

THE DEPARTURE

BY GRACE LUCE IRWIN

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"HONEST to Gawd, my mind's made up!" burst out Scott Hansen, foreman of the great Grieg ranch.

He sulkily pulled his felt sombrero over his brows, careful to look anywhere but at Miss Grieg, who was standing above him on the porch of the ranch-house. Yet ordinarily his eyes were in the habit of following her wherever she went, for she was good to see—tall, well developed of figure, her shoulders muscular under the flannel shirt-waist, and with the pliant freshness of youth in every line. The short skirt and canvas leggings she wore accentuated the independent freedom of her bearing, and her gray eyes were wide-open, fearless, perhaps a little cold.

"I've been the best cattleman on this 'ere ranch, man and boy, for fifteen years," Hansen added slowly, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, "and I've been a good foreman to ye since the old man died; but it's come to this—I'm a goin' away."

This unwonted eloquence dried his throat and set him tugging at the bandanna knotted about his burly neck.

"Honest to Gawd, my mind's made up," he repeated hoarsely.

Jen Grieg's expression changed from one of abstraction to alarm.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed vigorously. "How can I—how can I run this here big ranch all by myself?"

"Well, ye got somebody else now." The cowboy spat contemptuously. "Ye got that young feller down from Frisco to run yer ranch for you and your mother now—ye ain't got need for me no more."

Instead of answering him, she turned her head quickly toward the stable, as if fearing that his words might be overheard. The man had been holding his mare by her bridle, and now, jerking her cruelly toward him, he vaulted into the saddle.

"No, I ain't a goin' to stay," he said in a respectful tone. "I got to leave the ranch."

"Don't go, Scotty," the girl said indifferently, whereupon his face brightened.

"Don't ye *want* me to go?" he pleaded hopefully. "Ye don't need that city man."

"Yes, I need him, too," broke in Jen Grieg.

"Well, good-by, then," Scotty said with decision.

"Is it really good-by?"

"As long as ye got *him* hangin' around," the cowboy declared with an effort, "I ain't a goin' to stay."

She noticed an odd paleness around his lips, and asked:

"Why do you hate him so?"

"Um, um!" he grunted inarticulately. Already in the saddle, he wheeled sharply away from her. "This time I ain't a comin' back," he said, but he rubbed his disengaged hand across his mouth, listening.

"Scotty!"

"Yes'm."

"If you go now, I'm not coming after you to ask you to come back."

"No'm."

"I've done too much of that. I'm the owner of this ranch, not you."

"Yes'm."

"Any of my friends, whoever they are, have a right here, and you've got to make up your mind to it."

His silence was ominous.

"Even if it is some one you don't like, I'm not going to send him away."

Scott readjusted the blanket-roll behind his saddle.

"Good-by," he said respectfully. "I ain't never comin' back here. When I go out that there gate there, it's for the last time. The rodeo's over, and it's a good time o' year to quit."

She did not reply.

"Good-by," he repeated, a certain wistfulness showing in his face.

Surprise and some anxiety came into hers, but she said nothing.

As he clattered over the bridge at the gate, scraping along through the willows, his sense of injury seethed and overflowed.

"After fifteen years," he muttered aloud, "fifteen years of as hard work as ever a man done! Git ap, Bluebottle!"

He rode along between the pasture fences, headed instinctively toward the only consolation of which he had had experience—the first saloon, six miles away. And three miles of the distance in the cold spring evening lay along the Grieg ranch—a fertile, green, undulating, fresh, breezy country, as wild and untrammelled a bit of California as when it had first become Grieg's, early in the days of forty-nine.

Murmurs of swollen streams and of the wind gusting among the eucalyptus, the oak, or the evergreen trees made a sad, sentimental music to the cowboy's ears. He felt almost sick with the bitterness and sorrow of his sudden homelessness. He was tall, and broad-shouldered, and sat his horse with the perfect ease of a born cowboy. His shirt was brown; a red bandanna was round his neck; and he wore a leather belt that held his wrinkled trousers. Under the sombrero his jaw was Anglo-Saxon and sullen, his eyes dark with emotion. Altogether, as he loped along the muddy road, scattering the red-winged blackbirds before him, his appearance was far more blithe, far more a buoyant part of the easy, joyful fertility of the country, than was the heart he carried.

