Barney

by

S. B. H. HURST

¶ A novel of action which never lags, and yet is more than just a tale of adventure. From England, where Barney and his best friend, Dick Carew, are accused of a crime of which they are actually guiltless, the scene moves to Alaska and Canada. The reader sees a destiny working itself out in a series of breathless incidents, fierce struggles, and heartbreaking setbacks, pervaded always by a strange and satirical philosophy.

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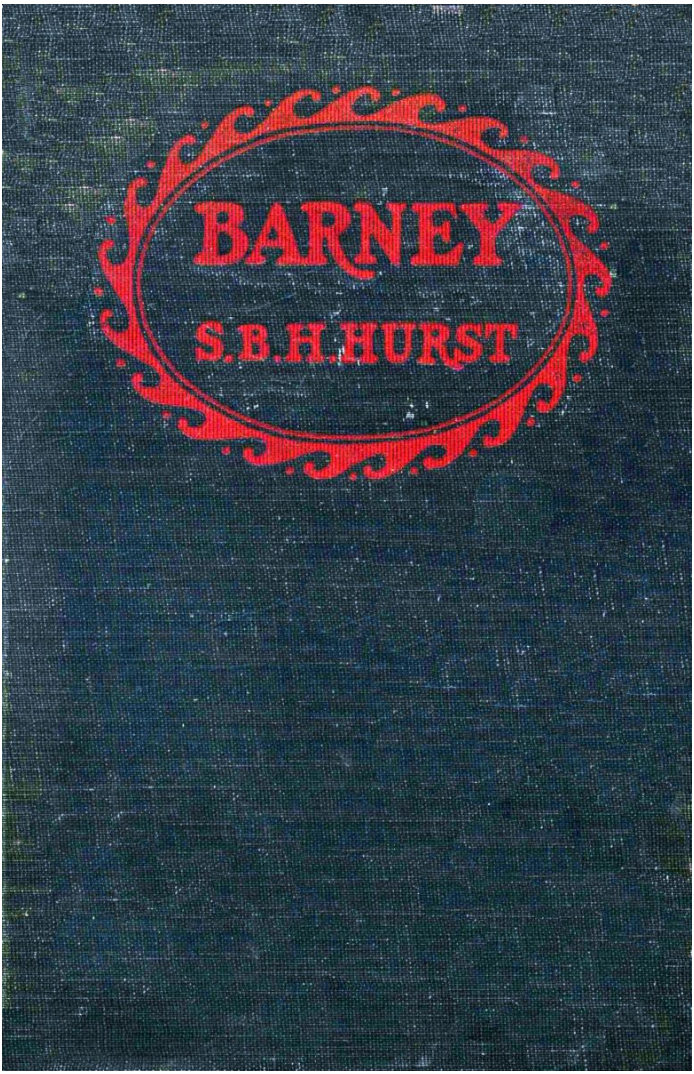
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Author of "COOMER ALI"

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
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First Edition
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I

BARNEY HILLIARD, wanderer, thinker, dreamer—a strangely mixed character with gorilla-like strength and vitality—stared into his lonely fire. For many years he had fought against a hostile environment, believing that the only logical explanation of the existence of sentient things was that God found amusement in their sufferings, that the world was indeed a stage, made by a lonely Creator, and that the actors were allowed just enough freedom to give possibilities of surprise to their solitary Audience, whose taste was Neronic in its brutality; that death ended all consciousness, and that the one decent thing in the entire Play was that any actor might kill himself if he desired.

But although the years had brought him pain beyond the ability of the ordinary man to bear, Barney had disdained to quit. Life seemed to have become a contest between his God and himself: God trying to force Barney to admit defeat and shoot himself, while Barney grimly continued to fight against the heavy blows of circumstance, determined to win out in the game of life, and then, when he had achieved everything he cared to achieve, kill himself if he felt like it.

So he had shrugged his wide shoulders at every extra burden laid upon them, and plunged ahead. And now he was wealthy. What was more pleasing to him was the fact that through all the bitter hardships of his everyday life he had kept a vow made to himself when a boy of fifteen; a promise so unusual in one of his physical type that if he had spoken of it his hearers would have believed he was trying to be funny. Indeed, if he had been suspected of harboring such things as vows, the ambition and determination to become a champion prize fighter would have been the popular guess. Either that or something as far removed as possible from the fact that Barney had made up his mind to so study science and philosophy that there would come a time when no man should have a wider general knowledge of those subjects than himself. And this goal, also, he had reached. Therefore, the Power had not beaten him. On the contrary, he had accomplished his desire in spite of the Power; and he felt that he could

accept the one poor boon of creation, not as the whining cur who kills himself because he is afraid to live, but as one who has earned the right to die. An extraordinary metaphysical opinion which had colored the life of an unusually keen mind.

In the drawer of his desk was the revolver he had carried with him for many years. He stood up, smiling at the comforts of his room. If it had not been for the satisfaction he found in his weird idea that he could at last shoot himself without being a quitter, he could have wished that things had not come his way. Better the struggle than, the awful reaction of lonely years. Better the fight than the barren victory.

Yet those years—forty of them—had touched him lightly. Most men would have failed to survive them, but Barney could still, if need be, call upon his strength for any possible effort, and the call would be honored.

The late winter afternoon was waning into dusk. Barney's 'poetry mood'—which he hated, and which he had tried to suppress since childhood—was taking hold of him. He grinned wearily. Why bother about a mood—now? Why not let it possess him—for the last time? It was a sort of weakness, of course—but why trouble about weakness now? He would slip into the mood as one does into a disreputable coat about which is comfort and the painful affection of memory. He would wallow in the dreams that beckoned. For the last time—because the old gun in the drawer was beckoning, also.

He locked his door. Then he dragged the couch before the fire, and lay down. The lights were not turned on, and presently he was watching the firelight and the shadows as he had so often done on trail, in camp.

He closed his eyes. Then he opened them, got up and took the revolver out of the drawer. It was, after all, an old friend. Indeed, it was the only friend left to him.

He lay down again. He would have one more dream, and in that dream he would visit memories.

He laid the gun upon the carpet where his hand could reach it, stared awhile at the fire, closed his eyes, and began to turn over the most poignant pages of his life.

II

THE village in Devonshire—its few hundred inhabitants claiming religiously that the place was a bulwark of civilization long before London was "discovered"!

Hilliard opened his eyes, smiling. He filled a sooty brier pipe, lit it, and closed his eyes again.

The ivy-clustered church, with its graveyard whispering intimately of the enduring spirit of the Race—that resistless, unchanging spirit which reveres the old places, the ancient names, but which, nevertheless, is always seeking the new.

The dozen or so family vaults. The graves of the "village people," who do not own vaults, although they have lived in that village just as long, if not so famously, as the families who do own them—the people who have for generations been a part of the lives of those dozen or so families; who manned their ships, carried their arms, led their horses, sharpened their swords, kept their powder dry, and acted as their retainers in a thousand different ways and in many a thousand different and out-of-the-way and wild places; who died for them and with them; who limped home to tell how they died, or were left behind and told about. Always the invisible barrier between them, yet loyal as steel to one another. Believing firmly that God had put them into their different states of life, they tried to do their duty therein without seeking in their relative conditions a logical reason for hatred.

Upon all the vaults, and about the worn and broken effigies of crusaders, are the names of men buried elsewhere, and the names of men whose deaths are yet to be recorded, because the family never heard what became of them. There is something of the pathos of a child's hopefulness, purpled with the grandeur of the beacon of immortality, about an inscription like the following:

RICHARD ANTROBUS MORETON
Son of the above
Born July 16, 1612
Died——

They carved his name when he was born, in its proper place, and while later blank spaces in the crumbling sandstone have become filled with the death dates of the men of his race, his waits for his home-coming, as if it fondly expected him to come.

Still they go! Leaving that fair countryside because the sea smiles rather mockingly upon its staid old ways, beckons tauntingly to youth, promises. So they lie, scattered dust in Palestine, sway like strange seaweed about the ribs of drowned ships, roll fathoms deep, foot-weighted with the rusted cannon shot of Francis Drake, gleam starkly in the weird light of some orchid-haunted jungle—everywhere.

A four-sided granite pillar in the church. Upon it the name CAREW.

III

THE estates of the Carews and the Hilliards had adjoined for several hundred years. The men had fought and died together, and, together, their women had wept for them. The same ideals had further welded them. And this friendship had reached its acme with Dick Carew and Barney Hilliard.

With the others of their generation these two were not in sympathy. Dick had an elder brother and two sisters, and it seemed that all the good looks, virility and adventurous spirit of the family had descended to Dick, leaving the others barren. For the brother was a weed, destined to become a harmless nonentity in the Guards. The sisters, as often happens in old families, were thin, anæmic, querulous, selfish women, born old maids, who looked upon the strenuous Dick as an uncivilized blight. This seemed strange, because the mother was an unusually fine woman, while the father was a very fair specimen of the better-class Englishman.

Barney's mother was dead; his father was a replica of Dick's, while his sisters might have been Dick's sisters, so alike were they in every way. But his one, elder brother was different.

Until Barney grew to about half of his later phenomenal strength the brother had bullied him. Then one day, while Dick Carew cheered him on, he had unmercifully thrashed that brother. After that they had little to say to each other. Barney grew up with clean ideas, athletic ability, and an unusual desire for knowledge. The brother became enamored of things the reverse of clean. A naval officer, he was one who did not conform to type, and, as he was gradually promoted and transferred from ship to ship, that which is neither history nor scandal went with him, and men came to shun him as nearly as might be.

And of course this family unlikeness served the more effectually to weld Dick and Barney—who, while throw-backs in some ways, were ahead intellectually of their kin—into a comradeship conferred upon the few by the gods in their forgetful moments, when they are kind.

Then, shortly after they passed their twentieth birthdays, their fathers pooled a large part of their capital and sent it seeking more gold in the way of a promising but risky speculation. The speculation failed of its glittering

promise, hence, one pleasing morning of summer, Carew Senior, after frowning at his newspaper through breakfast, spoke to Dick this wise:

"Take a walk around the house with me before you go, will you?"

"Yes, sir;" Dick was surprised. He had heard nothing about the speculation, and he and Barney had planned to go fishing beyond the cape. He lighted his pipe and waited.

"You know," the father began, rather hesitatingly—"you know that your brother has passed his examinations and is going into the Guards?"

"Yes, sir—of course," responded the puzzled Dick.

"It's an expensive regiment," added Carew senior, unnecessarily.

"Yes, sir!"

"Mr. Hilliard and myself—er—you may tell this to Barney—I don't think he knows—Mr. Hilliard and myself, in an effort to—er—to increase our—er—our resources, have gone into an investment which has not as yet made the profit we anticipated. . . . It will do, of course—er—but it may take some little time. . . . It's a bit unfortunate, coming just now—when we need money, as it were, to launch you boys. . . . But it cannot be helped. . . . Have you and Barney planned any sort of future—outside your youthful notions about becoming pirates?" He finished with a rather pathetic effort at jocularity.

"Not exactly, sir," replied Dick, undisturbed by the revelation.

"Well"—his father was anxious to conclude so unpleasant an interview—"well, talk it over with your friend, will you? And let me know what you decide. There will be some money for you, of course. Two or three hundred pounds or so. Not much, but better than nothing."

Dick left his father and strolled in his leisurely way down toward the beach. He couldn't see why he was expected to "be" anything. He was quite contented as he was. Why bother? Ambition was a nuisance! Barney had it, but Barney's was a nice, quiet sort of ambition. All he wanted to do was to write a book—when he knew enough—a book about philosophy. Just one book, which would take him all his life to write! Now that was a decent, undisturbing ambition which left lots of time for sailing a boat and fishing and having a good time generally. Besides, Barney claimed that philosophizing gave a man a calm mind—helped him to control his emotions so that he would not fall in love. Dick was gravely doubtful about the advantages of this effect of philosophy, but, then, Dick was always falling in love. He was too good-looking for girls to leave alone. Barney, on the contrary, was given to cynicism whenever the subject of love came up. Sometimes Dick believed that this attitude toward women was a pose on

Barney's part; then, again, he was not so sure. He paused in his stride. Where had he got to? Oh yes, about ambition. Why bother to "be" anything? Life in the village was pleasant, very pleasant. Barney and he could always find some strenuous amusement with which to pass the time. Why should men have to change their ways, when those ways suited. Dick hated change. Two or three hundred pounds! What on earth would he do with it—except spend it? Well, he would talk it over with Barney, and Barney would make up some weird rhyme about their future—in Dick's case to the third or fourth generation—or philosophize about it with a jaw-breaking string of long words. . . . Chances were that his father was a "bit gouty" and that the next day would see the matter definitely shelved and everything as usual. It was a very fine morning, and the sea glittered a welcome.

The people Dick met greeted him with affection and respect. The world was an excellent place in which to live, and the village the most desirable spot upon it. Why consider leaving it at all? What did money matter? There would always be enough to eat! Dick grinned. He imagined a picture of himself pottering about the old place in his age, after never having left it for a day; his end and his burial in the family vault. And he liked the picture. He could conceive of none more pleasing. And there would be Barney, also old, perhaps fat! Dick laughed. He would tell Barney that, because Barney despised fatness. Yes, there would be Barney, with his verses and his extraordinary philosophical opinions—Barney, with, perhaps, that wonderful book about philosophy written.

Dick Carew definitely decided never to leave the village of his birth. He would not even go away for a visit.

He walked along quaint old Church Street, the ancient cobblestones echoing his footsteps against the leaning houses. Here and there was a straw-thatched cottage, and old-fashioned double doors were numerous. Babies sprawled in the sunlight and contentedly covered themselves with mud. Occasionally a bit of fenced-in soil flaunted a few marigolds, with large shells, one or two of those curious solid bottles or a much-rusted anchor as additional ornamentation.

Dick breathed deeply, delightfully stirred by the strong, mingling odors of things of the sea. It was, indeed, a fine old world.

The pleasant sound of the rising tide rose above the crowing of babies and male poultry, and Dick turned at the end of the street and began to walk across the pebbly sand. A sailboat with mainsail hoisted was waiting the push into deeper water, with Barney Hilliard apparently orating to young Tom Rivett, the "crew." Dick laughed aloud with the joy of life. Good old Barney! When in the mood he would talk philosophy to a scarecrow, if no

more intelligent audience offered! No doubt young Tom was trying his best to understand, while Barney knew quite well that he did not. But as Dick drew nearer he saw that Tom *did* understand!

Carew's face changed strangely. The day seemed to lose its beauty. . . . And Barney, of all men—Barney who knew better!

Dick tried to hope that he was mistaken—that Barney was only joking with Tom Rivett. But Barney was far from joking, and the coming of his friend did not change his tone. Doubtless it compelled him to continue, when, otherwise, he would have decided that he had said enough. For Barney was scurrilously abusing young Tom Rivett.

"Barney!" Dick's voice was a protest.

As if he had not heard, Barney went on, "Yes, you damned young——"

"Hilliard, shut up!"

Barney turned, his face flushing, wrinkling simianly.

"What?" he snarled.

"Rivett's one of *our* people." Dick spoke sharply, with yet a hint of pleading. "You know that you have no right to correct him this way. You have no right! Take care of your own people, and leave ours to us! . . . I told you to shut up," he ended, angrily.

"*You* told *me* to shut up," sneered Barney, while the introspective part of his mind wondered at the first quarrel Dick and he had ever had.

"And if you don't I'll make you," added Dick, definitely.

Barney laughed and began to remove his sweater. "Er—my dear Sir Richard, do you prefer the Queensberry method, or—er—the London prize-ring rules—which I believe allow even biting?"

"No, no—not about the likes of me!" protested the horrified Rivett, to whose slow intelligence the situation had at length assumed definite outline.

Dick smiled at him. "Tom, the likes of you and the likes of me have been pretty thick for a devil of a long time! If your great-grandfather hadn't given up his life for mine I would not be here to-day!"

"Dear me!" sneered Barney. "How sweetly pathetic!"

Dick flushed as he stripped. He had spoken to Rivett to ease that youth's mind, although his English reserve had hated to do so. He was willing to admit that Barney's sneering remark was called for!

"I challenged you!" he answered, shortly.

"So!" Barney pretended to be busy with his clothes, thinking rapidly.

Dick and he had boxed with each other since childhood. There was little between them as regards weight, but, while Dick was several inches taller, Barney's gorilla-like length of arm and width of chest gave him, if anything, the longer reach. At wrestling, when Barney could use his really abnormal grip—although at that time his strength had not reached its final development—Barney was master.

But he was struggling with his sense of justice. He was in the wrong, and he knew it. To fight and win a fight when he was in the wrong always seemed to Barney to be on a level with stealing. Yet he could not refuse to fight. His predicament was horrible. He did not want to hurt Dick. He did not want to fight him. Yet what he clearly recognized as the weakness of a false pride compelled him. Anger had left him. He felt that he ought to apologize, and despised himself because he could not. All he could do was to give Dick the best of the terms.

"We have no timekeeper or referee," he drawled, "so we will have to make one round of it. If one of us goes down, he gets what time he requires, within decency, to get up again. Except for that, Queensberry rules, and—come on!"

However much a spectator might have enjoyed that fight, he would have found a certain horror in the breaking of friendship with such brutality. Tom Rivett could only stare, open-mouthed, now and then emitting a sort of howl, as if he himself were undergoing physical suffering.

No referee was needed. Both men fought with scrupulous cleanliness—either would have preferred death to the taking of any advantage. But science was soon forgotten. As both loathed the situation, this was to be expected. That cool-headedness so characteristic of them was swamped by emotion. Try as they might to crush their affection, it welled through every straining nerve, blotting out the "fighting instinct." Thus, they stood toe to toe, slugging until the strain broke their labored breathing into gasps, their blows in spite of will became mere taps, and, finally, glaring and exhausted, they fell to the sand, their faces hideous, their bodies terribly bruised.

There they lay, dumbly waiting, their brains feverish with fancies, their throats parched with something other than exertion. It was Barney, whose personality, brilliant as was his mind, dangled between an atavistic hell and an idealistic paradise, who acted. Always ready to admit when he was wrong—a habit of which lesser men often took advantage, usually to their later sorrow—he never saw himself so deeply in the wrong as at that moment. And he was not the man to hesitate.

"Dick," he panted, "I'm ready to go on if you are, but I'm a damned swine!"

Dick managed a weirdly distorted smile. Somewhat like a seal, he lurched along the sand toward Barney. Their hands met.

"I'm a worse swine," said Dick.

"Er"—Barney's feelings were beyond description—"er—rotten grammar, what?" he laughed.

The villagers, busy with their morning tasks, had seen nothing; and, although neither Dick nor Barney bothered about the opinions of others, they were glad of this. Their faces needed attention. The warm sunlight would not improve lacerations. But, as if by agreement, they ignored their injuries, putting on their clothes and acting toward Tom Rivett as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. They pushed the boat into deeper water, hoisted the jib, and started upon their interrupted sail.

The spirit of youth blossomed at the touch of the summer wind in the sparkle of the sea. It was inevitable that they should laugh at each other's appearance. Barney began with,

"My looks are never beautiful, my dear Sir Richard," a title to which Dick had of course no shadow of claim, "but your face is exactly like that "abomination of desolation" spoken of by some old poet. Now. . . ."

And Tom Rivett became cheerful, and the day passed. It was a day destined to be remembered. Hitherto they had been as puppies playing upon the lawn, their days a long morning. This was the beginning of life for them.

The mellow twilight was cloaking the village with a warm laziness when they hauled up their boat, craving supper and very happy. The mingling scents of the old-fashioned flowers welcomed them. It was past the dinner hour, so they decided to ravish the Carew pantry. At the ancient gate, from which a part of the coat of arms had been wrenched away by some enthusiastic follower of Cromwell, they met a surprise. Barney's father was nervously walking up and down.

It was not the fact of Barney's father walking in front of his friend's gate that was so astonishing, although his doing this alone was somewhat strange. It was his manner—the mental disturbance indicated by the way he came toward them—which brought to both boys a sensation hitherto unknown. Something was wrong, something was very wrong. Was it dire sickness or death?

The dusk had gathered into night, but there was sufficient light to show their cut and bruised faces. As it came to him that they had been fighting, the elder Hilliard uttered a sharp exclamation. Then he spoke angrily.

"So! This looks like further evidence—although none was required!"

The reference to their fight was sufficiently annoying—a tactless, ill-bred remark altogether unlike Hilliard senior—but the hint of something else, the mention of "further evidence" told of something of far more importance, and brought to Dick and Barney an oppressive anticipation of evil. For some moments no one spoke, the elder Hilliard seemingly trying to find the right word, tormented by conflicting emotions, until Barney's rising anger broke forth defiantly.

"Yes, we have done a little boxing, without gloves. That however, was our business, and concerns no one but our two selves! What do you mean by 'further evidence,' sir?"

"Your pretended ignorance does you no credit!" The pain in the old man's voice told of a shock that had warped his judgment, unseated justice, and replaced it with a blind intention of punishment. Dick and Barney looked at each other, trying to exchange glances in the dim light. This was not at all like Barney's father. It was a different being. But while the situation could only upset Dick, something of the strangeness of Barney's character was revealed in his being able to ignore the dire portent of that tense moment in the interest it afforded him. Already his studies in mental pathology were worthy of the term "profound"; and now, while he waited for what he knew not, but did know for something terrible—something which would press with sickening weight upon the lives of both his friend and himself—he could not avoid swiftly trying to diagnose his father's condition, trying to form a correct opinion of his apparently abnormal mental state. Then, while still observing his father, he answered.

"You mean that I am lying?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I will not attempt to change your opinion, but, all the same, you will be compelled to explain. Our ignorance is *not* "pretended"! And I know that I can speak for Dick as well as for myself." His voice became curiously calm. "Kindly explain yourself, sir—neither Dick nor I have the slightest idea what you are driving at!"

"Indeed! I suppose that if I mention Mary Rimmer to you—you—you, neither of you will have 'the slightest idea' who she is, eh?" Barney's father was now furious. Even if he had begun the interview with the intention of being fair, if natural affection had bade him hesitate before condemning—all such reasonableness had been swept away. That Judge Jeffreys who had sent one of Hilliard's ancestors to the scaffold had never been more anxious to pass sentence.

“That girl in the village—of course we know who she is!” blurted Dick, astonished at her name being mentioned.

“You have been fighting about her—about something concerning her!” asserted Barney’s father.

His son threw back his head and laughed, Dick laughing with him, if not so boisterously. They imagined they saw the end of the matter in a trivial but untrue accusation of intimacy or rivalry. And knowing the strict pride of their families, the narrow promptings to action of which their sisters were capable, they believed they understood the theatrical meeting at the gate.

“About Mary Rimmer!” Barney gasped, sarcastically.

“It may seem very funny to you”—the voice of the old man in some way shattered their mirth—“it may amuse you! Perverted minds find their amusement curiously, I believe! But, of course, with your clever assumption of ignorance, you will pretend that you do not know that Mary Rimmer is dead—committed suicide this afternoon!”

“Suicide!” Dick and Barney ceased to be boys.

Paternal love momentarily overbore disgust and horror. “Oh, Barney, Dick—whatever were you thinking about? Nothing nearly so disgraceful has ever happened to either family before! No, mistakes may have been made, but our men have been fairly clean. But this—my God! it dirties my mouth to talk about it! I know boys are foolish, but this is sheer filth!”

“Still, father”—Barney achieved control of his voice by a vast effort, “I give you my word that I don’t know what you mean—neither does Dick! I understand what you say—that the girl is dead—but what have we to do with it?”

“My God! Barney,” the old man groaned, “when you speak like that I almost believe you! But the evidence—evidence any court will accept as truth—that evidence damns you both!”

In the cruel silence that followed, Barney’s ability to detach his mind from pain, emotion, distress, to analyze a situation, again centered on his father’s mental condition. What was the exact change resulting from the shock? There was perhaps a slender chance of getting him to believe in their innocence, and to make the most of that chance it was necessary to understand his mental outlook. He had warped under the strain until he was a very different creature from the usual calm, aristocratic Englishman. Barney felt ashamed of his father. He was a bundle of nerves, illogical, too tired to face things, willing to accept the conclusions of others. A general nervous breakdown. But to say that meant nothing. Dick had forgotten to tell Barney about the unfortunate speculation, and the latter naturally believed

that the suicide was all the cause of his father's condition. Suddenly Barney decided that it was useless to attempt to influence his father, and a natural anger began to possess him. However bad the situation, it was no excuse for his father's going to pieces. For a moment he dwelt upon the supposition that his father was not only willing, but anxious to condemn, and this maddened him.

"Well, sir"—Barney spoke roughly—"and what is this wonderful, this conclusive evidence?"

Barney's angry innocence would have had its effect upon any man, and, stubbornly determined though he was, anxious to pour out what he considered his righteous indignation, Hilliard Senior hesitated. Neither had he realized how hard the telling would be. He walked a few paces this way and that, cleared his throat, did everything, it seemed to his son, that was "stagy." Then he faced the two with a sort of extrajudicial grimness, speaking as if sentencing them to be hanged, actually proud because he had not allowed himself to believe in their innocence!

"Mary Rimmer, about to become a mother and fearing the awful disgrace of an unmarried girl, jumped from an upper window upon the cobblestones of Church Street this afternoon. Before she died she implicated both of you. There were many witnesses, including the rector. Any court would accept her word, although unable to decide which of you is the actual cause of her killing herself—you are both guilty in fact. Cobbett, being our friend, questioned her carefully, but she stuck to her tale, dying so. I simply cannot repeat what she said. The village is furious!"

"To hell with the village!" snarled Barney. "All I care about is the condemnation of my own flesh and blood—and damned little for that!"

"Are you absolutely callous?" the father groaned.

"No—innocent! I am surprised you doubt it. A girl who is so emotionally disturbed as to kill herself hardly makes a responsible witness. She probably did not realize just what she was saying, and perhaps weeks ago, when she found herself in trouble, the guilty man showed her that if she accused one of us she would be able to get a tidy sum of money. Consequently, babbling in death, she accused us both, and that old fool Cobbett, trying, as he imagined, to help her to heaven, assisted her 'confession.' What fools call 'pride of love' may have caused her to shield the guilty man, as well. Good God! to think that the law would accept the babble of a weak-minded little fool like that, probably to ruin the lives of two innocent men! . . . Well, we'll face the music—the 'furious' village!"

"No—you cannot!" the old man nearly screamed.

“Cannot?” the almost stunned Dick shouted.

“Consider your father’s position—the case will come before him in the morning, Dick. That is why I met you here. He will not—he cannot see either of you. . . . Don’t you see?”

“And thou also——” said Barney, softly.

“Don’t try to be clever,” snapped his father.

“I’m not,” Barney spoke wearily. “You may as well pass sentence, father. I see it coming—anyone would—in fact, you have hinted at it pretty broadly. What’s a rotten miscarriage of justice, anyway, between—between parents and children?”

“Barney”—the father clenched his fists—“you force me to believe Dick innocent and you guilty. No decent man could hear of this and be sarcastic—let alone an innocent one. . . . You are a cad, sir!”

A worse insult was impossible, but Dick felt the sting of it far more than did Barney. In fact, the latter silenced his friend with a gesture. He wanted to be done with it all. Delay of any sort always irritated him. Die, if you must die, but don’t make a fuss about it!

“I am waiting—both Dick and I seem to be waiting for what is to be.” Again Barney spoke like a tired man.

“You must leave home at once, of course.” Hilliard senior seemed relieved, as if he had met with less opposition than expected. “You must go now—to Canada, anywhere.”

“What has Canada or ‘anywhere’ done to be punished this way?” Barney drawled, with a rudeness which until this evening he would have shuddered at using toward his father.

“Don’t interrupt me—you! I said ‘go,’ and go you must! I cannot say for how long—you can see that—but it will be for a very long time. I have three hundred pounds in Bank of England notes here. That will be enough to get away on. Later, we may send you more. Here, Barney, take it—half for Dick, of course.”

“Are you quite certain it is three hundred?” asked Barney, quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, I thought it might be—er—*thirty shillings that really belong to you*!”

But Barney’s rather labored inference escaped the elder man. He stared through the dark at his son, and suddenly a faint glimmer of paternal affection escaped him.

"Oh, boy, I'm sorry! But it has to be. Whatever made you do it? Why didn't you tell us when—when you knew the girl was in trouble? She could have been cared for and sent away. There would have been no such terrible end. Not every unfortunate woman need die. Here, take the money! I cannot stand any more of this!"

"Dick,"—Barney turned to his friend—"how much money have you?"

"About three shillings and sixpence," answered Dick, understanding immediately.

"You're rich! I have half a crown, two pennies, and a threepenny bit. . . . But it's enough! Good-by, father!"

"What do you mean? Where are you going?" demanded Hilliard senior, becoming incoherent.

"To London, I suppose. . . . Isn't that where they all go?" Barney's tone became almost a caress.

"But—but you must get out of the country! The people of the village may demand that you be brought back, or something! Think of the awful disgrace to us all! Here—take the money!"

Barney turned away.

"Does my mother know?" asked Dick.

"No—not yet; we couldn't tell her."

"I thought not," replied Dick, simply. "I will write to her," and, ignoring the proffered money also, he turned with Barney toward the ancient "Rupert's Lane" which led through age-grown hedges to the road to London. They lifted their caps—discipline of childhood—and started to go.

"Boys," the old man walked with them, paternal love striving to break through its crust of caste, "don't go! I mean, don't go very far. London will be enough. Yes, and send me your address! After all, you are entitled to a trial—a fair trial—and while you cannot stay here (I believe the fishermen would mob you; nearly every young man in the village was in love with her), London will be far enough. Then, when we can see this thing better, and the excitement has died down a bit—well, we might get a detective to look into it!"

This last, this suggestion that a detective might be "allowed" to "pry" into "family" affairs, was a tremendous concession; and both boys appreciated how the elder Hilliard was suffering.

"And," he added, holding out the notes, "you simply must have money!"

"Father"—for the first time Barney's voice betrayed something of his agony—"Father, you may not altogether understand us, but you know

enough to—to—— For God's sake, leave us!"

Ten minutes later they reached the crest of the hilly lane, just where it drops sheer into the London road. Instinctively, without a word, they turned and looked down upon the village of their birth.

In that moment their Spartan code did not seem to fit them. That stern line of this or that, bred into them, which had warped the minds of their fathers, appeared as the arrogant assumption of some nerveless, heartless creed of a god of cold metal. Sympathy, understanding! The unuttered wish for these rose in the boys, and hurt. They were facing a hostile world of a sort not good for youth to face without them. Amid this stark desolation their friendship stood like a rock, supporting them and backing up their clean pride.

The village lights, the evening wind whispering to the sea, the home spirit wailing a *vale*.

Both called upon their hard code. No word passed between them. They stared down at the village through a mist the clear night had never begotten.

That repression of their kind, so often mistaken for indifference, forbade any expression of pain. . . . They turned away, walking rapidly.

To Dick his brain seemed to be merely an instrument for understanding pain, but Barney found some relief in using his to find the truth. It was his brother, of course; and how that foul bird of an otherwise clean nest had warped the simple girl until she would lie outrageously when dying was a problem to which Barney could see several solutions. But it would have done no good to have accused the brother. Everyone would have looked upon such an accusation as being nothing but a cowardly attempt to shift the blame. For the brother was at sea, aboard his ship. That antemortem statement. The law. No, to bury his certainty of the guilty man silently in the grave of injustice was all he could do. Some day—some day! Barney was young enough to hope for that. Eventual justice was almost a fetish with him. His search for its universal application was the cause of his raging at the God of whose existence he was so certain. And he would say nothing to Dick.

God! Yes, and there were many gods, to whom men still made their sacrifices. The spirit of Abraham was not dead—among Englishmen! For just as the old biblical character had been willing to offer up his son as a burning sacrifice to his imagined god—thinking nothing of his son's pain in comparison to his own supposed benefit because of the sacrifice—so had Dick's father and his selfishly offered them as a sacrifice to their god of "respectability," family pride, what not! They were only younger sons. Had

they been first-born it might have been different. . . . Barney remembered a story—a true incident—which had stirred him greatly at the time it was told. A story in which Isaac was as willing as Abraham, the god a slight variation of the god of his own father. The old Earl of Lytham. The eldest son caught cheating at cards, playing with his younger brother and a guest—the guest making the accusation. And the earl, knowing his heir to be guilty, had persuaded (with little persuasion needed) the younger to shoulder the horrible accusation and admit that he, not his brother, had marked the kings, aces, and queens . . . for the sake of the family name! No earl could be known as a card cheat! And the boy—his injured pride refusing the money his father offered, exactly as Dick and Barney had refused it—had gone abroad, to Jamaica, and so to the devil and an early drunkard's grave. Family pride! Only a certain class of Englishman could understand fully to what cruel lengths the worshipers of a name can go! His last sight of his father came back to him. It seemed that the farther away from the lower animals some parents evolved the less they retained of love of offspring. No, that was not quite fair, because the attitude of his father, and Dick's, had been more English than general. An American father would have stood by his son and fought for him—his pride of race would not have been shown in such cowardly eagerness to get him away from the village. Only an Englishman could understand. It was like the stern lack of love of an old farmer in a play Barney had seen—turning his daughter away, telling her never to "darken his door again." It would seem that to such minds morality was entirely bounded by sex. What a hash of peoples' lives had been made by the fetish of the wedding ceremony! Later on—when the excitement had died down—both Dick's father and his would be sorry and wish they had not acted so hastily. But what was the use of thinking about it? They walked on silently.

Three miles farther, Barney broke the silence.

"Dick, I am pathetically reminded that I have had no dinner! What says your gross soul about it?"

Dick laughed, "There's the King's Head at the next turn."

"Bread and cheese and beer! Fitting to our need and our purses," agreed Barney. "But"—he hated to refer to their trouble—"but old Windebank and his minions may have—may have heard. We may be compelled to lick a sort of reception committee!"

"Public house—must serve us," answered Dick, tersely.

"And we both hungry enough to rob a bakery," added Barney.

The warm quiet of the evening. They knew every stile, every field, every landmark for miles around. Inanimate things pulled at their hearts like the

murmured words of dying friends. And every man and woman about the inn had known them since infancy.

"It will be—er—interesting," Barney bluffed, desperately.

In their wanderings these two essayed many difficult tasks, crushing down self in brave endeavor; but never a harder than to stride nonchalantly, after their usual manner, across the sanded floor to the old oak table where they had so often sat.

The place was empty, but for old Windebank himself—a portly person with a wealth of adjective. He was busy at his taps. Mechanically, at the sound of their footsteps, he greeted them.

" 'Evenin', gentlemen!"

Then he looked up, recognized them, and his face turned purple. But he met Barney's anticipating eyes, and caste prevailed, while adding fuel to the stubborn English temper of the man.

"Jane," he yelled to his daughter, "serve two gents. I'm busy!"

It was as near an insult as he cared to go. But for the flying, fiery scandal of the village, he would have been with his guests in a moment, solicitous, hospitable, all attention. But he found his unusual attitude a fearful effort. The years had molded him. He was vastly disturbed. So, to "prove his busyness," he began to *sandpaper* a shining beer tap!

Barney spoke wearily, hardly looking at his friend. "As our mutual and much respected pal Omar would say, 'He knows, he knows!' " and felt curiously proud because his drawl sounded natural.

Jane came in. Many times had they teased her. A buxom Devonshire maid of their own age. And many times had the handsome Dick kissed her—she very willing to be kissed. . . . She bridled, although the observant Barney saw more than the suspicion of tears in her bright eyes.

"Yes, gentlemen!" Her way of insult, of telling them that she knew all the evil they had done. She might not have known their names!

Dick fidgeted—did not look at the girl—but Barney seemed to be appraising her, showing nothing of the effort it cost him, while apparently deciding what to order. And this attitude of his—this calm he maintained at such an effort of self-control during his last hours in the district—bore its expected fruit. For while it was well known that Dick had had several love affairs which were not exactly to his credit, Barney's name had been tangled with no woman's. It was another facet of his strange character that took pride in never having kissed a girl! Yet, when the boys went away, and the people had time to put their heads together, all the blame descended upon Barney. They were so much together, were Dick and Barney, that the

wandering mind of the dying girl had confused them! It came out that people had always suspected Barney—"he was one of that sly kind," etc. Indeed, before many weeks had passed Dick had become a popular hero, and if he had returned to the village people would have apologized to him, when a similar appearance on the part of Barney would have roused the quiet villagers to the fury of a mob with lynching intentions!

"I think," said Barney, after what seemed like a week of hesitancy, "I believe that bread and cheese and ale—lots of bread, lots of cheese, lots of ale—will suit us!"

"Oh, you!" the girl gasped, then hurried away, a hand pressed tightly against her bosom.

And Barney, not looking at his friend, "Remember, Dick, we *must* eat, even if it tastes like medicine and swallows like lead!"

"I'm hungry," replied Dick, tonelessly.

The news of their coming might have been shouted from the roof of the inn. Rustic logic made queer guesses concerning their bruised faces. The girl served them, trying to act as if she were putting food upon a table at which no one was seated. The men about the place pretended to loaf, unconcerned, into the taproom, or else did their best to act as if very thirsty, while one original soul who was not employed at the inn discovered that he had most important business to transact with Windebank, which not only necessitated his leaning against the bar, but also provided a needed excuse for a total abstainer whose abstinence was generally considered to be due to miserliness.

"We both fight better on empty stomachs," murmured Barney, "but it's a long, long way to London on a short, short purse. Let's eat!"

"They won't begin," answered Dick. "We'll just walk past them as if they weren't there, and they'll talk a lot after we're gone. That's all. . . . I don't feel like fightin', and you don't, either."

Barney grinned wryly, "True, oh, king! To be perfectly truthful, I feel like—like hell!"

They finished the meal to the last crumb and the last drop, laid the price upon the table, pushed back their chairs scrapingly to announce their going. And breed told. As if they had been in the open country, miles from any other human, they walked out of the King's Head, while the men gaped at them and the girl stared between furtive wipes at her eyes with the corner of her apron. . . . A babble of argument ascended to the ancient ceiling!

They walked a number of miles in silence, while the world went to sleep. A deep peace came over them. Barney, always introspective,

attributed this to reaction from the strain of the past hours; Dick was content to accept its comfort without seeking its cause.

"Who was it raved about 'the stars for a canopy'?" asked Barney.

"Don't know," answered Dick, "but it looks awfully comfortable behind that hedge!"

"Ah!" Barney laughed. "And does it please you, my dear Sir Richard, to lodge there?"

"It doesn't, but there's nowhere else. . . . And, Barney, I have a notion that you and I are going to sleep under the stars you're so fond of talking about more times than on the old road to London!"

"Possibly," yawned Barney. "But sufficient unto the night——"

IV

MUD, rain and the London docks. Their money had lasted to a final glass of beer in a pub that leered out dirtily upon Commercial Road, and now, without definite intent, Dick and Barney strolled toward the Thames.

But the sea was calling to them in undertones their conscious minds did not hear, yet to which their beings responded. Beyond those grimy docks was adventure. The smiling women faces of the world enticed, although unseen; the seemingly tangled masts of sailing vessels taunted them with their intricate rigging after the fashion of an eternal puzzle which youth must solve.

For the first time they knew hunger without the means of satisfying it, and since they would naturally rather die than beg, work must be demanded of the world. But neither had ever earned a penny and knew of no way of trying.

"If nobody objects, suppose we board that three-master over there," suggested Barney. "We're both willing to work, and if we toil awhile they might sooth our 'shivering timbers' by 'splicing the main brace' or something!" Which was the dreariest attempt to seem at ease ever wrung by circumstance out of Barney Hilliard. Starving, miles from other humans on the snowy wastes of the North, it is far less difficult to be cheerful than when broke and hungry in a large city.

The ship attracting their attention had finished loading and would sign on her crew the next day. Riggers had bent her sails, and she exhaled that air of dirt and neglect possible only to a merchant sailing vessel after many weeks in dock without a crew to care for her. They climbed the grimy gangway, and as they stepped on deck the mate walked out of the cabin alleyway—neither of his visitors suspecting that he was that officer.

He apparently lacked all the requirements attributed to first officers by those who do not go down to the sea in merchant sailing ships. He wore no sort of uniform. His need of a shave was equal to that of Dick Carew, who was one of those unfortunates who must shave twice a day if they would look respectable. His cap was as ragged as Barney's, which is saying much, because it must be remembered that Barney was still wearing the apparel

sacred to his boat-sailing expeditions, and he rather prided himself upon its obvious antiquity. But the man's eyes held a quality, and personality exuded from him. Who was he?

"Can you tell me if this ship needs any men?" asked Barney, rather dubiously, unable to think of anything else to say.

"We sign on to-morrow. Looking for a ship?" the mate smiled engagingly.

"To tell the truth," Barney replied, liking the other at once, "we're both fairly good in small sailing boats, but we don't know a damned thing about a ship like this."

"That'll be all right," answered this astonishing officer, who loathed the mixed-nation crews who by working for less wages have practically driven the Englishman from his own country's ships, and who saw in Dick and Barney his own kind of people making exceedingly rough weather of it. "That's all right! . . . I'm a CONWAY boy," he added, simply—an entire volume of explanation!

"Oh!" exclaimed Dick. "I had a cousin there—Carew—left about eight years ago."

"He was captain of the starboard main—my top—and Queen's medalist," the mate replied; Dick nodding to the last, the part about the main top being beyond him.

"My name is Marshall," and, as introductions were effected, "Come into my room."

An astrologist once explained it all to Barney with elaborate signs, but Barney was not convinced, and remained puzzled. For as it was in the beginning so it remained with them until the end: wanderers' luck was with Dick Carew and Barney Hilliard. There were many times when the matter of caring for themselves seemed to be taken out of their hands, as if some unseen Power were interested in them and wanted them to know it.

In the cabin the mate produced a bottle of Scotch, and they drank.

"Here's to a fair wind down Channel!" said the mate.

"Where are we bound?" Dick essayed the nautical.

"Victoria, B. C.," the mate answered.

"Canada," said Barney. "That's where the prairies and cowboys are, isn't it?"

"Not anywhere near Victoria," explained the mate.

"Well, it suits me. What say, Dick?"

"I believe it's the best thing we can do, old fellow," replied Dick.

"Of course," said the mate, "you'll have to sign on as ordinary seamen—first voyage, you know. Wages will be two pounds ten shillings a month. You get three months advance. Be at the shipping office at ten to-morrow morning." He hesitated, guessing they were broke, and anxious to help if he could do so without giving offense.

"Seven pounds ten each—what will we do with it all?" laughed Dick.

"Well," the mate also laughed, "you may get a bar of soap and a donkey's breakfast!"

"But consider the unfortunate donkey," exclaimed Barney, who wished he had gone easier on the whisky.

"A donkey's breakfast," the mate explained, "is an apology for a straw mattress. The bar of soap might be said to be the apology of the boarding-house keeper for robbing you of your three months' advance, but if he thought it was you wouldn't get it!"

"Robbing?" questioned Dick.

"Yes! You can hardly understand! The boarding-house crimps seem to have sailors trained, as it were. A man may be a regular 'hard case' at sea, but he will be like a good little lamb with the boarding-house keeper. I have never heard of an exception. It's a rotten system, but nobody but these crooks will cash a sailor's advance note. You see, if a bank or a business house cashed a note it would have to hire a detective to watch the chap whose note they cashed, to see that he sailed all right. If the sailor does not sail in the ship, the owners will not pay the note, because he would not earn it. I would not want to cash the average man's note, but that's no excuse for the way they get robbed. Of course most men owe the boarding-house keeper for a few days rotten board and lodging, and for the rest he will give them about half a crown's worth of stuff for three months' wages. And he takes practically no chance. The sailor would be scared to try to cheat him by not sailing, even if he got a chance, which he doesn't, because he is either drugged or made too drunk with vile whisky. You will have to find a crimp to cash your notes. Of course you don't have to take any advance if you don't want to, but"—the mate paused significantly—"the captain won't pay you off in a foreign port, you know, and if—er—if you leave the ship out there you will have worked three or four months for nothing, except for what tobacco or slops you get out of the slop chest."

He was somewhat embarrassed after his long speech and at his hinting at the "clearing out" of Dick and Barney in Victoria—which he felt fairly sure they would do.

“I somehow look forward to meeting my first sailors’ boarding-house keeper,” said Dick, quietly, for, strange as it always seemed to all who knew them, Dick really enjoyed fighting, while Barney did not. A “row” appealed to Dick. On the contrary, Barney was so enamored of the “calm mind” that he only fought when he saw it was the best thing to do, after which he would write something about the “folly of scuffling with lesser minds,” or the like, in a little book he carried with him after the fashion of Marcus Aurelius.

“Be careful,” the mate cautioned; “those chaps have a lot of roughs in their pay!”

“So?” said Dick, quietly.

The steward knocked at the door. “The old man won’t be here, sir. Will you have dinner?”

“Yes. And, steward, set two extra places. . . . You’ll stay to dinner, won’t you?” he asked his visitors.

“Thank you,” and both Dick and Barney felt thankful to the custom of sailing ships which decrees that dinner shall be eaten at noon.

