

THE BIRTH-MARK

By ETTA W. PIERCE.

CHAPTER XXI—Continued.

And now," she said, "what do you want of me?" "What do I want of you?" repeated St. John, his eyes beginning to flash angrily. "Really, after our long parting, this is hardly the greeting I expected from you, Paulette. Is there can there be any truth in the horrible rumor I heard from Megryn—that you have a lover here at Hazel Hall?" Her hands were still, but she did not answer. The old-time jealousy flamed darkly into his face. "Why do you not speak?" he cried, seizing upon her roughly. "Is it true or false?" She could not bear his touch—she tore away. "Guy, I tell you I thought you dead," she answered. "Yes; you mentioned, also that the news reached you a few weeks ago. And was with you here in this very place to-night. Truly, mine was an inconsolable widow!" Her story anguish suddenly gave way. She stamped passionately upon the floor of the pavilion. "I never loved you, Guy!" she cried. "I recognized you as my master—I feared, but I did not love you!" "And you looked on my death, no doubt, with a great relief—you were only too glad to be free. I saw that man with you tonight—I saw the looks he gave you—I could hardly keep my hands off his throat."

A very lithe and active man was he. Making his way toward the rear of the cottage, he came to the beach—to the very spot where Serle Varneck had effected his entrance into the garden. Quite unconsciously following in the footsteps of Sibyl's lover, he climbed the wall dexterously, and dropping down on the other side, found himself in the very heart of what seemed to be a tenacious wilderness. "Indeed!" mused Mr. Trent, gazing around him in the deep, deadly silence, "she is playing the pentecost recuse dodge, eh?—explaining her early sins after the manner of La Valliere and the rest of them? And visitors are not admitted except by their own efforts. Well, now that we are here, let us see what we shall see." He plunged into the still green depths of the place, till he came to an uprooted tree, fallen across the way. Its trunk was evidently used as a seat, and on it Mr. Trent now saw a little gray glove and a bunch of faded roses lying. He snatched them up. "Heaven above! how very dainty! What a charming hand the owner must have, and how pensive and sentimental look these roses! Can they belong to a penitent La Valliere? I think not." He proceeded with admirable nonchalance up the path, stopping now and then to look and listen, and so came unchallenged to the door of the Gothic cottage. It seemed as silent, as utterly without life as a grave. After close search Mr. Trent found a bell, and gave a peal that reached which made the house ring. A tremulous echo succeeded, dying far away within—then silence—then the door opened an inch or two, and in the aperture appeared a hard, dry, woman's face, staring out on Mr. Trent in mingled anger and amazement. "Madame, your humble servant!" said he. She made as if to shut the door smartly upon him. He saw the design in time to frustrate it, by inserting into the open space a leg and an arm. "Who are you?" scowled Rebecca Hardin, "and how did you get here?" "I entered you," answered Mr. Trent, with his high-dramatic air, "do not crush me in this doorway, ancient dame. I have business of importance with Miss or Mrs. Arnault—whichever she calls herself."

