

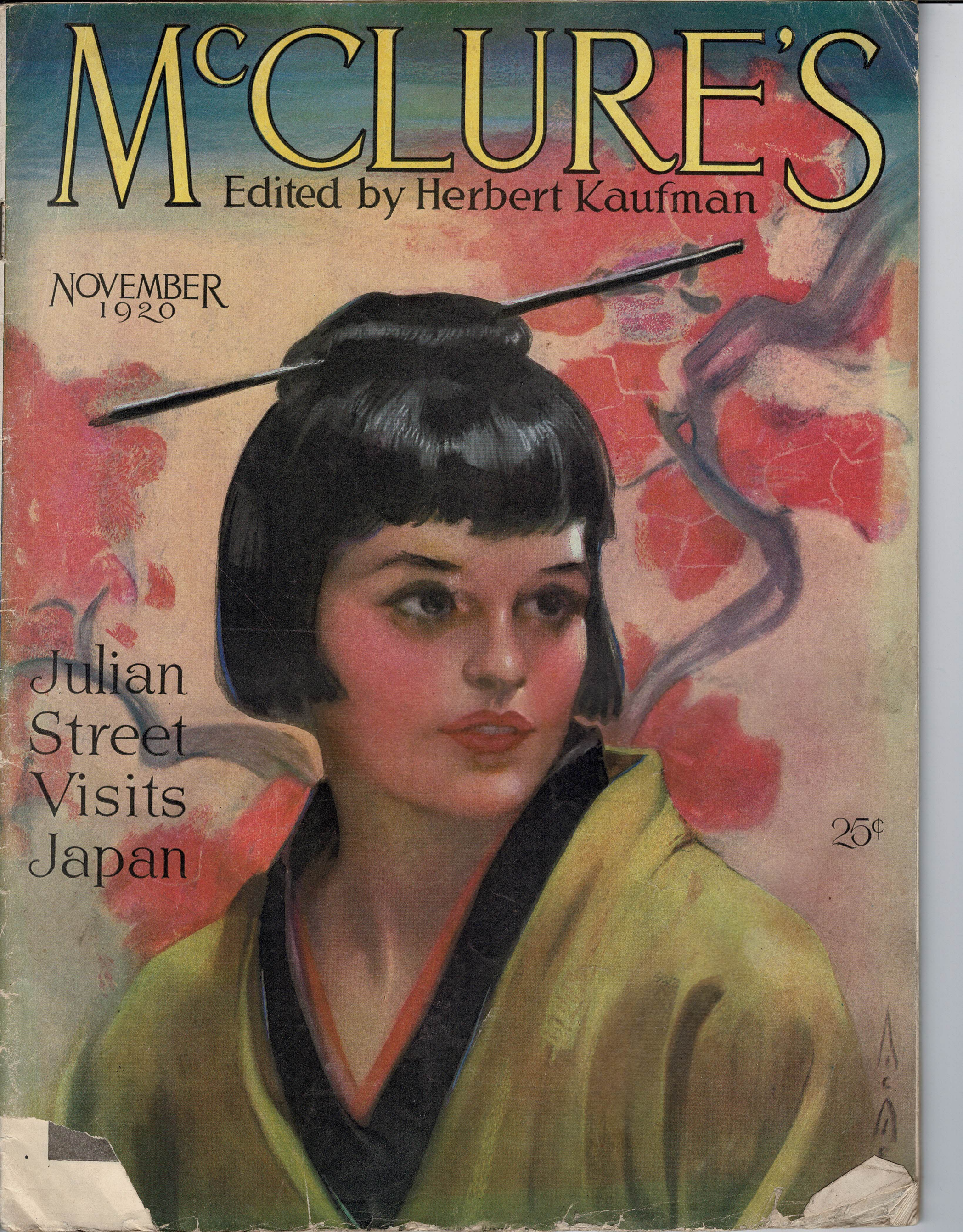
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Edited by Herbert Kaufman

NOVEMBER
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Tall, white-gowned, slender and graceful, with the poise of a woman aloof and proud, and the sad face of a Madonna — what a woman to sit at Adam's camp-fire in Death Valley!

WHEN Adam Larey came back to consciousness he was in a strange shack; there floated in to him the sound of low, guttural voices — Indian voices. He was so weak that he could not move but he was alive! The desert had not beaten him, after all.

Adam had had many hard, bitter lessons in the school of life since the day he and his unnatural brother, Guerd, arrived in the West — one seeing the world through the clean, honest glasses of sturdy youth, the other through the smeared lenses of the profligate. The break in the relations of two such contrasting types — inevitable from the beginning — came about over a girl. Guerd, the elder brother, as is natural with his stripe, played poacher; his philosophy was to take whether for good or ill; to dominate solely for the brutal pleasure of dominating. The brothers separated, met again, quarreled and Adam shot Guerd. Then followed his flight to the desert. It was death he sought; he wandered in circles, not caring, until stricken down by hunger and thirst.

Adam's wish would have been fulfilled had it not been for Dismukes, a prospector, who found him and nursed him back to life; gave him supplies and a burro to carry them. And it was Dismukes who restored his faith, who put him in the way of becoming a man.

With Dismukes' burro he started in search of a band of Indians, but the burro ran away, taking his supplies, and for the second time, Adam experiencing the tortures of hunger and thirst, looked death squarely in the face. But now that he knew that he was not to die life seemed sweeter somehow. How strong the spirit of life in him! "I — I wasn't ready — to die," he whispered.

The Wanderer of the Wasteland by Zane Grey

Illustrations by W. Herbert Dunton

Adam's present deliverer was an Indian chief, Charley Jim, and it was Charley Jim's daughter Oella who had nursed him. The Indians were only too glad to have Adam remain — for he hunted meat for them — and the young man himself might have remained with them indefinitely, so pleasing was the life to him, had it not been for Oella. She fell in love with this young wanderer, so different from her own kind, and Adam, not wishing from reasons of conscience to marry her, set off once more alone.

"I would marry you, cherish you as a white man

cherishes his wife," said he to Oella in parting, "but I have blood on my hands. I can only remember and love you always."

His wanderings renewed, the first man he met was Dismukes. The prospector interested Wansfell, as Adam was known in the desert, in Death Valley, and Adam started on another journey of adventure which was to bring him in contact with Mojave-Jo, a she-devil — one of those odd, vicious creatures encountered wherever men go in search of gold. Perhaps Adam's real mission in Death Valley was to find a woman of whose unhappy existence Dismukes had told him, and the gorilla in the shape of a man who was responsible. He might be able to help her and he had promised Dismukes to do so if he could.

