

THE UNQUENCHABLE FIRE: Or, The Tragedy of the Wild.

CHAPTER XII—(Cont'd)

It was the chance of his lifetime, told himself, as he hastened to deposit the chest in the sled. Now he set about obtaining his blankets and provisions. His journey would be an arduous one, and nobody knew better than he the barrenness of that north-western land while the icy grip of winter still clings. A large quantity of the foodstuffs, which had only arrived that day, was returned to the sled, and some of the new blankets. Then he shipped a rifle and ammunition.

Now was the trader to be seen in his true light. Here was emergency, when all veneer fell from him as the green coat of summer falls from the trees at the first breath of winter. His haste was not the swift movement of a man whose nerve is steady. He knew that he had at least twelve hours before any one of the three men was likely to awaken from his drunken stupor. And yet he feared. Nor did he know what he feared. And his nerves made him savage as he handled the dogs. There were living creatures and could feel, so he wantedly belted them with a lead. But Jean gave no heed to obey their new master. The great wolfish creatures had more courage than he had; they took the unjust treatment without open complaint, as is the way of the husky, tacitly resenting it, and eyeing with fierce, contemptuous eyes, the cowardly wretch who so treated them. They snarled, and with down-drooped tails and bristling manes, into their places in the traces, and stood ready for the word to pull. Victor surveyed them with little satisfaction, for now that all was ready to march he was beset with moral apprehensions.

He could not throw off his dread. He may have been that he feared to break four-hundred-mile journey. It may have been the loneliness which he contemplated. It may have been that he recollected the when those whom he had robbed had saved him from the storm back there in the heart of mountains. He shivered, and at every night sound that came to his feet.

Lead dog lay down in the snow. Victor flew into a rage, and running forward, dealt the poor brute a kick that would have been sufficient to break an ordinary dog's ribs. With a snarl the beast rose solemnly to its feet. Suddenly its wolfish eyes stared out at him. The man looked at the sound of some one walking out into the darkness, but all seemed quite still. He looked at the dog again. Its ears were still pricked, but they were twitching uncertainly, as though not sure of the direction when the sound had come.

Victor cursed the brute, and moved back to the sled. The word "Mush" was hovering on his lips. Suddenly his eyes chanced upon the slumbering form of old Pierre lying in a heap where he had fallen in the doorway. It is impossible to say what made him pause to give a second thought to those he was leaving behind. He had known Pierre for years, and had always been as friendly as his selfish, cruel nature would permit. Perhaps some such feeling now made him hesitate. It might even have been his knowledge of the Wild that made him view the helpless figure with some concern. The vagaries of human nature are remarkable. Something held him, then he turned quickly from the sled, and stepping up to the old man's side stooped, and putting his arms about him, dragged him bodily into the store. Pierre did not rouse, but remained quite still where Victor left him. Then the trader went out again. His back was turned as he reached to close the door. It would not quite shut, and he pulled it hard. Then, as it still resisted his efforts, he turned away. And as he turned he reeled back with a great cry. Something large and dark faced him. A great figure. And, even in the darkness, he could make out a shining ring of metal close in front of his face.

Victor's horror-stricken cry was the only sound that came. In the twinkling of an eye the metal ring disappeared. Victor felt two bony hands seize him by the throat. The next instant he was hurled to the ground, and a knee was upon his chest. A weight compressed his lungs, and he could scarcely breathe. He felt the revolver belt dragged from about his waist, and his sheath knife withdrawn from its scabbard. Then, and not till then, the pressure on his chest relaxed,

and the hand that had gripped his throat released its hold. The next moment he was lifted to his feet as though he were a mere puppet, and the voice of Jean Leblonde broke harshly upon his ears.

"Guess your bluff wa'n't with a cent, Victor Gagnon. I see'd this comin' the mite you pass'd me the drink. I 'lows ye ken mostly tell a skunk by the stink. I rec'nised you awakes back. Guess you ain't lightin' out o' here this night. Come right along."

