

The Beachcomber's Daughter.

By Don Munday.

AINSLEY did not know he was staring at the moon, and perhaps the moon did not know it either, "for like a bright bit of orange peel it slid down behind the black ridges of Bowen Island, utterly regardless of the moody young man. A sense of finality, a feeling of "dust and ashes, dead and done with," was produced by moonset as the in-stealing mist blackened the waters of English Bay. It was as though the Recording Angel, in scrawling "Finis" across the day's account, had splashed the whole page with ink.

"Forget her!" he muttered, referring to the girl in the case. In an effort to forget his disappointment he made ready for a refreshing plunge in the bay. He swam towards the Jessie Mac, which was anchored a hundred yards from shore with a big boom of logs. The tug's lights were scarcely visible from the further end of the boom, where he clung for a while, allowing his body to float in the undulant rise and fall of the strongly ebbing tide.

The bell on Spanish Bank tolled sonorously, and the fog-horn on Point Atkinson answered hoarsely through the darkness. Unseen in the fog, a liner tore seaward; the swell attendant on her passage rolled chattering against the gravel beach, and the logs heaved uneasily against each other amid the manifold spoutings and gurglings of the obstructed waters.

Ainsley was about to lose his hold and swim ashore, when he detected on the black water a blacker shape approaching. A mesh of ribbon seaweed washed across his face and chest; he left it there, an opportune screen against discovery by the occupant of the boat, for such the object proved. Ainsley took a sudden whim to know this man's business in approaching so cautiously. The boat bumped lightly against the boom, within arm's length of him. He felt certain the prowling boatman was McMasters, a beachcomber and fisherman, whom he knew held a grudge against the owners of the logs. Ainsley ran his fingers along the patched bow of the boat. He could swear it was McMasters' boat, at any rate.

He paddled softly away from the boom and watched. When the tension on the boom-sticks slackened in the cradles of the swells, the boatman slipped the cross-ends of the boom-chain through the holes in the ends of the boom-sticks, which at once swung apart. Like cattle through a gap in a fence, the logs scattered seaward. The crew of the Jessie Mac would certainly attribute the mishap to a broken boom-chain.

Ainsley struck for shore. Having dressed, he picked his way through the darkness towards the beachcomber's house. He was exultant. Fate had played into his hands, and as a rejected suitor of Bessie McMasters he thought his knowledge might be utilized. Nearing the house, he heard a boat being drawn up on the beach. "That you, McMasters?" he asked casually.

"Yes," was the growling response he received.

"I just strolled down for a little business talk," remarked Ainsley, unasked following McMasters into the house.

Bessie McMasters, with a slightly constrained greeting, offered Ainsley a chair. An almost imperceptible menace in his manner struck her with an apprehension of impending trouble. From childhood the motherless, sensitive girl had had to rely on her own swift intuition.

"Well, what is it?" demanded McMasters as he seated himself opposite Ainsley.

"It chiefly concerns your daughter here," replied Ainsley, flashing a look at the girl's pale, attractive face, framed with dark brown hair.

"She refused you once already, didn't she? Well, that settles it, I guess. Doesn't Bess?" McMasters glared at Ainsley, who merely rose and leaned on the back of his chair. It seemed safer

to be in a position to move quickly. His drowsy blue eyes were hard and narrow when he spoke again, and his voice rang hard as wire.

"Perhaps she will reconsider her decision," he said, adding with calculated emphasis, "to save her father from a jail sentence!"

Man and girl were on their feet in an instant—the girl white with dread, for she felt the deadly truthfulness in Ainsley's voice—the father pale with con-

scious guilt, yet trying to convince himself that Ainsley could know nothing of that night's doings, that it must be some other charge and therefore a mistake or a bluff.

Bessie mutely motioned Ainsley to continue.

"I know who broke the Jessie Mac's boom of logs."

Choking an oath, McMasters flung himself at him with an axe from beside the stove. Bessie flung herself between. Drunk or sober, he had never struck the girl. Her mother's eyes looked out of hers and forced the madness from his brain. He dropped back limply in his chair. She bent over him, not questioning, but asserting, "It is true!" He

affirmed it with a groan. She turned again to Ainsley, who briefly recounted the occurrence.

"You make me the price of your silence!" she asked in piteous appeal when he finished speaking.

"I do!" he answered in smothered triumph.

She threw herself at his feet—tears, reproaches, entreaties were alike wasted on him. Seeing at last the uselessness of her pleadings, she rose, swaying against the table for support. Ainsley was unmoved by her appeal as was the driftwood outside the door. McMasters looked on remorsefully, helplessly. He took the heartbroken girl in his arms, but had no word to comfort her, for he

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