

King Grub

by
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Preston



*Illustrated by
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SHIFTY PETE lay stretched on the floor of the cabin where Lem Flane's blow had landed him.

"I'll learn you to fill yourself up with grub on the quiet, after we agreed to go short so as to make it last out!" exclaimed Flane. "Now, get up."

Pete slowly rose to his feet. His eyes glowed like a tiger's. He clenched his fists and then unclenched them helplessly. Lem was too big.

"I suppose you ain't never took nothing on the quiet," he said sullenly.

"Well, maybe I have and maybe I haven't," returned Flane; "but I ain't never took anything from a pardner of mine yet, if that is what you mean."

"We ain't pardners to hurt," sneered Pete.

"That's right, too," agreed Flane. "I wouldn't never have took up with a little runt like you, except you was the only human I knowed who was wishful to come up this far north of the Circle and see what was in the ground."

"Well, there ain't nothing," muttered Pete bitterly. "I was a fool."

"Like enough," assented Flane. "But we've got to get back down to the Koyukuk again, just the same. And we ain't going to, if you eat up all the grub before we start," he added savagely. "It's going to be a hard pull anyway, seeing as we lost all our dogs but one, when they went into that air-hole down on the big creek."

"The time you drove them into it," injected Pete spitefully.

"What's the use of raking that up?" demanded Flane. "I didn't know the air-hole was there, did I? And, anyway, I saved the grub and one dog."

Pete muttered something.

Flane stretched his big limbs, with a careless laugh.

"Now, look here, Pete, it ain't no use our jawing and pulling apart. We two are alone up here in this far-off frozen place, tied together tighter than man and wife; and we've got to stay by the grub and pull together till we get out, just the same as if we liked it."

Shifty Pete looked up with furtive eyes at big, selfish, domineering Lem Flane, and sourly acquiesced.

It was the outgrowth of necessity. It was the philosophy of the North. Everything — quarrels, blows, hatreds — had to give way, be put aside, in the face of the grim struggle for existence.

"Now, look here, Pete," went on Flane calmly. "If you take any more than your share of grub again, I'll kill you. I ain't got no use for you anyhow, but if you act halfway square we'll get along all right enough till we make it back to Bettles, down there on the river, and right then we quit! Understand?"

Pete nodded impassively.

"Now, here is the program," declared Flane, in his domineering voice. "We ain't got grub enough to risk staying any longer. In the morning we will shovel out the dirt that's thawed by the fire we put in the drift this afternoon. We will give it that one more chance to show up something, and then we'll pull our freight. We ought to make it back to the river in two weeks — and we'll get there hungry, too," he added grimly. "We have stayed 'most too long already, hunting for something that ain't here, and we've got to travel hard to make the grub last out."

It grew colder in the night, and the cabin was a long time warming up the next morning. Pete shivered and kept the stove crammed full of crackling wood. Flane looked at him contemptuously. "I guess you are more at home in Arizony, Pete, than in Alaska," he commented, as they put on their fur caps and mittens and started out.

The drift that they were working in was some distance from the cabin, around a bend in the creek, and hidden by a clump of timber.

Flane walked in the lead. As they went along, he looked across the desolate fields of snow.

"There is miles of it to travel before we are out of this," he muttered.

As they clambered down the hole and entered the drift, he said: "We'll just shovel the gravel behind us, Pete, and then we'll take a pan from bed rock as far in as we can get, and see what's in it."

After they had finished their work, they came blinking back into the daylight, Flane carrying a pan of gravel on his arm.

"I bet there ain't nothing in it," grumbled Pete.

"You never can tell," returned Flane. "We'll know more about it after we have panned it out. What makes you limp?" he asked. "What's the matter with you?"

"A rock fell on my foot in the drift," answered Pete. "It ain't nothing. I'll put some Pain-Killer on it."

As they rounded the bend in the creek, Flane stopped dead still in his tracks and stared.

"What's that smoke?" he cried. "Where is the cabin? By heaven, it's burned down!"

The pan of gravel dropped from his arm and clattered noisily on the trail.

The two men raced forward. In a moment they were standing beside the still burning ruins of the cabin.

