

STORIETTES

fever, and the doctor looked grave. She demurred at having a trained nurse, on account of the expense, so he sent a sister of charity to her, thinking that it would not be long.

Nor was it. Pneumonia set in and carried the frail life quickly out toward its long voyage.

The third evening, she made the sister understand that she wanted something from the bureau drawer. It took several trials before the good sister brought her the coral

chain and the fan; but her face lighted up when they were given to her, and she signed to have the chain put around her neck. By putting her ear very close, the sister heard her say:

"Give them back to him—afterward. I think he would like to know how much I cared for them!"

And so, very tranquilly, the coral chain about her neck, and the gay, painted, foolish fan spread out on her breast, Miss Cornelia fell asleep.

The Code of Bucky Severn

BY JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

FATHER BROCHET had come south from Fond du Lac, and Weyman, the Hudson's Bay Company doctor, north through the Geikie River country. They had met at Severn's cabin, on the Waterfound. Both had come on the same mission—to see Severn; one to keep him from dying, if that was possible, one to comfort him in the last hour, if death came.

Severn insisted on living. Bright-eyed, hollow-cheeked, with a racking cough that reddened the gauze handkerchief the doctor had given him, he sat bolstered up in his cot and looked out through the open door with glad and hopeful gaze. Weyman had arrived only half an hour before. Outside was the Indian canoeman who had helped to bring him up.

It was a glorious day, such as comes in its full beauty only in the far northern spring, where the air enters the lungs like sharp, warm wine, laden with the tang of spruce and balsam, and the sweetness of the bursting poplar-buds.

"It was mighty good of you to come up," Severn was saying to the doctor. "The company has always been the best friend I've ever had—except one—and that's why I've hung to it all these years, trailing the sledges first as a kid, you know, then trapping, running, and—oh, Lord!"

He stopped to cough, and the little black-frocked missionary, looking across at Weyman, saw him bite his lips.

"That cough hurts, but it's better," Severn apologized, smiling weakly. "Funny, ain't it, a man like me coming down with a cough? Why, I've slept in ice a

thousand times, with snow for a pillow and the thermometer down to fifty. But this last winter it *was* cold, seventy or lower, an' I worked in it when I ought to have been inside, warming my toes. But, you see, I wanted to get the cabin built, an' things all cleared up about here, before *she* came. It's the cold that got me, wasn't it, doc?"

"That's it," said Weyman, rolling and lighting a cigarette. Then he laughed, as the sick man finished another coughing spell, and said:

"I never thought you'd have a love-affair, Bucky!"

"Neither did I," chuckled Severn. "Ain't it a wonder, doc? Here I'm thirty-eight, with a hide on me like leather, an' no thought of a woman for twenty years, until I saw *her*. I don't mean it's a wonder I fell in love, doc—you'd 'a' done that if you'd met her first. The wonder of it is that she fell in love with me." He laughed softly. "I'll bet Father Brochet'll go in a heap himself when he marries us! It's goin' to happen next month. Did you ever see her, father—Marie La Corne, over at the post on Split Lake?"

Severn dropped his head to cough, but Weyman saw the sudden look of horror that leaped into the little priest's face.

"Marie La Corne!"

"Yes, at Split Lake."

Severn looked up again. He had missed what Weyman had seen.

"Yes, I've seen her."

Bucky Severn's eyes lit up with pleasure.

"She's—she's beautiful, ain't she?" he

cried in a hoarse whisper. "Ain't it a wonder, father? I come up there with a canoe full of supplies, last spring about this time, an'—an' at first I hardly dast to look at her; but it came out all right. When I told her I was coming over here to build us a home, she wanted me to bring her along to help; but I wouldn't. I knew it was goin' to be hard this winter, and she's never goin' to work—never so long as I live. I ain't had much to do with women, but I've seen 'em and I've watched 'em, an' she's never goin' to drudge like the rest. If she'll let me, I'm even goin' to do the cookin' an' the dish-washin', and scrub the floors! I've done it for twenty-five years, an' I'm tough. She ain't goin' to do nothin' but sew for the kids when they come, an' sing, an' be happy. When it comes to the work that there ain't no fun in, I'll do it. I've planned it all out. We're goin' to have half an arpent square of flowers, an' she'll love to work among 'em. I've got the ground cleared—out there—you kin see it by twisting your head through the door. An' she's goin' to have an organ. I've got the money saved, an' it's coming to Churchill on the next ship. That's goin' to be a surprise—'bout Christmas, when the snow is hard an' sledging good. You see—"

He stopped again to cough. A hectic flush filled his hollow cheeks, and there was a feverish glow in his eyes. As he bent his head, the priest looked at Weyman. The doctor's lips were tense. His cigarette was unlighted.

"I know what it means for a woman to die a workin'," Severn went on. "My mother did that. I can remember it, though I was only a kid. She was bent an' stoop-shouldered, an' her hands were rough and twisted. I know now why she used to hug me up close and croon funny things over me when father was away. When I first told my Marie what I was goin' to do, she laughed at me; but when I told her 'bout my mother, an' how work an' freezin' an' starvin' killed her when I needed her most, Marie jest put her hand up to my face an' looked queer—an' then she burst out crying like a baby. She understands, Marie does! She knows what I'm goin' to do—"

"You mustn't talk any more, Bucky," warned the doctor, feeling his pulse. "It'll hurt you."

"Hurt me!" Severn laughed hysterically, as if what the doctor had said was a joke. "Hurt me! It's what's going to

put me on my feet, doc. I know it now. I been too much alone this last winter, with nothin' but my dogs to talk to when night come. I ain't never been much of a talker; but she got me out o' that. She used to tease me at first, an' I'd get red in the face an' almos' bust. An' then, one day, it come, like a bung out of a hole, an' I've had a hankering to talk ever since. Hurt me!"

He gave an incredulous chuckle, which ended in a cough.

"Do you know, I wish I could read better 'n I can!" he said suddenly, leaning almost eagerly toward Father Brochet. "She knows I ain't great shucks at that. She's goin' to have a school just as soon as she comes, an' I'm going to be the scholar. She's got a packful of books an' magazines, an' I'm goin' to tote over a fresh load every winter. I'd like to surprise her. Can't you help me to—"

Weyman pressed him back gently.

"See here, Bucky, you've got to lie down and keep quiet," he said. "If you don't, it will take you a week longer to get well. Try and sleep a little, while Father Brochet and I go outside and see what you've done."

When they went out, Weyman closed the door after them. He spoke no word as he turned and looked upon what Bucky Severn had done for the coming of his bride. Father Brochet's hand touched the doctor's, and it was cold and trembling.

"How is he?" he asked.

"It is the bad malady," said Weyman softly. "The frost has touched his lungs. One does not feel the effect of that until spring comes. Then—a cough—and the lungs begin literally to slough away."

"You mean—"

"That there is no hope—absolutely none. He will die within two days."

As he spoke, the little priest straightened himself and lifted his hands as if about to pronounce a benediction.

"Thank God!" he breathed. Then, as quickly, he caught himself. "No, I don't mean that. God forgive me! But—it is best."

Weyman stared incredulously into his face.

"It is best," repeated the other, as gently as if speaking a prayer. "How strangely the Creator sometimes works out his ends! I came straight here from Split Lake. Marie La Corne died two weeks ago. It was I who said the last prayer over her dead body!"

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