THE SQUAW MAN

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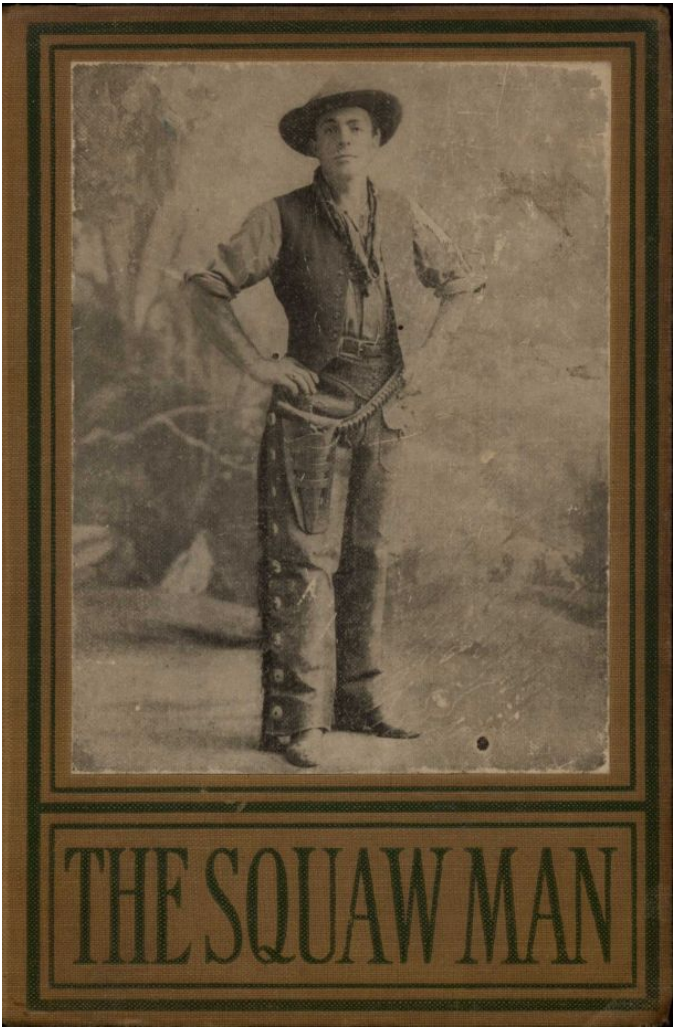
*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SQUAW MAN ***

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The Squaw Man

A Novel

By
Julie Opp Faversham



Cover art



[See page 250

"'BIG FATHER—SEND FOR LITTLE HAL—HAL SEE THE RISING SUN'"

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TO
WILLIAM FAVERSHAM

ILLUSTRATIONS

"THE SQUAW MAN" . . . Cover Inlay

"'BIG FATHER—SEND FOR LITTLE HAL—HAL SEE THE RISING SUN'" . . . Frontispiece

"ALMOST AS ONE MAN THEY THRUST THEIR REVOLVERS INTO BUD'S FACE"

"SHE DREW HERSELF UP CLOSE TO HIM, AND SAID 'ME KILL 'UM'"

"'YES, DIANA. MY BOY—MY SON'"

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HOME

THE SQUAW MAN

CHAPTER I

It was Jim's last day at home. He stood in the centre of the fragrant garden and watched the glory of color suffusing the Surrey hills towards the west. With a sigh he turned away and walked to the house.

"Where's Diana?" he called, as he came from the garden through the casement-window of the library.

"Diana—why, she's in bed an hour ago, I should hope," replied his aunt, Lady Elizabeth Kerhill. "She and Mabel went with Bates to see the decorations and then said good-night. Surely you didn't expect me to allow the children to stay up for the ball?"

Mabel was her daughter; Diana Marjoribanks was a young girl of thirteen, who had come to visit her.

"Poor imps! they were so excited all day, and followed me about the gun-room where I was doing some packing. They wanted me to coax you to allow them to see the ball, and the tenantry welcome Henry to-night."

Lady Kerhill elevated her eyebrows in questioning amazement at Jim, as she nervously twisted the lace of her gown, and with an impatient gesture motioned

the subject aside. She was a tall, angular woman, with a profile like the head on a bronze coin; there was a suggestion of the eagle in her personality, and by her friends she was likened to the famous Sarah Churchill, the first Duchess of Marlborough.

To-night her face showed that anxious thoughts were crowding in on her as she apprehensively watched the big, carved oak door leading into the hall. Jim knew his aunt's firmness of character, and as silence followed his words, he feared further discussion was useless; but the wistful faces of the children at tea-time in the nursery, as they coaxed him to plead for them to see the fun, made him venture a final appeal.

"You know, Aunt, Sir Charles brought Di over to stay with Mabel so that she might see the festivities and incidentally say good-bye to me, so you might turn angel and let Diana dance once with me at the very beginning of the ball. I sha'n't see my little playfellow for ages, you know."

A sound from outside held Lady Elizabeth's attention more intently than Jim's pleading words. He crossed to her in the window-enclosure and laid his hand caressingly on her shoulder.

"The Colonel wired me that we were leaving Paddington at nine to-morrow morning, and India is a long way off, Auntie mine."

"Nonsense," answered Lady Elizabeth, as she rose from the deep window-seat. "You are almost twenty, and Diana is only a babe—isn't she, Henry?" She glanced up and appealed to the young man who rather noisily entered the library.

"Who's a babe? Diana? Why, mater, she's a little witch, and I promised her I'd let her see the illuminations at ten and then old Burrow should carry her off to bed."

Henry Wynnegate, seventh Earl of Kerhill, dropped into a great settle close to the fire. The ball was for the tenantry in celebration of his return, after five years' absence with his regiment. He was a tall, heavy-set young soldier of seven-and-twenty, with the famous Wynnegate beauty, but it was marred by the shifting expression of his rather deep-set eyes and the heavy lines about his mouth. Self was his god: it showed in every expression of his face and in every action of his life.

Jim Wynnegate, his cousin, the son of the younger brother of the late Earl, Henry's father, turned from the window as Henry entered. In the young boy's face—for he seemed younger than his years—one could easily trace the family resemblance; but Jim, with his great, clean spirit shining in his honest gray eyes, invited confidence and won it, from a mongrel dog to a superior officer. He was taller than Henry, and as slim as a young sapling. The delicate, sensitive mouth was balanced by a strong chin.

In the oak-lined room, grown almost black with age, the candle-lights flick-

ering in the heavy brass sconces, stood these three last descendants of a great family. The Earl's brother, Dick Wynnegate, had run away with the daughter of an impecunious colonel. A few years later, while on service in India, he was shot, and the young wife lived only to bring the tiny boy Jim home and to leave him with her husband's brother. Even then the fortunes of the Wynnegates were somewhat impaired, but the old Earl had taken the boy to his heart, and on his death had confided him to his wife to share their fortune with his son Henry. His last words were, "Be good to poor Dick's boy." The estates were entailed, so no provision could be made by him for Jim, but Lady Kerhill, in her cold, just fashion, had tried to make Dick's boy happy.

Deep in his heart, Jim remembered the years that followed; remembered the selfish domination of the elder boy; remembered the blind adoration of his aunt for her son, the bearer of the torch, who was to carry on the golden light of the house of Kerhill. In the Anglo-Saxon idolatry of the Countess of Kerhill for the male of the family, all the old traditions and beliefs were justified. Her boy—-the man-child who was to be the head of the house—was her obsession. The tiny, flower-like girl who came shortly before her husband's death, learned soon to turn to Cousin Jim for comfort when her brother carelessly crushed her little joys, as he selfishly planned and fought for his own gratification.

Instinctively Jim watched his aunt, who, at Henry's word, had started to move towards him.

"Of course, if you care to go and fetch Diana, I shall be happy," Lady Kerhill said.

Henry lounged back in his chair. "Well, if I forget, Jim can remember for me—eh, Jim?"

Lady Kerhill's face became grave as she leaned over Henry's chair and closely studied the flushed face. She found there confirmation of the fear that had preyed on her mind for the past half-hour.

"Oh, Henry, you've broken your word," she whispered.

The reckless challenge of Henry's dark eyes as he moved impatiently in his chair was his only answer. Then in a burst of ill-concealed resentment he rose: "Don't nag, mother."

He swayed slightly as he crossed to the open casement. As Jim turned to him, he sullenly pushed him aside.

"And don't you preach," he muttered, as he started for the garden.

Jim quickly caught him by the shoulder, "Pull yourself together, Henry. It's eight o'clock and the people are gathering in the park."

Henry's only reply was a snarl as he disappeared in the shadow of the trees.

The broad window opened level on an Old World garden that led into the great park beyond. The late twilight of the July night was bathing park and

garden in a curious, unearthly light which made strange spectres of the slowly waving yew-trees. The scent of the rose-bushes, the call of the late nightingale to his mate, and the ghostly sundial, sentinel-like, guarding the old place, made a fitting environment for Maudsley Towers.

On a slight hill beyond the park, Jim could see the ruins of the famous Norman church. To the right, at the farther end of the garden, was the Fairies' Corner. There among the trees the fairies of the field were supposed to sleep, and to listen to and grant the requests of the children, who had the courage to venture to them at even-tide. Jim's thoughts were busy to-night; all the old memories seemed to tug at his heartstrings.

He had carried Diana Marjoribanks there on her first visit to the Towers. She was six then and he was twelve. She had clung to him and hid her head on his shoulder—the tiny body had stiffened with fear—as they made their way to the dark enclosure of the trees. He could still hear her prayer.

"Dear Fairy, please make Henry kinder to poor Jim, poor Mabel, and poor me!"

Even then, Henry had been the little tyrant of the Towers.

And yet to-night Henry's wish, as of old, was law to his mother. She conceded Diana to him at his first careless request, although in all probability he would forget the longing child in the nursery—forget his promise to give her pleasure, as he had forgotten so often when he was a boy.

Jim roused himself; as he turned to Lady Elizabeth he caught a glimpse of her with the mask off, the bitter disappointment of the mother's heart showing in every line of her proud face. He crossed to her, but the sound of carriage-wheels turning into the driveway heralded the approach of the first arrivals, and before Jim could speak the doors were thrown open to the guests.

Lady Elizabeth gave one look of appeal to Jim. It said: "Help Henry and me!"

Up-stairs in the right wing of the old house, a tall, slender child crouched close to the nursery window. She had crept from her cot, and, wrapped in a coverlet, waited, and clung to the belief that Henry would come for her. Jim had said he would try, but Henry had promised. She was old enough to know that what Henry desired he obtained. Her little face was pressed closer and closer to the window as she listened to the swelling music and saw the guests thronging towards the park. Carriage after carriage brought its load of finery, until the child fancied that the entire county must be gathered below. She could see through the climbing roses down into the library, which jutted out at a sharp angle almost opposite to the nursery window. But of Jim or Henry she could catch no glimpse.

The stars began to creep out and blink at the tiny figure in the window-seat. Gradually the entire house grew quiet. All—even the servants—had joined

the revelry in the park.

The music crashed louder. Fiery showers of illumination could be seen shooting and flaming into the sky. It grew cold. Tighter she drew the coverlet and held closer the small puppy that nestled warm in her arms and slept. In the adjoining room Mabel, Lady Kerhill's little daughter, lay fast asleep.

"It's Jim's last night. I must say good-bye," the child whispered to the fleecy white bundle in her arms. "I must keep awake and say good-bye."

Fainter grew the music, darker the sky, and heavier the curved eyelids. Slowly, with a sigh the child slipped to the floor, and the brown head pillowed itself on the cushioned window-seat. Diana slept.

In the park, the tenantry, eager to meet their young master, were shouting themselves hoarse. A speech of welcome followed the dazzling illuminations. Over it all, Lady Elizabeth, with Sir Charles Marjoribanks, presided.

Diana and her father lived on a neighboring estate, and Sir Charles had come to-night to rejoice with his old friend on the return of her son. Sir Charles was a man of slender physique, with a gentle, winning manner; extremely delicate in health, he led for the most part a secluded life, and since the death of his wife, at Diana's birth, went little into the social world. Diana's childhood had been almost as lonely as Jim's had been in his aunt's home. To-night Sir Charles delighted in seeing the house of Wynnegate honored. He scarcely noted the reckless demeanor and wild spirits of Henry as unusual; only for Jim and Lady Elizabeth was it a night of anxiety. Never for a moment did Henry escape Jim's watchful eyes; slip after slip made by Henry was covered by Jim's tact and thoughtfulness, and with simple dignity he carried the night to success. Only when he stood aside and saw Henry receive the demonstrations of the county and tenantry did the bitterness of his position force itself upon him. Not once did Henry remember his promise to the child waiting for him. Jim remembered; but the look of appeal from his aunt, and the sullen defiance of Henry, kept him close to his cousin's side.

The final bars of the last dance were dying away and the ball was drawing to its brilliant end. In the east, a pale streak of light was beginning to show over the horizon. Sir Charles, half an hour before, had gone to his room. Exhausted by the long evening's anxiety and late festivities, Lady Kerhill forgot that Jim was to leave early in the morning and that she would not see him again, and had retired to her own apartment. In the great hall, tired and excited groups of guests were saying good-night.

"It's good-bye for Jim," Sir John Applegate, Diana's cousin, called as the last carriage drove away.

A half-whimsical smile played over Jim's face. Then some one remembered that he was leaving England. As he turned from the door, he met the eyes of his

cousin fastened on him, all the latent rebellion rising to the surface. Henry Kerhill was sober enough to know that Jim had watched and guarded him through the entire night, and had stood between him and disgrace. As he leaned against the tall mantel, the bitter consciousness that the young boy had proved himself of fine mettle, ate like acid into his feverish brain. He dug his hands deep into his pockets, then with a lurch he pulled himself together. Without a word he turned, crossed to the twisted staircase, and grasping the oak rails, slowly ascended. From the landing came the slam of a heavy door, and Jim knew that he was alone.

So this was the end. The striking of the bell in the church-tower reminded him that it was now four o'clock and that he was to leave at six. His luggage had been sent on ahead the previous day. He changed quickly, without disturbing the tired servants, and in half an hour was ready to walk to the station. As he came down the broad staircase, lined with portraits of the ancestors of the house of Wynnegate, a slight noise in the corridor leading off from the broad landing attracted him. Before he could turn, a low voice called:

"Jim—Jim!"

It was Diana. Standing there in the dim light of the corridor, she made an entrancing picture. With the parted hair falling away from the low brow, around the oval face, and the far-apart blue-black eyes, she looked like the child Madonna of Rosetti's "Annunciation." The coverlet was drawn close about her, the puppy still hidden under its folds.

"It's Di, Jim," she whispered as she hurried to him. "I waited and waited for you—I knew you were going away and I wanted to say good-bye. Burrow promised that she would let me see you, but she's fast asleep, and so is Mabel. I tried to wake them but I couldn't." The little figure cuddled into his arms.

Jim's heart was very full as he looked at the frail child in the early dawn, the shadows of a restless night showing on her delicately modelled face. He drew her into a window-enclosure, and wrapping the heavy curtains about her, held her fast.

"Say something," the sweet voice coaxed. "I shall miss you so and wait for you to come back. You will come back, won't you?"

Jim's only answer was to press the little head close to his heart. In all the great house, she alone had cared to say good-bye—to wish him in her child's way godspeed.

"See," Diana continued as she opened her arms, "here is something for you to take away with you, so that you sha'n't be lonely any more." She opened her arms and held up the soft roll of fur with its blinking eyes and pink-tipped nose.

"Di, dear Di," Jim whispered, as he patted the towsled hair.

Quite seriously her big eyes searched Jim's face to be sure that her gift truly

won approval.

The church clock boomed the hour of five. Jim hurriedly rose and slipped the dog into his coat-pocket.

"Good-bye, Di, and God bless you!"

She clung quietly to him with her arms tight around his neck for a long time; then the little face quivered, and in a burst of tears she sank back among the cushions of the window-seat. Jim hesitated a moment, then with a final pat on the dear head, hurriedly reached the doorway and was out on the high-road. From a turn at the top of the common he caught a last glimpse of the great house, and in the big window of the hall could see the faint outline of the white figure still huddled among the cushions.

All the suppression of the past days gave way. With a cry, Jim threw himself down on the damp ground and convulsive sobs shook his body. It had all been his—his home, his country—and he was leaving it without a friend, without a loving hand or voice to cheer him.

He suddenly felt a damp nose thrust into his hand, and a soft tongue began to lap his face as though in sympathy. The tiny puppy had fallen from his pocket and crawled on to his shoulder. He rose to his feet and picked up the fluffy ball; something in the round, pulpy mass made him laugh.

"So I've found a friend, have I? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

The dog gave a faint yelp in reply and began to lick his hand. Holding the dog close to him, Jim walked on, all the boy in him welling up to meet the promise of the new day. Suddenly he stopped as he neared the station platform, and stroking gently the soft fur, he whispered:

"I'll call you Di."

CHAPTER II

It was London in full swing. A wild April shower had sprung up and was quickly driving people into the shelter of passing hansoms. There was a sudden exodus from the park of gayly gowned women, hurrying to their waiting carriages. Bewildered nurses gathered their young charges into protecting corners. Only a few minutes before it had been radiant sunshine. Open high-swung see-victorias, with their powdered, liveried men on the boxes, and unprotected occupants driving from a royal house to a ducal assemblage, were caught in the congested mass

of hansoms, top-heavy 'busses, and passing carts. Stalwart, blue-coated giants were trying to stem the rush and scramble.

Diana crossed from the couch where she had been sitting to the open window. In a week's time she was to be married. She held a note in her hand, which had just come by messenger. It was from Henry. He could not take her to Ranelagh as he had planned, he wrote. Unexpected business had arisen, but he would see her later in the evening.

The room in which Diana stood faced Hyde Park. The house was one of those built a century ago by the mad Duke of Delford, and was famous for the purity of its architecture. On this spring day the front looked like a hanging garden, so abundant and exquisite were the large boxes of trailing flowers. The room with its Adam ceiling and mantel, its crimson brocade curtains against the pale-cream walls, its rare specimens of Sheraton and Chippendale and precious bits of china, made a harmonious setting for Diana in her dove-colored gown. Bowls of yellow jonquils and daffodils gleamed like golden bits of imprisoned sunlight on slender-legged tables.

Diana was alone. Lady Dillingham, her aunt, and the mistress of the Park Lane House was confined to her room with a sharp attack of gout. From the window looking out across the park, the rain glinted like a fine sheet of steel. It beat down the great beds of flaming hyacinths and daffodils that lined the park walk with their glory of purple and yellow. The blue-and-white fleecy sky of a past half-hour now hung over the town like a dirty ship's sail, with puffing, dun-colored clouds sweeping past.

Diana half consciously watched the amusing scurry of the passers-by. Through the long, open windows protected by a projecting balcony she could hear the splashing of the rain against the pavement. The confusion of carriages began to straighten itself out. The hurrying crowds disappeared as though swallowed up in the drenched ground. What had been a fantastic, brilliantly colored panorama was now a desolate space.

As Diana stood there, a rising resentment at the broken promise filled her mind. It was not because of the disappointment. So often, at the last moment, her plans had been changed by Henry's failure to keep his engagements with her. A sharp gust of wind blew its damp air into the room and made her shiver. She closed the window and walked to the open log fire. The spring days of an English climate still permitted this luxury within doors. As she sat before the hearth, the letter still in her hand hanging listlessly by her side, the door quietly opened and her father entered. On the previous day he had come up from the country to join Diana, who was visiting his sister while the necessary wedding preparations were being completed. The passing years had greatly aged Sir Charles. The delicate, high-bred face had grown more spiritual, and he seemed further aloof

from material influences.

With a pang Diana noticed the change. She rose and crossed to him, her tall figure hovering protectingly over the old man. The maternal instinct was deeply embedded in Diana's nature. Quite tenderly he took the young face in his withered but exquisitely modelled hands and kissed her.

"Alone, dear?" he said. "I thought Henry was to take you to join some people at Ranelagh."

"Henry has just sent me word that he is unexpectedly detained in the city."

Something in her tone made Sir Charles wince.

She was very beautiful, in a curious, contradictory way. Her tender, serious eyes suggested the Madonna, but her arched, full mouth made her a half Venus. More than tall, there was in the lithe, girlish figure an embodiment of latent reliance and vitality. Her usually calm face was disturbed at the moment by a look of intense perplexity. It seemed as though she were vainly trying to combat her doubts.

She stood for a moment irresolute, then in a burst of tears she slipped down beside the big chair in which her father sat.

"I can't marry Henry—I can't," she sobbed, as she hid her face in her hands.

For a moment Sir Charles was startled; then, smiling at what he divined to be a lover's quarrel, he patiently patted the bent head as though humoring a wayward child. Absorbed in his own narrow life, he had no knowledge of men, and to him Henry Wynnegate was an ideal match for his motherless girl.

He had known the late Earl well, and in the reflected glory of the parents he saw the son. His heart was set on seeing Diana safely moored in the house of Wynnegate and the brilliant position hers, which she could assume as the Countess of Kerhill. These tears, of course, were the foolish outcome of the afternoon's disappointment. He let her have her cry out; then gradually drew the slender hands from her face.

"You are unreasonable, my child," he began. "Surely you can hope for no better husband than the son of my late friend. Why, I have known him from childhood. Think," he went on, "of his career as a soldier; of the respect of his tenantry; of his position in the world." He forgot the dominance of Lady Elizabeth, who, by her plans and generalship had commanded all these attributes for her son. "With his knowledge of life and the future assured him," he continued, "he can give you all that so far has been denied to you. What more can you desire, my dear?"

Diana raised her tear-stained face and listened.