“I’ve often been broke,” the mate suggested when they were leaving the ship. “Don’t want to offend you chaps, but, you know, if you happen to be as I often have been, why——”

“That’s awfully good of you,” Dick thanked the officer, “but we can manage.” He looked at Barney, and saw that he agreed. “We can stand a second-rate hotel for one night!”

“It won’t be any worse than a ship’s forecastle,” the mate laughed as they shook hands.

They left the dock and wandered on the Thames Embankment. The drizzling rain still fell. Occasionally a policeman would look at them suspiciously. Barney indicated some wet benches.

“It’s just as well to take a look at one’s lodgings ere the night falls—they might not suit,” he mocked.

“We were a couple of idiots for refusing a loan,” answered Dick, “but, somehow, I’m glad we did.”

“Of course! If we cannot go through on our own we shouldn’t have started out by refusing the money from the pater,” said Barney.

“My brother cannot be much more than a mile away—wherever it is the First Life hang out!” Dick grinned. “Those fellows consider themselves the swellest officers in the army. Wonder how he’d like it if we called on him?”

“We may be hyper-quixotic, but we must consider his feelings,” answered Barney, with becoming gravity. “If you could see your brother’s

brother as I see him at this moment you'd—you would call some other day!"

Dick laughed, "I know I look pretty disreputable, but, Barney, if you could see yourself! You're one of those chaps who look fairly tough when all dressed up, and when you're not—notice how the policemen keep eying you?"

Although Dick spoke with jocular affection, his words were true ones. Never handsome, the last few days had turned Barney into as hard a looking character as it is possible to imagine, and the rather low tone of his cultured drawl accentuated his villainous appearance instead of palliating it.

"Well, it's for one night only," he replied, "and fortunately it's summer; but at that it's sufficiently miserable to make one shiver with sympathy for the regular sleepers out. Surely, even the prosperous-looking priests of Christianity could have persuaded themselves that a small saving on church decoration would build at least a wooden covering over these benches. But as the Founder of the creed lacked a place to lay his head, those that preach about him may consider it only decent that some shall imitate him, since they find themselves unable to do so!"

The night continued the rain. The lights tinted the mud. Weary stragglers shivered on the benches—old men, young men, old women, young women. Thin blood, poor inheritance, lack of stamina, weakness of every sort, little or no self-control—told their stories. And the two who had inherited what the others lacked now for the first time peered at the dimly lit part of the world's stage, wonderingly. The nearness and pitiful humanness of the other players gripped them painfully. Hitherto only an occasional beggar had touched them, like a stray breeze brushing against one's coat.

"There are all sorts here—university men—all sorts," whispered Dick, feeling his inability to express the horror of it as Big Ben tolled eleven.

At a later period of his career Barney would have answered "it's getting my poetical goat," but he had not yet learned that expressive form of language known as "American slang." He swore softly, but eventually he was forced to seek relief in making weird rhymes which possessed the additional merit of amusing Dick. With a desperate effort to hide the emotion his sympathy had aroused, he began:

"When at last you are up against it and stagger away in the dark with the grip of an empty stomach to sleep on a bench in the park——"

"But this isn't the park!" objected Dick.

"Poetic license," retorted Barney. "Don't interrupt the muse!"

"I wonder these poor devils don't end it all," went on Dick—"drown themselves, or something!"

"Thanks for the suggestion," answered Barney.

"What suggestion? Wish we had some tobacco!"

"About suicide. . . . Listen to your old pal Homer! . . .

> "When death like a kindly woman would take you to sleep on her breast
> And teach you the greater slumber and peace of eternal rest,
> Look up at the stars and wonder how long they have stood the gaff—
> Shake your head at the kindly woman and look at yourself and laugh!"

"But," teased Dick, "there are no stars—it's cloudy!"

"You go to hell," answered Barney.

"What! Barney Hilliard becoming a theologian—of the sort that believes in eternal damnation!" taunted Dick in the quaint way a man will when trying to keep up his own and another's spirits.

"No!" Barney's devils descended upon him like a ravaging army. "No, old man. But I wish that whatever or whoever made this dirty universe would have the decency to become a man of my weight for half an hour and put up its hands—so I could get in one punch for these poor devils on the seats!"

Dick did not answer. An orthodox Episcopalian, he regretted having led the conversation into the dangerous latitude of Barney's pet diatribe. For Dick's religious beliefs, in spite of the somewhat too affectionate trend of his moral character, were tangible things to which he clung stoutly; and the sometimes "blasphemies" of his friend really frightened him! Indeed, his fear regarding the ultimate destination of Barney's soul was the only fear he ever knew, and he dreaded the possibility of his friend's sudden taking off without an opportunity for "repentance"!

The night dragged through, the rain falling steadily. Dick dozed, leaning against Barney, waking at times to lament the lack of tobacco; but Barney whirled upon a lonely Neptunian orbit, whereon he sought causes and cursed consequences, fully aware of the absurdity of both his search and his emotions.

Now and then a snore—more often a groan or a shuddering sigh; sobs wandering about on the little wind, torn in spite of suppression from the aching breast of one of the women. The voice of Big Ben, the occasional heavy tramp of a policeman, the squelch of his boots in the sticky mud. A chill fog heralding the dawn and blending with the drizzle. Never exactly a silence. Would-be sleepers stirring in agony and shivering at their dread of another day. The increasing roar of London. And Barney, finding no excuse for it all, and believing existence to be an unnecessary agony inflicted upon sentient things by some unseen fiend.

Yet he could not pluck a flower, and had been known to ask an acquaintance who was carrying a bouquet to a lady why he did not take her a bunch of babies to stick in a vase to die! To "live clean" was his creed. Besides, to do so "mocked the passions inflicted upon us by whatever made us," as he phrased it. Yet no man could be more certain of the existence of the deity, or have a keener admiration for the immensity of the "intelligence" that had caused the universe to be. His contempt for the atheist was only equaled by his scorn of what he called *weakness*; grief being a manifestation of the selfishness of the weakling—a fact the world is slowly recognizing—drove him to brutal speech. One morning, passing a house that stood in its own grounds, he was arrested by the sound of a man's weeping, always a disgusting noise. Supposing the man had hurt himself badly, Barney entered the garden and found him lying on the grass. When Barney appeared he stopped crying.

"What's the matter?"

"My wife," moaned the other.

"What's the matter with her?"

"She's dead—I just came from the funeral!"

"Hell!" snapped Barney. "Why make such a fuss about losing one woman when the world's full of 'em? The loss is yours, eh? You'll miss your kisses! Well, you're lucky, but you don't know it."

But he could not sit and look at what the light of that London morning showed him. The misery, the loneliness, the awful despair—these hurt. He roused Dick.

"Get up, old man! We must walk some circulation into our blood. After we 'sign on' we eat, you know!"

"Only about six hours to breakfast, then," answered Dick, optimistically.

V

ABOUT the dingy shipping office there was a hint of the mystery of the sea, and when you looked at the old models on the walls, and waited to scrawl upon the ship's articles whatever name you at that time chanced to be using, you could not avoid imagining the sound of waves breaking upon a coast, talking to the rocks, chattering like old friends, and complaining bitterly about the disturbing propellers which were so rapidly displacing sails.

The kindly mate kept his word, and saw to it that Dick and Barney were signed on as ordinary seamen; but his duties crowded heavily, and after signing on himself he went back to the ship.

The air of the office was thick with mangled language; blowsy women gathered about the door with crimps and their hangers-on—the lees and dregs of humanity that batten upon sailors.

As they received their notes, the owner of a tough cockney voice approached them. He looked like a disreputable cab driver trying to ape what he imagined to be the manners of a duke who was desirous of emphasizing the vast social difference between himself and ordinary seamen—his face distorted with that smile which is possible only to keepers of boarding houses for sailors!

"Who yer stoppin' wiv, mates?"

As an actor Barney was impossible, but Dick's impersonation of the nervous, flattered yokel was excellent—his "Devonshire" sufficiently distilled to be intelligible.

"Nobuddy!"

The crimp nodded, satisfied with the outlook for business.

Men fresh from the farm had curious notions concerning advance notes, and years of experience had taught the crimp to use these notions as bait; and since the strangest of these notions was a firm intention of seeing the actual money before they could be induced to indorse their notes, it was necessary to make a parade of gold and silver before robbing them. The process of robbing varied, but it was always vastly entertaining to the crimp and his assistants.

No sailor, no man who had made a voyage to sea, would expect to *see* money in connection with an advance note, much less expect to receive it. Even if he owed nothing for board, the sailor would be happy if he got a few drinks and a handful of odds and ends called by courtesy "clothes." Indeed, he would actually feel relieved when the transaction was concluded and he was rid of that bothersome piece of paper which meant three months' hard work! This, of course, of the deepwater sailor in the "good old days" when men were robbed ashore and starved at sea, and worked at least fourteen hours of the twenty-four; when a Parliamentary committee made up of avaricious shipowners made "laws" for ships and sailors! Let us hope they now frizzle in a special hell, looked down upon by thieves, murderers, and other decent citizens!

But "countrymen" were different from sailors. "Discipline" had not broken them until they instinctively cringed at any sort of authority—until a boarding-house keeper loomed as a vaster and more menacing authority than any captain! Therefore, the bluff of decent discount of the notes. After that, the drugged beer or the club, or any method which rendered them harmless and saw to it that they sailed, quietly, in the right ship.

"Bli me!"

There was something so indescribably loathsome about the fellow's leer that both Dick and Barney ached to hit him.

"Bli me! So yer just from the country, wiv the milkmaids and the cows and——"

Here Barney cut in with a contemptuous growl, "We want to get some breakfast and get our notes cashed!"

"Oh, yer do, do yer?" The man's evil temper almost cloaked his crude diplomacy, nearly caused him to overlook Barney's lack of accent. But, promising himself comforting revenge, he went on: "An' right yer are. I'm Jack Plunkett, and you've come to the right man, so yer 'ave! It's only a little ways to my place. Come erlong with me, and you'll be orl right. . . . Brekfus, is it?"

He turned his heavy body and lurched through the door. The unfortunate women looked at Dick's handsome face with a sort of hunger, but they never saw Barney. And as the latter winked at his friend, indicating the crimp with anything but kindness, they heard one poor creature whisper to a companion:

"Gawd! ain't 'e 'andsome! And there's that dirty scum, Plunkett, a takin' 'im in to rob 'im and beat 'im if 'e so much as open 'is bleedin' mouf!"

"My—er—er my dear Sir Richard Apollo!" Barney grinned with joy as he whispered, "I feel so hungry that fighting actually attracts me. But what about your 'andsome if bleeding mouf?"

"You go plumb to hell!" retorted Dick, and they followed the ungainly but powerful Mr. Plunkett.

A reeking little room at the back of his boarding house was Plunkett's "office"; and it had been compelled to witness villainies of an indecency that an ancient torture chamber hardly would have duplicated. A bare deal table, tattoed with mug rims, wall paper which reminded one of decayed vegetables, a mangy carpet, and, across the lower half of the dirty window, a red-checkered tablecloth which obstructed a view of "mostly cats wot 'as been drownded, by old ropes and mud surrounded," but which had not been put there for that purpose. Half a dozen crippled chairs completed the stage setting.

Into this unholy of unholies Dick and Barney followed the crimp quite contentedly. Many another had done likewise, but theirs had been the content of ignorance.

Sitting in the room were two toughs and a woman, the woman very far gone in gin. The sobriety of the toughs—"runners" for Plunkett—testified to their fear of their boss. The entire weight of the men gathered to undertake the usually pleasant task of reducing two strong young yokels into two crying, shivering, terrified wrecks was not less than six hundred pounds, and little of that was superfluous.

"Yer wants brekfus, do yer?" All five men were now seated, Plunkett at the table. Although the crimp had no moral objection to forgery, he had a high regard for the law and avoided its clutch. For that reason he was always careful to have the advance notes indorsed by the same hands that had scrawled upon the ship's articles. Otherwise his task would have been easier—he would simply have reduced his victims to unconsciousness and indorsed the notes himself. With sailors accustomed to do his bidding with drunken servility, the drama of the back room was unnecessary, much as Plunkett enjoyed it. "A bleedin' picnic," he would describe it. "I gives 'em the bleedin' coin, and they thinks they is goin' to keep it! Wot do yer think of that? As good as a blarsted music 'all, it are!"

And now, speaking to Dick, who was nearest: "Brekfus, eh? Well, 'ere's fifteen quid!" He produced the stump of an indelible pencil and pushed money and pencil across the table, his manner quite beyond description, while his two runners exchanged grins of amusement and anticipatory eagerness.

"Write yer names on the back of the notes, the same as wot yer did in the shipping orfice, and tike yer money. It's like doin' business wiv a bleedin' bank, ain't it?" He regarded the two friends with a cunning leer, and so sure was he of himself that he never thought to lull their suspicions with a reference to his commission—or perhaps he expected them to believe that it was his philanthropic habit to cash notes for perfect strangers without asking payment for his risk and trouble, and that he enjoyed doing it!

Dick and Barney indorsed the notes with signatures resembling those they had invented for the ship's articles. They both pocketed seven pounds. Then Dick, apparently not wishing to take advantage of the kindly omission in Mr. Plunkett's system of finance, pushed two ten-shilling pieces back across the table.

"Your commission," he suggested, blandly, allowing his voice to become normal, the mellow tone of it contrasting strangely with his abominable appearance.

The change of voice startled the crimp, but he was far too greatly outraged to allow lesser things to impress him. In all his life he had never known such insult. His "commission." Had he been good-naturedly drunk, unusually kind in the exercise of his kingly prerogative, he might have allowed them to keep ten shillings between them, retaining the fourteen pounds ten. He *might* have done this, although he was never known to be so careless with money. But this—this having "a quid" thrown at him as a lord might throw a copper to a beggar! In his fury Plunkett sought comparisons, but failed to find them. His rage grew into horrible ideas of revenge. Not even the traditional bar of soap and donkey's breakfast should these two get! Breakfast! That pleased him—they had asked for breakfast. Breakfast—hell! They would not even get a drink of bad whisky. If it had not been for losing the money on the notes, he would have contemplated murder. But the owners would not pay the notes unless he delivered the two ordinary seamen on board the ship alive. He would not kill them, but he would give them the worst beating ever given to men in Plunkett's boarding house, which was saying a great deal. They would wish they were dead—for weeks to come! Not a bite to eat would they get, not a drink of water! They would be tortured until it was necessary to deliver them on board their vessel. They would be made to understand that it was not wise to offend Mr. Plunkett. The usually "mild" beating meant to make them realize that the fifteen pounds was not their money, but *his*, and that anything that came their way was a generous gift from *him*—this program was dismissed as being altogether too gentle. An interesting time was about to be enjoyed by all, and to begin it Plunkett twisted his face into its nastiest expression, leaned

slightly forward across the table, and called Dick what is perhaps the vilest name a man can be called.

The runners tensed. The drunken woman became interested. Barney, ready to spring at the first opponent offering, waited.

The average self-respecting man would have smashed his fist into Plunkett's leering face immediately. But Dick did not move. He might not have heard. Neither would he condescend to strike this creature. There are some things so low that to draw a sword on them is to insult both self and weapon.

Yet even Barney, with all his latent savagery, could not have acted as Dick acted. It is doubtful if he would have thought of such an action.

Perhaps twenty seconds had passed. The sound of the vile name had died. Dick's black eyes were fixed upon the cur opposite to him with mesmeric intensity. An unusual, an hitherto unknown dread drenched the shallow soul of the crimp.

Suddenly Dick was on his feet. His large, powerful hands gripped the teeth and jaw of the boarding-house keeper with crushing force. Then—as one forces open the mouth of a dog to give it medicine—Dick, with a viciousness he would never have used upon an animal, wrenched the crimp's mouth wide open and deliberately spat down his throat, the fellow's tremendous efforts to escape availing him nothing.

In that moment of rapid action Barney became as cool as a snake, and as dangerous. That Dick would take care of Plunkett was obvious. Which runner would act most rapidly?

The woman shrieked "Perlice!" Momentarily the runners were cowed. Then one of them, going to his master's aid, sprang at Dick. Apparently he imagined that Barney was not dangerous.

Dick threw Plunkett to the floor, almost dislocating the crimp's neck as he did so. The now silent woman, watching avidly, saw Dick grin as something flashed across her line of vision. The runner, with a broken nose, his face a mask of blood, hurtled into a corner of the room. His face had collided with Barney's fist, and his own impetus had doubled the terrific force of the blow.

"Any other gentleman like to be accommodated?" suggested Barney.

Plunkett did not offer to move. For the time he was a broken, cowed man. The other runner remained seated. The woman, after the fashion of a parrot, again screamed, "Perlice!"

"Yes"—Dick spoke quietly—"get the police, by all means. I would very much like to ventilate this dirty den in the police court!"

“Per——” The woman’s horrible mouth showed two or three foully decayed teeth, when Plunkett growled an interruption.

“Shut up, you damned slut!”

“Isn’t he a nice man?” Barney spoke to the woman as he might have spoken to a duchess.

Surprise is often paralyzing to the lower mind. Plunkett’s discovery that Dick and Barney were not the sort of yokels he had taken them to be had almost as much to do with their victory as their physical prowess. He could have shouted for help, and his call would have brought a dozen men to his aid—impossible odds. The yells of the woman had attracted no attention—gin-sodden women continually shrilled that district with their meaningless words. So, stunned mentally and badly shocked physically, Plunkett lay on the floor—whipped—and there Dick and Barney left him.

“There are barbers in London!” Dick sniffed the clean air of the outside appreciatively.

“Yes,” drawled Barney, “barbers and baths. But I doubt if there’s food enough in this old town to make me really comfortable!”

“We’ll do our best,” answered Dick.

VI

THE ship was an unusually happy one, the passage to Victoria without exceptional hazard and with only a moderate amount of the traditional violence of Cape Horn. So, without incident of consequence, came the harbor stow, the yards laid dead square, and the kindly mate telling Dick and Barney that to ask the captain to pay them off would be a waste of breath. They had perforce signed for the entire voyage, and naturally the old man would not let them go, if he could help it, when he would have to hire other men in their places at higher wages.

So, since they sought something more promising than the drudgery of working as ordinary or even able seamen on a sailing ship, they decided to "clear out" at the first opportunity, without troubling about the few shillings they had earned over and above their three months' advance, but with hopes of dodging the police whom the captain would no doubt request to bring them back.

Cutting adrift from the ship, tearing, as it were, a page out of the book of their life and throwing it to the winds of time, there happened just one incident to remind them of the pages of the past.

When the ship came to her moorings, the steward went forward with a small handful of mail sent off by the agent. Confusing Dick with Barney, he called to the latter.

"Here's a letter—a small package—for you!"

"Cannot be," replied Hilliard. "Nobody in the world ever wrote to me, and nobody ever will!"

"Well, take a look!"

"Oh, it's for Dick. I'll give it to him."

Dick opened the packet. After reading the letter he said nothing for some time. Then he called Barney.

"Mother says she is certain that we are both innocent of—of that affair. I sent her our address from London, you know. She wants us to cable, so she can send us money—as soon as I get this letter, she says. I suppose we'll carry on as we have—without it? Shall I tell her that?"

Barney nodded, while Dick stowed away in an inner pocket a small prayer-book his mother had sent—a book destined to mix in many weird adventures—read by Dick until he knew every word of it, used by him at funerals of the dead of divers creeds in spite of its Church of England ritual, and, on one amazing occasion, at a wedding, when, hating the lie, but anxious to bring peace to two distraught souls, he pretended to be a minister.

But the quite different sort of books in which Barney had invested most of his three months' advance were left behind in the ship's forecastle, since it would not have been wise to have advertised their intention of clearing out by taking a bundle ashore. So they—unofficially—said good-by to the genial mate, and left the ship the first Saturday night in port, with a few dollars and no worries.

In those days Victoria was a "wide-open" town; but its insularity and an excellent police force made crime comparatively rare. Walking down Government Street, undecided regarding the direction their clearing out was to take—it was a very new, and very strange and very big country—they reached the gambling house of Bill Hinkman, to which was attached his "theater." Neither Dick nor Barney had seen a gambling house before, and while they possessed some vague knowledge of roulette—known in Hinkman's "Delmonico Club" as "the wheel"—craps, chuck-o-luck, faro, and the two varieties of poker were methods of bucking the god of the chances altogether strange to them, and stood out like unimagined islands in the sea of humanity drifting about the long room.

Along a passage from the adjoining theater came the sound of strident female voices raised in song, accompanied by the "professor" at the piano, who smoked cigarettes and drank whisky while he played. In the gambling room, Al Bean at the crap table wriggled his fat bulk cheerfully, droning: "Craps and the money once! One for the poor old dealer!" while Jim Hall informed the players at Black Jack that "everybody deals," and the dealer announced the arrival of the roulette marble with "Seventeen, odd, red, and the middle column—the gambler's favorite!" The short, stout man, whose feet could not reach the floor from his high stool, loudly rattled his chuck-o-luck box, and George Dixon carefully drew the cards at faro, while his lookout, who never missed a bet, seemed to be dreaming of mother and home. . . . The rise and fall of the voices of the players about the tables, muttering like a tide that laps half-submerged rocks.

The two friends approached the wheel, undecided whether or not to risk their tiny capital. Watching the game, Barney met Casey. Now Casey was a booster (an employee of the house, paid to play with money provided by the house—a decoy, although the games were strictly on the square). To be

exact, Casey had been a booster until his fondness for thrashing the other wheel booster had brought about his discharge—said other booster being a friend of the wheel dealer, who hired and fired his boosters by virtue of the authority vested in him by Hinkman.

Thus Casey had been out of a job for three days, and he was broke. But the lure of the place held him, and he stood watching the game, manifesting extreme disgust, his wide, codfish-like mouth twisted in a sarcastic grin.

In build he was almost a replica of Barney, but lacking the catlike grace of the Englishman; mentally he swung at a very opposite pole. Casey could read—if the words were not too long.

"Was you thinkin' of playin'?" he grinned at Barney, and Barney replied in kind. Ever after they were friends. "Twenty dollars is the limit on the numbers," Casey added.

"Thanks," replied Barney, wondering, for Casey was of a type new to him. What were his ways, his means, his extraction? Learning later that Casey's ways and means were peculiar, and that he altogether lacked information concerning his parentage—his jumble of childhood memories being mostly kicks.

"What number would you play?" asked Barney, intriguing Casey with his subtle quality of leadership.

"Thirty-four," answered Casey, oracularly and without hesitation. "But don't play the column, color, or odd or even!"

"Why?" asked Dick, much interested.

"It would change yer luck!" Casey spoke like one who is on intimate terms with fate. "It's like shootin' and love. . . . You've got to—to concentrate!" He uttered the words with some pride. "That's it—concentrate! You can't kiss more than one mouth at oncet, and you can't shoot at more than one bird! Leastwise, them things is seldom done. . . . And it's the same with playing a hunch. See?"

"I see!" drawled Barney, gravely.

"But," Dick questioned, "doesn't it matter *when* you play a number? While we've been talking the ball has dropped twice!"

"My friend lacks the divine gift of superstition," Barney explained, grinning because he was almost entirely lacking in that quality, himself, while Dick was more superstitious than he cared to admit.

"That's too bad," replied Casey, gravely, not quite certain that Barney had not referred to some sort of disease.

"What about my question, you owl?" Dick poked Barney in the ribs.

"It doesn't matter, does it, Casey?" said Barney, solemnly.

"Naw." Casey was slightly bewildered. "But I'll bet he's all right, at that!"

"Well, Richard," Barney filled his pipe, "we have about twenty dollars in all this wide world. Shall we risk it on one whirl?"

"What will we do if we lose?" Dick tried to hide his eagerness.

"Might as well be broke as the way we are! Let's do it—and ten-per-cent commission for Casey if we win the bet!"

"Naw; I don't want a cent! Always willin' to give my friends advice about playing!"

"Go on! Here, take the money and bet it for us!"

Casey took the twenty dollars which Barney had obtained for the English money they had brought ashore. The wheel was spinning against the whirling ball. Fearing the ball would drop before he could get his bet down, Casey roughly pushed another player aside. As he put down the money, the other player, resenting Casey's method, pushed back against him. His movement was automatic and careless, because he knew Casey! As Casey swung Barney grabbed his arm.

"Hold on! Wait until the ball drops!" Barney laughed into Casey's eyes, and Casey grinned back at him.

"Thirty-six, even," the dealer shouted.

"Hell!" Casey, still looking at Barney, voiced his disappointment.

"What you kicking about?" The dealer's tone was resentful. "Your number won, didn't it?"

It had! During the scuffle Casey's hand had been deflected from its purpose, and the important twenty dollars had dropped on thirty-six instead of thirty-four! Such things do happen. But no one thought to thank the player who had pushed against Casey.

Such direct intervention of "fate" demanded an immediate adjournment to the bar—the extraordinary luck of it seemed to have benumbed the usual anxiety to continue playing—where friendship was further cemented with liquids, and by the insistence that Casey accept the ten-per-cent "commission."

"Guess I'm lucky!" He grinned even more widely, impossible as this seems. "You're all right! It's what a Chink always does, and they're the best gamblers on earth. They always pay for a hunch, but a Christian never does —unless you make him! I'll go right back and play the wheel. Seventy bucks! I'll make it a million—you see if I don't! Coming with me? You

better—it's our lucky night! . . . What are you doing in Victoria—if it's all right to ask?"

"We are—er"—Barney paused humorously to emphasize the significance of his answer—"we're—hum—evading the law—running away—clearing out, if the police don't stop us!"

Instantly Casey forgot his wonderful financial prospects. He suspected Dick and Barney of murder, arson, highway robbery, second-story work, and what not, and was all attention and respectful sympathy at once! He was, he informed them, the best man in Victoria to render them assistance. Not only was he on fairly good terms with the police, but he also knew the ways. He had several friends in the penitentiary, and admitted with a sort of bashful pride to having served a short term himself. (In after years Barney learned why—that this roughneck held to a code of chivalry as quixotic as it was unusual.) "Come where us can talk," he advised. "If there's anybody in the 'club' room, I'll throw 'em out!"

The "club" room was a sort of alcove adjoining the gambling room, furnished with a few chairs and a table adorned with ancient magazines. It was empty. In fact it was seldom occupied. The three men sat down—Casey immensely proud of his attitude of guide, philosopher, and friend.

"Of course you've got to get out of town!" He politely refrained from asking for details regarding the crime committed by his new friends. "North is the place. There's gold there! I know a stoker on a boat going to Alaska to-night." He hesitated, feeling that he was off the track. To suggest "stowing away" on a boat going to Alaska was ill advice, even to men anxious to escape. It was no place for poor men. Indeed, it was not generally considered a place for any sort of men. This was some years before the Yukon strike, and, while gold had been found on the American side, the world at large had hardly heard of the country. It was very sparsely inhabited, and, while a fortune *might* be made there, the money just won at the wheel was not enough to prospect with. It was hardly the price of a meager outfit. But the idea of Dick's and Barney's going north possessed Casey, and while he hesitated at the difficulties, he could not get rid of it. He added, rather lamely, "You'd need more money, but"—he brightened perceptibly—"they may be a hand or two short in the stokehold!"

"And do another 'clear out' up there, eh?" Barney explained the nature of their "crime." "And to be broke or near it in that country——"

Dick had remained silent, staring thoughtfully at the magazines on the table, listening. Adventure pulled strongly, and Alaska in 1894 promised all a man wanted of it. He broke the silence with: "There is only one thing to

do, Barney, and that is to put the affair into the hands of your friend the 'god of the chances'—praying that he will remember that he is your friend. Alaska appeals! Let us divide this six hundred odd dollars, and play roulette. If we play at opposite ends of the table we may win!" And Dick, a born gambler, looked eagerly at his friend.

Casey wagged his head sagely. "That's the system," he concurred. "And what's six hundred dollars!"

"All right," Barney smiled at Dick. "But I make this amendment. You, Dick, take all the money and do all the playing. I have a suspicion that you'll be lucky—in fact, damned lucky!"

"Yer right," corroborated Casey, portentously. "Us fellers must keep out! Give him room—give him room, I say! A man feels better when he ain't crowded playing the wheel—and we'll be there to see that he gets all the room he wants at the table! . . . If that lousy dealer kicks at us sitting in and not betting, he can go to hell! . . . I'll tell him that!"

And Casey, almost as anxious to start a row with his enemy, the dealer, as he was to watch the play, led the way to the wheel.

"May as well make a big winning," he said to Dick. "Don't bother to buy chips. Just play money—a twenty or what you feel like—on the numbers. Colors and columns is too cheap for us! So is odd and even. What we want is fast action and big winnings! Numbers for us, eh?"

"Certainly," agreed Dick, eagerly placing twenty dollars on the number six as the ball started, while Barney, smiling his hopelessness of any more luck coming their way, drawled, "Oh, ye imperial god of the chances, who recently and for a moment smiled upon us to the tune of some seven hundred dollars, deign to remember that we are clearing out, and that we—er—we lack the wherewithal to do this clearing out decently. Smile upon us, therefore, and touch the tiny ball with thy kindly finger, that it may drop —— Well, I'll be damned!"

For the ball had dropped into the slot of number six!

"Keep it up," hissed Casey, vastly excited. "That sort of dope always works, if it's done right! The coons has that sort or line of talk, shootin' craps! And you talk better than any coon crap shooter I ever heard!"

That this was meant for a compliment was obvious, although at that period of his career Barney was not *au fait* with coon crap shooters.

"No," he replied, with admirable gravity, "enough is enough! If the god or gods controlling the destinies of gamblers and "clearers out" heard my prayer, as he or they seem to have done, he or they might be offended if I said any more. . . . Consider, Casey! Suppose some one asked you for help,

and you obliged—would you want to be bothered by the same man asking for a lot more?"

Casey considered this vital problem for a moment. Then, "Naw," he answered, gravely. "You're right! Dead right! I wasn't thinking, or I would have knowed!"

And Dick's luck did keep up. So lucky was he that the dealer was compelled to send for Bill Hinkman and more money. Of which need Casey took immediate advantage.

Pretending to be vastly interested in the welfare of "the house," he began loudly to bemoan its loss. Usually, when a long run of luck went against the wheel, Hinkman liked to deal, himself. Many times he had taken the place of a dealer in such a situation, and won back all he had lost, and more; and he liked to consider this demonstration of the law of averages as an indication of his own luckyness. Telling the dealer to go and get his supper, Hinkman prepared to take the man's place. Then, as the latter began putting on his coat, Casey went on.

"Ain't no wonder the house loses—with that guy at the wheel! He drives away custom with his dirty——"

"Well!" broke in Hinkman, a huge man with the general hardness of teakwood. "Well?" He addressed the dealer pointedly. For the dealer, pretending he had not heard Casey, continued to button his coat. "Better take that coat off, hadn't you?" Hinkman concluded, dryly.

"Don't worry, Bill," Casey spoke with consoling smoothness. "Don't worry. He won't start anything. He thinks this joint is a church, and he won't start trouble for fear of hurting the feelings of the minister. You're the minister!"

Disregarding this pleasantry, Hinkman went on speaking to the dealer: "If you want to hold your job you'll beat up this Casey right now! Leastwise, you'll try! Ain't no shame in being licked, but there's a hell of a lot in not trying. Take off your coat and do your best. Make a decent showing and your job's good here as long as you want it. I won't have a man here who's afraid. Some night some tough guy might start something—with *my* money. I want a man here who can take care of it!"

"What didga fire Bert Cummings for, then?" asked Casey.

"Who's running this place—you or me?" rasped Hinkman.

"Neither of us!"

"Eh?"

"You leave it to run itself!" Casey grinned. "Leastwise, you leave a *thing* like this dealer—which ain't nothing—to run it!" He winked at Carew. "How much you win, Dick?"

"Do you mean there's something crooked about here?" Hinkman gripped the edge of the table, and the few men in the room—it was a quiet night—became interested.

"Naw," retorted Casey, "and you know I don't. I mean that God hates a coward—so you'll never have any luck with that dealer in the house!"

Hinkman laughed in spite of himself at this theological affirmation. He took a five-dollar bill out of the drawer and gave it to the dealer—his pay for the shift, and big money in those days. "How did *you* ever get into this business?" he asked, not unkindly, as the man took the money. Then, as the now ex-dealer turned away without answering, Hinkman whispered to Casey, "Whose boosting here?" And when Casey pointed out his supplanter with a scornful gesture, Hinkman gave that individual two dollars and a half—his pay for the night—received from him his "playing money," and announced: "Casey, you're working for me now. You're a clerk. See?"

"Sure, a clerk," grinned Casey, enjoying the joke greatly. "And one like me's enough! And, Bill, these two gents is my friends! One of 'em—which means both—has about two thousand of your money, William!"

"That's all right," Hinkman laughed. "That's what I'm here for! Glad to meet you, gents!" He signaled a waiter. "Drinks, Jack! . . . And, Casey, send somebody to Bert Cummings, will you? Tell him I'd like to see him when it's convenient." He winked at Barney. "He's a most obliging clerk, Casey is! What'll you have to drink?"

Casey turned away to send for Cummings, saying with socratic profundity, "A coward is just naturally a damned fool! It ain't nothing to be scared—I've been scared lots of times. But if you'll just up and hit what you're scared of on the snoot—whether it's a man or something that's going to happen to you—you'll find it ain't worth being scared about, and you'll wonder why you was!"

"The chap who said that gambling is a fever was dead right," thought Barney, as he watched his friend; and a vast problem of mind unfolded like a panorama of agony—that panorama which the world has wrongly labeled "Loss of will power." "Drugs," he mused, "drink, women, gambling—what not? Whether 'will' be the focus of desire or not, it certainly is not a 'power' or energy which can be turned off or on like the gas, and nothing in the universe is ever lost—it is only changed, transformed. A 'lack of re-representative feelings,' as Spencer calls it, does not answer the question. I

have seen a man suffer horrible agony for the need of opium, get well, and then, at the first chance, start using it again—a man with a brilliant mind, too, who knew quite well what he would suffer next time he couldn't get the stuff. It looks as if the consensus of desire *drives*, and that the establishment of a desire beneficial to the patient is the only real cure. . . . Well, Dick is making us rich, so why should I moralize?"

Luck seemed to be at Dick's elbow, urging him to win. And win he did until, when he was almost five thousand dollars ahead, Hinkman suggested they take the limit off. Dick was willing—eager; and with the limit off the matter of winning or losing became a contest between them, and Hinkman would allow no other player at the wheel, although the crowd stood three deep, because, in its telepathic way, the word of a big game had percolated, and the room, almost empty during the earlier part of the night, had filled. There were some murmurs from those who wanted to follow Dick's play, but when Hinkman sized up the crowd for a cheap one, he announced that they might play, but that he would not accept anything less, from any one of them, than a hundred dollars in one bet on the numbers only! There were no more murmurs.

And Casey, hugely delighted, and careless of betraying the rather well-known fact of his being a booster, began to make an imaginary count of the money in several of the spectators' pockets; which they seemed to find embarrassing.

Vainly hoping to "change" his luck, Hinkman would turn the wheel now slowly, now swiftly; but however it turned, Dick's streak held. It was one of the heaviest losses Hinkman ever made at roulette in that house, for suddenly Dick's conscience remembered that he was playing with Barney's capital and future as well as with his own, and—he was a novice—there came over him that cold fear which sometimes saves men from themselves, and he quit in the act of placing a bet! He would play no more!

A gasp of surprise went up from the crowd, but Hinkman betrayed no emotion. He probably felt none. Dick was twelve thousand five hundred dollars ahead, but Hinkman's philosophy was as sound as his games were square.

"I'm starving!" Barney broke the silence.

Hinkman offered his hand to Dick, after the manner of fighters. "When you come back from the North we'll try another whirl, eh?"

"Sure!" Dick was rapidly absorbing the vernacular, but as he shook hands he felt somewhat embarrassed, almost apologetic. "I don't like to go

away without giving you your revenge, but—but we—er—need the money, you know!"

Hinkman laughed good-naturedly. "Matter of business—and one of us had to lose. Let's have supper. It's Sunday morning, but we can get steaks at the Dago's. . . . Thanks!" This last to Casey, who, unseen by the crowd leaving the room, returned the money that had been given him to play with.

During supper they learned much that was to their advantage, Hinkman ending his kindly advice with: "You cannot buy an outfit here on a Sunday, and you don't want to be here Monday. Better go to Seattle, and get your stuff there."

"Like to come north with us, Casey?" asked Barney, unexpectedly.

Casey had the curious habit of wriggling his ears when pleased. He did this now. Had anyone told him—say a dozen hours previously—that he would be flattered by an invitation to go anywhere with anyone, he would luridly have repudiated his informant. He did not answer immediately. He felt inclined to accept, but somehow felt that his presence would be an intrusion. However well he might get along with them, Dick and Barney were such close friends that a third party would always be a third. He grinned.

"Naw—thanks all the same! I'd like to go with you, but I can't." His manner became extremely confidential. "It's this way, you see: If I go, Bill here won't have nobody he can trust around the joint! And he might get sick or drunk, or something. So I has to stick around. Yes, he might get drunk!"

So Dick and Barney went to Alaska from Seattle.

VII

IT was small wonder that even Dick Carew gave up trying to understand Barney Hilliard and was content to accept him as a dear, stanch comrade such as few men are sufficiently lucky to possess. His contradictions were enormous! Such a mind as his, for example, was far more rare than his unusually strong body and constitutional vitality, yet he was prouder of his physical than he was of his mental endowment; and this in spite of the fact that his ambition was entirely mental. His whole aim in life was to solve certain problems of science and philosophy, and while he had read both wisely and widely, no further reading could help him to his solutions.

On these untrodden paths of mind he was compelled to stand alone, yet able to find his way because of his positive genius to relate causes and effects, his grasp of *principles*, and his ability to obtain a mental bird's-eye view of phenomena with a clarity necessary to an original thinker. He had, also, imagination; and that "faculty" Bergson calls "intuition" wherewith to grope and find his way in the dark, as if it were an antenna of his mind, as well as to bridge gaps between apparently unrelated phenomena by using it with the dizzy certainty of a spider throwing a single, hazardous thread which would in time become a web of circumstantial thought. Yet his ability to put two new packs of cards together, and then to tear them in half by the strength of his hands and wrists alone, was a possession far more precious.

Of course, always introspective, he himself wondered at this inconsistency, coming to the conclusion that, on one hand, it was due to suppressed desire—the ancient repressed instinct of the male to "show off" before the female compelling him to glory in physical strength. On the other hand, his physical strength was likely to leave him before the mental—therefore he valued it the more highly.

He explained all this to Dick, but Dick laughed, and told him that he was simply inconsistent, and that inconsistency was always inexplicable. Which was not altogether unsound philosophy in itself!

They had gone north because they were clearing out and because of the urge for adventure. And there what further need they may have had for further molding passed into the solid of their characters, while their different characteristics began prominently to stand out, like signposts of destiny.

Perhaps it was his good looks, in the first place, which made Dick's life a progress among pretty faces; for Dick Carew was as fine a sample of a man as was ever turned out. Added to this was undying courage—everything that goes to make a man a Man. Thus, even in Alaska, Dick's recreation was love affairs, which gave Barney much concern, not from the standpoint of morals, but of bullets. That Dick would meet his end from the gun of a rival or maddened husband was Barney's one worry concerning him; and Barney was much afraid—and had reason to be—that the bullet would be a husband's and not a rival's and that, for this reason, no possible outlet for his own grief and anger would be just. For while generally despising herd morality, Barney admitted its need; and the feelings of an outraged husband go far beyond any sort of ethical system—deep into the fundamentals—while his revolver practice was the sort of simple justice Barney admired.

Not that this matter was ever mentioned between the two friends. They never spoke of it!

And the North—which in after years loomed like the shadowy figure of some prophet—seemed to be, also, visibly breaking trail for Barney across the untrodden expanse of the future. It was there the agony of his lonely Gethsemane first began to torture him; it was there that his long hours of thinking evolved from the experience of the sentiency of the world that there is but one jewel without price, one which to the thoughtless seems common enough, but which is very, very rare. And that jewel is Love. Not that Barney had ever been in love, or even expected to be—whatever his dearest hopes might crave—he was almost impersonal in this conclusion; it was a part of his philosophical speculation, and it was the one credit he gave the Cause of Things on the wide page of the mighty ledger of Time, while at the same time he felt inclined to enter, as a debit, that which masquerades under the sacred name of the jewel referred to. And it tells much about the man when it is told that had Barney mentioned this idealistic conclusion to Dick Carew, his only friend, that friend—who believed he knew Barney pretty well—would have laughed at what he would have taken for a somewhat elaborate joke! For to Barney Hilliard self-control had become a fetish; powerful as was that body of his, his mind was the stronger. Besides, Barney was that rare man who has to be really in love with a woman before he can even kiss her.

They had a nebulous notion of making money, which gradually became solid, although the men of their own race who knew them in that sparsely populated country credited them with mild insanity when Dick spoke of their plans. It was Dick's theory, and, since Barney at that time wanted only to think, Dick's theory became their guide. Besides, Barney had positively

no “bump of locality,” so that Dick had to decide their comings and goings, their route.

The theory held that gold, much gold, lay along the coast, if it could only be found; and as Nome came into being some years later, Dick’s reasoning was not without merit.

But Dick never led the way to any sand worth the washing, although for more than three years they spent the time between the coast of his auriferous dreams and the hunting necessary to supply them with meat. Then they met Williams and the course of their lives was deflected. Often, years later, looking back, Barney would wonder what would have happened to Dick and himself if they had not met Williams; and often would it seem to him that, but for that meeting, they might have gone on seeking gold up north until age had overtaken them, unless they had struck it rich; and there would be moments when he would in sadly humorous fancy see Dick and himself with long white beards panning gold on the bank of some creek that never existed, and—wish the picture were true; only to feel glad, despite his pain, that it was not. Yet Williams was only a minor personality, an individual of little importance lifted to the eminence of those beyond-calculation causes which determine life and death, happiness and sorrow!

Even if meat may be had for the shooting, ammunition costs money, and the partners had come to where fifty dollars and a good general outfit, an excellent team, with grub and dog feed for several weeks, were all that were left to them of the money won by Dick from Hinkman. It will be seen that they had been economical. But winter was upon them, and, although neither uttered a word of complaint, the monotony of their life lay heavy and they craved change.

For some weeks they had seen no white men. It was unlikely that they could get work at any place. They had at odd times made a little money by selling furs and moose meat. Should they try this again or—what? They smoked and discussed the problem one noon.

“If we make a bend around that high land,” said Dick, “it will be quite a march, but, when we get around, if we steer due west, we ought to find that Indian village I told you about. Shall we try for it, or—go somewhere else?”

“Hum!” drawled Barney, comfortably pulling at his pipe. “Who said there was a village, how do you know that whoever said it knew what he was talking about, and what is there to go there for, anyhow?”

Dick laughed and pointed to the twin peaks north of them. “I have done our navigating so far, you lazy thinker, but the minute I suggest a definite destination, instead of drifting anywhere, you kick. What does it matter if

we don't find the village—we'll get to some place—some place where's nobody else—same as we have been for so long; and if we find Indians we may be able to hear something about gold. What's the odds?"

"That was a wonderful sentence," grinned Barney. "But I like quiet. Imagine the noise of a sort of young Indian London—fifty voices would sound like hell after our solitude. Maybe there'll be three or four hundred—women, dogs, Esquimos. But of course there ought to be seal meat. If we do find the place, I want to sleep well to windward of its inhabitants. Seals, whales, and, oh yes, igloos! What rhymes to igloos, Dick?"

"You go to hell!" retorted Dick, with friendly emphasis.

"You mean Bering Sea. Anyone who could import a slice of hell there would get rich. The imps would be Thlingets of the crow totem. If you took your hell a bit south, the Auks will——"

"Your ethnology is all mixed up," laughed Dick. "What you are trying to say is——"

"I'm not talking ethnology," interrupted Barney, "but geography. Hell's a place. . . . Hold on; don't throw it! I'll be good! But I've been watching the dogs, so I'll go with you!"

"Now what?" laughed Dick. "Do all hermit men have delusions? What have the dogs got to do with where we go next?"

"Seal-face is my informant," answered Barney, gravely. "Seal-face, the eternal enemy of Barabbas the lead dog. For a long time Seal-face has been sniffing toward the general direction of your imagined or real village. I believe Seal-face is the more intelligent navigator of the two, and——"

But Dick got the jump on him, and they wrestled in the snow like two boys, Barney gasping a gleeful explanation, "I mean—Seal-face—more intelligent than—than Barabbas, not you—you owl!"

"Alas, poor Barney!" panted Dick. "I know him well. A fellow of infinite verbal incontinence, lacking meaning in his words."

"Very good," applauded Barney. "I couldn't have put it better myself! To reward you we will follow your suggestion. Besides, my friend Seal-face is also of your opinion."

So they broke camp and began a toilsome march, during which Barney was hardly a sociable companion. There were days when he hardly spoke a word, but Dick, perfect partner that he was, and dear and perfect friend, uttered no reproaches. He loved Barney too greatly to be aware of his selfishness when on a thinking bout.

He was wondering, was Barney, whether anything other than a naturalistic philosophy was possible, leaving unsolved the problem of the individual quest, and his anger would rise at his impotence to understand the reason for his existence, and he would swear into the freezing air at the Cause of it All. He saw that another tool was needed. Logic was too feeble, and logic led him into a Humean skepticism with which he found himself unable to be content!

