

THE ROOT OF EVIL

BY THOMAS DIXON



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of the boat and stepped out into the shallow, swiftly moving water. He decided to ignore Bivens and regard him as so much junk. He pulled the boat out of the blind, shoved it among the rocks and took them up quickly.

The snow had ceased to fall, and the cold was increasing every moment. Stuart scanned the horizon anxiously, but could see no sign of the disabled tender.

He had gone perhaps 200 yards when the boat grounded on the flats. He saw at once that it was impossible to make the yacht until flood tide. The best thing to do was to get out and push to the island marsh, 200 or 300 yards away. There they could take exercise enough to keep warm until the tide came in again. It would be a wait of two hours in bitter cold and such darkness.

Bivens sat up and growled. "What's the matter? Can't you hurry up? I'm freezing to death."

"We can't make it on this tide. We'll have to go to the marsh."

"Can't we walk over the flats and let the boat go?"

"I could walk it, but you couldn't." "Why not?" Bivens asked angrily.

"Because you haven't the strength." "Nothing of the sort!" Bivens protested viciously.

He stepped out of the boat and started wading through the mud. He had made about ten steps when his boot stuck fast and he reeled and fell.

Stuart picked him up without comment and led him back to the boat. Bivens was about to climb in when the lawyer spoke quickly.

"You can't sit down now. You've got to keep your body in motion or you'll freeze. Take hold of the stern of the boat and shove her."

Muttering incoherent curses, the little man obeyed while his friend walked in front, pulling on the bow line.

In fifteen minutes they reached the marsh and began the dreary tramp of two hours until the tide should rise high enough to float their boat again.

"Why can't we walk along this marsh all the way to where the yacht lies?" Bivens asked fretfully. "We can fire guns, and the doctor can help us on board."

"We can't go without the boat. The marsh is a string of islands cut by five creeks. The doctor has no way to get to us. Both tenders are gone."

Stuart kept Bivens moving just fast enough to maintain the warmth of his body without dangerous exhaustion.

The wait was shorter than expected. The tide suddenly ceased to run ebb and began to come in. The reason was a common one. The wind had hauled nearly into the north and increased its velocity to forty miles an hour, and at that moment the cold grew more terrible. Stuart found the little boat stuck on the flood tide. Jumped in about delay and began his desperate little against wind and tide.

It was absolutely necessary for Bivens to keep his body in motion, so Stuart gave him an oar and ordered him to get on his knees and help shove ahead. He knew it was impossible for him to keep his feet.

Bivens tried to do as he was told and made a mess of it. He merely succeeded in shoving the boat around.

Stuart saw they could never make headway by that method, turned and went back into the marsh.

"Get out!" he shouted sternly. "You can walk along the edge. I can shove you alone."

Bivens grumbled, but did as he was bidden.

"Don't you leave the edge of that marsh ten feet!" Stuart shouted cheerily. "I think we'll make it now."

It was a question whether one man had the strength to shove the little boat through the icy, roaring waters and keep her off the shore. He did it bravely for a hundred yards, and the wind and sea became so fierce he was driven in and could make no headway. He called Bivens, gave him an oar and made him walk in the water and hold the boat.

While he placed his oar on the bottom and pushed.

It took two hours of desperate battling to make half a mile through the ice, blinding, freezing, roaring water. The yacht now lay but 300 feet from the edge of the marsh.

"Say, why do we stop so much?" Bivens growled. "I'm freezing to death. Let's get to that yacht."

"We'll do our best," Stuart answered bravely, "and if you know how to do now's your time."

"Oh, bonnyrot!" Bivens said contemptuously. "I can throw a stone to you from here."

here, and I want y'— He never finished the sentence. Stuart suddenly gripped his throat, threw him flat on his back and while he kicked and squirmed and swore drew a cord from his pocket and tied his hands and feet securely.

Paying no further attention to his groans and curses, he threw his little, helpless form across his shoulders, plunged into the water and began his struggle to reach the yacht. It was a difficult and dangerous task, but at



He Began His Struggle to Reach the Yacht.

last he struggled up the gangway, tore the cabin door open, staggered down the steps into the warm, bright saloon and fell in a faint at Nan's feet.

The doctor came in answer to her scream and lifted Bivens to his stateroom, while Nan bent low over the prostrate form.

"Jim, speak to me! You can't die yet; we haven't lived!"

He sighed and gasped: "Is he alive?"

"Yes, in his stateroom there, cursing you with every breath."

"Thank God! Thank God!"

CHAPTER XXI.

The Mockery of the Sun.

STUART refused to talk to Nan. He went abruptly to his stateroom and spent a night of feverish dreams. His exhaustion was so acute that sleep was impossible.

Through the night his mind went over and over the horror of the moment on that marsh when he had looked into the depths of his own soul and seen the flames of hell.

Between the times of dozing unconsciousness, which came at intervals, he wondered what had become of the two men in that disabled tender. He waited with dread the revelation the dawn would bring. He rose with the sun and looked out of his stateroom window. The bay was a solid sheet of glistening ice. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky, and the great white field sparkled and flashed like a sea of diamonds.