He drew her close to him, his feeble body vibrating with sudden emotion as he said, "I am very feeble—far older than my years, and I long to see you safely placed." He waited a moment as though expecting a reply, but there was

no answer to his appeal. "We are poor, Diana—very poor. I have carried a heavy burden for years. This marriage will make me supremely happy; it will make my remaining days peaceful." He paused. "You can trust me, dear, in this matter. Say that you can."

Something in the tense, pathetic face forced back Diana's words of opposition. Perhaps she was wrong, There was no tangible reason for this rebellion that her perplexed mind could grasp. Her father, so gentle, so wise, so loving, could not be doubted. Sir Charles watched her eagerly. He loved her, but in his short-sighted desire for her happiness he failed to see the depths of her troubled heart. Almost convinced that her frightened instinct was wrong, Diana rose, and, with a gentle pressure of her father's hand, yielded to his importunities. Tactfully, and in silence, Sir Charles accepted her consent.

A strained pause followed. Sir Charles reflectively sank into the cushions of his high-backed chair. He was sure that Diana's outburst was mere nervousness; it was often so with young, inexperienced girls before marriage. The excitement of the London life was a great fatigue to him. Even the muffled, vibrating roar that half penetrated into the dwellings of Mayfair, told on his sensitive nature. He closed his eyes.

Diana's girlhood had been singularly isolated from the world. Shortly after Jim's departure for India, she had been sent abroad to a school on the Continent. She had usually spent the summers with her father at some peaceful, out of the way corner. Her education completed, she had returned during the April previous, to the quiet life of her father's home.

There followed the lonely weeks with her awakening womanhood crying out for comprehension. Then one day Henry Wynnegate returned to the Towers. She had only a vague memory of the subsequent days of amusement that passed so quickly. All that her youth and gayety had so long desired was given her. She was unconsciously swept on by the passion of Henry's love and could hardly recall when she promised to be his wife. That was in the autumn.

At the beginning of the season she was presented at court. Her youth and beauty made a sensation, and her marriage was arranged to take place within a month.

Eager to grasp the bloom of the fresh flower he had plucked, Henry would tolerate no delay. Backed by the dominant influence of his mother, who in Diana saw not only the gratification of Henry's desires, but a gracious bearer of his name, and, with the persuasion of Sir Charles, Diana acquiesced to an early marriage. She was in love with love, not with the man, and her loveliness and the purity of her fresh young soul made her idealize the best of Henry's shifting, many-sided nature.

Sir Charles dozed peacefully. Diana, with feverish cheeks and burning eyes,

longed to escape from the warm room. Through the closed windows she could see that the rain had ceased. She wanted to be alone, to calm the battling emotions of the past hour. As she tiptoed to the door, it was thrown open, and the Countess of Kerhill and Lady Mabel Wynnegate were announced.

Sir Charles aroused, rose quickly from his chair to greet the visitors.

"My dear," Lady Kerhill began, as she entered the room and embraced Diana, "we are going to ask you for our tea at once if you will take pity on us. Such an afternoon! We were obliged to turn back from Ranelagh because of the storm. Fortunately we had a closed carriage, but Mabel and I were so anxious to know whether you and Henry had started before the shower sprang up"—with a quick look of surprise about the room, she exclaimed, "Why, where is Henry?"

Diana rang the bell for tea.

"I had a note from Henry, dear Lady Elizabeth, saying he was detained by some unexpected business."

Sir Charles noticed with great satisfaction Diana's superb control. Her rebellious mood, as he surmised, had been a mere whim.

For a moment a half-frightened look came into Lady Elizabeth's eyes. She was never quite sure of Henry, but even to herself she never admitted it. She had cast him for a role that he neither suggested nor attempted to play, but she never flinched before the duty of wilfully blinding herself to these truths. Her love and her belief would win, and out of it all would be created the son she so desired Henry to be—that was her unconscious prayer. She threw off the moment's anxiety.

"No doubt it is a busy week for Henry," she said. She crossed to a chair near the fire, and with the announcement of tea began to gossip with Sir Charles. Mabel moved close to Diana's side at the tea-table. She had grown into a fairy-like creature, with exquisite, youthful coloring. Very shy and utterly subordinate to her mother and brother, she lavished upon Diana a great affection in return for her sympathy. She stole shy glances at Diana's unusual color, as the latter poured the tea mechanically, but joined little in the conversation. Diana caught Mabel's eyes wonderingly fastened upon her. She could no longer endure the close room.

"I must get a breath of air. Can Mabel go with me?" she said, as she rose from her untouched tea.

Sir Charles was explaining to Lady Elizabeth some details of the previous night's rowdy conduct at the House. They both paused for a moment.

"Do take a turn with Mabel in the park," said Sir Charles. "It will refresh you."

"Remember we are due at the opera to-night," Lady Elizabeth said, as she rose. Sir Charles protested. "But it's just why I'm going myself," Lady Elizabeth

confessed. "I'll send the carriage back for Mabel."

A few minutes later Diana and Mabel entered the park. The pungent smell of the damp earth filled the air. Great crimson and yellow pools of color dotted the ground; they were the battered-down blossoms of the afternoon. Some stronger plants than the others were lifting their swaying stems. The paths were covered with bruised leaves, and from the branches came the drip-drip of the gleaming rain-drops. At times under interlaced branches it seemed as though the storm still continued, so heavy was the splashing of the drenched trees. The usually crowded meeting-ground of fashion was practically deserted; even the guards had not left their corners of refuge. Here and there a stray gardener in a by-path was pityingly regarding his damaged beds.

The fresh, wet air blew against Diana's face and calmed her troubled spirit. Mabel linked her arm through Diana's: neither spoke. On and on they walked, in and out of deserted side-paths, until a turn in the road brought them opposite to the Serpentine Bridge, and they faced the public driveway of the park. A gust of wind blew across the ground a deluge of broken boughs; it caused them to hesitate on the edge of the crossing. Mabel started forward as a cab dashed towards them at a tremendous speed.

"Why, Di, there's Henry in that hansom," Mabel gasped, as she blew a tangle of loosened hair out of her eyes.

But Diana could only see the occupant nearest to her in the cab—it was a woman with a strangely interesting foreign face.

"Nonsense," she answered, as she held firm the wind-blown hat. "Henry is in the city. You are mistaken, dear."

As she spoke the storm began afresh. The wind blew the sodden blossom leaves and broken branches into a hurricane cloud around them. Grasping Mabel by the hand, Diana made her way against the violence of the wind and finally reached the entrance to the park. In the rush of keen air and the fight against it, everything else was forgotten. They quickly reached the house, and Diana saw Mabel drive away in the shelter of the waiting carriage. A few minutes later she was in her own room.

She loosened her long, brown hair, and kneeling before the glowing fire held the wet coils to its warmth. On her bed lay a gown to be worn that night, and the light from the fire cast a delicate sheen over its folds. It flickered and blazed with merry bursts of flame, lighting up the old-fashioned chintz draperies of the quaintly furnished room. Through the closed window she could hear the faint splutter of the rain on the casement. As she leaned against the tall chair close to the fireplace, a soft, warm languor stole over her and the tension of her mind relaxed. The beauty of her present life stretched out innumerable magic wands that lulled into insensibility the frightened thoughts of the afternoon. Soothed

by the warmth and comfort of the room after the fatigue of her walk against the gale in the park, she abandoned herself to pleasant, intangible dreams. A knock at the door aroused her.

It was her aunt's maid, who carried a large box of flowers. Diana opened them; they were from Henry. Again they reiterated his apologies for the afternoon's disappointment. The perfume of the gardenias filled the room as she sank into a chair before her dressing-table and buried her face in the masses of delicate blossoms. The quiet servant gathered up the tangled hair.

"Her ladyship would like you to come to her room before you leave for the opera," she said, as she drew the brush across the soft brown locks.

Diana did not reply.

Yes, she was admitting to herself she had been unreasonable, as her father said. Life was beautiful and wonderful, and she meant to gather all its sweetness and bloom.

CHAPTER III

The rain that battered down the glory of color into the soaked earth of the park had slashed and beaten black, struggling lines against the gray stone-wall of the buildings in Lincoln's Inn. The radiance of the sun never wholly penetrated the court, but to-day the old place seemed like a tomb. In one of the forbidding-looking dwellings, in his solicitor's chambers, sat Lord Kerhill. He glanced around the silent room, and aimlessly took in the array of large tin boxes, with their painted family names, piled high on the shelves encircling the walls. Conspicuous among them was his own. With the exception of a few unattractive pieces of solid mahogany and some large leather chairs, the room was almost empty. Its ugliness jarred him. As he sat there, his face in repose showed that the years had given an added touch of bitterness to his expression. He still retained his well-cut features, and their beauty of line was only a little marred by a certain heaviness that had recently developed. His dark mustache hid the weak mouth with its suggestion of sensuality; indeed, the whole man showed a strong tendency towards grossness as yet only noticeable to the careful observer.

He still had the ineffable quality of charm, when he willed to exert it, which made his selfishness seem to many only the outcome of impulsive youthfulness. In a shamefaced way he admitted to himself now that he was in the wrong and

that he had stupidly involved his affairs, but he comforted himself in the same moment, with the fatuousness of self-indulgence, that everything would work out all right. To tide over this difficulty or adjust and evade for a time the demand of the hour had been his policy for so long that he could not realize that an end was possible to the long tether he so often abused.

He had come in response to an urgent summons. Opposite him, deeply absorbed in some papers, sat Johnston Petrie, the trusted solicitor of the Kerhill family since Henry's father came into the title. He was a large, powerfully built man of fifty-five, with a massive head, piercing black eyes under shaggy eyebrows, and close-cropped iron-gray curls above the shrewd face. Henry rose impatiently to go.

As he did so, Petrie lifted his glasses on their black ribbon to his eyes, and said, "I'm exceedingly sorry, your Lordship, but you must give me time to look more closely into that affair before I can venture a final opinion as to the condition of the estate. Besides, I have several other matters of the gravest importance to question you about; they pertain to some business transactions you made recently without my knowledge, while you were abroad."

He motioned his lordship to a chair as though to pursue deeper the conversation, and drew several documents from a drawer. Henry Kerhill fidgeted.

"It's impossible, Petrie. Next week, after the wedding, or after we return from Scotland, I'll have leisure then to discuss these things with you, and I really mean this time to have you adjust everything and set me quite straight."

Johnston Petrie shook his head.

"Oh, I know," Henry continued, "I've been careless, but I mean to pull up. I'll start fair from next week."

Johnston Petrie looked up sharply. He knew more of his client's career than Henry cared to remember. He had known him from boyhood, and his shrewd summing up of human nature could see only pitfalls ahead for Lady Elizabeth's son. He had tried in every way to stop the reckless living of his client. From the incessant demands made on the estate for large sums of ready money he knew that Henry Wynnegate, irritated by the conservative principles of his firm, had used outside help to prevent his family adviser from obtaining knowledge of some recent speculations.

Long ago Johnston Petrie would have asked to be released from the responsibilities of the Kerhill affairs, out for a loyal devotion to his dead client, the late Earl, and a desire to protect Lady Elizabeth's fast diminishing rights. He was not in the least deceived by Henry's machinations, but wilfully allowed himself to seem blind to certain matters. He wished to be able to keep his hand at the lever, and argued with his brother that the end justified the means.

Lady Elizabeth in a recent interview had assured him that the coming mar-

riage would be the turning-point in Henry's career. Nevertheless, he feared her judgment. Something in Henry's attitude to-day had made him more apprehensive; it had been impossible to pin him down to a serious consideration of his affairs. Petrie determined to venture a final effort, by enrolling his brother's services to strengthen his admonitions.

"Lord Kerhill," he said. "My brother is also most anxious to see you regarding some stocks you asked his advice about." He touched a bell; a clerk answered from an adjoining room.

"Ask Mr. Malcolm Petrie to come to us. Say that the Earl of Kerhill is here."

Henry chafed under the calm firmness of his solicitor. He had come in answer to an imperative note, and the discussion of his complicated affairs was extremely disagreeable. He was in no mood to continue it further. He moved to the door as Malcolm Petrie entered; a smaller counterpart of his brother, and a silent member of the firm, he took the same personal interest in the Kerhill affairs that his brother did. As he started to speak he was stopped by Henry.

"It's no use. I can wait no longer. A most important engagement demands my leaving at once. Advise me by letter—it will reach me to-morrow." And before either of the men could urge upon him the necessity of being allowed to advise him on certain negotiations, he had reached the outer door of the chambers, mounted the few steps leading to the court, and was in the square where his cab was waiting. He cursed the dreariness of the day as the rain splashed him. For a moment he hesitated. They had detained him far too long, these croaking fogies in their stuffy office. His hand fumbled in his pocket where lay a letter with a message not to be disregarded. On its arrival at his club early in the afternoon the note to Diana had been despatched.

The fury of haste that had made him so eager to escape from his business interview now deserted him. The rain drenched him in warm torrents. The driver on the box was a running stream, and from the horse came clouds of heavy steam.

Then the momentary irresolution passed as he gave his orders to the impassive cabman. He leaned back in his cab, tearing into shreds the mauve letter with its gold monogram as he muttered, "It's for the last time, by God." The hansom started with a jerk. It rattled down an alley. To Henry the damp, dismal court looked more than ever like a graveyard. He was glad when they turned into the vortex of the Strand.

That night at the opera, a new singer was to make her début in "Carmen." In Paris and America this sloe-eyed Italian had made the sensation of the half-century in her creation of the gypsy wanton. The brilliant throng in Covent Garden was alive with anticipation. The royalties were expected; indeed, the queen herself

had especially commanded this reception for the gifted woman whom she had honored as her guest on the Riviera, where this singing Rachel had entranced her with the folk-songs and lullabies of her beloved country.

All that the London season could assemble of wit, beauty, and distinction was gathered in the Opera-House. The tiers of boxes were filling unusually early. Near the stage sat the Prime-Minister, a man of strong artistic perceptions and a writer of extraordinary talent. His face, with the marked cleft in the square chin, looked less dreamy than usual to-night, and the large, pale-blue eyes, amusedly surveyed the house. He seemed to have slipped off the yoke of tangled politics as he turned to his secretary, who was pointing out to him the celebrities in the stalls.

"There is the delightful American whom I met last week at Lord Blight's." As he spoke, he bowed to the new American favorite, Mrs. Hobart Chichester Chichester Jones, a radiant figure in scarlet, who found many glasses levelled at her.

"Only an American would dress so originally," the minister replied.

The American wore a gown of clinging scarlet fabric, the decidedly low-cut corsage showing the perfection of the white shoulders and arms. Around her throat she had twisted one long rope of uncut pearls and diamonds that reached below her waist, and in the soft, waving, red-gold hair she had arranged some daring scarlet geraniums. With her pale skin and great green eyes she enchanted London by her unusual type. Near her was the famous story-book Duchess, as the most popular of the younger beauties was called. "Too good to be true," *Truth* declared her, and indeed she seemed to have been especially created to confirm the mode of the old-fashioned romances extolling the grace and loveliness of an English Duchess. The crowd noticed the famous rubies that shone like tiny flames against the white gown.

Here and there a Dowager gleamed like a shelf in a Bond Street jeweller's shop, so promiscuous was her array of gems. The younger school of beauties with more wisdom employed their jewels differently, using them as an added tone of color or a touch of brilliance to a costume. In the stalls the art world was well represented. Painters and writers with a sprinkling of actors and actresses, who were not playing, were on hand to-night to greet the new-comer. From the gallery rail a crowd of eager, swarthy faces peered, impatiently gesticulating to one another, because of the failure of the curtain to ascend at the given time. It was known that the prima-donna was a capricious creature, often swayed by a mere whim from making her appearance. Once the death of a mocking-bird had postponed her début as Marguerite. Would she really appear?

As the royalties entered the box, the excitement was at fever-heat. Henry with his mother impatiently awaited Diana's arrival.

The overture began its sensuous, stirring appeal, and before the cigarette-girl crossed the bridge in the street scene, every seat and box was occupied.

The singer made the ill-starred Carmen a bewitching and compelling wanton. Who that saw her will ever forget her delicious cajolery as she urged the bewitched Don José to loosen the ropes that bound her? With her Habanera she eclipsed all predecessors and made the role irrevocably hers. The first act ended with a storm of bravas from the gallery and vociferous applause from the rest of the house.

It was not until the tumultuous ovation over the first act had ceased that Diana's presence was noticed by the audience. Accompanied by her father, she had arrived at the close of the overture, and had only time to slip into her place before the curtain arose. The walk in the rain had given her delicate skin a touch of color and heightened the beauty of her tender eyes, "so deeply blue that they were black," as Lord Patrick Illington described them on his first meeting at her presentation at Court. Her bands of straight hair were wound around her head; pale-green draperies encircled her lithesome body, and the gardenia blossoms in her hair gave her a fleeting likeness to the water-sprite Undine. In the horseshoe of fashionable *mondaines* the fragrance of her beauty was like that of a dew-sprayed rose.

Mrs. Hobart Chichester Chichester Jones, with her usual common-sense of seeing things as they were, leaned towards the man beside her.

"That is a beauty—the real thing; no chic, no gowning, no Paris wisdom of make-up, but a beauty. I'm glad I've seen it." She sank back as though philosophically preparing for a Waterloo.

From his box the Prince noticed the daughter of Sir Charles Marjoribanks whose services in diplomacy in his youth were not forgotten. Forthwith an equerry was sent to Sir Charles and Diana inviting them to visit the royal presence.

Diana was the social novelty of the season. The Prime-Minister remembered his classics as he dreamily gazed at her and murmured, "Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?"

From the back of the box, Henry watched Diana's impression on the house. His eyebrows were drawn into horns of suppressed temper and there was an air of brutal determination in his bearing. Gradually his expression cleared. Diana's beauty that night stirred the best in him. He tried to dismiss the events of the afternoon; he would be worthy of this child-woman. He set his shoulders square as though preparing to fight unseen forces.

"Lucky fellow, Kerhill," one man confided to another as they watched the crowd's sweeping glasses pause constantly at Diana Marjoribanks's box and saw the triumphant look on Henry's face.

The sinuous, commanding Carmen had reached her triumphant entry with the toreador when the mad Don José's dagger drew the purple stain on the gold-embroidered gown. Over the house a spell-bound silence reigned. As from an animal wounded to the death, low sounds of agonized pain came from the great actress—she forgot to sing, and the house forgot that she was a singer in an opera comique. For the moment it faced the realistic truth of a grim tragedy.

Excited and intoxicated by the sensuous music, Diana was hardly conscious that the opera was over. She was like a child with the world for a great, colored balloon. As she came down the winding staircase she was almost happy, and turned to smile at Henry, who was by her side. As she did so she saw him frown. They reached the foot of the staircase, and found their way half-barred by a dark, foreign-looking woman robed in a spun-gold gown. Diana noticed the insolent, amused expression on her handsome face, but at that moment her attention was diverted by some one who spoke to her, and she only vaguely noticed Henry's constrained bow, and the sudden brutal flame in his eyes.

Only later, as she sleepily looked over at the park in the dim light, did she remember that the woman in cloth of gold at the bottom of the staircase was strangely like the vivid, foreign-looking woman who had flashed past her in the park as the storm broke.

The wedding took place at St. George's, Hanover Square. It was the first brilliant wedding of the season and royalty honored it, not by sending a deputy, but by its personal presence. Diana passed through the gay pageant and heard the conventional words of well-wishers like one in a dream. She remembered being changed into a going-away frock—the curious street crowd gathering around her as she left the reception at the Park Lane house. Then as she entered the brougham she was conscious of Henry's face drawn close to hers, and the old frightened instincts that her father only a week ago had soothed and quelled again took possession of her. A great wall of fear closed in about her.

At last the carriage reached the station.

Diana leaned back in their compartment in the train northbound for Scotland. The bustle of the outgoing crowds was holding Henry's attention as she glanced over the afternoon paper, which gave a prominent position to the brilliant wedding that had taken place at St. George's only a few hours ago.

Suddenly she espied a name that made her heart leap. A brief paragraph told of the reward to be conferred on Captain James Wynnegate, but a longer account followed, giving details of his gallant work in the Northwestern Hills.

A great longing to see the friend of her childhood came over her. She was ashamed that she had forgotten him so long.

Henry entered the compartment, the guard closed the door, and the train started on its journey. Her husband spoke to her and she answered him in an

absent manner. The sudden remembrance of her old playmate grew vividly and seemed to blot out all else, as, following on her self-reproach for forgetting him, came the thought, growing more poignant; "Did Jim remember her?"

CHAPTER IV

Jim lay in the hospital ward convalescing. Of the march back to the nearest hospital post, after the fight which has taken place three months before in the Northwestern Hills, when his name had been flashed over Europe in praise of his magnificent service to his flag, his mind held no memory.

Night after night in his delirium he lived again through the scenes of the fight that had brought glory to his name. Now it was the evening before the battle, when, acting upon information brought by the spy Rham-shi, he and his men kept their long vigil, sitting silently in their saddles the entire night awaiting the onslaught of the fanatical natives across the hill. Again it was early dawn, and in his fever-tossed dreams he heard the roar of the voices as the assault began; again he climbed to the summit of the hill and saw the dreaded gun of the enemy that was riddling his men. On—on he mounted. He felt the warm blood ooze down his body, the mists swim before his eyes, and the stinging pain pierce his side. In despair that he might not reach the monster in time to prevent it from completing its deadly work, his cry of agony often rang out in the silent room.

"Oh, God, God, my men—my splendid men—give me courage!"

Then his thoughts would wander to the hours when he lay on the ground with the blood dripping from his wound, and with the loaded carbine snatched from a fallen trooper he brought down a tribesman at the enemy's gun. As he fell, another sprang forward—there was another shot and still another as the tribesmen went down before his sure aim. There was but one thought in his brain—to prevent the firing of the gun, the devastation of his men. Difficult and more difficult it grew to lift the weakening arm. He could feel as he tossed on his couch the gurgle of the blood that glued him to the ground. He made an effort to rise to his knees. Another devil was about to load the gun. He must catch this one again—he must. It was his last cartridge. He stretched out his stiffening arm feebly; he tried to pull the trigger, but his strength failed him. Then—one supreme effort, and a report flashed through the air. The rest was a blank, but he had carried the day.

