

from you before? It's fate after all that sent you to make my paradise complete."

His arms were around her, he was on his knees staring up into the face drooping so close to his own.

And after that night conventions were at an end. Several times during the ensuing days Fairburn caught himself feeling vaguely guilty.

"It doesn't matter anyhow," he argued to himself; "she's a child of nature and when spring comes I'll take her to town and we'll be married right."

It was early in spring when Fairburn at last rounded up his horses from their winter retreat in the gully and started for town with Lota by his side.

Everywhere was waking life, budding trees and twittering birds.

So they came into town and were married, Fairburn answering for both, and the little minister, familiar with the various ways of the north, gave them his blessing and two days later they were once more on their way back.

And the summer passed, swiftly unnoticed to the two. In October Fairburn started to town alone for the winter supplies. He had worked hard and the long, ploughed field filled him with pride. Talk of a new railroad when he had been in in the spring had awakened fresh ambition within him and for the first time he had found a pleasure in work.

After supper on the day he arrived he walked to the post-office. A black-fringed envelope sent a fear to his heart. Despite his wildness and long wandering, there still lurked within him a love of those at home and a pride at their position. He stood under the electric light and read the long epistle through, and when he had finished he whistled softly and walked out of the building and down the street with his heart full of warring emotions, his brain filled with conflicting thoughts. His elder and only brother dead and they wanted him home. Then he thought of Lota and his dreams. Through the long night he tossed sleeplessly on his bed, but when the sun shone in his mind was made up.

"I guess I will have to go," he mused aloud. "I reckon Lota can do without me and if I don't come back she'll go back to where she came from. Strange she would never tell me how she came there that blizzard night. It means a trip home again to take the waggon back and tell her and then I guess I'll ride in."

As he swung the team down the trail Fairburn was in a queer mood. For the time, Lota, the wilderness and all the things of his new life were relegated to the background; old memories were calling and swayed by their mystic power the grip of the life of the last two years was dispelled.

As they sat on the bench before the door on the night of his return Fairburn turned suddenly.

"Lota, I'm going away to-morrow perhaps for a long time." He rose to his feet and stood in front of her. His voice had been hard and steady. But the dumb pain in her eyes unmanned him and dropping at her side, all the coldness gone, he gazed into her face, the old love shining in his eyes.

"It's all right, girlie, you don't doubt me, do you? And I'll come back soon, oh, so soon."

His voice broke and a big sob choked him. Softly the girl took his face into her hands and for a long moment gazed into his eyes. With all the quick fear of a woman she gazed and he returned the look, steadily, unwavering, knowing that she was reading his soul. For a long moment they remained thus, then with outstretched arms she clung to him, her body shaken with sobs.

And so Fairburn rode away in the early dawn with the heaviest heart he had ever known; his mind full of doubts, wavering between two paths. Turning in his saddle he looked back. The rising sun bathed the little cabin with warm, bright light and the girl standing in the doorway had never seemed so perfect to the man before.

From the brilliantly lighted ballroom came the noise of pounding feet, the swish of garments and the languid music of a waltz.

Fairburn had stolen away and now sat in a secluded part of the conservatory. The soft, cool darkness appealed to him—he wanted to think. The stiff, conventional evening dress fretted him and the shallowness of the people around filled him with disgust. For three long weeks now he had lived the life he would always have to lead some day. He looked around; the great house, the wide acres would some day be all his and yet he felt for everything an intense distaste. He had played tennis, and bridge at night, ridden, motored and gone dutifully to church on Sunday and sat for a long hour and a half while the ancient parson dawdled over a lengthy and pointless sermon. And now to-night amid the noise and glitter the picture of the little cabin came vividly to him, memories of the many silent hours when he had watched the sun set and the darkness fall over the landscape. Lota, too, he

owed her something; simple savage perhaps she was, but to him she was everything, a perfect woman, pure, knowing nothing of the big world outside, uncontaminated. Not until these last few weeks had Fairburn realised what the Indian girl was to him.

The strains of the waltz died away, the crowd were going for refreshments.

The plainsman looked at his programme card; it was bare. A dozen women had tried their wiles on him, but he with the image of Lota filling his mind was a stone wall. Though unashamed of the Indian girl, he had told no one of her. "They wouldn't understand and anyhow it doesn't matter," he told himself.

The rattle of dishes, the faint odour of coffee and the murmur of conversation aroused him from his reverie.

Stealthily he stole from the corner and opening the French window dropped lightly to the ground. Safe in his own room in the left wing, he discarded the stiff white shirt and evening dress and donned the suit in which three weeks before he had come. For a long moment he gazed at himself in the half length mirror, then breathed a sigh of content. For the first time in three long weeks he felt natural.

There was paper on the table and he sat down and penned a note. It ran:

"Dear Father and Sister:—I am going away now, stealing off like a thief in the night because I think it is best. Your life seems so empty. The restraints, the straight-laced conventions of such a life are impossible to me. Of course some day I will have to come back to it all but for the present I want to go back to the silence and the prairie. I feel you are just as well off without me.

"Yours sorrowfully,
"FAIRBURN."