"Logic," he thought. "A number of us seem to imagine that logic is an exact science, when the disagreements among logicians, and even between systems of logic, should convince us that it is not. Thus the expression 'the logical proof of so and so' is a fallacy very often. To a certain point logic reaches conclusions to which all thinkers subscribe, but go a few steps further and men diverge widely. Hence we witness the painful sight of naturalistic philosophers trying to solve the problems of philosophy, with only logic for their tool, while other and newer systems of logic are on the press. Admirable as are the efforts of such thinkers, they are vain. They are working with an inadequate instrument, and one which must lead to a doubt of the very epistemology of which it is the product!"

Thus they reached that odoriferous village by the sea which is flanked and guarded by many totems. The day was fine but suspicious. Toward the west the land rose slightly—a long slope of untraveled snow. Up this they drove the dogs, topping it among the last of the sun shadows. Below them, like some weird Christmas card, lay the Indian village, the uncanny totems staring their wooden quest of ancestry. Dogs and humans poured toward them, and their own dogs responded avidly.

"Know anything about this crowd, Dick?" asked Barney.

"Not a thing!"

"Maybe they'll eat us!" Barney laughed and cuffed the excitable Seal-face.

"More likely they'll treat us as curiosities," said Dick. "Mighty few whites can have been here, and even in a small village back home a stranger is quite an event. Two whites at once will be a sort of circus to this bunch!"

"That's so," agreed Barney. "And which are you, Richard—clown or elephant?"

"You roughneck highbrow! . . . But here's his nibs! Why, hello, Barney! —he's a white man!"

Barney stared at the Indians, so poor, so hedged in by superstition, their lives so barren. Suspicions regarding the fineness of the day were becoming justified. A gray heaviness was crowding the western sky, spreading around

to the north, and a chill, eerie-sounding wind whipped in from the sea, accentuating the gloom. One man walked ahead of the Indians.

"*Was* a white man—once," answered Barney, absently, his eternal question flaming against this dark background of stark savagery. . . . "Why? . . . Could any Power find amusement in the almost dumb sufferings of these creatures? Or was there any real difference, after all? His own ancestors, sufficiently far removed, had been even lower than these greasy people. That was it! From such as these, and less than these, the Power had seen to it that human beings should evolve with nervous systems enabling them to suffer keenly. This was near the raw stuff out of which God molded the actors for His titanic stage—out of which He grew the nerve-wracked marionettes who would furnish Him amusement for a space with their sufferings and their weird belief in immortality. Yes, this mind stuff, pitifully struggling in these animals, would pass on its little best, its trivial gains, until it became sufficiently sentient to amuse the Power responsible for its existence. And the individual strugglers—the predominating bits of mind stuff which were the temporary egos—these went out when the animals died, like candles in the wind!"

"Hullo, men!"

The white man halted a few yards away, his words bringing Barney out of his reverie, but not out of his mood. He did not answer. Vaguely he watched Dick go forward, heard his greeting, while the day seemed to close drearily—the rising wind snapping the tops off the waves as if to increase the chilliness of the unhappy-looking totem poles.

"Hey, Barney, wake up! Let me introduce you to Mr. Williams!"

Barney went forward, forcing a grin. All the clean-living man's disgust for the squaw man surged through him. But why, he thought, blame the squaw man? *He* was only a consequence. The Cause of Things had set him down in this miserable village to add pain to the life of some poor woman, to bring wretched half breeds into the world—poor souls with the cravings of the white, barred from their desires by the prison of their color. Why? Surely things were cruel enough. Existence needed no added pain. Barney cursed mentally. To have accepted the hospitality of the Indians would not have been so bad. There was something vile in being the guests of this Williams. Damn the weather! Well, they had camped out in worse. But, hell, this was snobbish! He himself was no better than the squaw man—very little, anyway. He had allowed his anger at the Cause to degenerate into disdain of his fellow sufferers. It was seldom he was illogical.

Williams was obviously nervous, and it seemed to Barney that his nervousness was hardly warranted by the advent of the first white men he had seen perhaps for many months. The three stood together, watched by everyone in the village able to be about. A few large flakes of snow heralded the coming storm and the gloomy end of the short day pressed heavily.

"A bit surprised to meet a white man here, weren't you?" said Williams, fidgeting.

"Damned glad we did," answered Dick, heartily. "We shall be mighty glad to get under cover—judging from what the weather looks like."

"No doubt you are prospectors?" said Williams, not looking at either of his visitors.

"Something like that," said Barney, not wishing to offend by his continued silence.

The nervousness of Williams increased palpably. He slipped a mitten and bit at a very dirty finger nail.

"No, but are you? You see, I am interested. I am sort of responsible here. The head man died some time ago, and me and the shaman run things."

"Oh, we won't hurt your Indians," growled Barney. "All we want is an empty cabin. We have grub. But if we'll inconvenience you we'll go on right now!"

"No, no. That's all right. Excuse me. I didn't mean to be rude. Let me show you your cabin," Williams answered, beginning to lead the way and motioning the Indians to go.

"Some stink, eh?" whispered Dick, and, indeed, entering that village was rather like camping to leeward of a dead whale. But the empty cabin, although rickety, was as good as any in the village, and was farther away from the sea than the others. Eighty or more Indians, whose faces seemed to have been frozen into immobility by the icy winds, watched Williams open the door.

"This house belonged to the headman of the village, whose place I have taken. I hope you will be comfortable. It's cold, isn't it. I'll come over after supper." And without more ado he left them.

"Doesn't have much to say, considering we're the first whites he's likely to have seen for some time, does he?" asked Dick, beating his hands to warm them. "What sort of a Gulliver's Travels place is this, anyway, Barney?"

"Well," drawled Barney, "considering that I was induced to come here by you and Seal-face, I think that it is I who should ask that question." He

became serious. “But I think this chap will bear watching, Dick. Study his eyes, and that queer, nervous manner he has. Of course, that may mean nothing, but it may also mean lots of things—that the late headman may have been helped to do his dying, for example.”

“Perhaps,” said Dick. “But any port in a storm, even if this one is a long way from a flower garden. Lord! how it is going to blow! Hear it getting up! And colder, too. But let’s eat. How everlasting is the smell of fish! Look after the dogs, will you, while I get our supper?”

Well within the hour, Williams returned, struggling through the storm and coming through the door in a great mouthful of it. He seemed less nervous, and apologized for his hasty leaving of his visitors before supper.

“The missus was waiting,” he said, while Barney wrinkled his forehead as he caught the accent, trying to place Williams in the English county of his birth. “Yes, supper was ready, an’—an’ you know what the women is,” and he grinned in that covert way which some men imagine conveys friendly, smutty confidence—a grin which Dick had once appropriately called “kickable,” because he always wanted to kick the grinner.

“That’s all right,” replied Barney, trying unsuccessfully to overcome his dislike of his host, “we were ready for supper ourselves.”

There were a couple of rude benches in the cabin, but no bunks. Williams sat down on one of the benches, while the partners occupied the other.

“Been prospecting long? . . . No, don’t smoke, thanks!” he said when Dick offered his tobacco.

“Oh, some time,” said Dick.

Williams hesitated. He seemed anxious to know all about his visitors, but was uncertain about the limit of prudence in asking questions. His nervousness, while less acute, still troubled him, and that the arrival of Dick and Barney was responsible for his condition had now become obvious to the latter.

“Been long in the country?” He brought this out timidly, seemingly skating with great care around the somewhat large danger mark of inquisitiveness in the far-flung places of the earth.

“This chap’s afraid,” thought Barney—“afraid we are *not* prospectors. Wonder does he think we’re Northwest Mounted, in disguise because we’re not on Canadian territory? Wonder why? And, do the N.W.P. ever cross the boundary? Poor devil! Well, I wonder what he’s done. But as I might have to dodge police, myself, some day, I’ll ease his mind.”

"We were sailors," said Barney. "Left our ship in Victoria. Came north, to get rich. Poorer now than when we came."

"Oh!" Williams positively expanded with relief. "I am glad you came here. Do you know much about spiritualism?"

So unexpected, sudden, and extraordinary was this question that Dick opened his mouth involuntarily and dropped his pipe. Even Barney stared in astonishment at the speaker.

"Spiritualism?" he asked.

"Yes. I have studied it. The shaman, you know."

"Oh yes, of course! Lots of medicine men are 'mediums,' aren't they?" asked Barney.

"All the Coast Indian shamans are, more or less," replied Williams.

"And shamans," Barney struck a match and lit his pipe, "where did I first hear that word? Oh—Russian! That's it. A shaman, or some name very like that, meant a sort of magician in some part of Russia. So that's how the name got over here—from Siberia—to the Alaska Indians."

"I never heard that," said Williams. "So you're a spiritualist, too, eh?"

"Me—a spiritualist? Hell, no!" growled Barney. "There never was a spirit manifestation in this world, and never will be. That may sound dogmatic, but I happen to have studied the subconscious. The things that happen in séances may be genuine enough, but they're not caused by spirits. When a man starts 'explaining' happenings by attributing them to spiritual agencies he is imitating his savage, ignorant ancestors. Every happening on this world has a natural cause, if we could find it. And all the genuine happenings in séance rooms will be explained naturally some day. But the spiritist won't look for natural causes. He is too darned anxious to drag in the spirits. Spirits—hell!" Barney spoke with some heat.

"But I have seen some very strange things—things that I cannot believe were caused by natural causes, that must have been caused by spirits!" answered Williams.

"You mean 'must have been' because *you* could not explain them otherwise, don't you?" Barney's impatience with "the occult" was shown by his rudeness.

"But, if you like, I will arrange with the shaman, and you can see for yourself," went on Williams.

"How long have you been here?" Dick broke in, his stanch Episcopalianism hating even the discussion of the modern witches of Endor.

"Nearly six years." Williams spoke evasively. "I had heard about this village, and found it after some trouble. The people are mostly Thlingets. Would you like to know that you are an immortal soul?"

"Very much," Barney grinned.

"Then I will arrange with the shaman to let you see and hear some of the things that happen when he is in a trance—but you must promise to keep quiet, you know."

"Very interesting," drawled Barney.

But the tortured mind of Williams could not stay poised over anything—not even his pet subject. Instead of the medley of words expected by his audience upon the subject of spiritism, he wandered off into a pedantic talk concerning the Coast Indians, most of which was erroneous. Once he strayed to the subject of the late headman, but nervously shied from it, as if he had drifted thoughtlessly into the stream of thought haunted by the dead. He talked for more than an hour—until a particularly fierce gust of wind shook the cabin, gutting the light, when he stood up suddenly, with a remark about getting back to his family.

"I must be going. But I will arrange with the shaman. See you to-morrow!"

A momentary lull saw him on his way, and Barney secured the door.

"You cuckoo," grinned Dick, "are you really going to go to his 'séance'?"

"Sure! And have the time of my young life, too! That Williams, is interesting. Did you notice how he braced up when I told him we were only runaway sailors?"

"You think he's a criminal, eh?"

"Sure of it! You'll see—he'll let out a word or two some time that will give him away. But it's none of our business. One cannot return hospitality by giving a man up to the law—not even if he were a murderer, which I doubt."

"All right," Dick yawned. "Let's go to sleep!"

The wind howled, flinging icy spray against the cabin in spite of its distance from the sea. Dick and Barney, pipes glowing, rolled up in their sleeping furs.

"It's a great night to think in vibrations," said Barney, suddenly.

"Darn you! I was almost asleep," retorted Dick. "What do you mean, anyhow?"

“Think in vibrations. Sounds like that damn-fool ‘new’ thought, doesn’t it? Everything can be reduced to vibrations, mentally, you know. Well, the idea is to get away from our everyday conception of things, and think of them in terms of vibration. For instance, you can hear what I say because I clumsily agitate the atmosphere into certain vibrations. When one thinks of everything in the same way it’s curious, as well as interesting. Try it! The big thing is to get to the final, or first, vibration—which is, what sort of vibration is it that is trying to think of everything in terms of vibration!”

“You go to hell—in any sort of vibration,” growled Dick. “Or, better still, try to figure out what vibration sleep is—that may keep you quiet, you goat!”

But Barney was already asleep.

VIII

BARNEY waked first, but his shout had hardly left his lips before Dick was struggling to his feet.

"Great Scott!" he shouted. "The deluge!"

And deluge it was! A catastrophe difficult to vision mentally, impossible of adequate description. It was one of those apparently unnecessary happenings, fraught with horror, pain, terror, which had so much to do with Barney Hilliard's attitude toward the Cause of things.

The paralyzing darkness, the awful cold, the wind, piercing, howling like some huge beast lost and in agony, and—the deluge. As if this were not enough, a driving snow making the night palpable. This, falling upon a primitive, nerveless people, spirit-ridden and helpless.

That neither Dick nor Barney was more than bruised was due to the stoutness of their cabin, its being somewhat farther away from the sea than the rest of the village, and their own quickness in getting out of it before it collapsed.

Noise! Such noise as baffles analysis. Heart-rending, terrifying, rousing every sympathetic response in the two white men, maddening them, mocking their inability to aid.

Somewhere a volcano had burst its controlling earth. Several islands had vanished from the face of Bering Sea—not the first nor the last time this phenomenon has caused devastation along the coast, with its resulting "tidal wave," swamping stretches of beach hundreds of miles in extent. In the middle of a wintry night, in a gale and snowstorm.

After the first warning shout neither man spoke. Swiftly they struggled into their outer garments. Then came a quick rush to their whining, snapping dogs. During such strenuous moments time loses its everyday meaning. But the elements supplied another method of division—the interval between the first wave and the second, which would probably be bigger.

They worked like fiends, for until they had salvaged their team and sled, and what grub they could, they could be of no assistance to any survivor they might find. And what survivor, crushed as the other dwellings had been under the first wave's breaking, would fail of being horribly mangled?

A saturnalia of elemental madness: smashing, grinding logs, acting as if containing demented devils; flood-driven debris of what had been a village; dogs, men, women, children, possessions. Even the slope above the village, against which the final fury of the wave had been spent, contorted dangerously, heavy rocks rolling from it. And it was up this that Dick and Barney had to work their team.

"Mush, you devils!" The words sounded like a thin scream breaking against a salvo of artillery.

No need to fling the whip into the scared and maddened animals. Difficult as was that crumbling bank, heavy with snow and muck, a hundred dogs dragging that same load but uninspired by terror could hardly have done better work. Even after their tremendous exertion, when they had reached comparative safety, it was difficult to stop them.

"There's the next wave! . . . My God! it's bigger! . . . Is the whole ocean coming for us?" Dick cried, his words reaching his partner in fantastic snatches.

"Are we clear of it here?" Barney yelled. They did not stop to discuss this, but drove the team—only too anxious to be driven—some thirty yards farther inland, watching the wave, which now seemed to follow them with an intelligent, elaborate, menacing slowness.

There were now only a few noises of human origin, but the loneliness about these occasional shrieks made a more horrible impression than the screamings of the entire village. Besides, the minds of the two men were not now occupied with work—they could only watch, wait, and listen. Agonized as they were with desire to help, until this other wave receded they could do nothing.

So, fascinated, they watched. The oncoming wave was like a thing of livid green life. In some way the driving snow captured what light there was between it and the sea, thus lighting the curling body of water with what seemed like mystery.

The crest of the advancing horror curled white, like the tangled hair of some fabled sea monster in an antique picture.

Whether smaller waves followed could not be seen, but they could be imagined, diminishing like the tail of the monster. But the most horrible and extraordinary feature of all was its apparent slowness, the seemingly intended deliberation of it—as if it first would terrify and then destroy. But for Barney's inspiration coolly to count the seconds as the wave advanced, this deliberateness might afterward have been considered imaginary—as being due to the nervous shock they had both suffered.

Then it crashed, mingling with the noise of the gale like a million sudden thunderstorms. Its toppling from its great height widened, or seemed to widen, the curious gap between wave and snow, with the result that the imprisoned light escaped, the green mystery left the surface of the water, and an uncanny dark supervened.

"As if it had been arranged," yelled Barney. "As if some clever stage director had arranged the whole damned business! And perhaps He did!"

The swirling chaos, with a growling and rending that rose above the sound of the wind like a long-drawn-out bass inharmony smothering a shrill treble of maddened discord, began imperiously to drag the fragments of the village and its dead, dying, and mangled inhabitants into the deeper water of Bering Sea—resurging, sucking into itself with gutturals of hungry satisfaction.

"Now's our time, if we're going to get anybody out!" shouted Barney.

They left their dogs and scrambled rapidly, but warily, down the crumbling slope, often sinking to their wet waists in holes where rocks had been, now filled with yielding mud.

As they went they shouted against the wind, but no human voice answered.

The water had retreated to its usual storm, high-tide level; but both men were strangely certain that another great wave would come.

To search among the piled and twisted timber that the receding wave had not taken with it seemed a hopeless task in that darkness and snow, but it was all that offered. Disregarding their own hurts and—which was more important—their drenched, frost-bite-threatening clothing and the imperative need of a fire, they worked as rapidly and systematically as possible. Slipping, shivering, bruising themselves, they went to it.

It is not a nice experience fumblingly to come upon the face, arms, and bosom of a woman, felt in the dark to protrude from under a mass of twisted timber; but the unpleasantness grows into positive horror when, trying tenderly to lift the woman, the upper part of her body comes easily to your lift while the remainder is left, a clotted mass, beneath the wood.

Not once, but many times in their haste and agony did Dick and Barney have such an experience. Fragments of humanity they found, never a whole body or a living one. It was indeed well that these mangled ones were dead, but, concerning this, the thoughts of the two men conflicted as they worked.

For where Dick would consider Providence merciful in that some poor, distorted body no longer breathed and suffered, Barney would go behind such a thought and curse the Cause, the "Providence," responsible for the

calamity. They worked close together, so as the more thoroughly to cover the ground. Straightening up for a moment, Dick saw again that threatening, long line of advancing green light against the black of the sea—another "tidal wave."

"We must get out of this!" he shouted in Barney's ear.

"All right! But help me with this log. We have time if we hurry," Barney shouted in return.

They lifted. Then their hands met upon another body. This body was wrapped in furs. Several times had they discovered fur-covered bodies, with the fur holding the contents together as a sack does potatoes. But as they lifted this one a feeling of "wholeness" was noticeable. Thus rapidly does the mind adapt itself! So accustomed had they become to finding mangled bodies, fragments, scraps of bodies, that what should have been usual had become unusual, and they raised this last finding with a feeling of delightful novelty. They had found a whole body! The first whole body they had found!

That it was most likely a dead body in no way detracted from the thrill of its finding. They had no time to make an examination, to look for life. They had found a whole body among the fragments with which they had toiled. Whether man or woman they did not know, but its weight suggested a man. The great point was its wholeness. It was not a crushed mass, held together by its furs!

The really tremendous task of getting the body up the crumbling bank, before the oncoming wave engulfed them, would have appalled most men. To have dropped the body of this probably dead Indian, and then to have scrambled hurriedly to safety, would have been the program of men who were by no means cowards. Indeed it was the logical course to pursue. But Dick and Barney never gave such a procedure a thought. That precious, whole body must be taken to the comparative safety of the sled. Their minds steadied dizzily, like the trembling needle of an abused compass, upon this effort which to them spelled Duty. And if they were hardly their cool, normal selves, what minds could have remained normal after the shock of their waking, and the still more shocking search amid the wreck of the village?

Toiling like giants, their labored breath issuing from their lungs in sobs, hastening not so much for their own lives as for the safety of what they carried, they essayed the bank—as careful with that inanimate, fish-smelling bundle as if it had been the beloved mother of them both.

Many times they slipped, bruising hands, knees, elbows; many times they felt as if they could not urge themselves an inch farther. All the weight of the night came upon them. Powerful men, in first-class condition, though they were, the exhaustion of their previous efforts seemed suddenly to overtake them, as if to make fruitless the effort of their last struggle.

Surely it was a man they lifted—no woman could be so heavy? They gained a yard, slipped back a foot, and, trying to regain the loss, slipped again. And all the time the deliberately menacing wave came nearer—every second they expected it to break, to seize them, to dash them helpless as chips upon a flood.

Those last moments were a delirium of effort; and, as in delirium, their limbs seemed unwilling to obey their wills. So slowly did their bodies answer the commands of their brains that they knew wild intervals when they seemed to be counting the seconds between impulse and action. Urging them to save themselves and abandon their helpless burden was the age-old instinct of self-preservation, held determinedly in check with gritted teeth and stubborn wills.

They were nearly there, when Dick slipped. Automatically, one hand let go its hold of the body. Barney's brain cleared at the beckon of that danger. Rousing his great strength into one of the greatest efforts of his life, he braced himself and took the weight of the helpless bundle of fur upon his chest, pressing against the bank. Then, one arm freed, he grasped Dick and, with what seemed the strength of six men, pulled him back to his place. This happened in seconds.

The accident roused all Dick's latent energy. He did not know that he possessed such a reserve of power. His anger at what he considered his clumsiness acted like a whip upon a jaded horse. Indeed, but for the spur of that accident it is doubtful if they could have escaped the oncoming wave.

The last yards were taken in a sort of frantic rush. That is, their last, sudden effort seemed like speed to them compared with their previous slow, toilsome progress. Tenderly, in a great final lift, they raised their burden to the level of their shoulders and gently rested it on the top of the bank—on level ground. Then, at the actual end of their reserve of strength, they managed to pull themselves after it and roll in safety to where they had pushed it, just as the great wave spent its frightful effort to gather them into its maw—breaking so close behind them that it drenched them, the water feeling, against the heat of their strained bodies, like *burning ice*, as Barney afterward described it.

The noise and the grinding, the shuddering of the tottering bank, the driving of the wind-harried snow, the horrible danger at their heels—all this troubled them not at all. They were too exhausted to care. Their lungs seemed empty, as if they could never fill them again. They lay, gasping painfully. . . .

But at last their breathing became normal, their hearts ceased pounding; the wave had receded and the bank no longer threatened to collapse. Barney came near saying, “Thank God!” while Dick not only said it—he meant it!

IX

"WE must get a fire going," said Barney somewhat needlessly, breathing normally, but feeling like a boxer after twenty rounds of hard fighting.

"Lots of wood." Dick, who did not recuperate so rapidly, sat up stiffly. "Lots of wood, even if most of the village has gone out to sea."

They looked at the quiet bundle of humanity they had rescued. The snow had ceased, the tide was ebbing, and there were no more big waves. A dreary grayness in the east heralded the coming of the short day.

"No use examining him until we get a fire going," said Barney, getting to his feet to stare down at the place where the village had been. "I'll gather wood."

The wreck of the village lacked impressiveness. Indeed, it was hardly more noticeable than any beach heavily strewn with driftwood. About it when whole there had been none of those silent monuments which mark men's awkward strides toward civilization, consequently there was none of that horror which so stirs the emotion when beholding the collapse of a town of the more highly evolved races—none of that wrench which so strikingly brings home to consciousness what a puny thing man is, after all, when Nature turns on him in one of her moods.

But there was one thing which, while primitive in itself, rose above the primitive and clutched painfully at Barney's sympathies—one grotesque remnant of family pride, the only thing left standing by that freakish indifference peculiar to earthquakes and similar catastrophes. And this was one of the totem poles, outlined starkly against the wintry sky, strangely solitary amid the desolation, which a fanciful mind might have imagined as sorrowfully surveying the scene and mourning over the loss of its many companions.

With rapid skill Barney built a large fire, protected from the dying gale.

"If you'll check up what grub we salvaged, I'll play doctor to the aborigine, Dick," he suggested.

Dick went to the sled and Barney knelt down by the figure in the furs, moving it nearer to the fire. It moaned softly and the firelight showed

Barney its face.

"Had a sort of hunch all along," he drawled. "Dick, we've saved Williams!"

"What?"

"Yes! But he's damned badly hurt, or I miss my guess, poor devil," went on Barney, gently removing the man's outer garment.

Dick continued to examine the stuff on the sled. When he spoke, Barney, who knew him so well, noticed the effort with which he controlled his voice, but no one else would have been aware of it.

"Well," said Dick, "after all he's our own kind. I mean," he added, hastily, "since we could only pick up one man, I suppose we should be glad it's him and not an Indian!"

"But think of the chance of it," answered Barney. "Like having a pot of beans, of which a hundred are black and one white, and putting in your hand and pulling out the one white one! But what's wrong—on the sled?"

"One full meal for three men, and no dog feed—and I thought I got all our grub. Don't understand it," said Dick, gravely.

"Fell off in the scramble," replied Barney. "Nothing was lashed or properly packed, you know. Another freakish reminder from the small god Chance. Let's forget about it. We'll have to eat the dogs until we find game, but I don't want to eat Seal-face—that dog's more human than Williams!"

As if the sound of his name had dragged him out of the deeps of unconsciousness, Williams opened his eyes, blinked at the fire, shuddered, and said:

"I remember. Are we safe now?"

"Safe as a church, old-timer," answered Barney.

With a curious effort Williams turned his head, trying to stare about the camp.

"The others?" he asked.

Barney looked at Dick, who in turn stared down toward where the village had been—where both men knew it would be a waste of time to seek anything living after that last wave.

"Sorry, old man." Barney patted Williams' shoulder. "Sorry to have to tell you, but you're the only human being saved except ourselves."

Williams blinked again, then apparently forgot his wife and family in considering his own condition.

"I feel queer," he said. "But . . . but . . . it isn't that. God! I must have a stroke! Below my waist I cannot feel at all! . . . Nothing—just as if I had no

feet!"

"So!" commented Barney.

"I tell you," Williams continued, irritably—"didn't I tell you that I can't tell where my feet are? Cannot feel below my waist?" his voice became a whine.

It was part of Dick Carew's creed that a man must control himself, whatever his tribulation; must fight weakness, not give in to it. Even if he were being burned alive it was still his duty to try to be a man—not to whine or cry out until his strength left him after a gallant fight and he did not know what he was doing. And here was Williams whining immediately upon discovering himself injured.

Also, Dick was irritated at the shortage of food, for which he blamed himself. The night had been a hard one, he had had no breakfast, and, unlike Barney, he did not realize how very serious were the injuries of Williams.

So it came about that, losing his temper, beginning with, "You damned thing," he treated Williams, whom he looked upon with rather bigoted Church of England scorn as a hated spiritist, to a tirade of abuse, much to the surprise of Barney, ending by calling him a "dirty squaw man"—turning away contemptuously to get together what sort of a meal the supplies made possible, while Barney, somewhat amused, made Williams as comfortable as possible, taking off his wet things and covering him with his own sleeping furs, which had been kept fairly dry. Should he tell him the truth? He would have to know some time. The fellow was dying—dying, and a menace. He would hinder their progress, when haste was imperative. And before he died he would become a terrible companion. Dick's best interests and his own demanded they put a bullet through Williams' brain; and, indeed, it would be a kindness to Williams to do this. But, of course, they couldn't. Other men, and decent men at that, would not hesitate. There was no chance of his living. If Williams were a real man he would want to be shot, as soon as he knew the truth, rather than be the cause of his companions' death. For starve they would, unless they found game; and when the dogs were gone—which would be very soon, since they had to eat them, and also feed the weaker to the stronger—they would have to drag the sled with Williams on it. Williams's back was broken, his extremities would freeze and gangrene, and then. . . . In a hospital he might live indefinitely, but out there he would live only long enough to make his presence disgusting. Barney began to fill a much-needed pipe, when Williams, recovering from the fright into which Dick's tirade had thrown him, reverted to his question regarding his lack of feeling below his waist.

"Why don't you say something?" he demanded.

"We're pretty much up against it," said Barney, quietly. "We had a strenuous time getting out of our cabin and neglected to make sure we took grub with us. Of course we might get game, of different sorts. Until we do we'll have to eat dog."

"What about me?" the voice of the injured man rose in a thin scream.

"You, too! We'll make a start right away, and keep going. But we'll have a tight pinch."

"But me . . . but me! I can't travel! I can't stand up!" yelled Williams.

"We'll put you on the sled and take you with us, of course. What the hell did you think we'd do with you?" Barney was finding it difficult to speak to Williams without betraying his contempt.

In that curious mixture of hearsay, belief, and crude misinformation which constituted the "knowledge" of Williams was a stray fact, picked up casually and long ago, which now began to detach itself and stand out conspicuously. Dimly he grappled with it. What did it mean? What did it mean when a man lost all sensation below his waist? All that was sentient in Williams shivered with fear. Then, horrified, like a child that knows its punishment to be inevitable yet pleads and cries to escape, he gripped his stray fact of physiology, and asked.

"My spine isn't broken, is it?"

"I am afraid it is," answered Barney, glad the question had been asked.

"My God!" gasped Williams. "Will I die?"

"I as good as told you that the three of us are liable to starve to death," replied Barney.

"Yes, but I'm hurt. Oh, why didn't He let me die down there?" Williams was sobbing. "Why did you pick me up? Now I'll have to go through with it all again, and I'm afraid—I'm afraid to die!"

"Why?" asked Barney, casually. "I thought you knew all about the next world! What about those spirit guides you spoke so intimately of? And what's the use of being afraid, anyhow?"

"I—I cannot tell you. You don't understand what I mean," Williams faltered.

The day was breaking. As Williams spoke, Dick came over to that end of the fire, suggesting they eat the last good meal they were likely to have for some time before taking advantage of the light to travel.

"Sure," said Barney, cheerfully. "We need it!"

"I'm not hungry," Williams spoke, his face buried among the furs.

"A cup of coffee, anyhow," suggested Barney, kindly.

"Does a man with a broken back die soon?" insisted Williams, Dick's eyes opening wide at the question.

"Depends." Barney could see no benefit in withholding the truth. "In a hospital it would be different, but out here——" Barney paused significantly, and Williams began to cry like a frightened child.

There was something terrible about that crying, the crying of a terrified man condemned to death, and it roused in both Dick and Barney those ancestral feelings of horror and fear which countless such experiences have impressed upon the organisms of every member of the human race. Dick turned away and went back to his cooking, while Barney tried to comfort Williams with the clumsiness of a strong man who cannot be moved to tears because of any hurt to himself.

"Buck up, old man!" he said. "Buck up! We've all got to die some time, and every damn one of us has to face it alone."

"It isn't that." Williams chest heaved convulsively. "It's—something else! Do you really think there is a God?"

That this spiritist, who a few hours previously had claimed intimate knowledge of another life, should ask this question did not surprise Barney in the least—he knew something of the breed.

"I am certain of it," he answered, truthfully. "Only a damn fool could think there wasn't a God—pretend to think, I should say."

"How will I die?" persisted Williams, morbidly.

"The thing to do is not to think about it," answered Barney. "Think of something else. Besides, I told you that a man in your condition may live indefinitely."

"I don't believe I'll live two days." Williams refused to be comforted.

"Well, I am going to eat!" Barney knocked the ashes out of his pipe and went over to his partner.

"I didn't know he was that bad." Dick spoke apologetically. "How long will he live, and how will the poor devil go out?" he whispered.

"His trophic nerves are paralyzed, of course," answered Barney, speaking so that Williams could not hear him, "which means that, in addition to his other troubles (for he seems to be hurt internally), those bruises on his legs and thighs will gangrene. I mean the trophic nerves below the break, of course. We have no way of helping him or keeping him warm. He'll be an awful sight, by and by. And stink! Imagine it. He'll be just like a decomposing corpse. Poor devil—I'd almost as soon die of

hydrophobia! The toxæmia should numb him—that's one good thing, because we have no morphine or anodyne of any sort. Really, Dick, we're taking an awful chance, traveling without any sort of medicine. I mean to get a medicine kit at the next opportunity—morphine, chloroform, and enough of that sort of stuff to be able to cut your leg off!"

"Thanks," replied Dick, dryly.

"You are welcome. By the way, when there's enough light for him to read, it might do him good, or at any rate keep his mind off dying, if you lent him all the literature we have with us—that prayer-book of yours."

"I'll do it," said Dick. "I'll give it to him now, before we make a start," and he walked over to Williams.

"If you're interested, Williams, I have a Church of England prayer book with me."

Entirely disregarding their situation, as if oblivious to the sacrifice the partners were making on his behalf, selfishly indifferent to everything but himself, Williams snarled.

"I don't want it." He knew now that he would not be deserted and that either Dick or Barney would have to attend to his needs as if he were a baby; and instead of being grateful for what they had done, and would do, he meant to make himself as unpleasant as he possibly could, his stunted soul finding a strange pleasure in the fact that two better men than himself would be, as it were, his servants, and would have to perform tasks for him which no servant would, while their sense of duty would prevent their neglecting him, and their understanding of his condition inhibit their angry retaliation. "I don't want it. What you ought to do is to take me to my brother on the Kuskokwin!"

This was his first intimation regarding a brother, and it was unexpected; but he had gone a little too far in his manner of rejecting Dick's offer and had rekindled the flame of Dick's anger.

"Williams"—Dick's voice was quiet but full of menace—"you may as well remember that you are only here on sufferance. I know men—decent men at that—who, if they were in our position, would put a bullet through your head and have done with it." He paused while Williams cringed. "If you were able to travel, we wouldn't have you with us. Your helplessness is all that keeps you with us—but don't go too far. Listen to me. You have no more to say about this outfit than the dogs. If you give too much trouble, we'll leave you!" He paused. What if the fellow called his bluff? They couldn't leave him. "About this brother—do you think we're a railroad?

You'd better lie quiet and make no damn-fool breaks. . . . What is this brother—another squaw man?"

"No, he's the priest in charge of the Roman Catholic mission on the Kuskokwin."

"Oh yes, the Kuskokwin!" Barney drawled, as he came over to begin harnessing the dogs. "No doubt a most charming river, whether frozen or otherwise. . . . I suppose you expect us to travel several hundred miles along the bank of this river, looking for your brother—when by that time, having eaten the dogs, we will have to drag you on the sled ourselves!"

The unpleasant Williams would, at his best, have annoyed a saint, and neither Dick or Barney was a saint. The awful night, with its horror of danger and mangled bodies, would have frazzled the nerves of any man. Add to this their situation—hundreds of miles from humanity; the lack of food and the thought of having shortly to eat their dogs; the likelihood of more storms; their being hampered by a man whom neither would have tolerated but for the condition which made him an even more unpleasant companion—it is little wonder that occasionally they spoke to Williams with an apparent lack of sympathy.

"Well," said Dick, "we must get along! But tell me, Williams, since you could live for years in that village without troubling to visit your brother, why are you so anxious to see him now?"

"Because—oh, it's a long story—because I want him to give me absolution!"

A sudden pathos seemed to cloak the fellow, piercing through Barney's tired mind to his essentially sympathetic soul. The pain, the agony of all the world! Why did God permit it? Barney's annoyance shifted from the miserable object on the sled to focus upon the Cause of it all. . . . Poor devil! And how caddishly they were treating him! Dick, too! What was the matter with them? They had had a bad night—but that was no excuse! By God! they *would* take him to his brother, however foolish his notion about absolution might seem.

And Dick responded similarly—he and Barney seldom needed words between them when decisions involving humanity were required.

"I am not so certain," he said, "that our trying to make the R. C. Mission on the Kuskokwin would be a mistake, Barney. As a matter of fact, I hadn't decided which was our best route. Neither am I sure of anything—except that the Kuskokwin is somewhere south of us. . . . Could you find your way to your brother, Williams?"

"I can help," answered Williams. He was suddenly grateful.

"All right, then!" Barney grinned cheerfully. "The Kuskokwin let it be. . . . I hope your brother isn't a teetotaller, Williams!"

"He is not!" The smile warmed the partners to the squaw man. After all, he was a human being, even if a dirty one, and since he was with them they might as well try to forget that they did not want him. Breakfast had put new life into both Dick and Barney, and the difficulties and dangers ahead were forgotten in the light of the dim, short day. Their natural buoyancy cheered them to further kindliness of thinking. And, as Barney, remarked, they would "go a long way for a drink of Scotch on a day like this!"

But there were to be many days, and not such good days. Time and again these two careless Englishmen had essayed long and hard trails, for little or no reason, and now, with their considerate reason driving them, they were upon their hardest traverse. But, while neither spoke of it—indeed, it is doubtful if the notion ever rose to consciousness in either of them—here was the supreme test of that pride which spells manliness; and this spurred them to greater effort than ever before. They had said they would take the injured man to his brother at the Mission. It was their job to get him there, if he lived long enough, and not to abandon him until he died. Also, they must do their best to make him comfortable, both in mind and in body.

"Mush, you damned huskies," yelled Barney. "We're a strictly limited transportation company, and we've got to make time. All aboard. Let her go, Mr. Engineer.

> "She's the smartest boat on the whole canal,
> Though only one-horse power!"

Williams, dying from the feet up, was fairly comfortable on the sled, wrapped in Barney's furs, which that particular gentleman would never use again; but the sled made poor way. Breaking trail—packing down the snow with snowshoes—was necessary every foot of the way; and breaking trail is real toil. It was not unusually cold, but it was cold enough. They kept going almost ten hours before making camp, which, after such a night, was a strain; but they wanted to get to the priest on the Kuskokwin. They saw no signs of any sort of game. Few words, and these necessary ones, passed between the partners—their work did not encourage conversation—although when they spelled each other ahead of the sled, the man coming back to "rest" would try hard to make a kindly sally, try to cheer up the wretched bundle lying there. And, doing this, the observant Barney watched the fear of death grow in Williams.

It was not an ordinary fear, Barney decided. There was something of the nightmare of the child about it, and it increased Barney's sympathy to notice that Williams was trying to hide this fear. But, following another spell at

trail breaking, Barney began to wonder if Williams was not trying to avoid telling about the cause of this peculiar fear. And then—the man's craving for absolution, the need of the priestly office of his brother, far more than that of an ordinarily bad conscience—it dawned upon Barney Hilliard that his early suspicion had been correct, that Williams was hiding some crime. But that the crime had been of the worst was revealed to Barney from an almost incoherent babble while the injured man slept. And then Barney began really to understand. Williams was afraid to die. Not so much from fear of death itself as from the fear that he would have to account to his victim after death! And never in all his life did Barney feel so pitiably unable to help, because, at another death where he was, also, helpless, the wonderful bravery and purity of the dying made it more like a living ascent into heaven!

When they decided to make camp, Williams seemed to be still comfortable, physically speaking, but his eagerness to reach his brother had increased, and he admitted being afraid to be left alone. When Barney suggested that Dick and he take their rifles and scout in different directions, tired as they were, in the hope of finding something to shoot—dark though it was—Williams begged and pleaded that one of them stay with him. The idea of being left alone—and, lying on his back, he could not see the snow-covered dogs—terrified him.

So Dick went, while Barney kept a great fire going. But Dick saw nothing to shoot at that night.

Nor did he the next, or the next. By day the work of breaking trail wore the partners out, and stringy dog meat is poor nourishment. Pressing down the webs, ahead of the sled, became like a horrible dream; yet, when the fire was going and their poor camp was made, either Dick or Barney would go out, hoping against hope for some stray caribou not devoured by the watching wolves. Indeed, they would have felt better if they could have shot even a wolf. And with every hour the condition of Williams seemed to grow worse. It was appalling. Even the senses of an Indian would have been offended. Yet the man left in camp made it a point—sitting as well to windward as he could get—to chat with Williams at night until his partner returned from his unsuccessful hunting! There were many days, and nights, of this, the partners growing weaker, Williams hanging on to life with a persistence which was horrible. Then there came a night when Barney, blowing heavy clouds of smoke through his nose, sat waiting for what he knew was coming. The dying man was about to seek the relief of confessing. There was little hope of his living to reach the Mission.

But Barney was hardly intending to hasten the story when he said, as kindly as he could:

"Don't think I am criticizing you, Williams, but do you really think that absolution can make a difference—that the God who made this wonderful universe can be persuaded to change the destiny your acts have earned for you by a few words said for you by another man?"

"There must be something in it," answered Williams, vaguely.

"Oh, if it will comfort you—I'm for it. What I am driving at is the logic of it. I am no admirer of the Deity, but He does not chop and change. He made certain laws, and He sticks to 'em. And—and this is the point—when you consider the sufferings of sentient things in this world, do you think He'll do anything to ease your pain in the next (if there is one) just because a man preaching Christianity asks Him to?"

"Yes—I hope so!"

"All right! Then I hope He does. I always admire faith, and—this has not occurred to me in exactly this way before—faith is the only answer to Hume! Hume proved, by logic, that all logic must lead to skepticism, and no philosopher has ever refuted him. That's curious, too!" Barney paused, visioning the extent of everyday faith, and humanity's dependence upon it. "Curious, but faith is the answer to Hume. I never expected to come to this conclusion, but, while philosophers have failed to answer Hume, it seems that one man answered him before he wrote a line—before Hume was born."

"Who?"

"Jesus! Yes, I mean it. Perhaps I am tired to-night, but it does seem that the only answer to Hume is the simple faith of little children, which, after all, we all have in the things of this world. If we hadn't we couldn't keep on living. Think how helpless we are. We believe that the condition of the atmosphere will not change materially, that the earth will continue to rotate—in a million things over which we have no control. If we lost our faith in them we would go insane. It's strange, but we really live by faith. I sincerely wish that, like you, I could extend my faith into the so-called next world. If one could only believe that God means well by us! Believe that our pains are like the growing pains of children, believe that being put to bed early, in the grave, being forced to leave our companions in tears, and they, too, crying—with our broken toys scattered along the path of our ambition—is necessary to our everlasting health in these, the earlier, days of our understanding! If one could only believe that! . . . I beg your pardon—I am not in the habit of talking like this."

Williams impulsively grasped Barney's hand.

"Mr. Hilliard, I'm going to tell you. I must tell somebody who can tell my brother—if I don't see him. Do you know why I fooled with that damned rot spiritualism? Or is it rot? I don't know—I have seen some queer things. But I don't know . . . I was afraid, and I wanted to find out. If you knew somebody was hidden behind a wall, and you knew that you would have to get over that wall, sometime—well, you would want to find out whether the party behind the wall was alive and could harm you or not, wouldn't you?"

He paused, out of breath, and Barney studied him by the light of the fire. The man talked in positive desperation—a continually increasing desperation—as if against time, as if afraid to stop talking for fear he would think. And his fear of being left alone—absurd as it seemed, Barney was beginning to believe that Williams was afraid that if he were left alone *something* would come to him. He was afraid of a ghost! And he was afraid of himself—of his thoughts and his fear of death! It would have been a terrible situation for any man, but for a man of the type of Williams—there are no words!

"We will keep trying to get you to your brother until hell freezes over," said Barney, gently.

"Yes, but—but I am afraid of him, too!"

"Of your own brother—and a priest?"

"Yes; when I tell him, I mean! When I tell him what I am going to tell you."

Williams stared furtively at Barney. He both admired and feared him, and he could have found no man in whom he would rather have confided, no man whose sympathy and understanding he would have preferred. Barney inspired confidence. Men confess not only to relieve their souls of weight, but because they also have the curious feeling that part of their burden is removed to the shoulders of the man to whom they confess, as if the sharer of the secret also shares the onus of it—weird and illogical as the notion is.

The night was calm and not overly cold. The fire burned clearly. The soul of Williams craved to be naked and known.

"Mr. Hilliard," he began, calmly enough, "I must tell you this—I cannot sleep until I do—and my brother must know. . . . If I am unable to tell him you will, won't you?"

"Certainly. But make quite certain that you want to confide in me. Don't say anything on impulse that you may regret in less expansive moments. Many a man has told some one something he afterward regretted having told. You will feel differently after you have told me. Consider carefully—I don't want you to be unhappy about this affair. Of course you can rely upon

my not repeating a word—not even to Dick, if you say so, although I am not keen about having a secret from Dick, and would only consent to have one because of the—er—the circumstances."

Williams drew in a deep breath, as if about to dive into deep water. He hesitated, then breathed again. Barney wondered if he had tried to tell his story before, and been unable, lacked the courage; and he had the fleeting impression that Williams had tried to tell his brother, the priest, but could not, had drawn back at the telling. Which seemed very strange.

There was no moon, but the stars were out in regiments. Objects on the landscape, the clump of spruce, loomed with a spectral blackness. The two men were so still that only the fire seemed alive. The untrodden snow beyond the camp stretched like a sea picture of a child's fairy book.

"It's hard, it's hard, but it's got to be done," moaned Williams.

"No, it hasn't. You don't have to tell. In fact, if telling me is going to upset you I won't listen to you!"

As if Barney's words had been a dire threat, Williams began to plead, his voice a thin scream.

"Yes, please do. . . . You must, please. . . . I must. . . . But it's so hard. I . . . you know. . . . yes . . . my brother and I were born in England." He paused exactly as a man taking a leap, a difficult leap at which he balks. Then—and Barney fancied he shut his eyes as if afraid of seeing *something*! —he blurted the terrible truth. "I killed her! Yes, I killed her! But they never knew, they never even thought I did it. Oh, I was clever, I was! You don't know how clever I was, Hilliard."

He lay back, half frightened, yet proud of having, at last, burst past the inhibition of his fear.

"Look here," growled Barney, "if you want to ease your soul by what you call your confession, why—tell it! But don't gloat over your dirty crime, and don't talk too much about being clever. Get me?"

