was little, and his hair was turning a bit gray; but the muscles of his arms were like ribbed iron, and his fingers had in them a grip achieved from almost a quarter of a century's wrestling with savage things.

When Forsythe, the government timber-agent, and his closest friend,

suggested to him one day that his creed was in many ways unlike the creed of his cassocked brethren, Father Charles's keen little eyes twinkled with flashes like lightning, and he said:

"Oh, man, man, what better can a mortal do than follow the ways of his own Creator? Ye have pictured Christ as a man with his hair parted in the middle; your artists have drawn Him as a woman in a man's raiment; you have distorted Him from a lion into a lamb; you have given Him to your children and to posterity as a weakling. You, and your famous artists, and your writers who have turned this mightiest of men into mere woman, are false. For He was a fighter. His voice was like no other human thunder that has ever rolled across the ages.

"He sent furniture crashing down the steps of a temple. He called Himself the sword of slaughter, and urged men to possess themselves of swords, if they had to barter their coats for them. He fought for the world, and He won its salvation. His tears were a man's tears, and not a woman's. He possessed His own plan for saving the world, and He carried it out in His own way. And so, when I, in my own small ways, strive to achieve my own small ends in His service, I absolve myself at times from creeds and laws as they are written."

This was Father Charles, the man of solitude—and of mystery.

Twenty years in a primitive world had stored, one after another, within his black-frosted breast such secrets of life, such stories of death and of

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pain, such human tales the whereof there was almost no beginning and no end, that he might have cast the discredit of disbelief upon himself by the telling of them. But they were buried deep, and mostly inviolable. Only now and then, when the black forests were thrashing and moaning in storm, did that mood enter into him, when he would occasionally unburden himself to Forsythe of some strange happening of a long dead past.

It was such a night—now. The August moon had not shone a glimmer in the sky. Over the few log dwellings of the post and mission at Abitibi the sky hung heavy and ink-black, rumbling with crashes of thunder. Vivid lightning flashes darted through the rolling gloom, and ten thousand black pine-trees began to wail and mourn in the gales that preceded the threatened deluge.

Out of the darkness the two windows in the small log cabin tenanted by Father Charles glowed with yellow light, and inside the one room of his home the missionary was pacing slowly back and forth, with his hands clasped behind his back. Forsythe had been with him for an hour, and not one reminiscence had he heard. More than once he could see that Father Charles was laboring under some tremendous emotion which he was struggling to suppress; and now, as the rumbling thunder shook the night, and the wailing tumult of the forest grew louder about them, he saw the nervous little flashes in those steel-gray eyes which always seemed to him like reflections of the darting fires in the heavens.

To him this was the most marvelous phenomenon of his lonely life—the effect of storm, of crashing elements, of the thunder and the winds upon Father Charles; and he was not surprised when his companion turned out the light, leaving them in darkness.

"Storm, storm," said Father Charles, and his voice was almost fierce in its intensity. "It is magnificent because it makes you think. And

when you think, with the gods roaring in the heavens, you are looking at yourself through a microscope held by your own hands, and see how insignificant you are. Ugh!"

He struck a match to light one of Forsythe's cigars, and the glow lighted up his pale, thin face, staring straight through the gloom to where the other was sitting.

"It is curious," he said, as the match died out, "how all things travel in a circle—the sun, the earth, the stars—how every event in life is a boomerang that will return some day, to bring joy or sorrow, new life or new death. It is a marvelous world, a world of ilimitable mystery, and the deeper you strive to fathom the weaker your mind becomes. Wonderful things happen, and when you do not account for them in the name of God you cannot account for them at all. The boomerangs of life are for us all. Perhaps you launch one that will not return until the tenth generation; perhaps your great-grandfather launched one that will travel its cycle of a hundred and fifty years, and then fall at your feet.

"Forsythe, there are some things of which a man must unburden himself. Here is one. Thirty years ago to-night something happened. On its thirtieth anniversary a boomerang has fallen at my feet. It came to-night, in the storm. It came from out of the black sky. I have picked it up. And its message is this: that I shall launch it forth again—with a prayer this time, instead of a curse. But—this is personal. It must bore you."

"No," said Forsythe, and his eagerness cut like a knife through the darkened room. "Go on, I beg of you!"