The trader had no choice. Jean had him foul, gripping him with a clutch that was vice-like. The giant's great strength was irresistible when put forth in the deadly earnestness of passion, and just now he could hardly hold his hand from breaking the neck which was so slight beneath his sinewy fingers.

Just for one instant Victor made a faint struggle. As well attempt to resist Doom. Jean shook him like a rat, and thrust him before him in the direction of the woods behind the store.

"You'll pay for this," the trader said between his teeth.

But Jean gave no heed to his impotent rage. He pushed him along in silence, nor did he pause till the secret huts were reached. He opened the door of one and dragged his captive in. There was no light within. But this seemed no embarrassment to the purposeful man. He strode straight over to one corner of the room and took a long plaited lariat from the wall. In three minutes Victor was trussed and laid upon the ground bound up like a mummy.

Now Jean lighted a lamp and looked down at his victim; there was not the faintest sign of drink about him, and as Victor beheld the spectacle he cursed himself bitterly. There was an impressive silence.

"You'll wait right here till Davy gets back. She's goin' to git her ears full o' you, I guess. Say, she was sweet on you—mighty sweet. But she's that sensible as it don't worry any. Say, you ain't goin' to marry that gal; ye never meant to. You're a skunk, an' I'd as lief choke the life out o' ye as not. But I'm goin' to pay ye sorer than that. Savvy? Ye'll bide here till Davy comes. I'll jest fix this wedge in your mouth till I've cleared them drivers out o' the store. I don't fancy to hear your lungs exercisin' when I'm busy."

With consummate deftness Jean gagged his prisoner. Then he glanced round the windowless shack to see if there were any weapon or other thing about that could possibly assist the trader to free himself. Having assured himself that all was safe, he put out the light and passed out, securing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Noon, the following day, saw the dog-train depart on its homeward journey. And the way of it was curious, and said much for the simplicity of these "old hands" of the northland trail. They were giants of learning in all pertaining to their calling; infants in everything that had to do with the world of men.

Thus Jean Leblonde's task was one of no great difficulty. It was necessary that he should throw dust in their eyes. And such a dust storm he raised about their simple heads that they struck the trail utterly blinded to the events of the previous night.

While they yet slumbered Jean had freed the dogs from their traces, and unloaded the sled which bore the treasure chest. He had restored everything to its proper place; and so he awaited the coming of the morning. He did not sleep; he watched, ready for every emergency.

When, at last, the two men stirred he was at hand. Rolling Pierre over, he shook him violently till the old man sat up, staring about him in a daze. A beaker of rum was thrust against his parched lips, and he drank greedily. The generous spirit warmed the Frenchman's chilled body and roused him. Then Jean performed the same merciful operation upon Ambrose, and the two unrepentant sinners were on their legs again, with racking heads and feeling very ill.

But Jean cared nothing for their sufferings; he wanted to be rid of them. He gave them no chance to question him; not that they had any desire to do so—in fact, it was doubtful if they fully realized anything that was happening. And he launched into his careful consideration.

"Victor's gone up to the hills 'way back ther'," he said. "Ther's been a herd o' moose come down

from the moose-yard further north, an' he's after their pelts. Say, he left word for you to git right on loading the furs, and when ye hit the trail, ye're to take three bottles o' the Rye an' some o' the rum. He says he ain't like to be back for nigh on three days."

And while he was speaking the two men sipped their coffee, and, as they moistened their parched and burning throats, they nodded assent to all Jean had to say. At that moment Victor or any one else might go hang. All they thought of was the awful thirst that assailed them.

Breakfast over, the work of loading the sleds proceeded with the utmost despatch. Thus it was that at noon, without question, without the smallest suspicion of the night's doings, they set out for the weary "long trail."

They saw them go. He stood at the door of the store and watched them until they disappeared behind the rising ground of the great divide. Then his solemn eyes turned away indifferently, and he gazed out into the hazy distance. His gaunt face showed nothing of what was passing in the brain behind it. He rarely displayed emotion of any sort. The Indian blood in his veins preponderated, and much of the stoical calm of the Redskin was his. Now he could wait undisturbed for the return of Davy. He felt that he had mastered the situation. He could not make Victor marry the sister he had wronged, but at least he could pay off the wrong in his own way, and to his entire satisfaction. Two years he had waited for the adjustment of these matters. He was glad that he had exercised patience. He might have slain Victor a hundred times over, but he had refrained, vainly hoping to see his sister righted. Besides, he knew that Davy had loved Victor, and women are peculiar. Who might say but that she would have fled from the murderer of her lover? Jean felt well satisfied on the whole. So he stood thinking and waiting with a calm mind.