"Yes," Williams shivered.

"Go to it, then." And the spur of Barney's contempt rode Williams over the last barrier of his fear.

"Sit closer, please!" Williams looked around, as if fearful of the ears of the unseen. "It was a small town in England, with a river winding through it and three old stone bridges—a pretty place. My brother and I were born there, and our parents were Roman Catholics. So when my brother left the village school he went to a Jesuit college. But he did not want to go in for the priesthood, then. You see, there was a girl. We three had always played together as children. But when I left school I got a job in the only factory in

the village—a fustian-cutting shop. You know, the men run from end to end of the long room, making lines in the stretched cloth with their specially shaped knives—cutting fustian, they call it. But I worked in the office, at the books, hoping to make enough money to marry the girl while my brother was at college earning nothing. But she did not love me—you see, I am keeping nothing back—and I could hardly get her to 'walk out' with me at all. 'Walking out' was what they called courting—the couples used to walk the lanes at night. I did all I could to get her to say she would marry me, but she wouldn't. And she would not let me buy her anything, except a little candy now and then. She was a good girl. And then my brother left the college and got in the same office with me. The owner was an old friend of father's. And my brother saw a lot of the girl. Did I tell you that we had played together as children? Yes, and she liked him better than me, and she would not walk out with me any more. My brother wanted to play fair, he said; but I could see no fairness any place. But I did not say this, no—I was too clever—I had something in my mind. I had a plan to get even. What right had my brother to come from the college, where they teach men to be priests, and take my girl away from me? You might say she wasn't my girl, because she would not love me; but she would have been if my brother had not left the college where they teach men to be priests. Who can say for sure that she wouldn't? So it was my brother's fault. He stole her from me. And his stealing gave me the idea. . . . There was a song about then, about making the punishment fit the crime. And I was clever enough to do it!

"Lord! what a fuss there was when the money was stolen from the office! The money they were going to pay the men with on Saturday. And my brother was missing, too! There was my cleverness." He looked at Barney, afraid of the effect of the word "cleverness." But Barney let it pass. "I had persuaded him that he should take a holiday—told him that he looked sick and that a week at the seaside would do him good. He got permission from the boss and said he was going to Blackpool. Then, just before he went to the station I talked about Blackpool being a noisy place, and persuaded him to go to a place the other end of England. He would be away a day or so longer, but I said I would explain this to the boss. I could always influence my brother. And I forgot to tell the boss, and when they found him at the opposite end of England from where he had told everybody he was going, it looked bad.

"Of course, at the trial, I told the jury that I had persuaded my brother to change his mind about going to Blackpool; but I told this so that they did not believe me, and they said that I was only lying and trying to shield my brother. Oh, it was easy! And there was my brother thanking me, with tears

in his eyes, for trying so hard to save him! Oh, it was funny! But it hurt to see the girl. She was awfully upset. And I didn't like her to be crying about him. But he got ten years, and I hoped she would get tired of waiting for him, and marry me. Nobody knew about us both loving her—they just knew we had always been friends, that's all. But my brother had made up his mind to ask her to marry him after he got back from his trip. He told me that he meant to do this, and hoped I wouldn't mind! I said I was glad she had chosen the best man, because we knew she would say 'yes' when he asked her. Then he got ten years. Funny, wasn't it—getting ten years instead of getting married. It sounded funny in the court when I said my brother did not go to Blackpool because the other place was better for his health. And I did my best—talking with him in his cell—to try to figure out who had sewed the bank notes in his vest! He thanked me with tears in his eyes when I said I would devote my life to finding the real thief and clearing my brother's name. Very amusing it was.

"So he went to prison. I waited awhile before I asked the girl to walk out with me again. I thought it best to do that. Then one night I asked her to walk out, and she said she would. We went by the river—along a quiet part—and I was just mad for her—mad with passion—and without a word I slipped my arm around her. She wrestled free and struck me in the face. I laughed at this—she looked so lovely when she was mad, and there was just enough moon to show her face. Beautiful she was—no wonder I was crazy for her. But she suddenly cooled me.

" 'You are the thief,' she said, holding a hand to her chest, and breathing hard. 'You did it, and put the blame on Tom. I know you took the money and sewed it in his vest. I said nothing because I wanted to be able to prove it. I have the proofs now—in my head, where you cannot get them. I can tell the judge just how you did it—and I will, too. And you shall go to prison, and he, my love, shall come out to marry me. You dirty dog! But every crime is found out at last!'

"If I had thought, I would have known that she had no real proof, only her suspicions. But I did not think. I became just as mad with fear as I had been with passion, and all I could think of was her saying that she had the proofs in her head. She stood there, all flushed and beautiful, triumphant, and before I knew what I was saying I had told her that I had done it for her, because I wanted her. I always did get frightened very easily, and I must have pleaded with her. But all she did was to laugh at me. She taunted me, and my fear grew to a frenzy. I kept thinking about her only having the proofs in her head and that I had to destroy those proofs. You see, I had to, or I would have gone to prison in my brother's place and he would have

married her. The bank was steep, and the river quite deep at that part. I had to destroy those proofs! She screamed dreadfully when she rolled down the steep bank. I can hear the splash yet. But I was clever, I tell you. I acted naturally. If you don't want to be found out just act naturally. It's difficult, though. But I did it. I could not swim, neither could she, but it looked like I did my best to save her, I acted just like a man who could not swim but who was doing his best to save a woman from being drowned. I yelled and got wet, and had to struggle to save myself. Two farmers came running. But the river was swift as well as deep, and they didn't get her out until next day. I was quite a hero in the village. I told how she had slipped and how I had tried to save her. The people said there ought to be a fence along the steep part of the river bank, and by and by they put one up. But it was too late then. People sympathized with me exactly as if the girl had loved me. One of the farmers had quite an imagination and got very excited. He swore that I had dived in after her, although I could not swim. Did I tell you that I was careful to get myself wet?

"My brother did not serve his term. Partly good conduct, and partly because the bishop believed in his innocence and worked to get him out. And my brother was believed when he took an oath he was innocent—after he was free—and he was allowed to finish at the college and become a priest. He took up missionary work to get away from all his trouble, and came out to Alaska.

"We parted on the best of terms, and I told him how the girl and I had been planning to find the real thief just before she slipped down the bank. My brother—he is very emotional and religious, you know—was moved to tears by this evidence of our love for him. He said I was the best and truest man in the world. Of course he knew the girl would have waited for him—she had told him so.

"Time went on, and instead of forgetting what I had done, as I hoped to do, the memory of it all became clearer and clearer. It seemed to grow—the picture of my taking the money, of my brother in the jail, and of the girl drowning. And I could hear her scream. At first it was like a whisper—but gradually it grew louder, until now when I hear it it sounds in my ear just like it was happening all over again. That's one reason why I am afraid to be alone—she comes then!

"So, when this memory began to grow worse I thought that if I went to my brother and confessed, it would help me. I would tell him under the seal of the confessional, so he could tell no one else. Funny how a man will reason a thing out! Knowing my brother as I did I began to feel sure that when I confessed he would not only forgive me—he would also find a

positive joy in doing so, like imitating Jesus! He believes that a man's greatest joy is to be found in the imitation of Jesus, so I believed that if I confessed to him not only would the horrible memory stop troubling me, but that, also, I would be giving my brother the greatest joy in the world. So I said I would go to Alaska to make my brother happy! I looked forward to this feeling, just like one feels when one is going to make some one happy by giving him a present! I even felt how unselfish I was to go all the way to Alaska to do this for my brother, because I don't like traveling and I am afraid of the sea.

"But when I reached my brother's Mission on the Kuskokwin I began to doubt his ability. He might not be able to imitate Jesus as I wanted him to. I did try to tell him several times, but each time I felt a doubt of him. I was sorry, too, because I wanted to make him happy. I really did, because he had suffered a great deal. . . . So I just stayed on at the Mission, but I found it lonely. I might have been there yet if one of the women converts had not been so attractive!"

The repulsive leer that followed this announcement seemed to come from the soul of the man through his mask of madness. This impression was furthered by his voice, his face, his deathly injuries—he was a changeful madman prisoned by the night and by an unchanging wilderness of snow—and with his mentioning his betrayal of the Indian girl, Barney saw the soul of him as it really was, warped by the circumstances of his life and the fantastic playings of his diseased brain. And a thoroughly rotten soul is not a nice thing to see.

"My brother found out about the woman convert—just my luck!" went on Williams. "Other men would not have been found out. Every man does these things. You have yourself, of course, Mr. Hilliard!"

Barney clenched his powerful hands, then he forced a laugh. Why trouble himself about the opinions of a thing like Williams? Why, indeed, about the opinions of one. Besides, he was far too wise ever to mention his unusual ideas concerning women or his religion of "clean living." Then, as he looked at the miserable object on the sled, a weird notion came to him. Was it possible that, after all, men had immortal *souls*, as the theologists claimed? If this were so, the condition of men's souls might so affect their bodies that eventually the bodies would become as the souls—either directly or by the play of circumstance into which the souls led the bodies: evil souls striving after evil things, and *vice versa*. Thus, driven by their vileness to bring about a just judgment upon themselves, rotten souls lived lives which culminated in disease or "accident"; and when the bodies became as rotten as the souls, so that all men might see this rottenness, the bodies died.

Consequently, Williams, having apparently escaped disease, had met with that which would bring about his death, and his body would putrify before it died, so that the very presence of it would become an offense to the senses, as no doubt his soul was an offense to the angels. And then, as Barney grinned at his quaint conceit, the voice of Williams came to him again.

"And my brother wept over me about the woman convert, and when I did not repent sufficiently he became angry for the first time in his life, and said that if I wasn't afraid of hell, I should have a chance to show whether I was afraid of the Indians—he threatened to urge the Indians into anger against me on the girl's account—but he was just as sorry as he was angry. But I thought it best to get out, so I spent nearly all the money I had on a dog team and grub, and left without my brother knowing I was going. I knew that that would hurt him, and that he would be sorry he had been angry with me. An Indian who had drifted into the Mission had told me that he was going back to his village, so I paid him to slip away quietly and take me with him. I did not plan anything particular until I got to know the shaman was a bit afraid of Nitasak, the headman, who did not like shamans. The old chap was losing his influence with the people, so I easily saw that if I put the shaman on his feet, and made him dependent on me, I would own the village. That was the beginning; and I knew how to make the shaman believe that I was a great man in his own line. Then the headman got sick and died!

"I was trying to run away from my memories and dreams, but I couldn't get away from them. I could hear her voice too clearly. . . . When the headman was dying she was there; so I managed to make him understand what she was like, and gave him a message for her. I told him to tell her to leave me alone. You may think I helped that headman to die. Well, what is an Indian? Mind you, I didn't say I did. But I married the prettiest woman in the village and was like a king, with the shaman for my minister. But my nerves grew worse. The night you came I was actually afraid it had been found out that I had stolen the money and drowned the girl. That's why I kept asking you what you were and why I went through the storm to your cabin. I was scared that you were detectives from England. If you had been you would not have left the village alive. I was so frightened that I would have done anything. You don't believe in spirits, but if you had been with that old shaman when he was in a trance—groaning in a beastly way—you would have had a hard job not to. The queer things I heard were enough to get on any man's nerves. But I couldn't keep away. And one night! . . . Remember the shaman could not speak English. He had gone into what seemed like a deeper trance than usual. Even if he had picked up a few

words of English, I would have known it was him talking—if it had been. It was a wild, dark, windy night, like the one when you came to the village. I sat and waited, listening to his nasty groans and moans and grunts and the noises of the sea and night."

Williams paused, shivering with memory.

Then: "Yes, I heard her voice. Not somewhere between my head and ear, which was where I was accustomed to hear it, but coming through the shaman's mouth. At first it seemed to come from a great distance, saying just my name, as if she were trying to find me in the dark. Every time she spoke she seemed to come nearer. It was terrible.

"I looked at the shaman, as you look to a friend when you need help; but he was dead to the world, just grunting in a deep sleep, and I was afraid to touch him—afraid I might hurt him, but more afraid of her. Then it seemed that the shaman was not there—and he might as well have not been there—and that I was alone with the dead girl, who was a live spirit! She came closer every step. She was not begging me to go to her—there was command in her voice—commanding me to listen. And then she was standing at my side! I knew it, although all I could see was the smoke curling up from the shaman's fire. . . . Oh, it was cold. Like an icy draught going through me. And then I knew that she radiated this cold—that she herself *looked through and through me*, and that her cold glance of hatred was what I felt in my entire being. Can you blame me for being so terrified that I could neither move nor cry out? I was paralyzed with fear.

" 'George,' she said, 'you are the lowest thing walking the earth, but you won't walk much longer. *They* are going to get you, George. Those you have never seen are after you, are waiting for you to die. And you will die horribly, and when you die you will wish you were still living, even though living were the greatest agony known to man. They are waiting for you, George, and when you die they will get you. During every man's life there are *those* who are with him, and it depends upon himself *who they are*. A man may change his companions—his unseen companions—by the sort of life he lives; and when he dies the companions he has chosen by his way of life will meet him. You can imagine what kind of *things* I can see waiting for you, George, when I tell you that I who hate and despise you—I, whose life you ruined and took—am sorry for you. And it is too late for you to change your companions. Did you ever have a horrible dream, George, from which you tried to waken in vain? I know you have—you have had many of them. Well, imagine that dream being far worse than anything you have ever had—you cannot imagine how terrible it will be—and you trying to wake up, trying and trying, but never waking up, because—because you will be dead!

Yes, I am sorry for you, George, because no man ever experienced a more terrible hell than you will know. They are waiting, and they will get you. I have come a long way to tell you this, because I want to stop hating you. My hating you keeps me from going away from you altogether—keeps me near you, so to say—and I want to get away from you. So I came, that I might see and feel sorry for you. Pity kills hate, George. Oh, but you will die horribly; yet, even so, you will not want to die!'

"Then, suddenly, the cold left me, and I knew that she had gone. The shaman grunted some more, and woke up. And now you know why I am so afraid to die, and so afraid to be left alone, and why I want to get my brother's forgiveness and absolution. Oh, why have I been such a beast, why have I lived such a life and collected such terrible *things* around me that I cannot see, that wait for me to die? Hilliard, you cannot understand what it means to be what I am! And there are no words to tell you how I feel and what I fear!"

Williams buried his face in the furs, breathing in sobs, while Barney, knowing that a sort of subconscious tidal wave had roused the fears of Williams until the voice and the presence of the dead girl had seemed very real, found himself wondering at the meaning of the word "hell," and speculating upon the punishment nature metes out to those who live lives which cause pain to others. He had no doubt that at the moment Williams died he would suffer terrible agonies in a dream of helplessness—that while the dream would actually last only a few seconds of what we call "time," it would seem like an eternity to Williams, and he told himself to remember to make sure when the time came, that he propped Williams up in the furs so that he would lie on his right side—his experience being that dreams were less lasting and more infrequent when the body was in that position. It was only too likely that the terrible reality of those last few seconds of dream consciousness were a very hell to those who had lived shameful lives, while a paradise to those whose subconscious resurgences brought up memories of kindly deeds and clean living. And, no doubt, many who had nearly died, and who had dreamed that last dream, had, by retailing their experiences, given birth to humanity's conceptions of heaven and eternal punishment. And who can say that such awful dreams are less real than the events of everyday living? Any medical man, with an experience of dipsomaniacs and users of opium, knows how these grow to fear the terrors of their dreams—because of the peculiar feeling of helplessness of the dreamer—more greatly than they fear the possible dangers of their waking periods. No wonder Williams was afraid to die, afraid to sleep, afraid to be left alone. Well, thought Barney, I will see that he lies on his side.

"Hullo!" The cheery voice of Dick Carew broke in upon Barney's musings. Dick, cheerful but tired, after never a sight or sign of game.

Barney threw more wood upon the fire. "Never mind, Dick. Maybe you'll get a caribou to-morrow. Let's all go to sleep!"

"Mr. Hilliard!" Williams called, softly.

"Yes?"

"Please don't sleep too far away, will you?"

"No—all right," answered Barney, reluctantly.

Williams felt offended at Dick's abrupt appearance. There was in him something of the feelings of a short-story writer after reading a story to a friend, when the expected enthusiastic praise is prevented by the arrival of the typewriter man seeking overdue installments. He was proud of the fact that few men could confess to so much, but he was unable to dwell upon this pride because the shivering rags of his many fears which clothed it turned the figure of his satisfaction into a hideous scarecrow. Then, as the quiet night stirred to the breathing of his companions, there appeared, as it were, a battered hat to crown the skeleton of his twittering imagination—the added definiteness of another fear to his ghastly image of terror. And this was his fear of what Barney might do with the secret he had intrusted to him. That a man would rather die than break his given word was beyond the comprehension of a creature like Williams. All his life the keeping of his own promises had been matters of convenience, consequently complete trust of Barney was impossible to him. For he who cannot be trusted can never know the peace of perfect trust! Had he not been afraid that Dick would hear he would have awakened Barney to ask him to repeat his promise not to tell anyone what he had confessed. . . . What a fool he had been to put himself in this man's power! Even if Hilliard kept his mouth shut the confession would always be with him—like a dagger, sheathed but ready to use. And a time was bound to come when he would use it—to get the best of him in some way, or as blackmail. The imminence of his death and the absurdity of the latter supposition were both hidden under the crowning flutterings of this latest addition to his fearfulness. His brother—why give the confession to Hilliard as a message to *him*? Time enough to tell his brother when he saw him again. . . . And so on, while the silent night seemed to peer at him, seeking him out, as it were, among the furs. He dozed, to wake suddenly, feeling foolish because he had dreamed about the night Dick and Barney came to the village. He dozed again for a few minutes, but was spurred to wakening by horrible dreams. He had some fever by now, and his slight delirium aroused ancestral impressions so that he walked with weirdly

distressing memories dormant for millions of years in the abyss of his inherited subconsciousness—that abyss over the edge of which peer little children in "nightmare," and into which plunge drunkards in delirium tremens.

Next morning the appalling fact of his approaching death possessed him. It was terrible to die. In his youth he had read something of the Master—surely such words never issued from the uncouth lips of a Warwickshire yokel?—and they now danced before his pain-filled eyes with a strange distinctness. How ardently did Williams wish that death was a sleep! That there were no dreams. For the dreams seemed to wait his dying like a mocking whirlpool into which a man knows that he must plunge, and whose depth is the depth of the bottomless pit.

Through the fog of his breath, as he lay on the sled, he watched the two men toiling toward the Mission on the Kuskokwin, but never a thought of their gallant generosity in thus throwing away their own worth-while lives as a service to the last hours of his worthless one came to him. He was dying, and now he knew it; if Dick and Barney did not stay with him they would double their own chances of living—but Williams thought no more about this than he did about the sky being over his head. He gave no thought to the panting efforts of their food-needing bodies except to feel a certain companionship in their being near him. The horror of being alone with his supernatural hauntings—anything or any one mitigating this loneliness became valuable in his eyes. And he was afraid to close his eyes, partly because he could not see his wholesome companions if he did and partly because he was afraid of what he might see. Therefore he struggled to keep them open, until exhaustion and autointoxication overpowered his will. And he strained his ears to listen to the noise of the toiling men—because when he did this he did not hear "the voices." The dark of his closed eyes was the avenue to his dreams, along which he was compelled at times to go, hearing these voices as he went.

His will to live was tremendous. He clung to life and would not let go. And in spite of the horrors he anticipated he was in doubt about his personal immortality! His anxiety to get to his brother and obtain absolution reminded Barney of the prodigal son, and brought to his attention the lack of comfort the devotees of the "new thought" cults found in their weird imaginings as compared with the old established creeds. He thought of the brave and decent men who had died in the firm faith of the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the Roman Catholic and the other forms of Christianity that have upheld the souls of men through the centuries, and it became obvious that those minds which affect to despise these fine old churches and dabble

in “occult sciences” because real science is beyond their mental assimilation, are a weak breed. Alive and well, Williams and his kind prate of a knowledge beyond the ordinary man—in trouble and the hour of death their own assumptions mock their need of consolation. He thought of Dick Carew and his little prayer book, and he knew that, while his friend made no pretensions to being a good man, his religious faith meant as much to him as his own honor. “If there is another life,” mused Barney, “any knowledge of it must be beyond the understanding of men in this world; and that is why the old creeds are the more scientific. They may have different conceptions of God, but there is no assumption in their belief in a God—only a fool says there isn’t one. Their only assumption is personal immortality, without which there can be no belief in the beneficence of Deity; and every argument must have one postulate, must assume something!”

But the passing days exhausted even Barney’s giant strength, and he became a physical automaton with a brain that at times was numb and at others active with wild efforts to assert itself in its old, coherent, lucid manner. Dick was in even worse shape, but he gallantly did his share, while the now usually gibbering Williams had become a hideous, filthy, indecently smelling animal of a nightmare for whom they must needs toil and perform unmentionable tasks.

The last of the dogs had been eaten, and with no food to warm their bodies the cold would not leave them. Seal-face alone had escaped, by dying a natural death. But it is doubtful if they would have killed and eaten Seal-face, because Dick had become as fond of that uncannily human beast as had Barney, and he would likely have died as they were dying, from exhaustion and starvation. For they never saw a sign of game, wherefore Barney’s cracked lips cursed the Deity, until he saw that his words hurt Dick, when he ceased to comment upon the Cause of things.

And both men looked anything but what they were. That they walked upright—staggered, rather—and wore clothes would have labeled them human beings; but their faces had been pushed back by frost bites, growth of hair, toil, and starvation until they might have been some shaggy beings of the before-man state, toiling endlessly through a glacial period.

Yet underneath all this horror their sense of right still shone as brightly as ever. To have abandoned Williams and pushed on in an attempt to save their own lives would have seemed criminal—Williams, a thing that now gibbered and now whined, with brief periods of something like lucidity. But, even as a physician cannot kill a victim of hydrophobia, although it would be better for the dying victim if he did, so neither Dick or Barney could have

blown out that feebly flickering bit of life that existed noisomely among Barney's furs.

There were doubtless times when the two men dragged that awful sled unconsciously; to rouse to the pain of their tired and hungry bodies, and—try to pull harder! But this could not go on; and, while neither mentioned it, both had felt for some days that they were merely walking to meet Death, and that it would be easier to lie down and meet him that way. There were even moments when their creed of not quitting seemed as the folly of a man who, being clubbed to death, holds up his head so that his assailant can hit it the easier!

They made what they felt—not without a certain feeling of relief that it was finished—was their last camp; did what they could for the babbling nuisance, who, as Dick put it, "positively reeked," and looked across the purple, dancing lights of the snow with swimming eyes. Daylight had not left the world, but they could no longer move the sled. Indeed, they could hardly move their tottering bodies. But for the line of spruce toward which they were headed they had believed themselves upon a limitless, barren plain. Williams, of course, had Barney's furs, so they huddled together, seeking warmth, and, in spite of hunger and cold, sank into deep sleep—the frantic delirium of the unhappy creature on the sled hardly noticed. They had done all they could for him—had probably given their lives to make his last days the less terrible—and they did not have it in their power to do more.

Just before the dawn Barney awoke. In some sort of dream he had heard Williams call to him in a voice of agonized fear:

"Don't, don't! Hilliard! Hilliard, don't let them—don't let them!"

"I must turn him on his side—on his side!" Barney told himself, trying to send his will through his nearly dead nerves to move his body.

He seemed to get up without the usual trouble. The dizziness was no longer there. His body no longer felt like lead. Then, as he was apparently walking toward the sled, he realized that he had not moved, that the message he had tried to send to his unwilling muscles had tricked him and recoiled upon his brain in the shape of a picture of work performed. He tried to swear, but could not move his lips properly. Yet, in some way, he got up. His limbs seemed to weigh tons. He was frightfully weak. Dimly he wondered if he could manage to hypnotize Williams and suggest away his fears—make his dying easier. Trying not to breath the vile stench, he reached the sled. Williams, his face uncovered and frost bitten, with one bare hand out of the furs, as if he had raised it with the idea of protecting himself against

something, was dead. . . . Barney went back to Dick, threw more wood on the fire, and woke his friend.

"We're not going to quit like this"—Barney wondered at his voice—what there was of it—high pitched and strange—"Dick, we aren't going to lie here to die. Williams has cashed in—no sled to drag. We'll take our rifles, matches—just what we must have to go on—and travel till we drop. There may be some game left in Alaska, and—it will soon be day!"

Dick opened glassy eyes and stared vaguely, and Barney shivered with something other than cold. Three times during the years they lived together did Barney—forgetting that he was also terrible to look at—believe that starvation and weariness had driven his friend mad. And this was the first time. Therefore—harking back to the early evolution of the race—he shook his friend with the tender yet frantic eagerness of a frightened child, repeating the words he had just spoken. With a great thrill of joy he saw Dick begin to rouse himself in a natural but painful way.

"All . . . right." With Barney's help Dick managed to get to his feet. "Dead, eh?" He indicated the finally silent sled. "Of course we must leave it. There will be madness among the wolves, if any come this way hungry enough," he added, wondering if even a starving wolf would tear at what flesh lay among Barney's furs.

They gathered together the few essentials, the snow now blinking back the weakness of their eyes. It was probably the last walk they would make together, but they weren't going to talk about that end of it. Almost more difficult to fight than their weakness was their appreciation of the futility of all effort. What was the use of going on when there was nothing to eat and all game seemed to have left the world, and when by and by they would fall down—to get up no more? It was so tempting to lie down at once, to try to get comfortable, to be eased of the awful effort of keeping on their feet—to die and have done with it. To keep going was such a fearful trouble, and there was no sense in it. Besides, it was so cold!

Ahead, and not far away, were the trees. There came into Barney's wandering mind the memory that to doubt the existence of God had always seemed to him to be a sign of lack of intelligence—it was so obvious that there must be a God. And, of course, the God who had made what was really a wonderful universe could do anything. This seemed axiomatic, whether one regarded God as a being, a spirit, or a sort of mathematical X. Well, then, reasoned Barney, as he stumbled painfully along, this God must be aware of everything in His universe—aware of everything. Consequently, God must be aware that Dick and himself were badly up against it. So! His mind fumbled with his reasoning—what was it all about, anyway? Oh yes,

God knew that Dick and he were up against it. Well, nothing wonderful about that—they knew that, too; and so would anyone who could see them. Closing his eyes against the glare, Barney stumbled a few yards ahead of his partner.

God was Reality, and now He seemed more real than ever—as if He were walking somewhere close, a bit ahead, a trifle toward the skies. And suddenly Barney spoke to God with all the intensity left to him.

"God," he whispered so that Dick could not hear him—"God, I have never yet asked You a favor—never prayed to You for help. Now I want you to help Dick. I don't quite see how You can help him to get out of this without helping me as well, but I guess You can do it. Now—as a favor, God—get Dick out of this mess. Never mind me. Of course I would like to get out, too. You know that, and I am not pretending otherwise. But I am willing to die if you'll help Dick. Don't laugh at me about that 'willing to die'! I know that I have nothing to say about it—there is nothing I can do. But You know what I mean. Go ahead and do it, please! I never asked You to do me a favor before!"

They struggled on, nearing the trees. Then, suddenly—hidden from him before by reason of his weakened eyes and the piled snow about the spruce—Barney saw a small cabin! He raised his eyes, and whispered:

"Thanks, God!"

Then he pointed, and Dick saw; and the sight of that shack acted like a cordial, putting new life into them, stimulating them to extra effort.

"Who . . . in the world . . . can be . . . living here?" panted Dick, painfully.

"I see no smoke—maybe it's deserted," answered Barney, ready to sneer at his easy belief in God's answer to his request, his old idea that God found amusement in the sufferings of sentient things springing up rejuvenated at what seemed like a trick—light-headedly thinking that God had in some way arranged the appearance of this cabin to raise their hopes, only to crumple them the more hopelessly by having them find it empty of life and food.

They floundered through the last yards of soft snow. There was no sign of life about the cabin. A keenly cutting wind began to sweep across the plain.

"If whoever owns the place has only left a handful of coffee," muttered Dick, wistfully.

Barney reached the door first—it swung drunkenly open. Across the step lay the skeleton of a man—only too obviously the last occupant.

Barney lifted his head with what defiance was left to him. “So!” he growled, hoarsely. “I asked You a favor, and you play a trick like this! This poor devil starved to death, eh? And You show us his finish so we may know what ours will be—as if we did not know already. Damned funny, eh? Well, laugh! But it seems pretty poor sport to me—amusing Yourself with two helpless men!”

“Barney!” Dick gasped.

“Yes, Dick—I guess the poor devil was either hurt and died as he reached home, or else was taken sick and starved to death because he couldn’t hunt game—dying when he made his last effort to go out. But it’s queer there are no rags about the bones and the wolves have left them intact. There’s quite a mystery here.”

The shock of their disappointment had made them weaker than ever. Their eyes met and they tried to grin.

“Shall we go in?” suggested Dick.

“May as well. Find the bunk and lie down. If I move this pathetic remnant we may be able to close the door—be warmer then.” Barney leaned his rifle against the cabin. His head ached terribly. What was the use? With a last flash of anger he decided to leave the bones where they were and stood upright again. Inside, Dick had struck a match. Then Barney saw the caribou—a small herd of them, apparently.

As he snatched at his rifle he wondered if he had strength to aim straight. Then scornfully he called himself a quitter. God had done His part; ashamed, Barney saw that the rest was up to him. His actions were automatic, and while he acted he thought, “Some fools would call me ‘superstitious.’ It stands to reason that God can answer prayer if He wants to. I don’t take back a thing—the cruelty, the sufferings of the world prove God to be a fiend. But it seems that He can be decent at times!”

As the rifle cracked Dick came to the door. “What are you shooting at? I found a sealed tin of coffee!” he almost screamed.

“And I couldn’t miss if I tried!” yelled Barney, as he brought down another of the disappearing herd.

They fed, restraining as best they could the tendency to overload their abused stomachs. And the mystery of that cabin came over them. It was one of several mysterious cabins that came into their lives in the North, and another of those seeming miracles by which their lives were saved, which Dick called direct interventions of Providence, and which Barney liked to call Circumstance, while somewhat doubtful about the exactness of his language.

They made theories about the cabin and its dead owner, about the way of his dying, and all the rest of it. But they never solved the mystery. They rested three days, and decided that the fourth day should see them continuing their journey to the Mission on the Kuskokwin. They felt that it was their duty to tell the priest about his brother's death—sparing him the unpleasant details—and, besides, they had no other destination in mind.

The night before they left, while Dick slept, Barney lay awake, thinking. He went over the "course" of his life and Dick's, thinking about the trifles which had altered it, and how little they really had to do with its control; and from this he drifted into thinking what a matter of accident was ancestry.

He was somewhat proud of his own long line, but he grinned at the possible chances that must have determined it—if there really was such a thing as chance. And before the record of the family had been kept—what then? A man and woman meeting, perhaps, in the woods of early England. Some trivial occurrence had brought about their meeting. Perhaps there was a mutual attraction. Perhaps both were lonely and wanted amusement—what passed for "love." (Barney considered LOVE was the rarest thing in the world!) No thought of consequence. A bantering word, a kiss. Never a thought of the lives that might come after, with all their hopes, fears, joys, sufferings. And so all over the world. Chance, circumstance, circumstance. But, behind it all, God . . . God, pulling the strings to make His puppets dance! There was no doubt about that. Apart from his own conviction, the recognition of God by millions dead and alive—this was greater than the strength of logic. And to argue, as some do, that the idea of God was only an idea projected by human mind upon infinity was in itself the "projection" of a weaker mind—a mind lacking the truth to admit its *feeling* of God's existence, that "unknowable Something underlying all phenomena."

But WHY? Barney lay very quiet. All about was quiet. There was no wind. The night seemed to lie heavily upon the world.

"Why?" Barney deliberately addressed God, as he had done the day they found the cabin. "Since men have such a short time in which to be conscious, why not let them be happy during that time? If there were an after life—but, no; consciousness is dependent upon a proper supply of blood to the brain; cut off the blood supply and the individual immediately become unconscious. Death cuts it off—the circulation ceases. If there were an after life I might build up a philosophy upon it and find a reason for suffering. But the more we know the more certain do we become that death ends the individual. Why did You put us here? Oh, I know I am well off—health, brains, everything. I have really no kick coming. But so many have nothing—nothing but their sufferings. Why? Tell me why, God! Why did

You put us here to suffer and die? If there is another life, why don't we know there is? Why the mystery of our existence? Tell me why! I demand to know! I have the right! You put me here without giving me any choice—in common justice I have a right to know why You did this! Tell me, then! All through nature I can see a certain law of abstract justice—will the Power Who Caused nature fail where His creation succeeds, in being just? I will not abuse any knowledge You may give me—You know that! Tell me! In Your own way, give me light. I demand to know why I exist! I *will* know!"

Barney concentrated all his powerful will upon his demand. His manner of addressing the Deity was perhaps novel, but, after all, it was simply prayer raised to the nth. He was, in his own way, "wrestling with the Lord in prayer," and the striking intensity of it was due to his feeling of certainty regarding the existence and nearness of God. He felt as if he were speaking to a Being who heard him as surely as Dick would hear him. And he felt sure that God could answer his question—in some way—that if he could only ask it in the correct way he would get the answer. And he felt sure that he must *compel* God to answer. His was more than faith. Not a hair's breadth did he allow his thought to swerve from his question. Steadily he concentrated upon it. His entire being was given over to his demand. He seemed to be *lifting himself within his body*. It was as if his body were only the outer, well-fitting cover of his real self. He no longer spoke the words. God knew what he wanted. Barney held himself to where he felt he had lifted himself—nearer to God than ever before—demanding an answer to his petition. He could feel every particle of himself stiffened and lifted within his body, with the power of his will focused between his eyes. There he waited, allowing never a thought to come between him and his demand. Had he not practiced putting all thought out of his mind—making his mind a complete blank and keeping it that way—for many hours during the past few years, it is doubtful if he could have continued to concentrate upon his demand so unswervingly for so long a time. He no longer felt the touch of anything against his body. Had he done so the thought of what touched him must have necessarily arisen. For fully five minutes there was nothing in Barney's mind but the question he was asking his God and the feeling of the presence of that God. Steadily he waited for the answer—demanding it.

The strain was tremendous, but he drew fresh strength from hitherto unsounded depths of soul. Then, suddenly, Barney felt *that an answer was coming*. He had no idea what shape the answer would take, nor did he try to imagine anything about it. With a tremendous certainty he felt that God was about to answer his prayer, and he lifted himself further, as it were, to receive that answer.

More sharply marked than ever was the feeling that he himself was something apart from his body, while in it; with an almost burning sensation the power of his willing focused between his eyes. The answer was coming. God was about to tell him why he existed! . . . And then! For one moment his steadily directed purpose to demand an answer from God halted. For a single instant he felt *surprised*—a slight feeling of astonishment at his having compelled God to answer his request pulsed through him. (Considering the intense strain, and the really astonishing result, this was perhaps excusable.) The feeling of surprise drowned out, as it were, the powerfully concentrated demand. At the same instant there came to him a vague feeling of fear—as if *the knowing that he was about to hear "the voice" of God had* been more than he could stand without being slightly frightened, brave man though he was. . . . Barney felt himself falling away from the spiritual height to which he had lifted himself, and made a desperate effort to recover himself. But even as he made the effort he felt that it was too late. A multitude of other thoughts rushed in between Barney and his thought of God. Then he knew that he had failed—that it was his own fault that he had failed; that if he had been a little stronger he would have received an answer to his question! A feeling of great weakness came over him—the natural reaction from the tremendous strain of his sustained effort.

"Damn!" he muttered, but he was not angry. Instead, an unusual feeling of peace and content filled him—which, of course, he explained by some law of psychological mechanics.

But Barney never tried that experiment again; and he often wondered at the emotional condition which had prodded him into it, disliking what he called the "weakness" of "crying for help."

X

THEY had packed up as much meat as they could handle—they did not care to use the sled again—and were ready to start. Barney waved a hand, indicating the interior of the old cabin.

"You're a mystery, but we thank you! Whoever built you has saved our lives—with the help of the caribou—for that coffee certainly put new life into us. To you, therefore . . ."

"You oratorical goat!" Dick jabbed him in the ribs.

"Goat!" laughed Barney. "Hear him!" He returned the jab, and Dick, somewhat overbalanced by the stuff in his arms, brought a foot down heavily upon the end of one of the floor planks, which was loose, and which gave under his weight, almost twisting his ankle.

"Hurt?" asked Barney, relieving him of his burden.

Dick stamped a tentative foot. "No, but it was a narrow squeak. Might have made me unable to travel for days. Funny about that plank—it's only about two feet long!"

"It is!" Barney was on his knees, examining it, wondering at his extraordinary curiosity concerning a likely enough happening in such a rickety building. "It's like a small trap door. Looks like it had been made to lift in and out. You canted it when your elephantine hoof centered on it." He thrust an arm into the hole, underneath the floor. "Hell—what's this?" and lifted out a small sack filled with gold dust!

The partners stared at each other in a sort of awed silence. Then Barney put the sack down and again reached under the floor. He swore softly, and pulled out another sack, then another, until there were ten in all—about thirty thousand dollars in the ten sacks. He made himself as comfortable as possible, and patted the sacks gently, while Dick did his best to appear unconcerned by trying to light an empty pipe.

"My dear Sir Richard"—as always in unusual situations, Barney's drawl was accentuated—"my dear Sir Richard, again have the imperial gods of the chances smiled! Should I say that we are 'lucky guys'?"

"I'd say it was like a bloomin' book I once read—something about a pirate who buried his gold some place, then killed the men who dug the hole

—so their skeletons would scare away the ghosts, or something!" answered Dick. "Truth is stranger than fiction," he added, bromidically.

"Bound to be," replied Barney, didactically, "because fiction is only the reflection of the real—the shadow, as it were. And, of course, the real is more solid than the shadow. Ahem!"

"You lunatic! Talk sense and get down to earth! You're more excited than I am about this gold, and you're trying to make out you're not. So you may as well admit it. What are we going to do with it? We cannot carry it all with us. And where's the claim it came from? Also, we must try to find out who the skeleton was that owned it—he may have heirs!"

"He may," Barney handled one of the sacks pleasurably, "and if we find them and give this stuff to them they'll probably accuse us of having kept the greater part for ourselves! I know what heirs are like! So, the heirs, if any, can go to hell! There's more than a hundred and twenty pounds of gold in these sacks, as near as I can guess, and no doubt the heirs, if any, would expect us to pack it out for them, when we are going to have all we can do to get out ourselves. Perhaps, if we did, they would say, 'Thank you!' perhaps they wouldn't. Oh, I know what heirs are like. They haven't done a thing to earn what they inherit, except to pray the relative will die and leave the stuff to them soon. And, oh, how they hate the idea of an inheritance tax!"

Dick laughed, "What if the heirs turn out to be a wife and daughter?"

"That's different. I don't include a wife and daughter in the word 'heirs'—they're human beings. Heirs are generally thin-lipped old maids with well-developed whiskers, who seldom take a bath and never clean their teeth; who love cats and whose blood is as cold as a lizard's. They pray to God a whole lot when there's anybody to hear 'em, and they weep copiously at the funeral, while keeping one eye on the other heirs to see they don't beat 'em off the mark to the lawyer to collect! Let's take another look around before we start—there may be some old letters or something."

They found nothing. Indeed, the cabin was as remarkable as it was mysterious. Except for the can of coffee and the sacks of gold, it was empty. The unclothed skeleton matched the empty bunks—two of them—never a trace of an old blanket, not a rag, a stick of furniture, or a cooking pot! A can of coffee and a skeleton—not a clew to how long the skeleton had lain in the doorway.

And where had the gold come from? Had the skeleton anything to do with it? Did the snow round about hide a worked claim? Most unlikely—no sign of a dump, of anything that looked like a mine. Theories were many,

explanations *nil*. They decided to cache all the gold but what they would need, to buy dogs and an outfit, and return in the summer.

"There may be some sort of store at the Mission—don't want to go to Sitka," said Barney.

Dick laughed, "It's a good job my bump of locality is better than yours. Are you certain Sitka is the nearest town?"

"I am not," answered Barney, whose absolute lack of any sense of locality was one of Dick's favorite jokes. "And what's more, I don't care. When we turn this gold into cash we'll take a holiday—the prairies for mine! I've had a longing to wallow in prairies for a long time!"

"What on earth is there about a prairie to entertain you?" Dick grinned.

"Don't know! Never saw a prairie. Did you ever feel that you just had to do a certain thing? You don't know why, and you feel foolish for paying any attention to the feeling. That's my case. For some time I have had that feeling—the feel that I *must*, absolutely must, go to the prairies! It's like one of Casey's hunches, I suppose!"

"But what prairies?" asked Dick. "There are hundreds of thousands of square miles of prairies in North America. What particular square yard are you headed for?"

"You know what an elegant bump I have for locality," laughed Barney. "So I shall just leave it to our very kind friend the god of the chances—he's been good to us, and I feel sure he will go on being good!"

Dick shook his head dolefully. "Alas! poor Barney, he's nutty! But I won't rub it in. Let's get started."

It was by no means a pleasure trip and they sorely missed their dogs. But, alone together, no longer bothered by the unhappy Williams, no feasible traverse could baffle them, and, while they met some bad weather, they reached the Mission by a series of marches that were a credit to their powers of endurance and Dick's ability to find his way from scant directions.

They came in with the ending of the short day and the first gusts of a blizzard, and were greeted by the priest, the brother of Williams, a lonely white man hungry for the voices of his own race, who welcomed them with delight and excellent Scotch whisky, and insisted upon their staying in his own house instead of in one of the empty cabins.

From the Mission store he fitted them with much-needed clothes, and they changed while yet under the spell of wondering how two brothers could be so very different.

A little later—wanting to be done with it—Barney went to the tiny bare room which the priest called his study, to give him the message of his brother—finding the missionary alone, sitting by the red-hot stove, watching the gathering night through the snow-crusted window, while the gale seemed to hurry through the gloom like heavy, succeeding shadows.

"May I have a few words with you?" Barney, feeling very uncomfortable, almost stammered.

"Certainly." The priest, who had been indulging in his one poor luxury of dream memories, was intuitively startled.

He pushed another chair to the stove and closed the door. He was about to light the lamp when Barney asked him if he objected to sitting in the twilight, feeling that his tale would be easier telling in the gloom.

"We seem to have similar tastes." When he spoke, the pathos of his lonely years gave the priest the haloed dignity of a saint. "I, also, enjoy this light—or, rather, lack of light."

"Thank you!" Barney suppressed a shiver, although he was not cold. How should he begin? To tell any man the bare details of his brother's dying would be bad enough, but, in addition to this, to have to tell this kindly, unselfish priest how he had been tricked and lied to, how his sweetheart had been cruelly murdered—to retell the confession of Williams to his brother was a fearful thing to have to do. Barney began haltingly.

"Father Williams, I regret that what I am about to say will not be pleasing to you—that it will be painful." Barney paused, his usual easy grasp of language having become a feeble clutching for words with which to tell the tale as gently as possible.

"But—but it must be about my brother!" exclaimed the priest.

"How did you know that?" asked Barney, feeling that, in some way, the exclamation had smoothed his way wonderfully.

"Partly by intuition, but more likely because when you came in and began to hint at bad news—well, I am sorry, but long association has brought me to where I connect my brother with whatever unhappiness may come to me. Perhaps I have brooded too much about him," said the priest, with painful slowness.

Barney stared at the dim figure beyond the glow of the stove. His eyelids narrowed as he thought. Then he nodded his head slowly.

"I don't think"—Barney spoke softly—"I don't think, father, that I have much to tell which is unknown to you. It is very remarkable. I have heard of such men as you, but I have always doubted their existence. That is, I did not believe that real men could act so! Your brother told me a great deal that

he believed was known to himself only, and he obtained my promise that I would tell what he told me to no one but yourself. But I see now that your brother was mistaken when he thought that he alone knew of certain happenings. Yes, he was mistaken. Because, I am sure that I cannot tell you anything you do not know already, except that your brother is dead, and how he died."

The rocking chair in which the priest was sitting became still. For some time there was no sound in the room but the murmur of the stove and the draught of its chimney. Presently, when the chair resumed its normal motion, Barney knew that the first shock of his telling had passed, although the priest was far from being himself again.

A most unusual man! Barney was glad to have met him, and Barney was seldom glad to meet people. The marvel of his self-control. He had known who had stolen the money; who had killed the girl, his sweetheart; but he had crushed down his human urgings and left his brother's judgment to what he believed to be a higher court! . . . When had he found out? Probably when his brother had followed him to Alaska. What must have been his feelings? Yet he had made no sign. Williams, the criminal, never even dreamed that his brother suspected him, much less that he *knew*! For he had made no sign. Imitation of Jesus! Never a sign! Never a murmur at the wrong done to himself, but his anger had roused when a wrong was done to an Indian woman, a woman of a supposedly inferior race—a wrong not thought a wrong in that country at that time. Then his anger had risen. But he had allowed his own face to be slapped many times, and always had he turned the other cheek. Many times. There were those who would have considered him a weakling, but Barney knew him for a man—for a strong man, an admirable man! But what hours of agony, what Gethsemanes he must have known!