A white glare of lightning revealed Father Charles for an instant, pacing with his hands behind his back.

"A confession," he laughed softly, as the blackness shut him in again, and there was a strange gentleness in his voice. "Thirty years ago yesterday there lived a lad in Donegal whose heart was glad because it was filled

...some years ago
...some had in
...that was broke
...had been stolen
...the parents
...Lough Swilly; she
...was as simple
...the flowers, and she
...of beauty. What
...?

...that space, between one rising
...and the setting of another,
...was battered body and soul to an
...Englishman who was setting out for
...America. The story is short. Her
...beauty was pleasure for a time. And
...then—abandoned—she died. Thus
...the boomerang was launched. It shot
...the Donegal lad out into the world.
...He found her grave; he traveled; he
...learned. Since years and years ago he
...has been known as—Father Charles."

Forsythe had guessed those last two words. But he was not prepared for the revelation of the lightning flash that came as they were uttered. Father Charles had stopped in his pacing.

He was standing in the middle of the cabin, and his two hands were clenched high above his head, as though even as he spoke he was calling-down malediction from out the blackness.

"The thing came home to me in this way," he said, and there was no sign of passion in his voice. "It has come to me in a manner so strange that I have accepted it as a sign of the hand of God. You have not been here long enough to know Vermonte, the Frenchman, or his daughter Eloise. At some time—somewhere—Vermonte has been a gentleman, and Eloise, who was seventeen yesterweek, is a little marvel of wild-flower beauty, with long black, shining braids, black eyes, red lips, and a love in her heart for young Jean Coulté that is deeper than the seas.

"I have taught them for years, Jean and Eloise, and a sweeter love than theirs I have never seen. Now, it is strange, is it not, that Vermonte

should sell his daughter just as that Donegal lad's sweetheart was sold to another? But 'tis true. I don't know the price; I have only guessed it. All the powers of heaven and earth cannot move the father. He has accepted the price. I have offered him double whatever was paid to turn traitor to his word, but he says that it is impossible.

"I have gone to Eloise, urging her to rebel, offering her the sanctuary of my faith as a guard against evil, but she, too, says that it is impossible not to stand by the bargain, though it breaks her heart. Voluntarily she gives up her soul and her body. And for what? *That* is the question; Forsythe. What is this marvelous price? That price must be a wonderful thing, must it not?—and yet whatever it is, it must be less strange than what I have to tell you.

"For I found to-day that the man who has purchased her virgin beauty is the son that was born to that Donegal lad's sweetheart a year before she died! In this way, Forsythe, has the boomerang of fate returned home—after thirty years to a day."

Father Charles went to the door and opened it, standing with his face to the storm. In a lull of the wind sweeping through the pine-tops there came the sudden beat of rain, and then in one mighty, signal-crash of thunder the clouds above sent down their floods in a downpour so heavy and fierce that the forest shivered and bent under it, and Father Charles jumped back and closed the door. Forsythe had struck a match and was lighting the lamp.

"We can't enjoy our cigars in the dark," he excused himself. "Mine is half gone, and I haven't sensed it, because I haven't been able to see the smoke." He looked earnestly at Father Charles. "Besides—I want to hear the rest of this story—with the lamp on."

"There isn't much more to tell you—now," replied Father Charles. "I have picked up the boomerang, but its

journey is not ended—only a half of its story is born. See, I hold it in this empty hand, and to-morrow I fling it out into space again; and when its story is finally ended you and I may be centuries dead. I mystify you, but the logic is simple. I have gone to the father; I have gone to the girl, and, lastly, I have gone to the man—her purchaser. He not only refuses to consider my pleas; he even laughs at me, and even curses what he calls my black-frocked interest in an affair that is not my own. I know what will happen.

"It has happened a thousand times in these vast reaches of wilderness, where a man may be known to-day and lose himself forever to-morrow. To-morrow he and Vermonte are to start for Moose Factory with Eloise. He says they are to be married there. And then—what will happen? Just this: This man is a city man. He has lived where life is swift, and he has lived the swift life. I have learned that his business will keep him in the North a little more than a year. During this year he will enjoy the companionship and beauty of little Eloise. Then—he will disappear. Do you understand? She will die, as a certain Donegal lad's sweetheart died years and years ago, abandoned, hopeless, ruined. But, see—"

With the sudden quickness which made men wonder at him, Father Charles darted to the door, reopened it, drew back his arm, and then made a movement as though he were launching an object out into the storm.

