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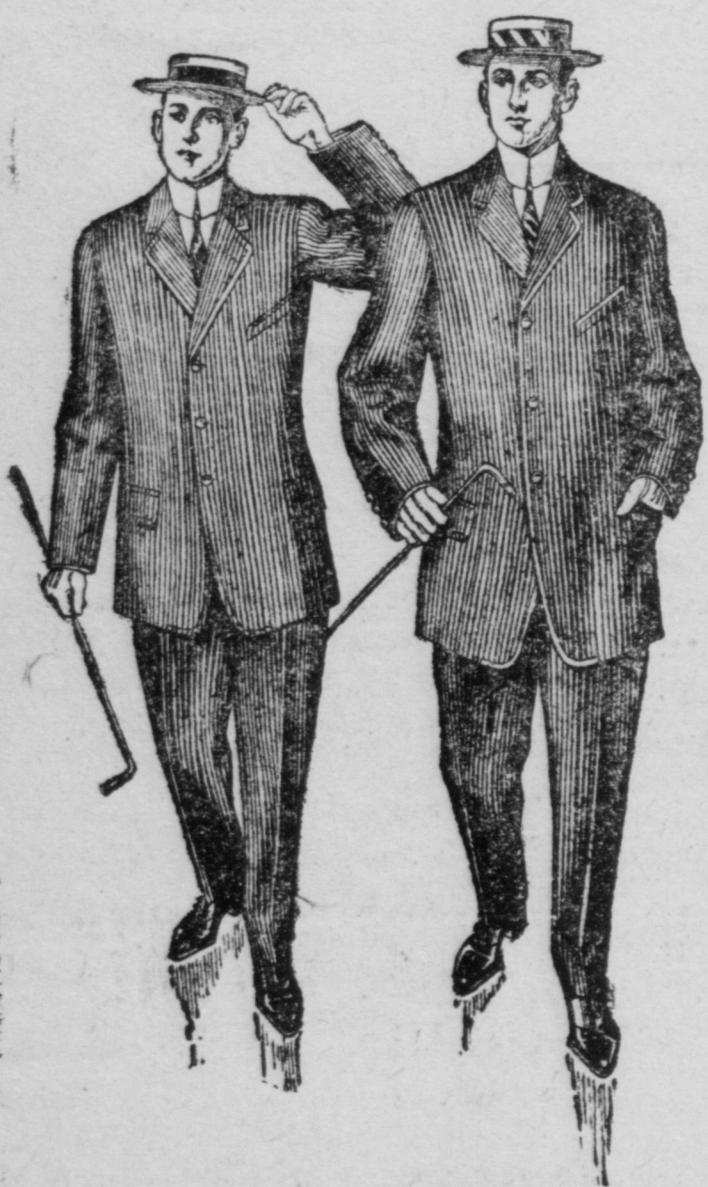
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(Continued.)

"I don't want to get even, and there is nothing to tell," said Nedra, "except a girl's troubles, and I can't talk about them." She smiled a painful, crooked smile at him.

"Your old man has been rough to you?"

"No, no! Nothing of that sort."

"Then it's that soldier?" he quizzed shrewdly. "I knew you cared a heap for him. Don't he love you?"

"Yes. That's the trouble, and he wants to marry me. He swears he will in spite of everything."

"See here. I don't quite follow. I thought you liked him. He's the kind most women go daffy over."

"Like him?" The girl trembled with emotion.

"Like him! Why—why, I would do anything to make him happy."

"I guess I must be kind of dull," Stark said perplexedly.

"Don't you see? I've got to give him up. I'm a squaw."

"Squaw b—!! With those shoulders?"

Stark checked himself, for he found he was rejoicing in his enemy's defeat and was in danger of betraying himself to the girl. In every encounter the young man had bested him, and these petty defeats had crystallized his antipathy to Burrell into a hatred so strong that he had begun to lie awake nights planning a systematic quarrel.

He had brooded over his quarrel with Nedra and the lieutenant ever since their first clash, for in this place they furnished the only objects upon which his mania could work, and it was a mania, the derangement of a diseased, distorted mind.

"So you like him too much to stand in his way," he said meditatively.

"How does your father look at it?"

"He wants the lieutenant to marry me. He says he will fix it up all right. But he doesn't understand. How could he?"

"You are doing just right," concurred the man hypocritically, "and you'll live to be glad you stood out. Now that both his enemies desired this thing he was set on preventing it regardless of the girl. How did the lieutenant take it when you refused him?"

