

THE UNQUENCHABLE FIRE:

Or, The Tragedy of the Wild.

CHAPTER X.—(Cont'd)

The afternoon was well advanced when he moved again. He rose to his feet without any warning, and the change in him was staggering. Now a gaunt, hollow-eyed man looked out upon the world with eyes that shone with the fever that burned in the brain behind them. His movements were slow, deliberate; all his actions had become quite calm. Only his eyes betrayed his condition, telling a tale of a strange new life born within him.

He moved off into the woods, striking down the slope towards the river. He was gone some time; and when he returned his face was cleaned, and a bandage was tied about it. The wound in his shoulder was not severe. He came none too soon, for, as he neared the clearing, he heard a succession of deep-toned wolf-hows. And, as he broke the forest fringe, he saw two great timber-wolves steal swiftly back to the depths whence they had just emerged.

Nick cursed them under his breath. Then he went to his brother's side. Here he paused, and after a moment of mental struggle, stooped and lifted the corpse upon his unwounded shoulder. Then he set off, bearing his gruesome freight and plunged into the forest.

He held the body firmly but tenderly, and walked as rapidly as his burden permitted. He often talked to himself as he went, like a man in deep thought and stirred by violent emotions. Sometimes he slowed his gait, and at others he almost ran. His thoughts influenced him strangely.

Once he set his burden down and rested. The forest was getting dark about him, but it suited his mood; it formed a background for his gloomy thoughts. And, while he rested, he fell to talking as though Ralph were living, and merely rested with him. He talked and answered himself, and later leaned over his dead, crooning like some woman over her child. The time passed. Again he rose and once more shouldering the body, now stiff and cold, hastened on.

And as the evening shadows gathered and the forest gloom deepened, there came the sound of movement about him. At intervals wolfish throats were opened, and the dismal forest cries echoed and re-echoed in the hollow shadows.

His burden grew heavy, and not only palled on his bodily strength. His mind suffered, and his nerves strung tight like the wires of a musical instrument. Every jolt found an echoing note upon them, and each note so struck caused him exquisite pain. And now, too, the wolves grew bolder; the scent of blood was in the air, and taunted their hungry bellies till they began to lose their fear of the man.

Nick stopped and looked about him. The evening shadows were fast closing in. In the gloom he saw eyes looking out upon him, eyes in pairs, like coals of fire surrounded by dark, lank, shadowy forms. One shadow stood out well pronounced, and he unsling his rifle and fired point blank at it. There was a howl of pain. Then followed several fierce yelps, and stealing forms crowded thick and fast upon the creature that had bit the dust.

With a thrill of strange dread Nick shouldered his burden again and proceeded on his way. His steps were no longer steady, but hurried and uncertain. In his haste he frequently stumbled; but he was strong, and he had a haunting fear of what lay behind him, and so he put forth a great effort.

The twilight deepened; black shadows were everywhere about him. Hill rose, and valley sank deep in his course. His fancy now saw the forest crowded with prying eyes. Every tree-trunk became a figure which stood pointing and whispering words of denunciation at him. And as he beheld this ghostly army of shadows his heart quailed, and the look in his eyes grew more and more fevered. He lurched on under the cold, clammy body without thought of his way, but with nervous dew upon his forehead, and with shaking limbs.

The wolves swiftly pursued. Their cries, vicious, eager, came to him, and he knew that the meal he had provided was devoured, and they hungered yet, and thirsted for the blood they scented upon the air. He sped on, staggering, and his mind grew dizzy. But he knew that he had entered his valley, and beyond lay the dugout which henceforth was his alone.

His intolerable burden had worn him down. He feared it as he feared the dark shadows of the woods as he stealing forms which

trailed at his rear. He longed to throw that which he carried to the ground and run headlong to the shelter of his home. But something held him. It was as if his brother's corpse were endowed with life, a ghostly life, and that it clung with tenacious grip to the back of the living. And the thought grew in his aching brain that he was no longer free to do as he chose, but was being driven by the thing he carried. At the river he bent he rid himself of the corpse. He proposed to rest ere he bore it up the last hill, but the stiff arms had somehow embraced his neck and clung to him. With a cry of terror he moved forward at a run. Hard on his heels came the loud-voiced throng of timber-wolves.

And now, ahead, he heard the yelping of his own dogs. The noise brought him a measure of relief, for the speeding shadows behind dropped back into the woods, and their voices faded away into the distance.

But the corpse clung, and its weight dragged him back; to his distorted fancy the arms held his neck as in a vice. He gasped painfully as imagination told him that he was being choked. A cold sweat poured down his face and set him shivering, but, like one doomed to his task, he sped on!