THE long-deferred hour at last arrived in which Adam, on a ruddy-gold dawn in early April, drove his burros out into the lonesome desert toward the Armagosa. He did not look back at Tecopah. His feeling was that of a man freed from prison, of a wanderer released from a hot, noisy, squalid, dusty pen into the wasteland of cool sweet air. Tecopah would not soon forget Wansfell! That was his grim thought.

The long drab reaches of desert, the undulating bronze slopes waving up to the dark mountains, called to him in a language that he felt. If Adam Larey — or Wansfell, wanderer of the wasteland, as he had come to believe himself — had any home, it was out in the vast open, under the great white flare of sunlight and the star-studded canopy of night.

This was a still morning in April, and the lurid sun, bursting above the black escarpment to the east, promised a rising temperature. The dry sweet desert

air seemed to permeate Adam's brain and clear it of miasmas and shadows. He was free. He was alone. He was self-sufficient. The desert called.

As the sun climbed and the broad day brightened and widened its portals, and the hours passed, Adam drove his burros over the barren benches, along the wide flats where sage and greasewood began to fail, and the earth to take on a dirty whitish crust, a poison look. No longer did the burros stop to nip a plant, for vegetation grew scarce and withered. Not a living creature animated the monotony of that waste.

In the afternoon Adam rounded a corner of a league-long sloping *mesa*, and gazed down into the valley of the Armagosa. It looked the bitterness, the poison, and the acid suggested by its Spanish name. The narrow meandering stream gleamed like silver in the sunlight. Adam headed down into the valley. The sun was already westering, and soon, as he descended, it hung over the ragged peaks. He reached the creek.

In the shade of some mesquite and screw-bean trees, where a scant rank grass grew on the banks of the stream, Adam unpacked the patient burros.

Adam set about the camp-tasks long grown second nature with him. He built a fire of dead mesquite. Then he scoured his oven with sand, and greased it. He had a heavy pan which did duty as a gold-pan, a dish-pan, and a wash-pan. This he half filled with flour, and adding water, began to mix the two. He had gotten the dough to about the proper consistency, when a rustling in the brush attracted his attention. He thought he caught a glimpse of a rabbit. He caught up his gun and stole out into the aisle between the mesquites. As luck would have it he did espy a young cotton-tail, and was fortunate enough to make a good shot.

WHILE Adam was at his simple meal the sun set, filling the valley with red haze, and tipping with gold the peaks in the distance. When he had washed his few utensils, the red haze had given place to purple shadows. Adam skinned and cleaned the rabbit, and hung it high upon a mesquite, out of reach of coyotes, and then his tasks of the day were done.

The heat had gone with the sun. Adam's camp was somewhat cut off by brush on the stream side, and a slope on the other, so that he could not see far. When possible he always chose camps where he could gaze afar, first at the ruddy spectacle in the west, and then oftener and longer at the magnificent purple panorama always presented in the opposite sky. He walked to and fro in the lonely twilight. There was absolutely no sound. It was such solitude as only men of Adam's life could bear. He seemed to be growing at one with the desert and its elements. After a while the twilight shadows shaded into the blackness of night, and the stars blazed. Adam had been conscious all day of the gradual relaxing of strain, and now in the lonely solitude there fell away from him the feelings and thoughts engendered at Tecopah.

"Loneliness and silence and time!" he soliloquized, as he paced his sandy beat. "These will cure any trouble—any disease of mind—any agony of soul. Ah! I know. I never forget. But how different now to remember! . . . That must be the secret of the power of the desert over men."

Adam's first sight of Death Valley came at an early morning hour, as he turned a last curve in the yawning canyon he had descended.

He stood in awe.

"Oh, desolation!" he cried. And it seemed that, as the shock of the ghastliness beneath him passed, he remembered with flashing vividness all that had come to him in his long desert wanderings, which seemed now to cumulate its terrible silence, desolation, death and decay in this forbidding valley.

He remembered the origin of that name—Death Valley. In 1849, when the California gold frenzy had the world in its grip, seventy Mormon gold-seekers had wandered into this red-walled, white-floored valley, where sixty-eight of them perished. The two that escaped gave this narrow sink, so many hundred feet below sea level, the name Death Valley! Many and many another emigrant and prospector and wanderer, by his death from horrible thirst and blasting heat and poison-dusted wind and destroying avalanche and blood-freezing cold, had added to the significance of that name and its dreadful fame.

Death Valley was more than sixty miles long and from seven to twelve wide. No two prospectors had ever agreed on these dimensions, although all had been in perfect harmony as to its hellish qualities. Death

was the guardian of the valley and the spectre that patrolled its beat. Mineral wealth was the irresistible allurements which dared men to defy its terrors. Gold! Dismukes himself had claimed there were ledges of gold quartz, and Dismukes was practical and accurate. The valley floor was a white crust where, for miles and miles, there was nothing but salt and borax. Beds of soda, of gypsum, of nitre, of sulphur, abounded in the vaster fields of other minerals. In the summer months the heat sometimes went to one hundred and forty-five degrees. The furnace winds of midnight were withering to flesh and blood. And sometimes the air carried invisible

"You poor devil!" muttered Adam, "maybe I can't save your life anyway. Maybe you're not worth it, but I'll do what seems best"



From the look of Death Valley Adam believed all he had heard.

He got his bearings, according to the map made by Dismukes, and set out from the mouth of the canyon to cross the valley.

There was no trail, no track of man or beast in the sandy floor that sloped gradually down to meet the gray level and the white-patched center. Adam did not realize the strangeness of the scene until he had gotten clear of the confines of the canyon. Once out in the open he seemed to feel himself an infinitesimal pigmy of life defying gigantic and forbidding forces of nature. The morning was bright and still, and hot with a burn that penetrated Adam's shirt.

A long sandy slope dotted by dwarfed mesquites extended down to the bare crinkly floor of the valley, from which the descent to a lower level was scarcely perceptible. The walking was bad. When Adam's burros early in the day manifested uneasiness and weariness there was indeed rough going. The sand had given way to a hard crust of salt or borax, and little dimples and cones made it difficult to place a foot on a level. Some places the crust was fairly hard; in

death in the shape of poison gas or dust. In winter sudden changes of temperature, whirling icy winds down upon a prospector who had gone to sleep in warmth, would freeze him to death. Avalanches rolled down the ragged slopes and cloudbursts carried destruction.

others it cracked and crunched under foot. Far ahead Adam could see a dazzling white plain that resembled frost or a frozen river.