"The grub!" The words came through Pete's white lips almost in a whisper, as if he feared to speak them, even to think them.

"It's in there!" returned Flane. "Burnt to ashes! Every bit of it!"

Pete began pulling madly at the ruins.

"Quit that," snarled Flane. "Can't you see that everything is burnt up? Nothing could stand that heat. Even the guns are in there somewhere, with the stocks burnt off and the barrels twisted up. You heated up the cabin good and plenty this morning, you infernal fool!" he ejaculated fiercely. "I hope you are warm enough now!"

"What will we do?" quavered Pete.

"Do!" snapped Flane. "We'll start for the Koyukuk right now!"

"What will we eat?"

"Eat! How do I know? What will we eat if we stay here? It's lucky I hung our snowshoes on the tree there, instead of putting them in the cabin. We've got them to go on, anyway, and they say the strings make good eating at a pinch. I ain't never tried them — yet."

Pete looked around hopelessly; then his eyes brightened. "There is the dog," he said, pointing.

"What good is he?" growled Flane. "There is nothing to pull."

"He is good to eat!"

"Sure!" cried Flane. "You ain't such a darn fool, after all. We'll let him follow us on the hoof, as they say down in Arizony, till — till — till we need him. Come on. Every minute counts now! It ain't no trouble to get ready, because we ain't got nothing to get ready. Here is my ax sticking in this chopping-block. That's lucky! Your'n was in the cabin. I'll break trail. Come on!"

All the rest of the day, and far into the moonlit night, the two men traveled steadily on, hardly exchanging a word, the dog following in their snowshoe trail, a gaunt shadow in the rear.

At last they stopped and camped for a few hours — a very few, for their need to get on was desperate. Without food and without guns, theirs was a race with starvation.

The Arctic spring was beginning, and the

intense cold of winter was over; but the nights were still bitter, and the men were stiff and hungry. The dog huddled about the fire with them.

"I wish that Pain-Killer wasn't burnt up," grumbled Pete fretfully. "I'd like to put some on my foot."

The next march was a long one, Flane setting the pace relentlessly, hour after hour. Pete fell behind at times, and Flane heard him groan.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Why don't you keep up?"

"It's my foot," answered Pete; "it hurts."

"This ain't no time for a sore foot," returned Flane harshly. "If you can't travel fast you're a dead man."

"It ain't nothing," declared Pete, catching up. "It ain't nothing," he repeated, as if trying to reassure himself.

When they halted for rest that night, their faces were gaunt with hunger. Pete looked at the dog, who was sniffing about in a vain search for food, and stretched out his hand.

"No—not yet," cut in Flane. "Wait till we're hungrier. Let him carry himself for a while. It's easier."

The two men took turns keeping up the fire during the short hours they dared spare themselves for rest. The hungry dog prowled about and howled dismally.

Flane was ready to start first. "Come on, Pete!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Are you going to take a week to fix on them snowshoes?"

"Go ahead; I'm coming. It's my foot—it's swelled up some; but I'm coming."

Flane started out at the killing pace of the day before. Pete followed him for a time, limping desperately, beads of perspiration starting on his face. Suddenly he sank down on the trail, with a groan.

Flane turned upon him savagely. "What's the matter with you? What are you sitting down for?"

Pete mumbled something.

"What's the matter with you?" yelled Flane, in a sudden fury.

"It's my foot, Lem," said Pete, as if confessing a fault. "Just give me a little time. It's stiff-like, and it burns—like fire."

Flane's face was set in hard lines. "There ain't no time to give you. We've just got to get on. You know that."

"Yes, I know," answered Pete, struggling to his feet. He took a few steps, and sank down again.

He looked up at Flane with a dumb horror in his face.

"I can't make it, Lem," he said, at last.

Flane stared down at him with somber eyes.

"Just take a look at my foot, Lem," went on Pete, hastily beginning to untie his moccasin. "Maybe you can tell what's the matter with it."

"I don't want to look at it," returned Flane gruffly. "I ain't no doctor. Well, all right, go ahead," he added, in answer to Pete's look of entreaty. "But I can't do nothing."