"He wouldn't take it at all. He only laughed and declared he would marry me anyhow." The very thought thrilled her.

"Does he know you love him?"

The tender, sobbing laugh she gave was ample answer.

"Well, what's your plan?"

"I—I—I don't know. I am so torn and twisted with it all that I can't plan, but I have thought I ought to go away."

"Good!" he said quickly, but his acquiescence, instead of soothing her, had the contrary effect, and she burst out impulsively:

"Oh—I can't—I can't! I can't go away and never see him! I can't do it! I want to stay where he is!" She had been holding herself in stubbornly, but at last gave way with reckless abandon. "Why wasn't I born white like other girls? I've never felt like an Indian. I've always dreamed and fancied I was different, and I am in my soul. I know I am! The white is so strong in me that it has killed the red, and I'm one of father's people. I'm not like the other two. They are brown and silent and as cold as little toads. But I'm white and full of life all over. They never see the men and women that I see in my dreams. They never have the visions of the beautiful snow white mother with the tender mouth and the sad eyes that always smile at me."

"You have visions of such things, eh?"

"Yes, but I came a generation late, that's all, and I've got that other woman's soul. I'm not a half breed. I'm not me at all. I'm Merridy—Merridy! That's who I am."

Her face was turned away from him, so that she did not notice the frightful effect her words had upon Stark.

"Where did you get—that name?"

His voice was pitched in a different key now. Then after a moment he added, "From the story I told you at the mine that night, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "I've always had it, though they call me Nedra. Merridy was my father's mother. I guess I'm like her in many ways, for I often imagine she is a part of me, that her spirit is mine. It's the only way I can account for the sights I see."

"Your father's mother?" he said mechanically. "That's queer." He seemed to be trying to shake himself free from something. "It's hereditary, I suppose. You have visions of a white woman, a woman named Merridy, eh?"

Suddenly his manner changed, and he spoke so roughly that she looked at him in vague alarm.

"How do you know? How do you know she was his mother?"

"He told me so."

Stark snarled. "He lied!"

"I can show you her wedding ring. I've always worn it." She fumbled for the chain about her neck, but it eluded her trembling fingers. "It has her

name in it—'From Dan to Merridy.'"

Stark's hand darted forward and tore the thing from her shoulders. Then he thrust it under the lamp and glared at the inscription, while his fingers shook so that he could barely distinguish the words. His eyes were blazing and his face livid.

Nedra cried out, but he dropped the ornament and seized her fiercely, lifting her from the chair to her feet. Then with one swift, downward clutch he laid hold of her dress at the left shoulder and ripped it half to her waist. A hoarse sound came from his throat, a cry half of amazement, half of triumph.

"Let me go! Let me go!" She struggled to free herself, but he held her in a viselike grip, while he peered closely at a bluish welt down upon her back. Then he let her slip from his grasp, and, seized with terror, she staggered away from him. He was leaning heavily with both hands upon the table, his thin lips quivering, his whole manner so terrifying that she shrank back. She turned and made for the door, whereupon he straightened up and said in a queer, commanding voice:

"Wait. Don't go. I—I—you!" He licked his lips as if they were dust dry, passed an uncertain hand across his bearded brow and, raising the water pail beside the door to his mouth, drank heavily in great, noisy gulps.

"Let me out of here!" the girl demanded imperiously.

"Don't be scared," he said, more quietly now. "You must excuse me. You—you gave me an awful fright. Yes, that was it. Don't worry. I didn't mean any harm."

"You hurt my shoulder," she said, almost ready to cry. "And you tore my dress. Are you crazy?"

"You see, it's like this—that name of Merridy and that ring—well, the whole thing was so startling I—I went off my head. It came sudden, and I thought—it don't matter what I thought, but I'm sorry. I'll apologize, and I'll get you a whole lot of dresses if you like."

His first impulse had been to tell her everything, but his amazement had rendered him speechless, and now he was thankful for it. "Care must be exercised. She must not learn too much, for if she suspected the truth she would go to her soldier lover at once, and no power on earth could hold her back. That would block the vengeance that he saw shaping in the dark recesses of his distorted brain."

First, and above all, he must get the girl away from Flambeau.

These last few moments had driven Nedra's own worries from her mind, but he was bent on recalling them and so continued cautiously:

"You were saying that you thought you'd go away. I think that's a good plan, and you'd be wise to do it for



"Let me out of here!" the girl demanded imperiously.