But the tragedy was working itself out in a manner little suspected, little expected, by him. And so he was soon to find.

The grey spring snow spread itself out on every hand; only was the wooded hill, which stretched away to the right and left of him, and behind the hut, bare of the wintry pall. The sky was brilliant in contrast with the greyness of the world beneath it, and the sun shone high in the blue vault. Everywhere was the deadly calm of the silent North. The presence of any moving forest beast in that brooding picture, however distant, must surely have caught the eye. There was not a living thing to be seen. These woful wastes have much to do with the rugged nature of those who dwell in the North.

Suddenly the whole prospect seemed to be electrified with a thrill of life. The change came with a swift movement of the man's quiet eyes. Nothing had really altered in the picture, nothing had appeared, and yet that swift flash of the eyes had brought a suggestion of something which broke up the solitude as though it had never been.

A while, and his attention became fixed upon the long line of woods to the right. Then his ears caught a slight but distinct sound. He stood away from the doorway, and, shading his eyes from the sunlight, looked keenly along the dark shadow of the woods. No wolf or fox could have keener instinct than had this man. A sound of breaking brush, but so slight that probably it would have passed unheeded by any other, had told him that some one approached through these woods.

He waited. Suddenly there was a movement in the shadow. The next moment a figure stepped out into the open. A figure dressed in beaded buckskin and blanket clothing. It was Davy.

She came in haste, yet wearily. She looked slight and drooping in her mannish garments, while the pallor of her drawn face was intense. She came up to where Jean stood and would have fallen but for his support. Her journey had been rapid and long, and she was utterly weary of body.

"Quick, let's git inside," she cried, in a choking voice. Then she added hysterically: "He's on the trail!"

Without a word Jean led her into the house, and she flung herself into a seat. A little whisky put new life into her, and the color came back to her face. She was strong, and a woman bred to hardship and toil.

(To be continued.)

Mamma—"Yes, dear, the angels can hear everything; they heard your prayers last night." Effie—"That's funny; I didn't say them."

Algy—"Myrtle, what are your objections to marrying me?" Myrtle—"I have only one objection, Algy. I'd have to live with you."

"There is nothing perfect on this earth." "You forget Giley." "Well, what about Giley?" "He's a perfect idiot."

ALL ABOUT THE KOREANS INHABITANTS OF THE JAP'S NEW COLONY.

They Are a Quiet, Peaceful, Unprogressive, Yet Intelligent Race.

Beyond the swift, though narrow, River Yalu, which rushes from an inland sea between the two peaks of the Ever White Mountain, lies Manchuria and the "Great Nation," as the people have always called China.

Southward of this torrent is the peninsula on which Japan has so long cast longing eyes.

The natural impression of many is that this little territory, of the size of Great Britain, is peopled like the rest of the mainland. This is not so. The Korean differs from the Chinaman, and from his traditional foe across the 100 miles of sea to the southward, as much as does the Italian from the German or the Pole.

He differs in language, in custom, in dress, and in innumerable other ways, from either.

Beyond the Yalu, the Chinaman, in blue smock and flowing pig tail, guides his wooden plough, and exerts his mule team; while, just across the river, oxen, even-tempered and slow, drag a steel-shod plough, behind which stalks the solemn faced Korean, wearing his hair in a top knot, his body swathed in

SPOTLESS WHITE GARMENTS.

Korea, now that it has become a province of the progressive Japanese, will be forced to abandon its old customs and beliefs. The old will give place to the new ideas in agriculture. The mechanical devices of the West will supersede the means of transport and traction considered by the indolent native to be quite good enough for hundreds of years.