Pete pulled off his moccasin and the thick stockings under it, and put out his swollen foot.

Flane ran his hand over it.

Pete winced with pain.

"It looks like one of the small bones might be broke," said Flane shortly, and again he regarded Pete with somber, speculative eyes. Then he turned away and called to the dog.

"What are you going to do, Lem?" asked Pete.

"Kill the dog. I'll give you the biggest half."

Pete began to tremble.

"Lem, you ain't going to——"

Flane turned abruptly away, and called loudly:

"Here, Mukluk! Here, Mukluk!"

The dog came up sniffing for the expected food; but, as Flane reached for him, he sprang away with a suspicious yelp, and ran back along the snowshoe trail they had left behind them. Flane followed after him, alternately cursing and cajoling.

Pete sat and watched them fixedly until they disappeared behind some trees. Then he looked at his foot and muttered to himself. He was shivering like a man with the ague.

It was a long time before Flane came back, and he came without the dog. "I couldn't catch him; he's gone," he said shortly. "We have lost him. I reckon he has gone back to where he was fed last—back to where the cabin was."

Pete said nothing.

Flane looked at him, and moved restlessly. "How many matches have you got, Pete?" he asked.

Pete shook his head. "Not any."

Flane took a box from his pocket, and began separating the matches into two piles.

"What are you doing, Lem?"

"Can't you see?" demanded Flane irritably. "I'm dividing up the matches. Don't you want none?"

"Lem, you—you ain't going to leave me?"

Pete was shaking again.

"Do you think that I am going to sit here and

starve without making a run for it?" demanded Flane. "What good would that do you? You can't travel, and I can't carry you. I'll leave you the ax."

Pete searched vainly for some sign of relenting in his partner's grim face, and then, at the supreme moment, something like dignity came into his own.

"There sure ain't no use of your starving, Lem, without a run for your money," he said quietly. "If you make it out, tell the boys —"

"I won't tell the boys nothing," broke in Flane, with sudden fierceness. Then he slowly got to his feet. "If you can travel, come on," he said thickly. "If you can't, it's tough, but it's no fault of mine. I'm off. So long."

"So long," returned Pete.

That was all.

Flane walked rapidly away, and disappeared without turning his head.

Pete impassively watched him go. There was nothing to do about it. Then he looked down at his foot. "I wish I had some Pain-Killer to rub on it," he muttered complainingly. "Then maybe I could get a show to make it back to the river, like Lem, before I —"

He stopped with a shiver.

"My God! Have I got to starve here without no show?" he cried desperately. "I won't never do it. I've got to travel someway, if it kills me. I can't stand it to starve! I can't! But what will I do?" he muttered, burying his face in his hands.

As if in answer, he heard a whine close beside him. He turned abruptly.

It was the dog. He had come back!

The man's eyes glittered. His pinched face became suddenly cunning.

"Here, Mukluk, come here!" he called, carelessly snapping his fingers.

The dog waved his bushy tail, and looked at the man with expectant, greedy eyes; but when Pete edged a little closer, he backed away, growling.

Pete made a sudden rush for him. The dog bounded out of reach, and Pete sank down on the snow, weak with the pain of his foot.

"I've got to get him — I've got to get him!" Pete muttered. "And I can't," he ended, with a half sob.

Next he tried strategy. He remained perfectly still, hoping that the dog would grow careless and come within reach. But the animal refused to be tempted, and kept moving farther away.

Pete watched his motions in an agony of apprehension. What if he went away again, and stayed!

The dog was now circling around one of the clumps of small trees that dotted the snow-covered plain, sniffing the air.

"He is trying to make himself believe that he smells something to eat," Pete muttered, with a sour smile. "And that's all the good it will do him!"

Suddenly the dog ran in among the trees, and Pete heard him give a succession of sharp yelps. Then he came out, still yelping, and, to Pete's amazement, ran straight up to him; but when Pete pounced upon him desperately, the dog slipped away from under his hands, and darted back into the clump, still yelping.

"Maybe he has treed something!" exclaimed Pete, crawling painfully after him through the snow — walking was torture now.