Adam proceeded cautiously behind the burros. He felt the beat of the sun upon him, and the reflection of heat from the valley floor. He had been less oppressed upon hotter days than this. The sensations he began to have here were similar to those he had experienced in the Salton Sink where he had gone below sea level. His strength, however, was unimpaired.

At last the burros halted. Adam looked up from the careful task of placing his feet to see that he had reached a perfectly smooth bed of salt, glistening as if it were powdered ice. This was the margin of the place that from afar had looked like a frozen stream. Stepping down upon it Adam found that it trembled and heaved with his weight, but upheld him. He walked out a little way. There was absolutely no sign to tell whether the next yard of surface would hold him or not. Still from what he had gone over he believed he could trust the rest. It never was safe to cross those crusted salt sinks.

On the other side extended a wide flat of salt and mud, very rough, upheaved as if it had boiled and baked to a crust, then cracked and sunk in places. The crust continually crumbled under the hoofs of the burros, and gave forth hollow sounds, as if a bottomless cavern ran under the valley floor. As Adam neared the other side he encountered thin streams of water that resembled acid. It was necessary to find narrow places in these and leap across. Beyond these ruts in the crust began an almost imperceptible rise of the valley floor which, in the course of a couple of miles, led out of the broken choppy sea of salt to a sand and gravel level. How relieved Adam was to reach that!

It was now hot enough for Adam to imagine something of what a formidable place this valley would be in July or August. On all sides the mountains stood up dim and obscure and distant in a strange haze. Low down the heat veils lifted in ripples, and any object at a distance seemed illusive. When he reached the slope that led up to the base of the red mountains he halted the burros for a rest. The drink he took then was the fullest he had taken in years. He was hot and wet; his eyes smarted and his feet burned.

When Adam had rested, he consulted the map, and found that he must travel up the slope and to the west to gain the black buttress of rock that was his objective point. And considering how dim it looked through the haze he concluded he had better be starting.

He got up from the stone seat that had almost burned through his clothes, and bent his steps westward, driving the wearying burros ahead of him. Three miles toward the black buttressed corner he wanted to gain before dark — so his experienced desert eyes calculated the distance. But this was Death Valley. No traveler of the desert had ever correctly measured distance in this valley of shadows and hazes and illusions. He was making three miles an hour. Yet at the end of an hour he seemed just as far away as ever. Another hour was full of deceits and misjudgments. But at the end of the third, he reached the black wall, and the line that had seemed a corner was the mouth of a canyon.

Adam halted, as if at the gateway of the unknown. Wonderful shadows were falling, purple and blue low down, rosy and gold above; and the canyon smoked with sunset haze.

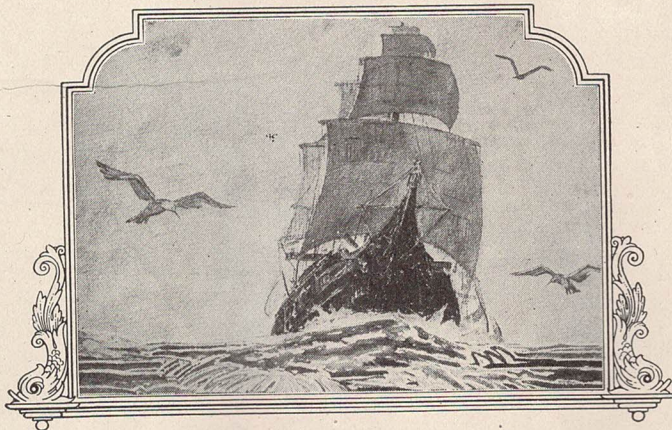
THE map of Dismukes marked this canyon, and a spring of water just beyond its threshold, and also the shack where the strange man and woman lived under the long slant of weathered rock. Adam decided not to try to find the location that night, so he made dry camp at the edge of the canyon. The weary burros might find scant picking along the wash that came down from above. Adam's diligent search for wood was rewarded by a few dead roots and sticks with which he started a little fire. His fare consisted of the remainder of the rabbit, some hard biscuits and a cup of coffee.

Darkness found him weary and oppressed. Tired and sleepy as he was, when he lay down in his bed, he felt the striking dissimilarity of this place to any other he had known on the desert. How profound the silence! Had any sound ever pervaded it? Adam could not believe any man and woman lived up this canyon. Dismukes had dreamed. Had not Adam heard from many prospectors how no white woman could live in Death Valley?

He went to sleep at last, and awakened somewhat later than usual. Over the Funeral Range the sun was rising, a coalescing globule of molten fire, enormous and red, surrounded by a sky-broad yellow flare. The valley was clear, still, empty, a void that made all objects therein look small and far away. After breakfast

Adam set out to find his burros and to have a look at the canyon.

This high-walled opening did not appear to be a canyon, but a space made by two mountain slopes running down to a wash where water flowed at some seasons. The rugged corners gave it the appearance of a canyon. Beyond them there opened what seemed to be a gradually widening and sloping field, gray with rocks and sand and stunted brush, through the center of which straggled a line of gnarled mesquites. Adam



The Call of the Sea

by

James Stuart Montgomery

Decoration by Richard F. Lahey

Blow the wind from out of the West,
Softly, sweetly, blow and blow.
A motherly sea that lulls to rest,
Cuddles and cradles us to and fro.
He who has lived by funnel and mast,
Belongs to the sea. She holds him fast,
And he shall return to the sea at last,
As sure as the West Winds blow.

Blow the wind from out of the South,
Coaxing wind and a sky that's fair,
The sea's salt kiss is on his mouth,
Her lang'rous breathing stirs his hair.
She lures as a woman — love confessed
By half-veiled eye and heaving breast,
And he, on land shall know not rest,
As sure as the South Winds blow.

Blow the wind from out of the East,
Raging billow and racing cloud,
The sea is lashed to a foaming yeast
By stark mad demons who shriek aloud.
As a handsome shrew, by passion rent,
Is loveliest when on mischief bent,
A wicked charm to her lure is lent,
As sure as the East Winds blow.