"Thus do I send forth once more the thing which fell at my feet to-night," he cried, and his voice was deep and filled with passion. "I send it forth with a prayer to the most just God that it strike where it should strike—deep home. Thirty years ago to-night this boomerang was sent spinning through the years by the hand of the devil—to-night it is thrown back by the hand of God! Its story may never end; but within this week, we

will know whether it is to begin in love and hope or in tragedy and death."

"You mean—" said Forsythe, coming up behind him.

"That I have arranged to accompany them on their journey to Moose Factory," said Father Charles.

"You have a plan for saving the girl?"

"None. My brain can conceive of no plan whereby she can be saved without crime. But the prayers of men and the hand of God work most marvelously together, and we shall see: I shall at least prevent one thing."

"And that?"

"Murder," said Father Charles quietly. "With the death of Jean Coulté's hope, everything dies for him. You understand? Perhaps—at the right moment—the Donegal lad might have killed. To-night Jean prays with me. He is determined to follow us to-morrow. And if our prayers are of no avail—if nothing happens between here and Moose Factory—nothing that we can foresee—"

"He will kill this Englishman?"

"Yes, he has sworn it on the crucifix."

For a few moments the two men stood looking silently out into the beating night. Then Forsythe laid his hand upon the little missionary's shoulder.

"Father," he said, "the government has sent me to map out the northern limits of black ash and balsam pine. My journey takes me north. Will you let me accompany you to-morrow?"

"I want you," exclaimed Father Charles, turning and closing the door. "I want you, Forsythe—of all men. You have spoken the words I have been waiting for. Yes—we will go together."

Father Charles's last words that night were these:

"The price—this marvelous price that is being paid for a handful of human flesh!—the price that love, hope, life itself cannot offset—what

must it be? This half-Englishman must be rich—rich beyond all riches—in *something*, and what can that something be?"

And he smiled mysteriously into Forsythe's eyes.

The August storm was followed by sunshine and the sweet, wild breaths that were not yet touched by autumn chill. Early in the day that followed the night of storm two canoes started down the river from Abitibi. In the first canoe were Vermonte, the half-Englishman Falkner, and the girl; in the second, which followed close behind, were Father Charles and Forsythe.

Forsythe had shaken hands with Falkner, he had quickly measured the other's thin veneer of affability, and his judgment was as quickly followed by a feeling of repulsion and dislike. He gave both Falkner and Vermonte to understand that it was but accident that had brought him into their company, and that his personal acquaintance with Father Charles was but a few days old.

Business, he said, was taking him to Moose Factory—which was true. He did not express himself until he was alone in the canoe with Father Charles.

"I'd take him for a scoundrel in a crowd," he said. "He's bad—rotten to the bottom, or I miss my guess. Watch out when you see animal-red in a man's eyes. Once, when he looked at her—back there—I felt like striking him. She's a little beauty! I can't understand—"

"Nor I," interrupted Father Charles from his place in the bow. "See her now—looking back at us. Is there not almost an angel's pathos in that face? She alone of those three knows that I am going to Moose Factory to be near her. And yet she has no hope. What a beautiful sacrifice—scarce more than a child, and yet a woman—a little wild-flower as pure as the stars! And the price—the price—"

"It must be more than money," said Forsythe.

"Yea, a thousand times more, else life itself is a lie!" shot back Father Charles. "I have more than guessed that."

Father Charles had little to say during their first half day in the canoe. Forsythe could see that he was in one of those strange moods that came over him when he was deeply absorbed in thought, and he did not interrupt his companion's meditations.

Even when occasionally they ran abreast of the other canoe, Father Charles maintained his stoic silence, dipping his paddle in and out of the glistening stream with the monotonous regularity with which he might have counted the beads of his rosary. Once or twice Forsythe caught the dark eyes of the girl fixed upon him, and in her pallid face, in the wretchedness and despair that were already marring her wonderful young beauty, he read far more of the tragedy that was taking place than his friend had told him.

