

Bones of Better Men

BY HERMAN HOWARD MATTESON

Illustrated by W. K. Starrett

SHE glanced at the tiny ship's clock ticking upon the cabin wall. Two bells! At four bells, ten o'clock, while it would be dark, moonless, the tide would be at ebb. Then the sealer would weigh, drift out, and beat through the Straits of Fuca to the broad Pacific. Already the contrary wind was blowing in, moaning through the fir and cedar with a voice like that of the island Indians when they chant the dirge of supreme sorrow.

At four bells, Kim Morris was due to sail. She might never see him again—probably would not. With the realization of final, irrevocable separation came such a flood of affection, of longing, that sophistries and arguments fled her heart as shadows dissolve before a strong light.

She loved Kim Morris. She had never really loved the cold, perfect man who had married her, and had sailed away, never to return. She loved Kim Morris—always had loved him, always would love him.

Three bells! The uncompromising, cold metal note was as the signal recalling a nun to her devotions. She loved Kim Morris, but that love might never seek the light, must always remain cloistered in the white cell of her affection. Her father had brought with him around the Horn, to the far island of Puget Sound, the New England conscience of his seafaring forebears, and had transmitted it to his daughter, Tsolo. Between her and Kim Morris this conscience reared itself like a granite wall.

A favorite theme of her father's had been "duty," and he was wont to illustrate it by reference to a famous case in British admiralty law. A seaman, cast away on some savage coast, with three mates, had saved himself at the cost of the lives of the other three. The admiralty court, declaring that there came times when it was a man's duty not to live but to die, had the seaman executed for murder.

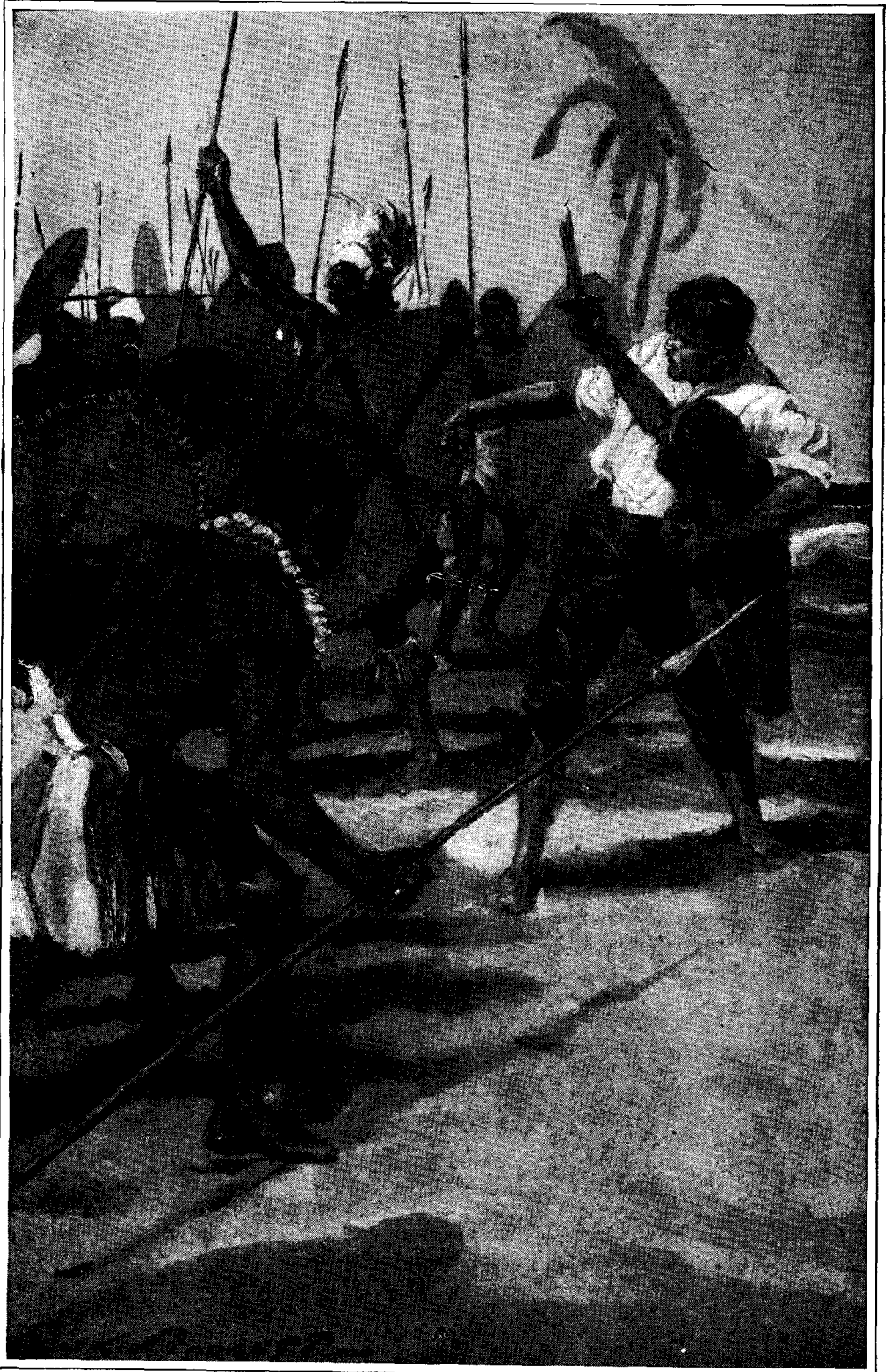
And here was a case of the deadly parallel. Of all the crew who had sailed upon her husband's ship, the *Voyageur*, none had ever returned but Kim Morris. With him he had brought the wonderfully carved figurehead from the *Voyageur*, had set it up in the front yard of Tsolo Smail's cabin, where it gazed ever to sea, far away to sea, to an atoll of the Solomon Islands, where lay the bones of better men.

