

Borrowed Fire

HOW A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FEUD CAME TO NEW ENGLAND

By Charles Neville Buck

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THE story opens with the marriage of Richard Carson and Phyllis Belknap at one of the stately homes of New England. The best man—Joe Carson, brother of the groom, and by profession a lawyer in Kentucky—has never seen the bride before. During his first talk with his brother's wife she learns that the Carsons and the Belknaps belong by the ties of blood to opposite factions in the bitter feud of the Wileys and the Powells.

Phyllis takes this deeply to heart. She has been in the Kentucky mountains, and has learned to love their primitive people. It was her intercession that gained a pardon for old Lloyd Powell, a militant champion of his clan, imprisoned for slaying a Wiley. In Richard Carson's cottage on Cape Cod, where he and Phyllis have planned to spend their honeymoon, she accuses her husband of having kept a vital matter concealed from her, declares that he has married her under false pretenses, and refuses to live with him as his wife.

IX

ANOTHER paused ensued. Each word now was a move on the chessboard of their future, and each move might decide the whole result. In each of them warring emotions met in sharp conflict. In each of them love cried out its paramount claim, and in each a righteous indignation proclaimed that love must not be stripped of its inherent dignity and independence.

At last Phyllis spoke in a sort of incredulous whisper:

"This whole matter came out of a thing that needed only a few words of honest discussion. You've made it an avalanche. You're making a war of tyranny on a woman. Very well, then, let it be war. You may keep your car in the garage. I'll telephone to the village for another."

"If it comes to that"—the voice which Carson had until now held under at least the semblance of restraint rose like a rocket to vehemence—"if it comes to that, I'll tear the telephone out. You will stay here—in your house and mine!"

She stood rigidly an arm's length from him, and into her eyes, through the incredulity that had widened them, there came an equinoctial fury to which any other anger that had ever shone in them had been mere

petulance. For an instant she gave him the picture of an Amazonian woman girded for war. For a moment it was as if, forgetful not only of their relationship but of their sexes as well, she was ready to take up his challenge in actual physical encounter. The man knew that however real the breach had been between them a moment before, it was incalculably wider and deeper now.

But the explosive flare that had made craters of her eyes paled almost at once. Carson knew that it had melted and fused all her emotions regarding him into an eclipsing contempt, against which he had no weapon. In her present mood she disdained quarrel with him. She had withdrawn beyond the range of his batteries, be they of anger or of pleading, and her voice had quieted to an arctic stillness.

"We can't talk any more," she said. "We've got past that now. It was a ring you put on my finger, you know—not a brand on my shoulder!"

She turned and walked away from him toward the house, her unbranded shoulders straight and her chin defiantly high.

Left standing there, Carson had the shaken feeling of one bewildered and deeply ashamed. His mortification was that of a man who had been publicly whipped, and who felt that he had deserved it. Publicly, because she was his whole public; deserv-

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edly, because though he had believed himself right until now, he had smirched the whole integrity of his position with a sudden and brutal ferocity. He had told her that they must discuss it, and then he had flown off from conference into a tangent of passion.

Starkly miserable, he stood by the debris of all his air castles, blaming himself, yet seeking some one else to blame. As he gripped his hands at his sides, his face hardened, and he muttered to himself:

"Joe was a fool—yes, and worse! He meant no harm, of course, but he's ruined me—and that's hard to forgive!"

He went back to the house with a heavy step, and sat down at a writing table. He drew out a sheet of paper from the rack and held it for a moment in his hand, looking at it with such a sickened sense of hurt as can come from small and inanimate things—lifeless in all save the perverse power of inflicting pain.

The engraved letterhead reminded him that the first sheet of his new stationery was being devoted to the composition of a note to the expected mistress of the house, who had drawn too far away from him for speech.

Sheets of stamps lay ready for the acknowledgment of wedding gifts. Sheaves of congratulatory notes and telegrams rested under a paper weight, most of them as yet unopened. With drawn brows, Carson began to write:

Dearest—please read this.

He underscored these words, to give them the effect of a headline.

You are right. I forgot myself. It was unforgivable, yet I beg forgiveness. For both of us there is too much at stake to let an issue stand that might be cleared away. From me there will be no more such relapses into barbarism. Whether it be war or peace between us, it shall at least be civilized; and it will always be love with me.

He wrote more than that in the tense vein of a lover's plea. He was sincere enough to say that for his outburst of savage temper, and for the manner of his attack, his apologies were abject; but that in principle he stood to his guns. He begged a chance to present his argument, pledging himself to deference and courtesy.

Then he drew out a telegraph blank, upon which he expended less time and effort, dashing out the words as if they were

blows given in combat. It was addressed to Joe Carson, in the Kentucky mountain town to which Joe had gone from the wedding, for attendance upon the summer term of the circuit court. The message ran:

Phyllis refuses to stay here. I refuse to let her go. Situation serious, thanks to your intervention.

Having thus hastily vented his bitterness, he sent his note to his wife's door and sat down to await results.

It was a long and speculatively anxious period, assaulted by questions. Would she come down, or would she elect to remain *incomunicada*? How could he hold her here, if her anger outweighed all merely conventional considerations? On the other hand, would not the whole disaster be harmlessly absorbed in the solvents of time and reflection, if only he could keep her here until the delirium of her mood passed?

Finally he heard a door close quietly above him. He rose, facing the stair. She was standing at its head, in an attitude of lingering indecision, her cheeks pale and her eyes an enigma. She was coming out of the seclusion of her own room, but in what mood she would greet him he could not guess.

No smile livened the sober curve of her lips, but she inclined her head as she came down the stairs.

"I hope I'm not late for dinner," she said lightly.

Her manner was that of well adjusted poise and composure. It was as if she were a charming and gracious woman whom chance had thrown into his company, not quite a stranger, and not at all an intimate.

When his somewhat awkward silence was relieved by the announcement of dinner, her lips shaped themselves graciously into a smile; but that, the husband told himself, was rather for the benefit of Kayami, the Japanese boy who had been with him for several years, and who now stood grinning and bobbing his head in the self-importance of his new stewardship.

Her eyes traveled over the quaintly beautiful dining room—a room which they had almost prayerfully planned together. It was as if she found herself, after all, in a strange place from which the familiar spirit had escaped. Their abode was not a large and ostentatious villa, vulgarly asserting its expense, but an old Cape Cod farmhouse, roomy, rambling, characteristic, which carried from the graceful sweep of its shingled

roof to its wide-boarded floors the savor of a stanch and simple beauty.

To this inherent and inimitable charm they had added modern convenience, but nowhere had they violated the spirit of character of a house dignified by age. The broad fireplace stood white-manteled against its brick, with its quaint old Dutch oven unimpaired at its side. Against a white finish of panel and closet door, ancient hand-forged hinges, latches, and bolts stood out boldly black.

It was in summary and detail, in tone and accent, a charming room, just of proportion and authentic in character; and as this room was a little triumph of artistic restoration, so were all the other rooms under that ridgepole. It was as if the old house had come into a fulfillment of its dreams, if houses have dreams, and had realized an apotheosis in which art went hand in hand with utility.

Its preparation had meant so much to the man and woman who were to begin their life there that they had chosen it not only as a habitation, but also as the scene of their honeymoon. They had conceived it as the frame in which to set all the freshest and sweetest moments of beginning life together; but now Phyllis looked blankly about the room, chilled with a sense of inward bleakness.

Carson, sitting across from her, and feeling as if a jealously guarded frontier ran through the table, talked mechanically, and hardly knew of what he talked.

It was not until dinner had ended, and they sat in the starlight on the terrace, with a distant sparkle of water before them, that he cautiously returned to the topic upon which so much depended.

"Dearest," he said in a low voice, "I was a beast to flare up, but I was frenzied. I was suffering the agonies of Tantalus, and it was a torture that came without warning."

He paused. She sat in an attitude of sphinxlike gravity, with the light from the open door falling in a single yellow shaft that divided her background between color and dark. She made no answer.

"A man can shape his conduct," he went on earnestly, "to face death. He can even find a certain satisfaction in dying decently; but if he's prepared for a coronation, and finds a guillotine where he expected a throne—well, it's different, and harder."

"I didn't deceive you about thrones and

guillotines," she answered in a low, tired voice. "I thought it was a throne, too, and I found a husband who regarded himself as my jailer!"

He sat silent, with his face drawn, and for a time made no reply. At length he admitted slowly:

"I think you decided deliberately, and it ought to be final. There wasn't any coercion, except from your heart."

Phyllis offered him no immediate response, and the man sat forward in his chair, waiting, with a feeling of intolerable suspense. It seemed that they had come back again, at the very beginning, to the point of stalemate.

Finally she spoke, with her voice still pitched to that self-contained modulation which told him nothing of its actuating emotions.

"Then if I refuse to stay here, and you refuse to let me go, where does that leave us? We can't squabble and fight as if we were married and hostile illiterates living in a tenement, can we?"

"No—I won't make that mistake again."

"But how else will you keep me against my will? You can't always stand over me, like a sentinel on guard. I can telephone. I can send Martha out with a message or a note. I can walk to the village myself. This is a fairly thickly settled country for solitary confinement. Escape would be too easy!"

Carson bowed gravely. The dispassionate and almost ironic tone of her inquiry dampened his hope with a premonition of defeat. Somehow he could not escape the feeling that she was inherently stronger than he, that they had measured the blades of their spirits, and that his own had proved the shorter and duller.