These delirious hours passed and there followed a vague mid-air suspension of existence. Of tangible things he was no part. The years of fighting were forgotten. He was back in the Fairies' Corner with Diana, he saw the giant trees bending and whispering in the starlight. The smell of the damp earth from the sun-hidden enclosure filled the sick-room, and the vibrant, strong, compelling cry of the night-jar echoed in his dreams. Again, he and Diana listened for the flutter of the fairies' wings in the tree-tops. Gradually, even these mists cleared from his brain, and to-day he waited with impatience the surgeon, who was to decide whether he might obtain his leave.

The doctor found him sitting up in bed, his lean hands idly resting on the coverlet.

"Well, doctor," he asked, "what is the verdict? Am I to be allowed to join my regiment?"

The surgeon looked into the brave eyes. Jim was a wraith of the man who had gone into battle. The drawn cheek-bones were like high lights in the sunken face, the gauntness of the body could be discerned under the bedclothes, but the unflinching eyes held the same expression of everlasting courage. The doctor took Jim's long, meagre hand.

"We are done with you, Wynnegate. You fought a bigger battle here on this cot than you did yon day on the Hills, but you've won."

Jim only smiled.

"Your regiment is ordered home within a month, and you must go to your station to join it. Fighting will be a little out of your line for a while. I think you'll find you need England—a summer of sunshine in the open fields. Then come back later to us again." A suspicious moisture clouded his glasses. He was a man many years older than Jim, and he had seen his own boy go down at the head of his troops. Still, with the instinctive loyalty of the Englishman to his country, he concluded, "We need such men as you, my son."

The surgeon moved away. Jim closed his eyes. Presently he looked up.

He saw the long line of wounded men with here and there a wasted, propped-up figure—the quiet nurses passing and repassing. He began to feel the pulsating call of life again. For him the sick-room existence was ended; soon he would be back in the Fairies' Corner; he could hear the flutter of their wings.

The men were in the mess. Dunlap and Singleton were stretched out in long, wicker-basket chairs. Tomlinson was talking in an excited voice with several officers of the Tenth Hussars. "It means that Jim will receive a mention and a damn fine one," Tomlinson was saying, as he leaned back in his chair and gulped down his gin-and-seltzer. Singleton called to the orderly to bring a whiskey-and-

soda. Dunlap leaned forward to Tomlinson as he asked:

"Is that absolutely sure? We all know that Jim has done fine work in his seven years here, but are the powers above really going to commend his last bit of pluck?"

"The powers above," thundered Tomlinson, who loathed being doubted, "not only mean to commend him, but they mean to decorate him with the bronze cross itself. I had it from Watkins."

A long whistle greeted this bit of news. Watkins was not apt to talk without positive information.

Tomlinson was fairly bursting with enthusiasm and importance. For him station life in India meant gossip—good or bad news—so long as it was news. He could work himself into a fever of enthusiasm, get all the glory out of another man's receiving a decoration, and rejoice as though it had been given to himself. He only asked that it should occur in his station. "Tommy," as he was called, had been known to incite blackballing from his club against a man whom he had never seen, because no opposition was made. It meant news, and the passing of the word from one mess to another. When the man was blackballed, Tomlinson, in a high fever of indignation, sought the downed man and became so incensed with sympathy that he threatened to resign from a club that could offer such indignities: by that time he had forgotten that he had caused it. At the moment he was basking in the glory of Jim's coming honors. He took another gin-and-seltzer.

"By George! he was down and done for when he came here from the hospital," Dunlap said. "Never saw such a goner. But he's picked up tremendously during the past month."

Singleton took his whiskey-and-potash from the orderly.

"Strange," he continued, as he sat up, glass in hand. "Wynnegate is so eager to go back: never saw anything like it. Seems as though this illness had knocked soldiering out of him, and he was such a keen one before."

"Mighty fortunate the regiment's time was up and we're ordered home. Talk about Jim's being glad—Gad! it means something to see those kiddies of mine. Wonder if the little beggars will remember me," Dunlap mused.

After three gins-and-seltzers, it was time for Tomlinson to listen to Dunlap about his children. He had heard it all before. He had come from his own mess with the news about Jim. That was all that interested him, so he got up to go.

"Who'll play polo this evening?" he asked.

Singleton promised he would.

"I'll walk back with you," Tomlinson said.

They started to leave, but catching sight of an orderly with a mail-bag, Singleton let Tomlinson go on alone.

"See you at six for polo, Tommy; and I say, send any of our fellows in that you see. Tell them the post is in," he called as he saw Jim's long, loose-jointed stride across the road.

A blazing sun beat down on Jim as he crossed to the mess. The April weather was anticipating India's most wearing heat. But only vaguely he noted the ominous lead-colored sky, with its promise of dust storms. The green of England filled his vision. Since the days in the hospital, his thoughts had recurred incessantly to Diana. A picture in an illustrated paper, picked up in his ward, showed him Miss Diana Marjoribanks as a beautiful young girl—little Diana no longer. There was the same Madonna face, but more exquisitely fair than the child he had left had promised to be. He hardly cared to admit to himself how much the picture had stirred him.

When he entered the mess he found the men in groups, absorbed in their letters. Singleton and Dunlap both called to him.

"There are two for you, Jim."

Letters did not often come his way. When he first left England, several child's letters had come from Diana—these he had answered. He never heard from Henry, and his aunt wrote seldom.

"Dinningfold." He saw the familiar old postmark. It was from Lady Elizabeth, then. Boyishly, he fingered its ample thickness. It was good of her to write such a budget, he thought, as he tore it open. The chatter of voices about him fell unheeding on his ears as the men read their letters.

"God! Breese is dead—dropped down quite suddenly at the club," Singleton remarked as he turned a page of the letter he was reading.

His words were almost drowned by an eager, exulting cry. Half the fellows turned toward Dick Farninsby. He was usually so quiet. To-night his young, fair face was the color of a puppy.

"I've come into the money," he stammered.

Every one knew that Farninsby's uncle had been an old reprobate and that Dick had had a close pinch on his meagre allowance. They also knew that a pretty girl was waiting for him at home. A buzz of congratulations followed. But Tim took no part in them. He was reading his aunt's letter.

"... We are so sorry that you won't be home in time for the wedding. Diana and Henry are to be married. It will be a London wedding. Diana has grown into a beautiful girl and will make a worthy wife for Henry and a charming mistress of Maudsley Towers...."

As he read, the page became a dancing mass of hieroglyphics. The men were beginning to light their cigarettes and pipes as they called bits of news to one another from the English papers. He tried hard to make the strange letters shape themselves and form words. He reread them. "Diana and Henry are to be

married." He turned the page. "On the 30th of April," it said. To-day was the 2d of May.

Several of the men started for the polo-fields. Some one called, "What's your news, Wynnegate?" He forgot to answer. He crushed the letter in his hand and left the mess. Mechanically he put the unopened letter from headquarters, with the news of his brilliant reward, in his pocket. Across the polo-fields he could see the heavy atmosphere gathering in great clouds. A dust-storm was nursing its imminent wrath.

It all seemed far away from the Fairies' Corner.

CHAPTER V

Since the day in his mess when Jim read the news of Diana's approaching marriage to Henry, he had been immersed in a strange dreariness of feeling and a curious indifference to the homeward-bound journey. Night after night he stood alone on the forward-deck of the *Crocodile* bound from Bombay for England, and heard the soldiers singing their camp-songs, their strong, rough voices growing tender as they sang their cockney ballads of home. But they roused no responsive echo in Jim; watching the Southern Cross in the sky, his thoughts often drifted back to the seven years of fighting with their sun-scorched days of fatigue and danger, full of work that drained body and brain. He almost wished that he were returning to them.

One night at Ismailia the pendulum of his emotions swung back from this indifference to the first hours of joy that he had experienced when he received the news that his regiment was ordered back. The ship had anchored there for a few hours to obtain supplies. With Dunlap and Singleton he went ashore to the little hotel with its Continental atmosphere of cheap table-d'hôte dinners and slipshod Italian waiters. It was a shaky wooden building, built around an inside court, with balconies over which clambered in exuberance pale, waxy tea-roses, while the front of the building hung over a cypress-tree garden.

The indifferently good but pretentious meal was served in the tiny court. Dunlap's and Singleton's boisterous mood jarred Jim. He found himself watching the other guests of Monsieur Carlos' hostelry. At adjacent tables parties of tourists were making merry while waiting for the P.&O. steamer to carry them from Cleopatra's land to golden Italy, and from a dance-hall came the fantastic

music of the nautch women's instruments. In half an hour the hotel was empty of all the diners save Jim, who lingered until the shabby proprietor, Monsieur Carlos, informed Monsieur le Capitaine that after ten the court was closed, but the verandas were at Monsieur's disposal for his kummel and cigarettes. Jim ascended the creaking staircase to the broad veranda partly hidden from the road by its screen of blooming roses gleaming like stars against the shadowed foliage. Here and there a tight, pink-tipped bud shone like a tiny flame.

The moon had risen and illumined the entire place with an uncanny brilliance, turning the night into an unreal day. Jim sank into a chair. The air was heavy with the perfume of the rose-trees. In the distance he could hear the barbarous clash of the dancing women's cymbals. It was their trade-night with two ships in the harbor. Jim took from his pocket a leather portmonnaie and drew from it the picture of Diana that he had cut from the paper in the hospital.

He had never willingly thought of her since the day he received his aunt's letter. As he sat on the deserted veranda, with the torn page lying on his knee, he was conscious of a sudden, intangible feeling of apprehension. Diana was the tenderest memory of his boyhood. Why did he fear this marriage with Henry? Vainly he studied the picture, trying to gain from the cheap illustration some knowledge of the woman into which Diana had grown. He tried honestly to face the truth of his great anxiety concerning the marriage. He knew that through his convalescence when the longing to go home had overmastered the soldier in him, the thought of renewing his friendship with Diana had been his happiest anticipation. He sought to reassure himself that his disappointment was selfishness—that he feared to find Diana absorbed in new interests, with his place completely crowded out of her life. Then a vision of Henry, sullen and defiant as he had last seen him, flashed before him.... Yet might not Henry's character have been redeemed by his love for Diana? Jim knew that the meagre fortune of Sir Charles Marjoribanks could not be a material factor in the marriage. This proved his most reassuring thought. Then his memory reverted to Diana, and he recalled the child Di, who had clung to him on the morning of his departure and begged him to return. He remembered how as a boy he had often played that he was her knight, and fought the unseen foes that were supposed to lurk in the alleyways of the giant trees. Was it a prophetic vision of the future?

He rose from his chair. Sweeping clouds were rolling over the pale moon. The desolation of the place grew more terrible.

Far out at sea he could see the black phantom ship now appearing, now disappearing. It seemed at the mercy of the heavy vapors that at times touched its topmasts. The desire to reach England again grew strong in him. He felt he had a purpose to fulfil.

A half-hour passed. Suddenly the moon swept from under a heavy cloud,

shaped like the wing of a monster bird. Across the road he could see the straggling groups of travellers returning from the festivities. Their tired, excited voices reached him, and he was glad to escape from the hotel and make his way to the waiting dinghy. Dunlap and Singleton joined him, and as he leaned back in the skiff, strong and incessant as the incoming tide that beat against the boat grew the strength of his resolve. Diana should obtain happiness if he could serve her to that end.

Three weeks later the *Crocodile* swung into the harbor at Portsmouth. A symphony in blues and greens greeted Jim's eyes as they anchored within sight of the Victory. An English June sky with riotous blues—from the palest flaky azure to the deepest turquoise—hung in the heavens over a vivid green sea. The very atmosphere seemed floating about in nebulous clouds of pearly tinted indigo. To Jim it was like the beauty of no other land.

Towards evening Jim reached London. The town was alive with the roar and rush of hansoms and crowded 'buses carrying the day's workers to their homes. His cab turned from St. James's Park into the Mall towards his club. How he loved the gray, majestic beauty of the place!

The expected arrival of the *Crocodile* had been duly noticed by the papers, and his part in the brilliant work of his regiment warmly commended. At the club he found letters of welcome awaiting him. Among them was one from Diana, urging him to come to them at once. It seemed the letter of a woman calm in her established womanhood. "Henry and I," it said, "will be so happy to see you to-morrow at luncheon at two o'clock. Do come." The letter further told him that Lady Elizabeth and Mabel were staying at the Towers. "Henry wanted a town-house, so we are settled at Pont Street for the season."

Late that night Jim sat alone in his club, and wrote an answer to Diana's letter. He spoke of his pleasure in being able to go to them on the morrow, but its phrases gave no sign of his intense feeling and his great desire for her happiness. He left the club and walked to the pillar-box opposite. He slipped the letter into the slit of the box, and slowly retraced his steps. A slight haze was beginning to creep over the city, and in the distance it looked as though a gauze theatre-drop was shutting off the scene from the spectators.

Jim was loath to leave the streets. There was an enchantment for him in the smoky atmosphere that intoxicated him. The call of London was in his blood. As he crossed the quiet Square near the Mall, he stretched out his arms, and youth

and the joy of life rang out in one great cry—Oh, it was good to be home!

CHAPTER VI

Jim slept but little that night. In the morning his first thought was to reach the War Office, which he did almost before that dignified machine was prepared to receive him. A rumor was afloat that the Tenth Hussars might have to start shortly for South Africa, but he found that the gossip had been greatly exaggerated. Even if troops were sent out, he was assured that the Tenth Hussars were immune from active service for a long period. He rejoiced at the news, for he was tired of foreign service. His long illness had left him shaken and requiring a much-needed rest for recuperation.

At the War Office he learned that Henry had resigned his regiment and was at the head of the Surrey Yeomanry, with headquarters near the Towers. This argued well, he told himself; it meant work and responsibility for Henry that would engage his interest and surely win him away from his old, reckless way of living.

The morning slipped away with its many demands on his first day in town. His hansom turned into Sloane Street only as a clock near by struck two. In a few minutes the door of the Pont Street house was opened to him, and he was ushered into the library.

He dropped lightly into an arm-chair near a table heaped with books. Suddenly a door opened as though at the end of a corridor. He distinctly heard voices raised in strong argument behind the hangings; one sounded like Henry's; a half-suppressed oath followed.

"It's no use," the voice went on. "You must do as I say. Don't preach." He could not hear the words that followed. Jim wished it were possible to make known his presence in the room. He crossed to the farther window to avoid hearing the remainder of the conversation, but the clear and incisive words of the first speaker—this time Jim knew it was Henry—again struck his ears sharply.

"I must have the money, Petrie; make what explanation you like, but send it to me within a week. It's useless arguing. I've lost heavily in speculation. Here are the papers." The opening and slamming of several drawers followed. To Jim the words that he had just heard were like a knell to his hopes of the past week for Diana's happiness. So this was the truth! Another mortgage! He knew enough

of the involved condition of the estate to dread the possibilities of that word.

As Jim sat in the window-seat facing the street, he was so absorbed in his reflections that he did not hear the door open. With a start he felt a pair of hands clasped over his eyes.

"Guess!" the low voice said.

He answered, quickly, "Di!"

"Yes, it's Di, Jim; and such a happy Di to see you again."

As he turned he half expected to see the tiny child as he had last seen her, with the puppy in her arms calling, "It's Di, Jim." For a moment they stood holding each other's hands and only the eyes of the two spoke. The thoughts of both involuntarily went back to their last meeting. They realized that unconsciously they had taken up their childhood manner. Slowly their hands unclasped and Diana was the first to speak.

"Oh, Jim, I should hardly know you. You are so big, so strong, and yet—you look as though you had been very ill; have you?"

She studied Jim's face closely, gaunt and drawn, but with the eyes still like gray pools of suppressed fire. Jim forgot the troubled thoughts that Henry's words had aroused. He only knew that Diana stood before him, young and beautiful. He threw back his head and laughed; it was the ringing, joyous laugh of a boy.

"And I almost thought, as I turned, that I could see my little Di," he said.

The memory of the delicate child faded into the tall, strong figure before him. Quickly he noted the complexities of her face; its newly acquired look of womanhood seemed curiously incongruous with the rest of her personality. He saw in her eyes a haunting expression of marked patience. The new acquaintance of the grown man and woman had adjusted itself.

"Oh, Jim, I'm so proud of you," Diana said, gravely. "You have really done something with your life that is worth while."

"Which means, I suppose, that the rest of us have not," a voice said.

Jim and Diana turned as Henry spoke. He was standing in the doorway. Jim noticed with satisfaction that his eyes rested on Diana in unquestionable gratification. Perhaps, after all, Henry's love for Diana was real. He remembered that his aunt, in her letter, had written of her great faith in this marriage for Henry's happiness—indeed, he well remembered that the letter seemed to insist upon the benefits Henry would derive from the marriage. He wondered what it had meant for Diana.

"Welcome to the hero," Henry chaffingly said, as he crossed to Jim's side.

An underlying nervous excitement, at once apparent to Jim, clung to Henry's manner. Otherwise his greeting was more than reassuring.

"Did you finish your business interview?" Diana questioned. A shade of

displeasure showed on Henry's face as he answered:

"Yes, yes, I had more than enough of it."

"We postponed luncheon," Diana explained to Jim, "because Henry found his solicitor wished to see him about some repairs needed on the estate. The request was urgent, Henry said, and I knew you would not mind the delay."

For a moment Jim felt as if Henry must read the thoughts that blazed so fiercely in his mind. So this was Henry's way of deceiving Diana. He tried to control his face so that it might give no sign of the disgust he felt. Henry had turned away; Jim could see him nervously twisting his mustache; Diana was smiling tenderly on Henry as though in approval of his morning's benevolent work. Jim, reading between the lines, saw Henry wince at the dishonestly gained approbation; and decided that Henry was vulnerable where his desire to gain her respect was concerned. This was so much in his favor, at all events.

An hour later, as they sat over their coffee, Henry began explaining to Jim his work with the Yeomanry. If Jim stayed at home he wanted him to join in this splendid service to England.

"We shall need these men later, mark me. The situation in Africa is threatening." Then followed a discussion of their plans.

Henry's career as a soldier, Jim remembered, had promised well, but he also remembered certain periods of riotous living that had brought him for a time under the ban of the authorities.

As Henry elaborated his scheme to perfect the Yeomanry in their county, Jim acknowledged that there was no question of his undoubted ability to be in command. He succumbed to the strong personal charm of his cousin. Surely Henry would control himself and make a worthy showing of his life yet. In Jim's heart was the silent prayer that it might be so, and that perhaps he could help him to attain this result.

Diana, listening, was happy in the apparent new bond between the cousins. She had been so eager for this: that Jim should be with them as he had been when he was a boy. Since her marriage, her life had been full of pleasant days, with only here and there the pin-prick of the old, frightened instincts. It usually occurred when Henry was in one of his black moods. Up to the present he had tried to avoid her on these occasions. She strangely rebelled when she came to realize that it was her beauty which gave him his greatest pleasure. That it was primarily her youth and loveliness that delighted him, he made no effort to conceal. At times she admitted to herself that she wished it were not so flagrant—this frank, pagan joy of the senses which she invoked in him. But, she reasoned, if she allowed these thoughts to frighten her, she was catching at shadows. Of tangible facts there was none; indeed, she found it impossible to explain satisfactorily these doubts and regrets.

Jim was promising Henry that he would think seriously of the Yeomanry work, when Diana suddenly remembered that Henry and she were due at a studio to see a portrait of hers that was soon to be exhibited. At that moment a note was brought to Henry. Jim observed the quick contraction of Henry's brows and the sharp biting of his lips as he read it. Henry crumpled the letter. "Jim can take you," he brusquely said. "This note is of importance and requires my immediate attention. It's concerning my interview of this morning."

Diana's face showed her disappointment.

"But this is the third time that you've broken your appointment with me, and you promised Mr. Bond that you would surely give your decision on the picture to-day," Diana protested. "Besides, it is difficult for me to take all the responsibility in the matter, and the picture must be sent to-day to the exhibition. Do meet me there later, Henry."

Henry had been fighting the Furies for days; his financial worries were now vital to his honor. Into his eyes came the brutal flash that Jim knew so well, and he hurriedly intervened, "I'll go with you, Di, with pleasure, if I can be of the slightest service to you."

Instead of helping the situation, Jim found that his quick acquiescence, although suggested by Henry, had the effect of further irritating him. Henry turned from the door, to which he had crossed, with the crumpled note in his hand; all the old, domineering, rebellious temper struck flame.

"There! You have Jim. What more can you wish? Your hero's opinion will no doubt interest you far more than mine, so don't talk rot about your disappointment."

Diana stood silent, amazed at her husband's uncalled-for fury. Jim found it impossible to speak. The servant returned to see if the answer to the note was ready.

Henry contended for a few seconds with a tempestuous remorse as strong as the flare of his nervous outbreak; he bitterly regretted his lack of control. He had tried to conceal the strain he had been under all the day; to be thwarted as he apparently was by the news from Petrie, was to arouse the demons of destruction in him—destruction to himself as well as to those near him. He cursed himself as the victim of his own folly; but to see Jim master of the situation roused the old rebellion of his boyhood. A movement from the waiting servant recalled him, and with a few words of half-muttered apology he hurriedly left the room. A moment later they heard him drive away.

From so small a matter so great a consequence had arisen. This insight into Henry's nature again showed Jim the quicksands on which Diana's happiness was built.

To Diana the incident was embarrassing, but with infinite tact she made no

allusion to it. Jim marvelled at the quiet control with which she deftly turned it aside.

