



THE WAY OF A MAN

By EMERSON HOUGH

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have hurt me more.

On the fifth week she called once more for her charcoal pen and signed the last letter of her Christian name.

"See there," she said; "it is all my girl name, E-I-I-n." I looked at it, her hand in mine.

"Ellen!" I murmured. "It is signature enough, because you are the only Ellen in the world." But she put away my hand gently and said, "Wait."

She asked me now to get her some sort of cut branch for a crutch, saying she was going to walk. And walk she did, though resting her foot very little on the ground. After that daily she went further and farther, watched me as I giddled for trout in the stream.

aided me as I picked berries in the thickets, helped me with the deer I brought into camp.

"You are very good to me," she said, "and you hunt well. You work. You are a man, John Cowles. I love you."

But hearing words so sweet as these to me, still I did not tell her what secret was in my soul. Each day that other world seemed vaguer and farther away.

Each day, too, it seemed less worth while to speak. Now I could not endure the thought of losing her.

One day we wandered in a dense berry thicket, out of which rose here and there chokecherry trees, and we began to gather some of these sour fruits for use in the pemmican which we planned to manufacture.

All at once our dog began to growl and erect his hair, sniffing not at the foot scent, but looking directly into the thicket just ahead. He began then to bark, and as he did so there rose, with a sullen sort of grunt and a champing of jaws like a great hog, a vast yellow-gray object, whose head topped the bushes that grew densely all about.

The girl at my side uttered a cry of terror and turned to run as best she might, but she fell and lay there cowering.

The grizzly stood looking at me vindictively with little eyes, its ears back, its jaws working, its paws swinging loosely at its side, the claws white at the lower end, as though newly sharpened for slaughtering. I saw then that it was angered by the sight of the dog and would not leave us. Each moment I expected to hear it crash through the bush in its charge. Once down in the brush, there would be small chance of delivering a fatal shot, whereas now, as it swung its broad head slightly to one side, the best possible opportunity for killing it presented itself immediately. Without hesitation I swung up the heavy barrel and drew the small silver bead directly on the base of the ear where the sidebones of a bear's head are flatter and thinner, directly alongside the brain.

The vicious crack of the rifle sounded loud there in the thicket, but there came no answer in response to it save a crashing and slipping and a breaking down of the bushes as the vast carcass fell at full length. The little ball had done its work and found the brain.

We were two savages, successful now in the chase—successful, indeed, in winning the capital prize of all savages, for few Indians will attack the grizzly if it can be avoided. She laid her hand wonderingly upon the barrel of the rifle, looking at it curiously, that it had been so deadly as to slay a creature so vast as this. Then she leaned contentedly against my side, and so we sat there for a time. "John Cowles," she said, "you are very much a man. I am not afraid when you are with me." I put my arm about her. The world seemed wild and fair and sweet to me. Life, savage, stern, swept through all my veins. We were very busily engaged in cutting up the slaughtered grizzly, when all at once we stopped and looked at each other in silence. We had heard a sound. To me it sounded like a rifle shot. We listened.

It came again, with many others. There was a volley of several shots, sounds certain beyond any manner of question. Her eyes were large and startled. I caught her bloody hand in my bloody one, and for an instant I believed we both meditated flight deeper into the wilderness.

"It may not be any one we know," I said. "It may be Indians."

"No," said she, "it is my father. They have found us. We must go John"—she turned toward me and put her hands on my breast—"John!" I saw terror and regret and resolve look out of her eyes, but not joy at this deliverance. No, it was not joy that shone in her eyes. None the less the ancient yoke of society being offered, we bowed our necks again, fools and slaves, surrendering freedom, joy, content, as though that were our duty.

Silently we made our way toward the edge of the thicket where it faced upon the open valley.

Almost as we passed I saw coming

forward the stooping figure of an Indian trailer, half naked, belegged, moccasined, following our fresh tracks at a trot.

I carefully covered him with the little silver bead, minded to end his quest. But before I could estimate his errand or prepare to receive him closely in case he proved an enemy, I saw approaching around a little point of timber other men, white men, a half dozen of them, one a tall man in dusty garments, with boots and hat and gloves.

And then I saw her, my promised wife, leave my side and limp and stagger forward, her arms outstretched. I saw the yoke of submission, the covenant of society, once more accepted.

"Father!" she cried.

They gathered about us. I saw him look down at her with half horror on his face. Then I noticed that she was clad in fringed skins, that her head covering was a bit of hide, that her hair was burned yellow at the ends, that her foot coverings were uncouth, that her hands and arms were brown, where not stained red by the blood in which they had dabbled. I looked down also at myself and saw then that I was tall, brown, gaunt, bearded, ragged, my clothing of wool well nigh gone, my limbs wound in puttee bands of hide; my hands large, horny, blackened, rough. I was a savage new drawn from my cave. I dragged behind me the great grizzled hide of the dead bear clutched in one hairy hand. And sadder and sullen as any savage, brutal and silent in resentment at being disturbed, I stared at them.