"I recognize," he made sober admission, "that we can live together only by agreement, but that agreement has been made. I only sought to compel you, in any fashion, until you tested the permanence of a whim."

"You haven't answered my question," she reminded him. "Suppose I rise now and say to you, 'I'm leaving this house.' Would you still seek to prevent me by physical force?"

"That," he answered quietly, "might be the only way. If you were seized by an insane impulse of suicide, I might have to use force to thwart temporary unreason. I can't help feeling that this, too, is tempo-

rary unreason, and I love you too much to let it ride me down."

Phyllis sat considering his words for a space in silence. Then she inquired, still in the tone of impersonal investigation:

"If you are sure this is a passing mood, why weren't you willing to let me take my problem away and mull it over?"

"The answer to that must be honest," he told her. "You said you couldn't trust yourself to settle it here, because the habit of loving me was too strong. I wanted you to be where that habit was too strong!"

"And you think that by keeping me here, even against my will, you're sure of having my love back again?"

"I believe it firmly enough to risk my life on it—to risk angering you on it," he fervently asseverated. "There's an illusion in your mind, dear, but it can't endure long in this house where we have set the stage together for love. Elsewhere you might make a morbid problem play for it. Here you can't, and in your heart you know it!"

Phyllis shook her head, but before she spoke again she pondered his words, and when she did speak her tone was dubious.

"When I said that—about the habit of loving you being too strong here," she told him, "I was thinking only of the original quarrel—the silence which I called a lie and an infidelity. Since then you've introduced another cause of disagreement, and a bigger one. You've taken the ground that, having married me, you acquire the right to hold me not as an equal, but as a sort of slave bride. I'm afraid even a habit of loving you can't excuse that. Something like contempt came with it, Dick, and I'm afraid it came to stay."

"Yet you're afraid to test it," he urged. "You're afraid to trust yourself here and think it out, because you know that love will bowl these illusions over like tenpins."

"Afraid!" She repeated the word after him in a tone of surprise. "Why should I be afraid? Why shouldn't I welcome love, when I've planned my life for it? Why shouldn't I open the door to it, if it's there?"

Carson rose and stood before her.

"Because, without knowing it, you're mutinying against your heart. No man dying of thirst ever wanted water more than I want to take you in my arms at this moment and hold you close. I love you, and my love isn't anæmic; but I'm

not afraid that I can't subdue my longings. It's you who are afraid to face love. I'm willing to wait and risk everything on waiting. Are you?"

He paused. Receiving no reply, he rushed on.

"I challenge you to a fair fight—the prize to be my happiness and yours. I dare you to stay here for ten days, and at the end of that time to leave me or to live with me, as you see fit. I dare you to give that love a chance without strangling it abortively. During that period I shall be your lover always, but a lover claiming no rights. It shall be precisely as if our marriage were still a week off. Unless you're afraid of yourself, I dare you to do that."

"I'm not afraid of myself," she answered gravely, and perhaps a shade scornfully. "It's you who are afraid. You're afraid to let me choose my own place of deliberation. It's you who cling to an empty advantage. I warn you in all fairness that this—this contempt that I spoke of is less likely to die here than somewhere else. Here I shall feel the cowardice of your effort to keep me. Do you still insist?"

"I still insist," he unhesitatingly declared. "I'm making my fight to win you all over again. If I fail, I accept my failure—on those terms. You agree to regard this house as your abode—to go and come as you like, but not to leave it for any other habitation. You agree that this problem which has arisen between us shall be treated as confidential between us, and that you will not speak of it to any one who doesn't already know of it. You agree that as to all outsiders you are my wife, but that as between ourselves you are—what you like."

"And if I refuse to give such a parole?"

"If you refuse, you confess that you're afraid to face the situation without stacking the cards; that you don't dare spend ten days here with me, because you feel in your heart that you must select a battlefield a long way off from the enemy."

Phyllis rose. For the first time her face dropped its sphinxlike mask, but the light in her eyes was not encouraging. It was a light of indignant scorn, mingled with pity for his boastful self-assurance. She held out her hand.

"Very well," she said almost casually. "You have my parole."

"I trust it," responded the man.

"You can afford to do so," she quickly returned.

They rose and went into the house. Phyllis, seating herself at the writing desk, began perfunctorily opening the telegrams that lay there. These messages of congratulation she passed to Carson, who read them with the bite of irony in his heart—a feeling which failed to diminish as they collaborated over replies worded in the proper vein of polite appreciation.

These responses, in the order of their completion, he thrust into his pocket. When the work had gone on for about half an hour, he glanced at the clock.

"Kayami spoke of going to the village for the second showing of the movie," he suggested. "Shall I have him file these telegrams before the office closes?"

The bride nodded, and Carson went out in search of the Japanese.

It was well after midnight when Dick, obsessed with restlessness, and still pacing the lawn at the front of the house, finally saw the light go dark in Phyllis's window. For some time before that he had seen her looking out. Her face, under its heavy mass of loosened hair, had been set, not in anger, but in a wistful unhappiness that drew down one corner of her mouth and made her eyes deeply grave. To comfort her did not lie in his power, so he remained at his distance, pacing and troubled.

Now, with her windows as unlighted as closed eyes, his thoughts circled aimlessly, always returning to the disaster that had turned his happiness to gall. Joe Carson had always been dearer to him than any one save Phyllis, and though his brother had brought this trouble upon Dick, he must have done it without intent. Joe had always been willing to shoulder difficulties if by doing so he could shield his brother; and the telegram which Dick had written would distress Joe without bringing solace to any grievance of his own. What was done was done, and it would obviously be better to tear up the message unsent.

Actuated by this kindlier intent, Carson went into the house, and began running through the contents of his pockets; but the message was not there. After some minutes of perplexity he realized the obvious. That hastily scribbled message had gone into the general budget, which the Jap had filed some hours ago, and before this it would have been put on the wire. It was now too late to recall it.

Looking back, Carson realized with disquieting chagrin that the telegram was not

only unkind in tone, but indiscreet in wording. It was a message which he could not possibly have written or dispatched in anything like a normal state of mind. It had been penned in hastiness and temper. It contained his wife's name, and intrusted private news to the leaky channel of the wire. Of course, Dick defensively argued, the writing of it had been an unconsidered impulse. Even as he perpetrated the breach of decorum, he had meant to re-read and revise it before dispatching it. Now it was gone, and others less in his confidence than Joe might know its contents.

With bitter self-condemnation and self-contempt, Dick hurried out to the garage, where a branch telephone could be used without rousing any one in the house. The railway telegraph office was closed for the night, and his call for Hyannis delayed him fifteen minutes.

When he had fumed out that period in futile waiting, he dispatched a second message to Joe. This amendment was brief:

Disregard former message. I was excited. All will come right.

Affectionately,

DICK.

X

ACROSS the cloud-high backbone of Hemlock Mountain—which is not a single mountain at all, but a range zigzagging for a hundred miles—Lloyd Powell had trudged until he stood near Peril Town. He paused then, looking down the forested slope, and an emotion which he did not quite understand swept over him like a tide.

His own home lay a few "measured miles" farther along, perched on a patch of clearing that seemed always about to slide down into the valley below it, like thawing snow from a steep roof. He was going there when he had passed through the town, but he did not mean to tarry there. His house would stand empty now, with no blue thread of smoke rising like a living breath from its chinked chimney, and no dog barking in welcome.

Half a mile distant from his house, and overrun with briars, through which he must fight his way, was the scrap of burial ground in which they had laid his wife and son while he was "down below."

The wife had died four years ago, and her funeral had been preached two years later, for in this mountain country obsequies do not always follow hard on death.

Sometimes two or more members of one family may die and be consigned to their graves at periods many months apart before the circuit rider reaches their creek bed or cove, and solemnizes over all at once the services that have awaited his coming.

It had been so in the family of Lloyd Powell during his five-year absence. His latest born, Little Lloyd—so called after the mountain fashion of distinguishing the junior from the senior—had gone to France. On the way, he had been allowed to come to the State prison for his father's blessing. His body had been brought back with a shipload of fallen comrades when the war ended, and later still the circuit rider held a joint service over mother and son.

It was now the old man's purpose to make, first of all, a pilgrimage to these two graves, and to the tenantless house where the boy had been born and the woman had died. That done, he would return to the house of a married daughter, who lived at the head of Little Viper Creek, and who had invited him to make his home with her.

At the verge of the town itself, accordingly, he paused, smitten through the armor of his racial stoicism by his sense of the changes that must be faced. Yet, when he crossed the toll bridge that gave entry to the place, he halted again and realized that his taking thought in advance had, after all, failed to prepare him for the facts of mutability.

The single familiar and unchanged landmark that his hungry gaze encountered was the brooding and magnificent bulk of the mountain towering above the roofs and steeples of the town. Elsewhere was total change. Along twisting streets that had in his day lain deeply mired ran sidewalks of concrete. Gone were the narrow boarded paths on which once feudal foes had met, while onlookers waited tensely to see who would quail—or, if neither surrendered the right of way, who would prove quicker to draw and fire. Now on the smooth breadth even enemies could meet and pass; but instead of enemies one saw "furriners" in riding breeches and pigskin puttees, whose talk ran glibly of "bringing in gushers," or, less boastfully, of "dusters" and "dry holes."

Ox teams yoked eight and ten deep strained along, moving the ponderous gear of oil drillers. Buildings that were new and

strange elbowed out of alignment houses that had stood since the land was young and this was its frontier.