When the dog saw him coming, he began to leap into the air at something high above his head among the trees.

Pete looked up.

"A cache!" he screamed. "Grub!"

Pete sprang to his feet, never feeling the pain, and rushed at his salvation.

There, on a platform raised high up on poles, under a snow-covered canvas, the outline of bags showed.

Pete climbed one of the supports like a madman, and, tearing off the canvas, seized something from the pile, and slid with it to the ground in an ecstasy of haste.

"Bacon!" he cried, tearing furiously at it with his teeth.

The dog pawed him, and whined.

Pete opened his knife, cut off a big chunk, and threw it into the jaws of the famished animal.

Man and dog, side by side, gnawed at the frozen meat.

Finally the man was satisfied. He looked up. "Good, ain't it, Mukluk?" he grinned.

The dog snarled, bolted the last of his hunk, and ran his quick tongue over his jaws.

"Now we'll see what more there is in the cache," said Pete, climbing up again — more slowly this time.

"Lord, how my foot hurts!" he groaned, as he pulled himself on to the platform and began rummaging.

"Bacon! Flour! Beans!" Each word was a shrill cry of triumph. Then Pete's eyes fixed themselves on the mark on the bags.

"That's his mark!" ejaculated Pete. "They belongs to Sandy Walsh, the feller his pardner was hauling back to Bettles, sick, when we passed them on our way up here last fall. They said they cached some grub when they turned back. Well, Sandy won't want it this season; and I guess he won't never want it,



"PETE BEGAN PULLING MADLY AT THE RUINS"



"PETE FOLLOWED HIM FOR A TIME, LIMPING DESPERATELY"

by the way he looked," continued Peter reflectively. "He was sure pretty nigh his finish when I see him."

Throwing a sack of flour and a frying-pan he had found down into the snow, Pete slid down after them.

"Lord, the luck of it!" he exclaimed. "And Lem hitting the trail with nothing in his belly. And going on and on till he drops. For he ain't going to make it. No man could. There's enough for Lem, too," he went on meditatively, looking up at the cache. "Well, it's his own lookout. He deserted me, and we was partners. He took the best chance—the same as I would," he added candidly, after a pause. "And he left me the ax, and he needed the ax bad. That was mighty white of Lem. I wouldn't never done it, I guess."

He looked up again at the cache. Then, as if in answer to a question, he muttered: "How can I? I can't travel till my foot gets well. I ain't got no way of catching him."

The dog was eyeing the unfinished piece of bacon which Pete had stuck in the crotch of a tree out of his reach.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Pete. "Mukluk could, if I only knew how to make him. I couldn't write Lem no message to come back, because I ain't much on the write."

Then his eyes fell on the bacon.

"I could wrap that up in a sack, and tie it on Mukluk. Lem would sure know that there was more where that came from, and make tracks back. I'll try it on," he nodded to himself.

He wrapped up the bacon in a sack he got from the cache.

"Come here, Mukluk," he called.

The dog came up to him quite confidently now, and Pete tied the bacon across his back.

"Now, Mukluk," said Pete, limping with the dog to where Lem's snowshoe tracks led away south. "See that trail? Go on, now, and find Lem! Fetch him, Mukluk, fetch him! Good dog! Mush, now!"

Pete pushed Mukluk forward along the trail as he spoke; but the dog, suddenly grown suspicious again, turned in his tracks and bolted off in the opposite direction.

"Here, Mukluk, come back!" called Pete. "I ain't going to hurt you."

The dog had disappeared.

"Curse the brute!" ejaculated Pete. "I done my best to help you, Lem," he muttered fretfully. "I can't go after you; I can't travel. And you starving to death, and plenty right here for the asking! Mukluk, for God's sake, come back!" he cried.



"I'VE GOT TO GET HIM—I'VE GOT TO GET HIM!"

His voice broke with weakness, and he sat there, head bowed, in bitter dejection.

"Hello, Pete!"

The voice seemed to come from away off. Pete raised his head, and stared as if he saw a ghost.

Before him stood Lem Flane, his cheeks sunken, his eyes like those of a famished animal.

