

said. "I've skulked in my own grounds long enough. If they order me out, they go in turn. I am master here, and I've a streak of old Martin they'd best not uncover."

And he got into his clothes and rode down to Criswell's dance, with some of the black hate that he had met all the months gnawing at his heart.

HE opened Criswell's door and, blinded by the blinking lights, stood for a moment on the threshold. There was a sudden turning of all eyes toward him, the dancers losing step as the bow old Bill Lindsay drew across the strings faltered.

The young master walked to the hearth, where Criswell greeted him civilly.

"The night is a bit raw, sir. Let me get you a chair."

"No, thanks," Martin said. "I'll just stand here till I'm warm."

"Ladies, choose your partners for the waltz quadrille!" Lindsay called.

"It is a leap year party," said Criswell.

Martin's glance, sweeping the room, centered on Lydia. She stood tapping an impatient foot and looking up at Lindsay, who was chaffing her. Her dress was wine-red, as warm as the flushed beauty of her face, with its flower-like mouth.

"Lyddy," he said, "you don't darst!"

She wheeled, fluttering color coming in her face as she slipped through the crowd to the cleared space before the hearth. A sudden hush fell on the room. Martin looked at her with his heart hammering; for she had stopped before him and swept him an extravagant curtsy.

"We are all sensible of the very great honor you have conferred upon us tonight by the mere fact of your presence here. Will the Lord of the Long Shore condescend further—and dance with his humble servant?"

A subdued laugh ran round the room.

said, "and the name don't sound good to us. It was the name of—a skunk!"

Martin took a step forward, fists clenched. Then he laughed, and the sound was not pleasant to hear. "You are too old to strike," he said. "And, after all, I'll not soil my hands with any of you. You don't fight fair. I'll handle you all with your own weapons. By the New Year every man of you be off the land of the Long Shore, or I'll turn you out after a manner the Clemms have. And I guess there are plenty of you to remember how that is. Clear out, bag and baggage, from the—skunk's land! That goes!"

He strode to the door, looked back at them, and his laugh was full of promise.

When he had gone, Lydia tossed her little head and swung on her heel, and beckoned Lindsay to a quadrille. But he threw down the fiddle, swore he had a headache, and went home.

FOUR days later McKeage, the young doctor, pulled rein in front of Martin's gate. Martin, leaning there, his hat over his eyes, looked up with a lightening of the shadow on his face.

"Stop!" the doctor said. "Don't come any nearer. Have you ever had smallpox?"

"No. Why?" Martin asked.

"I have just come from Lindsay's. He's sick as heck with it. Ever vaccinated?"

"Years ago. Why—again?"

"You were at Criswell's the other night?"

"Yes," briefly.

"Bill was there with the fever and rash. So you'd better let me vaccinate you again. The virus will be here from Metropolis to-night, and I'll disinfect and stop by. I've got to go back to Lindsay's again. He lives alone, and there is not a soul on the Long Shore who would dare hand him a drink of water."

Martin smiled a little. "No, I'm here to stay. I've cleared out a bit; but—" He looked round the room with disgust.

"Clemm," McKeage said, "the old hulk isn't worth it!"

"Which is not the question."

They looked at each other.

"I see," McKeage conceded slowly. "It's 'noblesse oblige' with you,—and the question of living with your own soul—afterward."

When Lindsay at last lay quiet the two men assailed the formidable task of cleansing the room. By midnight it was stripped clean and bare except for chairs, table, a few dishes and utensils, and the bed. Everything else had been burned.

And, with the master's nursing, Bill declined to die.

On the eleventh day he sat up in bed quite suddenly and tore the bandages from his face.

"What in hell you doing to me?" he said, and faced—Martin Clemm.

"You lie down," the master said. "You've been ill."

Assailed by sudden weakness in the face of facts, Bill lay down. "What you a-doing here?" he ventured.

"Nursing you."

"What have I been sick of?"

"Smallpox," said the master tersely.

"God Almighty!" Bill relapsed into an agitated silence.

That night the doctor declared Bill out of danger and sent Clemm home.

A WEEK later the doctor drove up to the big house. Niece Story met him at the door. The doctor's face, twitching with emotion, eased at sight of her.

"I've come to nurse him," she said. "I wronged him in my heart, and it's the only way I can make atonement. Lydia and I are immune: we've had varioloid."

The thought of her sustained McKeage

lor to celebrate the master's return to health. You have my full permission to descend."

Martin evinced no particular gladness at this. "Are you coming? If not, I don't think I'll go down."

"I promise you'll have company for the cakes and candles. Wild horses couldn't keep me away. I smelt the cake baking."