The returning exile said nothing, but his keen eyes narrowed into hostile scrutiny. The isolation which his hermit people had held intact for almost two centuries had come into touch with oil and cupidity, and in these solvents it was disintegrating.

Lloyd Powell had saved part of the five dollars given him by the State. With this residue he sought out the telegraph office, where, at the key, sat a lowland youth with a rattish face.

"What ya want?" brusquely inquired this callow official, a pendent cigarette wabbling close to his degenerate chin.

With a grave courtesy of tone which was in itself an unrecognized reproof, the elderly man in turn put a question.

"What's hit gwine ter cost me ter send one of them telegrams ter Boston, Massachusetts, or tharabouts?"

Superciliously thumbing his tariff, the young man gave an answer, and condescended to amplify.

"That's for ten words—no more."

Lloyd Powell deliberated.

"Ten words," he repeated at length. "Waal, I reckon mebby I'll send her two of 'em, then. Hit's right costly, but I wants ter afford hit." After a moment's pause he added gently: "I'd be right beholden ter ye ef so be ye'd pen hit fer me. My handwrite hain't so good es some."

The youth reached languidly for a pencil stub.

"Shoot!" he said, and Lloyd began.

"Hit goes ter Miss Phyllis Belknap."

From painstakingly memorized directions, he gave the address in detail.

"I've done come home"—jest put thet down," dictated Powell slowly. "'I thanks Almighty God an' you.'"

He paused, counting off the words on his fingers. Then he summarized:

"Thet makes ten, don't hit? Now I wants ter send another one ter the same lady. 'If I kin sarve ye any fashion, send me word—Lloyd Powell.'"

The young man at the key grinned and hummed a jazz fragment as he transcribed the two messages. Then he read them aloud, while Lloyd nodded his sober approval and counted out the payment.

"I wonder is the cotehouse in the same place hit used ter be at?" he inquired, when that business had been dispatched.

An impulse had come upon him to pause in the court room in which he had been tried and sentenced. It would afford him a place to sit and rest for an hour or so before resuming his journey; and to the mountaineer the diversion of attending court is a substitute for more urban pleasures.

"It's right up along this street," yawned the operator. Then, as he cut out his key, he wheeled in his chair. "Do you know a lawyer named Carson—Joe Carson?"

Lloyd Powell nodded his head slowly and as slowly responded:

"Joe Carson? I knows him—yes."

Deep in his eyes, as he spoke, shot a quick fire, but he masked it. He did not add aloud, as he was inwardly adding:

"Why wouldn't I know the lawyer thet prosecuted me an' penitentiariated me?"

A dispassionate restraint checked the sudden flare of emotion. "I reckon," he mused, still without words, "he didn't do no more then his bounden duty, nohow. I grudges an' disgusts them thet hired me prosecuted, not the lawyer they paid wages to, albeit he war a Wiley."

"Yes," he repeated non-committally, "I knows him—leastways, I uster know him."

"I got a message for him here," said the operator, rising wearily from his chair. "I wonder would you take it over, if you're going to the courthouse? He's there, and I can't leave the office myself."

The elderly man assented briefly with a nod. As the yellow paper was passed out to him, he took it face upward, for the economy of that office squandered no envelopes. His eye fell inadvertently on the name "Phyllis" with which the message began.

Having gone a little way along the street, he paused to look about him.

"I didn't 'low thet war no common name—Phyllis," he mused.

With his interest so pricked, he spelled out the message, which, like a post card, stood open to his eye, and of which he did not think as a thing hedged about with any sanctity of confidence. It was in his hand unclosed and unsealed, and he read it:

Phyllis refuses to stay here. I refuse to let her go. Situation serious, thanks to your intervention.—R. CARSON.

"Waal," he reflected, "they gives the same name ter some siv'ral diff'rent people, I reckon, an' 'tain't rightly none of my business nohow."

The coincidence of the name was quickly driven out of his mind by many clamorous impressions of change about him, as he walked like another *Rip Van Winkle* among disquieting transformations. Had he guessed that the Phyllis referred to in this telegram was the same woman to whom he had just sent his dispatch of thanksgiving, and to whom he had so simply pledged in service what was left of his life, the novel scenes about him would have been crowded roughly from his thoughts. An intimation of the truth would have made the soil of his mind fallow for a seed of tragedy; but as yet no such suspicion had been born.

In the rotunda of the courthouse he met a deputy sheriff, whom he remembered, and with whom he shook hands. These two had last met as prisoner and custodian. Now they "struck hands and made their manners."

"Is Lawyer Carson—Joe Carson—inside thar?" the old man inquired.

"He's on the bench," responded the officer. "The jedge war tuck sick this mornin', an' the lawyers agreed on him ter sot temporary. Does ye crave speech with him, Lloyd?"

The liberated convict shook his head.

"No," he said. "The man at the telegraph office guv me this message fer him, thet's all. I reckon you kin see ter hit."

When the deputy had turned back into the door of the old court room, carrying the yellow slip in his hand, Lloyd Powell remained standing for a time in the rotunda. Between walls of cracking plaster hung the yellow mustiness of age. Scars of bygone bullet-pocking were hieroglyphic records left from feud battles of older times. In the cobwebbed and rough-benched room beyond the open door, Prosecutor Jud Powell had fallen twelve years ago under a Wiley fusillade. Now a Wiley presided on the bench.

Lloyd himself had sat in that same dingy room some five years back, and had heard the verdict read:

"We, the jury, find the defendant guilty as charged in the indictment."

Here, at least, was little visible change. Already the bright colors of the recruiting posters—a decoration which had come and gone since his day—were fading, and their paper was torn. Lloyd Powell slowly and thoughtfully entered the room, walked half-way down its central aisle, and took a seat on an empty bench.

To-day's grist in the mill of human justice was a wispy-haired young man with the face almost of a half-wit. As Powell seated himself, cradling his hat on his bony knees, the twelve jurors, straggly of beard and nondescript of raiment, rose to file solemnly out to the room of legal secrecy, where they were to ballot upon the fate of the accused.

The old man who had himself been through that mill saw Joe Carson pick up and study his telegram with the air of one who gives second consideration to some matter of moment. It had been handed to the temporary judge by the court attendant, without comment, at a time when an impersonal duty engrossed him. Now the man on the bench knit his brows thoughtfully, and his mouth line tightened. With no other trespass upon the evenness of his judicial manner, he folded the yellow paper, thrust it into his breast pocket, and glanced off across the court room, which in its interval of recess buzzed to a murmur of low talk.

Then Carson's eyes met those of Lloyd Powell, whom he had once convicted, sitting half the length of the room away. The judge beckoned, and the late convict rose to move forward and stand by the shoddy rostrum.

Carson extended his hand.

"I thought it was you, Lloyd Powell," he said; "and yet I thought—"

He paused there, and the older man explained quietly:

"I've jest done been pardoned out. A kinswoman o' mine compassed hit fer me."

"A kinswoman?" repeated Carson interrogatively.

Powell once more nodded.

"Miss Phyllis Belknap," he enlightened, with pride in his voice at mention of the name. "Thet was who done hit, an' she's a plumb angel!"

The name, naturally, came as a surprise to Joe Carson, who had just read that disquieting telegram. Yet no surprise manifested itself in the well schooled expression of his eye or lip, and his next words were matter-of-fact.

"In your prosecution, Mr. Powell," he observed, "you will remember that I was associate counsel for the State—employed counsel. None the less, I congratulate you."

"I'm obleeged ter ye," responded Powell. Carson laughed.

"It's strange," he said slowly. "I only arrived here this morning, and I've just come from acting as best man at the wedding of this kinswoman of yours and my brother, Richard Carson."

"Wedding—your brother?" The old mountaineer seemed to be turning the words over vaguely in a perplexed mind. "I reckon I don't jest git yore rightful meanin'."

"I mean," explained the lawyer, "that Phyllis Belknap is now Mrs. Richard Carson, my brother's wife, and that I've just come back from the neighborhood of Boston, where they were married."

After a protracted pause, the older man said thoughtfully:

"I didn't know none of the Wileys dwelt down below. Air ye plumb shore she knowed he war a Wiley when she wedded with him?"

Carson smiled, but a shadow of uneasiness hovered about his amused eyes. Though the lips of the elder mountaineer stirred on the verge of further speech, they suddenly closed and remained silent. Suddenly into his mind there leaped a thought, or a series of thoughts which began winding and twisting themselves into a cable of grim strength; and these were no thoughts to share with a Wiley.

"Ye penitentiariated me five y'ars back," remarked Lloyd Powell, changing the topic; "but I hain't niver disgusted ye fer doin' yore duty, an' now I'll bid ye farewell."

At the edge of the town Lloyd Powell halted once more. His face was set to the laurel tangles of the hills beyond and the shadows of the forest, but now it was a face that had taken on something of flint or granite.

For a moment he stood rigid; then he trembled to the palsy of some sudden and gusty agitation. The paroxysm passed like the gesture that goes before action, and the old man raised his eyes to the skies.

"She come whar I war a sulterin' in prison, an' she sot me free," he made solemn declaration. "Hit 'pears like from thet thar message she's in right sore plight now herself—an' I aims ter sot *her* free!"

He squatted down on his heels, as if the strength which had carried him so far had suddenly gone out of him, and his hands clenched themselves knottily at the ends of his corded wrists.

"I told her ter send fer me ef so be she needed me, but she hain't called on ter

send. She's a Powell, an' us Powells don't holler fer help. What's left of my life rightfully belongs ter her!"