The rich rice fields and rye fields of the valleys, planted generation after generation by father and son, will, in many cases, own new masters. Mines will develop the hidden treasures of the mountains. The silence in which the monks of Buddha have so long rejoiced in their mountain retreats will be shattered by the noise of stamps and other machinery. Amongst the bleak and barren hills, perhaps, townships will spring up. But will this strange, silent people take kindly to the new conditions?

To the present time, the uneventful life of the Korean has been the strangest contrast to the hustle of life as we know it.

As a child he may not have such a profusion of toys as may be found in an English nursery; but he has his kites, and his tops, and his own particular games, which

HE PLAYS WITH REAL ZEST.

The missionaries of the English Church have introduced football, which is played with a vigor and contempt of rules which would break the heart of a referee.

At six or seven the boy goes to school—that is to say, he attends at a place where knowledge is expected to be acquired, the knowledge consisting of learning to write with "real writing"—i.e., in Chinese characters. This having been, to some extent, mastered, together with a certain amount of

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ability to read, he proceeds to study the classics of Confucius.

He works now from dawn to evening, week in, week out, with no rest on Saturdays or Sundays, and with only such holidays as fall to his lot because of the occurrence of some festival or religious feast.

The monotony of his existence is relieved by the prospect of marriage. This may happen at any age from twelve to twenty, according as his parents may decree. A gentleman whose profession is to arrange these social contracts is consulted.

The marriage broker is a man of considerable genius. He plans the alliance, and settles the terms, and saves the families immense trouble, and probably not a few unpleasant incidents.

The wedding day of a Korean boy is the one occasion when he is important. His pigtail is no longer at large. It becomes a sedate "bun" on the top of his head. He assumes a wonderful garment and headdress, similar to those worn by his father, and accompanied by a horse of diminutive size, he proceeds to the abode of his bride—whom he has never yet seen—and DEMANDS HER SURRENDER.

Poor child, her life is now to begin. And such a life! Her face, for this great occasion, is hidden beneath a coat of paint and powder, her eyes are sealed by a kind of wax, and her eyebrows are pencilled.

The broker presents the parties to each other, and the bride is hurried into a litter. Nothing is permitted to obstruct this cavalcade. Everyone makes way as for Royalty.

On reaching the house of the bridegroom's parents, the bride's party are presented, with much formality. Profound bows are made, a cup of wine is sipped by each, obeisance is made to the tablets of the family forefathers, and the marriage feast begins.

From this moment the child-bride is the slave of her mother-in-law. That is the great day to which a Korean mother looks—the wedding-day of her first son. It means for her an end of work; for she has now a daughter-in-law, whom she may beat and scold and put upon, just as she herself was served before her.

The bridegroom cannot assert himself to protect her. He eats the meals his child-wife cooks in solemn state alone; while she may take away what he leaves as her portion.

All old customs and traditions die hard, and the elder women of

Korea, will, no doubt, sigh before long for the good old days when daughters-in-law knew their place. —London Answers.

HOW IT STARTED.

"Prisoner," said the police court magistrate, "you are charged with creating a public disturbance."

"I deny it, sir," was the prompt reply.

"Well, what is your side of the story?"

"It was my birthday, sir, and I goes into a tavern as gentle as a kitten and says to the barman, says I:—

"Will you present me wid a glass of beer on this happy occasion?"

"I won't," says he.

"For wh'?" says I.

"Because I'm not in the presenting business," says he.

"You are cold-hearted," says I.

"Yah!" says he.

"And an anarchist," says I.

"G'wan," says he.

"And an assassin," says I.

"Skate out!" says he.

"And then, your worship—then when I gently taps on the bar and softly says that if justice was done him he'd be hung up by a mob, he comes out and grabs me by the neck and yanks me out-doors and flings me off the kerbstone. Disturbing the peace, is it? Why, your worship, even when I got up and smashed in one of the windows the noise couldn't have been heard twenty feet away. I am no fognhorn to go bellowing around and make folks wonder what's broke loose."

"What is experience, Uncle Tom?" "Experience! It is what we learn from wanting everything we don't get, and getting everything we don't want."

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