Now the open stretched before him, and beyond lay the dugout. And he saw his dogs running in a rush to meet him—his five fierce huskies. They came welcoming; then they paused uncertainly and grouped together in a cluster, and their tone suddenly changed to the short-voiced yapping of fear. As he came on he called them by name, seeking company in their presence and in the sound of his own voice. But the only response the dogs made was to move uneasily. Their bushy tails drooped and hung between their legs and they turned back fearfully. Then they began to creep away, slinking in furtive apprehension; then, finally, they broke into a headlong flight, racing for home in a perfect madness of terror.

And so the man who killed his brother came to his home again. Horror peered out of his eyes, and all he beheld was tinted with the sanguinary hue of his deed. Inside the hut he released himself from the icy embrace of the dead man's arms, and laid the poor cold clay upon the blankets which had been spread for the return of Aim-sa. And while he stood brooding over the corpse, a sound reached him from behind. Turning, he saw that he had left the door open, and in the opening he beheld the crowding forms of his dogs. They stood snarling fiercely with bristling manes, their narrow-set eyes gleaming in the dusk like sparks of baleful light.

The sight set him shuddering. Then something seemed to stir within him. His heart felt like stone in his body. A coldness seemed to freeze his blood one minute, and the next in a rush came a wave of fiery passion which drove him to unthinking action. The veins in his head felt to be bursting, and a sensation of compression was at his brain.

Out whipped his revolver, and six chambers were emptied at the figures which barred the doorway. A hubbub of howls followed; then, in a moment, all became quite. Now the doorway stood clear; the creatures had vanished—all but two. And these lay where they had fallen.

Suddenly a harsh laugh broke the stillness. But though the laugh was his, Nick's lips were unsmiling, and his eyes gleamed furiously out into the night.

CHAPTER XI.

Nick kicked the remains of the two dogs from the doorway.

Now, as a man moved by force of habit, he kindled a fire in the stove. He had no thought or desire for warmth. It was impulsive mechanically obeyed. Then he sat down; and as he sat he listened to the deplorable howl of the three remaining dogs as, in chorus, they mourned their dead companions.

And as the noise continued the man's nerves vibrated with the hideous dole. It rose and fell, singing its pitiful song, until he could stand it no longer. So he rose and reloaded his revolver. The action brought him relief. Nay, it did more; it brought him a feeling akin to joy. And he passed out into the night.

Forceful action alone could serve

him. His dread, the torture of heart and brain, found relief in the contemplation of taking life. Although he knew it not, a lust for slaughter was upon him. It did not matter the creature so that he could kill.

He closed the door behind him, and from the storm-porch peered out beyond. The moon had just risen above the ghostly mountain peaks, and its deep yellow light shone down over the gleaming crests in long shafts of dull fire. Twenty yards away the three huskies were squatting upon the ground facing each other, as might their blood relations the timber-wolves. Their long, sharp muzzles were thrown towards the starlit heavens, and their heartfelt voices trolled drearily from their cavernous throats, thrilling the air and arousing the mountain echoes.

For a second there was a gleam of light in the darkness of the porch as the moon's rays caught the burnished metal of the man's revolver. Then three shots rang sharply out; three hideous voices were instantly hushed; three bodies rolled over, falling almost side by side. The labor of the trace would know the huskies no more. And all was still.

But the man's passion was only rising. He re-entered the hut thrilled with a strange, wild joy. A fierceness leapt within him as he seated himself beside the stove and gazed over at the still form of his brother. And up out of the forest came the yelp of famished wolf and starving coyote.

The hunched figure made no move. Wild thoughts surged through his brain, thoughts which had no sequence, no continuity. He had not eaten the whole day, and though food was now to his hand he heeded it not. He was exhausted and utterly weary of body. But he sought no rest. He was living upon the vitality of his poor strained brain, sapping the tide of reason which owed none too surely.

The time passed. The cries of the wolves gathered force and drew nearer. The scent of blood was in the air. That night they were very bold. With muzzles thrown up they sniffed at the scent they loved, and came with licking lips and frothing jaws, fighting fiercely among themselves as they sought to reach their quarry. Death they feared not so that the

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pangs of their starving bellies might be eased.

(To be continued.)

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It is built in the French Chateau style, in the most approved method of fireproof construction. The frame of the building is steel, the walls are of Bedford limestone, surmounted with copper roof, and the whole building presents a majestic as well as picturesque appearance from every viewpoint. The possession of such a structure must prove to be not only a valuable asset to the City of Ottawa, but a credit to the Dominion of Canada.

The hotel will contain, in addition to its regular dining-room and cafe, a Ladies' Dining-Room, Banquet Room, Ball-room, a State Suite, and a number of private dining-rooms, as well as three hundred and fifty bedrooms with two hundred and sixty-two private bathrooms. Each bedroom will have a front outlook, for there is no courtyard to this hotel, and upon three sides it fronts the beautiful Major's Hill Government Park.