For an hour Father Charles had not spoken a word when, suddenly, he uttered a quick, low exclamation, and sat up rigid in the bow. He ceased paddling, and his hands gripped the birch-ribbed gunwales of the canoe. Forsythe could see the slow swelling of the veins in those hands, and he did not speak. Father Charles stared straight ahead of him for many minutes, and then, as unexpected as his cry had been, a laugh that was filled with a weird sort of joy broke from his lips.

He turned toward Forsythe, and there was a transformation in his face. His eyes burned with the strange fire that always filled them when he contemplated action, and the faintest flush of a sudden excitement had sprung into his smooth-shaven cheeks.

"The first answer to prayer!" he cried softly. "Forsythe, I have an idea. Back there I saw him playing flip-poker with Vermonte. They played for small stakes. See! they are turning into the shore now, to have

dinner in the shade of those balsams. I want you to engage him in play. And lose—lose! Do you understand? I want you to lose—three or four games—for small sums of money."

Forsythe stared, and Father Charles laughed at the amazement in his face. "Lose—and see what will happen," he said. "Will you?"

Forsythe had barely time to say yes before Vermonte, from the shore, was reaching out for the nose of their canoe. Father Charles got out first, and he followed. Eloise was already busy with arrangements for preparing food, and as her father joined her the timber-agent casually approached Falkner, proffering one of the half-dozen cigars he had brought with him.

"By George, but it's hot!" he exclaimed. "No wonder we grow strawberries up here so thick they turn your boots red, Falkner. I move we put off our afternoon's work until it gets a little cooler."

"It is hot," replied Falkner, accepting the cigar with a nod of thanks.

"And I'm lost," groaned Forsythe; "absolutely and irretrievably lost! There are two things I've got to have in the woods: my pipe and my cards. And I forgot the cards."

Falkner's reddish eyes brightened instantly.

"Do you play?" he asked.

"Solitaire and a little flip-poker."

"Then I'll save you, for I have a deck in my pocket," said Falkner with sudden animation. "If you don't mind, we'll have a game or two while they're getting grub."

"A dollar a game is my limit, if we play for stakes," said Forsythe.

They seated themselves in the shade of a balsam, and as Falkner shuffled the cards the timber agent caught a look of exultation in the face of Father Charles. Even as he looked he saw the little missionary whisper a few hurried words to Eloise as Vermonte's back was turned to them. The game was not half over when Father Charles and the girl strolled leisurely down to

the river, leaving the Frenchman to finish the meal.

Falkner won that game. He won the second, and the third. Then Father Charles returned and looked down upon their play. He saw Forsythe lose his fourth game, and his fourth dollar.

"You play like a couple of children," he said, and there was a sneering emphasis in his voice that caused both men to look up with a start. His eyes were fixed on Falkner. They were filled with a glistening challenge. "Perhaps you would be afraid to play with a man who uses his brain," he added, speaking to him directly.

An angry flush shot into Falkner's face at the contempt in the other's manner.

"If you were not what you are I'd invite you to take a hand," he sneered. "There is no doubt but that your marvelous brain would soon strip me."

"The brain is everything," said Father Charles, and with a touch of his hand he moved Forsythe aside. "Miracles are but achievements of the brain, and when the brain is strong enough it can achieve anything, even to stopping the sun in the heavens and drying up the sea. You disbelieve, Falkner, because you are a wicked and brainless man. But it is so. Christ multiplied the fishes and the loaves. He drew water from rock, and He walked on the sea as though it were land. I will prove to you the power of mind over matter. I know this game you play, but I have seldom played it. I will pit my brain against your science and we will double the stakes you have been playing for."

Forsythe stared, scarcely believing the words he heard. Falkner's face turned redder, then white. An angry fire glowed in his reddish eyes as he dealt the cards. In an amazement that was almost stupor, Vermonte approached and gazed upon the strange scene with open mouth. Eloise stole to Forsythe's side, behind Falkner. She was trembling. A hectic flush was burning in her cheeks.

For an instant Forsythe took her hand, and it was as cold as ice. He looked into her eyes, filled with a strange terror, and then dropped her hand without speaking. A few moments later Falkner laughed in sneering triumph. Father Charles had blundered and lost the game. He continued to blunder, and as he lost game after game the fire in his eyes became brighter, and Falkner's contempt and growing hatred of his opponent began to find vent in occasional words.

"Your brain; your beautiful brain," he repeated again and again. "Yes, it is truly marvelous how your wonderful brain does work!"