He stopped, and slowly, almost stupidly, readjusted the saddle-girth. What next, after dropping in at the saloon, he did not know. He did not even own the horse he rode. The Grieg ranch was soon behind him, and, turning, he looked back at its velvet hills lying silent under the sunset light. He knew every mountain, every ravine of it, every herd, and every clump of manzanita bush where the deer lurked and where the owls nested.

Two saloons or road-houses soon loomed into view. One was gaudy, brightly painted, ornamentally christened by Hardy, its ambitious proprietor, "The Delmonico Palace." But it was at the other that Scott stopped.

Swaney's saloon was in a small, one-story frame building, whose unpainted exterior suggested no prosperity. There was no fence or walk between it and the county road. The windows were curtainless, and through them came a flare of light from the ugly, crowded, brilliantly illuminated barroom. In front, horses were tied to the posts of the porch, to large stones, to trees, even to the pump. In the rear lived Mrs. Swaney and her five children in unimpeachably respectable domesticity. Swaney owned the premises, and was

himself bartender, friend, and sergeant-at-arms. He was, with a simple enthusiasm, performing his numerous duties behind the bar when Scott entered.

A yellow-haired child came edging in at the back door, stared at the smoking men, and approached his father doubtfully.

"You git!" yelled Swaney fiercely, snapping a bar-towel in his direction; whereat the child ran back and was received by a chiding voice behind the door. "Don't allow 'em in here, Mr. Hansen," explained the proud father. "That little feller knows it, but he's the worst."

"M—m!" grunted the cowboy indifferently. "Well, Swaney," he remarked genially a moment later, "what's the news?"

"Nothin' much," answered the saloon-keeper. "Measles in town, but I guess you ain't interested in measles much, not bein' a married man. McFarland's daughter, the long lank one, has eloped with that new barber, the one with the long black mustache."

"M—m!" grunted Hansen, shifting his feet.

He turned his back to the bar, looking over the room from under the brim of his sombrero. A group of ranchmen and grocers' clerks, with their hats on their heads and their feet on chairs, occupied the foreground. In a corner two cowboys, or "hands," from the Grieg ranch were playing cards, attended by a resident black dog.

"Hello, boys!" Scott called out impartially to the room. "Line up and have a drink on me."

Having stumbled indiscriminately over chairs in their haste to reach the bar, the men stood with a silent facetiousness of countenance, one foot of each in an easy attitude on the railing.

"Here's regards," said Hansen, with an air of grave ceremony, as he drank to them.

His dignified manner contained no remembrance of striking episodes of his earlier career when he had tied his horse to the bar itself instead of to the more conventional post outside, and no hint of his present inner trouble. He was now in the presence of his world. As for the morrow—that could take care of itself.

The group exchanged a few long-drawn-out stories. The foreman told one, which received polite consideration, of a dishonest tax-collector and the shrewd owner of a ranch. Portuguese Angelo and Hoop-legged Bob, sitting in the corner, watched these social amenities respectfully, but not to the extent of leaving their game.

"Happy days!" pronounced Scott courtously, as he emptied his second glass.

Swaney smiled approvingly.

"Say, Mr. Hansen," he said, "le's try and get up a dance on some ranch. Le's have all the men. I got a sister visiting me."

"M—m!" Scott answered. "You do it. I got to work. Maybe I got to go away." But he smiled. He liked dances. "Why don't you all mix in, boys?" he yelled jovially. "Set 'em up again, Swaney. Le's shake!"

The dice rattled for perhaps an hour with the usual *poco tiempo* habit of the countryside, the men lolling over the bar and interrupting themselves by sudden bursts of laughter. In the end Hansen paid the entire bill. It seemed to him only the proper course to take.

From minute to minute he put off his decision what to do next. He slouched over to the card game, and sat down at the table, throwing his sombrero on the floor. The fire in his eyes had sharpened.

"What you playin'?" he growled.

"Hearts," answered the good-looking young Portuguese shyly. "I'm playin' hearts against him, and he's playin' against me." He went on dealing laboriously, the sleeves of his canvas shooting-coat scraping against the edge of the table. Scott received this detailed information without a smile.

"How's everythin' out at the ranch?" asked Hoop-legged Bob, who had been away just twenty-four hours.