Then, as gently as he could—feeling that, vile as that brother had been, his death would hurt the priest—Barney told the story of the squaw man, from the evening they had met him in the village until he died on the sled, omitting the distressing details as well as he could. After the episode of the cabin, they had gone back and buried Williams; but Dick and Barney had decided to say nothing about the cabin until they had made inquiries, so Barney ended his tale with "The earth was frozen pretty hard, but we made him a fair grave."

"Thank you," murmured the priest. "I know that he gave you much trouble that you have left untold! I thank you!"

Barney passed his tobacco. They filled and lighted their pipes and smoked in silence, while, outside, the night roared and the snow beat against

the cabin. Once or twice the priest made as if to speak, but checked himself. So the silence continued, the priest trying to suppress his emotions, Barney thinking—his mind wandering upon the long road of evolution which life had traveled while growing from a tiny jellyfish to such a man as sat across the stove.

Sometimes the priest would stop rocking—when the poignant memories roused by the news gripped him, the ever-living love for the dead girl that was tearing at his celibate heart. Occasionally, but dumbly, he would wonder about the destiny of his brother's spirit, craving forgetfulness of the love that would not die and the proper mood in which to say the prayers he believed to be so greatly needed by the tortured soul in purgatory.

"A brutal difference of opinion might help him," thought Barney. "This country in winter is bad enough without trouble of the emotions, and unless he is shocked out of himself, as it were, Lord knows what will happen—he's had just about all that a man can stand in this damnable life, and, although he would still mumble that God is good, to hear some one say that He is not will help him." So Barney raised his voice suddenly:

"Sympathy drives me to the conclusion that the God who made us is far more cruel than anything He has made can be," he exclaimed.

The priest started, staring through the dark to where Barney sat, as if he believed he had not heard aright. So that would-be surgeon of the emotions repeated his words.

"Are you mocking me?" The priest's tone was one of surprise, and so rudely had he been jerked out of his stream of memories that he gasped slightly.

Barney struck a match and put it to his pipe—which did not require lighting—continuing as if the priest had not spoken, as if he had paused only to light his pipe.

"It would be funny if it were not pathetic! Because the people of the world, in spite of their sufferings, have knelt to this God who brought them into the world to suffer, and called Him 'good' and worshiped Him. And they allow certain other men to call themselves 'priests' and 'Christians,' after they have split the simple gospel of Jesus into several hundred sects and are no more Christians than I am. And how amusing their conception of a 'good God'! He demands a living sacrifice of His own son to appease his anger—an anger 'caused' by the unfortunate creatures He has made! Somewhat bloodthirsty for a 'good God'! Also, he demands an adulation which would be considered contemptible in a human being. So, and those who do not happen to be born where this terrible creed is taught are called

‘heathens’—even when they are gentle Buddhists—and the priests of this creed, with its several hundred quarreling sects, go to other countries to teach its ‘beauties’ to these ‘heathens.’ There was a bishop, for instance, who was so anxious to carry the creed of this ‘God of love’ to the Chinese that he said he would ‘make the Chinese Christians if it cost a million dollars and the lives of a million Chinese.’ As I said, it would be funny if it were not so pathetic!”

The priest had lit the lamp, and was standing up staring at Barney. He was annoyed, but a lifelong curbing of his anger and a suspicion of Barney’s reason for speaking prevented his showing any irritation. Instead, he spoke with gentleness.

“At least, you must admit that we priests have kept before humanity the faith in immortal life,” he said.

Barney did not admit this. He believed that the idea of another life had originated in the dreams of the savage, and that men did not need priests to keep it alive in their minds. But he did not say this. He both liked and admired the priest, and regarded his creed merely as a mistaken view, as he did in Dick’s case. Besides, his object had been accomplished—the priest had been roused from his mournful memories. So he got to his feet, grinning, and slapped Father Williams on his shoulder.

“You win!” he said, heartily.

“You’re a queer chap,” the priest smiled, “and I think I know why you spoke that way. Do you play chess?”

“Do I? I would rather play chess than eat!”

“Have you anything to do this winter?”

Barney laughed. “Want to put in the rest of the cold weather over a chess board, eh?”

“Shall we begin after supper?”

“You’re on!” agreed Barney.

XI

BUT if Barney was content to think, play chess, and take long walks until spring made it possible for the partners to visit the deserted cabin and seek the source of the gold, Dick was not. The society of the other sex was a driving need to Carew, and the barter of her charms by some wasted professional of "love," seeking the North as the last market on earth where her wares could find a sale, held no sort of enticement for him. And here was Barney's perennial worry. Time and again he imagined himself as looking at the face of his dead friend, yet barred by his sense of justice from taking any action against the outraged husband. But of course he could not speak to Dick about this. The subject never came up between them. Close as was their friendship, neither would have dreamed of invading the privacy of the other. So Barney could only worry and wish that Dick would get married, even if marriage brought about the dreaded curtailment of their partnership. For himself, he would never marry. He was on the trail of two remarkable mental experiments, and the philosophy he was evolving held a lifetime of employment and enjoyment which marriage, should his financial affairs warrant it, would merely serve to interrupt, or at least delay. Besides, he could neither imagine himself as falling in love or any woman falling in love with him. However, on this occasion, not only Eros, but also the grinning devil whose delight is the deluded confidence of deceived husbands, smiled upon Dick, and he came back to the Mission with his assurance increased and his delight in the charms of women stimulated. Barney was nearing one of his strange experiments, and only required a certain drug to take the risk of it—and he knew there was danger. He had become an adept in putting all thought from his mind—lying still, with an absolutely blank mind, not even feeling the bed upon which he lay; and he had, by repeated suggestion, reached the place where he knew whenever he dreamed that he was dreaming, and could study himself during those dreams. These exercises being necessary before he could make the experiment of plunging into his subconscious mind to study the record left there by his ancestors, from the first protoplast to his father—to watch, as it were, parts of the long moving picture of their many lives.

But such things would have to wait—it always irritated Barney to have to wait; and often it seemed as if he had been born into an hostile

environment, condemned to fight against circumstances which prevented his thinking his way to the solution of the many problems of the world. And this, of course, was but another feature of his dissatisfaction with the Cause of things which, when he was greatly stirred, prompted him to the "blasphemies" which so horrified Dick Carew.

For Barney could not accept the word "blasphemy," and he was inclined to consider those who did so as, at least, lacking in perception. "For why," he would argue, "should we sing the praises of a Power who put us here without giving us any choice, who has allowed such horrible agonies to continue for ages; against whom any thinking man could bring an indictment which, if he put in everything, he could not write in a lifetime? All religions are an apology for the Power, who does not apologize to us, as he should, for torturing us—an apology for the torturer, invented by his victims. They have imagined a future life and worked it into their religions, because, if they did not, their apology would be meaningless. And not only is there no proof of this future life—all our knowledge tends to show us that there is no such life. Yet they keep on building churches! Better spend the money relieving the distress caused by the God to whom they pray! I do not say this to hurt the feelings of Dick, or anyone else who may hear me, but because it is my honest conviction, and I am not afraid to say what I think. Of course, there is a chance of my getting hell for it!"

And it had often amused him, after making one of his remarks, to notice the expression on the faces of certain "religious" people of narrow, and of course cruel, minds. He could see the subconscious urge to kill him, and it tickled him to think that such as these—unclean as to their bodies, avaricious, cruel, bigoted, who treated their wives after the "best" biblical fashion (that is, made beasts of burden of them), who were entirely lacking in ideals—it amused Barney to think that the world, after hearing him call God a fiend, would consider such creatures as being more "religious" than he was, and, consequently, more likely to go to heaven! It was very funny. Often when thinking of the people who had died, and who had received the popular vote entitling them to paradise—he would wonder why it was called "heaven," and why anyone should wish to go there!

So, while he had to wait for his experiments, he took his thoughts with him on the expedition to the cabin; although he said good-by with genuine regret to the kindly priest of the Mission and was ready to admit that the priest was a better man than himself.

But the clearing of the snow gave no clew to the mystery of the cabin's late inhabitant or the place where he found his gold—if it was *his* gold. They

prospected for miles, but found themselves no wiser than they had been the winter before.

Came a night when, after supper, the two men smoked with a sense of disappointment irritating them, spite the gold they had acquired so easily—for, obviously, heirs, if any, to a property so found would involve a search impossible; thus, Dick and his partner could use the money without qualms of conscience. But, still, they were annoyed. Not because they coveted more gold, which the finding of the lost mine might have yielded them, but because they had failed to find what they had set out to find, and the *promise* in the *feeling* of the spring, reacting against their somewhat determined characters, enlarged their failure in their minds until, although they knew the hopelessness of any further seeking, they were inclined to call themselves quitters. So they sat in silence until the introspective Barney, seeking, as always, the cause of any unusual emotion, laughed.

"What?" Dick almost growled. "I don't feel humorous!"

"No, you owl; and you think that we're feeling blue and all that sort of thing because we haven't found the place where our friend the skeleton got his gold—don't you?"

"Well, what else can it be?"

"The moon of the year," replied Barney, sagely.

Dick stared at his partner. Then, with great gravity, he reached for Barney's wrist and felt his pulse.

"Not bad," approved the latter. "You are apt to find *that* affected, also—although—er—my inevitable calm mind acts as an antidote usually!"

"Construe!" demanded Dick.

" 'Tis the time of the year when poets most make poetry," said Barney, "and honorable men seek adventure of a more active if less mental sort. 'Tis now that the snows of yesteryear have lifted like a mantle of gloom from the world—leaving in their place a verdant expanse which will soon become a playground for the young of many species, when the birds and the beasts, and the—— Ouch!"

Dick, who had brought his hand down between Barney's shoulder blades with enough force to knock the ordinary man down, followed his physical objection with a verbal one, remarking:

"If you say any more along that line I shall feel justified in considering you insane and in tying you up while I spend the gold in one exceeding burst. Suppose the spring is to blame for my gloom and irritation and your poetical folly—suppose so, then what's to be done about it, eh? Answer me that?"

Barney simulated a yawn. “Let’s go out!”

“Outside?”

“Yes—to Vancouver, to the prairies!”

Dick pretended to think.

“How long, Oh Lord? Four years, isn’t it?” prompted Barney.

“Nearly five,” admitted Dick, “and we have many thousands of dollars.” He negligently kicked the pile of gold sacks.

“It will still be spring, if we hurry, when we get outside,” went on Barney, “although I admit that that does not matter greatly, because, in one way, it’s always spring.”

Dick, thinking, missed this cryptic remark. He stared into the night through the cabin door.

“It’s queer—about this cabin being here—for us, as it were!” he said, slowly.

“A lot depends on the point of view,” answered Barney, “but the older I grow the more queer do some happenings seem.” He paused, affected also by what might have been called without impropriety *the spirit* of that lonely cabin and its unknown history. “But, what—do we go or not?”

“We go outside,” said Dick, with decision.

“Good egg!” quoth Barney.

But the place still held them to silence, Dick thinking but little, while Barney wondered how his adventures would seem in after years, when they came back in vague memories, some parts clearly defined, some missed altogether, like rocks through a fog on a rough sea. And from this he drifted into the greater questions of metaphysics, about which he felt certain that logic could find no solution—wondering (mind being a form of vibration) if its vibratory rate were, say, doubled, would he be able to *see* answers to which he could not *think* his way. Because one cannot think without symbols —words. When he spoke again, however, he was far from metaphysics.

“Some day,” he said, “some one will find, not more than a hundred miles from here, a very rich placer ground—richer by far than your mythical sea-beach, Dick—and make Alaska famous as the richest placer mining country in the world!”

Three months later, after Barney had diplomatically steered Dick away from certain feminine charms, and dodged the probable loss of their money to Bill Hinkman in Victoria by way of Dick’s promised “revenge,” they reached Vancouver on a steamer that worked in a seaway as if it were tied together with string, and, as previously agreed, took the train for Winnipeg.

The rest of the world seemed to be bound to the Klondike, it being the first year of the great strike; but, while practically all Dick and Barney needed to do was to harness their team and drive there, the lure of more gold held nothing for either. A holiday was what they wanted, by which Dick meant many kisses, but which to Barney meant public libraries, laboratories, and the like—to both of them a lazy loaf westward from Winnipeg, taking in some small part of the vast prairie country as they traveled—Barney being curiously set on seeing the prairies, in spite of Dick's teasing remarks about the word that rhymed with them.

(Many years later, turning restlessly on his couch, Barney found his memories of this time coming in clearer detail—the episodes so far recalled having been mere sketchy bits of men and things, hurriedly passed over.)

Late summer, wandering lazily and delightfully through that wonderful country; leagues of ocean-like land through which they drifted from village to village, sometimes by train, more often on horseback, camping out at night.

Once they tarried where Barney found a farm hand out of work who made an excellent subject for hypnotic studies, and Dick enjoyed himself after his own manner. They went on again, riding one Sunday evening into a village touched by the C. P. R., and famous in its possession of a few trees.

"The name of the place," Dick laughed, "is Nippa Creek."

"And that's all there is to it," retorted Barney—"a name! Dimly in consciousness will that name stick. A name! Life is but a series of names, names, names! Words—symbols of the real we can never touch, never understand!"

"What the hell?" Dick was puzzled. "Do you want to remember the place? What's got into you, anyway? You talk as if you were tired—but you don't get tired easily."

"Guess I'm bored, that's all," answered Barney, lamely.

They were silent for a time. The hardly picturesque village with its Indian name, its few trees (rare in that country), a small church, a cemetery, and a hospital in course of erection. Sunday evening, and that sacred sort of quiet that goes with it.

"Perhaps you are disappointed," went on Dick, presently. "You looked forward to seeing the prairies, and they don't come up to your expectations. What is it that rhymes to prairies?" He tried to turn their moods into more cheerful ways. "I don't see any?"

"You go to the devil," Barney managed to grin, wondering what was the matter, feeling as if something unusual were going to happen. "Even *you*

couldn't find a fairy in this place. It would turn the prettiest girl the world ever saw into a worn-out rancher's wife who has to work eighteen hours a day, rear a large family, and eat with the rancher! Ye gods, what a fate!"

From which cynical remark Dick knew that the weight of the mystery of existence was pressing heavily upon his friend.

"What the hell is there to do?" Barney, who could usually, but not always, amuse himself with his thoughts, turned to stare through the window of their room. He was certainly, for him, in a curious mood, thought Dick, watching him, trying to think of some way of getting him back to his normal self, while the dusk gathered, the light breeze carried an edge of chill, whispering that Indian summer was merging into the season of sadness.

"I was thinking of going to church," said Dick, with some diffidence, although he gratified his desire for religious stimulation whenever their wanderings made it possible.

Barney did not immediately answer. He respected his friend's position, even admired his stout clinging to the faith of his fathers, incongruous as that clinging might seem in a man of so many varied love affairs; but never had Barney gone to church with him, although often tempted, because he was often lonely, although Dick never suspected it—never dreamed that Barney's way of life brought about fits of loneliness which were an actual physical agony, when his chest would ache and his philosophical speculations were like grit in the mouth of a thirsty man. No full-blooded individual can throw a spanner into the machinery of nature without being made acutely aware of it by his sublimated yearnings.

And this night the mood was more than ever troublesome. He was tempted to drink heavily, while his idealistic yearning brought about a feeling of expectancy, not unlike that of a child on circus day! The latter was unique—Barney could remember nothing like it. He murmured, absently:

"Believe I'd like to go to church with you!"

"Eh?" Dick was astonished.

"That is"—Barney recovered somewhat of his poise—"that is, if they'll let me into the place!"

"Oh"—Dick was greatly pleased—"I'll tell them that you're a deaf-and-dumb friend of mine, quite harmless in spite of your fearful appearance, and ____"

"Don't kid, Dick, please! I don't know what the hell's the matter with me, but something is!" Which was perhaps the weakest remark ever made by Barney Hilliard.

With English restraint, these two always avoided showing their affection for each other, the depth of which only they themselves could understand. But now—an irresistible impulse—Dick put an arm about Barney's shoulder. Immediately he withdrew it, embarrassed. To cover this embarrassment he said:

"We'd better start—the interval between the tolling of the bell is getting longer. Just as if the bellman was getting tired!"

"Oh!" drawled Barney, his mood gone, feeling like laughing and wondering why he felt that way so suddenly—deciding that it was simply reaction, but inclined, he knew not why, to doubt this eminently reasonable explanation.

"Come on, you old roughneck," exclaimed Dick.

Thus, the gods who stage the greatest of human moments and call the play "Coincidence," arranged that church-going.

There were no automobiles in those days, but various horse vehicles testified to the religious feelings of the ranchers, or their wives. Inside, a general air of weariness seemed to hold the women, and weariness had molded nearly all of them. A lack of intelligence, with its so often accompanying characteristic cruelty, limned the faces of the men.

The bell ceased as they entered. The church was well filled. But even in Alaska they had seen more pretentious places of worship. Here was a crudity worse than barrenness, and the truly hideous whiskered woman who pounded the harmonium—her legs working like those of a tired bicycle rider—fitted into the picture with a nicety impossible of description.

The few smoky oil lamps blurred other impressions into a benefiting softness. The service began, but Barney took no interest in it. Instead, his mind turned to his hypnotic experiments with the farm hand, and the theory of personality those experiments had proved. The mind of a man may be likened to a *cloud* of stuff which is partly conscious and partly under control of the individual. What we call *personality* is the observed result of the condition of the evolution of this *cloud* of mind stuff.

Because it is all potentially conscious and controllable by its ego, it is affected, through *suggestion*, by every mind with which it comes in contact; and the lower its evolution the greater its susceptibility, the less is it under control of its ego—its center. Hence we see the effect of "religion" upon lower minds, their susceptibility to panic, their lack of the "calm mind" (*i.e.*, controlled mind) of the thinker. And since all this mind stuff is inherited, all of it has been affected by past generations—is a jumble of memories, called either concealed or subconscious, with the exception of that part which is

under control of the ego, and even that is unstable and valid only between certain degrees of temperature, dependent upon a proper blood supply, subject to shock, insanity and the like, while the uncontrolled subconscious is liable to assume a personality and overthrow the controlling ego. It was a vast subject. And the egos were only controlling centers of the same stuff, as the sun is the controlling center of the planets. An analogy runs through the universe!

As the service continued Barney thought of how the suggestible minds, hardly under control of their "owners," had been subjected to epidemics like the South Sea bubble, religious revivals, spiritualism, witch dreads, demonism, crusades, millerism, and the like, but took comfort in the fact that, in spite of occasional setbacks, the world was becoming more sane—the clouds of mind stuff were coming under control of their egos in a way only known to the great men of past generations.

He was aroused from his thinking by the entrance of a young woman who took her place in the pew occupied by Dick and himself. He took no notice of her, but her coming caused him to turn from his theory to the nervousness of the very young clergyman.

In England there is a certain Order of the ministry which sends its young men out over the world to preach, vowed for four years to celibacy. Many of these men are, in addition to being young, hopelessly inadequate, but their courage is such as to arouse sympathy, if not admiration. So, Barney saw nothing to laugh at in the boy conducting the service—tired, nervous, red-nosed and sniffling—although the majority of the congregation was tittering. He felt tempted to leave the pew and kick some of the loose-lipped men expressing their amusement. The fact of the minister being a member of the Order referred to and, consequently, an Englishman, of course added to the enjoyment of the congregation.

Flushing painfully, the boy began to read the day's lesson from the Old Testament. It was his first Sunday of work on a new continent, and the day had not been kind. Riding from village to village, he had conducted three services since morning—traveling thirty miles on horseback after a year's absence from the saddle. His head ached vilely, he breathed with difficulty, he was saddle sore, dead tired, nervous, lonely, and homesick. The antagonistic attitude of the congregation added to his unhappiness. He did his best, but his voice trembled.

" 'And so it came to pass' "—here he was compelled to blow his nose —" 'it came to pass that Moses sent messengers into the land of Canada, and said unto them, 'Study well the manners of these Canadians——' "

At this point a hoarse voice broke into a loud laugh, and the poor boy, realizing his error, stopped reading, almost in tears.

"What a shame!" the little lady sitting at Barney's side whispered, and for the first time he looked at her. Their eyes met, and on the instant of their meeting the gentle soul of the maid wrote Destiny across the checkered page of the life of Barney Hilliard.

He was acutely conscious that he was blushing, and felt grateful for the poor lighting system of the church. The girl blushed delightfully, but felt quite comfortable about it. That instinct of good women—which Barney would have said has been developed like the protective coloring of certain fish and insects—told her he could be trusted, in spite of his lack of facial beauty. His obvious physical strength impressed her. But it is difficult to find a commonplace explanation for the sudden disappearance of conventional reserve in a girl noted for her shyness, her avoidance of men, her dislike of dancing—in a girl who had never had a sweetheart, although possessed of unusual beauty both of body and of mind. As an old woman in the village said afterward, "It looks as if she had waited for him all the time, knowing he was coming—an' him an Englishman, too!"

The poise, the coolness, the self-control of Barney Hilliard had left him. He was trembling. Observing this and accepting immediately the care of him without question, although as yet unaware she had done so, she offered to share her hymn book. At this interesting moment Dick Carew leaned toward his friend and whispered:

"Thought I knew the parson! It's little Peter Carew, my cousin. Don't you remember? Quiet, simple sort. I must see him after church."

Vaguely Barney remembered the boy who looked so pathetically lonely in his white surplice, while he grasped the opportunity to establish less distressing relations with the charming girl who had so easily carried the hitherto impregnable citadel of his love.

He had murmured his thanks as he accepted a share of the proffered hymn book; now, with his rather intriguing smile and the manner called "gall" by his enemies, he whispered:

"If you don't mind my introducing myself, my name is Hilliard." Here the man whom those same enemies admitted was "scared of nothing" shivered at his temerity, and added, hastily: "I have references, too, you see! The minister is my friend's cousin. I am, therefore, the friend of the cousin of the minister!"

With an effort she controlled an outburst of joyous laughter. Then she raised her head, and their eyes met in that complete understanding which

comes too rarely to man and woman, in that subtle mingling of soul which is called "love at first sight," the love to which the universe moves. It is a curious phenomenon, but invariably those few who are so fortunate as thus to meet and mingle feel a strange resurge of memory which seems to span eternity and whisper of past ages lived in love together! And at that moment Barney Hilliard—who, it may be remembered, *believed* in nothing—would not only have argued in favor of personal immortality, but also in support of the doctrine of "twin souls"!

"Mine," she whispered, lowering her eyes, and now afraid of her "terrible boldness"—"my name is Ethel Winfred!"

It was like the outpouring of the innocent love of two young children. The man whose ambition had always been intellectual development, added, simply:

"Barney is my other name—at least, that's what I'm called!"

Again their eyes met, and Barney added, desperately—desperately afraid, desperately in earnest, desperately eager, "Please don't think I'm impertinent, or a rotter, or anything, but—but, may I talk to you after church?"

He had once faced a wounded, maddened grizzly with less concern about the outcome. It seemed now that his whole world, his future, his everything hung in the balance of Ethel's consent to talk with him. Surely, surely she could see——? He clenched his hands, waiting. To have been waiting to be shot would have meant less suspense.

She looked down—the church and the service were a million miles away—then raised her piquant face, eloquent with charm, speaking bravely:

"I don't know you." At this Barney became cold all over. "I don't know you, but if you won't think any the less of me—if you won't think that I walk home with every strange man who asks me to, I'll—I don't know why I am doing this—I'll—Yes!" And she blushed the more, becoming furiously intent upon the useful hymn book.

The crude walls of the church melted away, opening upon an infinite paradise which beckoned to a future of delight. What Barney whispered under cover of the harried gasps of the unhappy harmonium was afterward a matter of teasing discussion. That his reserve vanished, and that he told all about himself, and that the girl told a great deal about herself, was perhaps all. But it always seemed that so much more had been said. Perhaps the moving pictures of a forgotten past were flashing, half seen and half unseen, through their minds, and so their memory of that evening always bore vague impressions into the afterwards for which they could not account, and about

which they argued happily. That Ethel was about a year the younger, and a few other facts—there were times when Barney could have sworn that she had only time to tell him this when the service was finished and they left the church. That she was a trained nurse who, in spite of her youth, was to have charge of the nursing department of the hospital when it was ready, was added smoothness to their happiness. They could discuss matters from a scientific standpoint which the ordinary woman would hesitate to mention, which a stupid world has allowed to become embarrassing—prudery clinging mudlike to the dainty skirts of modesty! And while Barney, with sublime egotism, accepted the greater wonder in so lovely a girl loving him—in his not having to "woo" or "win" her—he did find it necessary to "explain" this sweet phenomenon.

It fitted beautifully into his theory of personality! The mind of the average woman is not sufficiently evolved to make an important decision when her emotions are involved—the suggestible, uncontrolled part of her cloud of mind stuff is swayed by her inherited impressions, and she has to be "influenced"—*i.e.*, wooed and won, tricked by pretty ways, bought by the skins piled at the door of her father's wigwam. She does not know that she "loves" until the man gives her a diamond ring! In short, her love is not of the soul (which was a strange word for Barney to use in this connection), and she is so unable to understand the meaning of her own heartbeats that, in only a varying degree from the savage, she calculates the ratio of her "love" by the amount of pressure brought to bear upon her, from gifts to eloquence, instead of subjectively responding to her love need and waiting for or accepting the right man. So rare are the exceptions that many of them have become famous in history. But against this, a thinker might have asked Barney Hilliard—presuming the twin soul theory to be true (and Barney obviously leaned to it, whatever his agnosticism)—if a woman could possibly refuse to love her twin soul: could she turn down the right man for another? And all Barney could have said, being honest, was that the deeps of love were beyond his fathoming. Continuing his theoretical demonstration of his own situation, he thought:

"Ethel is different from the average! She is a personality. Naturally an intelligent girl, her training has emphasized that intelligence. She has won to great control of her cloud of mind stuff. A wave of popular feeling which would carry away the other women in the village would leave her calmly looking on." A somewhat original way of raving about the adorability of a woman! And did Barney forget that every man considers his sweetheart "different"?

Walking home with her, he reviewed his former attitude in regard to mating, coming to the conclusion that he had been wrong—that his cynicism had been caused by "youthful ignorance of the subject"!

It seemed unnecessary to tell Ethel he loved her. He knew she knew it; and there was a curious pleasure in not speaking—for a little while. But such a love as this breaks all bounds and laughs at custom, and Barney, always impatient and now more than ever impetuous, had no understanding of any other kind of love.

He went back to the room he shared with Dick, and Dick, who had been busy consoling his unhappy cousin, was surprised at the length of time Barney sat on his cot without undressing and without saying a word. He sat there long after Dick had turned in. Of course, Barney was given to long trains of thought, but this seemed different—at least, Dick sensed a difference, without being able to explain it. Had something happened? Dick felt rather worried.

And Barney was bursting to tell his friend all about it. With the egocentric attitude of a lover he expected his friend to be as delighted as he was himself. But, first, he wanted, as it were, to find out where he stood. His initial egotism had weakened. He was feeling unworthy. Would Ethel love him if she knew all about him? Casting up the debit and credit sides of the ledger of his life, he found on those blotted pages more debits than credits from the standpoint of any woman's auditing. Generous as she would be to forgive his debts, what would she think about his opinion of God? She went to church, she believed God was love! . . . He put aside the ledger! How swift it had been—that confession of love! He forgot everything in the memory of it. . . . His voice had quavered when he told her.

"I have only known you a few minutes. . . . You will think I am mad—the average girl would, I mean! You know nothing about me."

The calm mind upon which he prided himself had left him. His words eluded him. The lane leading to her cottage was deserted and shaded. He had taken her hand, and she had allowed him to keep it.

"But, I cannot help it! Please, please let me tell you. . . . Perhaps all men say the same thing, but I have never loved a girl before! There—I have told you backward! But I must tell you. I love you. I cannot help it. I loved you the moment I looked at you! Don't think I say this to every girl who lets me! I never said it before. I seem to have known you forever. Besides, it's the best sort of love. Love should be an immediate recognition, not an investigation, not a becoming acquainted, not like making up one's mind to

buy something. . . . Oh, I know I'm talking what you may call nonsense, but I cannot help it! I love you, Ethel. Will you be my wife?"

The girl said nothing, and Barney, believing against all the *feeling* that told him she loved him, felt his whole world reeling into chaos, and said, frantically:

"I suppose you'll despise me, hate me for being rude. But I love you, I love you, and always will love you and no other!" He paused, dejected. "And now I suppose you'll think me a cad and tell me to go?"

"Tell you to go!" her voice trembled delightfully. "Tell you to go, when —when I am letting you hold my hand?"

And then she was in his arms, and what followed is not possible of translation into comprehensible English! . . . That wonderful hour!

And now Barney was examining himself, and the result did not please him.

She would be hurt when she knew all about him. Of course, she would still love him, for such love as theirs was more eternal than the stars. But he could not hurt her. Could he allow Love to silence Reason, could he sink his resentment toward the Cause of Pain, could he agree with Ethel that God was good—to make her happy?

But was God cruel? How could He be when He had given him Ethel and her love?

For a long time he sat there, bowing before his fetish of intellectual honesty, and finally:

"After all, I know very little, and there may be an excellent reason for the pain of all the world which I cannot see. . . . 'Not to tell her, never to let her know!' To make her happy. I may be a coward, but—she shall never know, and to me henceforward God is good!"

He jumped from the cot. "Dick, old man, I'm in love with the sweetest girl the world ever knew, and she loves me, she loves me!"

"The hell!" exclaimed the bewildered Dick.

XII

BUT BARNEY'S honesty-harried mind continued to groan under the weight of what now seemed worse than deficiencies. Even the trembling anticipation of the waiting lover could not lighten this. Early next morning he took out his "Meditations" book, determined to get a clear view of himself by examining the entries left by the years, finding, as he expected, that its once hallowed pages only filled him with disgust!

For example, a bit of verse written when he was twenty:

> When for your morning's fancy faces bloom,
> Red lips lure yours and warm arms would entwine,
> When woman's love enthralls, ere trouble's gloom
> Clouds chillingly the day that promised fine—
> Kiss, if you will! Before the storm embrace!
> The pretty face will flit at sight of rain,
> And you in utter loneliness will trace
> Her name upon the callous sand again!

"Hell!" he muttered. "What utter damned rot—just the sort of thing a young fool would write!"

He tore out the page, and felt more comfortable. But there was much more to annoy him.

In an almost abandonment of bad language and self-contempt, he tore out another page:

> Stumbling on, the years are tiresome until happiness we find
> In the kindly joy of being decent and the decent joy of being kind.

Then he laughed. "Why does adolescence always feel called upon to preach to the world? Religious emotion and the budding sex instinct. . . . I wonder if preachers ever grow up mentally. To feel called upon to tell the world how bad it is, and how good it ought to be, is surely childish!"

He paused a while over the last remaining pages, reading:

> Certain that death ends all, it is our duty to play the game and keep fit and clean—in training. For we are all fellow victims of some fiendish power which, craving amusement, made us in order to enjoy witnessing our agonies. By helping one another we may show our contempt for that power.

Again he laughed, but with an effort. “Barney Hilliard, what an utter fool you have been, and you would have gone on being a fool if you hadn’t met a woman who loves you! It follows, then, that a man who avoids women is mentally sick, will become physically ditto as soon as he passes the meridian of his life. And to think of it—a bit of dust like you to have the supremely foolish notion that you could criticize the God that made you!” He looked at his watch. “Time to meet Ethel. . . . No, I won’t say anything to her about this stuff. Why should I when I’ve reformed. God bless her, she has made some sort of a man of me!”

An hour later, with his woman in his arms, he felt like praising God aloud—he had not imagined that such transcendent joy was possible to a human being.

“Sweetheart,” she murmured, “does it sound foolish when I say that fate took us into church together?”

“Call it fate or anything you like,” rejoiced Barney. “All I care about is that I *did* meet you, you utter darling!”

“I often wondered why I never fell in love,” she went on, musingly. “Now I know.”

Barney’s anything but handsome face wrinkled in a grin. “Naturally!” he drawled.

“Conceited old thing,” she chided, lovingly. “It isn’t that exactly. The Church doesn’t teach it, but I meant that we are really one, separated, you know, and——”

“Yes,” he interrupted, wondering how much strength he could put into his hugging without hurting her. “Yes, I know the theory, sweetheart!”

“And you believe it, of course?”

“Of course!” he lied, smilingly.

“Isn’t it wonderful?” she went on. “And how good God is to us!”

“To us—just now.” He spoke absently.

“Don’t you think He is always good?” she asked.

“Well,” he parried, annoyed at having so easily slipped—“well, I have no kick coming, but—there are others.”

“You mean the people who live in slums, or who are born deaf, crippled, or something?”

“I mean all the needless suffering of the world, sweetheart,” he answered, gravely, then forced a laugh. “But I am going to see that you never suffer.” His voice took on a certain fierceness. “I am going to make it my business to see that nothing hurts you!”

"Why, Barney, pain isn't much!"

Her words troubled him. Was his curious appreciation of the agony of the world but a sort of neurosis—a pathological reaction? It was a biological law that no sentient thing could exist unless it derived more pleasure than pain from its environment. Pleasure, therefore, was more usual than pain.

"Why," she went on, as if speaking to herself yet against his attitude, "some of the best things in life have a little pain to them." She turned her head away to hide the blush her words had roused, and Barney, watching the lovely color flood her neck, understood. Neither of them had any patience with that stupidly false convention which binds the tongues of the average man and maid about to wed, so he answered her naturally, as a man should, although his words are open to argument:

"A man who really loves his wife wouldn't want to have children!"

"But," the mother in her combated him, "I should hate myself if I didn't have babies!"

Barney could bear pain, could even laugh at his own agony, but he knew that to see Ethel suffer would drive him mad. Was there no escape from the inevitable agony of the world?

For a week he hung between heaven and hell. Spending nearly all his time with her, he tasted paradise, but the thoughts of years mocked him hellishly. He had said that he would put those thoughts away, but, with all his will, he found this difficult. So he tried to force himself to drift with the tide and to steel himself to take the world as he found it, without cursing the God who made it.

And he had to find a definition of their loving, of their immediate recognition of their mutual adoration; and this naturally became "a manifestation of positive spiritual chemotaxis," in which the word *spiritual* was not too closely examined; and while they both agreed that no ritual can sanctify love—that their own vows and first kiss made them more truly one than the blessing of an archbishop—they arranged with Peter Carew to read their banns the next three Sundays, in the meanwhile abandoning themselves to such a love as gods might covet.

Little Ethel Winfred, with her dainty ways, her piquant face, her night-black hair and blue eyes! Telling herself that she was being loved as not even her most wonderful dreams had pictured! Such a man! . . . With that charming assumption of ownership which is so alluring and distinctly feminine, she built great plans concerning the wonderful future of her man. That he dreamed of writing an ambitious philosophical book, for which he was always collecting knowledge and making notes, she knew, of course.

Therefore some way must be found of helping him—a way of obtaining the needed money which did not involve the hard work of seeking gold in the far north, a way which would never—never!—necessitate Barney's separation from Ethel for more than an hour at a time!

Dick Carew was introduced, and marveled. Here was Barney, who had never given a moment's thought to women, engaged to marry a queen! A celebration was in order! That evening Dick got into a fight with a sergeant of the Northwest Mounted. Thereafter, firm friends, the erstwhile belligerents journeyed to either Calgary or Medicine Hat—neither being able definitely to say which, and being none too certain that during their absence they did not reach Vancouver!—where they continued to enjoy a mighty wassail, pouring libations down their throats and the throats of all and sundry, to the kindly gods of the future, whose manifestations of beneficence should take the form of twin boys, surnamed Hilliard, to whom Dick and the sergeant (whose name Dick could never remember!) should stand as godfathers.

Barney—laughing at this news—almost managed to throw his problem overboard. Rather than be a philosopher and think, he would become a rancher and deny himself to all thought. He would live and love with all his being, and let knowledge take care of itself—he wanted no more of it! A few years, only, make a life. He had found the woman to make his life blessed above the lives of men. Why trouble himself about the deeper questions? Omar was right! Barney laughed at himself—he had been a fool, running in and out of a door! Now he would accept the beliefs of the Church, and—damn the heretics! He would accept the notion of a good God, go to church with his wife, and never rail at the plus of universal pain. He had told Ethel about the false accusation that had driven him from England, and she had blessed it! "But for that poor girl's dying lie I would not have had you!" . . . So Barney had arrived at the land of Now, a sphere with only room for two, as yet, but capable of enlargement! The master melody should surge untrammeled through him for all his years, and the world should be the better for the healthy, clean, strong children who should follow.

God was good, had always been good—the trouble had been that he, Barney, had been too blind to appreciate His goodness!

The darkening evenings were a bliss. Ethel was hardly a musician, but she could play the simple sort of music Barney loved. He hated "musical gymnastics," which he said appealed only to an educated mind, and failed to stir the soul. And of the few tunes that Ethel played there was one he begged for again and again, until she seldom played anything else. Thomé's "*Sous la Feuille*." And while she played he improvised such extraordinary rhymes

about her, keeping time to the music, that anyone who had known him in the days gone by would, hearing these rhymes, have believed he had lost his mind. All his cynicism about "the pretended sublimation of the sex instinct" might never have been. Neither did he remember his remarks concerning "the inanities of love making, as indicated by the absurd manglings of language to which lovers are addicted," to which Dick had patiently listened for years whenever the subject of marriage had been discussed by them. He who had mocked had stayed to pray! Nay, more, to worship with an abandonment which was like the bursting of a dam. Interrupted by kisses, these children babbled the most amazingly grotesque rhymes, sitting together at the piano, trying to keep their words within the rhythm of the music, of the melody of "Under the Leaves" with its divine suggestions.

Yet the trees sown by Reason, which Love had pulled and almost unrooted, would occasionally wrench at the man like aching teeth. And this when he was happiest.

There was a cloud. Even when he did his best to throw Reason overboard, there was a cloud. It might lighten during those infrequent moments when he believed (or made himself believe) that he had succeeded in drowning Logic; but it rapidly grew dark again.

These two loved with a passion transcending the experience of the majority, melting into each other's being with an abandonment beyond the comprehension of those who come together by a process of "wooing and winning"—loving without debasing hesitations or evasions, taking their love as a gift, God-given.

XIII

THE day before the wedding, a dreary day where autumn merges into winter. There had been no snow, but the skies were gray. No wind, but a sort of waiting calm. But the presage of evil weather could not affect the minds of Ethel and Barney. There cannot be any weather in heaven!

The afternoon was to pass in a wonderful ride together, on the prairies.

They cantered through the village, returning greetings. As they passed the cemetery—the trees of which the village boasted spectral in their leaflessness against the wan sky—they slowed their horses to a walk. A dozen or so people, busied with a grief-stricken task, caused this slowing.

"It's Mrs. Wilkinson and her baby—the first one," whispered Ethel. "That's poor George Wilkinson. See, he's crying! They had only been married a year. . . . Isn't it sad?"

Barney stiffened in his saddle. Anger, hatred of the Unseen, flared through him. He was about to utter one of his condemnatory sentences, when he realized what the words would mean to Ethel. With a tremendous effort, he managed to answer, hoarsely:

"Yes!" He leaned over and pressed the girl's hand. "It's terribly sad. Let's go on, sweetheart!"

The little lady returned the pressure. . . . Like a wide, shipless sea the prairie stretched before them. Slight undulations loomed brown. There was no wind, but an eerie tremble stirred the grasses.

"It does seem hard," said Ethel, answering, as a woman often will, the unuttered thought of the man she loves. "It does seem hard. Only married a year, and then to die when their baby came. But it *must* be all for the best, Barney! You know that! We don't understand, of course, but we will sometime!"

Barney, biting his lips, simply patted her hand.

"You *do* believe that, don't you, sweetheart?" she queried.

"Darling," he smiled, "I would believe anything told me by an angel like you! You are far more likely to know about such things than a roughneck like me!"

"You're *not* a roughneck!" she answered, firmly.

"I am—and will be—anything you like to think I am," he replied, softly.

They galloped their horses. The keen air thrilled them. The clouds banked more heavily to the north. They went on, glowing with happiness, until approaching twilight warned them that they were a long way from home.

"Oh," exclaimed Ethel, "our poor horses! It's a long way back, dear!"

"The horses will be all right," answered Barney. "Let's stop and talk awhile!"

"Talking" meant using their lips otherwise—Barney, leaning from his saddle, putting his arm about the girl.

On the prairies little winds spring up suddenly—tiny cyclones, a few feet in diameter, which whip up small pebbles in the faces of terrified horses. An unheralded puff of this wind eddied with ghost-like silence but devilish ferocity. Some pebbles were whipped into the face of Ethel's horse. Barney had just taken his arm from about her. Ethel's horse snorted and plunged violently.

It all happened with such appalling suddenness. Barney saw his love thrown. Had his strength and quickness been increased tenfold, he could not have saved her. He saw Ethel lying on the ground. He heard no cry. He sprang from his horse, his first fear being concerned with her danger from the animal's hoofs. Another gust of wind flung another handful of dust and small stones as he left the saddle. As he knelt by Ethel's side he was conscious of hoofbeats becoming less loud. The horses had bolted.

"Are you hurt, darling?"

He noticed that his voice had an unusual sound. He knew, but knew not how he knew, that Ethel was very badly hurt.

She gasped, trying bravely to smile. Barney felt cold all over, and fear such as he had never known before gripped him. She did not have to tell him how she was suffering. Intuitively, it seemed, before she explained, he knew that at least two ribs were broken. But he knew more! His brain was now working like a tensely driven machine. Her breathing was difficult, so unnatural!

Not merely broken ribs! Barney's teeth grated as he repressed an extraordinary impulse to scream. His sympathetic agony was fearful. Not only broken ribs!

"God!" he muttered.

He achieved some sort of poise. To curse God for "allowing" the accident, to blame himself—he inhibited these impulses. Ethel was thrown

by the unexpected plunge of her horse. Few riders could have kept the saddle.

Not merely broken ribs. Again, "God!" One of her arteries had been punctured by the splintered bone driven inward. Ethel was bleeding to death. She was dying from an internal hemorrhage. And Barney Hilliard, who loved her more than he did life, was helpless. He could do nothing. He could not even ease her agony.

His knowledge of what might be done in the temporary hospital in Nippa Creek, of what might be tried in the effort to save her, of the certainty of her pain being lessened by morphine—tiny little white tablets, God! and not a one on all the wide prairie—these things took shapes and seemed to whirl madly in his brain like mortally wounded birds which in some way could still fly, shrieking their powers, the greatest of which was freedom from pain, and madly beating their wings against his skull in their efforts to be free to act!

Nothing he could do! Fifteen miles from aid, their horses gone, no shelter, the night coming—this, as if the accident were not enough.

But her pain was the worst. God had seen to it that Ethel should die in as agonizing a situation as could be conceived!

Barney looked away from the suffering girl—an agonized stare. He clenched his hands in impotent wrath.

"The cursed Fiend! He fixed things so that the darling would have to go through this! The swine! Why? Why? And he has been doing this sort of thing for millions of years! How can any sentient thing be such a coward?"

In that moment Barney Hilliard came perilously near to madness. The tortured stage of the world rose before his mind. The diabolical cleverness which squeezed all the suffering possible out of mortals. If Ethel had to die, why couldn't God have let her die without the dreadful suffering now so rapidly increasing? Why not have left Barney a chance to help her?

Fifteen miles from morphine—and he couldn't leave her! Lest, it seemed, he make the desperate effort to bring relief to her, the threats of the weather were now showing him that if he left her he would not be able to find her again until spring! It was going to snow hard, and on that flat waste of sameness——! Death, her death, would come as a blessing; but death was hours away. What hours of helpless hell! Even if the weather had held fine, to leave her to get help would be to make her dying the harder, to come back to her and find her dead. Thirty miles—fifteen of them on foot, rough running, two hours at least, to Nippa Creek. . . . Thoughts like these stood out like coherent islands washed by a rough sea of delirium. . . . Besides, it

would be night when he got back to her—even if the snow had held off, he could not have found her again. But he *couldn't* leave her!

Barney looked round wildly for some sort of shelter. The wind was rising. A spat of snow struck him between the eyes. God was sneering at him! Barney "fought back"—cursing the Unseen below his breath. And then Ethel's gasping answer to his question brought to him the extraordinary realization that less than a minute had passed since the accident, since he had asked her:

"Are you hurt, darling?"

The brave darling was trying to smile. She—knowing, told by her training that she was dying—wanted to save Barney pain.

"Kiss me, sweetheart!" With a vast effort of self-control she managed to force her glorious voice almost naturally through her agony—evading the answer. The brave darling!

There was no shelter on that inhospitable prairie, no place where the sweetest girl in the world might die less bleakly, no way of making a windshield. The elements were urging into a storm. To Barney, this was the Power that made them inflicting further pain upon Ethel, showing His power after the manner of some brutal and ignorant man who takes a childish pride in his ability to bully some one weaker than himself.

He might wrap his mackinaw around her and hold her so that his body came between her and the wind—this was all that Barney could do. The wind was beginning to cut cruelly. Ethel whispered:

"Please keep your coat on, dearest."

Oh, the beauty, the courage and the love of her!

