

PURITY - QUALITY - ECONOMY

With the increased cost of labor and materials due to war conditions, it is not reasonable to suppose that a really first class baking powder can be made and sold at the old prices. Rather than sacrifice the quality of

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we found it necessary to make slight increases in price during the war period. Even though Magic Baking Powder may cost a few cents more than the ordinary kinds it is still by far the most economical baking powder on the market to-day when purity, strength and leavening qualities are taken into consideration.

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"Love in the Wilds"

OR

The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

CHAPTER XXX

"JUST LIKE A GIRL."

"Then I wish I'd stood out," said Cecil.

And he looked half induced to snatch the pipe from Laurence's lips, but sank down upon the ground at his side and gazed thoughtfully through the open door.

There was a placid, serene, and mysteriously happy look upon his face, his eyes, deep eyes that attracted the wounded man's attention and set him thinking.

Fixing his gaze, questioning eyes upon him thoughtfully, he said, suddenly:

"Cecil, are you happy at the farm?"

Cecil turned to him with a start and a rosy flush.

"Yes, Laury," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

Laurence shrugged his torn and blood-stained shoulders.

"Why, indeed, lad?" he said, dreamily. "I was watching your face and it looked so happy and contented that I asked the question, though your looks made it unnecessary."

"I am happy here, Laury," he said, lowering his eyes. "I could be happier here with you than anywhere else if you were well and in no pain. Poor Laury!"

There was a world of pity in the last words, and something more than pity.

"You are a strange lad," said the cattle-runner, smiling. "A strange lad and somewhat of a puzzle. I'm thinking that the world has served us both badly and driven us here rather against our wills. But that's neither here nor there—" He broke off curtly, as if he had said too much. "And you are happy at the farm? Cecil, if the settler should ask you to bind yourself to him—for a score of years, say—bind yourself to him hand and foot—what would you say?"

The youth looked round with a sharp, troubled look.

"Laury!" he exclaimed. "Bound? What do you mean—not be able to leave the farm when one would like?"

"Yes," said Laurence, curtly, and with a compression of the lips.

"Bound like a slave!" said Cecil, in low but indignant tones. "No, Laury,

that would be base! Who would give up his freedom like that?"

And he turned with a look of innocent wonder upon his face.

Something in Laurence's downcast eyes made him start and turn pale.

"Laury," he said, sharply, "tell me: you have not bound yourself?"

Laurence nodded almost surlily, with still averted eyes.

"Ay, lad!" he said. "Why not? I'm happy here—at least I have no trouble and plenty of work, and I can cheat memory here better than anywhere else. Why not? What is to be said against it? Why should I not make certain of a long run of this quiet and harmless life—eh?"

Cecil breathed hard.

"Bound for—how long, Laury?" he asked, turning his dark eyes upon him wistfully.

"Seven years," replied Laurence.

"Seven years?" murmured Cecil.

"Bound like a slave—"

Laurence jerked himself up.

"A slave?" he repeated, with flashing eyes.

Cecil sank down beside him and clung to his arm with an imploring face.

"Oh, Laury, Laury!" he cried; "don't look like that—don't! I'd rather you'd kill me. You—you look so angry! I didn't mean to anger you. My wicked tongue! Oh, Laury!"

He was startled and touched by the tearful eyes and imploring voice and sank back again.

"Tut, tut, lad!" he said, grimly. "Don't be frightened nor taken aback so. The word is hard. Who calls me a slave? 'Tis but a seven-years' apprenticeship."

And he laughed grimly.

Cecil got up and crept back to the block of wood with a sad, thoughtful face.

The fierce look had cut to the heart.

"And—and that was what you were talking about when I came out of the office the morning we started, Laury?"

"Yes," he said. "The settler had often asked me to bind myself over to him for seven years, but I had refused. I, awhile ago, though of it very hardily—as you do, lad—as slavery; besides, I was uncertain and restless."

I thought I might want to dash off here and there, when the fit seized me, and did not fancy being tied to the farm. But—and he paused and looked meaningly—"the settler came in that morning, and, lad, I'm thinking it was on your account I signed!" and he laughed his short, rare laugh.

"I took a fancy to you the first time I saw you at the Bay and, while the settler was talking and wheedling, I thought: 'The lad is young and weak and helpless; he'll feel strange and lonely with the boys, if the fit seizes me to go. If I sign I can't go, and he'll have a friend here to fight his battles until the wolves or a panther pushes me off the board.' So I signed."