## THE UNDERFED

How Children of the Ignorant Are Robbed of Oatmeal

A canvass made among the intelligent shows that seven homes in eight serve oatmeal. Among the ignorant another canvass shows that not one home in two serves oats. The children grow up incapable because bodies and brains are starved.

Nature stores in oats more energy food, more brain food, more nerve food than in any other grain that grows. That's why children crave oatmeal. There is nothing to take its place.

This is a food on which it doesn't pay to be careless. There is a very wide difference in oat foods—a difference in richness and food value. Don't serve the common kind.

Only the richest, plumpest grains are used in Quaker Oats. They are selected by 62 siftings. Only ten pounds are obtained from a bushel. The result is a food rich in all the oat elements—the utmost in oatmeal. Yet the cost to you is but one-half cent per dish.

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more reasons than one. It will give you time to think it all over and know your own mind. I want to help you—I'm going to help you—because I've got an interest in you like you were mine." Again he betrayed that strange, mirthless amusement.

"There is no place for me to go," said Nedra blankly, "except the mission, and I have no way of getting there."

"Don't you worry. I'll furnish the means, and you'd better go tonight!" she flinched—"yes, tonight. There's no use prolonging your agony. I'll get a boat ready and send a trusty man with you. The current is swift, and if he rows well you can make it by tomorrow evening. That's only one night out, and I'll put some blankets aboard so you can wrap up and have a sleep."

"I must go back and get some clothes," she said, at which he would have demurred had he not seen that she could not travel in her present condition.

"Very well. But don't let anybody see you."

"Of course not."

"It's getting late, and your folks will be abed." He looked at his watch.

"Midnight! Be here in an hour."

The light of sacrifice was in Nedra's eyes, and her cheeks were blanched with the pallor of a great resolution.

"I'll be here in an hour," she said simply.

He let her out, closed the door after her and locked it; then, drawing a deep breath, he raised his clinched hands above his head and gave a great sigh of exultation. Next he took out his six shooter and examined it carefully. The shells did not suit him, so he filled the gun with new ones, loosened the three lower buttons of his vest and slid the weapon inside his trousers band; then, facing the direction of Gale's trading post, he spoke aloud:

"I was a long time coming, Gaylord, but I'm here, and I've got you where I've wanted you these fifteen years! Yes, and I've got you, too, Burrell! By heaven, this is my night!"

His lithe body became panther-like in poise, his bearing that of the meat eating animal, and his face set in a fierce, exultant cruelty as he blew out his light and left the cabin.

## CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERY IS UNRAVELLED.

LEUTENANT BURRELL was considerably taken aback when a quarter of an hour after the young lover's ecstatic return to his quarters Gale knocked at his door, for the trader's visit, coupled with the late hour and his somber countenance, forecast new complications.

"He's here to object, but it won't go," thought the lieutenant as he made his visitor welcome.

Meade swung his big reading chair out beneath the hanging lamp, and, going to the sideboard, brought back a bottle, some glasses and a pouch of tobacco. Noting the old man's sigh of fatigue as he sat himself down heavily, he remarked sympathetically:

"Mr. Gale, you've made a long trip today and you must be tired. If this talk is to be lengthy, why not have a drink with me now and postpone it until tomorrow?"

"I've been tired for eighteen years," the other replied. "Tonight I hope to get rested."

"Well, let's get at it," the younger man finally said.

"I suppose you'll want to interrupt and question me a heap, but I'll ask you to let me tell this story the way it comes to me till I get it out. Likewise you'll want to know what all this has to do with you and Nedra. Yes; she told me about you and her, and that's why I'm here." He paused.

"You really think you love her, do you?"

Burrell removed his pipe and gazed at his old impersonally.

"I love her so well, Mr. Gale, that nothing you can say will affect me. I—I hesitated at first about asking her to be my wife because—you'll appreciate the unusual—well, her unusual history. You see, I come from a country where mixed blood is about the only thing that can't be lived down or overlooked, and I've been raised with notions of family honor and pride of race and birth, and so forth, that might seem preposterous and absurd to you. But a heap of conceits like that have been bred into me from generations back. They run in the blood of every old family in my country, and so, I'm ashamed to say, I hesitated and tried to reason myself into giving her up, but I've had my eyes opened, and I see how little those things amount to, after all. I'm going to marry Nedra, Mr. Gale. I'd like to do it the day after tomorrow, Sunday, but she isn't of age yet, and if you object we'll have to wait until November, when she turns eighteen. We'd both like your consent, of course. I'd be sorry to marry her without it. But if you refuse we'll be forced to dispense with it." He looked up and met the father's gaze steadily.

