

## The Undertow



LOOK sharp, old man, or you will be taking a plunge in the Willamette. On a stormy night like this we need electric lights in our district."

This was my introduction to "scow-town" in Portland. The cold swishink waves sometimes, breaking over the pontoon walls, emphasized the caution of my friend.

We were in the Nob Hill end of "scow-town" where are located some of the finest and most prosperous scows on the river. By no means palatial, but, as a rule, containing at least two rooms.

The black figure striding on ahead of me, barely visible through the gathering gloom, was one of my oldest and dearest chums, Howard Beaumont. He owned one large house boat on the river and had recently brought it from its summer mooring on Ross Island down to its winter quarters in scow-town. Here it was left in charge of Mr. Moore, an old sailor and a leading light in the political life of the community.

On this particular evening, Beaumont had asked me to come over and spend the night and following day with him. He desired to straighten the place up and put everything in shape for winter. So with an armful of dailies and a few late magazines, I trudged along with him.

I can hardly explain the feeling that came over me as I stumbled along the narrow walk, past the little box houses floating on the water. It was not a feeling of fear, but rather of fascination not altogether pleasant. A feeling of gloom seemed to have taken possession of me, completely submerging my former joy and recklessness as the inky darkness that had settled down over the river, pierced here and there by a twinkling light from a nearby scow, had overcome the bright daylight.

The Moonbeam was a cozy little affair and, thanks to the little oil heater, we were soon able to remove our top coats and make ourselves entirely at home.

Clouds that had been gathering all the afternoon began to show active signs and the rain was soon coming down in torrents. The