Father Charles showed a little irritation.

"Conditions must be right," he said. "It is not always that one's mental strength can overcome physical science. My brain is not right—just now. Let us have dinner, and we will continue the experiment later."

Falkner gathered up the cards with another taunting laugh, and followed Vermonte and the girl. Father Charles remained behind. The angry fire left his eyes, and into them there entered that softer glow which Forsythe had often seen in moments of thankful prayer.

"God is with us," he murmured softly. "Come—let us eat!"

An hour later, when they were once more shooting down stream under the August sun, Forsythe leaned far forward and said:

"I understand your game now, Father. At the last you are going to play one great game of cards, with Eloise as the stake!"

The missionary turned so that he could see the other's questioning face.

"No, Forsythe, I shall not play cards for Eloise. I could never win, because Falkner cheats!"

"Then what in the name of—"

Father Charles resumed his paddling.

"Christ was a man and not a woman," he said, repeating his words of

the preceding evening. "He was a fighter. He went into the temple and fought the money-changers. He threw them out, and broke up their furniture. He fought with his hands, because it was necessary, and because these men were desecrating the temple and insulting His God. I have gambled today, but I have not sinned. I am fighting—not against money-changers, but against soul-snatchers. And the fight? What is it to be? Forsythe, you must wait—and see. For God is the moving Hand."

That night Falkner and Father Charles played again, and always Falkner won. Forsythe's bewilderment increased. He observed that Father Charles let slip no opportunity whereby he might still further increase Falkner's dislike of himself.

He irritated and at times enraged the other man, even while he was losing. His tongue was like the sting of fox-bite, and yet he was at all times cool and smiling. Incessantly he dwelt before Falkner upon the superiority of mind over matter.

"He's stark, raving mad," exclaimed Falkner to Forsythe as they sat smoking their pipes after the others had gone to bed. "His own brain is cracked. I've won sixty dollars off him, and he's such a fool that he still goes on playing."

"He is a bit peculiar," agreed Forsythe.

The next morning Father Charles insisted on playing a game before the day's journey was begun. A gambling mania seemed to have taken possession of him, and the play was resumed when they stopped again for dinner. When Vermonte called them he managed to whisper aside to Forsythe:

"Take Falkner off into the bush after we have dined. I want to talk with Eloise—alone."

On a pretext that he wished to get Falkner's opinion of a certain stretch of timber visible from the summit of a near-by ridge, Forsythe drew the other away as soon as they had finished

their dinner. Half an hour later they returned. Half an hour later they steadied the canoes and felt of the girl's hands and face. Then he looked Vermonte straight in the eyes.

There was no change in Father Charles, but Forsythe was puzzled by the appearance of the girl. There was an unnatural flush in her cheeks, her black eyes shone with dazzling brightness, and as she went to enter her father's canoe she suddenly placed a hand to her head and almost fell.

"I am sick," she cried in a low voice. "Oh, my head hurts me so!"

Father Charles nodded significantly at Vermonte.

"It is as I told you," he said. "The fever."

The canoes shot out into the river, and as Vermonte and the half-Englishman forged ahead, Father Charles turned so that Forsythe could see the exultant light in his eyes.

"Fever!" he laughed back softly. "Did you observe that wild flush in her cheeks, Forsythe? It was the flush of moose-flowers crushed between the palms of my hands and rubbed in well while you had Falkner up on the ridge. Fever? Yes, it is a fever—of a sort they have never known before. Now—watch what will happen soon."

Father Charles began to scrutinize the shores sharply. Mile after mile slipped behind them, and Forsythe knew that he was searching for something which would appear very soon. Whatever it was, he never knew, for at a certain bend in the river Father Charles raised a hand above his head and shouted:

"Ho, we are coming to the Big Bend Rapids!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when there occurred a sudden commotion in the canoe ahead of them. The girl suddenly flung herself forward upon her face with shrill cries of pain, and in a dozen powerful strokes Father Charles sent his own canoe alongside the other. Eloise was sobbing and moaning, with her little brown hands clutching in her hair.

"Wait!" he commanded.

He leaned over, while Forsythe

steadied the canoes and felt of the girl's hands and face. Then he looked Vermonte straight in the eyes.