The other man's lips framed a faint smile.

"We'll see. I wish to God I'd had your decision when I was your age. This story would be different and easier to tell." He waited a moment, then settled to his self appointed task.

"I was mining at the time up in the mother lode country of California, which was the frontier then, pretty much as this is now, only we had better things to eat. I was one of the first men into a camp named Chandon—helped to build it, in fact—and got hold of some ground that looked real good."

"I must go back and get some clothes," she said, at which he would have demurred had he not seen that she could not travel in her present condition.

"Very well. But don't let anybody see you."

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"You really think you love her, do you?"

It was hard mining, however, and, being poor, I was still gripping my drill and hammer after the town had grown up."

"A woman came out from the east—Vermont it was—and schoolteaching was her line of business, only she hadn't been raised to it, and this was her first clatter at the game. Her folks died and left her up against it, I gathered from what little she told me—sort of an old story, I guess, and usual, too, only for her. She was plumb unusual."

He seemed to ponder this a moment and then resumed:

"It don't make any difference to you how I first saw her and how I began to forget that anything else in the world was worth having but her. I'd lived in the woods all my life, as I said, and knew more about birds and bugs and bees than I did about women. I hadn't been broke proper and didn't know how to act with them, but I laid out to get this girl, and I did fairly well. There's something wild in every woman that needs to be tamed, and it isn't like the wildness that runs in wood critters. You can win that over by gentleness, but you have to take it away from a woman. Every live thing that couldn't talk was my friend, but I made the mistake of courting my own kind the same way, not knowing that when two of any species mate the male must rule. I was too gentle. Even so, I reckon I'd have won out only for another man. Dan Bennett was his name—the kind that dumb animals hate, and—well, that takes his measure. His range adjoined mine, and though I'd never seen him, I heard stories now and then—the sort of tales you can't tell to a good woman—so it worried me when I heard of his attentions to this girl. Still, I thought she'd surely find him out and recognize the kind of fellow he was; but, Lord, a woman can't tell a man from a dog, and there wasn't any one to warn her."

"This Bennett came from the town below, where he ran a saloon and a brace game or two; but, being as he rode into our camp and out again in the night and as I didn't drink nor listen to the music of the little rolling ball, why, we never met even after he began coming to Chandon. Understand, I wasn't too good for those amusements. I just didn't happen to banker after them, for I was living with the image of the little school-ma'am in my mind, and that destroyed what bad habits I'd formed."

"It was along in the early spring that she began to see I had notions about her, but my d—d backwardness wouldn't let me speak, and, in addition, I was getting closer to ore every shot at the mine and was holding off until I could lay both myself and my gold mine at her feet and ask her to take the two of us, so if one didn't pan out the other might. But it seemed like I'd never get into pay. The closer I got the harder I worked, and, of course, the less I saw of her, likewise the oftener Bennett came. I reckon no man ever worked like I did—two shifts a day, eighteen hours, with six to sleep. The skin came off of my hands, and I staggered when I came out into the daylight. At last I struck it, and still I waited awhile longer till I could be sure. Then I went down to my little shack and put on my other clothes. I remember I'd gone so thin that they hung loose, and my palms were so raw I had hard work handling the buttons and got my shirt all bloody, for I'd been in the drift forty hours without sleep and breathing powder smoke till my knees buckled and wobbled under me. To this day the smell of stale powder smoke makes a woman of me, but that morning I sang, for I was going for my bride, and the world was brighter than it has ever been for eighteen years. The little schoolhouse was closed, at which I remembered that the term was over. I'd been living underground for weeks and lost track of the days, so that I had to count them up on my fingers. It took me a long time, for I was pretty tired in my head, but when I'd figured it out I went on to where she was boarding."

"The woman of the place came to the door, a Scotchwoman. She had a mole on her chin, I remember, a brownish black mole with three hairs in it. She wore an apron, too, that was kind of checkered, and three buttons were open at the neck of her dress. I recall a lot more of little things about her though the rest of what happened is rather dreamy."

"I asked for Merridy, and she told me she'd gone away—gone with Bennett the night before, while I was coughing blood from the powder smoke;