

which Eliza found in Janet Matthiason's cedar chest. "The Sailor's Farewell" showed a magenta colored gown not a fold disarranged by the embrace of a sailor with Byron mane and doll's feet. A vine with red roses embowered the scene. In "The Sailor's Return" the vine bloomed blue and the sailor had evolved a beard and a white suit, but the sailor's wife waited in the same magenta gown, after the immemorial manner of the newspaper heroine.

The pictures were in the oval frames that Eliza had made by folding brown paper into curved triangles, and lapping these together with glue. It was she, not the reverend James, who looked at the six-masted ship through the vista of blue vines, and wondered where the far-off brother sailed. And it was she, not James, who rejoiced at the first letter.

It was from a remote station in British Columbia, and it bore the marks of a long, long journey to the old Canada home, to Illinois, and at last to the Missouri valley.

Within, it was like the log of a ship, or the diary of a discoverer. A thermometer reading to right of it, a barometer reading to left of it, and the depth of snow and of frozen soil at the forefront of this greeting to a brother forty years forgotten. Eliza lingered with work-worn fingers over the slant, shaded capitals, every letter separately formed, as slowly, without doubt, as the characters in an old monk missal.

"My Dear Brother James:

"The wind blowing North by Northwest, snow four feet deep, ground frozen ten inches. Very much like Toronto weather, only more steady and mild. You do not get far out of your reckoning anywhere within five hundred miles of Puget Sound. This is where I have dropped anchor, after three times Cruising round the world, and I wouldn't take any other claim in the Queen's Dominions.

"If you want to sink another shaft in these Diggings you are welcome, in case your luck has not panned out. I have a log cabin and a Chinese cook and they are the Sole Specimens of such craft in Thirteen Leagues. So you see a private Yacht would not be in the same class with me. I am always sure of good company, but if you should decide to come into my Port, would try to accommodate myself to circumstances. Particularly if it was nigh about Christmas?"

But if it was Eliza who clasped her worn fingers, and looked from the apocryphal chromos to the real message, until her glasses dimmed, it was the old minister who acted.

"It is the call," he said, shutting his thin lips together, and looking away over a mile of corn to the Swedish chapel on the hill. "My work here is finished. There is work in the land that the blood of Marcus Whitman sealed to the kingdom. And I shall see Robert."

That solemn purpose of delivering a message to the brother whose spiritual welfare no one pondered, in his lone wilderness, would have seemed strange enough to the grey old miner in his British Columbia cabin. Nevertheless, while he read his thermometer and recorded it in his cabin log, those December days, Father Matthiason, on his "preacher's ticket," was climbing the Missouri slope. A first payment on his small farm had been exchanged for the ticket, and if Eliza's patient pain sometimes disturbed him, the barter of those corn grown curves for the long stretches of the heightening west was an outweighing joy.

Slowly the prairie wrinkled into ridges, and the pines came to stand out upon the crests. Then grey, strange turrets rose over wastes of ashen plain, that at last blackened, rounded, and crowded away in the sooty foot-hills of the Dakotas. After this, the old man slept, and his grey head swayed with the motion of the train, weaving through the dark. Now and then the keen old eyes opened, to watch, through the dim window, hills marching through the night.

At last with a sheer luxury of ease

unknown to knees that never ache with long tramps and longer prayers, the effortless climb was accomplished. The veteran itinerant stood gliding into the sunset of a long mountain gorge through which the train slowly wound, and looked up at the cliffs that are the ridge of the world.

"And I might have crossed over Jordan without seeing this," the old man was saying, while he stood outside his car door, with his face to the west, "looking sermons into the hills," as a mischievous red tam-o-shanter within, whispered to a demure white fascinator.

The gorge widened, and there slipped into it, from somewhere alongside, a thread of a mountain stream, splashing up into foam at every handful of pebbles in its way. A valley spread out, wide, and irrigating ditches, edged with green fringes of moistened grass, caught away the water of the little stream. Around a bend, a great ranch house, with stables, shops, carriage houses, summer houses, and a boat-house sprang into view. A wider river, with pine sentinelled shores, was flowing close by the railway embankment. The sun, which had come in sight again, dropped into this river, and once more the old man slept.

He had need of rest. For another sunset found him far in the Queen's dominions, facing a long stage route into the forest. "Every trois days" they told him, in Frenchy English, "Every trois days the stage go." And the stage has just gone. So Father Matthiason slept again, and at dawn stepped upon the floury snow, and into the ancient forest. What was forty miles to a plainsman who had trusted to his legs ever since those of Cromwell II. played him false, on the Toronto track? The piney smell of the woods filled him with youth. It was little "Scotch" who strode in among the frosty firs, cap drawn low over his ears, wintry blue eyes watching the white trail ahead. His foot was on the home soil, and before was Robert.