The carriage was announced.

"Will you come, Jim?" Diana asked.

He hesitated.

"Do," she coaxingly said, "it would help me."

Under the calm, serious face he could see the tremulous expression that showed her quivering, hurt feelings. The tender eyes held him fast. Still he hesitated. As in a moment of prevision he was urged to say no; it seemed as though he were starting on a way that led him into darkness. The absurd compelling force fastened around him in a tight grip; he tried to stammer a few words; he was irritated by his apparent stupidity, then he heard Diana say: "Let me decide for you."

As she spoke, a shaft of golden light penetrated the room. Why should he not go? He quickly threw off the intangible feeling of fear. He told her he was only too happy to be of service. It was a warm, mellow, summer day, and the soft, alluring air quickly lulled Jim into a tranquil mood.

As they stood before the portrait, Jim knew that it was one of the painter's true inspirations. The simple brown gown in which Diana had been painted brought out the gold in the bands of her straight hair. It faded away into a dull background, leaving only her luminous face in high relief. The painted oval contour and the curved lips were there in all their beauty; but the shadowy eyes unconsciously showed the troubled soul. It was a portrait of Diana older in years and experience. The painter seemed to have passed by her obvious youth and divined her in her maturity. Curiously enough, the portrait stirred Jim more than his meeting with Diana had done.

When they descended to the carriage, Diana said, "Come and drive—not in the park, but let us go along the Embankment, across the bridge towards Richmond. I long for a breath of the country." This time he made no effort to resist her appeal.

As they drove, Jim learned from Diana the news about Sir Charles. His ill health had greatly increased, and a London specialist's opinion had been far from sanguine. He gathered that Diana felt it was the beginning of the end; as she spoke, Jim could read the anguish of her thoughts. Once she turned to him and said:

"I have so few to love."

Soon they found themselves talking merrily over gay reminiscences of their childhood days. The hours slipped by, and it was only the deepening of the shadows that reminded Diana that she was entertaining the Prime-Minister that night at a large dinner-party. The return home was quickly made.

"Won't you dine with us, Jim?" Diana asked, as they reached Pont Street. "We can easily lay an extra cover."

But Jim, feeling that it would be better not to see Henry that night, pleaded an engagement at his club. He left Diana with a promise to see her soon.

That night he forgot her unusual beauty; he remembered only the fragrance of her personality. During the following week he obtained a leave of absence, and with Singleton planned to go abroad. Why he did this he could not quite explain. He saw Diana and Henry only once before leaving for his holiday. That was in June.

CHAPTER VII

Upon the expiration of his sick leave, Jim returned to his regiment, stationed at Dorden, a few miles from Dinningfold. He found the situation but little changed at the Towers. Henry's uncertain moods made Jim's visits a doubtful pleasure, but since his first day at Pont Street there had been no decided outbreak on his cousin's part.

The autumn brought with it the calamitous war in South Africa, and all thoughts were concentrated on preparing the Yeomanry of the country to be ready to join the Regulars in the field. Jim's services were readily enlisted by Henry, and in the organization of the county's Yeomanry he became an active force. His work often required him to spend days at the Towers.

With the passing of the last days of the old year, Henry's moodiness increased; even Lady Elizabeth seemed hopeless and unable to avert them, and Jim could see the bitter disillusionment that Diana daily encountered. During the winter Henry's attitude towards Diana changed; her presence was an irritation to him. At times he made every effort to regain his lost footing, but again and again he forfeited the newly acquired grace which her clemency granted. Days of absence from the Towers were now not uncommon. The light gradually faded from Lady Elizabeth's face, leaving it a haunting gray mask. But no word was spoken by either of the women to Jim. Both were indefatigable in their efforts to relieve the condition of the soldiers freezing on the African veldt. A fund was started in the county to be used for the widows and orphans of the fighting men, and Henry was placed at the head of it.

In London the innumerable bazaars and fêtes given to swell the various

funds of relief were the principal functions of the fashionable world. Jim, who had just returned from a visit to Scotland over the holiday season, was standing near a stall in Albert Hall, presided over by Mrs. Hobart Chichester Chichester Jones. As she eagerly turned towards him there was no doubt of the American woman's desire to gain his approbation. A friendship had sprung up between them since Jim's return from India, and her frankness amused him. It was Sadie Jones's second year in London, and the half of the great houses that had been denied her the previous year were now open to her and she was a much sought personage at their festivities.

Whether this was due to her insouciant face with its tip-tilted nose, or the slight lisp that made her American accent seem so fetching, her friends could not decide. Her enemies—and Sadie Jones had them at Battle Creek—declared it was her charming characteristic of never remembering a social slight; of generously forgiving the offender and in true Christian spirit offering the other cheek. They forgot what Jim and her sponsors in London could plainly see—it was her frankness that razed to the ground her social barrier. When she spoke quite frankly of a boarding-house her mother had kept in a mining-town where Hobart Jones had been a paying guest, and told in picturesque exaggeration of her starved youth and pitiful hatred of her environment—of the longing to escape to the great life of Europe with its men and women of tradition—she disarmed the gossips. She frankly acknowledged what was her detractors' store of tittle-tattle. It was a unique game and it won.

Jim watched her with tolerant interest as she inveigled a young guardsman into giving a substantial donation to the cause. As he idly surveyed the scene he wondered at Diana's failure to attend the fête. The tired women who had been in attendance were disposing of the remains of their stock. The eager crowd that had thronged the hall and paid a half-crown to be served tea by a duchess, or to see a peeress act as barmaid in rivalry to a popular Rosalind of the stage, was gradually thinning out.

Jim started to leave the flag-bedecked hall with its litter of packages and debris-strewn floor as proofs of the day's profitable traffic. Sadie Jones, who had been skilfully effecting her sales and keeping him in sight, turned to him.

"Wait and drive home with me to dinner. The brougham's at the door. I have news for you of Lady Kerhill. I have just returned from a visit."

Mrs. Jones lived in a box of a house in Curzon Street. It was a setting especially designed to suit her small, birdlike personality. But Jim's stalwart frame seemed grotesquely out of proportion in the small French salon. The dinner was an amusing *tête-à-tête* with Sadie at her most vivacious best, telling anecdotes of the plains she loved.

"Sometimes I long for the smell of the alkali. It chokes one, but I find the

fogs far harder to swallow. I was bred to it."

Hitherto her descriptions of the prairie had often made Jim long to see the country she painted so vividly. Suddenly she turned to Jim and with quick decision said:

"I can't understand your Englishman's point of view. Why, in America, if Hoby Jones had treated me as Lord Kerhill is treating his wife, there would be ructions. Yes, ructions," she calmly went on, in answer to Jim's look of amazement. "Lord Kerhill is your cousin, I know, but Lady Kerhill is an angel. Why don't you do something?"

For a moment Jim could not quite grasp her irrelevant outburst. Then he learned that Diana's failure to appear at the bazaar was due to days of accumulated anxiety at the Towers. Henry had been away for a week without a word of explanation to those at home.

"Of course," Sadie Jones continued as she leaned back and puffed her cigarette, "I know the truth. We all do here in town. He's drinking inordinately and leading a most flagrant life. An earl may be a stable-boy, I find, and Kerhill is certainly behaving like one. Lady Elizabeth is trying to cover up the situation, and Lady Kerhill seems dazed by recent events."

Of the sincerity of her interest in Diana, Jim could have no doubt. Under her frivolities she had an appreciation of what was fine in men and women. As she talked she was carefully watching the effect of her words on Jim; her instinct had long ago told her that Jim's interest in Diana was no usual one—how unusual she did not care to probe. She knew that he was the one person who might have an influence over Henry; she also knew that by this conversation she might be stirring up a situation that would far from benefit her, but she played the game fair. She was rich—Jim was almost poor. Often she wondered and hoped—but so far her dreams, she knew, were built alone upon her desires.

They talked for another hour, and when Jim left the Curzon Street house he promised Sadie Jones he would see Henry. From her window Sadie watched him swinging down the street. She had tried to serve Diana, but, she asked, what had she accomplished for herself? She lighted another cigarette and settled her foot against the fender. She was thinking of Jim's face as he had listened to her talk about Diana.

The fire burned gray. A line of "dead soldiers," as the boys at Battle Creek had called the half-burned cigarettes, lay on the hearthstone—a tribute to the length of her reverie. Another expression of the boys at home came back forcibly to her as she left the room and crossed to her bedchamber. After all, she had been "dead game." Gain or loss, she did not regret her evening's work.

As Jim walked along Piccadilly, he knew that Henry's *liaisons* were now town-talk. It was useless to close his eyes to the suspicions of the past month.

Sadie Jones represented the world's opinion, and what she tried to warn him about would soon be brutally brought to Diana's knowledge. At the club he could find no news of Henry. All night he thought out the question of the wisdom of his approaching Henry, but the strength of his determination only grew as the gray of the dawn increased.

The following morning he called at Pont Street. He found Henry lingering over some breakfast. A brandy-glass and empty soda-bottle aroused Jim's suspicions, while the bloated circles under Henry's eyes, and his yellow, discolored skin, were unmistakable proofs of a recent debauch. As Jim entered, Henry looked up with surprise.

"Didn't expect you back so soon," he said, after their strained greetings. Henry seemed ill at ease. "Anything up?" he went on, as Jim didn't speak.

There was a moment's portentous silence.

"Henry," Jim began, very calmly, "I've got to speak to you about certain matters."

Henry, who had been shifting about in his chair, became motionless. His clinched hands strained purple as he grasped the chair rail.

"About the—Yeomanry—work?" he half stammered while his eyes furtively sought Jim's face.

But Jim, who was thinking only of Diana and the difficulty of alluding to Henry's recent conduct, failed to notice his faltering words and frightened expression.

"Oh no—no," he answered. "That's going on all right, I hear." He hesitated. Then with a quick breath he said, "It's no use. I've got to blurt out what's troubling me. All the town is talking about your life; its flagrance, its indecencies. Do you realize that it will soon reach Diana, and that Lady Elizabeth is quivering under the strain of a certain amount of knowledge which she is hiding, and is dreading further disclosures?"

As Jim spoke he seemed to gain courage. "Don't speak. Let me have my say," he quietly commanded as Henry rose and attempted a blustering manner. "I am the only man close to Lady Elizabeth and Diana. For Sir Charles to become aware of this scandalous condition of affairs would be disastrous. You know that perfectly. Now tell me, in God's name, why you married Di if you wished to lead this life?" He paused. "Can't you pull yourself together? It's not too late. So far nothing definite is known to either Di or Lady Elizabeth, and you may trust me." He rose and crossed to Henry. "It's all true, I suppose—what I'm accusing you of—isn't it?" There was no answer. He laid his hand on Henry's shoulder. "Tell me that it's over and that you mean to go straight."

Henry turned. All his rebellion seemed to have slipped from him. Suddenly he dropped into a chair and buried his head in his hands.

"I'm not fit—not fit, do you hear?—for Di. I married her because I loved her. Yes, I did. But you don't know what it is to fight daily the devil's desire. God! what do you know about it? I am in the meshes. I have sunk lower and lower. You want to know about this woman the world links with my disgrace. Well, I tried to break with her when I married Di—I swear I did—but I can't. She is like a dog that one has grown attached to—you can't fling it out of your life completely. There has always been a wall between Diana and me. I tried in the beginning to reach her, but she's afraid of me—I know it."

As the torrent of words choked him, he stopped with a quick passion of agony. He was sincere in this confession of his weakness; Jim could not doubt him, though he was astonished at the admission. He had expected Henry to assail him with hard words and insolent denials. The acknowledged truth was sickening. Henry mechanically took some brandy; he seemed a vibrating bundle of torments.

Jim watched him closely. "I don't want to preach, Henry," he said, "but when you stop that,"—he pointed to the half-empty flask—"you'll have half conquered yourself, and the rest will be far easier. This drinking will pull you into days of horror, days that would mean desolation to us all."

He hesitated. Henry crossed to the chimney and leaned against it with his back to Jim.

"There is every chance for you," continued Jim. "In three months you can have regained your place with Di, and think—think what it would mean to your mother."

Henry did not move; his head was resting on his outstretched arms, lying across the mantel edge. The broken figure of Henry touched Jim deeply. "It's all right, old man. We'll forget this. Forgive my frankness, but, after all, your interests are mine; your mother and your home were mine, and Di—was like a little sister, so I had to speak. I'll not say another word. I'm off." And almost before Henry could realize it, Jim had left him—left him with the dull burning in his heart and brain.

So Jim knew. It had been a relief to acknowledge his pent-up remorse, but he was more deeply involved than his cousin suspected. Jim knew but half; the other half, with its awful, dreaded discovery, walked ever beside him. He made a sudden rush to the door as though to recall Jim, to unburden himself and be saved, but the momentary impulse died. He stumbled heavily into a chair; it was useless. He alone could save the situation, and the half that Jim knew would be bitter enough to face in his daily companionship with him.

August came with its heather-clad hills, but England rejoiced less than usual in the beauty of the great flower-garden which the entire country-side resembled. Over it all hung the tragic symbol of war. The call of Africa for men had

been appalling. In the park of the Towers a detachment of Yeomanry were encamped for a fortnight's training, and the restful beauty of the place for days had been broken by the firing manoeuvres of the men. To-night all was quiet, with only the sounds from the men in their tents faintly reaching the Towers. Henry was giving a dinner to the officers in command and coffee was being served in the garden. A flaming border of evening primroses were opening their yellow, cuplike blossoms, In the distance a boy's clear voice was singing:

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy Atkins, you're a good 'un, 'eart and 'and,
You're a credit to your country and to all your native land."

Lady Elizabeth had gathered a house-party to see the afternoon's manoeuvres and to remain for the dinner. The Bishop leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over his apron; his short, lean legs were stretched out comfortably—the Kerhills knew how to entertain the Church, he was convinced. Near him sat Sir John Applegate and Mrs. Chichester Chichester Jones. Close to a great bed of white pansies, with scarlet standard roses gleaming like sentinels over the delicate white blossoms, were Mabel, Diana, and Mr. Chiswick, the young ascetic curate. Henry, who was standing near Lady Elizabeth, kept his eyes moodily on the ground. Sir Charles, with a heavy shawl wrapped around him, was stretched out in a long basket-chair. The air was so still that the moving of a bird in its nest or the rustling of a leaf disturbed its silence.

"God bless you, Tommy Atkins—
Here's a country's 'ealth to you."

The voice ceased.

Sir John had been telling a story to Mrs. Jones of the mule who drew a pension from the American government.

"Heard that story in America. Rather good, eh, Mrs. Hobart Chi—" ignominiously he stood stricken by the American name. The Bishop, seeing his bewilderment turned quickly and whispered the dreadful cognomen. As Sir John finished the broken sentence there was a quiet laugh.

Henry leaned over his mother. "Mater," he said, "Don't you think that Mrs. Hobart Chichester Chichester Jones would make a ripping match for Jim? I wish you'd try and make an opportunity to help it along."

As he spoke he already saw the gold from the Battle Creek mines pouring into the coffers of the house of Kerhill. Lady Elizabeth looked up with sudden

comprehension. The American was charming; her look reassured Henry.

"Most assuredly. I'll do what I can."

From the drawing-room came the sound of music. An impromptu dance had been arranged by Diana for the young people, who were beginning to arrive. At a message from Bates she quietly went towards the open casement to meet her guests. Henry followed.

As the others started to follow, Sir John and the Bishop held a whispered consultation. Then the Bishop, bursting with importance, turned to Sir John and said:

"Shall we take the ladies into our confidence, Sir John?"

"By all means, Bishop; yes, do."

Mabel and Mrs. Jones joined in the supplication.

"Kerhill's brother officers," the Bishop began, "have purchased a very beautiful loving-cup in appreciation of his work for the fund, which we have arranged to present to-morrow afternoon to the Earl."

"Oh, how charming, and what a delightful surprise!" Lady Elizabeth said. These moments of joy in Henry were rare events in her existence.

"But," said Sadie Jones, "isn't Captain James Wynnegate to get a loving-cup, too?"

Sir John answered, "Oh, he's only the secretary of the fund."

The waltz tune, with its enticing beat, grew louder and louder, and soon the garden was deserted by all save Sir Charles, who remained there absorbed in his thoughts.

Diana, having seen her guests dancing, and fearful that her father might remain too long in the garden, hurriedly returned to him. She stood in the open window and tenderly watched the closely wrapped figure. The moonlight intensified his pallor; it had been an event that he should come to them that night. She saw him smile.

"Well, father," she said, "are you having a happy time?"

He rose and drew her close to him. "My dear child, I can't tell you how much this has pleased me. It is a great joy to me to know that my daughter is married to the distinguished head of one of our great families, a man so loved, so honored—a pillar of society, and a bulwark of the empire."

Never for a moment had he suspected the misery of Diana's marriage. Not a quiver of emotion showed on her calm face as she drew her arm into his and said, quietly, "Yes, father."

"I haven't forgotten your opposition to this match," but Charles continued, "although I dare say you have, my dear, and I am naturally pleased that events have vindicated me. Your husband cuts a noble figure in the world, and I am grateful beyond words to see you so happy."

As Diana gradually led Sir Charles from his seat to the house, she again answered, "Yes, father."

During the past months her life had grown more dreary. If it had not been for Jim—dear Jim—what would she have done? Her fragrant mind had never been disloyal to Henry. Often she had longed to go to her father, but her solicitude for him prevented her from bringing disaster to him. As they reached the door Lady Elizabeth called:

"Have you seen Jim, Diana?"

Jim had been down in the park doing some service for a sick trooper; Diana explained this to Lady Elizabeth. He had promised to return in time for the dancing.

"By-the-way, my dear," Lady Elizabeth began, "if you get an opportunity, I wish you would say a judicious word in praise of Mrs. Hobart Chichester Chichester Jones. Jim, you know, sets such an extraordinary value on your opinion."

A quick feeling of dislike filled Diana—why, she could not explain.

"What do you wish me to do?" she said. "Praise her American accent or her American money?" Before she had finished the sentence she was ashamed. She really liked Sadie Jones; the sneer had been unworthy. She was about to retract her words when Jim hurriedly came up the garden-walk. As she entered the library with Sir Charles he called:

"Don't forget our waltz, Diana."

"I won't, Jim."

Lady Elizabeth sank on to the stone bench. She watched Jim, whose eyes were still following Diana's receding figure. This was the moment in which she might serve Henry. In the music-room Sadie Jones was singing:

"Tout lasse, tout passé—"

Jim began humming the tune; he crossed to Lady Elizabeth and lightly put his arm about her as he said:

"Well, Auntie mine?"

CHAPTER VIII

Lady Elizabeth watched Jim with curiosity. The voice from the drawing-room grew louder:

"Tout casse, tout passé—"

deeper grew Jim's voice as he softly sang the refrain. Quite abruptly Lady Elizabeth began:

"She's a fine woman, Jim."

As she spoke, Jim caught sight of Diana crossing to the piano in smiling approbation as the song ceased, and answered:

"Diana?"

"Diana! Nonsense!" Again she watched Jim's face, but its grave serenity gave no sign. "I mean Mrs. Hobart Chichester Chichester Jones. She's quite the type that men admire, is she not?"

"That's the most offensive thing that one woman can say about another," Jim laughingly replied, as he turned from watching the group in the music-room—"isn't it, Auntie?"

"Not at all." Lady Elizabeth fidgeted; he was making it exceedingly difficult, she thought, as he leaned over her, his laughing eyes teasing her. "The sensible view of things never appeals to you, Jim; so I have hesitated to remind you that Sadie Jones is exceedingly rich."

"Did you notice how deferential I was, Aunt?" Jim lightly interrupted. "Why, if you tell me more, I shall scarcely dare to speak to her."

He drew Lady Elizabeth's arm through his; he knew what was coming. It amused him, and it also irritated him a little, but he felt very tender towards his aunt. All the boyish hurt had been forgotten. Her great endurance of Henry's conduct, her indomitable resolution to keep him well placed in the eyes of men, deeply touched him. After all, in her devotion to Henry there was a magnificent capacity for self-surrender. During the past winter Jim had grown strangely attached to his aunt, and a great pity for the inevitable tragedy of her life lay deep in his thoughts of the proud old woman. He patted her hand caressingly.

With almost a note of despair she said, "And I invited her here for this visit especially for you, Jim."

"Do you think she would care to add to her already abundant collection of names?"

He would not be serious, but Lady Elizabeth took up his question literally.

"I think she would be very glad to ally herself with one of the great families of England. Besides," she continued, as there was no reply, "such a marriage would put you in a position to be of great service to Henry and the family."

Jim distinctly saw Henry's purpose in this appeal. It sickened him—this

cold, devilish selfishness that made his cousin use all things as a means to further his own ends. His spirit rose in revolt against his aunt, who, he now saw, was seriously asking so grave a sacrifice of him. How lightly they played with human destinies! Then he conquered his sudden passion. He spoke in a tone of affectionate banter.

"You dear Aunt—Henry and the family are among the earliest of my recollections. I was taught Henry and the family before my letters. If I found a stray dog, or made a toy, I was forced to hand it over to Henry. Why, I remember I gave up a brilliant offer to enter commercial life—far better suited to my small fortune than an army career—because it would not lend dignity to Henry and the family." The hard tone he was struggling to keep down crept into his voice. "The woman I marry will have a right to expect more of me than a profound respect for her money and a laudable desire to promote Henry and the family."

Lady Elizabeth perceived the suppressed irritation, and was for a moment touched by Jim's reproaches.

"One must pay something for the glory and privilege of belonging to a great family."

"Don't you think we pay too great a price, dear Aunt?"

"I have never shirked the sacrifices."

The worn, tremulous face looked up at Jim with eyes that were unconscious confessors of the bitter struggle her life had been. He leaned towards her and gently took her hand.