"Why, honey, I'm sweating!" he lied, while a vagrant thought prompted the idea that in the apparently needless pain of the world lay buried the solution of the riddle of existence.

"You'll catch a cold," she chided, with that loving air of mothering him in which he so delighted.

Would it hurt her too much if he tried to make her warmer and more comfortable by lifting her to his breast? As so often happened, she seemed to know what he was thinking, and whispered—the needed change in the rhythm of her breathing adding to her pain:

"Hold me in your arms, sweetheart—just a little while. I don't want you to get tired."

There was no need to discuss her condition. Both knew—both knew that only death would end her pain—so neither spoke of it. And her request was

prompted solely by love, without any thought of her own comfort. She wanted to be in his arms, and she knew how his arms craved to hold her for the last little while in which they would have her to hold. She wanted to be in his arms, then, although she knew that his tender moving of her would add to her agony—he wanted her, she wanted him, and, besides, if she nestled to him it would help to keep *him* warm, for he had insisted on wrapping her in his mackinaw.

His great strength enabled gentleness. Lifting her as if she had been a baby, there was no strain, no jar. Against a tiny mound he had found a seat. With his back to the wind and now driving snow, as still as a statue lest a movement add to her pain, Barney held his dying love. Her head snuggled against his shoulder. She breathed with difficulty. But her nearness to her man, the feel of his powerful arms about her, her belief in the goodness of God—these brought mental peace. Brave, wonderful woman, she sighed—contentedly!

Night crowded the prairie and with the snow made a world of whirling gray—in which a man would lose all sense of direction after walking a few yards. Barney could only wait for the end, cursing his Maker mentally because he had nothing with which to stop Ethel's pain, the weight of the agony of all the world pressing with terrible bitterness upon his soul.

Yet, those were among the greatest moments or his life—indeed, they were his greatest moments. He was seeing the soul of the woman who loved him, at its best. To few men has this experience been given—with such a woman! And few men would have had Barney's physical strength, mind, and will in wonderful co-ordination, enabling him to control every muscle that ached to shiver, to deny with supreme scorn every craving of his suffering flesh, lest a movement hurt this woman of his. He gloried in the physical pain gnawing him, with a strange effort of will imagining himself as lessening the pain Ethel was suffering by "drawing" it from her body into his own. And who shall say that he altogether failed?

Ethel was denied the kindly unconsciousness of autotoxemia—she would die conscious. And she knew it. It was not strange that Barney, watching her bravely trying to suppress the moans her agony wrenched from her, cursed himself because he had left his revolver at home. Had it been with him, two lives would have ended swiftly.

The end! The utter end of life struck Barney like something physical. That the bright and beautiful personality of Ethel Winfred would be finally extinguished when she died was something of which he felt certain. There was no next life! She would die, and that would be the end of her. She would die, and he would live, lonely and wanting her, until he, too, became as

nothing. And this was the work of a God whom some weak fools called "good"!

Against the stark darkness of life his unusual intelligence flashed like a searchlight, illuminating and awakening accumulated and inherited suffering, while the night grew more bitter and the storm increased.

Presently, there was no longer any Time: in an eternity without divisions, through a void without end wherein the air he breathed was agony, Barney drifted. How often did he kiss those dying lips, either of his own desire or answering a certain pressure of the hand they had long ago—ah, how long ago!—agreed upon as a signal for a kiss? How many times, raising his voice against the wind's, did he answer her: "Tell me some poetry, sweetheart!" and how he craved his old revolver to end the agony of both.

"It won't be for very long, darling. You will find me waiting for you!" she whispered.

The faltered words, spoken in full belief, with enduring love, wrung Barney until they seemed to mock him. . . . "Waiting!" Dear, sweet, credulous darling! But, after all, it was better so. Her faith made her dying the happier. . . . But Barney!

Death was laughing at him! He wanted to crush Ethel to his breast, so that Death could not take her. He wanted to fight. He controlled the impulse to scream curses at an imaginary figure of Death, to get up and guard Ethel with his powerful hands from the fiend who would snatch her from him. The horror of it all maddened him. The woman he loved, the only woman he had ever loved or ever would love, going out like a candle in the wind, never again to be conscious. It was so hard to understand! So difficult to grasp the fact that this lovely personality was nothing but energy made conscious through some chemical change—was, in the last analysis, merely transformed solar radiation. Dust! Dust! Barney thanked God with bitter lips that his darling believed in His goodness. He could not understand how she could so believe, but he would help her all he could by pretending that he, also, believed in the pretty myth of personal immortality. Faith! Faith, the anodyne of the ages! The drug that had helped so many to die, had helped so many to live! Death but the gateway to another and better life. The perfect faith that she and Barney would meet at the other side of the grave—meet and love, never again to be separated. The anodyne of the ages—faith!

"Yes, dearest," he answered, "it's only for a little, lonely while. You will wait for me, I know, because there will never be another woman in my life. You are the first and the last—the only one!" And then, so that never a suspicion of his real attitude should reach her, he added, teasingly, lovingly,

“But you must promise me that you won’t fall in love with some angel—all the angels in the Bible are men, you know. Of course, angels are much nicer than I am, but you won’t forget me and love one of them, will you, honey?”

For the last time, Ethel Winfred smiled, and her characteristic, pretty frown of protest came in spite of her agony. But Barney saw neither the smile nor the frown, for the charm of the face he adored was in the shadows—the kindly dark, hiding so much of her pain, also hid her beauty. It might be wrong to retort that Barney was nicer than any angel, but Ethel did not care if it was.

“You are nicer than any angel, sweetheart, and I love you so much that I won’t even look at one of them. I’ll just wait for you!” A sudden fear, born of her knowledge of his love for her, brought the words, “But—but, Barney, you won’t come to me too soon, will you? I mean, you’ll wait until your time comes, won’t you?”

“Yes, sweetheart, I will wait till death brings me to you. I would like to shoot myself, but—since you ask me not to, I won’t!”

“Good boy!”

Came another of those spasms of agony. Barney, helpless, held her. He was no longer aware of the cold. As he wiped the blood from her lips her pain ceased, suddenly. Ethel was going out.

He kissed her. Then, very faintly,

“Good-by . . . for a little . . . while . . . darling boy.”

“For a little while, darling,” he sobbed.

He continued to hold her, sitting motionless.

Gradually delirium took hold of him. He must get Ethel to some shelter. Yes. Making the greatest physical effort of his life, he got to his feet without jarring the body in his arms. He could not understand why he was so numb, why his muscles hurt when he moved. He was very careful. Then he began to move his stiffened, frozen limbs. The snow on the ground seemed to rush against his feet, like a torrent, when he began to walk.

He lifted Ethel gently and kissed her, murmuring:

“It seems too wonderful to be true—your loving me. I don’t see why you do. But, oh, it’s good to know you do! I have wanted you—so long. Why, now, looking back, I know that I have always wanted you! Yes, I have wanted you ever since the beginning of the world!”

He kissed her again.

“Sleepy darling! But sleep. I like to look at you when you’re asleep. Sleep, sweetheart, and your old roughneck will take care of you. But you

don’t like my calling myself a roughneck, do you?”

Unsteadily he progressed, mercifully unconscious of the truth. Now and then he would the more carefully wrap his mackinaw about her. But several times during that terrible walk he fell. Then, hours later, Dick and the other men who were looking for them found them. Barney never remembered this. They saw him struggling to his feet and spurred their horses. Some medley of dim consciousness prompted him to snarl and bare his teeth when they gathered around and tried gently to take his dead love out of his arms. They were awed and baffled—almost afraid—until Dick said, “Barney,” in a normal tone. Barney seemed to recognize him—at any rate, he smiled weirdly. Then he collapsed, and Dick took her.

XIV

"WHERE shall we go, old-timer?" asked Dick.

"West," answered Barney.

He had regained his poise and felt no shame for his showing of grief, although he had expected to. But never again would he betray the fact of his suffering. Apparently he was the same old Barney. Even the sympathetic Dick believed he had "got over it" and would in time find another girl. But Barney knew better. Outward showing he inhibited by an icy self-control, but the longing and the loneliness increased. He had a curious feeling that every day took him farther away from Ethel, and he could not reason this away. The old, familiar ache across his chest returned again and again, to make impossible the "calm mind" upon which he prided himself. All he could do was to play the man, with manliness for all his property!

"West!" he answered, smiling with seeming naturalness.

"We are quite rich—for us!" Dick grinned, delighted in the belief that Barney was himself again.

"Let's travel like dukes, then," suggested Barney.

"The only duke I ever saw dressed like a tramp and went third class," said Dick.

"Why did he do that?" Barney was interested.

"Because there was no fourth, he said."

"Mean old miser." The drawl continued to deceive.

"I ought to give Hinkman his revenge," Dick mused.

"Sure! But before you give him your—your money—we'd better put a little in the bank, for contingencies; and I'll take a hundred myself," answered Barney.

So they traveled in the lazy way both loved to Victoria, the mild winter of that delightful town greeting them like a caress after the rigor of the prairies.

The blight of that peculiarly disgusting by-product of mankind, the "reformer," had not then fallen upon Victoria—surely there must be a special hell reserved for the gangrened soul that preys upon the mote in its neighbor's (always with a hidden vice of its own which it hopes to keep

concealed by its howling about the 'sins' of others, trying to drown conscience in its noise, and propitiate the god of its subconscious self, which knows)—and men lived their own lives, learning wisdom through the experiences of folly, which seems to be the plan of Creation.

Dick was all eagerness to give Hinkman his "revenge," Barney to try to read scientific magazines and forget pain in erudition. Yet the first night saw Barney possessed by something far removed from quiet thought. A wild and seemingly uncontrollable desire to go on a spree filled him, but just what form his spree should take eluded decision. He craved relief. Was there any in all the world? The things in which men delight seemed insipid. Was there anything into which he could plunge himself so deeply that he could drown in the sensations he obtained from it?

They walked down Government Street. At the entrance of the gambling house a burst of music from the weird theater adjoining moved Dick to say:

"I must have a love affair with one of those girls some time!"

"Why?"

"Oh, because! Oh, I don't know!" Dick seemed troubled, and Barney stared at him in astonishment. "Because—because they may be able to give a man a kiss without a sting in it! I mean, one which one need not regret afterwards!"

"Ye gods!" drawled the astounded Barney. "Richard Carew, the friend of my declining years, Sir Richard Adonis—actually becoming philosophical! Oh, Philosophy, often have I wondered at the varied moods thy lovely face presents, but never yet did I dream that in your soul was the last resort—a love affair with a—er—'lady of the boxes'!"

"You go to hell!" laughed Dick. "Now for the wheel!"

"I feel too lazy to think figures," said Barney, "so I'll loaf around and let you do the playing."

It was early in the evening, and the gambling room was very quiet. Only the dealers and boosters were to be seen at the various games. The moment the partners showed in the doorway, the chuck-a-luck dealer loudly rattled his huge box; the booster at the stud table began a seeming argument with the dealer; every booster and every dealer hummed to a simulated activity, the booster at the roulette table scattering a flood of chips, careless of what number, column, or color they fell upon.

"Roll the little ball around, Bert," this gentleman loudly commanded, "and maybe when it stops I'll be a millionaire!"

Barney stepped behind the speaker.

“Be careful,” he said, gravely. “Don’t be rash, Casey; the winter isn’t over yet!”

“The hell!” Casey jumped from his seat, hand extended. “I knowed you’d come! Didn’t I say so, Bert?” And as Cummings, the dealer, nodded confirmation, “There’s places,” went on the delighted Casey, “where guys is just naturally bound to meet up!”

“Hell, for instance,” said the dealer, dryly. “Don’t you want your winnings?”

They all laughed as Casey picked up the chips, the money of the house with which he was paid to play.

“Where you been? Let’s have a drink! Tell us all about it!”

Thus they forgathered. They drank. As they returned to the table Barney’s desire for nirvana seemed too strong for his sociability. He felt that he wanted to scream—that unless he could get away by himself he would scream. It was terrible. Scream—and he the man who would have compelled himself to smile had his leg been amputated without an anæsthetic. Through the rift made in his troubled mind by the twittering of his overwrought nerves Barney Hilliard could glimpse that chaotic land called MADNESS. It was as if the ego of him stared through the rift into that land—as a man might look through an open door into a garden of tangled weeds—a country with a curiously subtle attraction, from which rose a miasma to breathe which meant loss of self. Perhaps all men view that place once in a lifetime. Barney was almost afraid. He would have to fight—to hold his mind and force his thoughts into a rigorous run of logic. And to do this successfully he would have to be alone.

“Play your best.” He spoke with sudden fierceness to Dick.

“Eh?” Casey and Dick looked at him in astonishment.

“I mean”—Barney smiled a ghastly smile—“I mean that—that I have to take a walk—want to think. See you both later.”

And he turned away and left the gambling room.

“What the hell’s the matter?” asked Casey of Dick, a sort of awe in his voice.

Dick shook his head unhappily, wondering whether or not to let Barney go away by himself.

“If it was anybody else”—Casey used the word “anybody” as a concession to diplomacy—“if it wasn’t him, I’d think he’d had trouble about a skirt. But he ain’t that kind. Do you know what’s the matter? Hadn’t us better go after him?”

“No, better leave him alone.” Dick frowned. Casey was all right, but Carew did not like his “butting in” where Barney was concerned. He hesitated, then decided.

“Come on, let’s play. Barney’s all right. When he’s like this it’s best to leave him alone. He might get mad if we butted in.”

Meanwhile, Barney stood irresolute on Government Street.

“I’m a quitter,” he addressed the world morbidly. “Yes, a quitter. A damned quitter. But, God! I want to forget, and whisky only makes me remember—stimulates my memory.”

He began to walk slowly toward the Parliament Buildings. After a while he walked more rapidly. On Beacon Hill he turned to the left. Presently he found himself down by the sea, among the rocks and seaweed. Deliberately he forced his thoughts away from his loss of love. The “calm mind” of the stoics was his aim.

The dark was hardly tinted by a stray bit of moon; a faint touch of salty air stirred; and the water crooned its eternal tribute to the melancholy of the world.

Barney walked to the edge of the sea. The murky sky seemed to blend with the water—sky and sea welded by the gloom. Staring, Barney could imagine himself before the entrance of some huge cave which arched over the edge of the world, offering a dark entrance into the bowels of the earth. In his mood, the murmur of the tide was the welcome of the Styx.

He stripped mechanically and laid his clothes on a flat rock. Even in summer the water is cold. It was very cold that night. But Barney did not even shiver. Instead, he was conscious of being soothed, and he swam easily and seemingly without effort toward the lowering gloom ahead. Without any intention of suicide, he had no thought of turning back.

He was wondering how deep the water was when he became aware of a great and increasing interest in the depth of Everything, and his own smallness in comparison to that deep. There was Time, Time stretching back, back and never having a beginning.

“Duration,” he muttered, “if metaphysicians want to argue, call it *that*. What I am getting at is that *something*, call it what you will, has always stood for what we call Time, and always will— Eternity, perhaps. And my life, any life, is merely a frittering away of a little bit of it. Because Time is as wide almost as it is long. It is not a thread upon which existence is strung, because it is wide enough to contain myriads of existences at once—just like Space.

"Well, what about it? Every child can think this way. I am just like a child in a dark room, made conscious by the dark and loneliness of how small it is. And yet it's when I'm feeling this way that I seem nearer to the answer of the great question—what does it all mean? Why does the universe exist?"

He was silent for a few moments. Then, laying his face close to the quiet water, he asked a question aloud, as he had often done before.

"Barney Hilliard," he said, tensely, "who are you? Who are you, and what are you, Barney Hilliard?"

And, as always, he felt as if he had heard some one say: "You are a mere bit of dust. You are nothing at all, of no importance whatever. Soon you will pass and be nothing."

And with this he felt comforted. What need to worry or trouble? He was a mere moment in time, a mere atom in space, and without effort on his part he would soon cease to exist. To worry about such a trivial thing as himself was the height of folly. To be a Stoic and keep a calm mind whatever occurred was the only sensible way of life. It would soon end.

Barney laughed and turned round, swimming back to land. He was too healthy to wallow overlong in the gutter of the quitter. The swim had done him good. It had stimulated him, not to "forget," but to keep going.

He laughed again. How near had he been to madness? Was any man really sane? No, no, certainly not. Sanity must mean a perfect adjustment of mental acts to ends, and no man ever lived who could fill that definition. Only a few minutes previously Barney had been swimming, with never a thought of turning back, toward what seemed like a tenebrous opening to a cave leading underground; when he knew perfectly well that what he saw looming darkly before him was merely a darkly clouded horizon, and that if he swam far enough he would reach the American coast. Sanity. It was to laugh. The man called sane is called so because he does not differ too widely from his neighbors. Sanity, when not one man in ten thousand really knows how to think.

Thinking thus, Barney was swimming rapidly toward the few lights on shore. There was some remorse, though, for his "spree." He had made an ass of himself. Well, that was the meaning of every spree. Or was it? He felt too physically comfortable to trouble himself. Now, if some one had stolen his clothes!

He walked to town, very much himself again. What *was* this need of a "spree" that came over a man? He had had it before he met Ethel Winfred. All men had it—without a loss to make them crave forgetfulness. Improper

adaptation to the environment? As a postulate *that* would suffice. But if that were all, then a happy marriage should be the cure. And that asked another question—were there any really happy marriages? A quaint notion possessed him. Was it possible that, after all, there was such a thing as a *spiritual* environment? If there were, an adaptation to it would mean a life such as is led by "saints" and "mystics." They apparently found "a peace passing understanding."

"Yes," thought Barney, "and so do many other deluded creatures. Mystics are always pathological subjects. Back of all their living is the hope of reward. No man yet ever tried to 'develop himself spiritually' without expecting some future reward. And even such a philosophy as Eucken's, while preaching unselfishness, implies a reward for leading a decent life. It was all very childish. Why should a man expect a reward for being decent—a stick of candy for being a good boy? To look truth in the face and realize that death was the end of a man; to be decent because one felt uncomfortable when otherwise; to help others without making a fuss about it, without any thought of a reward, either here or hereafter—such a life would indicate a nobler man than any follower of any 'religion' could become."

Suddenly he was surprised to find that he was hungry, so he went into the New England and had a steak. Then, lighting a cigar, he walked across the street to the gambling house.

"May as well see how much money Dick has left," he thought.

There was a crowd around the roulette table, watching the play with such intensity that Barney guessed the limit was off. Hinkman was dealing, his shirt sleeves turned up, a cigar at the corner of his mouth. His face showed nothing.

Neither did Dick's features betray him; but when he saw Barney his request told the story.

"Do you mind writing a check for that thousand we have in the bank?" he asked.

"Sure!" answered Barney, without hesitation and with apparent cheerfulness. "You may need this, too," he added, giving Dick all the money he had in his pocket except ten dollars.

He was not angry, but he was disappointed. Gone was the opportunity for certain studies in bacteriology, for which he had waited for years. Again he would be compelled to work with his hands, and Barney detested physical labor with all the loathing of an active mind. Yet he made no complaint. For he knew that if Dick did not gamble away their last cent he would feel miserably certain that to have "taken a chance" with it would

have resulted in his winning all he had lost! So he gave the check to Dick, whispered that he was keeping ten dollars "for necessaries," beckoned to Casey, and went with him into the recess known as the "club" room, where he discussed the possibilities of "a job" with his friend the booster, returning to the table just as Hinkman told Dick that his "credit was good."

"No," said Dick. "I never play with borrowed money—it's not lucky!"

And Hinkman, with his admirable gravity, suggested supper, while mechanically he sent the little ball around upon its journey, although there were no bets on the table.

"I have just eaten," said Barney, fingering the ten-dollar gold piece in his pocket. "I am not hungry!"

And then he remembered that they owed a hotel bill and would have to sleep somewhere. A freakish notion took possession of him. The ten dollars was all the money they had in the world. He took it out of his pocket and slid it across the board. It rested on the number twenty. The ball was jumping from slot to slot, its course nearly run.

Surprised, Dick queried, "What's the idea?"

Barney grinned to cover his annoyance. What an ass he was! He drawled, languidly:

"Just remembered that we owe the hotel some money, so I decided to earn it!"

But he almost lost his poise when the ball did drop into the number twenty and Hinkman began to count out the money. The crowd stared at him, so, making an effort, and without a quaver betraying his astonishment, he continued:

"Er—as I said, I recollected our hotel bill, and I didn't like to trouble you, because you have been working hard." He picked up the money. "Sorry I'm not hungry, Bill—but I will have a drink!"

XV

"WE have over three hundred dollars," said Barney, "and I have a job. I have to stay in Victoria with the job. How about you?"

"What's the job?" asked Dick.

"It's scientific—er—and rather difficult to explain. Don't think it would interest you, but it's two and a half a—er—a day!" He continued, hurriedly, "It's up to you to start our pile—you always do it, anyhow! You're the money maker. And there's only one way to do it. You understand mining. But of course we haven't the money to go North!"

"But you don't want me to go alone!" objected Dick.

"No—I don't. But there's no way out, old man. There's only enough money for one of us. You leave me twenty-five dollars and take the rest. As soon as you make enough, send me transportation, and I'll join you. . . . Now, don't start to argue, Dick—there's nothing else for it. Where's the latest stampede?"

They were sitting in the "club" room on the night following Dick's big loss at roulette. Barney had paid the hotel bill and had taken advantage of Hinkman's offer to stow their heavier baggage in the storeroom of the theater. He had thought the matter over carefully, and had been forced to the somewhat painful decision that Dick and he would have to separate for a time. So far, Dick had not fallen in love in Victoria. If he went away, he would, of course, find an affinity. It was Dick's fate, and Barney was helpless about it. But if he went on a prospecting trip, or worked in some isolated mining camp, the danger Barney dreaded might be slighter.

The gambling room showed its usual Saturday-night crowd, and the noise of it swelled and dwindled like the mutterings of flood tide on a rocky coast. Casey could be heard cursing his luck, trying to imitate a bona-fide player in spite of the fairly well-known fact of his being a booster.

"My dear old philosopher," said Dick, after a long pause, "I really would like it better if you'd swear at me for being such a damned rotter as to gamble away your share of our money!"

"We're not on shares," retorted Barney, gruffly, "and if you hadn't won from Hinkman the first time—where the hell would we have been? Don't be

a damned cuckoo! If you hadn't lost the money, I would have lost it in some damned-fool scheme. You're a penitential goat—don't think that word is right! But, anyhow, it's no use arguing, Dick. There's nothing else for it. You go to Nevada, and as soon as we have the money I'll join you."

So it came to pass, after some more discussion, and after repeating the same objections to their being separated, Dick bought a ticket on the San Francisco boat.

A rather large crowd stood on the outer wharf when Dick leaned on the rail of the boat and waved good-by. By his side stood a very pretty woman. As the steamer went ahead, Barney saw them speaking to each other. The same old tale! But why blame Dick when pretty faces came to him so easily? A saint could not have withstood such temptation—not if he were a healthy saint! So Barney decided.

He ate a lonely dinner. How long was this wandering going to continue—how long this loneliness of life with its painful ache across his chest? Would he ever be able to settle down to his book? And where—when he would always be alone? The village in Devonshire was an ideal place, but he could not go back there. Would they ever be able to go home? If they could get that beastly affair straightened out, prove their innocence, Dick might marry a girl of his own kind and Barney would not have to worry about him any more. Dreams!

He walked to the gambling house—to his "job." Nothing else had offered. Diffidently, Casey had spoken of Hinkman's need of another booster. Barney had applied for and been given that position.

Although despising the work, Barney, somehow, enjoyed it. He saw life divested of its disguises, both in the gambling room and in the extraordinary "theater" adjoining. It is difficult to tell about it. God made life raw; man has partially cooked it, and he calls the result "civilization." It cannot properly be told. Animals done in oils and framed may be exhibited, but if some one attempted to exhibit the real thing his exhibit would be sent to a butcher's shop.

There was the love of Bill Hinkman for Mildred—out of that medley of passions, flowers of strange and beautiful growth. Mildred with her wonderful voice. She hangs vividly in a long gallery of faded and fading pictures. She had married a weakling professor in some university when but a girl, believing she loved brains and despised mere muscle. For she did not know that with muscle very often goes manliness, while, conversely——Within a month she discovered how horrible was her error. She ran away. Without money, hungry, she arrived in Victoria, and, with no inkling of what

sort of a "theater" it was, went to Hinkman's place, hoping to earn a living with her voice. Bill met her at the door, and was conquered. So was the lady. But she sang in the theater only when the whim possessed her or Hinkman asked her to, when she was received as is a prima donna. The sale of drinks ceased, men listened and bawled for an encore, while Bill, sitting in his room with the door open, dreamed. Naturally, the women who "ran the boxes" were jealous, and said that she "had the nerve to think Bill meant to marry her." She did, and she was right. All that stood in the way of this pleasing ceremony was a husband.

And Barney found the husband. Found him in the gambling room, planning, he said, his "revenge." It was a queer sort of revenge. A game of cards—stud poker. If the professor won, Mildred was to be taken away. If he lost, he was to grant the divorce. The professor won! But he found satisfaction when Mildred knelt at his feet. And Bill married Mildred, Barney being best man.

But he was no longer a booster—having been promoted to the honorable position of roulette dealer, with five dollars a shift. The raw life had taken hold of him and he fairly wallowed in it. It happened when Bert Cummings called his last number and fell with blood on his lips, dying of tuberculosis, did this promotion of Barney's—a job requiring brains and coolness. Casey, greatly pleased, continued as booster. So it went on, with the forty or so girls about the theater speculating about Barney—coming to many conclusions—when he sometimes sat there and took a drink. He was the only employé of the house with whom no girl had found favor. He never spoke to them, and his indifference first annoyed, then intrigued. And the strange thing about it was the fact that they did not go and sit on his knee uninvited, as they did with others. Barney imagined that this was due to his lack of facial beauty. He never spoke to a girl, but once. And always he regretted this speaking, although the affair seemed forced upon him.

It happened one evening when "the wheel" went wrong and a mechanic was replacing the worn pivot. Barney strolled along the connecting gallery to the theater. He was in a poetical mood, when his tirades against God seemed like the howls of a kicking child, and Ethel Winfred with her pure faith seemed to rebuke him.

He stood at the door, watching the crowd at the tables, the hurrying beer slingers, the girls, the drunken men. It was a theater where the doings on the stage were a secondary consideration, drink and the girls who "ran the boxes" being the main attractions.

There were tiers of these "boxes" all around the place. It looked like a monstrous honeycomb. Each girl had a box. Curtains covered the opening

toward the stage, and the doors locked on the inside. The scantily clad girls walked about the main floor to entice men to their boxes, when enticement was needed. Drink cost more there, and the girls received a percentage on all drinks bought by their admirers.

An alleged comedian finished his turn, the "professor" at the piano lit another cigarette, swallowed a glass of whisky, and banged the keys for an elephantine lady who danced like an omnibus. Barney sat down at an unoccupied table, his mind far away from the theater. As he did so, a girl who had been watching him came and sat by his side, smiling her best smile.

Absently, Barney returned the smile; and then, remembering the courtesies, hailed a beer slinger.

"Whisky for mine, Harry!" announced the girl.

That feeling of intense pity so painful to him flooded Barney. After all, the poor thing had to live. The mood which led him into the most weird mistakes of his queer life drowsed his common sense like a powerful opiate. He had some money. Why not do her a good turn? And he would act the part expected of him!

"Whisky—er—nothing!" he assumed the air of one demanding violent entertainment. "Come on upstairs, kid, and we'll drink wine!" Which was as near as Barney could go to being tough with a woman.

The poor girl beamed. Wine! And with a man like that! For if Barney's face did look as if some inartistic savage had made it out of hard wood, there was something about him more attractive to women than he dreamed of. Besides, mind carries distinction. To the woman, in that low crowd he stood out as conspicuously as an archangel in Hades. The woman in her broke through the paint and tawdriness. Her face flushed with the eternal hope of her class, of her dream Prince Charming, the hope that, some day, some "decent man" would marry her. And here was a man radiating a cleanliness beyond her experience. So Barney, intending kindliness, blundered and was cruel.

But the beer slinger—a newcomer who had never before seen the roulette dealer (a person of importance), did not approve. He affected to hold wine buyers and such "suckers" in vast contempt. The girl was pretty—had been very pretty; and about her the beer slinger was meditating the consummation of desire. Also, he had exchanged repartee with the bartender, and the latter had had all the best of it. He was in the mood for trouble.

He was a large, bull-necked individual, anything but clean, and he had evidently lost his razor some days previously. He sneered openly at Barney.

Many times had he sneered thus at other men, and because of his size had gotten away with it.

Now, Barney, who was looking elsewhere, did not see the sneer. At this, the beer slinger added a certain remark.

"That'll do for you, Harry!" The girl turned on him, flaming.

"Aw, can't your pretty boy take care of himself?" demanded Harry, adding another foul expression for the girl's account.

Barney's temper raced to its worst form, the words and the presence of the woman rousing all the suppressed viciousness in him. He smiled, and his voice sounded like a caress.

"I wish you wouldn't call me pretty," he drawled. "Really, I am not, you know!"

The girl stared. Then, being a woman, she began to understand. But Harry did not at all understand.

"You poor English sissy!" He presented a formidable fist. "If it wasn't for making a fuss, I'd let you have it!"

"Why don't you wash your hands?" Again the irritating drawl. "They are filthy, you know!"

The beer slinger swung at Barney, to become the victim of one of the latter's most extraordinary feats of strength—a feat possible only to an exceptionally strong man and skillful wrestler—for Harry was anything but a weakling.

As the other swung, Barney dodged and got behind him, bringing him to the floor. Then, almost as they fell, Barney got him in a sudden fierce hammer-lock and half Nelson, and the beer slinger was helpless.

Knocking over tables and chairs and raising an unholy row, the crowd gathered around, while Barney forced his man upward, squirmed himself into a chair, twisted his powerful legs about the other's while spreading him face down across his knees. Then, while the crowd howled joyfully, he deliberately spanked him and flung him with cruel force to the floor again.

"Now," Barney said, not raising his voice, "if you annoy any more ladies I shall probably kill you!" And Harry, shivering with pain and fear, "beat it like a good little man," to use the figurative speech of the delighted girl.

Getting away from excited men anxious to buy him drinks, Barney went upstairs to a box with the girl. There she sedulously tried to make for his comfort: arranging the chair, smoothing the cushions, and the like. And Barney felt his soul go out to all women. In a way the dear things were all alike. Though the moral and social gulf might yawn unfathomable, though

the darkness of eternity might separate their lives, they all showed the same alluring, pathetic, feminine traits. From Thaïs to an enshrined saint, from Mary of Magdala to the mothers of proud men, they were women, and, being women, they found their sheerest delight in ministering to the men they loved. For tending to babies is not so general, and it rouses such a different emotion that its joy often drowns in that emotion. And, again, all women do not have babies, or desire them.

He watched her, still thinking. Yes, in that unfortunate girl's efforts to "make him at home"—utterly sincere in that moment of admiration of his strength and manliness, all thought of her wine percentage forgotten—Barney could see, in all reverence, the tender, delicious home-making traits he had loved to observe in Ethel Winfred.

She carefully drew the curtains, cutting off the view of the rest of the world. Over her came a keen desire to be with him elsewhere—the farther the better from the box. She would have to let him buy drinks—her job depended on it—but she would not stick him for champagne—the stuff that was known by that generous name. She pressed the bell, turned to Barney, and met those unusual blue eyes of his. Her face looked terribly drawn. Her age was less than twenty-five.

To sit on his knee, to call him alluring names—these were the automatic tactics of her trade, and for the first time since she had followed that profession she joyfully anticipated them. But she found herself timid! She found herself unable to follow the usual routine. It was not "nice." She wondered at herself. She wanted him, she wanted him, too. But she could not! For during the brief moments of their acquaintance she had come honestly to love Barney Hilliard.

For a moment she stared at him, trembling with the realization of her love. And it meant just as much to her sad, tired soul as first love means to a maiden. Then, against the joy of it, stood out darkly the fact of her life, the "box." In the open, under the trees, she would have been as timid as any girl—that is, her timidity would have ruled her conduct. In this tawdry setting bashfulness was banished by the dominant emotion colored by her fear of losing Barney because of her surroundings. Because her love for him was *pure*, she forgot that he might not think it so!

She stared at him, trembling. Then, in a spasm of agony, she threw herself into his arms, sobbing.

"Oh, take me out of this! Don't stay! Don't buy drinks! I want to go away from here—forever!"

Some one knocked at the door. Barney, holding her, trying to sooth her, thought rapidly, and—took a wrong course!

The man at the door was a waiter. Knowing his business, he would discreetly wait a few minutes. Barney, thinking, saw that her distress was real, but never dreamed that he was the cause of it. Her anxiety to leave the place—would it last? If he took her away she might imagine she had an embarrassing claim upon him, or, which would be worse, offer to repay him. He had little money; she probably had none and might be in debt to Hinkman. He saw it all, but—steadied upon that erroneous course! Had he realized the curious bravery of his act, he might have seen its foolishness. And, whatever else he did, he must not allow her to get a false impression. He would not let her think that he wanted her for herself. She probably felt that he was like a big brother! Poor girl!

The knock on the door was repeated, softly.

"All right," whispered Barney. "Dry your eyes!"

He opened the door. Outside, with the waiter, was Bill Hinkman. The girl turned her back to them.

"Say"—Hinkman was grinning hugely—"I heard about you spanking that guy! You're all right. Shake! I knowed him years ago, and I wouldn't have let the barkeep hire him if I'd known. Good for you!"

Smiling, Barney shook hands. "Thank you." He turned to the waiter, "Wait outside a moment, please; I want to talk to Mr. Hinkman!" And to Bill when the door had been shut: "I know you for a square man, Bill—a man who can keep his mouth shut, and understand without asking a lot of questions. You will understand, now! You will know what I mean to do without any explanation!" He pointed to the back of the disturbed girl. "This young lady is my sister!"

"Hell! Excuse me! I get you. But does that swine, Harry, know?"

Barney shook his head. He felt weak—suddenly realizing from the girl's attitude that he had utterly misunderstood her. But he could not go back.

"All right, then," Hinkman rumbled on. "If he did know, I'd fix it so he'd keep his mouth shut. I got enough on him to send him up for life—and if I hadn't I'd get it!"

The big gambler had become embarrassed. As a girl who made a living running the boxes the woman whose back he now stared at was one sort of person; as the sister of *any* man she became something quite different.

"Excuse me! . . . I . . ." he made an effort to refer to his willingness to cancel all his business relations with the girl, but could not bring himself to the words. The situation was altogether beyond him. He wanted to say that

she had money due her—which was not true—but his generous impulse, if spoken, assumed the proportions of an insult to her "brother," as well as to his sister.

"Oh—let's step outside a minute," he managed, in desperation. "Beat it!" he told the waiter. He shut the door and turned to Barney. "You want to get her away from here, without anybody knowing, eh?" And when Barney nodded: "Well, she don't owe me nothin' for them clothes, and her own is upstairs. Her——" Sudden relief cleared his face. "Let's have Mildred fix things—she can do better than us! Eh? That's it! Suppose you tell your—ask her to go upstairs to my wife, and you go around to the Broad Street door—nobody ever goes there. And Mildred will have her there, all fixed up, in half an hour! And nobody will know!"

"You're all right," Barney assented, gratefully. "Excuse me a moment." He went back into the box.

"I'll take you away from here," he told the girl, but his voice was toneless, his manner lame.

"You said"—her eyes were streaming—"that I am your——"

"Never mind! If you'll go upstairs to Mrs. Hinkman, everything will come out right. It's all arranged. Don't worry," he comforted.

So he left her, and presently he walked round to Broad Street, desperately seeking the "calm mind" which so persistently eluded him. He tried to laugh at himself, but failed. At length he managed to mutter, whimsically:

"This—er—adopting business is one hell of a complicated game!"

So complicated was it that for one of the few times in his life he felt beaten. And when the kindly, lovely Mildred gave his charge to him at the door of Hinkman's private quarters, and the twain began to walk to where Barney knew the girl could get a decent lodging at a reasonable price—he carrying her pitiful belongings with the care one bestows upon a fragile masterpiece—and the girl told him the true state of her feelings, complicated became a word too mild!

"I love you!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. They stood on the deserted sidewalk. "It's more than love! I'd work and slave for you! I'd take in washing and wear my fingers to the bone to make a living for us both—if so you got sick! I'd kiss your feet, and just enjoy doing it! I'd . . ."

The amazed and distressed Barney interrupted her eloquence with all the gentleness at his command—not a little.

"But—er—but, Miss—er—you must not say that. I am not worthy of your love, and if I were . . ."

"Another girl?" she asked, chokingly.

He thought a moment. "Yes!" he answered, deliberately.

"Let's walk!" Her request was almost a moan. "Let's walk. I ain't fit for you, anyway! I should have known there was another girl! As if a man like you would be without one. Gawd! she's lucky—when you could have a million if you wanted." She paused, leaving Barney's imagination chaotically crumbling beneath the weight of its conception of his situation amid a million girls, with all of them in love with him! His mind was playing him most abominable tricks! "Yes—all you wanted!" Barney breathed more easily at the lowered estimate. "But there's only one, isn't there? You ain't the rotten sort! Tell me that there is only one!" And Barney wondered why she seemed to plead!

"Yes," he answered, "there is only One! And there will never be any more!"

The girl pressed his free hand, and he fatuously believed that all was well with her as far as love for himself was concerned.

"I know why you said 'wine,' " she went on. "You didn't want it, but you knew I got a per cent, and wanted to help me—the only way you could see. Well, you have helped me! But I'll bet you don't know just how you *have* helped me!"

"Me? Why—I haven't done anything!" he stammered.

"It was awful nerve to love you," she went on, "and it's worse nerve to keep on. But I ain't going to try to stop loving you, even if it don't get me nowhere. But, say, you don't think your real girl will mind—she won't be sore at me, would she, if she knew? Not when you don't love me, will she?" she concluded with pathetic wistfulness.

"I am quite sure she won't mind. But come in here and have a cup of tea before you go to your room, won't you," Barney begged.

So he took her to her room, after explaining to the clerk that it would be well for him to treat his latest guest as if she were a duchess. They shook hands, and she whispered an answer to his "good night." And he went away feeling that she would soon get over her feeling for him and that he would find some decent job for her.

But he need not have concerned himself. Next morning, a bit of a scrawl, addressed "To Barney," was all she had left the world in explanation. But that little was sufficient. Mildred saw to it that the funeral would have pleased her, that all the flowers were white ones.

Dick wrote spasmodically, adding nothing to Barney's peace of mind. There was mention of a lucky bet, but none of mining. A collection of

shanties held him in thrall, apparently. Golden City was its name. Dick said nothing about women, of course, but Barney did not have to guess why he said nothing about prospecting.

One evening, when business was rather quiet, just as Barney sent the little ball around upon its heart-disturbing journey, after retorting laughingly to one of Casey's lavish jests, a player came to the table. Barney glanced at him with that whimsical smile that Hinkman called "good salesmanship"; but the smile died stillborn in a frown. He felt suddenly cold and nearly forgot that he was dealing roulette. With an effort he braced himself to his work. Mechanically he noted the placing of the bets. Then he drawled, almost naturally, the announcement of the ball's arrival in number twenty-five. There was one bet, of a dollar, on that number.

Barney counted out the winning money, the winner watching him with a supercilious sneer. This man stood as one who had been well drilled. He was clean shaven; apparently a naval officer in mufti.

"Odd chance," the mockery of unspoken insult was in his voice as he carelessly pocketed the money. "Odd chance!"

He stared at Barney, who met his gaze with the cool, appraising, professional face of the gambler; showing nothing of the effort this cost in self-control. Without replying, he again whirled the fate-distributing marble.

The stranger, who had evidently dined well, raised his voice slightly.

"Yes, luck does things, but in the end it's the best man who wins. Then the loser talks childishly. Some are unable to face the music. Funny—what? Best man wins, of course. Wonder why some losers go straight to the devil, losing all self-respect, and seem to like doing it. What do you think, croupier—or is it dealer? . . . By the way, haven't we met before—somewhere?"

The other players had walked away, leaving only this speaker, Casey, and Barney at the roulette table. Barney had turned very pale, and his face now showed great strain. Casey saw this and looked for trouble, and Casey loved Barney like a brother. So he wriggled his ears and stared unpleasantly at the stranger. Then he looked questioningly at his friend. Casey was paid to attract customers, but here was one he wished to throw into the street. He tried to catch Barney's eye, but Barney avoided his look. Casey was puzzled. To compel Barney to notice him he laid three ten-dollar bills on the number seventeen.

"Twenty is the limit on a number!" said Barney as impersonally as if he had never seen Casey before in his life.

Casey was baffled. Barney had spoken to him as he would speak to some one who did not know the rules of the house. Then Casey imagined himself

mistaken. Perhaps the stranger had not meant to be insulting. But the stranger's next remark showed the insult had been intended, and Casey acted accordingly, waiting for Barney "to beat up the dirty guy."

"Pretty cheap place, but, then—ah—*you* work here!" and the tone added to the nasty implication of the words.

"Sure!" interposed Casey. "Must be tough for a real sport like you! You bet a whole dollar by mistake just now—and pouched the money damned quick when you won!"

The stranger stared at Casey as if the booster were some low animal. His stare almost spoke—told Casey that boosters were far beneath this gentleman's notice. But as Casey got out of his seat, clenching his fists, Barney spoke sharply:

"Cut it out, Casey!"

Purple with rage, Casey turned on his friend, astonished.

But Barney's wink told many things, and the booster sat down again—puzzled.

"Ah, dealer and animal trainer, all in one!" said the stranger. "What a charming mixture!" And he turned on his heel and walked slowly out of the room, while Casey waited eagerly for some explanation of Barney's extraordinary conduct, his apparent supineness.

"Find out where that chap lives—if he isn't on some ship at Esquimault. Get the number of his room, too! Follow him, and don't leave him until you can tell me where I can—er—where I can see him alone!"

Casey grinned comprehendingly and hurried away, to return several hours later, tired but triumphant.

"Thought he would never go home!" he announced. "He's across the street, at the New England—room twenty-two. What's doin'? And, say, wot's that guy to you? An' why didga stop me from bustin' him one?"

"I was working on a theory," drawled Barney. "In fact, I have been working on it for some time."

"It ain't none of my damned business, of course." Casey was both hurt and disappointed.

Barney smiled at him, and the booster was instantly mollified.

"Casey," he whispered, "that chap is my brother! . . . Double green and nobody on it!" And he swept chips and money from the table.

"The hell!" breathed Casey. "Sell me some chips—here's Bill!"

Hinkman came behind the table, "How are you making it, Barney?"

"Not much doing—about two hundred ahead. . . . Say, Bill"—Barney's smile was the smile of a man with pleasing anticipations—"say, do you mind running the wheel for an hour or so? I have a date!"

"You've got a nerve, too," Hinkman replied, good-naturedly. "Ain't he, Casey?"

"Don't ask me!" Casey's tone and expression transcended description. "Don't ask me! He's got everything! He's got my goat!"

"All right, Barney—go ahead!" Hinkman took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. "Come on, you gamblers! Here's the only way in the world to get rich without working!"

Barney put on his cap. Unlike the majority of dealers, who dressed well, he was wearing an old sweater, rubber-soled shoes, and a pair of pants badly in need of pressing. He nodded and went out.

Outside, on Government Street, he paused. He had a rotten job ahead. Certain as he felt of his brother's guilt, he revolted at having to accuse him of a crime so vile. Had it not been that Dick was implicated—Dick, who might some day get married and want to go home—it is doubtful whether Barney would have acted. Only a sense of duty kept him going. His dislike of his task almost amounted to cowardice.

Again, there was his brother's honest opinion regarding a man who worked in a gambling house! That the games were on the square made no difference. There was a stigma attached to the job. Barney cursed himself for feeling thankful that his brother had discovered him as a dealer and not as a booster. And he rather liked the work. Then he pulled himself together, realizing that his dislike of his immediate duty was making him introspectively foolish while causing him to regard things from the snobbish attitude of the ignorant moralist. Barney swore and crossed the street.

He did not inquire at the hotel office. The clerk, who was also cashier in the restaurant, would not see him go upstairs. He wondered vaguely why his brother had not taken a room at a more fashionable hotel.

Room twenty-two.

Light showed through the transom. Barney hesitated for about a minute, then knocked.

"Yes! Hullo! Who is it?"

"Barney!"

A brief silence, then a laugh.

"What do you want?"

Barney had hoped for this. To be treated as a coward treats a man out of jail, without money or job, cringing for aid—this was the greeting he had wished for. It was just what he needed to make him equal to murder. He was likely to fail if he remained a gentleman. To descend somewhat to the level of his brother meant success.

"To see you," he answered.

"Naturally. But what about? I do not care to talk with a person of your type, you know," sneered George Hilliard.

Barney grinned comfortably. "I cannot talk out here; but it's important!"

"I won't give you any money!" went on George, who, of course, had no notion regarding the reason for Barney's visit, did not dream that his visitor was quite sure that he (George) was responsible for the death of the girl in the Devonshire village—concerning which George had never troubled himself.

"I won't give you any money," said George.