Cecil's face was a study during this confession—for it was little else.

At first it turned paler than before, a transient flush passed over it, then the eyes seemed to grow larger, to fill and deepen with a wondrous, marvelous tenderness, the lips quivered with some fine, unspeakable emotion; then, as the man's curt, grave voice ceased, the lad covered his face with his hands, silent and overcome.

Before Laury could express his surprise at the result Cecil seemed to have recovered himself, and, turning to him with a look upon his face that struck Laurence to the heart, said, in thrilling tones:

"So, Laury, you agreed to be a slave—hush! I will say the word—for me!"

CHAPTER XXXI

Oh, shame to men! evil with evil! Firm concord holds, men only disagree And creatures rational.—Milton.

For the remainder of the evening Cecil was particularly silent and reserved, attentive and watchful, ever ready with the handkerchief and the broth, but very quiet and thoughtful.

So much so that Laurence was puzzled, and after an ineffectual attempt at conversation, he fell to watching the lad's face with a half-dreamy contemplation, and, in a fit of speculation as to the causes that had sent the handsome-faced, soft-voiced lad into the African wilds, he fell asleep.

Cecil, who had been waiting for this, rose and covered him with the rug, replenished the fire outside the hut, and then, after shutting the door, sank down upon the floor beside his head, and gazed long and fixedly upon his weary yet placid and noble-looking face.

Gazing thus, an expression of wistful, indescribable tenderness settled like a cloud upon the youth's face, his lips quivered, his eyes filled with tears, and, as if yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, he bent his head and suddenly, swiftly, yet lingeringly, touched the hot lips of the stalwart runner with his own.

Then, as if with shame, he started back and covered his crimson face with his two trembling hands.

As the caress rested lightly on his lips Laurence moved slightly, and the weary look upon his face gave place to a smile of ineffable peace and happiness.

But Cecil's eyes were covered and did not see it.

So the night wore away: Laurence, sleeping uneasily and with fitful starts of unrest; Cecil, sitting, sometimes dozing for a few moments, but for the most part watching intently, and with the same devouring look, the face beneath him and feeling supremely and unspeakably happy.

At daybreak Laurence woke, feeling much refreshed.

The coffee was already boiling and Cecil was leaning over the fire.

He turned with a smile of greeting as he heard Laurence move.

"Good-morning, Laury. How do you feel this morning?"

"Better, lad—almost well!" replied Laurence, rising.

Cecil jumped to his feet.

"No, no, sir; you lie down again. Ingratitude is a mild name for the folly you intend. What, after all my careful nursing to undo it by using up your first bit of strength? Lie down again, Mr. Presumption, and wait till breakfast is over."

"Nonsense!" said Laurence, smiling. "I am all right. Sit you down and let me get the meal ready. It's time I took my share of the work—"

"Not a scrap—not a word! Lie down," insisted Cecil, with a touch of his old superiority. "Do as you are told, Laury, now!"

And Laurence, seeing that all remonstrance would be but waste of time, sat down on the block.

"Now, here is a cup of coffee—don't drink it all until you cook a steak for you. I suppose you feel rather hungry after all the slops you've had?"

"I do," confessed Laurence. "But speak not so contemptuously of the broth, lad. It was very good, and all the sweeter for your making," he added, gratefully.

The youth colored.

"Come, no compliments, Mr. Laury! You'll be waxing me to let you do all sorts of wild things else. Steak rather underdone? Well, it's good for you. Wait a minute for the salt. No pepper, of course. There you are."

And he set before the hungry and convalescent a tempting antelope steak, nicely browned and salted.

Laurence did not fall too, though.

"Not a scrap until I see you similarly served, my lad."

And he put the plate aside resolutely.

"Very well, Mr. Impatient," said Cecil.

And he hastily put another juicy steak on the trons for himself.

Then they sat side by side and ate them.

It was an enjoyable breakfast, with good appetites and the most glorious scenery to add a zest.

All the carefully-laid dejuners would not compare with it.

They ate slowly, talking meanwhile, and looking through the open door at the mountains and sweet flower land.

Both were happy—Laurence with a strange, mysterious happiness he could not fathom or understand.

"The fever has left me entirely," he said, as Cecil disposed of the plates and kettle. "And, saving for a little weakness and the tingling of the scratches, I might fancy these last three days a dream."

And he smiled gravely.

"A very unpleasant one," said Cecil, with a sigh. "Panther wounds and low fevers are not nice nightmares." (to be continued.)



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