Bringing home through thousands of perilous miles the wonderful figurehead of the *Voyageur* had warmed the girl's heart exultantly, for it had been carved in the image of herself by old Opit Thorndyke. For a week she had posed while the old carver, with infinite pains and art, smoothed away the surplusage of white fir-wood, leaving finally a likeness that was strikingly faithful.

The head and bust of the figure completed, Opit had fastened it to a base with a great wooden screw, and this, in turn, had been bolted to the *Voyageur's* billet-head. Thus, with a heroic replica of herself brunting the seas, the *Voyageur* had sailed away, in the skipper's cabin her husband of a fortnight, in the forecastle her discarded, unworthy lover, Kim Morris.

Many times, before the fatal word had come, her lively woman's fancy had romanced while it traveled afar with the *Voyageur*. She could picture her husband looking upon the figure with a sense of cold proprietorship. She could visualize Kim Morris, standing at the wheel, laying his course by the proud, graven image of the sweetheart who had cast him off. Then, in imagination, she would explore the moody secrets of Kim's unruly, lawless heart, and would start back affrighted by what she found there.

At four bells the sealer was to sail, with Kim Morris aboard. He might never return, probably never would return, though



KIM STOOD WITH ONE ARM ABOUT THE FIGUREHEAD. THE CHIEF, THINKING THE FIGURE SOME POTENT WHITE MAN'S FETISH, HAD STAYED HIS WARRIORS' HANDS

Hiyu Canim, the Siwash medicine-man, who had taken counsel with the spirits of the forest, and consulted the auguries of flying birds, had said that the sea would never claim him.

Tsolo gazed from the cabin window through the gathering darkness. The wind, rising fitfully, swayed the figurehead upon its too slender anchorage of trimmed cedar sapling. Latterly, she had noted, the fret of the winds was loosening the fastenings of the figure, permitting it to turn slightly. Now as she looked, its face seemed to turn toward her, as if it had some portentous secret that it would confide.

For the sake of Kim Morris, and for her own sake, when regrets and vain memories had come upon her, she had asked her father for permission to have the figurehead removed. The hazard at which it had been returned from the far Solomon Islands surely entitled Kim to that consideration; but her father had shaken his head. No; he wished it to remain in place before Tsolo's cabin. And there it remained, a maddening remembrancer to the wives, sisters, and sweethearts of the men who had gone to their deaths in the *Voyageur*.