"All right," said Scott reassuringly.

But the others noticed that he was not rolling a cigarette. They surmised that something must have gone wrong.

"How's Alec?" asked Bob.

"Oh, the old bull's all right," answered the foreman. "I brought 'im in to new pasture."

"Ye did," said Bob laconically. He looked small and wizen-faced in his blue shirt, his tow hair tousled, but the corner of a clean white handkerchief protruding stiffly from a breast-pocket. "How's that pink-eyed bronco of Pete's? Busted yet?"

"Oh, yes, the bronco's busted."

"How's the sows?" asked Angelo at length, as if with sudden inspiration.

"The sows—oh, all right," was the reply. "I left 'em up by the dairy. They was there when I rode by."

"I thought, Friday, I seen a calf headin' for them tar-wells," ventured Bob, uncrossing his despised legs under the table and looking fixedly at his ace of hearts.

"I headed him off," said Scott bluntly.

The dog was nosing at his sombrero. Kicking him away, he looked about the room with a heavy, troubled air—at Swaney, who was still listening to stories at the bar as he mixed drinks, at the windows, at the clock.

"How's the Griegs?" asked Bob, ostentatiously attentive to his trick.

Angelo, in something of a panic, cleared his throat as loudly as the foreman.

"How's the Griegs?" repeated Bob.

Hansen scowled.

"The Griegs is all right," he answered at last. "Guess I'll go into Hardy's and see what's a goin' on in there."

He picked up his hat and replaced it low over his eyes.

"Better not now," said Hoop-legged Bob dubiously. "Burt's in there"—with a jerk of his thumb and neck to the left—"havin' one of his sprees. A feller came in from there with his nose broke a while back."

"M—m!" remarked the foreman. No one knew better than he that Burt was the hardest drinker and all-around bad man of the Grieg ranch. "Don't know as I'd mind comin' up against Burt this night," he remarked. "How long's he been at it?"

"Ever since Friday night. He ran amuck of a Chinese vegetable-wagon and threw every blessed onion out in the road. He stood up in it, and pranced about like mad. There wasn't no constable in sight."

"I know what I'd 'a' done if I'd been there," said Scott. "I guess I'm the law west o' the Pajaro River. Ten o'clock! Well, it's about time for his weepin' fit to be comin' on."

He began with serious deliberation to roll a cigarette.

II

THE card game proceeded in silence, and after a while Scott took a hand. The grocers' clerks went home. About midnight another man, dressed as were the others, strolled in and walked briskly up to the bar. But this newcomer was no ranch-hand. He was clean-shaven, and more picturesque than was natural. A certain restlessness that characterized his movements and expression was more than usually noticeable that night.

"Well, Mr. Freeman," drawled Swaney, in what he considered an engaging tone of informality, "what'll you have to-night? That's right, that's right—always the best. Yes, she's well, thank you. That noise? Oh, it's Burt from Grieg's ranch breakin' things in at Hardy's."

The sound of Freeman's singularly clear,

nervous voice had reached Hansen in his corner, and, though he did not look at the newcomer, something like an electric shock seemed to pass through his heavy frame.

"Play, won't you!" he said to Angelo with an oath.

Freeman had not looked in their direction.

"No one has been asking for me here?" he was inquiring of Swaney. "No mail has come? That's odd. Well, I may be going up to San Francisco myself, anyway, to-morrow. The weather here is so cussed bad." He laughed and strolled out, lighting one of the best cigars in stock as he went. "But I'll be back at Grieg's," he added at the door.

Hansen, who had been listening, suddenly threw down his cards.

"No use, boys!" he groaned. "I can't play. Drinkin' don't do no good to a feller when he's reely in trouble, and gamin' don't do no good!"

"Go ahead," encouraged Hoop-legged Bob. "Speak out!"

"If anythin' was to happen to me," said Scott slowly, "though I dunno as anythin' will—but things do happen, as drownin' and shootin' and the like—and you can't help 'em, and it's no one's fault."

"Now don't you go and do it," said Bob, while Angelo wiped his eyes with his sleeve. "Wha'd we do without you? Wha'd the ranch do? Wha'd Miss Grieg do?"

"Shut up!" said Scott promptly. "What I want to tell you is this—you know there's a new calf or two in the hills to the west."

"No!"