The Conquest of the Pole

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On legs I led the way. The sleds with light loads followed. The surface vibrated as we moved along, but the spiked handle of the ice about two miles we walked with an easy tread and considerable anxiety, but we had all been on similar ice before and we knew that with a ready line and careful watchfulness there was no great danger. A cold bath, however, in that temperature, forty degrees below, could have had some serious consequences. In two crossings all our supplies were safely landed on the north shore, and from there the lead was more picturesque effected. For a time this huge separation in the pack was a mystery to me. At first sight there seemed to be no good reason for its existence. Peary had found a similar break north of Robeson channel. It seemed likely that what we saw was an extension of the same lead following at a distance the general trend of the northernmost land exposure. This is precisely what one finds on a smaller scale wherever two ice packs come together. Here we have the pack of the central polar sea meeting the land ice. The movement of the land pack is intermittent and usually along the coast. The shallows, grounded ice and projecting points interfere with a steady drift. The movement of the central pack is quite constant and almost in every direction. The tides, the currents and the winds each give momentum to the floating mass. This lead is the breaking line between the two bodies of ice. It widens as the pack separates, narrows or widens with an easterly or westerly drift, according to the pressure of the central pack. Early in the season when the pack is little or no wind, it is a narrow, but later, as the entire sea of ice becomes active, it may disappear or shift to a line nearer the drift. New Ice Steps Drift. In low temperature new ice forms rapidly, and this offers an obstruction to the drift of the old ice. As the heavy central ice is pressed against the unyielding land pack the small ice is ground up, and even heavy floes are crushed. This reduced mass of small ice is pasted and cemented along the shores of the big lead, leaving a broad band of troublesome surface as a serious barrier to sled travel. It seems quite likely that this lead, or a condition similar to it, extends entirely around the polar sea as a buffer between the land and the middle pack. With the big lead and its many possibilities for troublesome delay behind, a course was set to reach the eighty-fifth parallel on the ninety-seventh meridian. What little movement was noted on the ice had been easterly, and to allow for this drift we aimed to keep a line slightly west of the pole. The wind was not a troublesome factor as we forged along for the first day over this central pack. After a run of eleven hours the pedometer registered twenty-three miles, but we had taken a zigzag course and therefore only placed seventeen miles to our credit. The night was beautiful. The sun sank into a purple haze, and soon there appeared three suns in prismatic colors, and the moon settled into a narrow band of orange brightened the northern sky, while the pack surface glowed in magnificent shades of violet and lilac and pale purple blue. Land Clouds Still Visible. Satisfactory observations at noon on March 24 gave our position as latitude 83 degrees 31 minutes, longitude 96 degrees 27 minutes. The land clouds of Grant Land were still visible, and a low bank of mist in the west occasionally brightened, offering an outline of the Eskimos without some protection. The two canoes were believed to be Crocker Land, but mist prevented screening the horizon and did not offer an opportunity to study the contour. Until midday the time was used for observations and a study of the land conditions. The dogs sniffed the air as if scenting game, but after a diligent search they failed to detect a fox and an old bear track, but no alpha or other small life was detected in the water of the crevices. At the big lead a few algae were gathered, but here the sea was sterile. The signs of seal and bear, however, were encouraging for a possible food supply. In returning to the Eskimos without some protection, and the light might more northward, thus permitting an extension of the time allowance of our rations. Though the heat of the sun was barely felt, its rays began to pierce the eye with painful effects. The bright light, being reflected from the spotless surface of the storm driven snows, could not long be endured even by the Eskimos with their accustomed results. The amber colored goggles that we had made at Annotok from the glass of the photographic supplies now proved a priceless discovery. They effectively removed one of the greatest torments to arctic travel. The darkened or smoky glasses, blue glasses and ordinary automobile goggles have all been tried with indifferent results. They failed for one reason or another, mostly because of an insufficient range of vision or a faulty construction, making it impossible to proceed more than a few minutes without removing the accumulated condensation. Relief In Amber Lenses. This trouble was entirely eliminated by our goggles. The amber glass screened only the active rays which injure the eye, but did not interfere with the range of vision. Indeed, the eye, relieved of the snow glare, was better enabled to see distant objects than through foghaze. It is frequently most difficult to detect ice irregularities on cloudy days. The amber glass also dispels this trouble

The Bitter Cold.

In starting before the end of the winter night and camping on the open ice fields in the long northward march we had first accustomed our eyes to a frigid darkness and then to a perpetual glitter with shivers. This proved to be the coldest season of the year. We should have been hardened to all kinds of arctic torment, but man only gains that advantage when the pulse ceases to beat. Far from land, far from other life, there was nothing to arouse a warning spirit. Along the land there had been calm and gales and an inspiring contrast, even in the dark days and nights, but here the frigid world was felt at its worst. The wind, which came persistently from the west—now strong, now feeble, but always sharp—inflicted a pain to which we never became accustomed. The kind of torture most felt in this wind and humid air of an arctic pack was a picturesque mask of ice about the face. Every bit of exhaled moisture condensed and froze either to the facial hair or to the line of fox tails about the hood. It made a comical caricature of us. The frequent turns in this course brought both sides to the wind and arranged a line of icicles from every hair offering a convenient nucleus. These lines of crystal offered a pleasing dash of light and color as we looked at each other, but they did not afford much amusement to the individual exhibiting them. Such hairs had not been pulled from the lips and the chin were wet with sweat, and when the wind carried the breath to the long hair with which we protected our heads and left a mass of dangling frost.

The Big Lead—An Arctic Hurricane—Narrow Escape From Death When Ice Parted

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In the Heart of a Storm.