Blow the wind from out of the North,
Chill with the drifting iceberg's breath.
Across the fog wrapped waves go forth
The awesome presences of Death.
Yet, artful past a woman's ken,
The sea enthralls the hearts of men,
And calls them back to her arms again,
As sure as the North Winds blow.

Blow the winds low, blow the winds high,
The sea to her sons is breath of life.
The beat of their heart, light of their eye,
Their mother and mistress, child and wife.
He who has lived by funnel and mast,
Belongs to the sea. She holds him fast,
And he shall return to the sea at last,
As sure as the winds do blow.

found his burros here, Jennie asleep as usual, and Jack contentedly grazing.

The cracking of a rock rolling down a rough slope thrilled Adam. He remembered what Dismukes had said about the perilous location of the shack where the man and woman lived under the shadow of a weathering

mountain. Adam turned to look across the space in the direction whence the sound had come.

There loomed a mighty mountain slope, absolutely destitute of plants, a gray drab million-faceted ascent of rocks. Adam strode toward it, gradually getting higher and nearer through the rock-strewn field. It had looked so close as to seem magnified. But it was a goodly distance. Presently he espied a rude shack. He halted. Adam had not expected the place to be so close to Death Valley.

Adam walked on, growing more curious and doubtful. Surely this hut had been built and abandoned by some prospector. Yet any prospector could have built a better abode than this. None but a fool or a knave would have selected that perilous location. No sign of smoke, no sign of life, no sign of labor. Suddenly he espied the deep track of a man's foot in the sand. Adam knelt to study it. "Made yesterday," he said.

He rose with certainty. Dismukes had been accurate as to direction, though his distances had been faulty. Adam gazed beyond the shack, to the right, and then left. He espied a patch of green mesquites and hummocks of grass. There was the water Dismukes had marked.

A broad belt of huge boulders lay beyond the shack, the edge of the talus, the beginning of the base of a mountainside, wearing down, weathering away, cracking into millions of pieces, every one of which had both smooth and sharp surfaces. This belt was steep and fan-shaped, spreading at the bottom. The curved base of the fan extended for a couple of miles, in the distance growing rounded and symmetrical in its lines. It led up to a stupendous mountain abutment, dull red in color. Yet this rugged, bold, uneven surface of mountain wall shone in the sunlight. It looked as if it had been a solid mass of granite shattered by some cataclysm of nature.

"Well," muttered Adam, darkly, "any man who made a woman live there was either crazy or meant her to have an awful death."

IN Adam's stern mind there could be no other reason for such unparalleled effrontery in the face of a tortured and riven mountain, under the shadow of which lay destruction. If any man had a woman there he had already incurred Adam's pity or hate.

Adam strode on to the shack. Seen close at hand it was indeed a flimsy structure of poles, stones and brush. It might afford shelter from sun, but not from rain or dust. Pack-saddles and boxes were stacked on one side; empty cans lay scattered everywhere.

"Hello, inside!" called Adam, as he halted at the door. No answer. He stooped to look in, and saw bare sand floor, a rude low table made of box boards, flat stones for seats, utensils and dishes, shelves littered with cans and bags. A flimsy partition of poles and canvas with a door, separated this room from another and larger one. Adam saw a narrow bed of blankets raised on poles, an old valise on the sandy floor, woman's garments hanging on the brush walls. He called again, louder this time. He saw a flash of something gray through the torn canvas, then heard a low cry — a woman's voice. Adam raised his head.

"Elliot! . . . You've come back!" came the voice, quick, low and tremulous, betokening relief from dread.

"No. It's a stranger," replied Adam.

"Oh!" The hurried exclamation was followed by soft footfalls. A woman in gray appeared in the doorway — a woman whose proportions were noble, but frail. She had a white face, and large deep eyes, strained and sad. "Oh — who are you?"

"Ma'am, my name's Wansfell. I'm a friend of Dismukes, the prospector who was here. I'm crossing Death Valley and I thought I'd call on you."

"Dismukes? The little miner, huge, like a frog?" she queried quickly, with dilating eyes. "I remember. He was kind, but . . . And you're his friend?"

"Yes, at your service, ma'am."

"Thank — God!" she cried, brokenly, and she leaned back against the door. "I'm in trouble. I've been alone — all — all night. My husband left yesterday. He took only a canteen. He said he'd be back for supper. . . . But — he didn't come. Oh, something has happened to him."

"Many things happen in the desert," said Adam. "I'll find your husband. I saw his tracks out here in the sand."

"Oh, can you find him?"

"Ma'am, I can track a rabbit to its burrow. Don't worry any more. I will track your husband and find him."

The woman suddenly seemed to be struck with Adam's tone, or the appearance of him. It was as if she had not particularly noticed him at first. "Once he got lost — was gone two days. [Continued on page 60]

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The Wanderer of the Wasteland

(Continued from page 32)

Another time he was overcome by heat — or something in the air.

"You've been alone before?" queried Adam, quick to read the pain in her voice.

"Alone? Many — many lonely nights," she said. "He's left me alone — purposely — for me to torture my soul here in the blackness . . . and those rolling rocks — cracking in the night —" Then the flash of her died out, as if she realized she was revealing a shameful secret.

"Ma'am, is your husband just right in his mind?" asked Adam.

She hesitated, giving the impression that she wished him to think her husband irrational, but could not truthfully say so.

"Men do strange things in the desert," said Adam. "May I ask, ma'am, have you food and water?"

"YES. But Elliot makes me cook — and I never learned how. So we've fared poorly."

"Will you tell me how he came to build your hut here where, sooner or later, it'll be crushed by rolling stones?"

A tragic shadow darkened in the large dark blue eyes that Adam now realized were singularly beautiful.

"I — he — this place was near the water. He cut the brush here — he didn't see — wouldn't believe the danger," she faltered. She was telling a lie, and did not do it well.

"Perhaps I can make him see," replied Adam. "I'll go find him. Probably he's lost. My camp is just below. I'll fetch him back to-day — or to-morrow at farthest."

She murmured some incoherent thanks. Adam was again aware of her penetrating glance. He strode away with bowed head, searching the sand for the man's tracks. Presently he struck them and saw that they led down toward the valley.

From there the footprints led down to the parapet of a wide bench, under which the white crust began its level monotony toward the other side of the valley. The leaden air weighed down, and though his keen scent could not detect any odor he knew there was impurity of some kind on the slow wind. It reminded him that this was Death Valley. He considered a moment. If the tracks went across the valley, Adam would return to camp for a canteen, then take up the trail again. But the tracks led off westward, straggling and aimless. Adam did not care about the heat. That faint hint of gas, however, caused him concern.