"I want you to remember it and bring 'em in to-morrow."

"We'll be doin' that," said Hoop-legged Bob cheerfully. "For the sake of old times," he added.

"And when ye sow the wheat in the field by the house next year—well, don't ye sow it. Ye'll be needed other places. Ye git Burt to do it—and ye watch him."

"Bet I will!"

"And say, Bob, there's a latch off the little stable door. Ye'd better buy one in town to-morrow, and put it on." He leaned his arms on the table and his face on his hands.

"Say, Scotty," said Bob, bending toward him, "ain't I to be the foreman when ye're gone?" His small blue eyes snapped greedily.

"How do I know?" mumbled Scotty without rancor. "It won't be *my* say. And say, Bob, in the summer, 'long the creek, ye'd better burn the poison-oak, for she's like

enough to be walkin' up there with some of 'er friends."

"We'll remember," said Bob almost briskly. "I'll do it fer the sake of old times. Ye always was a good feller on the treat, Scotty."

"There's a little black cow in the pasture by the spring," continued the retiring foreman. "She's a goin' loco, I'm a thinkin'. In the fall—"

A man in overalls suddenly banged open an outside door beyond the table, and shuffled over to him.

"You the foreman of Grieg's?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Scott. Then, remembering, he added, his face flushing: "I dunno."

"Well, us fellers been holdin' a mass-meetin' out in front o' Hardy's," went on the newcomer breathlessly. "'N' say, we got news there's goin' to be a war with Spain, and men's goin' from Grieg's; 'n' say, if ye do git a cowboy company up there, say, won't ye put Burt in the front ranks?"

He was interrupted by the sound of battle and of breaking glass, which followed him in from Hardy's Delmonico Palace.

"We got a petition all done and made up," said the man nervously.

"There ain't no company formin' yet, Mr. Miller." Scott's answer was deliberate and polite. "And no front ranks. But if there was— Burt! What ye 'fraid o' Burt about? Why, Burt's a boy."

"Don't ye call no names," blustered the petitioner. "I say, *will* ye? We got it all in this yere petition. It's a map o' Cuba, and the spot marked on it where there's goin' to be a battle. See? We want ye to put Burt in the front company where he'll git shot quick. He won't know."

A long arm from behind the enthusiast reached over and grabbed the petition on the map of Cuba, causing a sudden expectant silence as the gathering crowd realized that it was Burt himself, and that he already knew.

"Le' go o' me!" cried Miller, striking out blindly.

"Stop yer fightin', Burt," interposed Hansen quietly; "it ain't allowed."

Burt was tall, gaunt, ungainly—a rugged fellow of twenty with the look of youth burned out of his face.

"Say, Mr. Hansen," called Swaney, "take 'im out, won't ye?"

Instead of showing fight, Burt impulsively precipitated himself into Hansen's arms.

"Fight! Huh! We'd fight the Spanish," he laughed uproariously. "Bring 'em here

—man to man I'll have it out! Man to man! Shay, Scotty, ye hate a greaser same's I do, anyhow; *you'd* kick 'em off Grieg's ranch—le's you an' me fight Spanish—you'n me." His grasp tightened around the foreman's neck amid the general laughter. "You're law on Pajaro—shay, Scotty—you're ma friend. Shay! We'll fight—oh, no—fergot—can't spare you up to Grieg's—guess they couldn't git 'long 'thout ye up to Grieg's—shay, Scotty, wha's mattah? You been fired?"

With a drunken exaggeration of sympathy he gazed into the other's mysteriously solemn face. Patiently Scott endured the boy's gibe and mock embrace; but he was irritatingly conscious of the smiling face of Freeman—"that city feller"—on the edge of the group.

"*You're* white," muttered Burt. "I'll fight any measly Portuguese—"

Quietly Angelo left the room.

"War! I'll go to war. I ain't afraid," pursued Burt, the young "bad man" of Grieg's ranch.

Hansen succeeded in unclasping his arms, and set him not ungently down on a chair.

"Ye'd better go back home—to the ranch, Burt," he said half sadly.

Instantly, laying his head on the table, Burt burst into irrelevant tears.

"I promised her—I promised my mother—to give 'er the money!" he wailed in childish simplicity. "Oh, why'd I drink? It's all gone. Money's all drunk up. Oh, what'd I do it fer? Not a cent to show. Who's got it?" He looked up fiercely. "Who's got it? I'll never take a drink ag'in, s'help me!"