AH SING'S COALS OF FIRE

By DONALD A. FRASER



AH SING reigned supreme in the Renwick's kitchen, and by right of merit; for Ah Sing was that *rara avis* among hired help, Asiatic or otherwise, an excellent cook, and a faithful servant. His kitchen was the very apotheosis of neatness and cleanliness. Range, pots, pans, and all the other uten-

sils, beamed radiant gratitude to their placid, slant-eyed guardian, as he silently glided around in his thick-soled Chinese slippers. Serene as a summer cloud was Ah Sing, at all times, save when anyone other than his acknowledged superior, Mrs. Renwick, dared to enter the kitchen, his sanctum sanctorum, and disarrange his culinary properties. On such occasions the almond eyes would darken, the placid brows would contract, and a low rumbling of jerky monosyllables, which probably would not bear translation, would emerge from that usually smiling mouth, eventually culminating in the outspoken English: "What for you do dat? You not muchee sabee." Then Ah Sing would proceed to operate things to his own liking. Such occurrences were very rare, however. There was usually no one to disturb the serenity of the kitchen; for Mrs. Renwick's two daughters, Maud and Grace, had been at college in a distant part of the country for three years; so it was only when some officious visitor came down to putter around, or Master Fred wanted to make paste in the dipper, or develop photographs in the sink, that Ah Sing had any opportunity to display the gray lining of his silver cloud.

One morning, as Ah Sing stood by the sunny kitchen window scanning his account book with its curious calculations, looking for all the world like pressed spiders, Mrs. Renwick opened the door and said:

"Sing, my two girls are coming home to-day."

"Oh, velly good. What him name?"

"Maud and Grace."

"Him nicee gal?"

"Why, yes, Sing. My girls are fine girls. Very jolly girls. They like lots of fun."

In the afternoon they arrived, and, of course, were all over the house before long. Mrs. Renwick brought them down to the kitchen, and introduced them to Ah Sing, who shook hands bashfully with both of them.

"How do, Missee Maudie; how do, Missee Glacie. Velly fine day."

This was all he could say; but he smiled be-

Examining a time card, he found that an express would leave the station, four miles away, about two. He had two hours, and slipping outside he set out on foot.

A strange lightness filled his heart, a great gladness to be on his way home. The silence, the sunset and the quiet of the little homestead, and the love of the one woman, were calling to him and mentally he counted the days.

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In the afternoon sky the sun still hung high and it was fiercely hot. A tired horse loped slowly across the rolling plain, the sweat and the dust turning its colour to dun grey.

"Only five more miles, old Sport," Fairburn cried exultantly, "then we'll be home," and the pony responded gamely to the voice.

Silently the returned rode into the yard, and dismounting, crept to the open doorway. The afternoon sun threw long splashes of golden light across the floor and idly sitting staring at the farther wall was Lota, and the man saw the desolate loneliness in her eyes and a greater joy swept over him that he had come. In another moment he was in the room, his arms around her, the glory of a lasting love shining in his eyes.

After they had finished their supper and the dishes were put away Fairburn filled his pipe and together they went out and sat on the little old bench before the door.

The evening clouds hung softly coloured, more beautiful than ever they seemed to Fairburn, and the frogs and the crickets were filling the motionless air with their songs. And over all was the stillness, unbroken, deathlike, profound. And thus they sat amid the gathering darkness, a great gladness in their eyes.

nignly upon the two blooming school-girls who had descended like an avalanche into his domain.

For two or three days everything went smoothly. The girls were too busy running around seeing all their old friends to be much at home; but whenever Ah Sing met either of them anywhere in the house, he always had one of his seraphic smiles ready. He privately informed Mrs. Renwick:

"Me t'ink Missee Maudie and Missee Glacie heap nicee gal. Him allee same angel."

The girls were much amused at this glowing compliment.

The next morning they both appeared in the kitchen.

"Good morning, Ah Sing," they said, together.

"Good mo'ning, Missee Maudie, Missee Glacie. What you want?"

"Oh, Ah Sing, you give us little saucepan, we want to make some fudge."

"What you call fudge?"

"Oh, fudge is a kind of candy. You sabbee candy, Sing?"

"Yes, me sabbee candy. You makee candy, you no burnee saucepan, you no dirty stove?"

"Oh, no, Sing, we do everything fine. We are angels, you know."

The girls laughed, and Ah Sing blushed; but he produced the necessary utensils and ingredients, and waited patiently until they should be finished and gone. He frowned somewhat when Maud spilled some milk on the floor; and when Grace splashed a quantity of the decoction on the stove, the frown deepened to a scowl.

The fudge was eventually finished; but it was no sooner in the cooling pans, than Mrs. Renwick's voice was heard upstairs.

"There's mother calling, Maud," said Grace, "let's go. Sing, you wash things. You very nice Chinaman. We think you Chinese angel, Ah Sing. Good-by," and off they ran.

Sullenly, the Chinaman washed the soiled utensils; cleaned off the top of the stove; and opened the windows to let out the smell of burned sugar; but his opinion of the Misses Renwick had evidently fallen about ten degrees.

A day or two afterward, there was another fudge-making, and again, still another, each time Ah Sing's reception of the young ladies growing chillier, and his replies more curt; till it was not long before they realised that they had about reached the zero point in his regard.

One day, however, there was a change. On their arrival in the kitchen no one could be more gracious than Ah Sing. He bustled around and

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