Adam scanned the gray slope, so barren, so compellingly leading to distance. The tracks grew deeper, more dragging, wavering from side to side. Here the man had fallen. Then came the telltale signs of where he had again fallen and had begun to crawl.

"Looks like the old story," muttered Adam. "I'll just about find him dying or dead. . . . Better so — for that woman who called him husband! . . . I wonder —"

He strode on peering through the hot sunlight. At last he espied a moving object. A huge land turtle toiling along! No, it was a man crawling on hands and knees.

Adam ran with the strides of a giant. And he came up to a man, ragged and dirty, crawling wearily along.

"Say, hold on!" called Adam loudly.

As a phlegmatic beast, aware of sudden sound, but devoid of fear, this man halted. But he did not lift his head.

"What ails you?" queried Adam, sharply.

"Huh!" ejaculated the man, stupidly. He could only partially lift his head. Adam's repeated question accompanied by a shake brought only a grunt. Adam could arrive at only one conclusion, which was that this person had been overcome by the noxious gas known to be present at times in Death Valley.

He lifted the man to his feet, and began to lead him over the sand. He was considerably over medium height and weight, but his size did not hamper Adam as did the fellow's contrariness. He was heavy, loggy on his feet, and staggered this way and that, grunting like a pig, puffing and choking. His equilibrium had been upset, and like all men overcome on the desert he wanted to plunge off on a straight line.

At length Adam released the straining fellow, as much out of curiosity to see what he would do as from a realization that time could not be wasted in this manner. He did not fall, but swayed and staggered around in a circle, like an animal that had been struck on the head. The texture of his ragged garments, the look of the man, despite his unkempt appearance, marked him as one not commonly met with in the desert.

Adam calculated that they were miles from camp, and would never reach it at this rate. He pondered. He must carry the man. Suiting action to thought he picked him up and throwing him over his shoulder started to plod on. The weight was little to one of Adam's strength, but the squirming and wrestling of the fellow to get down made Adam flounder in the sand. Something must be done. He might tie the man's hands and feet, but the canteen-strap would not serve for that, and there was nothing else. Not the first time was this for Adam to need a rope to tie a man gone desert mad.

"YOU poor devil!" muttered Adam, at last brought to a standstill. "Maybe I can't save your life anyway. Maybe you're not worth it. But I'll do what seems best."

With that he set the man down, and swinging a powerful blow, laid him stunned upon the sand. Whereupon it was easy to lift him and throw him over a shoulder. Not for a long distance over the sand did that task become prodigious. But at length the burden of a heavy weight, and the dragging sand, and the hot sun, brought Adam to a pass where rest was imperative. He laid the unconscious man down while he recovered breath and strength. Then he picked him up and went on.

After that he plodded slower, rested often, weakened more perceptibly. Meanwhile the hours passed, and when he reached the huge gateway in the mountain wall, the sun was gone.

The limit that he had put upon his endurance was to reach the shack. He did so, and he was nearly blind when the woman's poignant call thrilled his throbbing ears. He saw her — a white shape through ruddy haze. Then he deposited his burden on the sand and fell beside it.

"Oh!" the woman moaned. "He's dead!"

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Adam shook his head. Pity, fear, and even terror rang in her cry, but not love.

"Ah! . . . You've saved him then. . . . He's injured — there's a great bruise — he breathes so heavily."

"Poison — air," choked Adam.

"Oh, this terrible Death Valley!" she cried.

Adam's sight cleared, and he saw the woman, clad in a white robe, a garment clean and rich, falling in thick folds — strange to Adam's sight, recalling the past. Once she must have been beautiful. The perfect lines, the noble brow, the curved lips were there, but her face was thin, strained, tragic. Only the eyes held beauty still.

"You saved him?" she queried, with quick drawn breath.

"Found him — up the — valley — crawling on — his hands and knees," panted Adam.

She reached a white worn hand to touch Adam's with an exquisite eloquence of gratitude.

"Get water — bathe him," said Adam. "Have you ammonia — or whiskey?" And while he laboriously got to his knees the woman ran into the shack. Of all the labors to which he had ever subjected his strength of body, this one had been the severest. Soon the woman came hurrying out, with basin and towel, and a little black satchel that contained medicines. Adam helped her work over her husband, but though they revived him they could not bring him back to intelligent consciousness.

"HELP me carry him in," said Adam.

Inside the little shack it was almost too dark to see plainly.

"Have you a light?" he added.

"No," she replied.

"I'll fetch a candle. You watch over him while I move my camp up here. I'll be back right away, and get supper for us."

By the time Adam had packed and moved his effects darkness had settled down. After he unpacked near the shack, his first move was to light a candle and take it to the door.

"Here's a light, ma'am," he called.

She glided silently out of the gloom, her garments gleaming ghost-like and her white face with its luminous eyes, dark and strange as midnight. As she took the candle her hand touched Adam's.

"Thank you," she said. "Please don't call me ma'am. My name is Magdalene Virey."

"So. I'll try to remember. . . . Has your husband come to yet?"

"No. Won't you look at him?"

Adam followed her inside, and saw that she marked his lofty height.

The candle did not throw a bright light, yet by its aid Adam made out the features of the man whose life he had saved. It seemed to Adam to be the face of a Lucifer whose fiendish passions were now restrained by sleep. Whoever this man was, he had suffered a broken heart and ruined life.

"He's asleep," said Adam. "That's not a trance. It'd be better not to wake him."

"You think so," she replied, with relief.

"I'm not sure. If you watch him a while you can tell. I'll get supper and call you."

Adam's habitual dexterity over camp tasks failed him this evening. His fingers were all thumbs. What ailed him? He lost something of patience with himself. Presently, however, the supper was ready.

"Mrs. Virey," he called at the door.

Tall, white-gowned, slender and graceful, with the poise of a woman aloof and proud, and the sad face of a Madonna — what a woman to sit at Adam's camp-fire in Death Valley! It was beyond belief. Adam served her with something that was not wholly unconscious satisfaction. He could tell the signs of hunger and the impression had come to him that she was half-starved. The way she ate brought home to Adam with a pang the memorable days when he was starving. This woman had an exquisitely spiritual face. She had seemed all spirit.

"When have I eaten so heartily!" she exclaimed at last. "But oh! it all tasted so good. . . . Sir, you are a capital cook."