"Who are you?" demanded the tall man of me sternly, but still I did not answer. The girl's hands tugged at his shoulders. "It is my friend," she said. "He saved me. It is Mr. John Cowles, father, of the Virginia Cowles family. He has come to see you!"

But he did not hear her or show that he heard. His arm about her, supporting her as she limped, he turned back down the valley, and we others followed slowly.

Presently he came to the rude shelter which had been our home. Without speaking he walked about the camp, pushed open the door of the little ragged tepee and looked within. The floor was very narrow. There was one meager bed of hides. There was one fire.

"Come with me," he said at length to me. And so I followed him apart, where a little thicket gave us more privacy.

"You are John Cowles, sir, then?" he said to me at length quietly. "Lieutenant Belknap told me something of this when he came in with his men from the east."

I nodded and waited.

"Are you aware, sir, of the seriousness of what you have done?" he broke out. "Why did you not come on to the settlements? What reason was there for your not coming back at once to the valley of the Platte? Here you are, a hundred miles out of your way, where a man of any intelligence, it seems to me, would naturally have turned back to the great trail. Hundreds of wagons pass there every day. There is a stage line with daily coaches, stations, houses. A telegraph line runs from one end of the valley to the other. You could not have missed all this had you struck south. A fool would have known that. But you took my girl!" He choked up and pointed to me, ragged and uncouth.

"Good God! Colonel Meriwether," I cried out at length, "you are not regretting that I brought her through?"

"Almost, sir," he said, setting his lips together—"almost!"

"Do you regret then that she brought me through—that I owe my life to her?"

"Almost, sir," he repeated. "I almost regret it."

"Then go back—leave us—report us dead!" I broke out savagely.

"She is a splendid girl, a noble being," I said to him slowly at last. "She saved me when I was sick and unable to travel. There is nothing I could do that would pay the debt I owe her. She is a noble woman, a princess among women, body and soul."

"She is like her mother," said he quietly. "She was too good for this. Sir, you have done my family a grievous wrong. You have ruined my daughter's life."

I struck my hand hard on his shoulder and looked him full in the eye. "Colonel Meriwether," I said to him, "I am ashamed of you."

"What do you mean?" He frowned sternly and shook off my hand.

"I brought her through," I said, "and if it would do any good, I would lie down here and die for her. If what I say is not true, draw up your men for a firing squad and let us end it. I don't care to go back to Laramie."

"What good would that do?" he said.

"It's the girl's name that's compromised, man! Why, the news of this is all over the country—the wires have carried it both sides of the mountains; the papers are full of it in the east. You have been gone nearly three months together, and all the world knows it. Don't you suppose all the world will talk? Did I not see"—he motioned his hand toward our encampment—"I know men."

"Yes," I said, "I would have been no man worth the name had I not loved your daughter. And I admit to you that I shall never love another woman, not in all my life."

In answer he flung down on the ground in front of me something that he carried—the scroll of our covenant, signed by my name and in part by hers.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"It means," said I, "what it says; that here or anywhere, in sickness or in health, in adversity or prosperity, until I lie down to die and she beside

me in her time, we two will be one of God married; and in the eye of man would have been, here or wherever else we might be."

I saw his face pale, but a somber flame came into his eyes. "And you say this—you, after all I know regarding you!"

I saw my guilt once more, horrible as though an actual presence. I remembered what Ellen Meriwether had said to me regarding any other or earlier covenant. I recalled my troth, pledged earlier, before I had ever seen her—my faith, pledged in another world. I turned to him with no pride in my bearing.

"So I presume Gordon Orme has told you," I said to him. "You know of Grace Sheraton back there?"

His lips but closed the tighter. "Have you told her—have you told this to my girl?" he asked.

"Draw up your file!" I cried, springing to my feet. "Execute me! I deserve it. No, I have not told her. I planned to do so—I should never have allowed her to sign her name there before I had told her everything—been fair to her as I could. But her accident left her weak—I could not tell her—a thousand things delayed it. Yes it was my fault."

He looked me over with contempt. "You are not fit to touch the shoe on my girl's foot," he said slowly. "But now, since this thing has begun, since you have thus involved her and compromised her, and as I imagine in some foul way have engaged her affections—now, I say, it must go on. When we get back to Laramie, sir, you shall marry that girl. And then out you go, and never see her face again."