II

As boy and girl, Kim and Tsolo had grown up together. They had cruised together, fished, dug clams, and danced at the boisterous celebrations held when a ship came home. Indifferent at first to the mutual attraction that existed between his daughter and the young fisherman sailor, Tsolo's father, upon Kim's return from his first voyage, suddenly turned against the boy, and laid upon the girl his stern command to have no more to do with Kim Morris. He reiterated the command upon his death-bed.

The name of Kim Morris had become an evil name. There was something wild and untamed about the boy that constantly chafed the spirit of the skipper and crew with whom he had shipped. Kim had struck a mate with a pin from the pin-rail. In the forecastle, Kim had been an agitator; had showed the makings of a sea lawyer. Then a smuggling episode, which at first had been considered a boyish prank, came to be seen in a sinister light. The fact that once Kim, alone in a dory, had put out to the aid of a halibut in distress was remembered now only as proof that the boy had a reckless devil's heart.

When it became apparent that Kim Morris had chosen Tsolo Kennedy to be his wife, the girl was assailed by the dire warnings of old wives and counselors. Added to her father's stern mandate, these warnings had overwhelmed her girlish inclinations, and she had listened passively when Henry Smail paid her austere, unsentimental court.

Smail, a man considerably older than Kim, had been able seaman, mate, then skipper. Now he was both skipper and owner. Astute in trading, firm but fair in discipline, he had both a ship afloat and a cabin ashore. They were married. Tsolo Kennedy had married a man—everybody in the village said so.

Old Opit Thorndyke was a relic of the days of the clipper ship, who, from modeling noble figureheads for noble ships fifty years before, had, with his fortune's ebb, taken to carving and selling the sailors' trinkets called "scrimshaws." He gazed longingly upon the *Voyageur*, the prow of which bore only a simple billet-head. Afterward it was recalled that Kim Morris had suggested that Opit should be commissioned to carve the figure, with Tsolo as a model.

Without enthusiasm, Henry Smail had consented, and Tsolo posed for the old carver. The figure completed, it was viewed by the whole village and pronounced a perfect likeness. Long after the throng had departed from before Opit's little shop, there remained standing beside the figure in the gathering darkness, Opit Thorndyke, Hiyu Canim, the Siwash medicine-man, and Kim Morris.

The figurehead was bolted into place on the *Voyageur*'s prow, supplies were loaded, hatches battened, the mainsail hoisted, the anchor weighed. The *Voyageur* was destined for the south seas and beyond, to trade, to load with copra and the dried flesh of the sea slug called *bêche-de-mer*.

Smail, who had been too busy to put back ashore for a farewell word with his bride of a fortnight, waved her good-by from the rail. A dory shot out from shore. The Indian oarsman ranged his craft alongside the *Voyageur*. Kim Morris, from the dory, called to Smail to know if there was still berth on board for an able seaman.

Henry Smail squinted his eyes, wrinkled his brow. Kim Morris had an evil name with skippers. Where Kim Morris was, on deck or in the glory-hole, which is the fo'c'sle, there trouble was. On shore, alone



"SURE
I SAY A
STRONG SPELL."
HE REPEATED.
"WHITE MAN'S TALK
SAY IT 'GOOD FOR-
TUNE GO EVER WITH
THIS FIGURE AND BRING
HAPPY TO ITS SHADOW'"

for six months at least, was the skipper's wife. Of course he trusted Tsolo. Still—

Skipper Smail nodded his head, waved his hand for Kim to come on, and the young man swarmed the side with his ditty-bag upon his back.

Six months elapsed. No word of the Voyageur. Still a second six months. The underwriters notified the widow of Henry Smail that they had listed the Voyageur as lost. Within the third six months they paid her the insurance money, and advised her

that the Voyageur had been lost at sea with all hands, somewhere off the Solomons.