"Lem! What brought you back?"

"Because we is pardners," answered Flane. "I traveled fast, but all the time I see you laying here crippled up and starving all alone — and me, your pardner, deserting you. And, if I got out, I knew I would always see you as long as I lived. I ain't got no liking for you, Pete; I ain't pretending any. But you is my pardner. I couldn't get away from that. I ain't never deserted a pardner before — so I come back to travel the same road as you. I guess it won't take long."

For a moment Shifty Pete couldn't speak. Then he gulped over his words. "Lem, I couldn't travel—I tried to make Mukluk go and bring you back. I tied a piece of bacon on him for a message, but the cussed dog ran the

other way; he ain't come back yet. I was waiting for him. I done my best, Lem — honest."

"Bacon!" ejaculated Flane. "Pete, you're loco! I suppose that's the way we'll both get soon," he muttered, half to himself.

"Bacon! And beans! And flour!" shrieked Pete hysterically. "Me and Mukluk found a cache! There the brute is now," he cried, pointing down the trail, "coming back with the bacon still tied to him! Ask him! Come on, Lem! Come on, quick!"

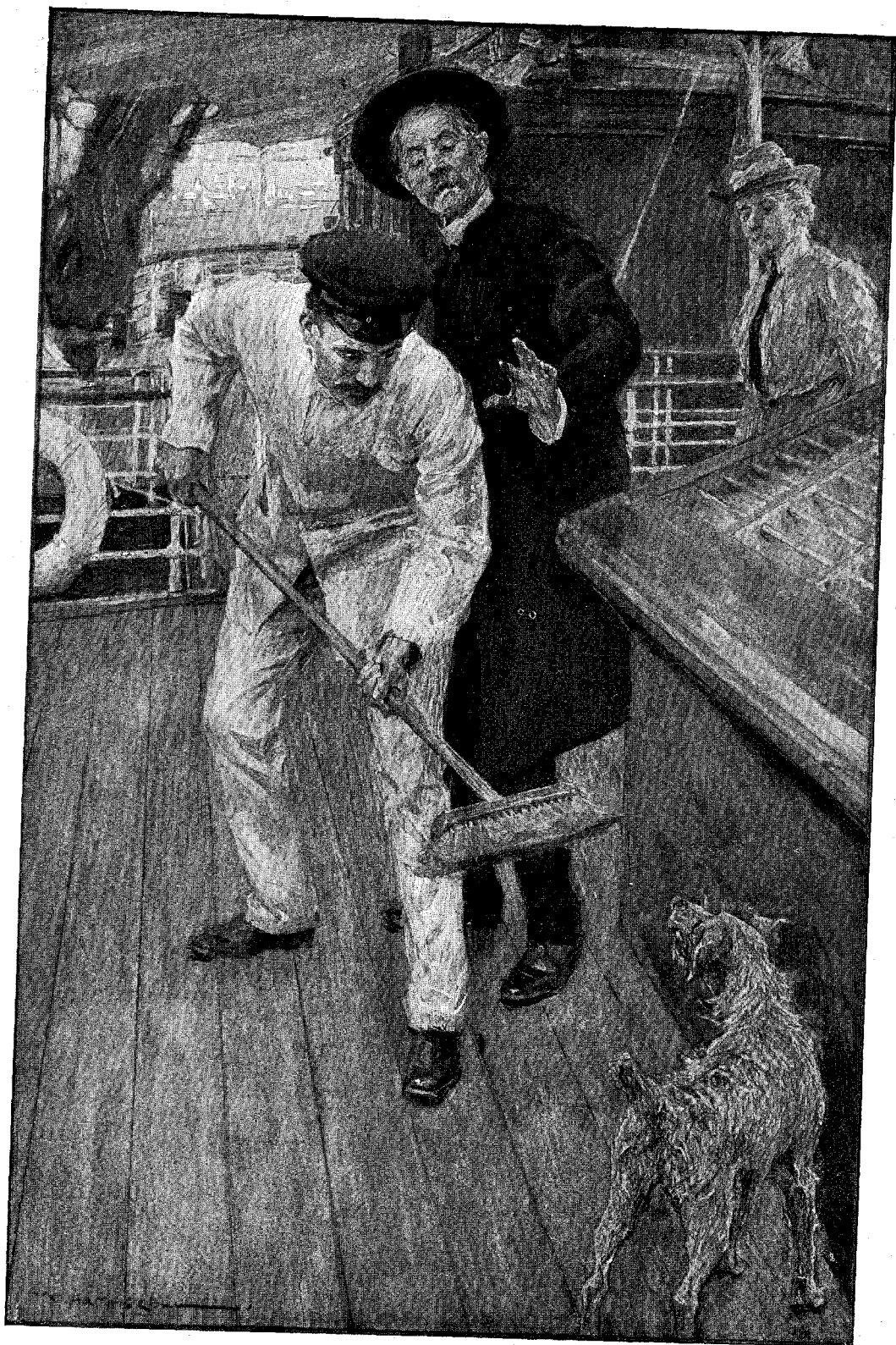
And half dragging, half leaning on Flane, Pete limped with him over to the clump of trees and pointed to the cache. And then, before Flane could make a move, he climbed up and threw a side of bacon straight down into Flane's arms.