Barney did not reply, believing that silence would save him the trouble of breaking the not overly strong door by hurling himself against it. And, finally, after some more insulting words, George, mumbling curses, did open the door.

"Come in, and shut it after you!" he said, rudely.

Barney, smiling nastily, obeyed. Then he locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"Hey! What are you doing that for?" asked George, rather nervously, the door locking, as Barney had calculated, spoiling the effect of George's rudeness and shaking his self-assurance.

"It's done," said Barney, laying his disreputable cap on the bureau, while George sat down on the bed, forgetting his intention of lying there in order the better to treat his brother with disdain.

"I . . . I . . ." began George.

"Shut up!" said Barney. "You've done most of the talking you're going to do; so if you open your mouth too wide I'll jam my fist down your throat. Get me, you dirty pup?"

But George, although the thrashing given him years before made him still fear his brother's strength, was not without courage.

"You get out of here," he snarled, "before I ring the bell and have you thrown out!"

"If you make a fuss, the clerk may call the police. You don't want that, do you?" suggested Barney.

George turned pale. “What . . . what do you mean?”

Barney laughed. So George had committed some crime! For some reason he was afraid of the police. Was he in Victoria to hide?

George had done many things since he had been kicked out of the navy—the disgrace of which had killed his father, about which Barney knew nothing—and Barney’s suggestion concerning police had affected him so that he even remained silent when Barney taunted.

“You’re in a hell of a fix, aren’t you?” Then: “See here, George, I am only amusing myself. I don’t care a damn what you have done recently—I would even ask my underworld friends to help you out of the country. It’s what you did years ago that brought me here. I have here a typewritten confession that you got the Rimmer girl in trouble and were the cause of her killing herself. You will sign this paper—there’s a whole lot to it!” And, as if it were an ordinary business agreement, Barney produced the confession and his fountain pen.

George stared at him, his pale face turning livid. Then with an effort he staged a laugh. But he was feeling more comfortable.

So this was it. Barney *needed* that confession. Perhaps he wanted to go home, to get married. There was some money coming to him from their father’s estate—no doubt Barney had heard about it. George laughed naturally. All bluff! Barney had no idea as to why George was in Victoria. The police! What would the Victoria police know about him (George)? Bluff! And Barney wanted the confession.

Why, he would laugh at the young fool! Even would he admit that he had betrayed the girl and so worked on her weak mind that, half conscious, she had accused Barney and Dick Carew. George felt rather proud about his ability to work on the mind of a woman—any woman. He was as good-looking as Barney was the reverse. He laughed contentedly.

“You damned young fool! What makes you imagine that you can come here and get me to sign your damned paper?” His voice rose. “Pretty clever, wasn’t I? Let you think I had done something that made me fear the police . . . something other than seducing that little fool at home. You and your confession! Get out! I am not fooling. I have no reason to fear the police, and if you annoy me I will have one called: You damned young idiot! Get out—hear me?”

Barney stood up and George smiled with satisfaction. Then, to the intense surprise of George, Barney took about seven feet of stout cord from his pocket. He fastened one end of this around the hinge of the clothes

closet, and the other to a convenient staple near the window—stretching the cord across the room tightly and securely at a height of about four feet.

"What the devil are you doing?" George, now his evil self again, shouted. "Are you crazier than you look?"

Barney stared at his brother, putting hate and contempt into that stare. Few men could have faced those eyes in comfort. George, after a vain attempt, gave up and looked away.

"I am just fixing up a swift and easy way for you to die," answered Barney, gently.

"What?" George's voice trembled in spite of his effort to control it.

"The way you will die," said Barney, his tone caressing. "Look here!" Facing the stretched cord, with his hands clasped behind his back, he continued: "If I lean forward and allow my throat to rest on this cord, with the weight of my body behind it, I will not be able to unclasp my hands with sufficient speed to save my life. I would be unconscious in two seconds—unconscious and helpless, and dead in a very little time!" He paused and looked significantly at his brother. "And if you don't sign that paper you will die that way. I know it's murder, but you're not fit to live. And the verdict will be suicide. No one saw me come here, and no one will see me go. No one knows I know you. Besides, it will look like suicide. . . . Now!"

What happened then took place too rapidly for George. The snake-like swiftness of Barney's actions when he meant business have been referred to. And with his tremendous strength (then at its greatest height of power) his task was easy.

A handkerchief was painfully forced between George's jaws and tied behind his neck, effectually gagging him before he could cry for help. Lying face down on the bed, with Barney's weight crushing him, he was as helpless as a baby. Barney spoke with seeming naturalness, although his heart was beating unpleasantly.

"After you are dead, no one will connect me with you. My friends in the gambling house will swear to any sort of alibi I make up. But even if there was any danger of my being suspected, I would kill you just the same. Driven from home, living the life I have been compelled to live, love, honor, and country lost—all because of your rottenness and lying! Why, if after I kill you I go and give myself up, the worst any jury in this country would bring in against me would be 'justifiable homicide.' I ought to get a medal for killing you!

"But I need your signature. I won't promise, but if you sign there is a chance of my not killing you. I am going to take out the gag. The pen and

paper are on the bureau. . . . If you make any sound—if you don't just walk over there and sign—you will be dead in three minutes. Even if you do sign, I may decide to kill you. Get up!" And Barney removed the gag. "Get a move on!" he ordered.

George was cowed. Ever since the thrashing of years ago, the fear of Barney's strength had festered. Now he found that strength doubled. Also, in imagination he felt that cord pressing against his throat, strangling him. He tottered over to the bureau and with fingers scarcely able to hold the pen, signed his name to a confession of utter vileness without reading it! Then he threw himself face down upon the bed again, while Barney laughed.

But Barney was not laughing at George—he was laughing at himself. He had believed himself cool and fairly collected, yet he had removed the gag because of the unreasoned feeling that George could not sign his name if it was allowed to remain in his mouth!

But George, although the laugh reached him, remained silent. Presently, with Barney gone, he would rage and swear. Just now he was as one hypnotized. Also, he was not certain that Barney would let him live. Even when he heard the key turn in the door he said nothing. Then he heard Barney drawling:

"I have left the cord out of kindness. You will find that it will work exactly as I said. Save you the trouble of getting another. Any man with a spark of decency would use it according to instructions!"

With which unbrotherly remark Barney left the room. But in justice to Barney it should be told that he knew George well enough to know that there was no danger of his wounded honor preferring death to continued existence. . . . Contentedly, he went back to work, trying to appreciate his release—to understand that he was no longer an exile unless he chose to remain one, and finding it difficult to do so because the years had accustomed him to the feeling that a barrier lay between England and himself.

"After all, we need not have gone," he thought. "We might have stayed and fought the thing—father would have probably come to our side in a day or so!"

And he wondered if he would have been better off if nothing had occurred to cause him to leave home; but it did not take him a moment to decide! A second in Ethel's arms was worth a lifetime of any other sort of existence—a million lifetimes! Logically, he felt that he ought to thank his brother!

One evening, “Mrs. Bill,” as they all called the lovely Mildred, handed Barney a letter, smiling significantly, with: “So, woman hater, She lives elsewhere!”

“She does!” agreed Barney, smiling back at her. “This is from my friend Dick Carew!”

“Barney, why don’t you fall in love?” she chided.

“Dear lady,” he drawled, “no woman could possibly love me for myself, and I have no money!”

She looked at him curiously. “You don’t give women credit for what intelligence they have!”

“I am no good at microscopical accounts,” he retorted; and, at her pretended anger, “Love is rare—that’s why we value it!”

She left him feeling, as a woman will, that “there was some one”—pausing to think that there might have been.

And Dick’s letter was interesting. Also, it contained a draft for ten thousand dollars—the result of a lucky prospecting trip. But the interest—Dick was going to get married! At last!

It was all like Dick, except the last! Married! Where another man would have sent transportation, and divided, if necessary, when they met, Dick had to send “Barney’s half,” as he put it. At this Barney could smile, but, in spite of his long desire to see his friend married “and settled down,” the great news in some way troubled him. It was not jealousy—not a thought of what Dick’s marriage would mean to their friendship occurred to him, although it did later. No, Barney was wondering what sort of girl she was—in a mining camp like Golden City! And he could not down this thought, loyally though he tried. Perhaps, unconsciously, he compared the Unknown (for Dick said nothing about her) with Ethel Winfred, and, of course, she suffered by comparison.

Of course he had to go, but he was surprised at the pang this leaving gave him. He thought of Bill and his charming wife, of Casey, of others.

“Damn it, we’re like a family!” he muttered. “But I’ve got to go.”

The parting actually hurt and Mildred alarmed Barney dreadfully by crying. It was Hinkman who voiced the general opinion, his wife in his arms:

“He’s a queer guy, and there ain’t nobody just like him—but he gets you!”

Many men have worked hard for a less pleasing endorsement.

XVI

THE stage was filled by one of those heterogeneous cargoes to which Barney's life had accustomed him—people of many trades, livers of varied lives—the Chinaman and the prostitute, whose advent in the mining camp of Golden City was for such opposite ends as cleaning and befouling—pay day suggesting to the men that they needed their shirts washed, their bodies besmirched.

He was not happy. His easy sympathies were touched by the drab lives crossing the desert with him, by the horses plowing through the scorching sand, beaten unnecessarily—all this stirred his soul until his old, consuming hatred for the Cause of things darkened the day.

Everyone seemed bad tempered, as if angered at gold for having tried to hide itself in the places of the world most difficult of attainment. But the grizzled stage driver, by whose side Barney sat, who uttered continuous foul remarks like a parrot, would have shivered at the thoughts his companion ached to express. The arrival of the stage at Golden City was a relief to all of them.

Dick was there, grinning happily, and Barney's ill temper vanished when he saw his friend. The night had begun to hide the crudity of the place, and the desert stars held that warm glow and wonder of nearness peculiar to them. From various directions came the sound of music. It was a tide of human life of which Barney knew every ripple.

They gripped hands. "I'm glad, old man!" exclaimed Barney.

"So am I," answered Dick, happily. "I am to meet her in a little while!"

"Then perhaps I had better leave you!"

"Hell, no! I want you to meet her. I promised I would bring you along."

Barney checked his belongings. They walked away from the stage depot, and a silence came between them. *The well-worn trail of the past seemed about to divide!* Barney sensed this with a feeling akin to horror that he could not understand. On Dick's part the silence was due to contemplation of his love.

The idea of separation persisted. How could it be otherwise, thought Barney, while he felt himself staring at an awful gulf. Surely he was

exaggerating! Of course, a wife would make a difference, however sweet she might be. The long trail—verging toward thirty years of it. The smoke of many camp fires, slowly clouding their way upward until they threw a mantle of benediction over as great a friendship as men ever knew! And the future—a lonely fire, a solitary pipe, echoes of the past, and dead fingers seeming to beckon. But it was best for Dick to marry! *Vale!*

How he hoped that, if the woman drove a wedge between them, she would do it without arousing any feeling which would spoil all memory of the years. . . . What sort of woman was she?

As often happened, Dick answered Barney's thoughts.

"She isn't the sort to come between us," he said, suddenly. "She isn't a drawing-room girl. She has lived and suffered, Barney!" There was just a trace of hesitation. "I am going to marry a dance-hall girl!"

Dick said it proudly, believing that into Barney's mind would swirl the traditions of the Carews. But Barney had gone past that and was thinking of the confession he had wrung from his brother. Dick could take his wife home! But while he again wondered what she was like, a grim vision of the sort of greeting she would receive from Dick's sisters failed to be amusing.

"I am glad, Dick," he said. "A woman who has never bumped into unhappiness cannot appreciate a good husband! You're lucky!"

"I know it," answered Dick, almost humbly.

They went on, again silent. The street was without proper lighting, and very dark in places. They turned into an alley drenched with the noise of the dance hall. Two men, very drunk, staggered past. From the shelter of a doorway came an eager exclamation.

"Dick!"

"Ah!" Dick spoke joyfully. "Here she is!"

"Yes." The girl reminded Barney of a frightened bird. It was too dark properly to see her face. "Yes, dear, and I'm through with this place. Take me away—forever!"

A fugitive memory brushed by Barney, and as Dick began to introduce him to the girl a large man materialized from among the shadows.

"Damn you!" he growled, "you won't take her, away far, Mr. bloody Englishman—unless she wants to go to hell along of you!"

And before Dick could answer, before astonishment could change into action, the man (a deputy sheriff of the low type with which Nevada mining camps were at that time "policed") pushed his revolver against Dick's back and pulled the trigger.

Dick had not even time to hit. The bullet, tearing through his kidneys, had done its deadly work.

"He's got me!" he said, quietly, and fell.

Then Barney Hilliard went mad!

He heard the girl scream as he sprang for the murderer. He heard the feet of men running. Then, in a red haze, with all his terrible atavism stirred to its ultimate possibilities—a maddened gorilla possessed by a powerful human mind—he gripped the man.

He was unusually strong, was this deputy sheriff; he was accustomed to all the tricks of rough-and-tumble fighting; he was without any notion of fair play or decency, and he felt himself protected by his office; he weighed more than did Barney, and he had few scruples about killing, maiming, or torturing. But he had met a man who, in that moment, had fewer scruples than he had—a man who had no scruples at all—a man who had ceased to be a man—a ferocious animal in whose hands he was as helpless as a little child!

And had he been twice as strong, he would have still been helpless. For that terrible ancestor who lived so near the surface of Barney's mind, who had lived on earth millions of years before—lived there before men sought caves for their dwellings—this, somehow guided by the brain of Barney, now responded to the agony of the dying of his only friend!

Some reflex of the present made Barney work systematically. First, with a truly fearful wrench, he broke the fellow's right arm, the shriek of pain sounding wildly above the noise of the dance hall. Then he broke the other arm, and, astride his man, he began bending back his fingers, one by one, enjoying horribly the sheriff's agonized screams as he broke them. Some demon had perched itself in his brain and was telling him that all the world should not prevent his breaking the murderer into small pieces!

Dick lay in the street, his head on the girl's lap. The half dozen loafers who had arrived stood by, watching Barney, not daring to interfere. The people who had heard the first scream of the deputy sheriff had been too busy enjoying themselves to investigate a noise of the sort often heard, and had forgotten it.

A grim silence, punctuated by labored breathing and groans; for Barney, with almost unimaginable cruelty, had dashed the heel of his heavy boot into the mouth of his victim, breaking his teeth and lower jaw, and reducing his signs of agony to moans.

It went on until something began to trouble Barney and spoil his pleasure in breaking the murderer. He had broken the last finger when he

paused to try to understand what was bothering him. Slowly he realized that this was the sobbing of the distraught and helpless girl.

Into the pause of Barney's horrible work came Dick's voice, speaking as brave men speak when they do not wish to betray their suffering.

"Barney, Barney, old man—we have no time, we have no time!"

These words seemed to come to Barney from another world—a world to which he had once belonged. He shivered, and with the coming of understanding the red left his disturbed vision. He got to his feet, staggering slightly, and the now senseless sheriff faded from his consciousness with the personality of the brute that had recently possessed him. He saw Dick lying there dying, and again ceased to be Barney Hilliard. Again the brute of the past took hold, and Barney viciously kicked the huddled figure of the murderer, snarling brutally when it made no sign of pain. Again he looked at his dying friend, and again he became Barney Hilliard.

He turned on the loafers, who cringed away from a brutality beyond their experience or imagination.

"Hadn't any of you damned bums sense enough to fetch a doctor—if there is one in this God-forsaken town?"

An old desert rat answered as one would speak to a wild animal uncaged.

"One's gone for one, mister."

Barney stared at the old man, trying to think, but he could not. To ask about the doctor had been the limit of his mental ability! With an instinctive effort to be careful not to disturb Dick, he knelt by the side of his friend, and presently he took one of his hands in his—holding it in a puzzled sort of way. Staring at him, terrified, the girl controlled her sobbing.

The dying man smiled vaguely. He was not able to speak.

Barney could see that he wanted something—wanted it badly. What was it? He wanted something! Water—was it water? thought Barney. No, it was not water. He did not know how he knew this, but he knew. His brain was slowly returning to the normal. He shook his head violently, trying to clear it. What was Dick's vitally important need? Again Barney shook his head, trying to force his brain to think. Then, suddenly, he understood, and with the understanding of Dick's need there was torn from him a ghastly scream.

"Christ! Is there no one here who knows how to pray?"

The silence seemed to palpitate as his voice died away. To the watchers there came the uncanny sensation that all the world had become quiet—the

dancers, the drunkards, everything—all the world, waiting. Even their own uneasy feet no longer shuffled.

And then, falteringly, making an effort of memory, afraid of failing, but doing her best as a woman will under stress, the girl of the dance hall began:

"Our Father which art in heaven——"

The loafers raised their battered hats. Barney's head bent lower over his friend.

"Hallowed be Thy name——"

She paused, hesitated. Barney felt Dick's grip tighten slightly, then loosen again.

"Thy kingdom come! Thy will be . . . My God! Oh God! Dick! He's dead! . . . He's dead!"

XVII

AND here was another, gone out like a match struck to light a pipe! And that other the only close friend Barney had ever had, would ever have. Ethel, his one love. Dick, his one real friend. And they called God good!

It benefited Barney's state of mind not at all that his handling had killed the creature who had shot Dick; nor was he in any way elated in the camp's verdict of justifiable homicide. For, tough as the camp was, shooting an unarmed man in the back, without even a warning, was too much for its moral digestion. "Saved us the trouble of lynching the swine," was the way they put it when respectfully speaking about Barney's tearing strength.

He went about, speaking to no one, that awful brooding loneliness which caused an actual physical ache of his chest, possessing him. But he no longer railed at the Cause of things. Now, however much the Power behind phenomena might torture him, he would treat his torturer with silent contempt. Only once was this expression torn from him, and that did not refer to his own sufferings, but to the apparently cruel cutting off from life of the two human beings he had loved so much, "And they call God good!"

And his feelings toward Dick's murderer had passed with that one's dying. He had, after all, been but a poor vulgar puppet, without responsibility—a thing molded carelessly and thrown out by the eternal factory of evolution, to strut his small part when circumstance pulled the strings to amuse the lonely Audience who had made the universe for His solitary amusement.

"Free will!" It was to smile! Will was strong or weak as a muscle was strong or weak—according to its development; and to speak of "free" will was as foolish as it would be to speak of "free" muscle, meaning a muscular development which had no limit to its power to lift. The soul! How could one develop a soul? Does it evolve? When and how does it get into the body? The soul! Physical death meant the end of the individual.

Yet, because he was intellectually honest he did admit one good argument for that very weak case, personal immortality. And that was the phase of personality so well expressed in Henley's poem—its ability to rise superior to the bodily sufferings, to endure until consciousness ended, to sacrifice self; such sublime heroism, for instance, as was manifested on

Scott's return march from the South Pole. Yes, there was a *possibility* of the individual's surviving death, but it was *only* a possibility. More likely such grandeur of character had been evolved merely to give zest to the play; and its rarity, its being so far above the loathsome living of the herd, made the argument for the "soul" that much the weaker.

In his mood Barney was glad that the girl Dick had been going to marry kept away from him. He wanted to see no one. The necessary details connected with the taking of Dick's body to England appalled him, simple as they were. He who had never shrunk from great effort of either mind or body began to find little things looming like insurmountable difficulties. It was as if he were desperately tired. And with this he was conscious of being disgusted with life. It could not give him what he wanted, and merely to eat and sleep was not worth while. Thus began his gradually growing intent to shoot himself. He wanted to be done with everything.

When all arrangements had been made, he inquired about the girl—but she had gone. Without any explanations, with hardly a word to her friends, she had taken the stage across the desert the morning after Dick's death!

Barney felt relieved, although cursing himself for the selfish impulse behind that relief. Thinking of her at odd moments, he had almost planned to take her to England with him—to see that she was provided for. He would even have passed her off as Dick's wife, grimly realizing the snobbish horror with which she would have been received by the Carews. Now she had disappeared. After all, Dick had loved her—or at any rate thought he had, which amounted to the same thing. In not taking care of her he could almost imagine himself as having failed Dick. But it was not his fault. She had gone away without giving Barney a chance to do anything. In that awful indifference, in his negation of life, even the woman Dick had loved became unimportant. And Dick knew nothing about it! That Barney Hilliard could see comfort in such an excuse well portrays his mental state. And his state was not due only to the shock of his friend's death—that atavistic resurgence during which he had killed the deputy sheriff had also affected him.

The journey home was a mere succession of days. Ever since Dick and he had left the village there had been a warm anticipation of going back again, and Barney's obtaining the confession from his brother had fanned that warmth into a glow. But now there was none of this. Indeed, he would have felt more content if the ship crossing the Atlantic had met with an accident and he had known that he would never again see the land.

But at times there was a feeling of something that came near to quickening his pulse. And this was bound up with his visioning the old family vaults in the weather-worn church of the village. So often had the

Carews been brought home as Barney was bringing Dick! Pride of race was strong in the man and would not die.

Had he been a woman he would have caressed his soul into feeling by having a good cry. But his soul was numb until they entered the Channel, and even then, as well as during the weeks that followed, his condition might be best described as one of "dual personality"—part of him responding to the emotions of his home-coming, with yet a greater part as inactive as something dead, chained and bound with a longing beyond the description of words, a desire for something of which he was acutely aware without being able to give it a word; a dull ache which even England with all her wealth of mother-touch could not relieve.

He was on deck when they sighted the Lizard Lights, and he leaned upon the rail and mused upon the long line of pride which had woven into the making of England. But the greater part of him might have been an indifferent visitor from some other planet.

Wraiths of ancient ships, ghosts of great men, effort, heroic sacrifice for country. Men who had given of their best—to England. Men who had given all they could, without a thought of honor or preferment. Yes, there had been such men. To be brave and enduring. That feeling of content which comes with doing one's duty, that ability to look oneself in the eye without feeling ashamed. Barney had come to the crux of the matter again—that the highest type of man does his best without thinking of or hoping for any reward, that the weakling needs the idea of reward to stimulate him into doing right, that the simplest and greatest philosophy is contained in the idea that virtue is its own reward, that to suggest a reward to the truly ethical man is to insult him, just as a decent man would be insulted if he were offered money as a reward for saving a life.

Falmouth, with the ancient castle ruins standing on the hill to port. The ships, the men that had entered that old harbor, thrilling to the realization of warm, loving arms awaiting them. Love. That was it. Take love away from a man and he dies. And all Barney loved was dead.

Hell! it was no use quitting. Things had to be done. In this world there always would be something to be done, so some one would always have to be on hand to do it.

Yet the village might have been but the setting of some stage; while the people seemed like dumb actors in a play without interest, badly written. There was a moment, when he gave the confession to Dick's mother and she kissed him, that the old grip of things touched him; but this passed and he listened to respectful apologies for having doubted him in a bored way,

pulling away from the speakers. They put it down to grief for Dick, and let him be.

He remembered a story about a dead man whose spirit tried to speak to the living, to make them understand that he was not dead; and except that he was able to make people see and hear him he was as much out of touch as the mythical ghost of the dead man in the story.

He wandered about, seeking familiarity with inanimate things. The lanes, the places where he had played as a boy, the cliffs, the shrieking of the sea birds, the trees where, season after season, Dick and he had seen the birds build.

If he could only let himself go! If he could break through his awful cage of icy isolation and allow the surge of his grief to carry him in its flood back to wherever he had left his heart, his ability to feel as he used to feel! It was all such a mockery; and since life itself seemed to be nothing but a mockery, how could he merge into it with the exquisite feelings and sorrows of unsophistication? The poets had the best of it. They could swim in the sea of their emotions, drown in them if they wished; while he was as one chained to a rock, with the bright light of his knowledge of the mockery of existence burning pitilessly into his lidless eyes.

How he dreaded the funeral! This, surely, was the greatest mockery of all. It was like an adventure into the country of the blind. Not only did these people fail to see the truth, they actually denied that it was the truth. It was the supreme horror of egotistical ignorance—a crowd of people believing that they were of such value to the universe that death was not the end of them, singing the praises of an amused Power and thanking Him for an imaginary continued existence. What sensible man would want to go on living after death? Why, it was like begging the torturer not to discontinue his torturing, like a man being burned to death asking the fiend who fed the flames not to kill him, but to allow his suffering to continue forever!

The old minister in his white surplice—a decent, kindly old man. Did he ever think? Or was he one of the arch dope peddlers, anxious to give the drug to whoever asked for it?

Yet these were Barney's own people. The villagers, too—these were the hardy, honest, decent men and women of his Race. The best people in the world. Yes, but dupes. Living their lives in a condition of semianæsthesia, bearing the pains of this world with more equanimity because of an imagined paradise. And the paradise they imagined was as futile as their desiring it. A city of golden streets, a crown, a harp, an eternal sabbath. True, some had evolved beyond this crudity and imagined a nebulous

condition of happiness. But it was the result of the same fear of facing the truth to which nature sternly pointed.

Everybody was there, and it seemed that even the old graves showed a kindly interest in this addition to their silent family. Dick, and the end of Dick. Never again would he smile or speak. He was dead. To mourn his going was to give tongue to a selfish sorrow for his loss, but in that weakness of humanity Barney joined. He missed Dick, and would always miss him, and he was not ashamed to admit it. Probably he was more disturbed than anyone at the funeral.

If he could only have broken down and wept, as did Dick's mother, as the other women pretended to do. It was not shame that held him, because, afterward, he went away by himself and deliberately tried to weep. He even remembered his infrequent weepings of childhood, attempted to arouse the same emotional reactions, but could not.

"Dust to dust." Well, that part of it was true. "In the sure and safe hope . . . life eternal." It was terrible. Why send a good man to his grave with a lie?

The smoke from chimneys went up into the quiet summer air, moving like the beckoning fingers of trembling age. So Dick Carew slept with his fathers.

Next morning, with half a gale blowing, Barney took out the old boat, alone, driving her past the Cape under all sail, delighting in the danger. But the delight was in the chance of death, not in the one-time thrill of adventuring; and when he remembered that to drown in sight of the village would show both bad seamanship and poor swimming, he reefed the boat down and came in with the fishermen.

And he could not stay there. It was not restlessness, not the urge of living, that drove him, but the sort of numb nervousness that makes a man walk the floor nights. He could not remain in one place. There was nothing to tie to. He was lonely, yet he craved a greater loneliness. The man was hovering around what he believed to be the eternal loneliness of death, hesitating upon its verge. A hesitation born of the work not done—caused by the suppressed memory of his ambition to write his great book. But when he thought of the book, and all his plans for it, he would put such thoughts aside with a "what's the use?" and return to his moody introspection.

Then, one night, he saw clearly that to kill himself would be to quit, to admit that God had beaten him into submission with the blows of circumstance, and he gave himself a term to live. Before he died he would accomplish something. The book did not matter so much, but it would be

more decent to try to make the world a bit happier before leaving it. There were thousands who were worse off than Barney Hilliard could ever be. There was gold in the North. If he could wrest some of that gold from the creeks and do something for those worse off than himself, then he would not be quitting if he put a bullet through his head. Coldly logical, he called himself a bit of a prig for thinking he could help anyone; but he could see no other solution to his problem. He would defy God by setting himself this task. When he had accomplished it, he would again defy God by shooting himself. And, because he would have done what he set out to do, this last act would not be quitting—would not be admitting that God had beaten him! But only for a moment could this decision stir him—the morning saw him as indifferent to action as before, with the same numb desire to move on without caring where he went.

In this way he left England and crossed the Atlantic again. While he was as yet unaware of it, he had found something he wanted to do, something that urged him on. It was strange that he did not realize where he was going, that he thought that all he wanted to do was to get away from England, away from the herd of narrow lives. The greater loneliness. To go North, and stay North, away from other men. This he could vision as a need. And when North he could prospect for the gold he wanted. But a moment's thought would have told Barney Hilliard that that growing, palpitating craving to be *somewhere* was not a mere wish to be North and alone. He *was* going North, but he had something to do which was urging him like an appointment long waited for. And finally, in Winnipeg, this trembling desire forced itself into his consciousness, and he bowed his tired head in understanding.

After all, it was the natural thing to do, however much fools might laugh, if they knew. But Barney was not the sort of man to trouble himself about the laughter of fools.

The train seemed to go very slowly! The prairies seemed as wide as the space in which the stars are set. It was night when he got off at Nippa Creek.

The night was warm and clear; a half moon helped the stars. As if about to visit a queen—which he was!—Barney walked proudly, although his soul was bent beneath its load of grief.

It was past eleven and very still. Only an occasional, isolated noise of the night broke the quiet, to accentuate it. The wooden gate creaked somewhat as he opened it. The little white marble cross he himself had put there welcomed him. A belated ranch hand saw Barney's figure move against a streak of moonlight, and hurried fearfully home to tell of having seen not one ghost, but several.

He sat down on the grass beside the grave. Ethel's name was clearly visible. Barney, almost instinctively, began to try to think away from his pain—trying pedantically to reduce all things to their elements, bludgeoning his mind with thoughts as elementary as the alphabet!

"And that's all," he mused. "A sound among multitudes of other sounds—a name! That's all we are to our fellow sufferers—a name! All the rest, the feelings, the emotions, remain in ourselves, and are only guessed at! Dick was only a name to me. I liked him because he aroused friendly feelings in me—made me happier—and because I believed that I aroused similar feelings in him. But all I really knew of Dick was appearance—appearance, a sound—his name!

"A few feet below me lies the only being who ever aroused in me the emotion we call 'love.' . . . A tiny glitter of light against the dark of eternity that I knew as a conscious woman. Now the light has gone out—forever. Love! Swinburne was wrong—love *can* be as deep as the grave! . . . I am mixing my metaphors abominably! . . . It's strange—strange how we met and loved as soon as we saw each other! Roughly, I can trace the thing! Some billions of years ago, a mass began to cool. It was, no doubt, a slow process, but it cooled and cooled until it became a spherical mass of heated rocks and hotter mud—spouting from as many places as a man perspires. A dense, heavy atmosphere surrounded this young world—rain, wind storms of terrific intensity crooned this baby's lullaby. Perhaps the sun was hidden by this 'caul' of steam. Perhaps the world had rings, like Saturn, as Vail suggests. But on this smoking, forbidding, storm-stricken Earth there was no sign of life. Love had not been born, and dreams lay latent in the womb of possibilities. We know within what limits life as we know it is possible, so it was long after the world was born that the Great Accident occurred—or, rather, that the Stage Manager began His first experiments with the amusing puppets of His perverted imagination! What a ghastly picture that empty world must have made! It took genius to change it. *Evolution*, the visible process of the invisible genius! Genius—akin to insanity, lacking what we call 'moral balance.' And the puppet-genii copy the Master, as little children imitate their elders! It's a nice question—did those storms blow around the world in utter silence? There were no ears to hear. Without ears and nerves to resolve certain vibrations into sound—could there be any sound? Metaphysics, but there is something fascinating about such questions. And I can close my eyes and see the Plutonian agony of that lifeless, lonely world. . . . So it cooled! It cooled, until a 'fortuitous combination of salts and temperature' (whatever that may mean, really!) produced the first microscopic vegetal form of life—caused protoplasm. It is hardly likely that

life has bridged the inorganic since that first time. Against a re-occurrence of such a 'fortuitous combination' the chances are almost infinity to one! So, that first, scant, nigh-invisible growth was the parent of all the life this world has ever known, or ever will know! And when one thinks of the chances against such a combination, it seems that this poor world, of all the worlds in our stellar system, was the only one to bear this thing we call life—the only stage used by the Genius for His amusement. Well, why blame Him—it must be lonely being all alone through eternity?

"It went on, and grew, changed and multiplied. Fragile as it was, limited by temperature, need of nourishment, by conditions, it went on, learning adaptation. The frost killed it, heat scorched it, and by and by it turned upon itself and, by killing and eating its neighbors, did its best to exterminate itself. But it kept going.

"It increased and multiplied by the simple process of splitting—the parent split into two halves, these two halves became its children, to again split when their time came. Sex was unknown, consciousness was not known, the dim shadows of coming *feeling* merely stirred into needed activity. Then—change and growth. Yet, somewhere—dimly down the ages it cast its first glow—somewhere, somehow love was born. Love, a far greater mystery than life. Some day we may make life in our laboratories, in the form of protoplasm, but love—never will we be able to make love in a glass tube!

"Is it merely a chemical reaction? Like hell it is! But why does a man crave some particular woman? Even the origin of consciousness is less mysterious than the dawn of this glowing emotion we call love!"

Barney was making a desperate effort. Forcing himself to repeat words of trivial import, marshaling thoughts of his early days—he could find no other weapon with which to fight off his all-consuming grief. And glimmering in his mind was the impulse to tear up the earth until he could again press his lips against the dead lips of Ethel Winfred!

Dreaming down the ages—for only the gist of his soliloquy is given here—he had not found peace. He only came back to where he began, and he ended in something very like a prayer.

"It does not seem possible that You could be so rotten." He knelt by the grave. "Not even a fiend would allow the planting of such hopes and aspirations as fill the breasts of good women—only to cheat them! Besides, how could You make something better than Yourself? Through the medium of evolution You brought Ethel into existence—all her sweetness and goodness were due, in the last analysis, to You, First Cause. How could You

make Ethel, if You were not kind? . . . Oh, hell! why don't I lie down and howl my head off, as I feel like doing?"

He lay down, and his unuttered sobs tore like earthquakes at his heaving chest.

In some blind manner he left the cemetery, and took the first train out of Nippa Creek.

"Energy and matter," he mused, "and since we cannot imagine one of them separate from the other we must assume that, originally, they were the same. Sunlight and atoms—some millions of cells built into a lovely body, deriving their energy from the food that body eats—a marvelous machine, filled with inherited emotions, conscious we know not how, unless through chemical change. And this was Ethel! And I, another mass of similar cells and energy, met her, loved her, and still love her! But something occurs to cause the cells to cease to co-ordinate—Ethel died, as I shall die. The machine disintegrates, the energy dissipates, the gleam we call 'consciousness' drifts like smoke into the air! And that is all, that is the end! Some pain, some tears, some kisses, some yearnings, some hopes—a darling organism, a tender, loving woman! Just one actor among the myriads that have trodden the world's stage. It's strange that God does not become tired of the play and drop the curtain forever upon humanity's agony. One would think that even a lonely God would tire of our troubles, our noises, our struttings, our loves, our hates. Surely He could devise some other form of amusement! I could, myself, if I did not choose to improve the plot of this weariness. Through suffering we grow character—but to what end? That our children may be better than ourselves? And what then—what's the use of growing character if it all ends in the grave? And what, after all, is happiness? Oh, dear God, if You are only half as tired of it all as I am, I pity You in Your loneliness!"

XVIII

NOW came what was perhaps the strangest episode in all Barney Hilliard's strange life. Without knowing it—and he would have laughed at the suggestion—he was intensely religious. Even what the unthinking would have called his "blasphemies" were manifestations of this religious emotion pervading him. But where others had "wrestled with the Lord in prayer" from an attitude of humility and fear, Barney stood out unfearing and demanded reasons of his God, when his intense sympathy with the sufferings of humanity tried to bring that God to trial. No man ever born had a more overpowering sense of God's presence.

And so, in his strange way, Barney did what many other men of deep religious feeling have done. He went out into the wilderness, to live entirely alone! And while his idea in doing this was not that of the hermits and holy men of other days, his impelling motive was the same—the lonely agony of his tormented soul demanded a greater loneliness, and he wished to learn to understand his soul—that is, there were certain mental experiments which he could the more profitably pursue when away from his kind and the interruptions of civilization.

Years before had began his efforts toward perfect mental control, with no particular experiment in view; and the method he had stumbled upon was a very old one. Unaware, at the time, of what he was doing, he had discovered the principles of an ancient science, miscalled "occult"; and when his practices resulted in a remarkable discovery, he had called that discovery "imagination," until the proof of what he had seen showed him that the most imaginative thing a man could do would be to set a limit to the ability of the human mind, although there was nothing to indicate that this wonderful *mind* continued to function after death—that it differed in any way from the "minds" of the animals, except in degree.

To isolate himself as much as possible, he filled his ears with cotton and vaseline. Then he would look at his watch. Suppose the hands showed two o'clock. Barney would close his eyes and force himself to dwell upon the mental picture shown by his watch. After *years* of practice of this sort of thing, he was able instantaneously to fix his mind upon any one thing and keep it there as long as he wished, without any other thought coming into it.

The next exercise was more difficult, but very necessary. This was to make his mind a blank, and keep it that way—without thought. When first succeeding at this, he would fall asleep, but practice enabled him so to exclude thought that he could make himself "unconscious" while wide awake—that is, allow no concept whatever to enter his mind.

Next, he taught himself *never to dream without being aware that he was dreaming*. Just before falling asleep, he would give himself the powerful suggestion that if he dreamed he would know he was only dreaming. This was not particularly difficult, and in time he was able to *watch himself doing things in dreams*, and to a certain extent control those dreams, although there were dreams in which he watched himself perform as if he were watching a moving picture.

His mind was not a mere kingdom, but a universe waiting to be explored, and he had all the explorer's eagerness to be the first to tread new places, feeling certain that there were many such. And yet his first discovery came to him almost as an accident, and in making it he was only walking along a very old trail.

He lay facing south. His mind was a blank, nearing the sleep state. Almost as one imagines he does a thing, although he could *sense* the difference, his mental view traveled through the wall, down over the rim of the horizon, until he found himself looking down upon a field of untrodden snow which stretched as far as he could see.

At first he saw nothing but snow, and so accustomed was he to snow that the sight of it *caused no concept*—the word *snow* did not come into his mind. He continued to look, and presently he saw what appeared to be a small tent. It looked soiled, brown, with the snow drifted against it. Then he saw what were either small flags or an upended sled. There flashed into his mind a concept of what this was, and the picture vanished immediately. He was lying on his bed, seeing nothing.

Thus he learned the very important fact that when making this experiment one *must not allow a concept to form of what one sees*. Of course the mind receives the impression, but no action of mind must be allowed. Many may say that this is impossible, in spite of the fact that the word "impossible" has become foolish these latter years. (Continue to "stare" hard at what you see!)

Tremendously interested, Barney "went out" again. Again he saw the pathetic little tent, while over him stole that vague feeling which is part fear and part reverence, and which comes to one in the presence of death. His sight was clouded. Indeed, in this experiment, although he was often able to

see a book, he could never see with sufficient clarity to read it. And now, *looking through the wall of the tent*, he saw that there were three dead men in it. (It seems possible to make things transparent or otherwise as one wills.) Blurred as was his sight, Barney could see three bodies, seemingly wrapped in sleeping robes. A concept of what he saw brought him back to his room. Had he imagined all this? He knew he had not dreamed it. He realized what he had seen, or what he had thought he had seen; but, surely, he had imagined it. Because he believed there should have been five men in that tent. The end of Captain Scott, Doctor Wilson and Lieutenant Bowers. But long before the proof came to him that he had seen correctly, other experiments along similar lines had banished the notion of "imagination."

Alone, in a winter-bound world, in perfect physical health, he came to the other experiment for which he had long practiced; an experiment dangerous anywhere, but particularly so when alone and hundreds of miles from help; an experiment probably original with him.

The days were so short as to be negligible, when the sun peeped for a minute at noon, as if staring fearfully at the twilight of a world.

Barney stood outside his cabin, musing over what might be his last coherent view of earth. Because he was not merely facing a physical danger, but a mental one. For he was going to take a plunge into the subconscious—to dive down deep into that sea of inherited memories and impressions, perhaps back to where consciousness first began to evolve—and when he came to the surface again some long-dead ancestral personality might be clinging to him; he might no longer be Barney Hilliard, but a pathetic case of dual personality. Or he might slip into the paralysis of amnesia, and never remember himself again.

Thinking thus, came the memory of something Dunsany had written of Irish superstition—that a man might dream so deeply that when he awoke a "demon" might be in possession of him—Barney's gravest danger; and he was reminded of that principle of comparative mythology, that there cannot be a superstition so gross that there is not a germ of truth in it.

He wondered if any man had ever tried this experiment—it gave him a curious feeling to think that he was about to adventure where no man had willingly trod. *Willingly* was the word; because it was Barney's thinking upon the experiences of those unwilling ones who had merely dipped into the sea where he was about to plunge, that had given him his first clew leading to this adventure.

The "things" seen by people when in delirium tremens, by children in nightmare, and the like—that these "things" were resurgent memories of

things seen by dead ancestors, submerged in the subconscious minds of the people seeing them until the condition called "delirium" brought them to the surface, was obvious to Barney; who, however, did not believe that any ancestor had seen pink rats or similarly distorted creatures. No, the mirage of fear in the sufferer in delirium almost made the things seem unrecognizable; but that did not prove that the things had no existence. For however much an object may be distorted by the nervous condition of the person seeing it, the object itself remains the same; and another person seeing that object through clear mental perception would see it as it actually was—leaving outside the old philosophical argument concerning "appearance" and "reality," of course.

So Barney had come to where he knew that, by inducing a condition of delirium in himself, he would be able to see some of the things seen by his ancestors, and even some of those ancestors. There would be no fear in him to distort his view, and his long training toward mental control and knowing of himself when dreaming, told him that he would be able calmly to examine what he saw, almost as if he were wide awake.

But the risk of trying to do this when all alone amounted to folly. Even the shock of unreeling that silent "moving picture" in his mind would be enough to make him very ill. So he looked out upon that winter world, wondering what he would see. How far back would he be able to go along that long line of life which extends beyond the first tiny jellyfish thing? Billions of years of evolving life! In the few hours of his experiment he would have time for only a fragment of this picture of life—would it be an important part, something of value to paleontology, for example? Or would the visions be fleeting and nonunderstandable?

The sun slipped below the southern horizon, and a line of heavily snowbound spruce near his cabin took on a deeper gloom. It was not unusually cold, but the growing wind had that eerie tone presaging a blizzard. Barney shivered slightly, and, in his utter loneliness, saw again that wonderful picture of the world's ending in H. G. Wells's *Time Machine*. What with the sparse vegetation, the darkness, and the chill of the seemingly lonely wind, he might himself have been the Time traveler who had adventured millions of years into the future. Yet not even that Time traveler, had he been real, had taken a greater chance than Barney was to take in his plunge into the mysteries of the long-buried years, and memories of the long-dead ancestors of the race. He turned away from the desolate scene and entered his cabin. He had the drug which he had found to be best for his experiment. He had trained faithfully for that experiment. But to use that drug oneself is difficult—a visual difficulty due to the fact that the drug

(hyocine hydrobromide) causes the eye muscles to lose their accommodation. But Barney had provided for this.

He had three glass hypodermic syringes, a spirit lamp, a bottle of alcohol, and a bottle of sterilized water. He lay in his sleeping furs, with everything handy. A stove made the cabin comfortable.

He wanted to avoid making an injection directly into a vein, so he made a number of circles on his arms with red chalk. When the drug caused his sight to fail, he would be still able to see these circles dimly, and thus know where he was putting the needle. He filled a syringe, and, thoughtfully, tremendously interested, he injected one one-hundredth of a grain of hyocine hydrobromide.

About fifteen minutes later he found that he could not distinguish the hands of his watch. He began to fill another hypodermic, and was surprised at the difficulty he found in controlling his muscles. While his mind was still clear, it took all his powerful will to drive his actions—the motor side of his nervous system was affected by the drug. Suddenly, the syringe dropped from his fingers. It had fallen upon the floor, and broken into a hundred pieces before he realized it had left his hand. But he was neither startled nor agitated.

"Lucky I have two more!" he mused.

He took up another syringe, after spreading a blanket so that if he dropped anything it would fall on the blanket. He also worked close to the floor, so that if one of the syringes did fall it would stand less chance of being broken.

He pointed the filled syringe needle-point up, and began to press out the air bubbles, as he thought. But out of the point of the needle cascaded a myriad of tiny, diamond-like stars, and before he knew it the syringe was empty.

"No use," he muttered. "Got to take it any old way, and take it quick, or my muscles will go before I can take enough to become delirious, and I'll make a failure!"

He did "take it any old way"! Seven times in succession, with the utmost difficulty, he injected one one-hundredth of a grain of the deadly drug, determined to succeed, if he killed himself. His muscles began to feel like water, and all his great strength left him. Then, gradually, he felt himself slipping into delirium.

He would have to watch himself. Firmly he repeated this injunction. He was going into delirium to study his subconscious, ancestral memories; taking a dive into the past, plunging through millions of years of time which

had become like a silent lake, moving only when stirred by the memories which gave it form. Memory! What is it? One can remember back to some thing as one looks at a distant star, time being reduced to the second needed for seeing. But does memory occupy space? While we cannot think of anything that does not occupy space, memory does seem to disprove this rule. If one only considers the memories stored in his own brain which have to do with only his own life, what space so small can those memories occupy in order to find room in one small brain? And when we add to the memories of a life all those inherited memories of the subconscious, as well as those many dim ones which have become automatic and are called "instincts"—what sort of space does memory occupy? Or is Bergson right?

Yet, to Barney Hilliard it seemed that he was not only about to journey through Time, but also through great space. In his mind memory-time extended for billions of years, while space extended indefinitely—the long history of the descent of man. Tangled it might be, faint here and there, that long scroll was his to examine, to the extent which that other sort of time (the time he could stay under hyocine) would allow. The lake of the past, as apparently bottomless as a barrel of water in which the sky is reflected. Leaving himself, as it were, babbling delirious nonsense in his furs, he plunged into that deeper self which was made up of all the men, women, and animals who had lived before him in order that he might be born.