The spirit of Janet Matthiason seems to wait, over the pointed spires of the wood, as if it had always been there; the prayer she had breathed over his bed seemed to whisper, now, out of the crystal heights, as he walked, like one that is sent, toward Robert's door. Everything was hushed, as if no wild things in snowy fur watched every step of the pilgrim, going to bear witness. Once, far ahead, a black blur came into the track—a clumsy, shaggy beast stumped inquisitively out from the white wilderness, looked up and down the trail, and with no undignified haste, crossed into the wood on the other side. The deep toed tracks in the snow made the old eyes keen, as the minister walked on, with a speculative glance at the clear, high stems of the pines. Then the unbroken pause of long, quiet miles, fell over the path. Even the sunlight was muffled in fine snow gauze that hung over the sky. In that pure forest twilight where everything was smothered in satin softness of snow, the weariness that crept slowly into the old man's frame seemed a thing apart, like the ache of some other mortal, not his, whose spirit lifted above him, listened to voices of the past.

It was a most real voice of the pres-

ent, however, that answered from within the snow-thatched miner's cabin as the minister's hand touched the latch.

"Come in, come in. No knockin'. We're all Injuns in this tepee."

But there was no start of recognition, in the little, weazened, bald figure that waited, while a benumbing sense of years, held the new comer voiceless.

Man to man, the two grey-beards looked each other up and down, in the light of a huge fireplace of crackling pine. For the seventy seconds while the rime gathered into round, tiny drops on the minister's worn brown coat collar, they looked. Then James asked perfunctorily:

"Is this Mr. Robert Matthiason?"

And the old lips before him twitched into decorous rejoinder, "And if it was, what might be your business with the gentleman?"

"I was just coming by, and thought I would ask"—which the very nearest approach to a witticism that the Reverend James ever perpetrated. It was under strong provocation, however.

"You'll maybe stop over night?"

"I will," said the weary minister, with such unction that his brother stopped in the act of taking the ancient brown valise, and stared quickly at the cut of the collar James was unwinding from a long, blue scarf.

"You're not a parson?"

"I am."

"They are not common in these parts," remarked the old sailor drily, setting the valise in a kind of locker, and hanging the scarf and cap, and warm overcoat, each on a separate hook within. And then a curious gleam came into the old grey eyes.

"So you will have come to convert me, maybe?"

Matthiason met Matthiason, as the two pairs of grizzled brows were fixed in the instant's cross glance. Then the host resumed his judicial impartiality. "And that might not be so difficult a task for a man that has walked from Hoover's Station through the timber. But first you will have at Turn Foo, and his heathen soup."

In that easy generosity, the old minister felt the thickness of the armor he must pierce, but he ate beans and biscuit with an imperturbability which only a brother could fathom.

The host brought forth a Bible, and carefully dusting its cover, before handing it to the guest. Indeed, the same precision and the same reserve marked the intercourse of all those wintry evenings of the fortnight that the brothers enjoyed guarded fellowship. Only at one time did the sailorminer show more feeling, when the minister set himself to his task, then did the sailor picture in Eliza's brown paper frame that was when James told something of Janet Matthiason's trust to him.

"You did very right, and she will be pleased, no doubt." Then he began to speak of his shaft, and to turn in the fire-light bits of bright ore.

When the old minister went back through the forest, Robert himself placed the brown valise in the stage coach and held the door open, as if for a king. But he said:

"You've eaten and drunk and washed yourself like a white man. You are my brother, no doubt." And James,

once looking back through the white wood at the fur-topped watcher, felt a touch of something strangely like pride in his defeat.

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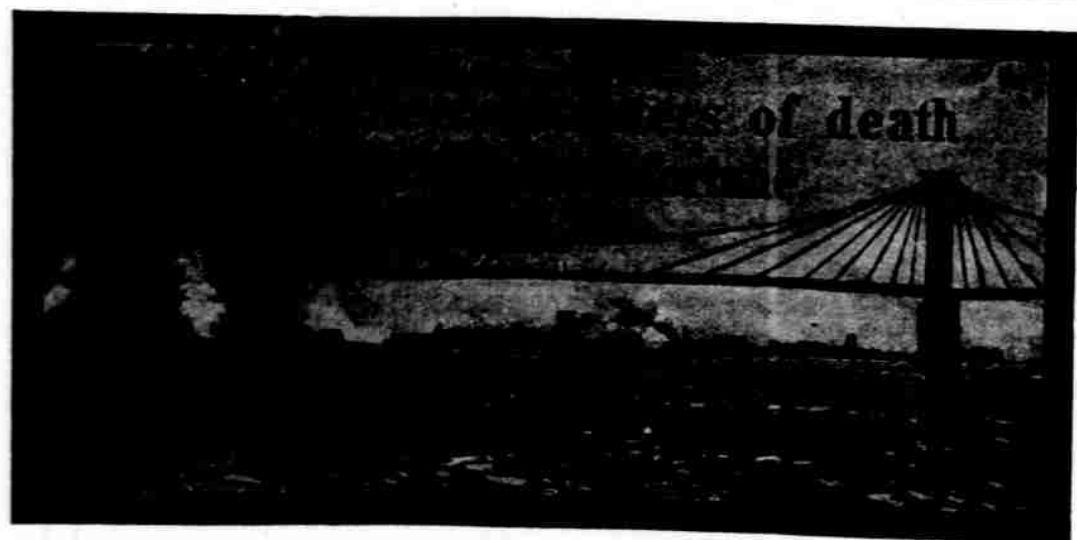
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