"That's what ye said the last time," laughed the crowd.

"Oh, why'd I do it?" he wailed helplessly, beating his head against the table. "Why didn't no one stop—stop me? It's all gone."

For this scene the onlookers had been waiting. It happened every Saturday night. Over their curious, half-amused countenances, Hansen saw a smile on Freeman's smooth, cynically humorous face, and then heard him laugh aloud.

"Better hasten him homeward, Hansen," remarked Freeman. "He wants his mother. You won't do."

There was a moment in which a murderous contempt and hatred swelled the veins in the ex-foreman's sunburnt neck and forehead. Then he shouldered his way through the crowd, and bent close to Freeman's face.

"Cut it out!" he said, fiercely clenching his fists. "Don't ye give us none of yer laff! Don't you *dare* laff! Ther's nothin' funny 'bout him now. It ain't funny to

drink up all yer money that you earn by hard work—up at daylight with the cattle, and out till dark with the cattle. Don't laff at him, I tell you, or ther'll be somethin' doin'. He ain't got any way of enjoyin' himself but gittin' drunk. It's the best way *he* knows anythin' about. He ain't got education! He ain't got fine city clo'es or teams to drive—he ain't got anybody to teach him books and learnin'. He never has known any way but gettin' drunk. You jest cut out that foxy grin of yours—while I'm around!"

For the moment Freeman's face was certainly grave enough, but Scott was not through with him yet.

"He ain't got no smart city ways," growled Hansen resentfully. "He don't know how to hold onto his money so tight it hurts 'im. He has his fun, and then he pays for it. And the fun wasn't worth it, and he knows it. He don' know no other way for a man to enjoy himself. He was born to it, and it ain't his fault."

He flung this at the astonished Freeman defiantly, yet with such intensity that it seemed to come from the depths of his soul. He shook himself and reached for his sombrero on the floor.

"'Tween you and him—as he is," he said deliberately, "I'd take him!"

He spat contemptuously into the nearest spittoon. For a full moment there was silence while Scott waited, looking into the eyes of the debonair young fellow he hated, hoping, perhaps to get an excuse for an altercation; but none coming, he walked out, slamming the door of Swaney's with a bang that could be distinctly heard by the rival gang at the Delmonico Palace.

III

OUTSIDE there was moonlight over everything; the wind was freshly blowing, and a few clouds were scudding up the eastern sky. Down close to the earth shivered the nasturtium flowers which Mrs. Swaney was ever replanting along the trampled edges by the porch.

A deepened sense of homelessness and helplessness took the place of anger in the man's feelings. Stumbling over to where Bluebottle stood, he leaned his forehead against her neck, with his hand stroking her side.

"Good-by, Bluebottle," he whispered. "I done the best I could not to hate 'im too bad to stay—and I branded the calves jest as honest, for her sake. Don't ye go to for-

gettin' me, Bluebottle—when ye nibble the grass along there where I showed ye. Gawd knows I ain't worth much, but it ain't my fault!"

What wasn't his fault? Neither he nor Bluebottle, for that matter, knew. But he was taking his farewell, not only of the mare he had broken, but of the ranch which had been his care, and of the gray-eyed girl he had watched grow from a merry child into a spirited woman.

A clatter of hoofs, suddenly stopping, made him look up, wiping his eyes stealthily on his bandanna. In the stream of light from the window, he saw Jen Grieg dismounting from her horse, still in her short riding-skirt, with a bandanna like his knotted about her throat. He fixed his longing eyes on her face, and found a change there which he was unable to understand. In the few hours which had passed since he had spoken with her, something had happened. There were purpose and desire in the wide, troubled eyes and eager mouth, a certain softness where before had been merely physical content. Were there tears on her cheeks? Scott strode a clanking step toward her before he remembered.

She was standing now at the door of Swaney's, tapping on it imperiously with her riding-whip. Why was she at such a place, and at such an hour? Suddenly he knew. She had ridden here to ask him to go back with her to his old place on the ranch. Once more she had found that she needed him too much to let him go. And now with that wonderful look on her face, suggesting affection and forgiveness, she had come to tell him, Scott Hansen, that the city man had gone, and that he might stay.