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"Is your piano out of tune?" "No, I don't think it is," said Brown. "I never tried it to see." "How long is it since it has been tuned?"

"It has never been." "Then of course it ought to be tuned at once. You'll ruin it if you don't have it attended to."

"Do you think you can tune it?" "Certainly I can. I never saw a piano yet that I couldn't tackle." "There is one mighty good reason why you can't in this case. You see, I haven't got any piano."

Then the man lifted his carpet bag, rubbed his nose thoughtfully, and left.

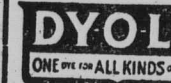
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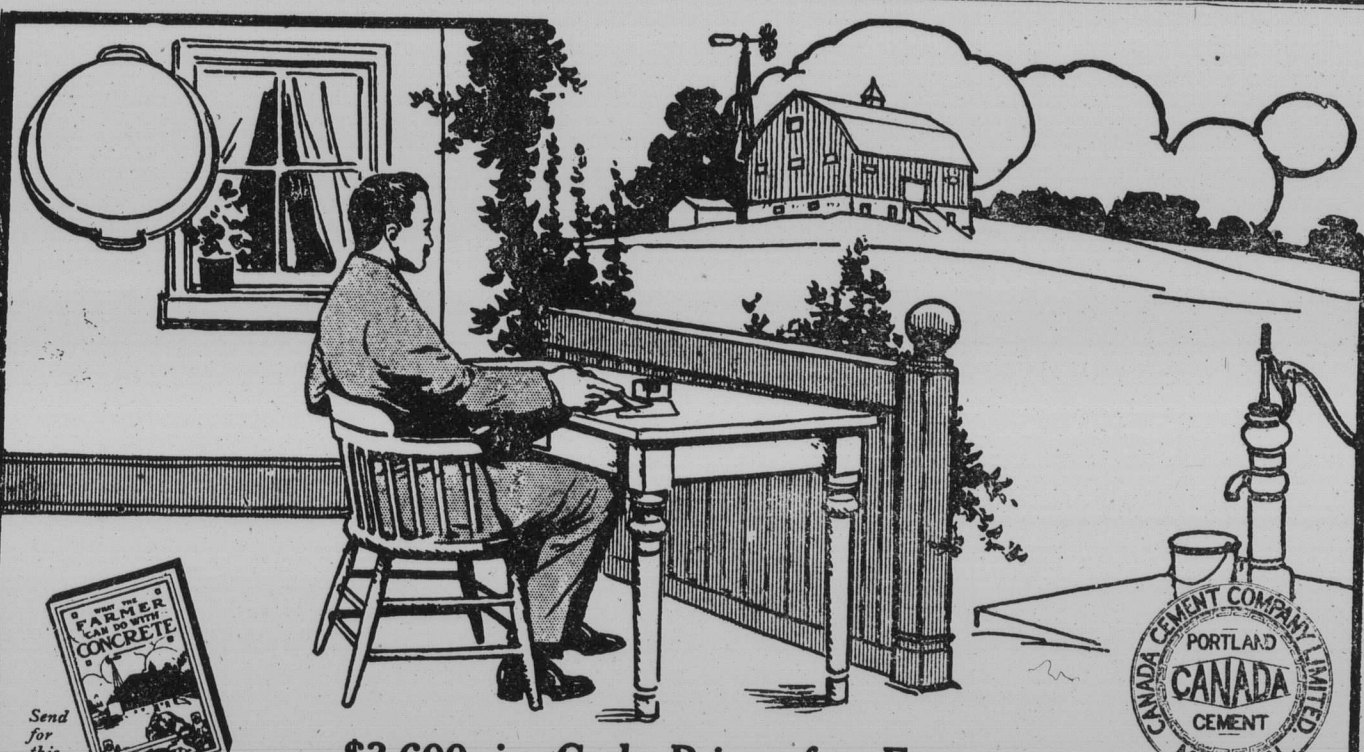
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Now couldn't you do the same for us, with this difference—that you stand a good chance of getting well paid for your time? In Prize "D" of our contest, open to the farmers of Canada, we offer \$100.00 to the farmer in each Province who will furnish us with the best and most complete description of how any particular piece of concrete work shown by photograph sent in was done. The size of the work described makes no difference. The only important thing to remember is that the work must be done in 1911 and "CANADA" Cement used.

In writing your description, don't be too particular about grammar or spelling or punctuation. Leave that to literary folk. Tell it to us as you would tell it to your neighbor. What we want are the facts, plainly and clearly told.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? And it is simple. And surely it is well worth your while when you think of the reward in view. Now sit right down, take your pen or pencil—all out the at-

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