"Thank you," replied Adam, much gratified.

"Do you always fare so well?"

"No. I'm bound to confess I spread it on a little to-night. You see, I seldom have such opportunity to serve a woman."

She looked at him with intense interest. In the night her eyes seemed very full and large, supernaturally bright and tragic. They were the eyes of a woman who still preserved in her something of inherent faith in mankind. Adam divined that she had scarcely looked at him before, as an individual with

a personality, and that some accent or word of his had struck her singularly.

"It was that miner, Dis — Dis —"

"Dismukes," added Adam.

"Yes. It was he who sent you here. Are you a miner, too?"

"No. I care little for gold."

"Ah! . . . What are you then?"

"Just a wanderer. Wansfell, the Wanderer, they call me."

"They? Who are they?"

"Why, I suppose they are the other wanderers. Men who tramp over the desert — men who seek gold or forgetfulness or peace or solitude."

"Men of the desert have passed by here, but none like you," she replied, and her eyes pierced him. "Why did you come?"

"Years ago my life was ruined," said Adam, slowly. "I chose to fight the desert. And in all the years the thing that helped me most was not to pass by any one in trouble. Dismukes is my friend — he saved me from death once. He told me about your being here. He said no white woman could live in Death Valley. I wondered if I might — at least advise you, turn you back."

"Sir, your kind words warm a cold and forlorn heart," she said. "But I cannot be turned back. It's too late."

"No hour is ever too late. . . . Mrs. Virey, I'll not distress you with advice or importunities. But the fact of your being here — a woman of your sensitiveness and delicate health — it is a terrible thing. This is Death Valley. The month is April. When midsummer comes you cannot survive here. I know nothing of why you are here. But you cannot stay. It would be a miracle for your husband to find gold here, if that is what he seeks."

"Virey does not seek gold," she said.

"Does he know that a white woman absolutely cannot live here in Death Valley? Even the Indians abandon it in summer."

"He knows. Shoshone Indians pack supplies to us. They have warned him."

Adam could ask no more, yet how impossible not to feel an absorbing interest in this woman's fate. As he sat with bowed head, he felt her gaze upon him.

"Wansfell, you must have a great heart — like your body," she spoke presently. "It is blessed to meet such a man. Your kindness, your interest soften my bitter doubt of men. We are utter strangers. But there's something in this desert that bridges time — that bids me open my lips to you. . . . a man who traveled this ghastly valley to serve me! . . . My husband knows that Death Valley is a hell on earth. So do I. That is why he brought me . . . that is why I came!"

"My God!" breathed Adam, staring incredulously at her.

Yet, as he stared at her, realizing the tremendous passion of will, of spirit that emanated from her, divining how, in her case, intellect and culture had been added to the eternal feminine of her nature, he knew she spoke the truth.

"WON'T your husband leave — take you away from here?" asked Adam, slowly.

"No."

"Well. . . . I have a way of forcing men to see things. I suppose I —"

"Useless! We have traveled three thousand miles to get to Death Valley. Years ago Elliot Virey read about this awful place. He learned that it was the most arid, ghastly, desolate and terrible place of death in all the world. . . . Then, when he got me to Sacramento — he would talk with miners, prospectors, Indians — any one who could tell him about Death Valley. . . . Virey had a reason for finding a hell on earth. Sir, the hell of which we read — even in its bottommost pit — can not be worse than Death Valley."

"Let me move your camp higher up, out of this thick dead air and heat — where there are trees and good water?"

"But it is not a beautiful and a comfortable camp that Virey — that we want," she said, bitterly.

"Then let me move your shack out of danger. This spot is the most forbidding I ever saw. That mountain above us is on the move. The rocks are rolling down all the time."

"Have I not heard the rocks — cracking, ringing — in the dead of night!" she cried, shuddering. "I've heard them slide and crack, roll and ring — hit the sand with a thump, and then with whistle and thud go by where I lay in the dark. . . . People who live as I have lived know nothing of the elements. I had no fear of the desert — nor of Death Valley. I dared it. I laughed to scorn the idea that any barren wild valley — could be worse than the chaos of my soul. . . . But I



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didn't know. I am human. I'm a woman. A woman is meant to bear children. Nothing else! . . . I learned that I was afraid of the dark. These rolling rocks got on my nerves. I wait—I listen for them. And I pray. . . . Then the silence—that became so dreadful. It is insupportable. Worse than all is the loneliness. . . . Oh, this God-forsaken lonely Death Valley! It will drive me mad."

"True," replied Adam. "And for a woman—for you—these feelings will grow more intense. . . . I beg of you to let me move your camp out of danger."

"No! Not a single foot!" she blazed, as if confronted with something beyond his words. After that she hid her face in her hands. A long silence ensued. At length she looked up again, apparently composed. "Perhaps I've talked more than I should have. But you came here to help an unknown woman. Not to any one else have I breathed a word of the true state of my feelings. My husband watches me like a hawk, but not yet does he know my fears. I'll thank you, when you speak to him, if you stay here so long, not to tell him anything I've said."

"Mrs. Virey, I'll stay as long as you are here," said Adam, simply.

"Virey will not like that."

"I'm not sure, but I suspect it'll not make any difference to me what he likes."

"If you are kind to me he will drive you away," she went on, with agitation.

"Well, as he's your husband he may prevent me from being kind, but he can't drive me away."

"But suppose I ask you to go?"

"If that's the greatest kindness I can do you—I'll go. . . . But do you ask me?"

"I—I don't know. I may be forced to—not by him, but by my pride," she said, desperately.

"Oh, I don't know what to say. . . . Just the sound of a kind voice makes me a coward. . . . This desert of horrors teaches the truth of life. . . . Once I had the world at my feet! . . . Now I break and bow at the sympathy of a stranger!"

"Never mind your pride," said Adam, in his slow cool way. "I understand. Whatever brought you to Death Valley, whatever nails you here, is nothing to me. If you do not want me to stay to work for you—why, let me stay for my own sake."

She rose and faced him, with soul-searching eyes. Emotion governed her.

"Sir, you speak nobly," she replied, with lips that trembled. "But I don't understand you. Stay here—where I am—for your sake!—Explain, please."