Scott's heart leaped for joy within him. His love for the girl was a kind of adoration that was like the sprouting of a new nobility.

Saying nothing, he walked gently to her side, and touched her submissively on the arm. She turned and caught the expression on his face, for he was holding his hat in his hand. Hope had gladdened his somewhat somber eyes, and softened the stern set of his jaws. Furthermore, in this sudden tenderness, there was a personal, protecting feeling for her as a woman, which he had never allowed her to see before. She felt it for a moment as something which startled and troubled her.

He himself believed that all he hoped from her was the old, half-affectionate faith in the honesty and necessity of his service; but there was more in his face. She knew

for the first time that Scott Hansen was not only her loyal slave, strongest and most capable of the Grieg cowboys. He was a young and proud-spirited man as well. But this realization came to her now too late to win any sympathy. It was an interruption.

"Oh, Scott!" she exclaimed.

In the mixture of moonlight and lamp-light her troubled eyes looked up into his. Oddly enough, some outside power seemed urging her to remember those times when she had liked him best; when he had saved her from the charge of an infuriated bull—he bore the scars yet—or when he had ridden recklessly up the sides of hills too steep for any one else to venture. Her eyes dropped.

"Oh, Scott!" she said again. "Is he in there?"

Slowly the cowboy stepped back from her out of the light.

"Yes, he is," he answered after a minute.

"I sent him away—a while ago," she said hurriedly. "I didn't know how I'd feel after he went, but now I—I want him back."

"You want *him* back?"

"Yes, yes! Won't you please go inside and tell him that I want him?"

Grown awkward for the moment in his disappointment, the cowboy stood first on one foot, then on the other, tramping the flaming nasturtiums with his heavy boots. Through the window he could distinguish Freeman's silhouette leaning across the bar.

"Yes, Miss Grieg," he answered at last, even more slowly than before, putting on his sombrero.

She stepped back to her horse and stood waiting.

Were the two still talking there under the trees? Scott came outside again, shading his eyes with one hand from force of habit. He could see them standing there beside the horses, each oblivious of everything save the presence of the other.

"If I come back," he heard Freeman say in his nervously vibrating voice, "if I come back, dear, it is to stay. I cannot be near you and not love you. I told you so, and you sent me away. In that you did the right thing—for what do you know of me? Only that I came a stranger to your gates, and you took me in. Dearest, send me away!"

But already he had caught her two hands in his and carried them to his heart.

Hansen in the darkness trembled, even while he heaped names of infamy on the other man through his set teeth. Fifteen hard, laborious years of devotion had not won him

the right to a touch of the girl's hand, which she had eagerly allowed to this stranger of just a month's acquaintance.

"I don't care who you are or what you are," said Jen Grieg, giving her lips bravely. "I can't live without you, and in some strange way I know"—it seemed she looked about and even shivered a little—"that we belong to each other." There was a pause; then she spoke again: "Thank Heaven you hadn't gone any farther than this—without me. I don't know where you were going." The daughter of the hills raised her head to the cool moonlight. "And I don't care!"

Burt came staggering out, and Scott helped him to mount Bluebottle, hoping the while that the girl would give him at least a farewell—but she had forgotten him.

At last, in despair of having a word from her, he turned to the horse:

"Home, Bluebottle!" he cried, clapping her smooth sides; and with clattering hoofs the mare loped off, carrying Burt into the shadows.

Freeman was helping the girl on her own horse now, and Scott stood anxiously coughing behind his hand. His pride would not allow him to speak first.

Her horse started gently off along the winding way that led back to the old ranch-house, set among the glorious, green hills—those hills over which Scott had so often galloped with her all day long, silently ador-

ing the blossoming beauty and the sweet woman way of her.

Now her figure, to his eyes, was illuminated mystically by the moonlight. The lines of her rounded arms, the ends of her bandanna, the flying locks of her hair, the movements of her bare hands on the reins—all were touched for a moment by the pale light, illuminated as if for his memory alone before they disappeared entirely from his adoring gaze.

She had meant, he saw, never to have him at the ranch any more. Freeman, excited but satisfied, was swinging himself leisurely on his horse; and before clattering by to overtake her, he cast on the discarded foreman a look of negligent scorn. It was a look which, Scott Hansen well knew, he could never endure to meet again.