III

A TRAMP ship that had come from Makassar through the Banda Sea, put in at the Puget Sound Island for an overhaul and a stepping of new masts. Her anchors let go. Over the side, into a dory that he had hailed, Kim Morris lowered away a great bundle wrapped about in clean tarpaulin.

With no word to a soul of the village,

even Tsolo Smail, Kim carried the bundle to the yard of Tsolo's cabin, topped and trued a cedar sapling, and bolted in place the figurehead of the *Voyageur*.

Brief was Kim's story. The *Voyageur* had won into the Solomons. Buffeted by a terrific hurricane, the ship had made into the shelter of a wide-flung atoll of sand and broken coral. There she had driven upon a reef, had taken a bad list to starboard. At sunrise, a hundred high-prowed canoes had assailed them. In the first flight of Papuan spears, all the crew of the *Voyageur* had perished save Henry Smail, Lennon, the cook; Brower, a seaman, and himself.

The four survivors had been taken prisoners and thrust into a grass hut ashore, under guard. Kim had escaped, swum back to the ship, unbolted the figurehead, and returned. The Papuans, discovering him, had attacked. A dozen spears were aimed at the breast of Kim Morris, but the old chief held up his hand. Kim stood with one arm about the figurehead. The chief, thinking the figure some potent white man's fetish, had stayed his warriors' hands. More, the old chief had outfitted Morris with a canoe and provisions, and had permitted him to depart, carrying with him the graven image of Tsolo Smail.

These were the details of Kim Morris's story, adding only that he had understood from the actions of the savage chief that Smail, Lennon, and Brower were to be put to death. Kim Morris related it to Tsolo Smail, to the mother of Lennon, the cook, to the sweetheart of Brower.

Lennon, who had been a rat-faced youth, shifty-eyed, a petty liar and thief, had at once been imbued in the generous memory of the village with noble attributes never before discovered. Mrs. Lennon, mother of the departed, flinging her skeleton arm toward the snow-white figurehead in the yard of Tsolo's cabin, would burst into cackling lamentations, denounce Kim Morris for a coward and a poltroon, call Heaven to witness that it was a shame and a profanation for Kim Morris to live when behind him, in the far Solomons, he had left the bones of better men.

Almost proverbial the words became, and the village took them up. There had been Smail, Bowden, Jack Stanley, the ship's carpenter, Hoky Williams, Capstan Culbertson, and the seaman called Bigpaw—better men all than Kim Morris. Their bones lay whitening on an atoll of the Solo-

mons, while Kim Morris had slunk home to claim the widow and the wealth of Skipper Henry Smail.

Then, when weeks passed by and Kim Morris sought no speech with Tsolo other than to relate the details of the tragedy in the Solomons, the village wagged its head and whispered of the cunning that could wait, abide its hour, and still abide.

IV

BUT now, at four bells, Kim Morris was due to sail for the far-off Bering Sea. Twice or thrice only, and then but briefly, Tsolo had had commonplace speech with him. Often she had seen him standing upon the sand-dune before her cabin, alternately looking at the figurehead, then gazing raptly to sea. Almost overwhelmingly she had felt the urge to go to him, to place her hand in his and say that in him she still had faith.

But pride forbade. Why did not he come to her and say his say like a man?

Hatred against Kim Morris grew apace in the village. This isolated community on a remote island hunted in a primordial pack. Every hand was against him save the hands of Tsolo Smail, Opit Thorndyke, and Hiyu Canim, the medicine-man. No ship clearing that port would have him in the crew. The fishing craft would have none of him.

Presently it became known that the dory of Kim Morris floated out many a night when the moon was in the dark. Kim Morris was smuggling again, first said rumor, then accusation direct.

A sealer had come to anchor off the island for an overhauling and the stepping of a new mast. No secret was made of the desperate undertaking upon which it was bound—poaching seals upon the Russian side of the Bering Sea. Capture by a Russian cruiser meant ten years in the Siberian salt-mines, almost inevitable death.

Craft bound upon such a venture are not apt to be overnice in the selection of a crew. Kim Morris sought a berth upon the pirate sealer, was signed on, and received the rating of mate.