"I have my burden. Once it was even more terrible than yours. Through that, I can feel as you feel now. I have lived the insupportable loneliness of the desert—the silence, the heat, the hell. If I might somehow help your husband, who is blindly following some road of passion—that would ease my burden. If I might save you weariness, or hunger, or thirst, or terror—it would be doing more for myself than for you. . . . When the furnace heat comes—when the blasting midnight wind comes—it means either madness or death."

"STAY—Sir Knight," she said, with a low ringing gaiety. "Who shall say that chivalry is dead? . . . Stay! and know this! I fear no man. I scorn death. . . . But ah! the woman of me! I hate dirt and vermin. I'm afraid of pain. And lastly, I have a mortal terror of going mad. Spare me that and you will have my prayers in this world—and beyond. . . . Good night."

"Good night," replied Adam.

She left him to the deepening gloom and the dying camp-fire.

Daylight again, as if by the opening of eyelids!

He pulled on his boots, and gave his face an unusual and detrimental luxury in the desert. Water was bad for exposed flesh in arid country. The usual spring and buoyancy of his physical being was lacking this day. So Adam moved slowly, and with caution.

First he went to the spring. He found a bubbling gush of velvet-looking water, pouring out of a hole. The color of it seemed inviting—so clear and soft and somehow rich. Before he tasted this water, despite its promise, he knew it was not good. Dismukes had said this water was all right, yet he seldom stayed long enough in one locality to learn the ill effects of the water. Besides, the prospector had the non-corrosive internals of a camel. Adam knew he, too, could live on this water. But he was thinking of the delicate woman lost here in Death Valley.

The spring was located some two hundred

yards or more from the shack, and just out of line of the rock-strewn slope. Adam decided to pitch his permanent camp here on the grass. Here he erected a brush and canvas shelter to make shade, and deposited his effects under it. That done he returned to the shack to cook breakfast.

There appeared to be no life in the rude little misshapen hut. Adam smiled half-pitifully at it. There were men so utterly helpless and useless out in the wilds, where existence depended upon labor of hands, that they seemed foreign to the descendants of Americans.

Leisurely Adam attended to the preparation of breakfast, prolonging tasks that always passed swiftly through his hands.

"Good morning, Sir Wansfell," called a voice, with something of mockery in it, yet rich and wistful.

It stirred Adam's blood. It seemed to carry an echo from his distant past. Turning he saw the woman, clad in gray, with a girdle of cord twisted around her slender waist. Soft and clean and fleecy, that gray garment, so utterly incongruous against the background of crude shack and wild slope.

"GOOD morning, Mrs. Virey," returned Adam. "How are you—and did your husband awake?"

"I slept better than I have for a long time," she replied, "and I think I know why. . . . Yes, Virey came to. He's conscious, and asked for water. But he's weak. I'd like you to look at him presently. And how are you after your tremendous exertions of yesterday?" she inquired.

"Not so spry," said Adam, with a smile. "But I'll be myself soon. I think it would be more comfortable for you if we had breakfast in your kitchen. The sun is hot."

"Indeed, yes. So you mean to—to do this camp work for me—in spite of—"

"Yes. I always oppose women," he said.

"Last night I was upset. I am sorry that I was ungracious. I thank you, and I am only too glad to accept your kind service," she said, earnestly.

"That is well. Now, will you help me carry in the breakfast?"

Unreality was not unusual to Adam. The desert had as many unrealities, illusions and spectres as it had natural and tangible things. But while he sat opposite to this fascinating woman, whose shadowed beautiful face shone like a cameo against the drab wall of the brush shack, he was hard put to it to convince himself of actuality.

"Shall I try to get Virey to eat?" she asked, presently.

"That depends. On the desert, after a collapse, we are careful with food and water."

"Will you look at him?"

Adam nodded his willingness, and followed her as she swept aside a flap of the canvas partition. This room was larger and lighter. It had an aperture for a window. Adam's quick glance took this in, and then the two narrow beds of blankets raised on brush cots.

Virey lay on the one farther from the door. His pallid brow and unshaven face appeared drawn into terrible lines. Surely he had been handsome once. He had deep-set black eyes, a straight nose, and a mouth that betrayed him, despite a mustache.

"You're in pain?" queried Adam.

"Yes," came the husky whisper, and Virey put a hand on his breast.

"It's sore here," said Adam, feeling Virey, pressing him slightly. "You've breathed poisoned air down in the valley. You just lie quiet for a while—then you'll be all right again. I'll do the work around camp."

"Thank you," whispered Virey.

The woman followed Adam outside, and gazed earnestly up at him, unconscious of herself, with her face full in the sunlight. It struck Adam that the difference between desert flowers and the faces of beautiful women was one of emotion.

"He's ill—don't you think?" queried the woman.

"No. But he recovers slowly. He hasn't the lungs to stand Death Valley. But Virey will get over this all right. Perhaps it will scare him into reason."

"You never give up—do you?"

"Come to think of that—I guess I never do," replied Adam.

"Such spirit is worthy of a better cause. You are doomed here to failure."

"Well, you never can tell. The fact of my standing here is proof of the overcoming of almost impossible things. How long have you been here?"

"Several weeks. But it's years to me."

"Who brought you down? How did you get here?"

"We've had different guides. The last



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were Shoshone Indians. They left us here. I rode a horse. Virey walked the last stages of this journey to Death Valley—from which there will be no return. We turned horse and burros loose."

"Are these Shoshones supposed to visit you occasionally?"

"Yes. Virey made a deal with them to come every full moon. We've had more supplies than we need. But I have not the skill to prepare food wholesomely under these conditions. So we almost starved."

Work or action was always necessary to Adam. He planned a brush shelter from the sun, a sort of outside room adjoining the shack, a low stone wall to keep out blowing sand, a heavy stone fence between the shack and the slope of sliding rocks. When these tasks were finished there would be others, and always there would be the slopes to climb, the valley to explore. Idleness in Death Valley was a forerunner of madness.

THAT day passed swiftly, and the twilight hour, which was Adam's favored time, as he ate again with Mrs. Virey, seemed to have less of gloom and forbidding intimations. The woman showed less gravity and melancholy, and not once did she speak with bitterness or passion. She informed Adam that Virey had improved.

Adam reverted to old habits that night, as he lay in his blankets and watched the white stars blinking in the intense blue, and listened to the silence. Before he fell asleep he heard that silence broken by the hollow cracks of a rolling rock. Many a time had he heard such sounds in the lonely desert nights, but never ominous as now.