"I, at least, know something of malady, if not of cards," he said. "It is as I told you, Vermonte. It is the fatal fever which killed hundreds of our people two years ago. There is but one hope, and that is to find some Labrador tea."

Vermonte's face was white with horror. He had not forgotten the terrible fever-death of two years before.

Father Charles straightened himself. "I have been in this country often," he said. "Just above the Big Bend Rapids a small stream branches off to the east, and empties into James's Bay, ten miles from here. We will find Labrador tea there. We have no time to lose."

He picked up his paddle, and in an instant Forsythe and he were in the lead. Ten minutes later they turned into the branch stream. The others were a hundred yards behind. Father Charles half turned his head, and cried back softly to Forsythe: "The hand of God is with us! We are going to win!"

"For the love of that God, tell me what is going to happen!" begged the timber-agent.

"A miracle!" replied Father Charles. "I tell you that all matter is but zero to one great mind, and that before the rising of another sun your booted feet shall tread where the sea has run dry!"

Was this madness, after all? Was Falkner right? Had Father Charles gone mad?

Forsythe made no answer to his companion's strange words, but he dug his paddle deeper, and not once during that swift race to the bay did he see the other's face. When they stopped the sea swept out before them farther than the eyes could reach.

The beach was low and grass-grown, shelving steeply back, and Father Charles was the first to spring ashore. Only his eyes were strange to For-

sythe. They were filled with the old fighting fire. About them the Labrador tea grew to their knees, and by the time the second canoe had arrived Father Charles had collected an armful of the herb.

"Place the tents up on that little knoll," he commanded. "But first build a fire. We must make the tea at once."

Half an hour later, in one of the two tents, Eloise was sipping a bitter concoction held to her lips by Father Charles. No one knew what happened besides that drinking of tea. When the missionary joined the other three he was wiping his forehead with a big plaid handkerchief, and his face wore an expression of relief.

"Praise be to God, we're just in time!" he murmured devoutly. "Now, Falkner, I'll play you a game of cards!"

The play went on until dusk. Twice Father Charles interrupted himself, once to carry a cup of bitter tea to Eloise, again to eat the supper which Vermonte prepared.

When it grew dark a lantern was lighted and the play was continued in the second tent. At last Forsythe broke away and went out alone into the night. It was dark and intensely quiet. There was not a breath of wind in the motionless spruce and balsam, and so far as he could see through the gloom the great bay lay without a ripple.

He sat down, and for an hour was absorbed in thoughts which made him more and more restless as the night lengthened. Was it possible that Father Charles was at all deranged, that something had gone wrong in his head? He asked himself the question a hundred times. And if not, what did all this mean—the gambling, the feigned sickness of Eloise, and that wild and ceaseless talk of the power of mind over matter?

For a long time he walked up and down the shore, and then he looked at his watch. It was after midnight,

and there was still a light in the tent. In a little more than two hours the early midsummer dawn of the north would be breaking. Father Charles must indeed be mad—to gamble through the whole of a night!

A loud laugh drew him once more to the tent. It was Falkner's laugh, and something in it sent a shiver of disgust through him. Then he heard Father Charles. He was talking swiftly, excitedly; and when he reentered the tent the little missionary had risen to his feet, and stood with clenched hands and blazing eyes, while Falkner looked up at him from his seat with a sneering smile.

"Ye laugh at the power of miracle, at the power of God Himself," Father Charles was saying. "I tell you, Falkner, that the sun shines, the stars glow, the earth moves only because the human mind dares not to stop them! I tell you that when we once possess His faith we, too, can walk on the water and rise through the air. And I have that faith. It is consuming me to-night." His bent figure was tense, his face white, his voice rose on the still night with an awesome intensity. "I have that faith to-night, faith to perform miracles—yea, even to the drying up of that sea out there!" he cried.

"Your mind is strong enough to dry up a sea, but not strong enough to win at cards—eh?" taunted Falkner.

Father Charles seated himself where he had been a few minutes before, facing Falkner. Forsythe saw no madness in his face. It was terribly calm.

"Falkner, the spirit comes upon one only at times," he said. "It has descended upon me now—now! Yes, I can beat you at cards. I can beat you at anything. But when this wonderful power has entered into me I do not play for small stakes. See—"

He had thrust a hand into an inner pocket of his shiny black coat, and now he drew forth a buckskin bag. In an instant he had emptied out upon the

box between them a shimmering pile of gold coins. Falkner gave a sudden gasp. His eyes glittered. The laugh left his face as he looked at Father Charles.