Stealthily Tsolo Smail sought out Hiyu Canim, and told the old medicine-man that she had had a warning dream that Kim Morris would never return from the Bering. The girl swore Hiyu to secrecy, and asked him to convey the warning to Kim Morris.

Hiyu glanced at the girl shrewdly, and shook his head. The dreams of white folk were not dependable guides. He would con-

sult one of the three infallible Indian *tomanawa* first, then convey the verdict to Kim if it carried warning.

Old Hiyu Canim, upon the following day, came shuffling through the sand and paused before the figurehead in the yard. He came no nearer the cabin, so Tsolo went to him.

"Three *tomanawous* spells that never lie," said Hiyu solemnly. "One of

"See," he exulted, "see how spells of the seven twigs of blood-bush never lie? See? Figurehead come home, though all mans on ship die but Kim Morris."



WITH GLAD CRIES, ALL UNASHAMED, SHE RAN TO HIM AND PRESSED HER LIPS TO HIS

the three is the spell of flying sea-gulls. The second is the spell of the seven twigs of the blood-bush. The third is the spell of the tail feathers of a thunder-bird carried in a doeskin-bag with seeds of the plant called *sapolil*."

Hiyu pointed for vindication to the figurehead.

"The figurehead come home! What do you mean, Hiyu?"

"Why," answered Hiyu importantly, "before figurehead is put on ship, I say it a strong spell over it that makes it come home, that saves life of Kim Morris, that some day makes Tsolo Kennedy to be happy."

"You said a spell over the figurehead?"

"Sure, yes. I say it. And figurehead come home. Kim Morris come home. Some day, Tsolo—"

He paused abruptly, regarding her searchingly.

"Sure I say a strong spell," he repeated. "White man's talk say it 'Good fortune go ever with this figure, and bring happy to its shadow.'"

In the Indian belief she was the image's replica, or shadow, instead of its being the replica or image of herself.

Her eyes filled with tears. Old Hiyu had called down a blessing upon the figure. She tried to thank him.

"No thank me," expostulated Hiyu. "He say it to me to make a strong, good *tomanawous*."

"He?" she asked. "Captain Smail, my—my husband?"

Hiyu smiled indulgently, shook his head.

"No, no—not Henry Smail. Kim Morris he say it to me to do a *tomanawous*."

Kim Morris had asked that the Indian blessing be said over the figure—not Henry Smail, but Kim Morris!

She laid her hand upon the wooden image.

"Hiyu," she said in a voice so low that he could hardly catch the words, "tell me about Kim going to the Bering. I'm afraid. Please, Hiyu!"

Sadly the old savage had shaken his head. He would like to say as the girl wished him to say, but he dared not. The augury of flying birds had said that Kim Morris might go safely to the Bering, that the sea would never claim him.

"But the mines," she had argued. "Not the sea, but the hazard of the salt-mines."

"I don't know," he had answered briefly. "Spell just say sea will never claim him. I don't know."

The hands of the little ship's clock were creeping on toward four bells, the hour when the sealer was due to weigh. Her face pressed against the window-pane, Tsolo stared into the darkness, listened to the rising gale, prayed that the storm might delay the departure of the ship until morning. Then, pride or no pride, she would go to Kim Morris. She would! She would!

As if in answer to the prayer, the wind came tearing at the shakes of the roof, swaying the figurehead upon its pedestal until at times it twisted about, facing the cabin, and held toward Tsolo the threatening sword in the uplifted hand.

Heavy footsteps sounded upon the step. There was a knock. Wrapped about in oil-skins, a sou'wester upon his head, Kim Morris stood upon the threshold.

"I'm going, Tsolo," he said simply. "I hain't got much to say. I put off till now to say it, for—well, I know what folks of this village think and say about me. Remember once, Tsolo, when I and you went clammimg to Shelter Cove? Remember? I hain't never changed, except that it's grown stronger with the days. It's no use, though. Something is there, between us, like a cliff—the bad name of Kim Morris. Maybe it 'll always be a bad name. I just thought I'd wait to the last minute to say it, then go. I love you like ' then, Tsolo, only stronger. Good-by—I'm going!"