He paused, then rose to his angular height. He had spoken aloud, and his words were quiet with the determination that has done with all doubt or debate. In them was none of the venom of the assassin, but all the self-dedication of the martyr who casts up the cost and accepts the penalty.

"I'll fare up thar," he went on, still talking aloud, but low-voiced. "Ef he hain't sot her free erginst the time I gits thar, then he's my man ter kill!"

XI

PHYLLIS CARSON lay awake in her mahogany four-poster until at last a fitful sleep brought ragged dreams which savored of delirium. Her subconscious self fought through fantastic mazes to recapture a drifting and elusive love, which blackened and withered under an equally fantastic blight.

Dick Carson, in the glamour with which love endowed him, always came into the beginnings of her dreams, heralded by the thrill and ecstasy that had belonged to her weeks of anticipation; but always, with the swift and illogical change of sleep thought, the man who took her in his arms was transformed into Joe Carson, his brother, who held her in the grip of blood-stained hands. As the *Launcelot* changed to a satyr, she struggled and sought vainly to scream—to escape.

She would waken chilled with the moisture of fear, and would turn her eyes to the door beyond which her husband lay, perhaps as restless as herself, until in sheer exhaustion she drifted away again into repetitions of the nightmare. Toward morning she sank into such a heavy coma that when Martha came to waken her, she opened her eyes torpidly to wonder where she was.

She brought to the breakfast table wearily ringed eyes, and had need to approach the world of the actual through a veil of nervous oppression. Each time she spoke it was as if a heavy screen must be lifted and pushed aside.

Dick's sleep had been haunted, too, and though the bay danced under a sun that woke it to a zestful and living blue, he nodded understandingly when Phyllis rose from the table, and, pleading a slight head-

ache, suggested that a nap might bring relief.

He moved dully about the place, finding everywhere some detail of a stage set for care-free delight, and left like an empty theater with its purpose unfulfilled.

It was mid afternoon when they sat on the terrace together. Few words passed between them. Both were miserable with the amazing realization that they, who had premeditated such delight in the sharing even of trifles, should find nothing to say to each other, no rapture of companionship that had not been frosted.

Kayami brought two telegrams and handed them to Phyllis, who took them listlessly and held them for a time unopened. Doubtless they were of a piece with others that had voiced perfunctory felicitations.

At length she opened one and read it. Then she read the other. After a time the man saw that her hand rested, palm upward, in her lap, a yellow blank lying loose in its concavity, and that her lashes were tear-drenched. She had not spoken.

"What is it, dear?" he hazarded, half fearing to ask, and cursing the situation that had made constraint and tears possible on such a day.

Phyllis leaned forward and passed him the two messages.

"Who is Lloyd Powell?" he inquired gently, when he finished reading them.

She sketched for him a picture of the old man in prison. She outlined his story, which had been recited for her at the headwaters of a narrow creek, and which had livened in her the sympathy that had taken her to Frankfort, and to the Governor. Her narrative had the force of direct simplicity; and Dick, as he attentively followed it, was moved to a responsive interest. Now this old prisoner was free, and he was thanking God and Phyllis. He was offering himself to any service she might name.

"Perhaps," suggested Carson, "if there's nothing he can do for you, there's at least something we can do for him."

It was beginning to dawn on him that the fragment of her life which had been framed in her visit to the mountains had after all held a significance too deep for ignoring. Possibly her contact with primitive and simple steadfastness had stamped her with an impress deeper than his own understanding had been. Perhaps, in short, he had been a fool.

Before either of them spoke again, the sound of a light footfall on the driveway interrupted their silence. They looked up to see a stranger approaching whom neither of them remembered ever having seen before.

Phyllis rose and went abruptly into the house, with an embarrassed consciousness of tear-wet eyes, while Carson came to his feet, a little puzzled as to the identity and character of the unexpected visitor.

"You must forgive my unceremonious coming," began the man, in a voice rich and pleasing of modulation. "The fact is, I'm a beggar, though it's not my only character. Later I had meant to present myself as a guest."

Carson smiled, while his eyes held the approaching figure inquisitively. Khaki trousers and flannel shirt might have indicated the native clam digger, come to peddle his wares; but the carriage of the shoulders and head were proclamations of a more sophisticated status in life, while the voice and its inflection carried oral warranty of cultivation.

"I'm living in a windmill a quarter of a mile from here," announced the gentleman in khaki, as if living in windmills was the accepted custom of mankind. "At times I fear my practical sense is on a par with that of the celebrated Spaniard who tilted at them. Fifteen minutes ago I realized that it was time for tea. Thirteen minutes ago I realized that I had no tea in my windmill. Hence I come as a beggar, hoping there's a spare pinch of tea in your tin."

He spread his hands in a gesture of mock pleading, and through his close-trimmed beard his smile brought a somewhat dazzling flash of even teeth.

Carson laughed.

"The desperation of your plight appears to be both acute and curable," he answered. "If you'll wait a moment, I'll institute relief measures."

He turned, to find Phyllis standing on the threshold, with a hand resting lightly on the jamb and with a ghost of the old twinkle in her eyes. Curiosity had stayed her flight, and the whimsicality of the stranger had wrought a little miracle, bringing back to her sobered pupils the gay light which, until yesterday, had habitually animated them.

"Phyllis," said the husband, grateful for this momentary transformation, "this gentleman is suffering from a tea famine. He's

our first charity. I don't believe I've heard your name yet, sir, have I?"

The stranger bowed from the hips, with a touch of ceremony in his manner that is not taken for granted by the generation which prefers an accusation of rudeness to that of Victorianism. A quaint yet obviously unaffected courtliness was his as he said:

"My name is Lawrence Speed, madam, and I'm honored!"

"Why not have tea with us, Mr. Speed," she suggested, "and make one brewing do for two?"

"But," he demurred, "you've just arrived. Perhaps you're not ready to receive visitors yet." Again the gleam of fine teeth flashed through his smile, with a rather amazing effect of illuminating his face. "Neighborhood talk flows large and free in a spot like this, you know. Even a newcomer like myself learns that the large house on the hill is being prepared for 'a bride the *Ricardi* brings home to-day.'"

Dick Carson flushed. It occurred to him that the quotation was an unfortunate one, carrying—though the visitor could scarcely suspect it—a sinister and unpleasant analogy. Like himself, the bridegroom in the poem from which the line came had discovered, on his wedding night, that his was an unwilling bride. In Dick Carson's mind ran other words from the same source:

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalque repassed.

He heard a light tinkle of laughter from Phyllis. He heard her insist, and heard the stranger accept. Perhaps Phyllis didn't remember her Browning.

Lawrence Speed might have been a youngish man prematurely grayed or an elderly fellow inveterately youthful. He proved himself a naïve and entertaining egotist. He sipped tea with epicurean delight, and played gracefully with talk, as if each subject was the specialty upon which he had posted himself. Anecdotes and names linked themselves on his tongue in a fashion that argued acquaintanceship with circles of celebrity, but his self-esteem never grew boastfully assertive. He admitted himself to be a landscape painter hardly above the level of the dilettante, and scarcely escaping the submergence of poverty.

"Come and see my windmill," he invited, as he rose to leave. "The old Cape Cod windmills are among the loveliest of

our passing landmarks, and mine is a good specimen, with salt-grayed shingles and well proportioned sweeps. Ivy clammers over it, too, and the sun sets behind it."

"The man in the windmill!" laughed Carson, when Speed had gone. "He seems to come from everywhere, and to know everything," Suddenly he broke off, then said impetuously: "I like him! He made you smile."

XII

WHEN Lloyd Powell had constructed the major and minor premises that the woman to whom he owed his freedom was herself a prisoner, and that her jailer was a Wiley, the conclusion followed with a directness as simple as it was deadly. She must be freed from that incubus, and the duty devolved unequivocally upon himself.

Complications wound the case about in perplexing meshes, but the old man's philosophy was all of a piece with that which cut the Gordian knot. The jailer, in this instance, was also the husband. The grim call came from a distant land, where his own code was without recognition, and where he **himself** could expect no leniency—where, indeed, it was almost sure they would hang or electrocute him. No matter! These things embittered his duty, but in no way clouded its imperativeness.

In some fashion not quite clear to his understanding, Phyllis Belknap had been tricked into a marriage from which, at its very outset, she sought escape, and escape was denied her. Duty, imposed by gratitude, commanded him to set her free, and set her free he must.

Thus far old Lloyd Powell's reasoning ran in an unobstructed channel, but at that point arose the difficulty.

The price he could pay, and would pay, in the currency of punishment, with no spirit of haggling over the bargain. He was of such stern stuff that he could stamp his way up the scaffold steps and say:

"Keep the change!"

There was a further consideration, however. The call should be responded to at once. It was like a burning house. It would not wait. The cost of transportation—quick transportation—from Powell's corner of the Alleghenies to a place near Boston confronted him as an insurmountable obstacle.

"Why, I reckon it's thousands upon thousands of measured miles from hyar to yon," he ruminated, as, having left Peril

Town behind him, he drew near the abandoned house that had been his home. "Hit'd take me a coon's age ter journey thar on foot, an' hit 'd cost me a kittle full of money ter ride thar on the cars."

He shook his head perplexedly, but he set his jaws.

"Nonetheless," he summarized, "hit's got ter be compassed, an' I reckon the good Lord will lead me on an' show me how."