New Land Sighted—Mid-Polar Basin a Lifeless World. During two days of chilly bluster the sleds were forced along with encouraging results, and on the evening of March 24, with a pedometer and other method of dead reckoning for position, we were placed at latitude 84 degrees 53 minutes. The western horizon remained persistently undisturbed. A brisk storm, it seemed, was gathering, but it was a long time in coming eastward. On the evening of the 26th we prepared for the blast and built the igloo stronger than usual, hoping that the horizon would be cleared by a good blow on the morrow and afford us a day of rest. The long, steady marches, without time for recuperation, had begun to check our enthusiasm. In the daily monotony of hardship we had learned to appreciate more and more the joy of the sleeping bag. It was the only animal comfort which afforded a relief to our life of frigid, and with it we tried to force upon the weary body in the long marches a pleasing anticipation. In the evening, after the blocks of snow walled a dome in which we could breathe quiet air, the blue flame lamp sang the notes of gastronomic delights. A heaven given drink of ice water was first indulged in to quench the chronic thirst, and then the process of disrobing began, one at a time, for there was not room for all to act at once. Tea In an Hour. The fur stuffed boots were pulled, and the bearskin pants were stripped. Then half of the body was quickly pushed into the bag. A brick of pemmican was next taken out, and the teeth were set to the grind of this bonelike substance. The appetite was always large, but a half pound of cold withered beef and tallow changes a hungry man's thoughts effectually. The tea, an hour in making, was now ready, and we rose on elbows to take it. Under the influence of the warm drink the fur coat with its mask of ice was removed. Next the shirt, with its ring of ice about the waist, comes off, giving the last sense of shivers. Pushing farther into the bag, the hood was pulled over the face, and we were lost to the world of ice. The warm sense of mental and physical pleasure which follows is an interesting study. The movement of others, the stinging of the air, the noise of rattling winds, the blinding rays of a heatless sun, the pains of driving snows and all the bitter elements were absent. The mind, freed of the agitation of frost, wandered to home and to the past. Under these peculiar circumstances, there comes a pleasing sense with the touch of one's own warm skin, while the companionship of the arms and legs, freed of their cumbersome furs, makes a new discovery in the art of getting next to oneself. In the Heart of a Storm. On March 27 it blew a half gale at night, but at noon on the following day the wind eased. The bright sun tempted to remain quiescent, and though the west was still darkened by threatening clouds, the dogs were put to the sleds and off they went among the wind swept hummocks. We had not gone many miles before the first rush of a storm struck us. Throwing ourselves over the sleds, we waited the passing of the icy blast. There was no suitable snow near to begin the erection of a shelter, but a few miles eastward was a promising area for camp, and to this we hoped to take ourselves after a few moments' rest. The squall soon spent its

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Resolutions were re-enforced and energy was harbored to press onward for the pole in an air line.

Every observation, however, indicated an easterly drift, and a westerly course must be continuously forced to counterbalance the movement. A curtain was drawn over the land in the afternoon of March 31, and we saw no more of it. Day after day we pushed along in desperate northward efforts. Strong winds and fractured, irregular ice increased the difficulties. In one way or other we managed to gain a fair march between storms during each twenty-four hours. In an occasional spell of stillness mirages spread screens of fantasy out for our entertainment. Curious cliffs, odd shaped mountains and inverted ice walls were displayed in attractive colors. Discoveries were made often, but with clearer horizon the deception was detected. On April 3 the barometer remained steady and the thermometer sank. The weather became settled and clear. The pack became a more permanent glitter of color and joy. At noon there was now a dazzling light, while the sun at midnight sank for but a few moments under a persistent northerly haze, leaving the frosted blues bathed in noontday splendor. In these days we made long marches. The ice steadily improved. Fields became larger and thicker, the pressure lines less frequent and less troublesome. Nothing changed materially. The horizon moved; our footing was seemingly a solid crust of ice, but it shifted eastward. All was in motion.