He dressed hurriedly, went into the galley, made a fire and called Nan. He rapped gently on the paneled partition which separated their staterooms. He could hear her low, softly spoken answer as if there were nothing between them.

"Yes, Jim, what is it? Are you ill?" "No, hungry. You will have to help me get some breakfast."

"The cook hasn't come?" she asked in surprise.

There was a moment's hesitation, and his voice sounded queer when he quietly answered: "No."

In ten minutes she appeared at the door of the galley, her hair banding in glorious confusion about her face and the dark eyes sparkling with excitement.

"What on earth does it mean, Jim?" she asked breathlessly. "Cal could tell me nothing last night. Why hasn't the cook returned?"

"He may never come, Nan."

"Why, Jim?" she gasped.

"They started to tow us in, and the engine broke down. I think the carburetor probably froze, and they were driven before the wind, helpless. There's a chance in a thousand that they reached an oyster shanty and found shelter. We'll hope for the best. In the meantime you and I will have to learn to cook again for a few days."

"A few days?" Nan exclaimed.

"Yes. The bay is frozen. Our old guide is a good cook, but he's safe in harbor ashore. He had too much sense to venture out last night. He can't get here now until the ice breaks up."

Nan accepted the situation with girlish enthusiasm.

The doctor pronounced the meal better than he had tasted on the trip. Bivens was still in an ugly mood and refused to leave his stateroom or allow any one but the doctor to enter. He was suffering intense pain from his frostbitten fingers and toes and ears and still cherished his grudge against Stuart. He had carefully concealed from both the doctor and Nan just what had occurred between them on the trip that day.

On the second morning after the freeze a light dawned on the little man's walking spirits. During the night the ice softened, and a strong southerly breeze had swept every piece of it to sea.

It was just 9 o'clock, and Nan was busy humming a song and setting the table for breakfast when Stuart heard the distant droning of a tender's engine. The guide was returning from

the shore or the lost tender had come. If it were the guide he would probably bring news of the other men. Stuart called:

"A tender is coming, Nan. Don't come on deck until I tell you."

In a moment he came back down the companionway and spoke in quiet tones:

"It's just as I expected. They are both dead. The guide found them on the marsh over there, frozen."

"The marsh you and Cal were on?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes. Both of them were kneeling. They died with their hands clasped in prayer."

"And you saved Cal from that?" she gasped and, turning, fled into her stateroom.

He went in to change his clothes and help lift the bodies on deck. Through the paneled wall he heard Nan softly sobbing.

Bivens refused at first to believe the doctor's startling announcement. He hurriedly dressed, came on deck and for five minutes stood staring into the white, dead faces.

Without a word he went below and asked the doctor to call Stuart.

When his old friend entered he took his hand quietly, and for once in his life the little, black, piercing eyes were swimming in tears as he spoke.

"You're a great man, Jim, and what's bigger, you're a good one. If God will forgive me for the foolish things I said and did I'll try to make it up to you, old boy. Is it all right?"

Stuart's answer was a nod, a smile and a pressure of the hand.

When they were back in New York the stirring scenes of Virginia brought Stuart more and more into intimate personal relations with Bivens, and he had taken advantage of the fact to draw away from his wife. He ceased to see Nan alone. Bivens' increasing devotion made this easy, and on Harriet's return from Europe with an engagement as understudy in grand opera his life settled down once more to the steady development of his ideal of service to the common people.

Scarcely a day passed without bringing to the young lawyer some reminder of Bivens' friendship. Two great lawsuits involving the principles on which the structure of the modern business world rested were begun in the federal courts. At the financier's secret suggestion the more important of these was placed in Stuart's hands.

Bivens hoped to beat the government in this suit, but in case the people should win he wanted Stuart to have the honor.

Stuart could scarcely credit his ears when Bivens said to him with a chuckle:

"How's your big suit to dissolve the American Chemical company coming on, Jim?"

"We're going to win, beyond the shadow of a doubt!" was the enthusiastic reply.

"If you do, I want you to know, old boy, that I threw that job into your hands."

"What a funny mixture of the devil and the human you are after all, Cal!"



Bivens Stood Staring at the White Dead Faces.

The more I see of you the less I know you. In business you are an oppressor of the weak; cruel and unjust, and yet you are a good husband, a loyal friend and a member of the church."

Bivens smiled cynically.

"Nothing mysterious about it. I came into a world where I found robbery and murder the foundation of our commercial system. I grappled with my enemies, learned the rules of the game and beat them at it."

"And you expect to win in the end?" "I have won."

The young lawyer shook his head thoughtfully.

"There's a text our old preacher at home used to ring the changes on that's been burning into my life of late. 'Win when it is full grows bringeth forth death.'"

As the two men drew thus closer and closer together, Stuart's bearing toward Nan became guarded, and at last their relations strained. She met his new attitude with deep resentment and growing wonder. Her firm conviction was that he had become interested in another woman. From the first she had suspected Harriet Woodman, and had inevitably linked her coming with Stuart's change of feeling.

With the liberal use of money she made the acquaintance of a member of the chorus of the grand opera company who agreed to report to her every movement in Harriet's life.

(To be Continued)

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