But he took his normal awareness with him! To this end had he trained, beginning with his control of himself in dreams. Even as he dived, he knew himself to be sinking down deep into "memory"; in which the "spirit mediums" fish for surface nonsense to retail to the witless in the folly markets of the world.

For a while he knew that the vaguely distorted sun was the lighted lamp in his cabin; but this disappeared. The memory of the events of his own life seemed to have been left behind—as it were, on the bank of the lake into which he had dived—and now he could see this past of his own like a huge signal fire on the desert of time that dwindled as he went deeper and away from it. The fire moved as if signals were being made to him with wet blankets. Barney knew this for the fading, distorted upper consciousness of delirium, and forced his will into ability to view what might come. Some mixed pictures came rapidly, and passed.

"I am Barney Hilliard," he repeated. "I cannot be licked!"

Pictures were flashing past too rapidly to be distinguishable. Barney tried to will himself to sink more slowly, but could not stay his rapid descent. In the space of seconds he was rushing through millions of years of impressions. Would he ever be able to stop himself? He might go on sinking

into the past until he came to where life was first "made," and, being unable to stop, go on into the inorganic! A weird and illogical notion which made Barney shake his head, as he often did in ordinary dreams, to clear it.

He seemed to have been traveling for ages, even as he had traveled through ages, without having seen anything sufficiently clear to distinguish. How far back into the past had he gone? He had no way of knowing. He might have gone beyond where life first came to live on land, so far into the dim past that the ancestor who first crawled ashore was millions of years unborn! And he had no way of stopping his downward time-annihilating plunge. But he still kept his dream self-control.

Then, suddenly, he knew that his rapid descent had ceased, that he had plunged to the limit of ancestral memory, and was rising slowly to the surface again. Then he began to see "things"!

He shuddered with a fear he had never before known. He wondered, then understood. The fear he was feeling had been felt millions, billions of years before he took hyocine, but the memory of it would never die while life continued!

That small, near-helpless thing! Was it a fish? That queer creature which by sheer luck had just escaped the jaws of a truly terrible monster! (Terrible, that is, to Barney because of his sympathetic response to his ancestor's horror.) That tiny wriggler, scurrying away, whose deluge of fear had swept through Barney! He had descended from *that*! And—tremendous thought—if it had not luckily escaped from the other thing which had tried to devour it, Barney had never been born! Nay, more! If it had not escaped, the race of men had never walked the world! From it had continued that life which had grown into man. Otherwise it had not been in Barney's subconscious mind!

"I am a proud child of chance!" he thought. "And my coming into existence was dependent upon millions of similar chances! What a thing is circumstance! And what an accident is man!"

He watched his remote ancestor swim or wriggle wildly out of sight, and again the pictures blurred with his upward motion. Again the pictures of memory flashed past too rapidly, with Barney vainly trying to see them. Suddenly—and it seemed that some attitude of mind caused this—he saw clearly again—things moved at a normal life rate. He saw a forest of huge tree ferns.

"The carboniferous," he murmured.

He seemed to be standing in a vast hothouse, and so strong were those old impressions that the langourous heat, the tropical *feel*, came to him. It

was more than a picture. He was even conscious of a mixture of strange scents, although the smell was faint.

Then he saw something which made him stare intently. Was this some huge mistake, some trick of imagination? But even as he asked himself this question, he knew he was not "imagining"! The huge ferns hardly moved. But what would a paleontologist have said? How he would have adored such a sight as Barney saw—saw now with the same clarity and understanding as he saw things in everyday life, colors and everything. And between himself and the creature he saw the sympathetic, ancestral relation was so profound that its emotions swept through Barney as through itself! But, could he rightly call it an animal—using the word in its general sense?

" 'There were giants in the world in those days,' " he found himself quoting. "But this—in the coal age! Of course, the carboniferous extended over millions of years, and differed in time on different parts of the earth! But this! If I tell anyone that a branch of the primates—not the lowest, but the highest, apparently—lived in the coal age, I shall be laughed at. . . . But it's as real as I am myself!"

It was not like looking at the fish-thing which had so narrowly escaped. To think of that wriggler as an ancestral relation was an abstraction. But now, in this forest dripping with heat, Barney might have been looking at himself, on stilts and disguised, so strong was the feeling of kinship.

"It might be myself, dressed up in hair and grown a lot," he mused. "And a fierce-looking cuss, too!"

He was staring at something which was far more man than ape, which had no trace of a tail—an "ape man" fully sixteen feet in height, which lurked, as if on watch, behind a tree fern!

"What's he up to?" queried the interested Barney, entirely forgetting the tremendous gulf of time separating him from what he saw—a gulf spanned so marvelously by memory.

Although nothing menaced it, as far as Barney could see, this strange creature seemed desperately afraid; and its fear—reborn in Hilliard—showed an intelligence beyond anything that might have been expected in that age. No "missing link" this, but a member of the branch of the tree of true men which had withered and died without leaving a trace among the rocks. But there was one record of its existence which man still carries with him, changed—and a very surprising record! A ductless gland now, but what fascinated Barney more than anything else was not the size of the creature, but the fact that it had a third eye! Somewhat higher, and between its other eyes, there glittered a smaller eye.

"The pituatary as it used to be," Barney gloated. "And fancy my seeing it like this. Oh, for a camera!" So real was the experience that the absurdity of his last remark escaped him! "But what is he afraid of?"

The creature's feelings were coursing through Barney exactly as they swept through the creature itself. To this was added the visible effect the fear was having upon it. And Barney was compelled to believe that this fear was allied to the "spiritual" or religious. There was no other word for it. That huge ancestor—for it must be remembered that unless the creature had been Barney's ancestor the sympathetic relation would have been absent—was not afraid of any physical enemy. Had he heard thunder? Then, as Barney sought to analyze this emotion, both emotion and picture vanished, exactly as a picture leaves the screen, with the same disappointing "cutting off," and Barney was rising through the sea of confused memories again, his last coherent vision that of his giant ancestor shivering behind the slightly swaying tree fern of the vanished age of coal.

Then came a horrible experience. At first, Barney wandered in the dark. He had not merely lost his way—it seemed there was no way. Desperately he tried to open his eyes and awake, but he could not. He was buried in the subconscious, as far as his personality was concerned, as deeply as men are buried in a mine, after an accident has cut them off from the upper world. Worse than this, he was so terribly alone. Would he never be able to wake?

Came the time when he could no longer keep his dream self-control, and he became as any ordinary man in a bad dream. He was caught under countless twisted tree trunks, and, struggle and seek as he would, he could find no way out.

Another time, he was under a huge rock, as large as the Rock of Gibraltar. Along the base of this rock ran a dusty road whereon hundreds of people passed. Where he lay under the rock there was just room for his body, with a tiny hole, the size of one nostril, through which he could breathe. But the passing feet stirred up the heated dust, and the air he inhaled with such difficulty through the tiny hole choked him.

Every sort of evil dream was his, through which were shot those terrible moments when he struggled to awake. At such times he could wonder if he had gone mad, and if his efforts to awake were those made by his ego to reassert itself. It was worse than being buried alive, and was probably like the agony of those who die in uræmic poisoning, who cannot awake, in spite of their own and their friends' and doctor's efforts—hands that beat feebly on the bed, betraying the agony of the brain-imprisoned soul! And once, dimly, came to him his lifelong question—why did God allow such agony? Would he never awake?

Before he finally fell deeply asleep and ceased to dream, Barney probably suffered as greatly as a man can suffer. It was the sort of agony which drives men insane, and it may be that only his mental balance and the deep, long sleep which finally came saved his reason. When he did awake, shouting, he was very sick; and he vowed to himself that never again would he attempt that experiment.

XIX

SPRING was waking the world; the snowbound earth, like some huge white bear, was coming to life again after its winter sleep.

But the season of youth found little response in Barney. He would ponder upon the mystery of life, but purely from a scientific standpoint—ultimate questions had been dismissed from his speculations. It was a waste of time to bother about the reason why one lived and died; while eternity was a question from which, like Herbert Spencer, he shrank. Two years of entire separation from his kind found him near the apex of his ambition—in science and philosophy he would be hardly likely to meet a man who knew more than he did—but more sympathetic than ever with his suffering fellow humans.

He hunted and killed only as his need demanded, and he was very careful to kill without inflicting pain; but this need of killing animals weaker in defense than he was, in order that he might continue to live, increased the bitterness of his opinion of the universe, which shows nothing but a cruel struggle for existence—for he could not agree with those thinkers who regard *civilization* as a phenomenon apart from the survival of the fittest.

But his magnificent health demanded long walks, and it was during one of these walks that he discovered what was afterward called "Hilliard Creek," which was so rich in placer gold that many old miners believed that the fabled "mother lode" must be quite close to it.

Barney was not excited by his discovery. For two years he had lived within two miles of his find, and after numerous washings had shown him the extraordinary richness of the dirt and told him that he was a rich man, he was as unmoved as he had been during the time he had lived alongside the gold without knowing it was there.

For a moment he was surprised by his own indifference. Then he saw how logical it was. Nothing in life had power to move him any more—since Dick's death he had been drifting farther and farther from desire to live until he had reached the place where there was nothing to live for. He saw quite clearly where he was drifting. Life itself had become a bore, and the ordinary details of living an incubus. And in this regard his finding the gold gave him a certain satisfaction—he could quit now without being a quitter.

He had satisfied his early ambition, and could say, if he cared to, that few men knew more than he did; and he had made good in the game of life, as men call it making good. Now he could be of some use to those less able than himself; and the money was an actual increase to the wealth of the world. He had not bowed beneath the blows of circumstance, but had kept going. Now, if he shot himself, he hurt no one; and his suicide was not due to despondency, but to boredom—he had won in the game, and he could leave it as a good player who does not care to play any more.

As he staked his claims these thoughts ran through his brain. If only Dick had been there to stake alongside him! And if there had only been Ethel to take his winnings to! Then he would have joyed in life! For he had everything but the most precious thing. Health, wealth—all but That!

> "Life without love, there was no life in it
> Whereby the man might live."

he quoted as he worked. Well, it would not take a great deal of time to either work out enough gold or to sell his claims. Just what he meant to do with the money he could decide later. A year or two at the utmost! Then—then no more unrest, no more yearnings, no more loneliness, but a sleep, a long, long sleep, and eternal forgetfulness!

But there was more to do than he had imagined, and he found numerous responsibilities which he could not shirk. And he had to admit to himself that there was a certain pride, almost a pleasure, in being the big man, "the boss" of the mining camp which so rapidly sprang up on Hilliard Creek. The popularity which came to him when, naturally, he did "not try to hog it," but broadcasted the news of his discovery, remained and increased as he gradually emerged into the position of dictator. Thus, even when he had sold his holdings he could not immediately leave the camp.

In its strange way the camp loved him, even the dance-hall girls, to whom he was always polite but nothing more, while the gamblers claimed him as one of their own, although he never placed a bet or associated with them. And this close contact with life went to confirm what his abstract thinking had decided upon: that to write his projected "Critique of Existence" would merely be to try to put a wire fence around what Barney Hilliard believed he logically controlled, while what near-realities life contained were hedged outside and even escaped through the wire. No, he would never write a line.

But even the rapidly growing camp could not dispel his loneliness—apparently there was nothing on earth that could do that! There were nights when he would lie face down on the floor of his cabin in an agony of mind and body, yearning for the only woman he had ever loved, for the clasp of

the hand of his one real friend. He might watch the camp become a town, and then a city, but what would its growth avail? There was only one way out!

And he was nearing that way. He would not end life among those who might mourn. He would make no man sorry, if he could help it. He had realized upon everything he had, and all his property was in the form of cash or bonds. Away from the North, in some city that did not know him—there could Barney Hilliard end his agony of yearning. So, he was ready to go; but he waited. The camp had become dearer than he had thought, and the idea of telling its people that he was going to leave them hurt him. But it had to be done. Life was made up of hurtful partings, anyway! Well, he would soon part with life!

So, he would go out. For three days he went about the country he knew so well, changing so rapidly from the lonely land he had known during his two years of hermitage. He could have laughed at himself for this strange wish to "say good-by" to the district—but it was like getting into training to say good-by to those who could understand his speech. It was the dead of winter and they were thawing the ground. Afterwards, he went into town alone, unshaven and muddy. He felt unusually well, even for him, and very hungry. The lights welcomed him. But for him there had been no town there. The thought gratified him. He turned in to the restaurant that adjoined the bar of the largest saloon, ordered his dinner and some whisky. Then he looked about. He saw a man point him out to a stranger as the discoverer of the creek and its richest man; but no one came to speak to him. His ways, and particularly his desire to eat alone, were known and respected. And, sitting there, he looked very grim and tough—anything but a man who had set out to "make all knowledge his province"!

Knowing nearly everyone there, Barney began to place them while he waited. Here was So-and-so. There was the unfortunate who had sold his claim for a song—to see the buyer take more out of it in three days than he had paid. One by one Barney placed them, idly listening to the music from the dance hall that opened off the end of the saloon.

The waiter brought his dinner. Just as he was beginning to eat he looked up—almost as if some one had called his name!—to fix his gaze on a man and a woman who were talking over in a corner. That is, the man was talking, commanding, it seemed. Barney frowned in a puzzled way. Why did he find himself so interested in two apparent strangers? Then, as he continued to watch the couple, it came to him that he had met the man somewhere. Not in Hilliard—Barney had not seen the fellow in the camp before. Where, then? The association seemed unpleasant. Suddenly he

remembered. In Victoria, years ago, Casey had pointed out the fellow, grinning and cursing as he did so. He bore the unusual name of Waverly, and this, of course, had been enough to annoy Casey. But the greater cause for Casey's annoyance is best told in his own words.

"Ain't it hell, Barney? There's me and you without a wife, just because we ain't pretty! If we was only prettier, with all our other good qualities, we might have three wives each, like that skunk Waverly over there! Sure he has! It's a well-known fact! But he's smart, and nobody ain't made any complaints. The swine! Nice girls, too! If they hadn't been he wouldn't have had to marry them. See? But they were decent! And now I guess they're too ashamed to tell the police on him. It ain't nice for a decent girl to have to say she lived with a man when she wasn't really his wife, even if she thought she was! I don't see why they fell for him, though! Why, he ain't even a actor!" This with supreme disgust. "All he has is a pretty face. Yes, of course they left him when they found it out. But what did he care, when he was maybe tired of them? Too late, eh? God! Barney, I guess you is pretty rotten, and I'm worse, but to—to do what he done! God! Three girls with ruined lives. The swine!" Which was certainly the longest, and probably the most impassioned speech ever made by the genial Casey.

Then, with an audacity that seemed sheer insanity, this Waverly had attempted to marry another girl—in Victoria. But the secret leaked out and he just managed to leave town a jump or so ahead of a warrant. And now, years after, he was in Hilliard.

Barney frowned. And what was he bullying the dance-hall girl about? For bullying her he certainly was. Barney half rose from his seat, when the girl suddenly left Waverly and started toward his table. The fellow tried to stop her, but she persisted. Seeing this, Waverly hurriedly left the saloon. Barney sat down again and waited.

She came toward him, walking more slowly as she neared the table. The crowd at the bar looked on curiously, for Barney's attitude toward women had been the subject of much weird and illogical speculation. She came forward. Once she had been very pretty, but now even the make-up on her face failed to conceal what years of dance-hall life had done to her beauty. With his tremendous sympathy for sentient things, the sight of this poor, tired girl roused everything unselfish in him, while the memory of Waverly's recent bullying boded ill for that much-marrying gentleman.

"Good evening, Barney!"

He started as if a bullet had entered a mass of nerve centers. No one in the camp had ever called him by his first name! Who was she?

"Oh, Barney, don't you remember me?" she pleaded.

There was not a sound in the saloon. The music in the dance hall had stopped and everyone around the bar was far too interested in the scene at Barney's table to speak.

Her voice had aroused some poignant association, and this, crowding upon his astonishment, troubled him so that he could not speak. He motioned with his hand, and the girl sat down.

"Oh, Barney, I am so sorry to bother you, but I must." She laid her head on the table and broke into passionate weeping.

The crowd at the bar tensed, and other men came in and silently added to it. Through their minds was running the old saying, "It's always this way—there's always some one!" while Barney tried to comfort her.

"What is it? What's the matter? And tell me who you are!"

"Don't you remember? Nevada. Dick!"

Barney shivered. Dick's girl! The girl Dick would have married if he had lived! Who had disappeared when he died. Back again—back "working" in a dance hall—in one of the far-flung dance halls where decaying beauty can still find a market! Dick's girl!

Barney could not speak.

"I came here with my husband, and——"

"Your husband!" the exclamation was wrung from him as Barney realized that the man she believed to be her husband was Waverly.

"Yes. I am Mrs. Waverly. And, oh, Barney!" She sat up in the chair, her eyes bright with anger and outraged decency. "A woman doesn't like to complain about the man she is married to, but I must. . . . I—I don't love him any more. I hate him. He's too rotten!"

Another burst of sobbing interrupted her. The men around the bar, with fine decency, turned their heads, trying to pretend they had not heard.

Again the woman flamed into speech.

"I have supported him with my earnings and with my drink percentage, but, oh, Barney!" Her voice became pitifully weary. "I was so glad when I saw you, because I didn't know what to do. It's not only his beating me when I haven't any more money to give him. It's—he wants me to earn more money by . . . by . . . you know what he means. . . . And he says he'll kill me if I don't! . . . You saw him bullying me! . . . Oh, I was so glad when I saw you! . . . What shall I do?"

Barney was never a handsome man, and now, with a growth of beard, a dirty face, a flannel shirt without tie or collar, and an old mackinaw—he

looked very tough and ugly as he gritted his teeth, the horrible story almost strangling him. So far lynchings had been conspicuous by their absence, but Barney felt that he wanted to sling a rope over the first convenient place, while his hands itched to slip that rope around Waverly's neck. And he knew that the listening men felt as he did. It would be all he could do to control them! A better punishment had taken shape in his active brain. Dick's girl! The sweetheart of Dick Carew! The dance hall was bad enough, but this—this to be almost compelled to shred pieces of her soul, cut therefrom for the glory of the devil by the keen edge of a twenty-dollar gold piece.

"You will help me, won't you—for Dick's sake?"

Barney found himself wishing that she had not mentioned Dick, but his rage had steadied into coherence and he knew what he would do.

"Are you quite certain that you don't still love this man Waverly?" he asked.

The men at the bar turned round to listen again.

"I hate him, the brute!" she cried.

"Good!" answered Barney, quietly. "I am glad of that, because he is not your husband!"

She stared at him, astonished. And, as gently as possible, he told her about the other marriages which nullified her own, while he, the woman hater, as he was called, tenderly stroked her hand in sight of the crowded barroom.

"You will do exactly as I wish?" he asked, determined to settle Waverly before she relented—fearing she might relent.

"I would like to see him hanged!" she exclaimed, the tears making weird rivulets down her painted cheeks.

Barney beckoned to the men at the bar, who had, of course, heard everything.

"Go and get Waverly," he ordered. "Bring him in here alive—alive, understand! And ask Bill to fix this place up a bit. We're going to have a trial. Waverly deserves worse than hanging!" He glanced at the girl, but her face showed only hatred at the mention of the man's name.

"All right, boss!" one of the men answered, as several of them went out.

"Go and wash all the paint off," Barney told the girl, unaware of the brutality of his words. "Put on a simple black dress, if you have one. Borrow one, if you haven't! Then come in when I send for you—not until then!"

She nodded.

"My clothes are back there!" indicating the dance hall.

Then she got up and went away, watched by everyone in the place. And Barney left his untasted dinner and directed the arrangement of the court—a curious desire for theatricalism possessing him—while the news spread, until, when Waverly was brought in, the saloon was crowded with a mob of men and women who roared, "Lynch him!"—Barney determined to prevent any lynching, but fully aware of the difficulty.

They brought Waverly to Barney. And, sitting there a judge for the first time in his life, he was conscious of that curious impression which comes to all of us—it seemed that, long ago, Barney, sitting upon some barbaric throne, had seen Waverly dragged before him for sentence. So vivid was this *feeling*, that there was one moment when Barney was hardly certain which scene was the memory and which the actual!

About Waverly's naturally pale face there was a cornered look, and a fear he tried to avoid showing twitched his regular features. But he was more afraid of the mob than he was of Barney; and well he might be. A mob, frothing with its lust to kill, is not nice to look at, and its cowardice is a terrible argument against there being anything spiritual in humanity. This mob wanted Waverly lynched, when three parts of it did not know why he was on trial—had merely heard that he had treated his wife badly. Against this lynch desire stood Barney, alone. The situation appealed to his peculiar sort of egoism. It became a matter of pride to twist this crowd away from its desire—to force it to relish the punishment he had in his mind more than the more immediate and spectacular one of hanging. And he felt quite sure that he could do it!

That Waverly did not know the worst was obvious to Barney. He believed that the woman had appealed to Barney against his treatment of her—he knew she had spoken to Barney, but did not know how much she had told. And he had no idea at all that Barney knew he was a bigamist, or worse. Until he had seen the boss of Hilliard in Hilliard he had never seen him. Knowing little of what was against him, like a cornered rat he was prepared to fight. The men Barney had sent for him had found a grim pleasure in refusing to answer his questions.

Making a brazen effort, he demanded of Barney why he had sent for him. But the mob roared him down, and Barney made no answer. He simply held up his hand for quiet, and pointed to a chair. Waverly sat down. The crowd packed as close as it could get.

The dance hall and the gambling games had quit. Barney sent for the girl Dick had loved. The crowd made way for her, while speculating loudly. She had washed her face and changed her dress. She was very pale, wan, haggard. She looked like an old woman. Her appeal was tremendous, as

Barney had meant it should be. Through that appeal he would divert the mob of milling minds from the lynching. She sat down at Barney's side.

"Lynch him!" howled the mob when it saw her.

She did not look at Waverly, no doubt steeling herself against sympathy for him. But the horrible shout had acted like a spur to what intellect the fellow possessed. He jumped to his feet, silencing the crowd by his sudden action.

"A woman cannot give evidence against her husband!" he screamed, and sat down.

The mob howled its amusement. Such a legal subtlety did not commend itself to its collective ideas of justice. But when Barney stood up, the saloon became very quiet.

"He is quite correct—or, at least, I think he is," said Barney, astonishing the rough crowd by his attitude. He might have been a pedantic lecturer. "No woman can give evidence against her husband!" Then, with instinctive understanding of his audience, he winked at them; and while the mass of men and women wondered whether they should laugh or shout, he added, "But this woman is not this man's wife!" And he shouted it in the bluff, tough Barney Hilliard way, while the mob howled its approval of the jest. Then Barney raised his hand and became serious.

"I am going to tell you people," he began, "about one of the rottenest deals a man ever gave a woman. And if any guy feels like interrupting me, he'd best get out right now—before he begins!" The deep, cultured voice, which so easily lapsed into the slang of the time, seemed to grip its hearers. Besides, no one there coveted trouble with the speaker. "When I get through a lot of you will jump off the handle and holler 'lynch him!' Yes, you'd give him the best of it and make this camp look like thirty cents. Listen! There's going to be no lynching—I have a better punishment for this Waverly." And while the mob stared its astonishment, Barney went on with the story—told them all about Waverly's marrying the three women, and the fourth (who sat by Barney's side), and how she had supported him with her earnings. Then, in angry, terse sentences, he told them how the poor girl had failed to earn enough to please, and how the cur had demanded that she become a prostitute, to earn more; how she had appealed to him, Barney, an old friend. But he did not mention Dick Carew. "Now," he concluded, while the breathing of the heated mob accompanied him, "lynching is far too good for a thing like this! Why, think, we might have a decent murderer in this camp some day, and have to hang him! It wouldn't be fair to the murderer if we hanged Waverly," and his inimitable drawl sent the house into a regular fit of

laughter, during which Waverly got to his feet and tried to talk. The apparent good nature of the crowd had given him courage.

But they would not listen. Waverly was convicted. Like a crowd of children, they shouted to Barney to deal out his punishment. And Barney knew he had won. Again he raised his hand.

"I am going to leave Waverly to God!" he shouted.

The mob gasped; it did not understand.

"The prisoner will now say what he has to say!" added Barney, and sat down.

But Waverly was beyond speech. His cowardice again had him gripped. The handsome, alluring, female-trapper had left the stage of his consciousness, leaving, alone and unsupported, to play a desperate part, the naked cur so long hidden from the audience of his destiny. A trembling, pale, hideous thing, which driveled its inability. And while the woman stared, wondering how she had ever loved him, the crowd leered cruelly, itching for his throat. Only Barney turned his face away.

"Lynch him! Lynch him!" The mob forgot Barney in its cruel craze to trample something which had fallen. They were like so many wolves when one of the pack is down.

"Have you forgotten what you promised me?" Barney shouted at them, and they became silent and ashamed. Of course, they had never promised anything; but Barney knew his people, and his suggestion worked. The mob believed it had promised. And it listened while Barney went on:

"I knew you would keep your promise. And this is the only camp that ever did such a thing. Yes, I am going to leave Waverly to God."

He paused, and the saloon buzzed. Such a statement might have been expected from a professional preacher, but coming from the boss of Hilliard! Then some man laughed, and the mob believed it understood. Barney was joking! And as the crowd grasped this belief, a roar of laughter went up.

"Hurray!" shouted one leather-lunged individual. "Good for you, Hilliard, old man! Leave it to God, eh? But I guess we'll have to provide the rope."

With the rapid reaction of all mobs, this sinister suggestion quelled the laughter feeling. The rope! Rope was what the mob wanted.

"Oh, lynch the swine and quit the talk!" shouted another man.

"There will be no rope and no lynching!" said Barney, in the silence following the last outcry. "You promised to let me run this thing, and when I tell you what I mean to do—without explaining—some of you seem to think

you can read my mind and don't like what you read there. There is no lynching. As I told you, I am going to leave this matter to God, and if any of you feel too impatient to listen while I tell what I mean, why—any such can beat it. Get me?" For the first time Barney put a "punch" into his talking. He looked directly at the last speaker, and that individual turned away with the discomfort of the average personality when made conspicuous in a crowd.

"Now listen to me!" Barney took advantage of the lull. "I am *not* kidding. I am really going to leave this punishment to God, and the punishment will fit the crime. I want God to know that the thing He made, called Waverly, is too damned low to be hanged by the decent citizens of Hilliard Creek!"

A roar of approval greeted this remark.

"Yes. I haven't a hell of a lot of use for God, myself, and it gives me a certain amount of pleasure to give Him the job of killing a pig we don't condescend to kill ourselves. Of course, He may refuse the job. He may take no notice of this Waverly. If He doesn't, Waverly will live. But we will have shown where we stand. As I said, I am going to leave it to God, and I have a hunch that God will do the square thing."

There was no answering sound this time. Instead, a curious and most unusual feeling held the mob. Men and women stared at Barney, fascinated. This startling speech had raised the pedestal on which he had climbed to bosship. And now the crowd inscribed that pedestal *reverence*. They had never imagined that a man could talk as he had talked. They waited, proud of him, for what he would say next. They liked to think that they could boast of having been in the saloon when he made this remarkable speech.

"To make myself plain," he went on, "I am going to use some old-fashioned figures of speech. All of you have heard of creatures like this Waverly, who traps a woman, uses her, gets tired of her, and then, as the saying is, 'abandons her to the cold, cruel world.' These are silly sort of words, but true. And because Waverly has turned his women out into the cold world, leaving them to God, we will do the same with him—only his world will be a whole lot colder. You are getting my drift? South, East, and West is a very cold world; and unless I miss my guess it's going to be colder. It is two hundred odd miles to Moose Jaw. Waverly will be given an ax, matches, snowshoes, and his sleeping furs—but no grub. It is unlikely that he will meet anyone on the trail, but in case he does I want some man to harness up and go ahead—warn all people not to help this Waverly if they meet him. Because he will be turned loose here and told to start for Moose Jaw. If he reaches Moose Jaw, he is free and can get grub. I want this understood. That's what I meant when I said I was going to leave Waverly to

God. It's no easy job for even a good man to travel two hundred miles without grub, but it can be done; and it's a better chance than being lynched. It's up to God, because if the weather keeps fine Waverly may make it. But if God knows His business He will send a blizzard. It's up to God. Of course, if Waverly turns back, he turns back to the rope we have waiting for him, and he will be lynched at once. Any remarks?"

A roar of approval greeted the sentence, while the removal of his fear of immediate hanging restored some pitiful sort of courage to Waverly. He tried to protest. Banking on the hope that no words of his would change the sentence back to hanging, he started a talk. But he was speedily silenced.

"Oh, let's hang the swine and have done!" shouted some one.

Barney silenced this one. "Waverly," he said, "another word of objection from you and you will be hanged. You will go right now and just as you stand. These men will see you on your way and protect you against some of our young men who never saw a lynching and want to see what it looks like to see a man kicking at the end of a rope!"

The grim jest ended Waverly's protesting and restored the good nature of the crowd.

"Not a word of regret," said Barney, with quiet ominousness. "You have ruined another woman's life, and now all you care about is your own filthy hide!" His hand shot out and he gripped Waverly's shoulder, while the men pressed hopefully around. But Barney removed his hand. "It's all I can do to keep myself from breaking you up," he went on. "You are leaving this woman to God knows what fate, but you never think of her. A decent regret would have made me less ashamed to belong to the same species. . . . Oh, hell! Take him away, boys, and if he is caught sneaking back, you may do what you like with him—even burn him alive, if you feel like it! That is our judgment, Waverly!" Barney paused. Again the feeling that he had sentenced Waverly before, long before, possessed him. This passed, and he ended. "Yes, that is the judgment of this camp, and may the Lord have mercy upon what little soul He gave you!" And Barney turned his head, annoyed at the concession to popular approval and custom his words implied.

Stunned, and without a look at the woman he had betrayed, Waverly went through the lane the mob opened up for him. One or two of the women made as if to pull his hair or scratch his face, but the men guarding him prevented this. So they led him out into the night and turned him loose, headed for Moose Jaw, while the stars seemed to watch his going. With

well-put warnings anent his trying to turn back following him, he started briskly along the well-packed trail.

And freedom from the mob restored his poise. Two hundred miles without grub was no pleasure trip, but it could be done if the weather held. And the weather would hold and make that fool Hilliard look silly. After he, Waverly, got to Moose Jaw and safely left the country, how the camp would guy Hilliard and his "leaving it to God." That clinging to life which is so often mistaken for courage made him make good time. He had only to keep the trail to make Moose Jaw.

And the weather did hold, but Waverly was no wonder musher, able to travel long stretches without sleep. Toward the end of the next day he began to realize acutely what it meant to be tired, because he had not rested since the men turned him loose at Hilliard.

It might have been better if he had slept during the short hours of light—wolves are not so courageous then—but as the dark began to make him so sleepy that he dozed as he walked, he saw that it was imperative that he build a fire. At the best Waverly was not an outdoors man, and he was a checkacko. But with a good ax he chopped an abundant supply of wood, and laid his fire. It was colder than he had thought, and when he took off a mitten so as to be able to strike a match his fingers rapidly grew numb. So the match dropped from his fingers before he could light his dry shavings. He swore; then, instinctively, he looked up from his work. With a cry, he spilled the remaining matches—silently, making hardly a sound in the snow, the wolves had tracked him; and now they ringed him in, watching his every move, while the slaver ran from their hungry mouths.

He went mad with fear then, and forgot to put on his mitten. Consequently, when he thought again of his one means of defense and began to pick up and strike the matches, his fingers were useless. With his last frantic scratching of his last match he was raving and cursing at the curious wolves. Barney Hilliard had left Waverly to God. The God of any man's conception is usually an idealized image of himself. Waverly had never concerned himself about God, had probably no conception of Him whatever. He himself was a cowardly cur, a human wolf. So it was perfectly right that the last image in his fear-distorted mind was that of a huge wolf, with open jaws, about to devour him! And God had played square with Hilliard Creek.

XX

BUT this time Barney had made up his mind that the girl Dick had loved should not be any longer dependent upon the dance halls. It had been her independence, her fear that Barney would feel that it was his duty to provide for her, that had driven her away after Dick had died. And even now, knowing how wealthy Barney had become, she would take nothing but a relatively small loan, which she made Barney promise to accept when she was able to repay it. And she went outside with the money only after he had agreed not to attempt to help her any further. He found himself wondering how any girl with such a character could have been satisfied to work in dance halls, and decided that her doing so was another mystery of the always-feminine. So that was that!

And although he dreaded the parting with the people of Hilliard Creek, for the first time for many years he felt something like contentment. There was no more to do except go outside and get rid of his money for the benefit of those who most needed help. He was like an old ship ready to cast off its hawser from the wharf and slip out to sea—knowing that once out of sight of land he would sink.

It was a prideful departure, and he left the camp he had founded like some popular monarch, the men cheering, the girls weeping, after a night and a day when everything in town had been free, at his expense. And when at last the captain of the steamer rang "slow ahead" to his engineers, and Barney saw the land of the grim North that he had grown to love slipping past the side of the vessel, in spite of his near-grief at leaving, a certain peace came to him.

But it was the peace that often presages death—the end of effort, the passing of "the will to live" with its recurrent irritation. Barney's world was dead—all the people who had meant anything to him, even the gamblers in Victoria, had either passed on or drifted away; and the hustle and bustle of Seattle served only to tell him that he was very lonely, that he had no place there, that it would be worse than foolish to go on living.

But not in Seattle. His body might be identified, and Barney had no wish to have the town of Hilliard know him for a suicide. He sneered at himself. Why should he care? What did it matter what people thought? Yet he knew

that it did matter—to him. He might logically convince himself that it was not the act of a quitter, now that he had triumphed over material obstacles, but deep in himself he knew that he had an appalling dread of having even one human being call him "coward." That stood between Barney and a bullet. He was afraid, not of death or its consequences to himself, but that some one individual might say, hearing the news:

"So, after all, he quit! There must have been a yellow streak some place. But he kept it hidden mighty well. It's always that way, though—however much a guy tries to hide his yellow streak, it's bound to show some time."

The burning shame of that epitaph luridly melted the cold logic advising and excusing self-destruction.

And of course it made him angry. What business was it of theirs? The question of a boy! Why should a man care about what the thoughtless world said? A really brave man would not even mind being called a coward—either living or dead. For how could such a one as he had imagined as speaking of his "yellow streak"—what could such a man know what Barney had thought, studied, suffered? Nothing. But, like all humanity, without any knowledge of the facts, he would not hesitate to pass judgment. That rotten, that disgusting habit of men and women—their putrid eagerness to judge their fellows, careless of the facts, too lazy to gather the facts. And the amusing part of it was that every one of them, while judging, implied perfection in himself without knowing he did so. It was a good world to get out of. Humanity was but a mass of milling, thoughtless, back-biting cattle; eager to talk about the worst of their fellows—lower than the cattle in this regard. The veriest degenerate, the fellow who did not realize that to think one must use words as a mathematician uses figures (reasoning his way word by word), the brainless crowd (were there a dozen men in the world who really knew how to think?)—this slimy, money-grubbing race of *things*; why should Barney Hilliard care a damn what they called him? He knew. He himself knew. . . . And so on. So on until he sternly told himself that the argument was not worth the time it occupied. He had said he would do certain things before shooting himself. He had done them. What he was going to do now was his own business. What others said about him did not matter.

He had disposed of all his money except enough to give him an income of two hundred dollars a month. Enough for any single man. Five thousand was enough for any man, and the man who spent more on himself or his family was a poor fool. Either he was weakening himself with luxury or he was bringing his children up like petted fools. So Barney had done as he said he would do with his money. All his possessions just filled a large kit

bag. After his death, the remaining money would go to the Catholic Missions of Alaska. While he had greatly admired one priest, and knew that there were many others worthy of admiration, admiration was not his reason for this bequest. No, it was, rather, pity. With much the same feeling he would have given a drink of whisky to a broken-down, trembling bum—a man without money, shivering for alcohol—because the fellow had the habit and could not quit, and because Barney blamed the Power behind things for every shiver, every need.

And now he had rented, in a strange town where no man knew him, under an assumed name, a comfortable apartment which was warm and nicely furnished. His world had died. It was no use waiting longer.

So he had surveyed the comfortable room and smiled. At last his struggle was ended; but the loneliness of that end was terrible. Better, far better the struggle. There was nothing left now but the impossible—to forget. Impossible to a living man, but perhaps not to a dead one. At any rate, Barney would find out.

So he locked his door, laid the old revolver by the side of the couch. He would take one more look back along the road he had traveled. There were places, pictures, that he wanted to see again before he died. He lay down on the couch.

XXI

BARNEY HILLIARD sat up on his couch. He had visited with memories, looked again at the most poignant pictures of his life, and now he wondered why he had done so. The leaves of his years had not made a happy book, and his turning over its pages had left him more lonely and more certain of the uselessness of living. The fire was almost out, but its fading flicker showed the old revolver lying on the floor. Why hadn't he used it, instead of heeding the beckoning of the dreams he cherished?

"Life without love, there was no life in it
Whereby the man might live!"

he murmured as he switched on the light and threw more coal on the fire. Why the devil had he done that? Just as mechanically as he was beginning to fill his pipe. Oh, well, might as well be comfortable when he died.

He lit his pipe and picked up the revolver.

"Old gun," he mused, "you and I have traveled some queer trails together, and now you are going to give me the send-off on a trail that only leads one way—on a trail that you cannot travel with me. . . . I wonder who made you! If I made guns I suppose I would do a lot of dreaming about the uses they would be put to! And who made you, Barney Hilliard? There are many who think they could answer that question, but the older I grow, and the more I think, the more puzzled do I become. All my possibilities and capabilities, all my hopes and yearnings, feelings, sorrows, and joys—all the everything that is me!—did it all originate from a tiny animal one hundred and one-twentieth of an inch in diameter? Maybe, but it's a difficult matter to comprehend! Between apparent cause and effect what may happen, what chance and change—small wonder men believe that, somewhere, some time, a soul is introduced! And whether the continuity of the germ plasm or the inheritance of acquired characteristics, or any other biological theory, tries to solve the problem of the making of the me that's about to die—whatever theory may seem closest will leave a great gap unbridged, much unsolved! I think "acquired characteristics" have it but only those acquired "intentionally" are inherited—the creature must "desire" them, and does *not* inherit those forced upon him, which is why fox terriers are born with long tails! But, anyway, I am but a complicated arrangement of atoms and energy

—both of which will eventually be reduced to one primordial element of force, even if we cannot represent such an element in thought. When I put this old gun to my head and pull the trigger, all I shall do will be to put out the light—which is something else we cannot quite understand, however much we may think we do! . . . But what in hell am I sitting here fussing about?"

He examined the revolver and saw that it was loaded and in working order. While what we call "time" might split the death second into fragments of seemingly eternal agony, he would be "dead" before the sound of the explosion reached his brain. And the coroner's jury would call him "insane"!

A flash of anger at such a verdict made him smile, but the picture he had seen stayed his hand.

"No, it wouldn't be decent to do it that way," he thought. "Make a mess all over the place and give the landlady trouble when she tries to rent this apartment again. I must do it so they won't know I did it myself!"

He took the shells out of the revolver and stowed it away in his old kit bag.

"Success," he mused. "What is success but a copper flung by careless Fate to a persistent beggar!"

Then from the same bag he took out a hypodermic case and a tube full of morphine. Neither had ever been used, Barney having bought the outfit just before he went North for the last time, for use in case of accident only. Next, he found a teaspoon, which he bent so that it would stand flat. Then he wrote a letter to an imaginary friend.

> DEAR TOM—Sorry I cannot keep our appointment, but I am not feeling well enough. You know about my heart. Well, two specialists have told me that while I may live several years, I may pop off at any moment. Not a pleasing situation for a man who has always prided himself upon his health, eh?
>
> Now, as regards that investment——

At this point, Barney artistically allowed the pen to slip awkwardly across the paper, as if his "heart trouble" had suddenly overcome him.

He left the pen and the letter "staged" artistically. Then he tested one of the hypodermic needles and threw the other in the fire. Everything he was using—needle, spoon, syringe—would be partially melted and lost in the ashes. There would be nothing suspicious to cause the coroner to make an

autopsy. No, death from natural causes would be the verdict. Better than shooting. Trouble no one!

He filled the syringe in his bathroom. Then he thought for a moment. Twenty quarter-grain tablets of morphine—five grains. Barney was a strong man. It would not do to make a failure. Merely to sleep a long time and wake up feeling sick would be a banal business. Better make sure. He decided to take the entire five grains.

Where should he make the injection? It would never do to leave a mark to catch the eye of whoever found him dead. He smiled grimly at the picture of his being found dead—he who did not know what sickness means. Well, he had a somewhat hairy chest. He would inject the morphine into his chest. He would have time to button his shirt.

It would be necessary to use a good deal of water with such a large dose, else the solution would cool and clog the canula of the needle. For the same reason he would have to be quick.

He emptied the morphine into the spoon, then the water. With a couple of matches he boiled the solution until it became clear. Rapidly he filled the syringe, fitted the needle, and threw the spoon into the fire. He had opened his shirt. Sitting on the couch, his right hand lifted the syringe to make the injection. Suddenly he stopped, frozen into the immobility of a statue by—the music of "Under the Leaves"!

The mind which prided itself upon its calm strength, upon its ability to concentrate as few ever could, became a chaos wherein whirled conflicting ideas; the first words to cohere being:

"It's after ten o'clock! It's against the rules of this house to play after ten!"

And then—while the music drenched him with its melody, stirring all the dearest memories of his life; while the old square piano she had played during those evenings at Nippa Creek might again have been talking to him—through the haze of the loving, foolish words he had made up in the rhythm of the tune, came again her pathetic, questioning whisper, and his promise not to follow her before his time.

Barney could never remember throwing the hypodermic and its contents into the fire. His first state of consciousness was that of lying face down on his couch, listening with an agony of intensity, and hoping that the music would never cease.

He seemed painfully to stare into infinity, the music drenching his being, penetrating every cell accusingly. His breath came in broken sobs. All his poise might have never been. And, as if he heard her voice, Ethel's words

were with him, pleading—pleading, until the intensity of her plea became to Barney an actual awareness of the agony she would have suffered had she seen him dead, a suicide. And no one could say with certainty that she would not have seen him!

He saw it all as a promise forgotten—as a given word that had almost been broken. Ethel's death did not alter that promise. He had given it; he alone was responsible for it. And he had come very near to breaking it. In intent he had broken it. But for the lucky coincidence of a tune, played by a sleepless woman in the apartment below, he would have broken it. He, who considered himself an honest man, to come so near to the lowest thing a man can do! Lower than theft, lower than murder! To have come so near to breaking his word to a woman! For neither a murderer or a thief is necessarily a cad. But the man who breaks his word to a woman! And she the only woman he had ever loved.

Barney Hilliard shivered, stung to the core of his proud nature. But he did not spare himself in his indictment. That miserable quibble—as he saw it now—allowing himself to believe that because he had made a little money it would not be quitting to shoot himself! Only lack of intelligence had saved him from intellectual dishonesty!

Further, he had fallen into the most common mistake of the average mind—ignorant of the whole of the facts, he had made a generalization which required knowledge of those facts. With his handful of knowledge he had believed that he had sufficient evidence to convict God of cruelty! It was not the possible injustice of his accusation that troubled Barney. No! That was a detail when compared with his being so illogical as to come to a conclusion without enough facts to warrant that conclusion! For, to accuse God of creating a universe of cruelty is to assume universal knowledge—is tacitly to affirm that the accuser knows everything—that there is nothing in the entire universe that he does not know! And Barney Hilliard had done this!

Yet, illogically to assume all knowledge and accuse God of cruelty was as nothing compared with breaking his word to a woman.

For a long time he lay there; long after the music ceased and the player went back to bed, Barney lay on his back, staring at the ceiling.

"I wonder," he mused, "if the game would seem less of a bore if I thought less of myself and more of others?"

And a little while later, "God, I beg Your pardon," he said, quietly.

He lit his pipe again and put more coal on the fire.

“Yes, I’ll play the game till the finish. I don’t know the reason why we are compelled to play, and I don’t suppose I ever shall. But, then, when I first went to school I couldn’t see the reason why I was sent, when I didn’t want to learn. There is always the chance that Ethel and Dick had the right idea about it—that death is not really death, but a birth into a better life. I wish I could believe as they did; but I cannot. . . . Suppose they were right?”

The supposition clung to him, and he found that he could not disassociate it from Ethel’s memory—his love was entangled with the meaning of faith and made sweeter by its promise. He was compelled to let it remain that way. . . . Suppose they were right?

So, though he could not accept the doctrine of personal immortality—sudden conversion was somewhat out of Barney Hilliard’s line—it haunted him like a tune that one cannot put out of mind, and persisted in its haunting whenever he thought of Ethel or Dick.

“Well,” he mused, “they may have been right. Death may not mean the end of us. And perhaps, if there is another life, I may be able to borrow a soul somewhere and get into heaven with it!”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Barney* by Samuel Bertram Haworth Hurst]