Into his reverent seriousness broke no suspicion of the irony which another might have discovered in the thought of divine guidance to murder. Divorce and death were the only solvents he knew to an unhappy marriage, and he had no divorces to dispense.

Undemonstrative, even here with no eye upon him, he stood for a while, and then knelt, at the grave of the woman with whom he had lived for more than thirty years. His lips moved noiselessly. A squirrel chattered shrilly at him from a walnut limb, and a skunk paraded with unhurried sedateness across his path.

At the newer mound of the soldier son the man paused again. His lips jerked, and his eyes, looking off to the ragged spur of the mountain top, narrowed between their wrinkled corners.

"He war a right good boy, little Lloyd was," said the father at last.

Then he turned on his heel and walked stiffly away.

Nightfall brought him to the home of his daughter Melissa, a clapboard house with gaudy yellow and blue trim, but unpainted walls. Sordid dreariness looked out from the place, as despair looks out from some defeated human faces.

The crude dignity of the square log house was wanting here, where a pitiful effort at modernity had succeeded only in destroying a native quaintness. But the gigantic green arm of the range went round the spot like the embrace of a strong and loving elbow, and an unspoiled magnificence of forestry enveloped it. In the bare-tramped yard beyond the broken stile, bee gums and bird boxes on tall poles humanized the habitation more than the effort of man had done.

Melissa, a sharp-faced slattern, came to the door as her father crossed the stile. To her untidy calico skirt clung two dirty children.

"Waal, land o' Caanan!" she made exclamation in a rasping voice. "Ef hit hain't pap hisself!"

The old man nodded and went slowly toward her, until they met, in mountain fashion, without caress or greeting.

"I've done been pardoned out," he said briefly. "I jest got hyar."

The grandchildren hung back, gazing covertly at him in half savage shyness from the protection of the skirt in which they sought to wrap themselves.

"I reckon ye wants ter see Little Lloyd's *krwaw dy gair*, don't ye?" inquired the woman, a little later.

The parrot-like pronunciation in which she had been schooled fell unmeaningly upon the ears of the man who had seen only the written words.

"Little Lloyd's what?" he inquired.

"The medal the French general pinned on him atter he'd done been slain," she amplified.

Lloyd Powell turned the trifle of bronzed metal over and over in his palm, scrutinizing it through narrowed eyes; then he handed it back. Whatever emotions were awakened by it in his aging breast made a little drama played behind a lowered curtain.

"You keep hit," he directed. "Women folks sots more store by jewelry an' sich-like things then what men does."

"Lots of triffin' loafers come struttin' home safe an' sound from the war," the woman broke out, her voice rising shrill and discordant; "but an upstandin' boy like Little Lloyd hed ter git kilt!"

"He guv his life fer what his duty stud fer," commented the father evenly, and there was no taint of the sanctimonious in his inflection. "Hit hain't none too much ter do." There was a long pause; then he added: "Hit hain't none too much, even when hit's a young life, an' a hopeful one."

The woman went about her housework, leaving the old man sitting in a decrepit chair by the doorstep, but sitting uneasily and fidgeting as if he found no ease. Often she paused and looked at him with the anxious air of one who has news to impart, and who finds its utterance difficult.

At last she came and stood before him with her hands on her hips. Her eyes had hardened defensively, and her manner had taken on a waspish, half defiant quality.

"Ye guv me a power of attorney afore they tuck ye away," she reminded him. "Ye licensed me ter sell yore farm ef so be anybody offered me a price. Waal, I sold hit fer three thousand dollars in cash money."

The old man looked up abruptly.

"Three thousand dollars!" he exclaimed almost incredulously. "Thet's a master sum of money. I didn't 'low ye could haggle hit outen nobody fer them rocky acres."

Melissa laughed bitterly.

"I didn't 'low so, nuther," she informed him. "The ground's too pore ter raise anything on, save only weeds an' cuss fights. I didn't waste no time parleyin'. I jist up an' sold, but—"

"But what, M'lissey?"

"But atter I'd done sot my name ter the deed, they found oil on them God-fer-saken hill sides. I reckon the feller knew hit war thar all the time, an' I hain't got no manner of doubt he hornswaggled us."

"Hit's kinderly hard on you an' the children," Lloyd said slowly; "but I'll make ye a free gift of half of hit, M'lissey. Fifteen hundred dollars 'll be all I'm liable ter need."

"So fur's thet's consarned," suggested his daughter, with a quick flash of cupidity in her eyes, "ef ye dwells hyar with Luke an' me, ye won't need fer skeercely nothin' at all."

"I'm farin' away on a journey," he told her non-committally. "I kain't handily tell ye nothin' more'n thet. I'm foot-loose now, an' I aims ter travel scme. I aims ter make a soon start in the mornin'."

XIII

JAKE SNOW, who wore the courtesy title of "captain" because he had once commanded a rich man's yacht on a summer cruise, came out of the door of his house and took stock of the weather indications.

"Wind sets in the west'ard," he observed sagely to no one at all. "Tide's slack. Don't know but we'll have fair weather. Don't know but we shall."

Captain Snow had not yet breakfasted, and that meant that the day was young. Roving about the radius of sight from his back door, his eye swept the tops of low pine woods, the undulations of more distant sand dunes, and, beyond them, glimpses of sapphire water. Abruptly it halted and became perplexed, troubled.

"Smoke! Well, I want to know! Smoke!" he exclaimed. Wheeling, he shouted through the door: "Just set my breakfast back on the stove, Abbie. I've got to go over to Mr. Bowes's camp before I eat. Somebody's there."

Mr. Bowes's camp was one of Captain

Jake's stewardships—a place usually empty until the cold northeasters of coming winter brought the ducks and geese down from the arctic and gunners out from town. Then live black ducks, bred in captivity, quacked raucously among the cunningly painted wooden decoys, and long lines of speeding dots in the wintry skies were lured to wheel and drop down within range of the sportsmen who stood dry-shod in ambushed trenches. Then live wild goose decoys called from their tethers and pegs on the beach, to high-honking voices near the clouds, in the Judas invitation whose acceptance spelled death in the withering range of the masked batteries.

At other times Jake went over from day to day and inspected the empty premises, overhauling the gear, repainting battered decoys, whittling out new ones, and guarding the interests of the absentee landlord.

Now Jake, who had been away from home for some three days, returned to find smoke rising from the chimney, which should be cold. It was a situation that demanded investigation.

As his battered motor dory chugged to an anchorage abreast of the building, the Cape Codder's face set itself to a stern displeasure. The eviction of trespassers on an empty stomach did not appeal to him as an exhilarating task.

"By Godfrey Hallelujah, he must be a bold scamp!" muttered Jake, as, standing in his sharpie, he sculled it shoreward with a dexterous wriggling of a single oar. "I don't know but he'll give me trouble. I don't know but he will!"

As he stepped ashore from his beached boat in water that came knee high on his hip boots, recognition broke over his face and cleared it of anxiety.

"Mr. Bowes!" he exclaimed amazedly. "Mr. Bowes! Well, I want to know! By Godfrey Hallelujah, why didn't you send me word?"

The man who had come as a refugee from a wedding where he had been miscast as an usher laughed somewhat ruefully.

"I didn't know I was coming down, Jake. It was a sudden notion."

Jake's weather-beaten face lighted enthusiastically, and he pointed up the beach, where the bulk of a grounded hull loomed under a covering of canvas.

"Just got through overhauling your power boat. She's as fresh as a June bride now, an' she runs like a gold watch. Don't

know but you'd like to la'nch her while you're here."

Bowes suffered himself to be led along the sand, and stood by while the Cape Codder, with the pride of a sculptor unveiling his masterpiece, ripped away the covering of sail cloth from a thirty-footer, gay and trim in the freshness of paint and varnish.

"There she lays," declared the old seaman, almost tenderly. "I don't know but she's better than new. I shouldn't swap her for a new one if she was mine. A lady or a child can handle her."

Bowes contemplated the little craft with surprise. To him it seemed an amazing thing that the boat he remembered as tide-battered, and almost dilapidated, should have emerged with such a phoenix reincarnation from her overhauling.

"She was shabby, and now she's beautiful, Jake," he declared heartily.

With the suddenness of inspiration, there came into his head an idea that was tintured, had he known it, with pathos.

Bowes had been miserable. He had been pitying himself, because life held no possibility of stirring him again to interest; because for him existence was beer gone stale. Now, however, his face brightened with a boyish delight new-found and zestful.

It had occurred to him to take the Mackerel Gull over and anchor her off Dick Carson's beach as a parting gift to the bride. He would once more see Phyllis, though only for a moment or two. In that quick meeting and parting he would find an agonized delight, a tortured rapture. Having made his presentation, he would go back to Boston and trust himself no longer in this neighborhood.

In Cullom Bowes had always bubbled an effervescent vitality. Even in the darkest days of the war some comrades, living in a perpetual shudder of disgust, had railed at his idiotic cheerfulness; but while they had railed at it, they had nevertheless drawn upon it, as a man with an empty canteen draws on him who is still supplied. Now, with the sun sparkling on water of jeweled color and clarity, and with a green fringe of shore line hemming and scalloping it, some persistent bubbles of that old effervescence began to rise, dancing through the stagnant dullness of his spirit.

It was early afternoon, and the Mackerel Gull was bearing him steadily toward Phyllis with an engine that purred as happily as a contented cat. Once more he was to

see the woman he loved—to hear her voice, her laughter. He would present to her an attitude of comradeship unchanged, except that from it should be censored every vestige of the lover's egotism.