That evening Martin dressed himself slowly, feebly. He was thinking of the New Year—when the Long Shore would be rid of those who had plagued him. It was too late to recall his spoken word; but the surge of passion had all died out of him. It had not been courage; that he had learned, sitting out the solitary nights by old Lindsay's bed. It was but an ignoble flashing up of some spirit of retaliation dark as their hate.

His nerves must have been weakened by his illness. There seemed to be a good deal of noise, of a muffled kind, coming up from below,—doors opening, feet stamping and shuffling on the piazza outside. The sounds irritated him, and he wished he had not promised McKeage to go down. The doctor had not yet come.

At last McKeage called from the foot of the stair: "Martin, the candles are lit."

The master descended the stair. McKeage put his hand on his shoulder, smiling into his eyes.

"You've some friends in there, boy, who are asking to see you."

"Friends?" Martin said with a bitter smile. "Friends—here—on the Long Shore?"

"Steady!" the doctor said, his friendly hand supporting Martin. He flung the door wide, and they stood on the threshold.

For a long moment there was silence, the hushed silence of profound emotion at the sight of one who had come back, but hardly, from the gates of death. Then with a simultaneous movement every man was on his feet. As one voice the cry rang out:

"Clemm!"

The master's face had blanched even beneath its pallor; for there facing his astonished eyes were all who had flung their contempt and hatred into his face: Wyatt and Criswell and Bass—these and many more, here now in his own house, and Bill Lindsay, pallid and unbelievably clean, the word spilling from his twisted, toothless mouth.

"Clemm!"

At that the master's head went up, and his eyes flashed a strange darkness that blotted out the steel.

"Clemm!"

AT the last, given with a wild hurrah that echoed under the rafters and shook the Christmas candles, Martin's knees gave under him. "Men," he said, "men—" But his voice left him, and he sank into the chair McKeage had ready for him, his head bowed on his breast. For, after all, he was very young, and the hurt had gone deep.

Presently he was aware that Criswell had stepped forward and was speaking. "I don't know as any words I could say would change matters any. Words don't speak like deeds, anyhow. What we want is one more chance with you, Mr. Clemm. If you will live among us another half-year, you'll find that there's one name we like better than any other name on the Long Shore, and that name is—Clemm!"

"However, if you want us to go, we'll go, and take it as our just deserts; nor will we hold any ill will to you. That's all, sir."

"What I want," the master said with a pale smile, "is to shake hands with every man of you, and to let by-gones be by-gones."

Which was the luckiest thing he could have said, since old Bill Lindsay, in a struggle to be first, fell over the cat, and this interposition of comedy relaxed the tension. There was general laughter and handshaking. And in the midst of it all Martin caught sight through the parted curtains of a girl's dress, wine-red and warm, of a slender hand lifting the curtain's fold; and, looking straight into his own, the penitent, beseeching eyes of Lydia.



"What have any of you got against me?" He flung it at them and stood facing them."

But Criswell, recognizing the insult, turned pale.

Martin looked down at Lydia. The smile had died in his eyes, and there started out a sudden, sinister likeness to that other Martin Clemm.

"Thank you," he said. "But first I've one question to ask of you—and the rest. What have any of you got against me?"

He flung that at them, standing there facing them—and Lydia. But his eyes held hers, and there was no mercy in them.

"I'd like an answer," he said.

Lydia stared blankly into his eyes, the red gone out of her face.

Suddenly Bill Lindsay laid down his fiddle and spat. "You're a Clemm," he

Martin waited at the gate every day to hear from Lindsay as the doctor passed. On the sixth day McKeage shook his head.

"He hasn't much chance. I got a man to nurse him; but he got drunk on smuggled in whisky, and I kicked him out. Bill is too far gone to haul twenty-two miles to the pesthouse." And the doctor drove on.

WHEN McKeage pushed open the door of Lindsay's cabin that night some one rose up from the hearth, where the burnt-out, neglected fire was rekindled.

"He's pretty bad," a voice said. "I am glad you've come!"

"Good God!" the doctor shouted. "Get out of here!"

in the weeks that followed. For he was laboring like a Trojan, isolating, disinfecting, vaccinating; now teaching ignorance with vast patience, now raging at stupidity. And by Christmas the plague was checked.

Over the big house the shadow hung for days. But Martin at last got up from his bed, shaken and spent, but unscarred by the plague.

The morning of Christmas Eve dawned clear and fair. McKeage came up the stairs, and into the room where Martin sat glooming at the fire.

"The prisoner is released. And Mrs. Davis informs me that at six this evening there will be cakes and candles in the par-