She thrust forth her arms against the whipping gale, and called his name:

"Kim! Kim!"

But he was gone. Her only answer was the roar of the sea, the requiem of the wind, the creaking of the figurehead.

V

THE sealer was weighing. She could see the men as they hoisted away the anchor. The riding-light of the craft swayed like a pendulum. For a long time she could follow the light, then it blinked out in the spume and spray of the driving waters. Close-hauled, the sealer was beating out to sea.

Then, again, with fresh access of fury, the wind howled and shrieked. There sounded a crash. The figurehead, torn from its base, lay buffeted by the wind and by the rain that had commenced to fall.

A lighted ship's lantern in her hand, Tsolo leaned to the storm, made her way into the yard, stood beside the prostrate figure.

The wooden screw which had held the upper part of the graven image in place had broken off. She laid hold of the jagged bit of wood. It turned easily in her hand, and there in the hollow of the image was a bit of paper twisted into a tight roll.

She ran to the house, and with trembling hands unwrapped the paper. It was a closely written page torn from the log-book of the *Voyageur*. The writing was the precise, legible hand of Henry Smail:

This is my last entry in the log of the *Voyageur*. I shall hide this page in the base of the figurehead. The Papuans think the figure a god image. They will not touch it, and some day some one may salvage the figure and find this message.

We four are alive—Smail, master; Morris, quartermaster; Lennon, cook; Brower, seaman.

All others killed by spears of the savages. We four were put in a grass hut under guard. Last night Morris gave us good-by; said he was going to make a try for his life and ours. He worked his way through the atap-grass side of the hut, and made the shore by crawling. God let him swim to the Voyageur. The water is alive with sharks. He planned to unlimber the old four-pounder, fire it into the village, and open with the rifles hidden in the locker of my cabin. Under cover of his fire we were to make a break, seize an outrigger canoe, and put off.

The four-pounder, rifles, everything had been looted by the natives. So Morris unbolted the figurehead, and swam ashore with it in tow. The natives were going to kill him, but the old chief lifted his hand. The Papuans fear any image, thinking it a god. This Morris had counted on. They let him walk to the hut with the image.

"Come on," says Morris. "Walk up bold, but keep close to the figurehead. We'll make the shore and seize a canoe."

Morris motioned for me to take the figurehead. I thrust it before me, and we crawled through the hole. With howls and blows of their spear-hafts they drove us back, all but Morris. They put a crown of feathers on his head, danced around him, led him off. The shark devils had let him swim ashore; he was a shark god.

I must hurry. The Papuans are coming. I can hear their shrieks, the clank of the head-axes. They are coming after us. It's good-by.

One other word—Kim Morris is a man. Himself he could have saved. Kim Morris is a man. They are coming. Good-by.

HENRY SMAIL.
WILLIAM LENNON.
DAVID BROWER.

Tsolo flung open the door. Into the windrows of seaweed that lay along the shore her stumbling footsteps went. Running down the beach until the breakers curled about her feet, she stretched her arms seaward, called his name, and still called until her voice grew hoarse.

Finally, in utter despair, she stumbled

her way back to the cabin and sank into a huddled heap upon the floor. There at daybreak she still lay.

Boom! Boom! From afar came the reverberation of the signal-gun. She lifted her head, turned it to listen. *Boom!* A wreck—a ship in distress!

Her breast heaving, her hands pressed to her sides, she ran along the beach in the direction of the life-saving station. By ones, by twos, by half-dozens, the villagers joined her. Without a word the throng ran on, on to where the point of the island commanded a vista of the turbulent open of the Straits of Fuca.

A three-master lay rolling in the trough. Her house was gone. Men were clinging in the rigging of the shattered sticks.

But the life-boat was alongside. A man dropped from the rigging into the sea, a second, a third, a fourth.

The life-boat wallowed, came about, headed for shore. A cable of human arms stretched to it. Up the slope of dank sands they were bringing the four staggering derelicts.

Tsolo would have fallen to the earth but for the supporting hand of an old, wrinkled Indian who came up beside her.

