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THE KING

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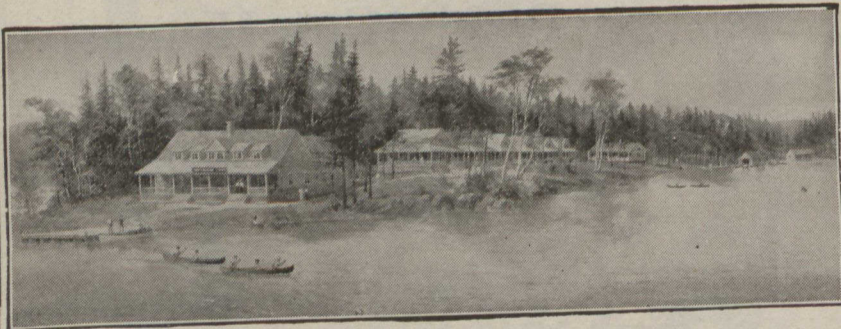
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with this ploughing. Of course, it does not sound very sensible."

Miss Barrington looked at him gravely, for there was a curious and steadily-tightening bond between the two. "It depends upon what you mean by sense. Can we reason out all we feel, and is there nothing intangible but real behind the impulses which may be sent to us?"

"Well," said Witham, with a little smile, "that is a trifle too deep for me, and it's difficult to think of anything but the work I have to do. But you were the first at Silverdale to hold out a hand to me—and I have a feeling that your good wishes would go a long way now. Is it altogether fantastic to believe that the good-will of my first friend would help to bring me prosperity?"

The white-haired lady's eyes grew momentarily soft, and, with a gravity that did not seem out of place, she moved forward and laid her hand on a big horse's neck, and smiled when the dumb beast responded to her gentle touch.

"It is a good work," she said. "Lance, there is more than dollars, or the bread that somebody is needing, behind what you are doing, and because I loved your mother I know how her approval would have followed you. And now sow in hope, and God speed your plough!"

She turned away almost abruptly, and Witham stood still, with one hand closed tightly and a little deeper tint in the bronze of his face, sensible at once of an unchanged resolution and a horrible degradation. Then he saw that the Colonel had helped Miss Barrington into the saddle and her niece was speaking.

"I have something to ask Mr. Courthorne, and will overtake you," she said. The others rode on, and the girl turned to Witham. "I made you a promise and did my best to keep it, but

I find it harder than I fancied it would be," she said. "I want you to release me."

"I should like to hear your reasons," said Witham.

The girl made a faint gesture of impatience. "Of course, if you, insist!"

"I do," said Witham quietly.

"Then I promised you to have all my holding sown this year, and I am still willing to do so; but, though my uncle makes no protests I know he feels my opposition very keenly, and it hurts me horribly. Unspoken reproaches are the worst to bear, you know, and now Dane and some of the others are following your lead, it is painful to feel that I am taking part with them against the man who has always been kind to me."

"And you would prefer to be loyal to Colonel Barrington even if it cost you a good deal?"

"Of course!" said Maud Barrington. "Can you ask me?"

Witham saw the sparkle in her eyes and the half-contemptuous pride in the poise of the shapely head. Loyalty, it was evident, was not a figure of speech with her, but he felt that he had seen enough and turned his face aside.

"I knew it would be difficult when I asked," he said. "Still, I cannot give you back that promise. We are going to see a great change this year, and I have set my heart on making all I can for you."

"But why should you?" asked Maud Barrington, somewhat astonished that she did not feel more angry.

"Well," said Witham gravely, "I may tell you by and by, and in the meanwhile you can set it down to vanity. This may be my last venture at Silverdale, and I want to make it a big success." (To be continued.)

## A Black Fox Skin

(Concluded from page 9.)

dressed as a white girl.

Now she walked into the prison calmly. "You are a good man, Roy," she said in a business-like manner. "And I have brought you back your sleeping robe, that you wrapped our little girl, Dolly, in, when you sent her home."

Roy found his voice. "El-Soo, you must go away directly. What would the factor say? How did you get in, anyway? Jack would be very angry if he knew."

As El-Soo knew her husband was at the prison door seeing and hearing everything she was unimpressed by this. "We did not know till to-day," she said in her precise English. "The boys were afraid of being punished for running away when you told them to wait. But Dolly told us, and then we asked Little Fox. Brown Moose is very angry with him. And I have come to thank you."

She held out her hand to him gravely, but Roy drew back, his face crimsoning. "I'm not fit for a woman like you to touch," he said.

"I don't think you are a thief all through, any more than Little Fox is a coward," she said reflectively. "You could be good if you liked. Real thieves don't know how to be anything else."

"In other words I am rather worse than what they call a moral degenerate," said Roy grimly, his tired eyes seeking the hook again and wishing El-Soo would go, but she had brought him a Christmas present, a basket with meat and potatoes, hot tea and Christmas pudding. This last was rather an achievement in a land where flour, plums and spices were not. It had potatoes for flour, frozen cranberries for fruit, and was flavored with much ginger and molasses. Roy drank the tea thirstily, but in spite of his long fast he was too nervous to eat, much to El-Soo's disappointment. However, in answer to her questions he told her of his journey back with the stolen black fox. Then he started up as Jack came in.

El-Soo passed out, quick and noiseless as a shadow, and the two men faced each other, Roy rather white.

"You don't look exactly fit, kid," was all Jack said.

Roy glanced again at the hook overhead. "I know I must pay for what I did to you," he said steadily, "and I'm fit enough for that whatever it is."

"Pay your grandmother," retorted Jack. "I don't count what a crazy man does any more than I would a girl. But I owe you a life, Dolly's life. I'll settle your account at Fort Gray River, and there's a dog team outside with three weeks' supplies. I guess if you like there's nothing to hinder you getting clear away. Brown Moose is satisfied, he's got the black fox back, and if we're all willing you should get off now, we needn't worry about the law."

"You mean you think I'm not a thief all through," said Roy after a long pause. "You think I've had enough for what I did. I wonder if you would mind shaking hands with me?"

Jack held out his hand instantly.

"Are you going to run, kid?"

"You know I'm not," Roy answered with an uncertain smile. "When Pete gave you his keys it meant you would have to answer for it if I escaped."

"You can cut that out, kid," said Jack drily.

Roy hesitated and flushed. "See here, Jack, I've been getting things all my life without paying for them. I don't mean what the law calls stealing, but I owe my folks to live a lot different than I have—if I'd been what I should I would never have been crazy enough to steal the black fox. So I won't run away from paying for everything, and then being able to start again clear."

"Paying includes Pete, kid."

Roy flushed again. "If El-Soo and then you had not come here I should have killed myself to-night, Jack. But now you've shaken hands with me, and I know you believe I can pick myself up again, you needn't be afraid that all the Pete's I may meet while I'm paying will send me off my head again."

Jack left him then, to eat, and sleep warmly in his fur robe, the Mackenzie substitute for the Yukon sleeping bag, with something like Christmas peace in his heart.

Two days later he was brought before McPhail again. That gentleman looked at him severely. "Jock's told me of the most unlawful and improper proposal he made ye on Christmas night," he said. "And I told him I was fair scandalized at him. But I have decided that ye can go on suspended sentence, and as Jock has paid your debt to the company, ye are free to return home, and, I trust, do your duty there."