All was silent and dim now in the road. The cowboy heaved a great sigh and passed his hand across his eyes. As he had said about Burt, as he had murmured to Bluebottle, he felt a deep sense of injustice as well as bereavement. Had it been his fault? Was he not, point for point, as worthy of the friendship of the girl that he adored as was this stranger of a month's acquaintance, this unctuous "city feller" of her love?

Suddenly he started, looked about as if again awake to his surroundings, and striding back, kicked open the door into Swaney's saloon. The night was young!

MY SHIP

Oh, ships from here, and ships from there!
They fill the harbor with their din,
And seem to come from everywhere;
But never does my ship come in!

Say, has there been a storm at sea?
Has any crew been cast away?
Or else what could the trouble be,
That there should be this dire delay?

Oh, ships from south, and ships from north,
And from the east, and from the west!
But is there none has fared her forth
From out the Islands of the Blest?

Her cargo is of yellow gold—
Most marvelous, you will agree;
And there are jewels in the hold;
And all this treasure is for me!

Oh, ships from here, and ships from there!
To doubt and dread I now begin;
I must be brave, and not despair;
But never does my ship come in!

Harold Melbourne

THE SHORTEST DAY IN THE YEAR

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

AUTHOR OF "VIGNETTES OF MANHATTAN," "A CONFIDENT
TO-MORROW," ETC.

THE snow was still falling steadily, although it had already thickly carpeted the avenue. It was a soft, gentle snow, sifting down calmly and clinging moistly to the bare branches of the feeble trees, which stood out starkly sheathed in white, spectral in the grayness of the later afternoon. Gangs of men were clearing the cross-paths at the corners and shoveling the sodden drifts into carts of various sizes, impressed into sudden service. It was not yet dusk, but the street-lamps had been lighted; and the tall hotel almost opposite was already illuminated here and there by squares of yellow.

Elinor stood at the window of her aunt's house, gazing out, and yet not seeing the occasional carriages and the frequent automobiles that filled the broad avenue before her. The Christmas wreath that hung just over her head was scarcely more motionless than she was, as she stared straight before her, unconscious of anything but the deadness of her own outlook on life.

She looked very handsome in her large hat and her black furs, which set off the pallor of her face, relieved by the deep eyes, now a little sunken, and with a dark line beneath them. She took no notice of the laborers as they drew on one side to allow her aunt's comfortable carriage to draw up before the door. She did not observe the laughing children at an upper window of the house exactly opposite, highly excited at the vision of a huge Christmas-tree which towered aloft in a cart before the door. She was waiting for Aunt Cordelia to take her to a tea, and then to a studio, where her portrait was to be shown to a few of her friends.

Her thoughts were not on any of these things; they were far away from wintry New York. Her thoughts were centered on the new-made grave in distant Panama, in which they had buried the man she loved less than a week ago.

And it was just a year ago to-day, on the 22d of December, the shortest day in the year, that she had promised to be his wife. Only a year—and it seemed to her that those twelve months had made up most of her life. What were the score of years that had gone before in comparison with the richness of those happy twelve months, when life had at last seemed worth while?

As a girl, she had wondered sometimes what life was for, and why men and women had been sent on this earth. What was the purpose of it all? But this question had never arisen again since she had met him; or, rather, it had been answered, once for all. Life was love; that was plain enough to her. At last her life had taken on significance, since she had yielded herself to his first kiss, and since the depth of her own passion had been revealed to her swiftly and unexpectedly.

As she looked back at his unexpected appeal to her, and as she remembered that when he had told her his love and asked her to be his, they had met only ten days before, and had spoken to each other less than half a dozen times, she realized that it was her fate which had brought them together. Although she did not know it, she had been waiting for him, as he had been waiting for her. She was his mate, and he was hers, chosen out of all others—a choice foreordained through all eternity.

Their wooing was a precious secret, shared by no one else. They knew it themselves, and that was enough; and perhaps the enforced mystery made the compact all the sweeter. Ever since they had plighted their troth, she had gone about with joy in her heart and with her head in a heaven of hope, hardly aware that she was touching the earth. All things were glad around her; and a secret song of happiness was forever caroling in her ears.

And yet she knew that it might be years before he could claim her, for he was only