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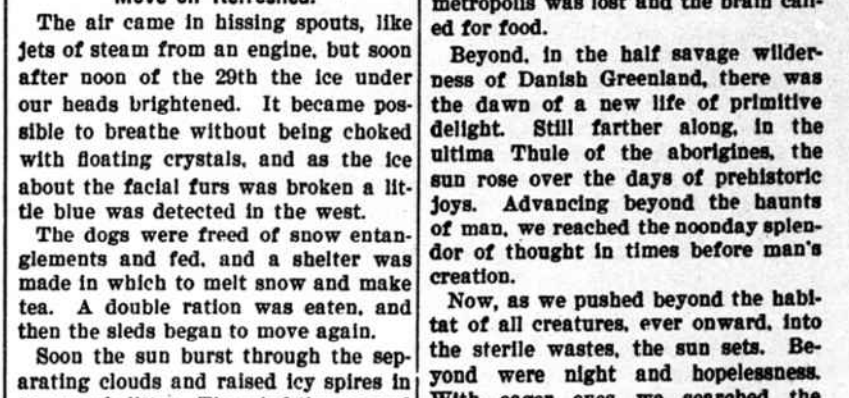
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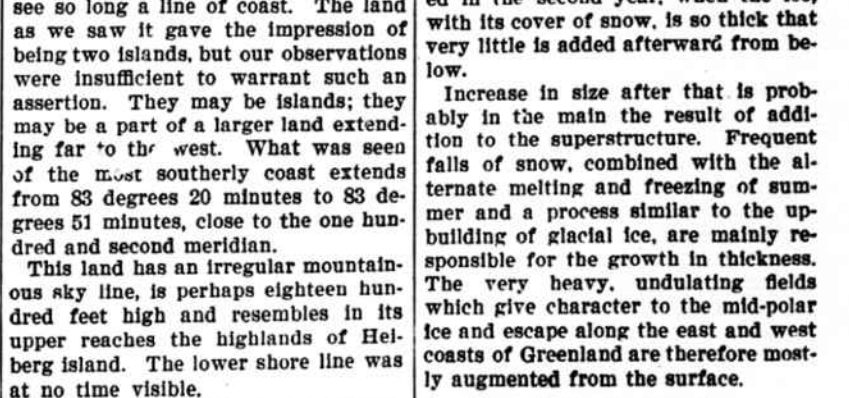
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The humidity escaping about the forehead left a crescent of snow above, while that escaping under the chin, combined with falling breath, made a semicircle of ice. The most uncomfortable icicles, however, were those that had formed on the coarse hair within the nostrils. It is to free the face of this kind of decoration that the Eskimos pull the facial hair out by the roots; hence the real poverty of mustaches and beards.

In the Heart of a Storm.

New Land Sighted—Mid-Polar Basin a Lifeless World. During two days of chilly bluster the sleds were forced along with encouraging results, and on the evening of March 24, with a pedometer and other method of dead reckoning for position, we were placed at latitude 84 degrees 53 minutes. The western horizon remained persistently undisturbed. A brisk storm, it seemed, was gathering, but it was a long time in coming eastward. On the evening of the 26th we prepared for the blast and built the igloo stronger than usual, hoping that the horizon would be cleared by a good blow on the morrow and afford us a day of rest. The long, steady marches, without time for recuperation, had begun to check our enthusiasm. In the daily monotony of hardship we had learned to appreciate more and more the joy of the sleeping bag. It was the only animal comfort which afforded a relief to our life of frigid, and with it we tried to force upon the weary body in the long marches a pleasing anticipation. In the evening, after the blocks of snow walled a dome in which we could breathe quiet air, the blue flame lamp sang the notes of gastronomic delights. A heaven given drink of ice water was first indulged in to quench the chronic thirst, and then the process of disrobing began, one at a time, for there was not room for all to act at once. Tea In an Hour. The fur stuffed boots were pulled, and the bearskin pants were stripped. Then half of the body was quickly pushed into the bag. A brick of pemmican was next taken out, and the teeth were set to the grind of this bonelike substance. The appetite was always large, but a half pound of cold withered beef and tallow changes a hungry man's thoughts effectually. The tea, an hour in making, was now ready, and we rose on elbows to take it. Under the influence of the warm drink the fur coat with its mask of ice was removed. Next the shirt, with its ring of ice about the waist, comes off, giving the last sense of shivers. Pushing farther into the bag, the hood was pulled over the face, and we were lost to the world of ice. The warm sense of mental and physical pleasure which follows is an interesting study. The movement of others, the stinging of the air, the noise of rattling winds, the blinding rays of a heatless sun, the pains of driving snows and all the bitter elements were absent. The mind, freed of the agitation of frost, wandered to home and to the past. Under these peculiar circumstances, there comes a pleasing sense with the touch of one's own warm skin, while the companionship of the arms and legs, freed of their cumbersome furs, makes a new discovery in the art of getting next to oneself. In the Heart of a Storm. On March 27 it blew a half gale at night, but at noon on the following day the wind eased. The bright sun tempted to remain quiescent, and though the west was still darkened by threatening clouds, the dogs were put to the sleds and off they went among the wind swept hummocks. We had not gone many miles before the first rush of a storm struck us. Throwing ourselves over the sleds, we waited the passing of the icy blast. There was no suitable snow near to begin the erection of a shelter, but a few miles eastward was a promising area for camp, and to this we hoped to take ourselves after a few moments' rest. The squall soon spent its