"Look, Tsolo!" said the savage. "See, I say it! Three *tomanawous* spells that never lie. There is Kim Morris. Sea never claim Kim Morris. And some day, the *tomanawous* make Tsolo Kennedy to be happy."

With glad cries, all unashamed, she ran to him, flung her arms about the battered, gigantic form, and pressed her lips to the lips of Kim Morris.

AT EPIPHANY

WHEN I went out to breathe the morn—
The morning of Epiphany—
The frost was white upon the thorn,
And white upon the beechen-tree.

The wind that made the midnight seem
A chaos where wild furies whirled
Had died away, a wonder-dream
Of perfect peace enwrapped the world.

Such was the silence of the snow,
So hushed the starling's slender strain,
Within my soul I felt as though
The Christ indeed had come again!

Clinton Scollard

The Last Straw^{*}

THE WINNING OF A GOOD WOMAN IN THE BAD LANDS

By Harold Titus

Author of "I Conquered," "Bruce of the Circle A," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY LEE CONREY

THE cow-hands at the H. C. Ranch are surprised when the new owner, Jane Hunter, turns out to be an Eastern girl. She chooses Dad Hepburn as foreman by having all the hands draw straws—all except one, Tom Beck, who refuses to participate in the lottery, although had he done so he would have won. Beck lectures Miss Hunter because she drinks cocktails and smokes cigarettes, telling her that the ranch is in bad condition on account of cattle-stealing, and that she will have to change her Eastern manner of living if she is to make good. Piqued, Jane resolves to compel the plain-spoken fellow to like her.

A New York lover, Dick Hilton, appears at the ranch and rebukes Jane for heeding a cow-puncher's advice, but finds that he has lost his hold upon her. Thereupon he is overcome by his passionate temper, threatens to do her bodily harm, and desists only when Tom Beck opportunely arrives. Leaving the ranch, Hilton misses his way on the prairie, but is hospitably received by Bobby Cole, the daughter of a "nester" who threatens trouble for Jane, as he has filed upon a water-hole much used by her cattle. Finding that the Cole girl hates Jane, Dick makes love to her, and joins in the plot against Jane's welfare.

Jane has assigned Beck to the task of teaching her riding and roping, and is much in his company. He finds himself drawn more and more to the beautiful and reckless girl who has become his employer, and resolves to protect her interests with his life, if need be. He suspects that her foreman, Hepburn, is secretly in league with her enemies; and an open clash between the two men comes when Hepburn accuses Beck of shooting at him. The charge is false, but circumstantial evidence is so strong that Tom is saved only by Jane's intervention; and in this crisis she reveals her love for him.

Hepburn leaves the ranch, and Beck takes his place as foreman. The secret warfare that has been waged against Jane now becomes open, her stacks being burned and her cattle killed. Finally, resolved to end it one way or the other, Beck straps on a brace of guns and rides away alone from the H. C. ranch-house.

XVIII

THE fire in Webb's cook-stove was not all that furnished warmth to the seven men in the cabin that night, for they drank frequently from a bottle which, when not passing from hand to hand, was nestled on Dick Hilton's lap, his hands caressing it lovingly.

Sam McKee and three other men played solo on the table, noisily and quarrelsomely, after the manner of their kind. Engrossed in the game, they gave little heed to the talk of the others. It was talk of plots and schemes, of danger and distrust.

Webb's little button eyes were even uglier than usual, Hilton's mouth was drawn in lines that were more cruel than ever,

but Hepburn, under influence of the liquor, only became more paternal, more deliberate, as the evening and the drinking went on. He was not nettled by Webb's disfavor, and even smiled on the rancher indulgently as he listened to his querulous complaint.

"If you'd only used yer head an' stayed there," Webb went on, "then we'd hev had it all easy. You could 've stole her blind an' she'd never knew. Then you had to git on the peck about *him!*" He sniffed in disgust.

"Now, Webb, you're too harsh in what you say," the other replied blandly. "I done all I could, but Beck wouldn't be blinded. He's got second sight or some-thin'. We had him scotched all right, but

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