

sands had lain with closed eyes and set teeth, but when he heard this his eyes opened and he looked up.

"Eh!" he said, in that blind, stupid fashion. "What's that theer tha's sayin', Mester?"

"Th' tide," blurted the speaker. "I wor tellin' him to look sharp, that's aw."

The poor fellow moved restlessly. "Aye! aye!" he said. "Look sharp—he mun do that. I didna think o' th' tide." And he shut his eyes again with a faint groan.

They strove while the messenger was gone; they strove when he returned with assistance; they strove with might and main, until not a man among them had the strength of a child, and the boldest of them were blanching with a fearful, furtive excitement none dared to show. A crowd had gathered round by this time—men willing and anxious to help, women suggesting new ideas and comforting the wounded man in rough earnest style, children clinging to their mother's gowns and looking on terror-stricken. Suddenly, in the midst of their mightiest efforts, a sharp, childish voice piped out from the edge of an anxious group a brief warning that struck terror to every heart that beat among them.

"Eh! Mesters!" it said, "th' tide's creepin' up a bit."

The men looked around with throbbing pulses, the women looked also, and one of the younger ones broke into a low cry. "Lord ha' mercy!" she said, "It'll sweep around th' Bend afore long an'—an'—!" And she ended with a terror in her voice which told its own tale without other words.

The truth forced itself upon them all then. Women began to shriek and men to pray, but, strange to say, the man whose life was at stake lay silent, though with ashen lips about which the muscles were tensely drawn.

His eyes searched every group in a dead despair that was yet a passion, in all its stillness.

"How long will it be?" he asked slowly at last—"th' tide? Twenty minutes?"

"Happen so," was the answer. "An' lad, lad! we canna help thee. We'n tried our best, lad," with sobs from the uncouth fellow who spoke. "Theer is na one of us but ud leave a limb behind to save thee, but theer is na time—there is na—"

One deep groan and he lay still again—quite still. God knows what weight of mortal agony and desperate terror crushed him in that dead, helpless pause.

Then his eyes opened as before. "I've thowt o' deen'," he said, with a queer catch of his breath. "I've thowt o' deen', an' I've wondered how it wor an' what it felt like. I never thowt o' deen' like this here." Another pause and then:

"Which o' yo lads'll tell my mis-sus?"

"Aye! poor chap, poor chap!" wailed the women. "Who on 'em will?"

"Howd tha noise, wenches," he said, hoarsely. "Yo daze me. Theer is na time to bring her here. I'd ha' liked to ha' said a word to her. I'd ha' liked to ha' said one word; Jem Coulter"—raising his voice—"canst tha say it fur me?"

"Aye," cried the man, choking as he spoke, "surely, surely." And he knelt down.

"Tell her 'at if it wor bad enow—this here—it wor not so bad as it mought ha' been—fur me. I mought ha' fun it worser. Tell her I'd like to ha' said a word if I could—but I couldna. I'd like to ha' heard her say one word as happen she would ha' said if she'd been here, an' tell her 'at if she had ha' said it th' tide mought ha' comn an' welcome—but she didna, an' theer it stands." And the sob that burst from his breast was like the sob of a death-stricken child. "Happen"—he said next—"happen one o' yo women foak say a bit o' a prayer—yo're not so fur fro' safe sand but yo can reach it—happen one o' yo ha' a word or two as yo could say—such like as yo teach yo're babbies."

Among these was one who had—

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thank God, thank God!—and so, amid wails and weeping, rough men and little children alike knelt with uncovered heads and hidden eyes while this one woman faltered the prayer that was a prayer for the dying man; and when it was ended, and all rose glancing fearfully at the white line of creeping foam, this dying man for whom they had prayed lay upon his death-bed of sand the quietest of them all—quiet with a strange calm.

"Bring me my jacket," he said, "an' lay it o'er my face. Theer's a bit o' a posie in th' button-hole. I gettin it out o' th' missus's garden when I comn away. I'd like to hold it i' my hand if it's theer yet."

And as the long line of white came creeping onward they hurriedly did as he told them—laid the rough garment over his face and gave him the humble dying flowers to hold, and having done this and lingered to the last moment, one after the other dropped away with awe-stricken souls until the last was gone. And under the arch of sunny blue sky the little shining waves ran up the beach, chasing each other over the glittering sand, catching at shells and seaweed, toying with them for a moment and then leaving them, rippling and curling and whispering, but creeping—creeping—creeping.

They gave his message to the woman he had loved with all the desperate strength of his dull yet unchanging nature; and when the man who gave it to her saw her wild, white face and hardened lips, he blundered upon some dim guess as to what that single word might have been, but the sharpest of them never knew the stubborn anguish that, following and growing day by day, crushed her fierce will and shook her

heart. She was as hard as ever, they thought; but they were none of them the men or women to guess at the long-dormant instinct of womanhood and remorse that the tragedy of this one day had awakened. She had said she would never forgive him, and perhaps her very strength made it long before she did; but surely some subtle chord was touched by those heavy last words, for when, months later, her first love came back, faithful and tender, with his old tale to tell her, she would not listen.

"Nay, lad," she said, "I amna a feather to blow wi' th' wind. I've had my share o' trouble wi' men foak, an' I ha' no mind to try again. Him as lies i' th' churchyard loved me i' his way—men foak's way is apt to be a poor un—an' I'm wore out wi' life. Dunnot come here courtin'—tak' a better woman."

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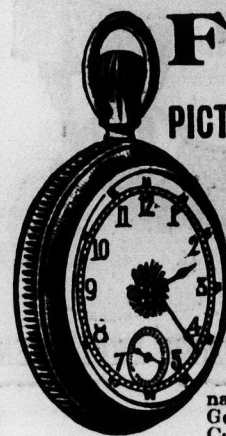
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