"No, dear Aunt, you haven't. You deny yourself everything. Don't you think I can see that? You stint yourself to the point of shabbiness: why, your wardrobe is positively pitiful! And Mabel—the child has had no proper education, no advantages; she has never been anywhere, nor seen anything, nor had anything—Henry needed the money."

"We have been as generous to you and Mabel as we could, Jim. We must keep up the dignity and position of the head of the family." Like a war-horse sniffing the powder of battle-fields, at the words "family" and "dignity of its head," Lady Elizabeth's courage rose. In the moonlight Jim could plainly see the determined look grow on her face until it formed granite-like lines. The fox might eat her vitals, but she would not whimper. The torch of the family was the light of her declining years, as it had been of her youth. It was useless to argue further, Jim told himself. The music sounded a new dance. It was an opportune moment to escape.

"You've been a dear—I'm not complaining, only I don't think we have the right to sacrifice an amiable lady on the altar of our obligations." He drew his aunt towards him and leaned over the seat. "Besides, I have no desire to marry at present, so we won't speak of this again, will we?" As he spoke he kissed her

on the forehead. "God bless you! And now I must be off to help Di with the dancing."

Lady Elizabeth rose. It was impossible to resist his tender charm, but his evident indifference to her wishes vexed her. He crossed to the casement and Lady Elizabeth called:

"There's an occasional streak of stubbornness in you, Jim."

He smilingly called back. "I think it runs in the family, doesn't it, Aunt?"

As he went into the house, he passed Henry and several of the men busily discussing the condition of the Yeomanry, and the Relief Fund that was doing such excellent work. Here Henry proved himself of worth—of his interest in the work there could be no doubt.

As Lady Elizabeth stood alone in the garden, she was conscious that her recent interviews with Jim had been most unsatisfactory. He had a way of not taking the traditions of her life seriously; he discussed and dismissed them lightly. She knew that Henry would be annoyed at Jim's indifference to this fortune within his grasp, and she suspected that there was a cause unknown to her for Henry's nervous and upset condition.

She had no inclination to return to the dance; instead, she crossed to the seat under the great oak-tree, and drew her lace scarf close about her. The garden was quite empty. In the distance the yew-trees, like a line of ghostly, fantastic figures, seemed pregnant with sinister forebodings. She shivered; it was growing slightly cold. She could hear the dancers, and from the card-players in the house came sounds of more life and mirth. Her recent desire to be alone deserted her—the living warmth of the life of the crowds within her reach attracted her. The sadness of the moaning wind in the trees she could dispel by returning to her guests—she would do so and assist Diana in her duties. As she started to leave the rose enclosure, Henry with Sir John came through the open casement.

She noticed the strained look on Henry's face as he said, "No, no, I haven't done it yet. But we'll prepare a statement in good time—leave it to me. I'm getting tired of the word Fund—the demands of the work have been so incessant."

They reached Lady Elizabeth. Henry's look quickly told her that he wished to be alone. She came to his assistance as she said:

"Don't you believe him, Sir John. He really thinks of nothing else. But won't you join the dancers? I'm sure Diana will need you."

Henry quickly added, "Do, and forget the Fund for a moment." As Sir John disappeared he muttered, "And let *me* forget it."

Lady Elizabeth heard the last words and wondered. The ugly horns on his brows showed the irritable state of his mind.

"Well," he quietly said, "what did Jim say to the American widow? It isn't often that a man without a title gets a chance like that." There was a moment's si-

lence. Lady Elizabeth would have preferred to have this conversation at another time; her mind was anxious about Henry's recent words—what did they forebode? But Henry settled himself in a big chair, and she saw that he was anxious to learn the result of her interview with Jim.

"He declines positively," she answered.

Then the passion he had been fighting to keep under broke loose. He rose and began pacing the walk.

"Not an atom of consideration for me—eh? In the hopeless struggle I make to live up to the traditions of my race?" Henry could always work himself up into a great burst of self-pity.

"Jim is an anarchist in his talk, but an angel at heart. He always ends by doing the right thing."

This defence of Jim caused Henry to stop in his walk. That his mother should advocate the goodness of Jim was a new victory for his cousin.

"Jim likes to play the saint, confound him," he barked, "but waking or sleeping, he never takes off his halo."

Lady Elizabeth crossed to him. "He says he has no desire to marry at present."

"That's the sickly sentimental pose of the man who loves a woman beyond his reach," Henry answered.

Like a flame of illumination the innuendo of his words brought their meaning to Lady Elizabeth. She remembered so much and yet so little in Jim's actions of late, but all tended towards a horrible suspicion. She could still see Jim's face as he watched Diana earlier in the evening. It was not the face of a lover in the usual sense. It was a face glorified by an unconscious devotion to a great ideal. All she could stammer was:

"You mean—"

But Henry, who had blurted out in a heat of temper more than he felt he had reason for, tried to ignore the question and the look of sudden bewilderment in her eyes. He moved restlessly in his chair as he said:

"Never mind, mother; it doesn't matter."

But Lady Elizabeth went to him, and, with her arms about him, whispered, "My son, you are nervous, pale, distrait. You have been so for some time. I haven't spoken of it for fear of annoying you, but others are beginning to speak of it. What is it?" She drew his head back until it rested against her breast. "Can't you trust your mother?"

Instead of a restive withdrawal from her embrace, he let her soothe his head with her half-trembling hands. Why not tell her what he suspected?

"Have you seen Jim and Diana much together?"

"Not more than always," was her reassuring reply.

"But, mother, have you observed them when they are together?"

Lady Elizabeth slipped down on the seat beside him.

"My boy, your suspicions are morbid and unjust. You ought to be ashamed of them," she gently urged. In her heart she feared for him and his happiness with Diana. She had seen the girl gradually sicken and turn away from her life with Henry. Great provocation, she knew, had been given Diana, but at present it was wiser not to discuss this with him, but to calm him.

Suddenly he leaned forward and buried his face on his arms.

"Mother, I love Diana. I have my faults, but that is the best of me. I love her desperately. Oh, I know you're going to say that at times I haven't proved by my actions that I cared for her, but it's because I knew from the beginning that I never could reach her. Does she love me? No, I can't deceive myself. She was devilled into marrying me for the damned title. I know that now. The best I can hope for is that she should not utterly despise me, and I want a chance to win her love—my God, how I want it! Everything that Jim does pleases her. She admires him; I can see it clearly." He paused as the whirlwind of words swept from him; he rose, and towered over his mother. "That admiration belongs to me. You've spoiled me, mother. I've always had what I wanted, and now I'm the victim of it. I'm the selfish monster that takes everything while St. James stands modestly in the background. Oh, don't you see you have made him her hero, not me?"

He began to move restlessly about the rose paths, Lady Elizabeth following. Indulgently she linked her arm through his. Although a fear was beginning to persuade her of the truth of his wild words, still, she argued, he greatly exaggerated. That he cared so deeply for Diana promised well for the future, and, with her aid, Diana would soon be convinced of Henry's worthiness.

"My dear boy," she said, "is that all you have to worry over?"

"No, mother, no—I wish to God it were."

She caught hold of him almost savagely, "Ah—" she gasped. Then the apprehensions that had torn her for days had been justified. She feared to question further. An overwhelming dread held her in its torturing grip. Henry started as though to leave her; his face was averted, she turned him towards her.

"Money again?" she asked.

"You know what the demands on me are. I couldn't disgrace my family by going into bankruptcy, and I had to have money. Well—I was foolish enough to borrow—"

Lady Elizabeth knew instinctively the words that would follow. Her hands clinched his arm so tight that he shrank under the pressure.

"Borrow, mind," he continued, "some of the Fund's money."

"The Relief Fund? Oh, Henry—"

The despair and horror of her tone caused him to put his arms protectingly

about her. Even in his own blind fury at fate he could see her shrink from her stately strength into a feeble old woman. He tried to reassure her.

"Oh. it's really all right, mater. I'll be able to replace it.

"How?"

She clung to his arm. He could hear the quadrille's last quarters beginning; it would be impossible to continue this conversation much longer.

"You wouldn't understand, mother. You see, it's a stock transaction, but it's all right—bound to be. Hobbes, of Simpson & Hobbes, you know, gave me the tip. It was absolutely inside information."

Lady Elizabeth loosened her hold, and with a hopeless gesture moved away. Henry read her lack of faith in the enterprise.

"Oh, I took the trouble to verify it." He did not admit, however, that he had sought Petrie's advice only after the plunge, when the waiting had grown too fearful. "I'm expecting a telegram to-night—that's the reason I'm nervous. But I'll have enough to put back the sum I've borrowed, and a nice little fortune besides. Don't you worry." But even as he spoke the comforting words he seemed to lose the confidence which he was vainly trying to assume. The telegram should have arrived in the afternoon. He knew that Petrie, if his investigation had been at all hopeful, would have sent a reassuring word. Then, that the strength of his mother, upon which he had so often leaned, should crumble away as he confessed to her, that he should be forced to carry her anxieties instead of receiving her support, terrified him with its significance.

It was all quite palpable to Lady Elizabeth. His drawn face with eyes like burned-out flames showed how the fever of unrest and fear consumed him.

"Henry, you are trying to reassure yourself, not me," she said.

"No, no, mother, it isn't that." But it was useless, he could no longer play a part. "Yes, you're right," he acknowledged as he threw himself down on the great stone bench. "My God, the consequences!—the consequences!"

And Lady Elizabeth stood dumb and helpless. For the first time he held out his hands to her, and she was unable to grasp them in support. She could offer no respite to the torture of suspense he endured.

As they stood in silence, Diana came from the pergola, "Dear people, are you moon-struck? Our guests are missing you."

With an effort Lady Elizabeth turned, "Is the dance over?" she said.

Henry's words followed close: "Have we been gone very long?"

"Oh no—but you see they have stopped bridge, and the men want to talk to you about the Fund. They are all so proud of our extraordinary result. They want a statement published so that they can gloat over the envy of the other regiments.

"Published—a statement!" but Diana, who was bending over some roses, hardly noticed the strained speech, and Lady Elizabeth motioned him to restrain

his agitation.

"First, I believe," Diana continued as she seated herself, "there is a committee or somebody to go over the accounts and what do they call it—?"

"Audit them," Henry found himself mechanically saying.

"Yes, that's it. They want to know when it will be convenient to-morrow for you, Henry."

Quite vaguely he said, "Oh yes—for me."

In his work for the Yeomanry and his characteristic British loyalty to his men, Diana found one great virtue to be proud of in Henry. She realized this as she heard the men discussing his efforts. For several days a growing feeling of pity for his misspent life had taken hold of her as she saw what he really could do when he willed.

"You are a great man with the Tenth, Henry," she said. "To hear them talk, one would think you carried the regiment in your pocket. And the dear mother there—to see her listen to your praises! Oh, well, it's very beautiful—you both had better go and glory in some more. The taste for adulation will grow insatiable after this—won't it?" As she spoke she lifted her long, slender hands and fastened them across her brows. Henry came to her. She was very beautiful; an unusual pallor gave her face a delicate spirituality. In the dim light her soft white draperies, the fluttering scarf ends, and the wreath of green leaves made her seem half a sprite.

"Won't you return with us, Di?"

"No—I have a headache. I'll stay here in the air for a few moments."

As she spoke, Jim came towards them.

"The next is our dance, Diana. Will you come?"

Henry answered for her with unmistakable sarcasm.

"Perhaps Jim will stay with you, Di, as you have a headache."

And Jim innocently replied, "With pleasure; I've really been doing duty quite assiduously in the way of dancing."

He crossed to Diana's side. Lady Elizabeth, who had been trying to divert an awkward moment, drew her arm through Henry's. Henry looked at his mother's face, which grew tender as her eyes rested on him.

"I'm afraid my wife does not share your pleasure in my praises, mater."

"Oh yes," Diana answered, "but you must not expect a wife to have the illusions of a mother." It was lightly said, to cover up an apparent effort on Henry's part to cause an embarrassing moment.

Lady Elizabeth took up the cue. She glanced from Jim to Diana, but they were beginning to talk; she almost drew Henry forcibly away as she said with forced gayety, "No—no one can love you as your mother does, dear."

She little knew the prophetic truth of her words or to what length her

mother-love would lead her before another day had passed at the Towers.

CHAPTER IX

These moments of respite from the dancing were peaceful, Diana thought, as Jim drew a chair forward and seated himself beside her. She was strangely unsettled to-night. Her head ached slightly, it was true, but she was conscious that ever since Lady Elizabeth's remark concerning Jim and Sadie Jones, a curious irritation had possessed her. She didn't stop to reason it out, but plunged at once into the heart of the matter.

"I congratulate you, Jim."

"On what?"

"Your brilliant prospects."

"We've never met—shouldn't know them if I saw them."

So Diana knew too of the scheme to secure a fortune for the house of Kerhill. Jim was curious to learn her point of view. There was a new touch of bitterness in Diana's voice that puzzled him.

"Don't let them beat you down in the price, Jim. If you sell your sweet young life, let it be at a good round figure, for our sakes." The scornful mirth of her last words was unmistakable.

"I shall always be a joke to you, Diana."

"Well, if our whole social fabric isn't a joke," Di interrupted, "pray, what is it?"

"I don't belong to the social fabric. I'm an outsider."

Again she feverishly interrupted.

"Oh, you can't escape. You are up on the block. Look your best, and try to bring a fancy price. We have always sold our women, and now we have taken to selling our men."

For a moment he wondered if she, too, approved of the fortune hunt.

"Are you in the Chichester Jones conspiracy, too?" he asked.

"Certainly," the answer came, but with it a look that plainly contradicted the words. She was in wild spirits, he could see; he let her run on. "You are a monster of selfish obstinacy, Jim. Your inability to grasp your own best interests and ours—is a proof of a feeble intellect—and a wicked heart."

Gayly he entered into her mood. "Well, Diana," he said, "I'm an amiable

brute. If you insist upon it, perhaps—"

"Good," she cut in quickly as she jumped up on the seat and clung to an overhanging bough. "Let me be the auctioneer; I'll get you a good price." Blithely assuming the voice and manner of a professional auctioneer, she began: "Step up, ladies—step up, ladies. Please examine this first-class specimen of the British aristocracy. He is kind and gentle, sound in mind and limb; will travel well in double harness—has blue ribbons and medals, and a pedigree longer than your purses. He's for sale; how much am I bid—"

Jim, who laughingly followed her words, interrupted in mock seriousness:

"One moment before you knock me down. Have you considered the existence of the American Peril? These Yankees are driving the English girls out of the home market. I believe in protection for the home product by an *ad valorem* tax on the raw material and exclusion for the finished product—in the shape of widows. I'm a patriot. God bless our English commerce—homes, I mean."

Jim's burst of nonsense was finished by a "Hear, hear" from Diana. Then their laughter rang out merrily. Diana clung to the swaying branch; Jim, below her, like Henry, noticed the ethereal quality of her beauty that night. She put out her hands to him.

"Please," she said, and he helped her down. Their light-heartedness seemed to desert them. Mechanically he kept her hand in his, held spellbound by her gracious charm. Diana withdrew her hand as she said, "Jim, you're a boy and you'll never grow up." Then, because she wished him to reassure her of his distaste for the proposed marriage, she said, "Sadie Jones is the chance of a lifetime and you'll miss it."

Jim only half heard her words. He was conscious of a strange dread of remaining longer alone with her.

"How do you know I will?" he said.

All her tender faith and belief in him was in her answer: "Oh, Jim, I know you."

Did she though? Did he know himself? What was this wild new feeling of fear, of sweet, elusive pain? His words gave no sign of the tumult of his thoughts.

"Do you? Well, you couldn't do me a greater service than to make me know myself. Fire at will."

Diana, too, was conscious of a strange undercurrent to their lighter talk. She was aware of Jim's searching glances, but, like him, she gave no sign of the vague uneasiness that would not be stilled.

"Shall I, really?" she questioned.

Jim nodded.

"Remember, you've brought it on yourself." She seated herself close to the sundial, and half leaned against it. Jim was facing her. "Well, to begin with, you

will never wholly succeed in life."

"Dear me, I meant surgery, not butchery, Di."

She paid no heed to the interruption. "You are not spiritual enough to create your own world, and you are too idealistic to be happy in this frankly material world. You have temperament and sentiment; they are fatal in a practical age." She paused; there was no denial from Jim. As she waited for him to speak, her eyes rested on the decorations glittering on his coat. "Your breast is covered with medals for personal courage, but you could never be a great general."

He almost stopped her with a reminder of the days on the Northwestern Hills, but a certain truth in all that she said kept him silent. His memory went back to the hours in which he had fought—even at the sacrifice of himself—to save his men. He heard her say:

"You could never sink your point of view to the demands of necessary horrors. Confronted with the alternative of suffering, or causing suffering, you would suffer." She rose, and, as though peering into the future, said, "You are marked for the sacrifice."

Her face shone as though illumined by a clairvoyant power of spiritual insight. She seemed to have forgotten the present and stared straight ahead, trying to see into the heavy mists that enveloped the coming years. Jim made an effort to relax the nervous tension of the moment.

"What a rosy, alluring picture! A failure at everything I touch, eh? Have I one redeeming virtue?"

But although the voice that spoke was light with raillery he was possessed by an uncontrollable agitation. She stood with a haunted look of such intensity on her face that he became conscious only of an infinite desire to protect her. As he came close to her she was thrilled by the vibrating sympathy that drew them together, and raised her eyes to his. The strong, tender face of Jim, to which she had so often turned in her days of unspoken despair, gave her the comprehension and sympathy that were denied her by another. She thought of the expression of Sadie Jones's eyes as she sang:

"Tout passé, tout lasse."

Diana knew that she had been sending her song out into the night as a message to Jim in the garden. She thought of the unacknowledged sense of comfort that Lady Elizabeth experienced when Jim came to visit them. Without him, what would the days be? She shuddered at the desolation it might mean to be without this reliant, forceful friend. As it all flashed through her mind, she said:

"You have one triumphant quality, Jim. Whether it will add to your sum of suffering or compensate for all the rest, who knows? You have one inevitable

success."

She paused, but the rustling of the tree-tops prevented either of them from hearing Henry as he came from the pergola. Diana moved a step nearer to Jim—Henry did not make known his presence. Quite simply and sincerely she said:

"You will always have the love of women, Jim."

Something snapped in Jim's brain. He stood hypnotized by a stronger force than his own will; he could not speak. Henry's voice sounded like the cracked clang of a jarring bell in a golden silence.

"That's a dangerous gift, Jim. Professional heart-breakers ought not to be allowed in other people's preserves."

Henry spoke quietly, but he was consumed by a mad, unreasoning fury. Diana simply said, "Oh, I was just trying to tease Jim about Sadie Jones."

Jim started towards the house, intending to leave Di with Henry. "Teasing—a ruthless grilling, I call it. I've been vivisected, Henry; it's not a pleasant experience, believe me."

But Henry, who was looking from Diana to Jim, with unmistakable meaning, said, "You stopped at an interesting—perhaps a critical—moment, Diana. I suppose I ought to beg your pardon. Where lovers are involved, the husband is an intrusion, almost an impertinence."

Jim turned and retraced his steps. Diana did not move. Their eyes were fastened on Henry's face, now flaming with passion. All Diana's womanhood was battling within her; her face grew tense, her eyes like black pansies. She seemed unconscious of Jim's presence; all her being was concentrated in the challenge of her eyes as she let them strike back her answer.

"You are making a grave mistake, Henry. One that you will regret as long as you live."

She could say no more; she wished to escape. Why didn't Jim speak? She could hardly see him. An overwhelming desire to leave both men before the sinking trembling of her body should overpower the strength of her will, enabled her to reach the house.

The men were alone; both had watched Diana gain the doorway. Neither seemed capable of helping her. Jim was the first to move; he came towards Henry with a quick, resolute step. Suddenly he became conscious of a new knowledge that checked his speech. He could only stare at Henry, while the wild beating of his heart tormented him. Much had been revealed to him regarding his feeling for Diana, during the past hour. Henry was watching him furtively.

"And now, sir," he began, "I will listen to you. You have had time to think up a plausible explanation."

For Diana and his aunt's sake he must be calm, so Jim only answered, "I would not insult you or Diana by offering one."

The quiet scorn of Jim's apparent indifference maddened Henry.

"Oh, indeed!" He drew a chair forward. "Sit down and confront the truth," he said, as he sat on the bench opposite. He was trembling violently. Jim still maintained his composure. Henry's clinched hand struck the table as he sneeringly exclaimed: "You owe everything you are to me."

With the bitter knowledge of how much he had sacrificed for the family, quick came Jim's reply:

"You mean everything I am not."

But Henry did not notice the truth of Jim's words. Ever since his boyhood, when he had first abused his power as master of the Towers, he had been irritated by the opposing point of view of his cousin—had rebelled at Jim's success in making a place for himself in the world without his help.

"You have lived in my house," he said, "enjoyed my bounty, and now—damn you—"

"Don't say it—don't!"

Jim's words hit at Henry across the table like points of forked lightning. All the pent-up feeling of years seemed concentrated in the utterance. He was leaning far across the table, his face twitching with disgust at Henry's suspicions. Like Diana he sickened at the thought that Henry could believe him capable of playing so degrading a part in Diana's life.

"Don't," he continued, "or I'll forget myself—forget the respect we owe her—" Even as he spoke he knew that Diana was the supreme concern of his life. That he loved her, he now realized; all the misery that might ensue was engulfed in the supreme surrender he made to his love, the love that unconsciously for the past months had become part of his life. But with this knowledge came clearly the injustice that Diana and he were being subjected to, by a mind that could not conceive of the purity of her friendship. "You—why, you—" he began again, then with difficulty controlled himself.

It was impossible to continue this conversation further; any moment they might be interrupted. He could not determine the course of his future at the moment, but he could save her the discovery of his secret—he could save her further humiliation from Henry.