Two more days slipped by, and on the third Virey got up and came forth into the sunlight. Adam happened to be at work near-by. He saw Virey gaze around at the improvements that had been made and say something about them to his wife. Approaching with slow gait and haggard face, he addressed Adam.

"You expect pay for this?"

"No," replied Adam, shortly.

"How's that?"

"Well, when men are used to the desert, as I am, they lend a hand where it is needed."

"But I didn't want any such work done."

"I know, and I excuse you because you're ignorant of desert ways and needs."

"The question of excuse for me is offensive. I'll have no one's excuses."

Adam fixed his piercing eyes upon this man. Mrs. Virey stood a little to one side, but not out of range of Adam's gaze. Did a mocking light show in her shadowy eyes?

"We all have to be excused sometimes," said Adam, deliberately. "Now I had to excuse you on the score of ignorance of the desert. You chose this place as a camp. It happens to be the most dangerous spot I ever saw. Any moment the whole avalanche may start."

"It's my business where I camp," rejoined Virey.

"Were you aware of the danger here?"

"I am indifferent to danger."

"But you are not alone. You have a woman with you."

Manifestly Virey had been speaking without weighing words. The brooding shade passed out of his eyes and in its place grew a light of interest.

"You're a prospector," he asserted.

"No. I pan a little gold dust once in a while for fun, because I happen across it."

"You're no miner then—nor hunter, nor teamster?"

"I've been a little of all you name, but I can't be called any one of them."

"You might be one of the robbers that infest these hills."

"I might be, only I'm not," declared Adam, dryly. He felt disposed to be lenient and kind toward this unfortunate man. If only the woman had not stood there with that half-veiled mocking shadow of doubt in her eyes!

"You're an educated man!" ejaculated Virey, incredulously.

"I might claim to be specially educated in the ways of the desert."

"And the ways of women—are they mysteries to you?" queried Virey, with scorn.

"I confess that they are," replied Adam. "Few women have crossed my trail."

"You don't realize your good fortune,—if you tell the truth."

"I would not lie to any man," returned Adam, bluntly.

"Bah! Men are all liars and women make them so. . . . You're hanging round my camp, making a bluff of work."

"I deny that. Heaving these stones is

work. You lift a few of them in this hot sun. . . . And my packing you on my back for miles over Death Valley—was that a bluff?"

"You saved my life!" exclaimed the man, stung to passion. There seemed to be contending tides within him—a fight of old habits of thought, fineness of feeling, against an all-absorbing and dominating malignance. "Man, I can't thank you for that. . . . You've done me no service."

"I don't want nor expect thanks. I was thinking of the effort it cost me."

"As a man who was once a gentleman, I do thank you. But now that you have put me in debt for a service I didn't want, why do you linger here?"

"I wish to help your wife."

"Ah! that's frank of you. That frankness is something for which I really thank you. But you'll pardon me if I'm inclined to doubt the idealistic nature of your motive."

Adam pondered over this speech without reply. Then as he met the magnificent flash in Magdalene Virey's eyes he was inspired into revelation of Virey's veiled hint, and into a serenity he divined would be kindest to her pride.

"Go ahead and help her," Virey went on. "You have my sincere felicitations. My charming wife is helpless enough. I never knew how helpless till we were thrown upon our own resources. She cannot even cook a potato. And as for baking bread! . . . Stranger, if you eat some of it I will not be long annoyed by your attentions to her."

"Well, I'll teach her," said Adam.

His practical response irritated Virey excessively.

"Who are you? What's your name?" he queried, yielding to a roused curiosity.

"Wansfell," replied Adam.

"Wansfell?" echoed Virey. "Wansfell? . . . I know that name. Are you the man who in this desert country is called Wansfell the Wanderer?"

"Yes, I'm that Wansfell."

"I heard a prospector tell about you," went on Virey, his haggard face now quickened by thought. "He said he had seen you kill a man named Mc something—McKin—no, McKue. . . Did he tell the truth?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say. I killed Baldy McKue—or rather, to speak as I feel—was the means by which the desert dealt McKue the death justly due him."

Virey now glowed with excitement.

"Somehow that story haunted me," he said. "I never heard one like it. . . . This prospector told how you confronted McKue in the street of a mining-camp. You yelled like a demon at McKue. He turned white as a sheet. He jerked his gun—began to shoot. But you bore a charmed life. His bullets did not hit you or, if they did,—to no purpose. You leaped upon him. Then—then you killed him with your hands! . . . Is that true?"

ADAM nodded gloomily. The tale, told vividly by this galvanized Virey, was not pleasant. And the woman stood there, transfixed, with white face and tragic eyes.

"My God!—You killed McKue by sheer strength—with your bare hands! . . . I had not looked at your hands. I see them now. . . . So McKue was your enemy?"

"No. I never saw him before that day," replied Adam.

Virey slowly drew back wonderingly, yet with instinctive shrinking.

"Then why did you kill him?"

"He ill-treated a woman."

Adam turned away as he replied. A silence ensued.

"So—so that was it," spoke up Virey, evidently with effort. "I always wondered. Wild west sort of story, you know. Strange I should meet you. . . . Thanks for telling me. I gather it wasn't pleasant for you."

"It's sickening to recall, but I have no regrets," replied Adam.

"Quite so. I understand. Man of the desert—ruthless—inhuman sort of thing."

"Inhuman?" queried Adam, and he looked at Virey, at last stung. Behind Virey's pale working face and averted eyes, Adam read a conscience in tumult, a spirit for the moment terrorized.

"Virey, you and I'd never agree on meanings of words. . . . I broke McKue's arms and ribs and legs—and while I cracked them I told him what an inhuman dastard he had been—to ruin a girl, to beat her, to abandon her and her baby—to leave them to die. I told him how I had watched them die. . . . then I broke his neck! . . . McKue was the inhuman man—not I."

Virey turned away, swaying, and his white hand sought the stone-wall for support, until he reached the shack, which he entered.

[To be continued.]

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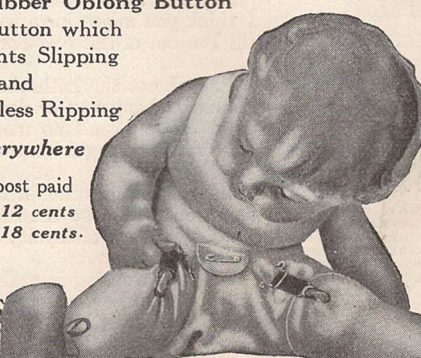
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