Yesterday he had sworn that, under the altered status, he couldn't bear to see her again. Now his hand on the wheel was shaping a course for the shoulder of the promontory upon which he could already make out the roof of Dick Carson's house.

He told himself that to leave his boat moored or beached in idleness all summer would be an ungracious and wasteful thing. He argued the matter into complete logic as the Mackerel Gull cut through the water with a bone in her teeth and a wake streaming far astern.

A small cove, round as a bowl, and landlocked save for a tiny channel, bit into the shore line of Dick Carson's land, and Bowes steered for that diminutive harbor. A coast guard gun could have shot a line-iron across the center of the cove. On three sides of it pine woods masked a steeply sloping shore, where wild rose, bayberry, and poison ivy wove a tangle to the salt grasses of the margin. At high tide the water encroached on these grasses; but on the side upon which the house stood, and again straight across from it, lay white and enticing little beaches of smooth sand, even when the tide was at flood.

As the Mackerel Gull nosed her way, with idling engine, through the narrow entrance, Jake nodded from his place by the throttle.

"Where did you cal'late to anchor her?" he inquired. "It's lee enough anywhere in this pond."

Bowes pointed to the side of the cove on which, hidden by thick woodland, stood the house itself.

"While you're getting the mooring block out," he said, "I'll take the tender, if you don't mind. I want to row across to the other beach for a few minutes."

Somewhat suddenly, Bowes had felt a fluttering of his heart, an immense and disconcerting stage fright. Before following the little wood path to the crest, he discovered a need for sitting alone a few minutes and composing his agitation. He felt that he must get away even from Jake Snow, undisturbing as the captain was; and there on the far side, where the hull of a good-sized boat lay rotting in the sun, he could for the instant find hermitage.

He rowed away in the little sharpie, and,

having beached it silently on the gradually lifting incline, he walked slowly toward the decaying hull. He went with his head bowed and with troubled lines between his brows, and once or twice, in that freedom from watchfulness, his lips twisted without words.

"Maybe," he reflected, "it would have been better, after all, to have sent the boat over by Jake, with a note. I'm not sure I can stand seeing her—here!"

He stopped. Quite suddenly his head came up as if a fist had landed on his chin, and he stood, his expression instantly changed to one of astonishment and dismay.

Just beyond the intervening bulk of the beached boat sat Phyllis herself, alone. She was in a bathing dress, still wet from her swim across the cove; but it was none of these things that had caused Bowes to halt with such abruptness, and to change from self-pity to bewilderment.

The girl was sitting with her back half turned, and was gazing fixedly across the strip of water, so that the delicate outline of her profile stood out in cameo clearness against the rising sand beyond her.

And in the expression on that profile Bowes read no declaration of happiness. The lip corners drooped with the downward tilt of grief, and the rose-leaf delicacy of the cheeks betrayed a suggestion of pallor. The eyes, too, touched about with the smudge of weariness or strain, were telling a story of distress in a language as plain to his sympathy as words could have been.

She had not heard him, nor even seen the power boat yet. For a few moments his astonishment held him there incredulously, facing the revelation that, for some reason, she was as unhappy as himself.

He was certain, too, that it was no ephemeral unhappiness, no little sadness, like the shadow of a scurrying cloud over sunlit hills, but something which had struck deep enough to convey, in the miniature of the moment, the significance of depth and permanence.

Bowes saw all this in the unguarded confession of her face, as clearly and as suddenly as one sees things in the glare of a lightning flash through darkness. He was deeply moved. If she was in trouble, he ached to offer her comfort; but his discovery had been accidental, and without her invitation he must not seem to know her secret. To share it was her right, or to keep it.

Hordes of questions rushed overwhelmingly upon him. Had Phyllis already discovered that she had made a mistake? Great God, thought the man, while a chilling sweat broke out over him, does life juggle human matters so lightly and uncertainly as that? Had he himself missed his life's happiness by so narrow a margin of decision? And if that were true, in what quarter lay the remedy?

Of course, he told himself, that was an absurd conjecture, born only of self-centered egotism; and yet what else could have put that stamp of tragedy on the bride's face within three days of her marriage?

She stirred, and her eyes closed, then opened. She clasped her hands to her face for a moment, shuddering. Then she took them away, and caught her lower lip between her teeth.

It was too late for Bowes to escape now. She was about to rise, and must see him. He felt as guilty as an eavesdropper or a peeping *Tom*. The best he could do was to draw back out of sight and then to come upon her with the innocent appearance of having witnessed nothing. He wondered if his own face was drawn and telltale, but he got to his boat, and scraped it noisily on the sand, as if he were just grounding it. He leaned over, toying with his anchor rope.

When he rose again, Phyllis had also come to her feet and moved to the bow of the boat, where she stood facing him. She must have supposed that she had seen him first.

Once more the flair of the actress had worked its swift magic with her. As the man rose, he would not have believed that this could be the same woman. He almost doubted that the woman of a few seconds ago had any existence outside the distortion of his own biased imagination.

Phyllis was smiling on him with a clear-eyed graciousness that illuminated her face a radiant charm. Her pallor and her ringed sockets seemed to disappear as shadows do under a sudden flood of light. She stood in her clinging bathing dress, slender and upright and vital, as if her shoulders had never sagged or her lips drooped in dejection. She seemed what until just now he had always thought her—an incarnation of youthfulness who finds life generous and who faces it lightly and gratefully.

"Cullom Bowes!" she exclaimed, and her voice rang with surprised and genuine

pleasure. "Did you come up out of the water, or down out of the sky? And how did you find me here?"

"Me?" answered the man, less mercurial in his ability to change his whole aspect in the space of a breath. "Oh, I just came over like the Greeks, bearing a gift—a wooden sea horse, to carry the analogy to its end."

"Greeks with wooden horses," she laughed, "should be met coldly and with suspicion, if I remember rightly; but somehow"—she had held out both hands, and Cullom Bowes had taken them in his—"somehow I don't seem able to think of you as a menace."

"My wooden horse is tame," he assured her; "and the only warrior it will disgorge is one Captain Jake Snow, a man of peace. Moreover, the horse can stand hitched while we talk."

He paused, wondering if she had marked the avid searching of his eyes into her smiling masquerade; but she only nodded and laughed again.

"Dick," he went on with mock severity, "has bad discipline in his household. He shouldn't let you take such a long swim alone. It's close to half a mile across that cove and back."

"I ran off," she smiled, "while Dick was driving to the village. He didn't know."

"If I were Dick—" began Cullom Bowes, and paused. "It would be as easy for my shadow to run away from me as for you to escape," he had been on the point of saying. Instead, he announced sternly: "If I were Dick, I'd hide your bathing suit!"

"But you aren't Dick," she reminded him. "Besides, you're going to ferry me back, aren't you?"

"Eventually," he responded, "but on my own terms. First I'm going to sit here on the sand and talk to you—unless you're chilled after your swim."

"I'm not cold," she assured him.

For just an instant there was a hungry flash in her eyes, as if to sit here, away from others and with him, meant an interval of escape—from something. But that momentary upflaring of insurgent spirit in her face passed so speedily that, except for what he had already seen, it would have escaped him.

"What do you want to talk about?" she demanded.

"You," he answered, and the fervor of his voice gave comprehensive eloquence to the short word.

"It's so long since we met," she mockingly protested, "that I hardly know where to begin. Almost three days, isn't it?"

"Is that all?" he asked simply. "It seems more."

"Yes, doesn't it?"

Possibly the very simplicity of his tone had thrown her off her guard, made her forget the playing of her part. At all events, the three words had slipped out in a tone that was serious, perhaps even regretful.

Instantly the man flung away his manner of levity.

"Does it seem long to you, too?" he demanded searchingly.

Quickly she parried.

"Eventful days seem long, because they are full. Don't you think so?"

Bowes nodded non-committally.

"If happiness makes days long," he declared, "I hope each one of yours will be a century!"

"I know you do, Cullom, dear," she answered, and her hand rested briefly like a feather on his arm. "And I wish it for you, too."

He pulled himself together and forced his old infectious grin.

"I didn't come to hold a post mortem over myself," he declared; "but I wish you would tell me something, Phyllis. You know aged gentlemen who live in the past like to mull over faded memories. Was there ever a time, during my late candidacy, when you—" He broke off. "Well, when you were tempted to regard me as possibly available?" he went on, flushing brick red.

She stood for a little while looking across the water, and her face grew sober. He wondered whether there was hunger in it, or only sympathy. Then she nodded.

"Yes," she said frankly. "It took me quite a long time to decide, you know. Why did you ask that, Cullom?"

His face had gone pale, but again he twisted it into a grin.

"I suppose," he explained, "it's on the same principle that makes every loser want to feel he was at least in the running."

Their eyes held, and his were saying things that he had refused his tongue the right to say. Phyllis's lips stirred as if to speak, then quieted into a silent smile. She turned toward the boat, but the man caught

her hand, and his words came tumbling in a cascade of impetuosity.

"We've been talking nonsense, dear girl," he declared. "I want you to be happy. I want it above everything. You chose old Dick, and that's that! But don't forget—and this is in deadly earnest—if I can ever be of any use to you, in any way, call on me. That's an authentic offer, and there's no limit—anything up to and including murder, do you understand?"

"I understand, and even the hyperbole doesn't weaken it," she said. "Come now, let's row across and get Dick, and we'll all look at your wooden horse."

