

inches. She kept her eyes on the fire, but her hand moved from the cat's side and clutched his sleeve. He had declined a share of the box, but sat on his heels beside her.

"I ought to tell you—something I did!" said Sally in a hard voice. "Perhaps you'll think it is my fault that you have lost Alberta. See! Your snake-skin—that you sent to Alberta——"

"And she threw it away. Never mind. I was a fool. It don't matter. Would you have thrown it away, Sally?"

"I—didn't give it her at all. I kept it myself. There!"

Sally's fingers crept down the neck of her blouse, and brought forth the speckled, uncanny thing.

"There! It's yours really. Take it!"

It lay, strangely warm for a snake, in Jake's big palm.

"But—won't—won't you keep it, Sally, if you like it? I—I'd rather *you* had it than Alberta!"

Sally turned her intent face full on him; in the fire-glow her eyes gleamed eagerly.

"Oh, Jake, Alberta wouldn't have liked to live on a homestead. *She* didn't care. And she's got the Captain. And—oh, Jake, I know it's an awful thing to say, but I don't care, and I shall say it—I love you—there—I love you like anything, Jake!"

A man who lives much alone loses to some extent the power of ready speech; and a snake-skin is an awkward thing to tie in a dark place.

Aunt Mary called down the air-shaft, which carried sounds both up and down, that they must be doing a lot of stoking up.