"Will you cover that stake?" cried Father Charles. "Fifteen hundred dollars in gold! Will you cover it—in one last bet?"

"My God, I can't!" exclaimed Falkner. "I have two hundred. I will play you for two hundred at a stake."

"All—or nothing," replied Father Charles, replacing the gold in the bag. "All or—" Suddenly he stopped, and this time there came a taunting smile into his own face. "Falkner, I will give you a chance," he said. "You cannot win, for God is with me. It is His hand and His brain that will play against you in this last game. I warn you. But I will still give you a chance. I will stake this bag of gold against Eloise. If I win she is to go with me, freely and without hindrance, and hereafter is to be subject to my guardianship. If you win, the gold is yours—and Eloise as well."

With a low and eager cry, Falkner began to shuffle the cards.

"I accept!"

"Hold!" exclaimed Father Charles, rising to his feet again. "It is not cards that I would play, Falkner. It is another and more wonderful game. You have sneered at the miracles of God, and have taunted me for my faith, so I will do a greater thing than to win at cards! Falkner, you have seen that sea out yonder. It reaches beyond your vision. I feel my power to-night, and I will prove it to you."

"To-morrow, with the dawn, there will be no sea where that sea now is! I swear to you that it shall be driven back! Upon my knees, in this tent, I will pray to the great Creator of all things, and He will answer my prayer, and the sea will drop away, so that where it lies deep and still out there to-night, you may to-morrow walk upon its bed for many miles without so much

as wetting your knees. Upon this miracle I stake my gold!"

"Father," expostulated Forsythe, taking him gently by the arm, "come! You must not make this wager. It is madness. The heat of the sun has made you sick. Come!"

He attempted to pull him to the door of the tent, but Father Charles jerked his arm free.

"Mad or sane!" he exclaimed, "that is my wager."

Falkner had jumped to his feet, and now he held out a hand.

"I accept!" he cried hoarsely. "Give the gold to Vermonte. He will hold the stakes—the money and the girl."

Father Charles handed the buckskin bag to the Frenchman. Then he turned to Forsythe.

"You hear!" he said, his eyes flashing into the other's face. "You hear, Forsythe! And now, gentlemen"—the soft change in his voice was almost startling—"now—you will seat yourselves there—and wait for the dawn. Falkner, you must at least respect your God sufficiently to let me pray undisturbed."

Before them all he sank upon his knees, and prayed for the miracle that would save his gold and Eloise. And as if the first words of that prayer were a signal to some invisible hand, the lantern-light began to slowly fade away, until with a final sputtering effort it died and left them in black gloom.

Forsythe shivered, and the voice of Father Charles rose, higher and higher, until it rang out in the deep stillness of the night like the notes of a clarion. Now that they could not see him, there was something in the missionary's voice and in his thrilling words of prayer that filled his tense-bodied listeners with a feeling of awe.

In that darkness, when Father Charles had finished, there was no laughter on Falkner's lips, and Vermonte crouched close against the wall of the tent, his fingers digging into the flesh of his palms. For many minutes

there was silence, broken only by the deep breath of men. Then Forsythe struck a match, and lighted his pipe.

For an instant he saw Father Charles's white face staring toward Falkner. The Englishman's jaws were set, his eyes wide open. In Vermonte's swarthy face was the fixed gaze of an animal. Then darkness came again. Without a tremor of passion or excitement in his voice the missionary spoke.

"Gentlemen, God has heard my prayer. *The sea is moving!*"

A deep-chested breath came from where Vermonte was hidden in the gloom. It was almost a groan of fear.

"The sea is moving," repeated Father Charles in a voice so low and solemn that it filled them with the portentous dread of a voice issuing from a grave. "It is receding. I see it sweeping back, inch by inch, foot by foot, yard by yard, until now the canoes are high and dry! Faster—faster—it leaps away now, more swiftly than man can run—"

Madness—was it madness? Forsythe's hand reached out and accidentally touched Vermonte. The Frenchman started as if struck. In the tent it was so still that he could hear the rapid tick-tick-tick of his watch. They waited, none speaking. Forsythe reloaded his pipe, and when he struck another match he looked at his watch.