"Henry, you must have been drinking. Go to Diana at once, before she realizes what you said, before it is too late. Go and make your peace with her for this outrage against her." While he spoke he was trying to escape from the knowledge the night had brought. He watched Henry, who in a dogged tone said:

"It's too late now. It has always been too late—with me—and Di."

"Nonsense," Jim said.

Henry mumbled on as though he were only half aware of the words he was speaking.

"Unless you'd intercede for me? She'd listen to you."

Jim rose. To obtain peace and dismiss from Henry's mind all suspicion that might harm Diana was his one desire. But almost before he was on his feet, Henry sprang up and held Jim with both hands while he spluttered in frantic abandon:

"No, no—I couldn't trust you—I couldn't trust you."

With a quick movement Jim flung Henry off. It was useless to expect sanity from this trembling, fanatical creature. Without a word or look he left him, and Henry stood watching Jim's receding figure down the alley of trees.

"And now I've driven out of her life the only interest in it, and she will hate me for that, too."

There was only one thing for him to do—he must get to his own quarters and send some message of excuse to his mother. He turned into a side path. He could hear the dance music and the gayety of the groups scattered near the pergola. Diana was there. He could see her, pale but with perfect poise, assisting Lady Elizabeth. Even Jim was at Lady Elizabeth's side. He envied them their control; in his condition it would be folly for him to venture near them. As he turned towards the house he met Bates carrying a telegram.

"I've been looking for your lordship," he said. "The message came about half an hour ago."

He remembered Petrie ind the expected word as he tore open the wire. It read:

"Impossible to give any definite news. Still probing matter. Will be down tomorrow afternoon."

God!—and he had this to add to his night's vigil! Bates left him. He threw out his arms as he stumbled into a chair. He knew and admitted that he alone was responsible for it all. But he did not know that he had fanned to life the love that Diana and Jim now acknowledged to themselves for the first time. That night their fight for happiness began.

CHAPTER X

In the Towers four desperate souls fought their battle, and to none of them did the dawn bring comfort. In her room Lady Elizabeth sat motionless before her open window, and, like Agrippina, saw the long line of destruction that the child she had borne had brought to her and to her house. Shortly before the end of the evening's entertainment, she had received a message from Henry, begging to be excused, as a matter of great importance had arisen which prevented him from remaining with his guests.

Once she thought of venturing to go to him, as she listened to his restless pacing above her, but fear of his displeasure and a physical shrinking from a painful scene forced her to keep her watch alone. To-night's confession of his use of the Fund was the gravest of his many offences; she could not shake herself free of its grave consequences. Along with it came the memory of the faces of Jim and Diana as she had last seen them at midnight. The guests had departed; Diana was entering her own apartments, while from the landing Lady Elizabeth could see Jim below her as he started for the garden. Both their faces were stamped with a new, vital truth which, in its immensity, they seemed to find difficult to grasp. She recalled the wistful, inquiring expression of Diana's look as she turned to call her good-night to Jim. Even more vividly she recalled the answer of his eyes. The mute, unspoken thoughts that lay there were haunting her now with their tragic possibilities. A numb fear possessed her.

Above her, Henry's monotonous steps continued; her imagination began to play tricks with her. The steady tread above seemed to change into the tentative, faltering toddle of a baby boy; she remembered that the room over her was the old nursery, now used by Henry for his own apartment. How often she and his father had listened and rejoiced at the stumbling efforts which they could hear in the early morning! The terrible sympathy of a mother's sorrowing womb, that can reach the most poignant of all human anguish, caused her suddenly to start to her feet; a physical craving to hold again the tiny body firm against her own, and ease this suffering, overpowered her. She could hear the broken steps of the long ago; she could see only the naked, mottled body of the sturdy chap that she had so often clasped close and smothered with her kisses. She stretched out her arms as if in search of it. The longing to touch again the soft warm flesh of her own creation became intense, from her wildly beating heart to the tightly contracted throat there grew a spasm of pain that ended in a long, broken sob. She forgot all the years of suffering, the disappointments, and to-night's crowning tragedy of Henry's wilful treachery to her and his house.

She was the young mother again. The half shy, inquiring face of the babe with its tight corkscrew curls, as she had seen him first walk across the long nursery to fall into her arms at the open doorway, was all that she could remember. Other ghosts crowded into the room; the husband of her love-days—for

Elizabeth Kerhill had passionately loved her boy's father—stood, as he often had stood, close behind her at the nursery door and joyed with her at the beauty of its tiny occupant. The old wound, which nature mercifully in the passage of years had alleviated, again ached as it had in the first hours of her great sorrow at his death.

Suddenly the pacing above ceased. She became conscious of a terrible anxiety to know why; she feared the stillness; the steady beat had been an unconscious comfort. Her tired brain grew more fanciful. Did she imagine or did she really see the pale spectre of her husband at the farther end of the room beckoning her to follow him? He seemed to open the door into the corridor and disappear into the gloom. There was a slight movement from above, significant in its abruptness; it was as though a quick decision had been made by Henry. Down the corridor she fled, obeying a compelling instinct. The pale mist of the first streaks of dawn was struggling through the distant windows. She remembered a similar hurried rush to the nursery, when the tiny, twisted body was attacked with writhing convulsions. Quickly she sped along the hallway, around a twisted enclosure, and up the broad staircase until she reached the nursery. Without a pause she swung open the heavy oak door; then she knew why the warning had come to her.

At the creaking of the door, Henry started; he was unaware that it had remained unlocked. For a moment he stared at his mother as though she were an apparition. He was standing near the open drawer of a huge desk; the glint of fire-arms in it shone clear against the flicker of the spluttering candles. He made no attempt to move. His eyes were held by the figure at the door, but no words came from the moving lips of Lady Elizabeth. Instinctively, both their glances went to the open drawer with its certain means of death. Henry turned away; he tried to close the case. Through the silent room came the sobbed name of his childhood days.

"Ba-ba! Ba-ba!"

He felt her strong arms fasten tight around him; unresisting, he was gathered up close against the trembling body of his mother, as she drew him down into a big settle. He made no attempt to speak. He heard only the name of his babyhood in his mother's moans, as she pressed his tense face to hers, kissed the faunlike ears, while her hands strayed, as they used to do, over the long limbs that, relaxed, lay helpless against hers. The old nursery again held her treasure, and mechanically the tremulous lips fell to crooning a long-forgotten lullaby.

Gradually he slept with his head on her breast. Straight and stiff the early shadows found her, while the bitter tears furrowed her face, as she held her child, warm and alive, against her heart. During the long hours of her vigil she heard distinctly the crunching of footsteps on the gravel-walk outside as some one

passed and repassed the east wing. But she was little concerned with the world without.

Below, unconscious of the tragedy so close to him, Jim, whose step it was Lady Kerhill had heard on the gravel-path, fought through the long night for his right to happiness. His entire horizon seemed blocked by the unyielding figures of Lady Elizabeth and Henry; behind them, tantalizing him with the sweetness of the vision, he could see Diana's face illumined with its new light of wonder. The heavy dews, which gave to the old garden its fragrant, green, sweet odors, drenched him as he paced along the path under the giant trees. He was insensible to his wet clothes—to the tumbled hair which the dampness knotted about his head in kinky curls. The tangle of his thoughts proved too difficult for him to unravel; the night had been so charged with emotions that he could hardly look truthfully into his own heart. The hours passed as he paced restlessly, dazed and overwhelmed by the chaotic uprooting of all his being. Aimlessly he at last wandered towards the Fairies' Corner, and sought rest on the rudely fashioned seat, dented and marked with his boyish carvings. There he lay haunted by intangible dreams until, overcome by weariness, he crept close into his old corner and slept.

The strong orange shafts of sunrise were lighting up the hill-side opposite Diana's window as she stealthily crept down and let herself out of the silent house into the garden. The mounds close to the Towers were covered with great splashes of heather, while the moor beyond dipped and stretched far away like a trailing, purple, overblown, monster flower, which seemed, mushroom-like, to have sprung up during the night. Diana's first sight of the brilliant coloring that came every July to the heather-covered hill-side, brought now as always bitter memories of her first summer in Scotland, where as a young bride the illusions of her virgin mind and heart had been shattered by Henry.

She turned away from its flaunting beauty with a shudder. No memories of the past had been hers during the night; why should she allow the old pain and heartache to come back? She alone in the great house had given herself up to delicious reveries that tempted her; every thought of Henry, her father, and the ties that bound her, she ignored. She never questioned what had changed her since she had left Henry, outraged at his vile suspicions. Why probe into the cause of her happiness? Enough that she could rejoice, silently, if need be, without a reason acknowledged even to herself, for her joy. But the dawn brought with it only feverish longing to reach the cool of the hill-side, and now the blooming riot of purple tones had struck at her like a menacing ghost. She plunged into a

thicket, and, sinking knee-deep in its luxuriant growth, made her way across a yellow meadow. Finally she reached the copse of trees through which she could see the Elizabethan gables of the back of the house.

Oh, the beauty of the unstained day! Like every weary wayfarer exploring for the first time since childhood the fresh virgin country-side, her soul cried aloud its appreciation of this beauty of soft green, wet glistening flowers, crystal clear air, and what is utterly unknown save to the frequenters of the first hours of dawn in forests and glades, the ecstatic perfume of the early breezes. Across the hedges from their kingdom, the flower-garden, came these ripples of scented air, heavy with the breath of honeysuckle, rose, phlox, and heliotrope.

Like Jim, she unconsciously turned to the Fairies' Corner. As she reached the narrow aperture, and its wet earthy smell drowned the sweet, sensuous odors of the garden blossoms, she espied the sleeping figure on the old bench. At the unexpected discovery she gave an involuntary exclamation. Jim was lying on his back, with his head on his arm, all the wet stain of the night passed in the garden showing on his unchanged evening clothes, while the unkempt hair gave a curious boyishness to his face.

Diana waited for him to move, but her surprised ejaculation had failed to awaken him. How big and wonderful he was! The thick lashes swept his brown face with its dull touch of red showing under the olive skin. As she bent over him and was about to touch his hand to arouse him he opened his eyes.

He had been dreaming that he was in the hospital in the Hills after the fight, and in his delirium he was back at the Fairies' Corner with Diana—and there she stood looking at him, but his eyes seemed unable to grasp the reality of the moment.

"Jim, Jim," she said.

It was no dream. With a rush of memory it all came back to him. He quickly rose to his feet and came towards her, impelled by an uncontrollable force. Cobwebs of sunlight were making glinting spaces against the gray-and-green enclosure; a movement began in the tree-tops that brought back the childish reminiscence of the rustling fairy wings. He forgot everything. He only knew that she stood there like an essence of delight to ease his aching being. The still wonder of the evening before was again shining in her luminous face.

He lifted her hands to his shoulders, and held them fast there. To her awakening womanhood he seemed like a young god of nature, who had bathed in the primeval springs and had arisen glorified and overwhelming in his forcefulness. They stood speechless, their gaze fastened each on the other's face, while the moments slipped away. How long they stood there neither realized: the burning intensity of the moments told them more than any words could have conveyed. Both now knew the truth—it downed them with its unflinching eyes; they knew

that they were peering close into the core of life, that they had touched at the vital springs of the Great Game. Strong and incessant as the beat of the swaying tree-tops, the bitter knowledge was forced upon them that they could no longer, even to themselves, play a part. Their months of unconscious self-deception had that night been slain; each knew that love triumphant had come into his own.

From the camp in the park beyond came the sound of the bugle calling the men to their early morning duties. It roused Jim and Diana to the consciousness of the workaday world. Diana was the first to move; she slipped her hands away from his shoulders, while she still had the strength to do so. Jim silently started towards her, his eyes showing the surrender of his love. She could read all that they asked; her name broke from his lips in tender reiteration.

"Di, dear—dear Di!"

But this time the out-stretched hands waved him back.

"No, no!" she cried, and down the long copse she fled from him.

Alone, Jim realized that they had been on the edge of a great precipice. Gradually it came upon him that there was only one way to save himself—to save Diana; he must go away. When, how—it all mattered little—later he would decide that. He managed to reach his room unobserved. How could he face the day's responsibilities, he asked himself, as he heard rising from below the sounds of the life of the house, and knew that the duties of the camp were awaiting him.

Towards noon in his tent a letter was brought to him. It was from Diana. Trembling he tore it open and read:

"DEAR JIM—Our meeting this morning has revealed me to myself. If you can find it in your interest, I hope you will leave England. I cannot trust myself to say anything more but good-bye. DIANA."

"Revealed me to myself," he repeated. "Oh, Diana, Diana," he whispered.

Yes, he must go.

CHAPTER XI

"When Mr. Petrie comes, show him to me here," Henry gave orders to Bates.

It was late in the afternoon and he was alone in the rose enclosure—the library had proved too stifling. He had managed to attend the afternoon's drill, and discharge without comment the duties required of him by his guests. The Bishop and a great number of visitors were still in the park. Diana, on the plea of illness, had remained in her room, but had sent word that she would be down at tea-time. Absorbed in his own reflections Henry hardly observed that Jim was passing the entire day in camp with the troops. That the farce of the day's pleasure was nearly over, was his most comforting thought; a few hours more and the house-party would disperse. If only Petrie would come.

"No news, good news;" over and over he tried to comfort himself with the old saw.

Lady Elizabeth, if she had remembered, would have warned him of the intended presentation, but the night with its torturing memories had made her forget utterly the surprise arranged by the Bishop and Sir John.

Henry looked at his watch—it was past four. Would Petrie never come? He cursed the hour in which he had listened to the tempting voice that urged him to speculate in a mine controlled by Hobbes. He remembered the night he had finally agreed to enter into the game, and—then, a loss here and an unexpected blow there had disastrously crippled his resources.

Money had been necessary to protect the already invested fortune. The Fund was under his control—Why not use it temporarily? He used the word "borrow" to his mother, and he had tried for weeks to ease his mind with the same word, but he knew that the world had an ugly name for such "borrowing." Wherever he turned he could see five blazing letters—the flaming stigma was beginning to burn in his brain. Was there no way of protecting himself a little longer? He closed his eyes and tried to think.

No, it would be impossible to evade the request of the committee. To elude the young curate, Chiswick, had not been difficult. On the plea of his devotion to the cause, he had succeeded in controlling all the papers and accounts for the past week, but now—a cold perspiration began to ooze over his body; it was followed by hot flashes that tormented him like the five fantastic little demons ever before his vision, as they twisted, contorted, shaped, and reshaped themselves into one hideous imputation. An hour before, he had promised to give to his secretary the keys of his desk; to put off the auditing any longer would have aroused suspicion. His only hope now was that perhaps the absorbing interest in the last day of the manoeuvres would give him another twenty-four hours leeway. If Petrie brought reassuring news he might be able to realize the necessary amount and prevent discovery. He poured himself some brandy. Just as he raised the glass, Bates announced:

"Mr. Petrie, my lord."

The glass slipped to the ground; Bates stooped to remove the fragments. Johnston Petrie advanced with perfect composure and shook Henry's trembling hand.

"Your lordship," he said. Then both men waited until Bates disappeared towards his quarters. To Henry the moment seemed an eternity.

They were alone, and yet neither spoke. Through Petrie's mind ran a memory of having stood there long ago and conferred with the late Earl, while the man before him as a boy sat on his father's knee. He knew nothing of Henry's use of the Fund; he only knew that he was bringing news of a big loss to his client. Henry's face as he grasped Petrie to steady himself, told him something of the importance attached to his report.

"Well, Petrie, well? Speak—man. Don't you see you are killing me? Hobbes—what of Hobbes?"

Truthfully, Petrie answered: "Hobbes is a fugitive—the whole scheme was a gigantic swindle. Every penny invested is irremediably lost."

Almost before he had finished speaking, from the various side-paths leading towards them came the sound of voices. Henry made a staggering movement as though to escape towards the house, but his way was blocked by Sadie Jones, who had gone at the Bishop's request to fetch Diana. As Henry stared at the advancing groups he saw himself already convicted. What was the meaning of this unusual gathering of officers and men silently falling into lines behind the circle of friends who surrounded him? He supported himself by his chair. Petrie quickly realized the situation as he saw a sergeant approaching with an open case containing the gift of the big loving-cup. He tried to reach Henry, but Lady Elizabeth anticipated him. She had recalled too late the demonstration arranged to take place at tea-time. There was a moment's hush. A little way off the servants were gathering to witness the honor shown to their master, and the enclosure about Henry was quickly crowded.

Henry clung to his support. He could distinguish all the faces quite plainly, except Jim's. Where was Jim? Muffled, as though coming from a long distance, he heard the Bishop's voice:

"My lord, I am so overwhelmed with the significance of this delightful occasion and my own imperfections as a speaker, that I could have wished my task to have fallen into better hands. But when I was approached in the sacred name of charity and of that noble cause so dear to all our hearts, the relief and succor of the widows and orphans of the brave men who have given their lives in the smoke of battle, I felt I ought to be sustained by your own noble example. I will not dwell on the lofty nature of your lordship's services to the Fund—"

Henry's impassiveness began to desert him: "Liar! liar!" shrieked the little demons as they came in a swarm towards him. He closed his eyes.

"In accepting this very beautiful loving-cup," droned the Bishop.

But it had gone too far. His greatest pride—his regiment, his men, their Fund—was his greatest dishonor. Better discovery—anything rather than this awful continuation. He swayed—Petrie caught him; there was a moment's surprised ejaculation from the crowd.

Lord Kerhill was ill. The heat had been intense during the afternoon drill. It was noticed then that he was unwell—and so the tactful excuses went from one to another as Henry was assisted by Petrie to the library. But Lady Elizabeth, with some hurried orders to Petrie, turned to the assembled guests.

"My lord Bishop, some one has said 'speech is but broken light falling on the depths of the unspeakable.' This in thanks for the great honor done our house. I am sure my son's inability to reply is more due to your eloquent tribute than to his slight indisposition. Won't you allow the tea to be served? Lord Kerhill will, I am sure, join you very shortly."

Imperiously she took command of the situation, and soon the waiting servants were dispensing tea, while the guests discussed the beauties of the cup that lay in its velvet case, as if nothing unusual had happened. Then quietly she made her way to Henry. She found him alone, and motioned him to follow her into a small room adjoining the library; it had been a prayer-closet in the past for a devout Kerhill, but during recent years it had been used as a smoking-den, with old sporting-prints and curious whips and spurs in place of the *prie-dieu* and the crucifix. Drawing the bolt across the oak door, Elizabeth Kerhill turned and faced her son.

"Henry, what is it?"

"The South American Security Company—a swindle. Hobbes a fugitive—for me exposure."

Lady Elizabeth realized that if salvation were to come to him it must be through her.

"To prevent this exposure, you must not lose your self-control. We must think—not feel—think what we can do," she began.

And Henry answered, calmly, "I must blow my brains out."

"Dear God!" her heart prayed as she watched him. His dull impassiveness frightened her more than any madness of rebellion; he meant this—it was no idle boast. Had she only delayed, not prevented, the contemplated tragedy of the night before? Tightly she buckled on her armor of mother-love. She must fight—fight him—the world, if necessary, but she must win. She put all the sickening hurt and broken courage behind her. She must obtain help—from whom? In the mean time she must distract and arouse him from this awful apathy of resignation to his disgrace. While these thoughts were flashing through her brain she answered:

"If—" she paused, she could not say the word. "If—*that*—" she half whispered, "would cover up the shame—but it wouldn't. No; no Earl of Kerhill must go into history as a—"

"Thief!" Henry supplied the word. It was a relief to speak it. "You might as well say it—no one else will hesitate to do so."

His voice shook, but he still maintained his stoicism.

"You had no intention to do wrong, my poor boy, I know it, but no one will believe that but your mother. It's my fault too in some way, I suppose." The agonized mother's consciousness of failure in shaping her child's character broke from her. "I'd willingly take the blame on my shoulders if I could."

He held her hands tighter. She knelt beside him.

"Let's see. No one has had anything to do with the Fund except you, Chiswick, and Jim"—-the thought of Jim brought reassurance. Jim perhaps could help them in some way to evade discovery. "Jim—Jim," she reiterated.

Henry answered her unspoken thought. "Jim and I quarrelled last night."

"Quarrelled—about what?"

"Diana."

"Diana?"

"They were spooning last night—I caught them. He loves Di"—and under his breath he cursed him. She hardly heard the last words. Jim loved Diana—her resolve was formed. She must see Jim.

"Henry, try to control yourself and return to our guests. Let no one leave this afternoon under the impression that you are in trouble."

"Why—" he began to expostulate—but she had already left the prayer-closet and was pulling the faded bell-rope in the library. A servant quickly answered.

"Tell Captain Wynnegate that I wish to speak to him here." Quietly she commanded Henry, "Leave this to me."

At first he was inclined to refuse; then touched by her supreme devotion, and partly because he dreaded an interview with Jim, he agreed to return to the garden.

"You've pulled me out of many a scrape, mother," he said, as he drew her close to him. "God—if you gain time for me in this"—with the words, hope began to revive.

"Go," she only answered as she pointed him to his duty.

Furtively, from behind the curtains, she watched him join the Bishop. She dreaded to lose sight of him; the awful vision was ever before her. Her mind swung chaotically from her fear of the previous night to the salvation that must be gained for Henry. Could Jim help? What if all that remained of the estate were to be sold, and Jim were willing to give what he could—what if the years that followed were bereft of all save honor! Why should she not attempt this?

But even as she reasoned she knew it was useless; all save the entailed portions of Henry's inheritance were involved. She heard Jim's step ringing along the corridor.

"Bates says you want me, Aunt."

As Jim stood before her, his face, with the purple shadows under his eyes and its grim resoluteness, told her much. Yes—he loved Diana. Her keen eyes, that took in every phase of the boy's nature and every expression of his face, could easily see the desperate marks which the struggle of the night had left upon him.