XIV

BOWES had gone through his moment of earthquake, and had survived it. The carefully reared and buttressed structure of his self-command had been near to falling, but it had survived the storm.

He felt that he must, in honor, take his cue from Phyllis, who had handled the misery that had unsteadied him as a magician handles a gold piece. She had palmed it, made a swift pass over it, and it had seemed to vanish into space.

His mind had no Machiavellian subtleties, and yet, in responding to the guidance of an instinct which he did not even realize, he had perhaps taken the most diplomatic course he could have chosen. He had seized the cue which she had given him to break into a moment of fervent seriousness, to offer himself, if she chose to take it so, as a confidant and champion. He had proclaimed his continued allegiance, asking nothing in return. Had she had ever so slight a wish to draw aside the curtain with which she had so swiftly masked her misery, she must have recognized the opportunity.

Had she so responded; had she let slip the half gay manner which the man recognized as spurious; had she shown herself in need of any sort of help, he would have rushed into the temple of her life from which marriage had excommunicated him, and let the consequences go hang. Her sanctum was no more sacred to him than to her; but she had guarded its doors with a smile, sentineled its entrance with laughter, and left him outside.

So the perilous moment had passed, and they were standing by his sharpie, as conventionally correct as if no threat had brushed them.

Cullom pushed the boat out, with the girl seated aft, so that he could look at her as he wielded his oars. He talked with matter-of-fact ease, just as he had led the chatter at the bride's table, but underneath he was surging on a turgid whirlpool of thought.

"That boat is a perfect beauty," declared the girl delightedly as they drew nearer it.

Bowes smiled.

"That's the aforesaid wooden sea horse brought by the Greek, Cullom Cullomides," he prattled with his good-natured grin. "After all," he was saying to himself, "this business of marriage is a funny proposition. There isn't any other contract under heaven that ties its parties up so tight and gives them less guarantee. You take on the bargain—on the strength of a few fancy samples—with your eyes shut, and then the world sits on your neck and holds you to it."

"I think, Cullom," said Phyllis soberly, "that only a genius for kindness would have thought of doing a thing like this. You always were the most gracious and kindly soul in the world!"

"I'm Cullom Cullomides, the kind Greek boy," he ironically apostrophized. "Dick's all right," he went on, to himself. "The question is, are they suited to each other? But how would they know? How could they tell?" He halted his reverie and declared: "Well, here we are! Jake, turn out the guard, and fire the admiral's salute. Mrs. Carson, this is Captain Jake Snow."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," said Jake, seizing the sharpie's gunwale and holding her close. "Come aboard!"

Fifteen minutes later, while Phyllis was changing from her still damp bathing suit, Cullom Bowes was smoking a cigarette with his old chum Dick Carson on the terrace.

It seemed to the visitor that the old bone-crunching heartiness of Dick's handclasp had slackened when they met. Cullom thought, too—though he realized that his state of mind was probably coloring all his impressions now—that Dick's eyes were tired and haunted. Both men felt as if they were walking warily among trespass signs, seeking to avoid this and that, with a shadow of unadmitted embarrassment between them.

"It's great of you to let us have the Mackerel Gull, old man," declared Dick.

"It's great to see you, too. I didn't know you were nearer than Boston."

"I ran down to the shack," explained Cullom. "I'm just about to start back."

Dick felt that his old friend's appearance here just now was freighted with danger. His recent rival had met his wife alone, and had talked with her. How much of the truth had Bowes guessed?

Of course Phyllis had told nothing outright. Her parole gave Dick that assurance; but a man in love can read the small and obscure type in his lady's eyes. They can construe the quick, unguarded meanings of her gestures and manner—and in such a precarious situation small things may cause disaster.

Once again Cullom and himself might be thrown into the deadly parallel of comparison, at a time when Dick stood calamitously clouded with the prejudice of a fancied disillusionment. So a polite constraint fettered the two old friends, who had for years shared confidences and chaffed each other with affectionate affability.

Half an hour later, when the three had inspected the Mackerel Gull, Bowes took his leave. Jake had found a neighboring "quahogger" in a lumbering power dory, who volunteered to take them back. Soon the promontory was dropping astern, with Phyllis and Dick Carson, receding figures on the shore, waving their farewell.

When the explosive noisiness of the engine that took Bowes away had died to a drone at the end of a long-stretched wake across the blue of the bay, Carson turned to the woman at his side.

"Phyllis," he said, "the chance you're giving me isn't a real chance, after all. In the old days of courtship, when I came to you, I came to a welcome. It was like sunlight. A plant can bloom in sunlight. A man can show what's best in him when there's a welcome to invite it; but now—"

Her eyes did not turn toward him. They were still absently following the course of the departing boat.

"You said," she responded slowly, "that if I stayed here, where your influence was at work, I couldn't help feeling—as I felt before."

He had no answer. After a moment of silence she turned with the flash of contrition in her eyes.

"Forgive me, Dick," she begged. "I'm not withholding any chance—not consciously, at least. I'm hungry for the happiness

of a few days ago; but somehow it seems gone. Some mainspring seems broken."

XV

JOE CARSON, sitting in his small hotel room in Peril Town, had food for thought, and the somberness of his face gave declaration that it was not a delectable repast.

From this village and the forested uplands about it he had looked at life through childish eyes, but it had been a different town then. Even in boyhood, though his blood was native and his roots of sentiment deep-set in the rocky soil, he had also known the viewpoint of the outer world.

Despite its austere disdain for the pretentious and meddling wealth of "down below," mountain life had its own little aristocracy, and into it Joe Carson had been born. His mother's branch of the Wiley family had always been moderately wealthy, and had escaped the cramping limitations which poverty imposed so generally upon the people of the hills. That mother, until her separation from her husband, had raised her children to the two lives, so that Joe had known his own remote people with a perspective which they themselves lacked—the perspective of a balanced outlook.

To his mind the men in butternut brown, who still took and kept the blood oath of the vendetta, were not unlettered barbarians lagging stagnantly behind the march of progress, but a crudely heroic race. About them hung, for him, a glamour like that of the warlike clans of Scotland who stood so long and stubbornly against the encroachments of change, defending their traditions by force of arms.

He knew that eventually the old order would be changed. He realized that this amendment would sweep away miasmas of ignorance and semipauperism, as well as a certain vital picturesqueness. It had been his early dream that when this change came, he should stand as an instrument for safeguarding his people against the dangers and the exploitation of invading capital.

Above all he loved them, and he had fought their battles in the Legislature when older adversaries in debate humorously counseled him to "tarry in Jericho until his beard should grow." In order that they might trust him, in return for his love, he sought to show them that he was no tame preacher, but a clansman whose spirit they could understand and trust.

He had seen this so-called lawless people rise with single-hearted response to the call of a war which, to their comprehensions, lay as far away as the Pleiades. He had fought along with them, and when the struggle ended he had smiled as, in places many miles from any railroad, he had seen citation ribbons on hickory shirts and heard gangling lads who used to drawl "I reckon" and "I 'low" interlard their speech with "*Oui, beaucoup*," and "I'll tell the world!"

The giantess was stirring, but even now it was with the giantess rather than her labor pains that Joe Carson's interest concerned itself.

This evening he sat in the room of the new hotel, and saw the febrile activity of an oil boom streaming through a street where he had known wild-eyed men to ride galloping with bridle reins between their teeth and pistols barking from each hand.

Carson's eyes went out over the changed panorama and rested on the crown of the lofty mountain behind the town. It loomed soot-black, gigantic, and unchanged, against a luminous pallor of moon mist.

Before the man, on the table, lay a partly finished letter, written in that pale ink which for some reason seems indigenous to country hotels. On top of a pile of legal papers rested two telegraph blanks.

Carson rose to push back his chair impatiently and pace the room with a caged restlessness, and his brows knitted in troubled abstraction. For the twentieth time, perhaps, he reread those accusing words that his brother had carelessly permitted to reach the wire:

Phyllis refuses to stay here. I refuse to let her go. Situation serious, thanks to your intervention.

The second message had attempted an assuagement of ruffled sensibilities, but it was the first that counted.

Never before, since trivial childhood quarrels, had Dick regarded it as needful to rebuke his brother. Now Dick, in effect, charged Joe with disrupting his world; and such charges could not be lightly made or retracted.

Joe's feeling for Dick had always been a sort of worship. Dick was his pattern of what a Carson might be, of what a gentleman should be, of what a man was; and yet the two brothers had not been thrown closely together in recent years. Dick, after all, was more a tradition than a fact

in Joe's life—or, perhaps, more a religion than either.

Now Joe Carson had gone to his brother's wedding and had brought about what seemed—so this hateful scrap of yellow paper told him—to be a terrible disaster, imperiling the happiness of Dick's life.

A woman who could be so easily won away from love wasn't worth any mortal heartache. Of that Joe was certain, but he was equally certain that no man enmeshed in the web of infatuation could admit the truth of it. To Dick only one thing would stand clear—obviously only one thing was standing clear—that his brother had undone him.

Joe himself could as soon have contemplated a scalding infamy as the thought of concealing his ancestry because of shame or fear. It was hard to acquit Dick of censure on that score, and yet his loyalty for his brother was cut to a pattern which could not accuse him. Here lay Joe's own dilemma of conflicting loyalties.

At all events, Dick had won love, and was losing it through him, and if a remedy lay in his power he must apply it.