"It is half past one," he said. "It will soon be dawn."

His voice sounded strange. Falkner moved, but did not speak.

"Going, going, going," murmured Father Charles in that terrible trance-like voice. "Where there was sea last night there is no sea to-day, and still the hand of God is thrusting it back. The water has passed beyond my vision—it is miles away. Behold the power of the unseen will! Gentlemen, go forth and see what the dawn brings. Seek for the sea that was, but is no more!"

He had dropped the flap of the tent, and now he opened it. Outside a pale

gray light was beginning to break the pall of gloom. Vermonte darted with the quickness of a cat after Father Charles. Falkner followed, and Forsythe was last.

The Frenchman reached the canoes first, and the cry which he sent back was scarce human in its sudden fear. The others ran to him and found him crouching beside one of the canoes.

The sea was gone!

As far as their eyes could reach out into the breaking darkness there was earth where there had been water. The northern dawn came swiftly, and farther and farther reached the land, dotted with pools of water, and with the narrow stream running through it like a dark and shimmering ribbon.

Then, with that mysterious suddenness which is almost startling, the gloom was dispersed like a fog before the sun, and even from Forsythe's lips there burst a sharp cry as he stared out upon miles and miles of black rock and earth where a few hours before there had been nothing but water.

Father Charles turned to the Englishman and Vermonte and held out his hand.

"A bargain is a bargain," he said, "whether it be made between man and man or between man and God. And this is both. I have won!"

Vermonte gave him the bag of gold.

And then, as he turned back toward the tents, he said in a low voice to Forsythe:

"It is God, my son, and not I. Listen! When you go back to your government look at the maps. You will find that at this certain point, which is seldom visited by man, James's Bay is very shallow. Its depth is from four to six feet for a distance of seven miles out. At low tide it is scarce two feet deep. But there comes a season once each year, the dry season in August, when at low tide *there is no sea here for seven miles!* You know this. Vermonte and Falkner are ignorant of this perfectly natural phenomenon. Ah, there is Eloise—my daughter now!

To-day—some time—we will meet. Jean Coulté and his canoe up the river, and I pledge you my word that I will make them man and wife within the first half-hour of their meeting, with you as witness."

Still Forsythe detained him.

"This price that the Englishman was paying for her," he said, "it will always remain a mystery?"

Father Charles laughed softly.

"The price? Have you not guessed? Yes, it will always remain a mystery, because of her. But if I were to make a guess, Forsythe, it would be this: that in years past there has been a crime, and that the Englishman holds a halter about Vermonte's neck."

Forsythe looked back.

Falkner and the Frenchman were still staring out into that empty space where the sea had been.

HAZING A HUSBAND

A SHORT STORY

BY FRANKLIN P. HARRY

"JAMES AUGUSTUS, I want the parlor stove put up, and I want it done this—very—night," said Mrs. Jenks firmly, as she followed him up-stairs.

"I've waited just as long as I intend to wait," she added, eying his singular haste in removing his street clothes.

It was his custom at this hour to doze over the evening paper, by the dining-room lamp, with no thought of changing his clothes except his shoes for his slippers.

Mollie knew the signs—James Augustus was up to something, but it wasn't to be dodging, if she could prevent it.

"But my dear," he gently expostulated, "surely not to-night. To-morrow, perhaps."

He fished about in the bureau drawer and triumphantly hauled a clean shirt from the bottom of the pile to Mollie's increased indignation, and suavely continued:

"I had entirely forgotten, until re-

minded this afternoon that the lodge gives its annual supper to-night, and the committee insists that I be there."

He paused long enough for the importance of this to sink in before he resumed.

"Every man of any consequence," assuming a most fatherly attitude toward her, "will be there. Surely you wouldn't have me miss it?"

Taking for granted that her plans, whatever they were, would certainly alter themselves in the face of such a compelling argument, even though she did not appear impressed, he airily added:

"We'll have to put it off a day or so longer."

"Yes—put it off a day or so longer," his wife flared back, mimicking him. "It's always put off and put off and put off. That stove's got to go up to-night," she insisted warmly and strenuously. "The weather may turn cold any day, now."

"Now, now, Mollie," soothed her husband, "don't excite yourself needlessly. To-morrow night we'll get