"Jim, Henry tells me that you have quarrelled; but for the moment we must forget all personal differences. We are face to face with a crisis which affects us all; you alone can help us to save the family from dishonor."

"Ah, so Henry has been gambling again," Jim vaguely answered. Did this mean further anxiety for Diana? He was conscious of a curious light-headedness that made all of the day's work—even this possible unhappiness for his aunt and Diana—seem faint and blurred. The dead-level of his tone made Lady Elizabeth answer, sharply:

"Worse—infinitely worse than a card debt. Henry has borrowed an enormous sum of money which it is absolutely impossible for him to repay."

"Borrowed? I had no idea Henry's credit was so good."

Elizabeth Kerhill saw that his mind was only half grasping what she was trying to tell him—that he thought it only another of Henry's peccadilloes. She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Henry used the Fund to try to cover the loss of his last possession, which he has sunk in a huge speculation."

Jim quickly looked up.

"The Fund—what Fund? Not the—"

"Yes, the Relief Fund."

"Why, that's embezzle—"

But his aunt's feverish hand stopped the word. She clung to Jim as she piteously said, "Henry intended to replace it."

"Poor Diana! poor Diana!" The words slipped from him and then as he looked at the terrible eyes full of this bitter knowledge he quickly threw his arms protectingly about his aunt. "Poor Aunt! poor Aunt!"

"Yes, we women must bear our sins alone, and you men make us bear yours, too."

"You have had your share, Aunt," he answered, as he caressed her hand. He found it difficult to say more; he was so tired, yet he must struggle to grasp what it all meant.

"It will ruin your prospects, too, Jim, I'm afraid. It will be impossible for

you to remain here after this." She began to understand why she had sent for Jim. Like him, her mental condition was at its lowest ebb—she, too, was exhausted. What were Jim's thoughts? Why didn't he speak? There had been a new resolve on his face when he first came in response to her summons.

"Oh, it doesn't matter about me," Jim roused himself to say. "I don't represent anything. Besides—" he hesitated. He was leaving England—why not tell the truth? The tragedy that the night had wrought was far more difficult for him to face than this crime of Henry's. Then into his tired brain came the knowledge of what all this would mean to the woman he loved. "But Diana"—he continued—"she is a proud woman; her father is a proud man—he is in delicate health. It will kill him. You took from Diana her own proud name to give her ours. God—this scandal will ring from one end of the empire to the other. Di, Di—" he could think only of her now. "She's a city set on a hill—she'll be the object of pity and the tattle of every back stair in England. It's monstrous—it's monstrous!" Suddenly in the midst of his vehement despair for Diana he became conscious that his aunt was watching him. His entire cry had been selfishly for Diana. "Oh, forgive me—forgive me!" he pleaded. "And you—what will become of you?"

"I don't believe I could survive it."

Why was she reflecting Henry, she asked herself. Did she hope to accomplish with Jim what Henry last night had done with her?

"Hush, hush! You must not talk like that," Jim entreated.

Her strength was beginning to fail her. Jim placed her gently in a chair.

"Jim, can't you help? Can't you think of some way to help us all?"

"What money I have wouldn't be a drop in the bucket. But you can have it." He added, quietly, "I'm leaving England—don't question me why—but I'm going."

Jim was going. He meant to sacrifice himself in any case to his great love. If he had only gone before this discovery had been made—the unspoken thought that had been struggling at the back of her subconsciousness began to form words that, if she dared, would tempt him to a greater sacrifice. Dare she go on? Even as she hesitated Henry might be—almost she prayed that last night's intervention had been denied her.

Knowing what she did, she must try to save her son—save her house. She drew a quick breath. She rose and crossed to Jim, who was leaning against the mantel; his figure drooped inert and helpless, hers grew stronger and more rigid until she stood over him like a menacing figure of fate. She took both of his unresisting hands in hers. There was no mistaking the meaning of her words.

"Jim," she whispered. "I know you must go. I've known it for days. As it must be, can't you think of some way to help—us"—she hesitated on the word. "Can't you make a greater sacrifice? You are the only one who can save us from ruin and dishonor. Will you?"

In silence he looked into her unflinching eyes. From her feverish brain to his strained sensibilities came the unmistakable message. Was his love great enough to serve to this end—to make this supreme immolation? He threw back his head and closed his eyes. The seconds slipped by—neither relaxed the hold each had on the other.

Yes, to serve—to give—that was love. Renunciation would mean the salvation of so many—to Di, and the life of the delicate old man so closely entwined with hers. The honor of his house—this proud old woman! Through Henry, peace at least to Diana. What mattered his life now—why not? But what he did must be done at once, he could brook no delay. Again he looked deep into his aunt's eyes.

"Yes," he said, "I'll do it. It's the only way—the only way."

"God bless you!—God bless—" she sobbed, as she clung to his hand.

But Jim evaded all further words. "Leave me. Later I'll see Henry."

The dressing-bell sounded. He led her to the door, opened it, and watched her pass down the long corridor with its portraits of the dead Wynnegates lining the walls. But Jim made no effort to obey the summons of the bell. He returned to the prayer-closet; he wanted to be alone.

In his dressing-room Henry received two messages. One was from his mother, it said, "Courage"; the other note read: "Come to the prayer-closet at ten.—Jim."

At dinner Diana strained her eyes in vain down the long table, and then watched the great doors for Jim's appearance, but to no purpose. Had he obeyed her note? By the desolation of her heart she knew that she had not wished such swift obedience.

CHAPTER XII

The clock was striking ten, and Jim was waiting for Henry in the prayer-closet. He had arranged all the details of his departure. It was as though he carried a dead soul, so calm and void had been his feelings for the past hours. He had stayed away from the dinner-party on some pretext, and his man had already started for London with his luggage to be left at his club. When the servant returned the following morning, as he supposed to accompany his master back to town, he would find him gone. By the time the discovery of the deficit was made, Jim

would be aboard the steamer that was to carry him across the Atlantic.

Sounds from the drawing-room told him that dinner was over. He sat twirling his travelling hat; on a chair near by lay his coat. The chimes of the last notes of the church-bell were dying away as Henry hurriedly entered. Jim looked up and studied his cousin's face, and he saw by his manner that some word of hope must have reached him from Lady Elizabeth. Save for a half-suppressed exclamation from Henry as he noticed Jim's travelling clothes, neither of the men spoke. Henry flung himself into a chair; he could feel Jim's eyes on his face.

"Damn it, why don't you speak?" he finally gasped, when he could no longer endure the situation.

Jim quietly asked, "Have you made your peace with Diana?"

"What would be the use now?" He knew that his mother had told Jim the truth. Why did Jim not refer to it? Perhaps there was, as his mother suggested, a way out of this; if so, why in Heaven's name should the torture be continued. But Jim remained silent. "You think of nothing but Diana—Diana—Diana." With the last call of her name it became a wail. Henry had learned during the past hours what suffering could mean—he was beginning to know what life tempered with discipline might have meant for him. "When I stand dishonored before the world, it will be easy for you to take her from me. Is that what you are thinking?" He began excitedly to pace the room.

"Not exactly," Jim answered, without moving from his bent position; "I was wondering whether you can be trusted with Diana's future. I believe you love her after a fashion."

Henry stopped in his walk in front of Jim. "And I know that you love her."

Jim moved from the position that told how spent he was, and raised himself to his cousin's height. "Yes," he said, "but not quite in the way you mean. I am about to show you how I love her."

Something in the simple directness of his words made Henry lower his eyes. He threw himself into a chair and with averted head listened to what his cousin had to say.

"It's too late for Diana to find out what a blackguard you are, Henry." Henry only dropped his head lower on his hands. "I wonder if you will enter into an honest conspiracy to keep her in happy ignorance to the end," Jim continued.

"What are you driving at?" Henry asked. He almost knew the words that were to follow, but he hardly dared believe that what he surmised could be true.

"I am thinking that under certain conditions I will disappear—leave England; as secretary of the Fund my action would be practically a confession of guilt."

Jim could hardly hear the strained question that followed.

"Your conditions?"

"That you give up gambling of every kind; that you drop your mistress, shut up her establishment, and give up your other liaisons for good and all; that you make a will leaving everything you have, except what is entailed, to Diana; and that you give me a written and signed confession that you embezzled this money; that for the above considerations I consented to assume the appearance and responsibility of the guilt, and that if you do not keep the agreement you have made with me, I am at liberty to appear at any time and make known the truth."

Henry rose and stood looking silently at Jim. Vaguely he began to grasp the tremendous power of Jim's loyal love. He could find no word—the clock chimed the quarter-hour.

"Well?" Jim asked.

"It's for her, Jim—for her—I understand that, and I'll try and have the future make up for the past, so that you'll never regret this." His voice broke—he leaned towards Jim and tried to grope for the hands that he could not see—"I was a dog to say what I did, but, by God! I'll keep my part of the agreement."

Jim nodded—he was beyond emotion. "Good; it's a bargain. Go to your room, make out a paper such as I have indicated, sign it and bring it to me here. Be quick," he added, "and I'll get away at once."

This time it was Jim who dropped into a chair and averted his head to avoid seeing Henry's out-stretched, pleading hand. He never raised his eyes until he heard the door click, then he went and unlocked a side entrance that led from the prayer-closet to the other side of the garden, and with his watch in his hand leaned against the open door and waited. Henry must not be too long; he was to leave by the midnight train, but before that he must make his pilgrimage. Across the garden he could see the waving tree-tops beckoning him, calling him with the mysterious powers of the night. Yes, he would make his start for the new life from the Fairies' Corner that led—whither?

Towards the carriage-drive Diana tenderly assisted Sir Charles, followed by Bates.

"Must you really go, father?"

"Yes, my dear, I must keep good hours, you know. These two days have been a great dissipation for me; but I've been well repaid; I can't tell you how much the delightful episode of the loving-cup pleased me. So now, good-night, my love." They had reached the entrance, "No, no," Sir Charles protested as Diana started to walk to the carriage with him, "Bates will take care of me." Then he gathered her close in his frail arms as he kissed her, and whispered, full of the pride he felt in the honors done to the house of Kerhill, "You see, it was all for

the best, my dear—all for the best." And Diana made no answer. Ever since she had sent the note to Jim revealing the truth of her tortured heart she had seemed to gain a spiritual strength that helped to calm the aching call of her senses. She dared ask no question concerning Jim's absence, and her heart mocked her again with the truth that she had not meant him to obey her so implicitly.

She saw Sir Charles drive away. "Dear father," she whispered, "he must never know—never know—but it was all for the worst, my dear, all for the worst." Tears began to stain her face; they were the first in many days. She tried to control the passion of her grief but it was impossible; quivering sobs shook her in an hysterical outburst. To escape from the possible eyes of any chance meeting she quickly sought refuge in the rose-arbor. Hidden completely, she gave herself up to the relaxation of her sorrow. Finally, spent with her tears, she leaned against the damp foliage of the rose-screen, and an aftermath of calm followed her outburst. Suddenly she became conscious that Sir John Applegate and Mr. Chiswick were crossing to a bench near the sundial.

"My dear Chiswick," her cousin John was saying, "I'm greatly distressed. I've been obliged to ask you to give me a few moments here, and, indeed, I've asked Lady Elizabeth—as Kerhill seemed so ill to-day—to join us here."

Diana could distinctly hear every word, but with her tear-stained face it was impossible for her to make known her presence.

"You see, Chiswick," Sir John continued, "I presume that as Lord Kerhill's secretary you had his accounts in such shape that we could go over them at a moment's notice. When the keys were sent me this evening I gave an hour to glancing over the accounts before meeting the auditing committee to-morrow; as I've just told you, they seemed in a frightful tangle, and—"

"But, as I explained a moment ago, Sir John," Chiswick interrupted, "I really know nothing about the Fund; it was a pleasure for the Earl to do all the work—a labor of love—and he took the matter quite out of my hands. Captain Wynnegate, as secretary of the Fund, and Lord Kerhill have had absolute control of the business side of it."

"What you tell me amazes me; but no doubt there is an explanation which we will have from Kerhill later."

An intangible presentiment began to fasten its web about Diana. Lady Elizabeth came from the house; both men rose, and Diana watched eagerly.

"Lady Elizabeth, believe me I'm exceedingly sorry to trouble you, but—" then Sir John Applegate quite brusquely said: "I've had the books for the Fund's accounts, and there is, I'm afraid, trouble ahead for our Yeomanry. Lord Kerhill seems ill from overwork with the troops, so I've hesitated to trouble him to-night."

Lady Elizabeth's brows contracted; so it had come so soon. She must act at once—why not? Jim had agreed: perhaps he had already gone—everything was

at stake—one small misstep might prove fatal—how far dared she venture?

"What you tell me comes to me as no great surprise," she said. Both men drew nearer to her, Diana strained to hear the low words. "The cause of Kerhill's indisposition this afternoon was due to this sudden discovery on his part. Need I say, as Captain Wynnegate had charge of the books, what it means to Henry? He and his cousin are alone responsible, so my son feels that the honor of our house is involved. To-morrow he intended to lay the case before you; he will. I only ask that to-night you will keep the matter quiet until our guests have departed. Perhaps, after all, an investigation will prove quite satisfactory and the shortage may be adjusted." She spoke more directly to Sir John; Chiswick, after all, could do little harm. "Indeed, I feel it is in all probability a mistake, the result of overtired nerves." Sir John listened, he had a great respect for Elizabeth, Countess of Kerhill; seriously he answered:

"I feel anxious, but you may rely absolutely on me. In the morning I must see Henry—will you tell him to meet me with Captain Wynnegate? The matter must be laid before the committee; there may be a leakage in some out-of-the-way corner of another department." Lady Elizabeth acquiesced. Sir John went on, "I could only find confusion in the books; consequently, I feel we need not be too seriously alarmed. By-the-way, where is Captain Wynnegate?" Lady Elizabeth shook her head. Into both the men's faces came a look of curious surprise.

"He has not been seen the entire day, save for a little while quite early, in his tent." Diana could feel the condemnation in the silence that followed.

"Mr. Chiswick, Mr. Chiswick," it was Mabel's voice calling from the open casement. "You promised to come back for the charades."

"Yes, you must both return—they will need you. And, after all," Lady Elizabeth whispered as they started for the house, "we have no doubt been anticipating difficulties that do not exist."

The voices died away, and Diana left the rose-bower. She had but one thought—she must find Jim at once. Why, oh, why, had she written the note of the morning? She stumbled across the heavy, thick sward. In the distance she could see a figure; it looked like Jim's; he was coming from the Fairies' Corner over the green to the entrance which in the morning had let her out on to the purple moor. Quickly she hurried to him, staining her gown and delicate slippers in the wet grass.

"Jim, Jim," she called, "where are you going?" As he turned she came close to him and repeated her question.

"I'm taking your advice, Diana; I'm leaving England—"

"Oh no, no," she eagerly interrupted, "I thought so, but now you must stay—stay to protect your honor. I've just heard that the Fund—oh, it's not you, I know, Jim, it's not you—not you—you couldn't be—" her despairing cry stopped. Still

he made no effort to comfort her.

Finally he said—"I must go."

What did it mean? That he should go after the revelation she had made to him—she understood that; but now with his honor at stake it was different. Into her mind there flashed an unanswerable suspicion. Was there some reason why he had so eagerly acceded to her request; that even now, when she asked him to remain, he still stood mute at her entreaties?

"Whether you go or stay, Jim, I do not expect ever to see you alone again, and I'm glad of this chance to bid you good-bye—forever. I can never, never believe that you are—Jim, if your hands are clean, if you haven't robbed the soldiers' widows and orphans, you may kiss me good-bye."

Into his eyes came the desire of his love as she had seen it in the early morning in the Fairies' Corner. This time she did not move; but Jim only bent low over the out-stretched arms as he answered, "I must go," and went away from her.

The circle of his boyhood was complete. Again he went along the same lane that he had travelled ten years before; again the desolation brought by his departure from his home, his country, hurt and bruised his spirit. Instead of the dawn, it was midnight, with clouds sweeping sinisterly over the light of the heavens, and instead of a boy's optimism he carried a man's disillusions.

From the park the light of the tent fires sent out flames that illumined the roadway, the swaying and rustling of the heavy trees made whispering sounds. Once at a turning he heard a boy's voice in the camp ringing out high above the moaning of the trees:

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy Atkins, you're a good 'un, 'eart and 'and,
You're a credit to your country and to all your native land."

He clutched his arms about his head to deaden the sound and hurried on out into the roadway, stumbling and half-falling over the gnarled roots of the ancient trees.

EXILE

CHAPTER XIII

Like a Tanagra figurine, Nat-u-ritch stood silhouetted against the golden light of the afternoon. She was small and slender, and her pointed face, in spite of the high cheek-bones, was delicately modelled. The eyes were long, but fuller than the usual beady eyes of the Indian woman. They seemed far too big in proportion to the tiny person whose body was swayed by the stifling breezes that swept over the plains, raising a suffocating cloud or alkali dust. The heavy, embroidered, one-piece gown clung to and slapped against the slight form, wrapping it in lines of beauty. Long, twisted ropes of blue-black hair hung dank and straight on both sides of her face and reached to her knees.

As the wind blew her gown one could see the copper-colored legs, and through the scant sleeves could catch a glimpse of the immature red-bronze arms of the young girl. In her hair a turquoise strand repeated the touch of blue that was woven and interwoven in the beading of her gown. She was standing near the trail that led to Maverick. To the left and to the right the plains stretched into an eternity of space. Nat-u-ritch shaded her eyes with straight, stiffened fingers, and from under the set hands gazed over the country. Towards the west a circular cloud, repeated at intervals, told her that horsemen were making their way to the cow town. From behind a wickyup close to her emerged an Indian chief—heavy, tall, with the sublime dignity of the red man, unimpaired even by the halting, swaying walk that told of his surrender to the white man's fire-water.

Quietly Nat-u-ritch watched her father, Tabywana, mount his pinto pony, his flapping scarlet chaps gleaming against the white body of the animal. He looked neither to the right nor left, nor behind him, as Nat-u-ritch followed with her eyes his disappearing form. It was twenty-six miles into Maverick, and she knew she must follow the trail that led there, but she made no movement yet towards departure. Immovable, she stood and watched from under rigid hands an alkali whirlwind swallow up the horse and his rider.

Her brain was busy with the problem that lay before her. For two days Cash Hawkins, the bad man of the adjoining barren land, had been with her father; for two nights Tabywana had drunk from the bottle that the white man had brought to him. Not once for forty-eight hours had her father called her to

him, not once had he likened her to the flower of the tree of his love—the spirit-mother. She clinched her long, narrow hands until they tore the fringes of her robe. The pleading, dumb look of her dark eyes gave way to quick defiance; they seemed to become chasms of gloom, unfathomable but determined; they showed the decision and strength of which her resolve was capable.

Her father was to sell that day a large herd of cattle to Cash Hawkins. Intuitively she knew what the two days' visit from Hawkins would mean for them—despair when her father realized the trick the white man had played on him, scarcity of food and many privations for her, then long weeks of silent suffering for both.

Still she stood staring into the winding, desolate land, the stretching heavens, the stretching plains—both flat, straight, unbroken, like two skies. A world might be above one or under the other. Could this intermediate space of ambient atmosphere lay claim to a life of fact and reality?

But no such thoughts came to Nat-u-ritch as she watched the sandy face of the country. The desert was her home. She had toddled across its burning ground, following, as far as her baby strength would permit, her father's pony. In the solitude of the waste land she had grown into womanhood. She knew that to-day's dreariness could be broken until the entire place echoed and re-echoed to the life of the men whose cattle thundered at their heels. She had heard the desert answer to the fanatical outburst of her tribes; had seen the white men drive her people farther and farther back. For her and her people it had been their refuge.

Suddenly she stretched out her delicate arms. Her figure grew erect. From the distance came the distinct beat of horse's hoofs; it passed so close within her vision that she could easily distinguish the features of the rider. He was a stranger who had recently settled there, the stranger whom she had first met at a bear-dance down at the agency.

She remembered that with the squaw's privilege of choosing her partner she had selected him. She remembered his eyes. As she did so her own turned and followed the man who, unlike the other horsemen of the prairie, rose in his stirrups, and into her sphinx-like face came a look of unutterable yearning. She watched the clouds of dust envelop him as they had swallowed up her father, but this time she no longer stood staring into the prairie. Swiftly she caught her pony, mounted him, and let him gallop across a trail that led to a short cut to Maverick.

For a long time she lay flat on her animal, the hot sun sizzling down on her clinging figure. She only drew her hair as a veil over her face, while her wistful eyes watched the stranger across the plains as she sped close on his track. She was glad that she was gaining ground, too long had she lingered after her father's

departure. She soon reached the short cut, and a wise smile lighted up her face. She would be in Maverick ahead of the man riding across the plains, and she wondered whether she would see him at the Long Horn saloon. Then the smile died away; she was not going to Maverick for that purpose. First she must find and guard her father from Cash Hawkins's machinations; and then—

She tightened her hold on her pony. She gave a curious low cry to the animal. His ears stood erect in answer as Nat-u-ritch flashed across the sand track.

The man on the horse only vaguely saw Nat-u-ritch. His thoughts were busy with the wearying business of the day's shipping of cattle. It was Jim's second year at his ranch. When he left England he did not arrest his journey until he reached the Far West—that Mecca of all Englishmen. With the small sum of money that he had lifted from his bank, he had purchased a ranch near Green River, and under the name of Carston had begun forming the ties that now made up his life.

As he rode his face and body showed the beneficial results of his work in the open. The cow-boy clothes seemed to have become almost part of him. A certain neatness and precision in his mode of wearing the picturesque garments of the plains alone differentiated him from the hundreds of wearers of flapping leather chaps, flannel shirt, sombrero, and loosely knotted kerchief.