To have won love was a wonderful thing. Joe realized, in an echoing emptiness of heart, how much he had missed it; how loneliness had walked with him like a shadow which always fell across his eyes. Now he was trying to write to Dick, and his letter proved more difficult of composition than an involved brief.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed to himself. "I can't tell him that the trouble with the whole explosion is that his shell is a dud!" He returned to the table and took up his pen again.

At length he straightened up and read what he had contrived to set down.

Your two telegrams came this morning, old man. I need hardly tell you what a jolt the first gave me, or what relief came with the second. You, who have the graces I lack, must make my abject apologies to Phyllis and do what you can to set me straight. I was surprised into saying what I said, but history and fiction teem with the disasters that come of introducing one's country kin into polite society.

For you and yours I'd go the limit to bring happiness, if I could—my record to the contrary notwithstanding.

The man frowned and lighted a cigar.

"It's not a howling success," he admitted to himself, as he resumed his reading.

The first telegram was handed to me by a deputy sheriff while I was temporarily presiding

on the bench, and the machinery of the law came near skidding. It had been sent over by some chance messenger from the telegraph office.

The usual dullness of the court that day was broken by elements of personal drama and coincidence, which may interest Phyllis. Just after I had read my telegram—indeed, as it still lay on my desk—I recognized an elderly man sitting in the court room, whom I had once prosecuted for homicide, and whom I supposed to be still in prison. It was old Lloyd Powell. During a recess of court I called him up and we talked affably enough. After all, since I was only hired counsel in that case, there was no reason for any deadly grudge between us.

Joe paused and puffed reflectively at his cigar, gazing out at the peak of the sentinel mountain. At length he took up his sheets again.

The germ of drama lay in the circumstance that before we had talked five minutes, this old man told me—with a positive monomania of gratitude in his eyes—that he owed his pardon to Phyllis herself. He said that the remnant of life which she had given back to him belonged to her and that to her service he henceforth dedicated himself.

Once more the writer paused and puckered his brow. In the next paragraph he had essayed a touch of humor, with which he was not altogether pleased.

When the devoted old fanatic had taken his departure, it occurred to me to dramatize in my own mind the effect it might have had on him, had he known what lay in your telegram so close to his eye. His single track intensity of mind would be quite capable of some primitive frenzy, but his slow old eyes could have divined nothing in that time, and so we parted friends.

"It's a sad effort," meditated the writer despondently, "but I doubt if I can better it. I'll let it go as it is!"

XVI

ALONG the decks of the Fall River boat, lying at her North River pier, rang the stentorian warning:

"All ashore that's goin' ashore!"

Down her gangplank ran a freshet of human exodus, and bucking against it came three belated passengers fighting their way upward. Two of the three appeared to be middle-aged men of affairs. Accustomed to the exigencies of travel, they fell in behind their luggage-laden porters and suffered those burden-bearers to break the way for their progress. The third man had no porter, and labored under the weight of a cheap fiber telescope. He also carried a parcel as long and awkward as a broom,

which was swathed in burlap and newspapers, and which fouled his movements like a dragging spar.

This tardy passenger was elderly, tall and rawboned, and just now he was sweating as he jostled against the impact of outflowing fellow creatures. He was palpably country-bred and unsophisticated, and was garbed in a suit of cheap and nondescript black; but he glanced comprehensively about him out of shrewdly keen eyes.

When the boat nosed out from her slip this traveler stood by the rail of the upper deck, forward. Removing his shapeless black felt hat from a head that had not long ago been shaven, he mopped his forehead with a huge handkerchief. At his roughly shod feet reposed the suit case and the long parcel—which contained a repeating rifle, an instrument in the use of which he was an artist of skill and precision.

To the unsuspecting eye, however, this part of the traveler's impedimenta might well have been some cumbersome agricultural instrument—the shaft of some farm machine, perhaps, or pruning shears of generous reach and power.

Around the tip of Battery Park the panorama of the town unrolled itself, and the boat set her course up the channel of East River toward the Sound. Here, in the light of late afternoon, before the eyes of a man who had known only ragged mountains and bleakly limiting prison walls, rose peaks of another sort—lofty peaks of masonry.

To eyes that had seen so little of a populous world, the sight must have savored of pure miracle, for the sky line of lower Manhattan was drawing its spired and turreted massiveness upward, high and thin, through a mist that softened it into ash of violet.

To any vision that picture must stand for the spirit of a colossus; but each beholder is likely to interpret it according to its relation to himself. To the young egotist of towering ambition it may mean infinite opportunity, a magnificence of promised triumph. To the tired stenographer fleeing to a brief vacation it may loom as forbidding as did Cheops's pyramid to Egypt's sweating slaves.

To the despondent and disappointed it masses itself as an unbreakable might of adversity; but to old Lloyd Powell, standing beside the rifle with which he was traveling a long way to do murder, it epitomized the remorseless power of the society he was defying. It proclaimed, like an edict

printed in iron and stone, the certainty of his own crushing in the jaws of that society's vengeance.

Yet the mountaineer gazed at it steadfastly—gazed at the staggering marvel of such a city out of eyes that had hitherto seen only "settlemints." He gazed on its upflung height and bridge-webbed solidity, and passed it by, unshaken of resolve, as he would pass a milepost along his way.

In deck chairs at his back sat two urbane and obviously prosperous men, who puffed at their cigars and chatted of business affairs. Their talk was as alien, almost as incomprehensible, to Powell, as if it were being carried on in another tongue.

The sounds of the river traffic, too, blended into a strange and blatant dissonance that beat on nerves uninsulated against such assaults. For a time he stood rigid, unconscious of glances that lingered on him in amused recognition of his blending of uncouthness with an almost patriarchal dignity of bearing.

Eventually the voices at his back fell silent. The two gentlemen had gone elsewhere, and Powell turned to look across the boat to the starboard quarter. There he saw an island with great stone and brick buildings of barred windows, and figures moving about in drab uniforms. Experience told him that this was a prison. Perhaps, he vaguely reflected, it was the prison to which they would shortly consign him. He gazed at it with a morbid fascination. It was Blackwell's Island.

He had never heard its name, and yet, as the solidity of its walls and the ordered discipline of its grounds met his eye, he took in its portent and recognized its character. Custom and experience filled in the blanks of ignorance and wrote a story grimly full of comprehension.

Across the clean and salty waters churned into yeasty foam, or running like liquid jade, the nostrils of remembrance caught smells that he knew—the odors of formaldehyde and lime. His ears registered again, from long and jaded memory, the sounds that go bleakly echoing through inclosures of masonry where jailed men are housed—the oppressive click of locks and metal doors; the occasional midnight wail of some unfortunate who cries out in futile desperation and beats his bars; the shuffle of feet that have lost their elasticity, and the drone of voices that suggest a partial death.

In retrospect he endured once more the caged years when lowland air, shared and polluted by other hundreds of human animals, had seemed to stifle lungs that longed for clarity and altitude and freedom. From

all this he had gained release—and now to its bleak wretchedness, or to the sterner penalty of death, he must soon return. After all, he thought, death would be preferable.

(To be continued in the November number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Degrees of Temperament

A MOTION PICTURE ELECTRICIAN TELLS THE STORY OF THE
BEST FILM HE EVER HELPED TO MAKE

By Jack Whitman

I DON'T belong to this here I-Knew-Him-When Club. I wouldn't join it under no circumstances, being a family man, and having enough to do to keep the milkman coming, and the rent collector away, without paying dues in a secret society besides.

Just the same, I can give you the straight dope on these here movie stars, and no fooling. I been closer to a lot of 'em than their maids and varlets, since I been head 'lectrician on this lot.

Believe me, they don't fool with the little guy that banks the Cooper-Hewitts round their sets, and fixes that misty effect they all hanker after in a close-up. Not them! Nobody tells a 'lectrician where to get off at. Why, say, old Dave Griffith said to me once:

"Mr. Hennessey, will you please let us have another Kleig?"

"Will you please?" Get that? Did you ever hear a director say "please" to a star? You did not! But a 'lectrician—that's different. We got a union. Without us, kid, you couldn't see these stars at all.

Take a look at those three-sheets over in front of Bill Higgins's office, will you? See what they say, reading from left to right? First you see little Billie Thompson—she's a great star, ain't she? Say, I knew her when she played bathing girls over at Max Ennett's place. Next there's Thomas Mervin. When he was plain Tommy, and going around on street cars from one film factory to another, we used to sit side by side and swap hard luck stories.

Yeah, and many a time he bummed me for the makings. Now they're getting fifteen hundred a week apiece, and they don't know I'm alive, except when they want something.

Remember when they made their big hit? It was in "The Soul Doctor"—the best picture ever made, and the only one I'd sit through twice. That was a picture! None of this hokum you see being shot all around us. None of these big sets that cost ten thousand iron men and five hundred men to build. No, sir—just a plain, everyday picture, but a picture made by a director that knew what he was doing.

Mr. George Richards—that's the man, the only director I'd call "Mr." if I was paid to do it. Why? Because, son, he was a scholar and a gentleman, or I ain't the best 'lectrician in the moving-picture business—which I am.

Maybe you remember seeing my name on "The Soul Doctor." Mr. Richards put it there himself—had a special slide made for it; and then he came and told me how much I had helped him, and how much he appreciated my work. No bunk about it, either; straight goods, every word he ever spoke.

He made "The Soul Doctor." Every darned scene of it was his work. Don't let nobody tell you different. Billie Thompson and Tom Mervin didn't have a thing to do with it; they were just puppets in his hands. It made them, though, 'cause right afterward the Superexcellent gave 'em both big contracts.