"Colonel Meriwether," said I to him finally, "if it would do her any good I would give up my life for her. But her father can neither tell me how nor when my marriage ceremony runs, nor can he tell me when to leave the side of the woman who is my wife. I am subject to the orders of no man in the world."

"You refuse to do what you have planned to do? Sir, that shows you as you are. You proposed to—live with her here, but not be bound to her elsewhere?"

"It is not true!" I said to him in a hoarse voice. "I proposed to put before her the fact of my own weakness, of my own self deception, which also was deception of her. I propose to do that now."

"If you did she would refuse to look at you again."

"I know it, but it must be done. I must take my chances."

"And your chances mean this alternative—either that my girl's reputation shall be ruined all over the country—all through the army, where she is known and loved—or else that her heart must be broken. This is what it means, Mr. Cowles. This is what you have brought to my family."

"Yes," I said to him slowly, "this is what I have brought."

"Then which do you choose, sir?" he demanded of me.

"I choose to break her heart," I answered, "because that is the truth, and that is right. I only know one way to ride, and that is straight."

He smiled at me coldly in his frosty beard. "That sounds well from you!" he said bitterly. "Ellen," he raised his voice, "Ellen, I say, come here at once!"

She came before us slowly, halting, leaning on her crutch. A soft flush shone through the brown upon her cheeks. I shall not forget in all my life the picture of her as she stood. Then, lovable in her rags, beautiful in her savagery, the gentleness of generations of culture in all her mien in spite of her rude surroundings, she stepped up and laid her hand upon her father's shoulder, one finger half pointing at the ragged scroll of hide which lay upon the ground before us. I loved her—ah, how I loved her then!

"I signed that, father," she said gently. "I was going to sign it little by little, a letter each week. We were engaged, nothing more. But here or anywhere some time I intend to marry Mr. Cowles. This I have promised of my own free will. He has been both man and gentleman, father. I love him."

I heard the groan which came from his throat. She sprang back.

"What?" she cried. "You object? Listen. I will sign my name now. I will finish it. Give me—give me"—She sought about on the ground for something which would leave a mark. "I say I have not been his, but will be, father, as I like, when I like, now, this very night if I choose, forever. He has done everything for me. I trust him. I know he is a man of honor; that he"—Her voice broke as she looked at my face.

"But what—what is it?" she demanded brokenly.

"Ellen, child, Mr. Cowles has something to tell you."

Then some one in a voice which sounded like mine, but was not mine, told her—the truth, which sounded so like a lie. Some one, myself, yet not myself, went on cruelly blackening all the sweet blue sky for her. Some one—I suppose it was myself, late free—felt the clamp of an iron yoke upon his neck.

I saw her knees sink beneath her, but she shrunk back when I would have reached out an arm to her as of old.

"I hate that woman!" she blazed. "Suppose she does love you. Do I not love you more? Let her lose—one one must lose." But the next moment I saw her face change.

"It is not that you loved another girl," she whispered, "but that you have deceived me—here, when I was in your power. Oh, it was not right! How could you? Oh, how could you, John Cowles?"

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Then once more she changed. The flame of her thoroughbred soul came back to her. Her courage saved her from shame. Her face flushed; she stood straight. "I hate you!" she cried to me. "Go! I will never see you any more."

Still the bright sun shone on. A little bird trilled in the thicket near.

(To Be Continued.)

Lightning Killed Cow.

During the thunder shower this morning about 8 o'clock a bolt of lightning struck a tree in Mrs. Jacob Stenner's pasture, glancing off and killing a valuable milk cow belonging to Mrs. Stenner, which had been standing under the tree.

J. C. Smith of Nehawka came in this morning and visited his brother, W. T., for the day.

M. Fanger, who has been looking after his commercial interests here for a short time departed for Missouri Valley, Iowa, this afternoon.

W. T. Smith came in from William Wheeler's this morning, where he expected to thresh today, but owing to the heavy rain there early this morning the threshing had to be postponed. Mr. Smith went to Council Bluffs to get some repairs for his machine.

C. A. Welch, the carpenter, is engaged by the school board in repairing the Central building, putting in partitions and such necessary work as will place the building in ship-shape for the opening of the school year.

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Up From Nehawka.

Ex-Congressman E. M. Pollard and Frank Sheldon, the merchant prince of Nehawka, were in the city a few hours last evening looking after important business matters. There was nothing political attached to their visit.

Both agree that the political outlook is somewhat muddled and that it is hard to determine the final result. Both gentlemen are for Taft, because he is the regular nominee, and they cannot see any other way out of the dilemma than to support the regular nominee. They autoed up and returned last evening.

Jake Miller, the veteran fisherman, had about all he could do to land a forty-pound catfish this morning. He was in his boat and the forty-pounder tugging at the line caused Jake's boat to turn about rapidly.

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