Flane gazed at it with ravenous eyes; but, before he took the first mouthful, he looked up at Pete and said solemnly:

"Pete, I didn't guess you right. You're a pardner — and a gentleman."

Pete grinned.

"That makes my foot feel good," he said.



"WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY HAVING A DANGEROUS BRUTE LIKE THIS ABOUT
TO ANNOY PASSENGERS?"

The Adventures of Miss Gregory

by Perceval Gibbon
A Dog and Unclean

Illustrated by William Hatherell

THE little Jaffa steamer splashed out past the tall statue of Lesseps, which stands at the seaward end of the western pier of Port Said, and lifted her bows to the roll of the free water of the Mediterranean. At the after rail two people watched the roofs and masts slide back into the morning haze. One was the English-woman, Miss Gregory, at whose coming on board all hands had stopped to stare, for the sheer quality of her. Fifty years of age, or thereabouts, she had the suave and secure presence of one whose place in the world has never been in doubt; her voice, a little high, with an urgent tone in it, was full of authority. The other was the Rev. Daniel Blake, on his way back to a mission station on the edge of a Syrian desert. He leaned with both elbows on the rail, gazing somberly.

The land was astern of them when Miss Gregory spoke. The harbor works were stretched upon the water like some elaborate toy, and behind them the feverish town stood glowing under the sun. She was an inveterate maker of acquaintances—it is the modern short cut to adventure. She turned to Mr. Blake pleasantly, and pointed across the widening water to the picture that dwindled as they watched.

"A wonderful thing to see, isn't it?" she suggested.

"Eh?" Mr. Blake came out of his preoccupation with a start, and looked at her sourly. He was a man of her own age, gaunt and gray, with a worn, unhappy face. He had traveled to

Port Said from his mission in Syria to greet a brother missionary passing through on his way to China, and the evil town, with its dreary elaboration of vice, had scared and saddened him. As he watched it sink back into the distance, his eyes were dark with a vision of judgment.

"What did you say?" he asked harshly.

"I said it was a wonderful thing to see," repeated Miss Gregory. "That statue, you know—a fine idea, that. One needs to be French to finish a breakwater with a statue."

He was staring at her, while she spoke, with a sort of hostile intentness. She was as strange to his experience as anything he had seen in Port Said. He had lived too long among his heathen to know her type, and he resented her manner of being serenely at home in a wide and active world. A touch of color rose in his cheeks.

"No doubt there were people who admired Sodom and Gomorrah, too," he retorted suddenly, casting the words in her face almost violently. She lifted her eyebrows in astonishment; for the moment, his meaning was not clear.

"Oh," she said then, and smiled good-humoredly. "Yes, one lady *did* look back at them, didn't she?"

Mr. Blake made a noise remotely resembling a snarl, and turned on his heel forthwith. He took the only way he knew of giving her what he considered a fit answer: his narrow back was rigid with wrath as he went striding forward.