Jim was wondering if his men had reached Maverick. He had sent Big Bill, his foreman, on ahead of him with a message from him cautioning them to beware of being drawn into a quarrel with Cash Hawkins, who he had learned would be there. For days the "boys'" anger had been incited by the discovery made by Jim and Big Bill that Cash Hawkins had been mixing his cattle with theirs, for Hawkins's gain. This complaint of "rustling" he found was not uncommon. Its penalty when proven was not a pleasant one; the law was not consulted—punishment was meted out by the cow-boys themselves. But for the present Jim preferred to avert a fight with Hawkins. In the future he meant to take greater precautions to protect his property.

As Jim rode he planned out many details of his new life's work. Thus often for days all other thoughts would be blotted out. It was a big game to fight and win in this barren land. It absorbed all his time and vitality, and memories of dew-drenched England were burned out in this dry, brilliant land where the tender half-light was unknown and where often his English eyes yearned in vain, when he abandoned himself to the past, for a touch of the soft gray of his own country

in protest against the hard brilliance of the sun and unending sand plains.

CHAPTER XIV

The Overland Limited swayed, creaked, and then with a grunting of many chains drew to a sudden stop before the Long Horn saloon at Maverick. From the window the passengers peered at the desolate cow town and wondered how long they were to be delayed.

In their private car at the rear Diana, Henry Kerhill, and Diana's cousin, Sir John Applegate, rose from their seats to study the shipping-point for cattle, so novel in its environment, as indeed their entire journey in America had been for the past months. The death of a distant relative on Diana's side, who had left her an unexpected legacy, had enabled her to retrieve to a great extent their cramped fortunes.

Lady Elizabeth had lived only a short time to enjoy the new improved condition of affairs. She died in the year following Jim's departure and vicarious disgrace. During the months previous to her death she had grown grimmer and held herself more aloof. A stroke of paralysis one morning made her bedridden and speechless; a merciful third stroke caused her death within a month after her first attack. She never spoke, and seemed to find no consolation save in Diana's presence. The trip to America for a much-needed change was principally taken, however, on account of Henry, whose nervous condition the medical attendants declared most serious. The two years had made scarcely a perceptible change in Diana; in Sir John none at all. But in Henry an oppressive melancholy was rarely broken by the old flashes. Towards Diana he had faithfully kept his word to Jim. A truce was accepted, and he never ceased in his pathetic endeavors to try to make her happy. If neither could honestly lay claim to a real joy of life, still they had peace and dignity. As he stood near the window, the strong light showed how much thinner and lined was his face. A touch of gray was distinctly visible along his temples and was beginning perceptibly to streak his dark hair.

"My, but it's a corker!" Sir John gasped, as he put his head out of the window and the blinding heat beat down on him. There was a smile from Diana at Sir John's acquired Americanism. More British than the Union-Jack itself, yet he was keen to gain knowledge of the new country, and long conversations with the servile black Sam were enlarging his vocabulary. All three watched with

curiosity the ramshackle hostelry, which they could plainly descry from one end of the car.

Diana turned to the men: "Do let us see the place. I've always longed to have a real adventure at a way-place off the beaten tourist track. I'm so tired of the sights that are arranged for one to be shocked at—at so much a head."

They moved to the door, but the intense heat of the day for a moment seemed to dampen their ardor. Then, at Henry's solicitations, Diana was persuaded to wait until he found out from an official the possible length of their stop.

Within the Long Horn saloon the afternoon's heat was apparently not felt by its inmates. It was a roughly hewn, wooden, three-cornered room with an oak beam stretching across it. Over this were thrown saddles and blankets. A bar extended along one side of the room. On the walls were grotesque and crude pictures done in chalk, while other spaces were covered with cheap, highly colored illustrations cut from the papers that reached Maverick. Tables for roulette and faro were placed at set intervals. The floor was covered with a mixture of sand and sawdust, while mounds of wood-dust were heaped near the bar, to be used by the men as cuspidors. It was clean in a certain primitive fashion. The glasses and bar fixtures were not unpleasant. The bartender, Nick, an ex-prize-fighter, took a pride in his "emporium," as he called the saloon, and lavished a loving though crude care on his possessions.

But the place was stained and soiled by the marks of the tragic remnants of humanity that were housed within its walls. Around the gambling-tables on this afternoon were groups of tattered specimens of the various races. Cow-boys at certain tables gave a wholesome, virile note to the place, but the drift-wood of a broken civilization was at this hour in larger proportion than the ranchmen. Among the battered denizens from the world beyond that had strayed into the saloon life was a parson in a frayed frock-coat, who leaned in a neighborly way against the blue shirt of a Chinaman, while a large negro with a face like a black Botticelli angel grinned and gleamed his white teeth in sport with a dago from Monterey. In a chair in a farther corner a tenderfoot lay in a drunken sleep in his soiled evening clothes, which he had donned three nights before to prove to the tormenting habitués of the place, who since then had not allowed him to grow sober, that he was a gentleman.

A half-breed at a faro-table watched with tolerant amusement the antics of those in his game to outwit him. The smell of the sawdust and the human mass of unpleasantness grew stronger as the men played, changed money, and Nick's corks flew and glasses clinked. Over the entire place there hung a curious sense of respectability. Low-muttered oaths were not uncommon, but Nick, sturdy and grim, with his watch-dogs—two large six-shooters—lying on the shelf behind the

bar, had a certain straightness of purpose and a crude sense of right and wrong that won respect from the heterogeneous mass of his followers.

The passing of the Limited would have caused a sufficient amount of interest, but its stopping was a momentous occasion. The rude platform outside was only a shipping-point for cattle, not a stopping-place for through or passenger trains. There was a rush of some of the inmates from the room, but to a number of them the game was at its vital point, and Pete's lazy call of "jacks up" quickly chained the attention of the more eager of the players.

But to Nick it meant new trade, and his battered and scarred face grew into one ebullient smile as McSorley, the engineer, in his jumpers, with begrimed face and hands, and Dan, the dapper Pullman conductor of the Overland Limited, entered the saloon. McSorley was mopping his sweating face.

"Say, Dan, who's the English swells in the private?" he asked, as he looked back at the luxuriously fitted car.

"The Earl of Kerhill," Dan answered, as they veered towards the bar. "Been out to the Yellowstone. The old man lets 'em have his private car. Must be the real thing, eh?"

McSorley grunted his approval of the noble freight that he was carrying. "Let's have a drink. What's yours, Dan?"

They reached the solicitous Nick.

"What 'll you have, gents?"

"A bottle of beer for me, Mac," Dan answered his companion's question. Then, with English tips still a pleasant memory, he added, "But this is on me."

Nick began opening a bottle of beer, and its foaming contents were soon filling the glasses. As he served he inquired: "What's up gents? 'Tain't often the Overland Limited honors Maverick with a call!"

"Washout down the road," was McSorley's laconic reply, as the cool liquid slid down his parched throat.

"Staying long?" Nick again asked, with visions of many strangers visiting his bar.

Dan was surveying the place with an unsympathetic eye.

"Not longer than we can help, you bet," he answered. "Expecting orders to move every minute."

But Nick was determined to be affable. "Pity; Maverick's worth seein'. Who's in the parlor-car?"

"English people—Earl of Kerhill and party," Dan replied. Then he moved down the bar with McSorley, both carrying their half-consumed beer.

A Southern cow-puncher, Pete, who had gone from ranch to ranch, finding life too hard at each, leaned back on his stool until he rested against one end of the bar. Through the windows he could see Shorty, one of Jim Carston's men,

coming along in animated conversation with several other men of the Englishman's ranch.

"In my opinion the calm serenity of this here metropolis is about to be tore wide open." A nudge from Punk, the Chinaman, made him go on with the shuffling.

"How many, Parson?" Pete queried.

The cadaverous face of the Parson, with its highly colored nose, showing the cause of his cloth's disgrace, turned to him. Frayed and seedy as he was, he bore the imprint of a gentleman.

"Dearly beloved brethren, three."

Again Punk nudged the others, who were inclined to become too talkative. They began indicating the number of cards desired with their fingers while the conversation continued. Nick leaned over the bar and watched Pete's hand.

"Cash Hawkins is in town!" Pete gave the news as though it were of moment. They all knew what Cash's visits usually meant. An ominous whistle followed. They all looked at Nick.

"Bad medicine is this same Mr. Hawkins, particular when he has his gun wid him. Bedad, the kummunity could spare him a whole lot without missing him," Nick volunteered.

"If they provoke unto wrath Brother Carston's outfit, my Christian friend, there will be some useful citizens removed from our midst." The Parson approved of Jim as a remnant of his earlier days. He recognized in him one of his own class.

"And who the devil is Jim Carston?" Nick asked.

"Jim Carston? Never seen Jim? Oh yes, you must have, although Jim don't frequent emporiums much. Why Jim's the English cow-boy. First he had a place about a hundred miles from here. But he's bought Bull Cowan's herd. Bull stuck him—stuck him good," Pete lazily informed the crowd.

"Sure!" said Nick. "That's why Englishmen was invented. More power to 'em."

"Amen," hiccoughed the Parson, whose drinks by this time had been numerous. "The prosperity of our beloved country would go plumb to Gehenna if an all-wise Providence did not enable us to sell an Englishman a mine or a ranch or two now and again."

"Say," Nick asked, seriously, "the Englishman ain't a-goin' up agin Cash, is he now?"

"I call you, Parson," Pete calmly commanded, and then raked in the pot. "When the smoke has cleared away I will venture an opinion as to who has gone agin who," he resumed, as he pocketed the money. "Jim and his outfit is here to ship some cattle to Chicago. I seed them all through the window, and they ain't the kind to run away much."

There was a finality about Pete's words. He might be lazy and slow, but he was anxious to open another pot, so he turned his back on Nick and began shuffling the cards. As he did so, three of Jim's boys—Andy, Shorty, and Grouchy—entered.

"Come on boys and have a drink," Shorty yelled.

Andy was a wiry, slender German with tender, romantic proclivities. Grouchy, who seldom spoke, and then only in a husky, low growl, was a massive fellow and looked like a Samoan native, but was in reality a product of a Hebrew father and an Irish mother, while Shorty gained his name from his low stature. Brave as a lion and honest, with a face from which twinkled the smallest and merriest of blue eyes, he was the live wire of any ranch.

"What's your nose-paint, gents?" Nick asked, as he greeted the newcomers.

"A little of that redeye," Shorty replied, and soon he and his comrades were clinking glasses. Several cow-punchers joined them, and the place began to resound to lively disputes concerning the rates on cattle.

Dan and McSorley had finished their beer.

"How much?" Dan said. His look plainly showed his contempt for the saloon. It was Nick's opportunity to pay back the insult that had been quietly levelled at him by the Pullman conductor's attitude for the past quarter of an hour.

"One dollar," was Nick's quick reply.

"One dollar!" Dan repeated. "For two glasses of beer?" He stepped back and his voice rose in angry protest. It attracted the attention of the others, who were only too eager for a row.

"Why," Dan continued, "it was all collar, anyway."

Nick leaned over the bar and quietly said, "I didn't charge nothin' for the collar, gent, I throwed that in." There was a laugh from the hangers-on at Nick's witticism. Nick flushed with approval and went on, "Beer's our most expensive drink—comes all the way from Cheyenne."

Dan, furious at being done, as he knew he was, struck the bar with his fist. "I won't pay it," he said.

There was a hush about the room. They didn't often see any one venture to buck against Nick's authority.

"Oh yes, you'll pay it, gent." Nick's voice was lower and calmer than Dan's. He had turned while Dan was speaking and was lovingly fingering his six-shooter. He lifted it from the shelf and laid it carefully on the bar, keeping his hand well over the trigger.

McSorley nervously edged to Dan. "Better pay it; better pay it," he whispered.

Nick heard him. "Yes," he added, "better pay it. Saves funeral expenses."

Dan knew enough of the country to know he was at Nick's mercy. He drew a silver dollar from his pocket, and slapped it down on the bar.

"Well, I'll be ——!" Dan started for the door, followed by McSorley, who thought his companion's rage ill-timed. He wished he were back in his caboose. As they reached the door Nick's voice rang out in stentorian tones.

"Wait a minute!" There was no gainsaying his command. Dan halted. Nick, leaning far over the bar, held in each hand a watch-dog. "I don't allow no tenderfoot to use bad language in my emporium. We do strictly family trade and caters particular to ladies and children."

Dan and McSorley stood under the levelled guns. A shriek of mirth shook the crowd. All had stopped playing and were watching the situation. Finally, when there was no doubt as to the ridiculous position of the train officials and the laugh had subsided, Nick dropped the guns, and with a low bow turned from the bar, leaving them free to go. Dan and McSorley quickly disappeared, Dan wildly expostulating while McSorley vainly tried to calm him.

Nick went back to the players.

"Pete," he asked, "what has Cash got agin the Englishman?"

Pete, nothing loath to tell his yarn, especially as he had been winning all the afternoon, drawled the information so that all at his table could hear.

"Well, Jim's outfit has been heard to openly express the opinion that Cash can't tell the difference between his cattle and Jim's."

"Rustling, eh?" the Parson interrupted.

Pete nodded.

"Serious business."

"Yes," said Pete. "Serious—quite—in these here parts. I see the Englishman stand off a greaser down at the agency, and I've got a wad of the long-green to lay even money that Cash can't twist the British lion's tail a whole lot—not a whole lot. Any takers?"

Pete's eye was always keen to take up a "sure thing." The men with him fell into a dispute concerning the respective merits of Jim versus Cash Hawkins.

Meanwhile, seated at a table in the centre of the room were Shorty, Andy, and Grouchy. They had heard nothing of Pete's and the Parson's conversation. They were intent on a mild game and were awaiting Big Bill, who was to meet them at the saloon. None of them saw Big Bill coming towards them until they heard the slow, deep voice saying: "Boys, Cash Hawkins is in town. The boss asks as a special favor to him that you will avoid Cash and his gang and try to get out of town without a collision."

Bill was a giant, over six feet tall, with a great, leonine head. He had a strong face with piercing eyes. The mouth, "a large gash," as Shorty described it,

could at times give vent to loud guffaws of laughter, and at others frighten one as it straightened into two lines of grim determination. For two years he had been Jim's right-hand man, and his devotion to the boss was the most beautiful side of Bill's life. Forty years ago he had been born in a prairie saloon; the woman who bore him died the night of his birth. He never knew who his father was, and the upbringing he received was from a handful of miners who had adopted him. As soon as he could toddle he began to try to do for himself. Little errands he volunteered, and long before most boys even on a ranch were anything but a nuisance, Bill was contributing gravely his share to the big game of life. Save once, to Jim, he never spoke of the past. He had drifted to Maverick twenty years ago, and except at intervals, when he took a notion to better himself, he was usually at the cow town.

On one of these occasions when he was trailing the country he met Jim, who was looking for a man to direct the practical side of his affairs. Bill had never met a gentleman who treated him as Jim did, and in return he gave his body's strength and all the scheming devotion of his brain in his endeavor to benefit Jim's complicated affairs.

The three men looked up at Bill, who slid into a chair at their table and started a new game with them.

"Say, Bill," Shorty began, "if Cash has his war-paint on there ain't no use distributin' tracts on love one another."

"Und, Bill," Andy added, "und say for peace—dot's me, Andy. But say, Bill, rustlin'—cattle stealing—you know. Particular when it's our cattle, Cash has got a lot wit' a circle-star brand which original is a big C for Carston. Say," he wildly went on, becoming more incoherent as his temper rose, "und if we stand for it—you know—und say—we got to git out of de business."

Grouchy leaned over to Bill and shook his head. "Say, I wouldn't work for a man that would stand for it."

Still Bill said nothing, but listened gravely to the storm of protests that the message from Jim to the boys had provoked.

"If the peace of a kummunity is worth a damn, you got to shoot him up a whole lot. It's this delicate consideration for the finer feelings of bad men which encourages 'em." Shorty, in his nervous, jerky manner, fairly shook the table with his vibrations of rebellion.

Then Bill spoke. He was in sympathy with the boys, but he had his orders from the boss—that was enough for him.

"Well, you know Jim. It ain't likely he'd ask you to show the white-feather nor to stand no nonsense. Only"—here Bill paused and said, impressively, "don't drink mor'n you can help, and avoid trouble if possible. Them's the boss's orders."

As Bill was laying down the law for the men, the saloon began to fill with

curiosity-seekers from the train. The delay was evidently to be longer than had at first been anticipated. Shorty was the first to see the humor of some of the new-comers.

"Gee, get on to the effete East. Say," he called to the rest of them, "get on to the tenderfeet."

They looked with childish glee at a quaint-looking couple who were entering the saloon. Mrs. Doolittle was a prim, mild-mannered little woman with a saintly smile. She evidently was travelling in the West for the first time. Her husband, Hiram, was one of the prosperous New England farmer class. Pleased with the entire condition of affairs, he beamed on the cow-boys with great condescension.

Shorty, who scented some fun, whispered to Bill: "D.C. brand. Day Coach, savvy?" As he watched the odd pair he made his way towards them. They were quietly studying the place. The pictures of prize-fighters and ballet-girls that lined the walls really shocked them, but it also tickled their sense of the wickedness of their adventure. They reached a roulette-table with the game in progress.

"Why, Hiram!" Mrs. Doolittle ejaculated, as she watched the players and surveyed the saloon, "this is a gambling-hell."

Shorty, who with the others was closely watching the strange adventurers and planning to tease them, mocked them in an aside—"Well, I want to know."

But Hiram was too intent on Faith's observations to notice that they were becoming the centre of interest in the place.

"Durned if it ain't," he affirmed, in a pleased tone. Then, ashamed of his laxity, he added, "Want to git out?"

"Why, Hiram, what a question!" Faith Doolittle answered, severely, as she drew away from her husband's out-stretched hand. "'Tain't often one gets a chance to see life. I've read about Montey Carlo, and here it is."

The boys were now all attention. Andy whispered, "Three card, eh; Montey Carlo here, eh!" The laugh began to be noticed by Hiram.

"Dear me," Faith Doolittle gravely remarked, "and over there is rouletty, I suppose."

Shorty came forward. He took off his large sombrero and bowed low to the ground, in mock cavalier fashion as he good-humoredly said, "No lady, that's where they're voting for the most popular lady in the Sabbath-school." His sally was greeted with applause. Faith hardly noticed it; she had taken Hiram by the arm and was trying to drag him to the table.

Pete called to them, "That's not rouletty, that's faro, lady."

The parson added, "So called after Pharaoh's daughter."

"Who found a little prophet in the rushes on the bank," Shorty further explained.

But Faith was eagerly whispering to Hiram, "You know, Hiram, frequently people by just putting down fifty cents, or a dollar, walk out with millions." Then timidly she added, "I'd like to try it once."

"Faith Doolittle!" was all Hiram could exclaim, so great was his surprise at his wife's request. Truly, he thought, women were strange cattle. To think of Faith, so quiet, so serene all these years, and then—to see her now with flushed cheeks, hat awry, and an eager, feverish look in her mild eyes as she tried to draw him to the table.

"Oh," she pleaded, "only fifty cents' worth, Hiram. There couldn't be any harm in fifty cents' worth."

Behind his great hand Shorty convulsed the others by observing, "Mother's a sport, but father's near."

Hiram now realized that he must be firm and leave this place that was affecting so strangely his wife's conduct.

"You couldn't keep money got in that nefarious way, even if you won it," he explained; "you're a churchwoman."

"We could give some of it to the church," quickly reasoned Faith; "and, Hiram, we could do such a lot of good with a million. Just try fifty cents' worth." She made a further attempt to reach the table.

"Come out of here, Faith Doolittle," stormed Hiram, as he saw his protests were of no avail, "or you'll have me going it in a minute." He, too, began to feel the tempting influence of the green cloth, the glittering money-heaps, and the feverish gayety of the ribald crowd.

As Hiram started to lead Faith to the door they were stopped by Shorty.

"Nick," he called to the bartender, "my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Hill—Bunkco Hill—of Boston." The slang name for the innocence of the couple caught the crowd's fancy. They quickly formed a circle around them.

"Pleased to know you," Nick observed from the bar. "What's your drink?" He began filling glasses with whiskey.

This time Hiram's indignation was effectual. Grasping his now-frightened spouse by the arm, he fiercely drew her away, the cow-boys laughingly letting them go, with polite bows, and bits of advice called good-naturedly after them.

It was the sport of children, as indeed these men were to a great extent—crude, rough, but with a sweetness not to be denied and a decency that it might seem strange to find in such a place. So far their fun might go, but they knew where to stop, and Faith Doolittle's gentle face was its own protection. They watched Hiram nervously leading his wife along the platform down the line. Then they turned back to the saloon and amused themselves by giving imitations of the quaint visitors, until the place rang with their boisterous merriment.

Suddenly there was a rattle of spurs and a noise from without as a tall cow-

puncher lurched through the door.

In a moment there was silence. Every one knew the man.

"Hello, here's Cash now," observed Shorty.

The innocent gayety was forgotten. A different expression began to appear on the men's faces. In Jim's crowd it was one of sullen rebellion and suppressed indignation, in the other an expectant desire for real mischief. With Cash Hawkins's entrance that afternoon, history was made in Maverick.

CHAPTER XV

Cash Hawkins leaned against the bar and maliciously took in the silence that followed his entrance into the saloon. He knew he was feared; he had made more than one man there feel his power. Malignity was marked in his demeanor and in the physiognomy of his face. He was lithe and straight, with wiry, steel-like muscles. He had a small head with a shock of tawny hair that he wore much longer than is usual with ranchmen. The rawhide strap of his hat hung under his chin, and his face, with its long, pointed wolf jaw, suggested that animal in its expression of ferocious keenness. When he grew excited his mouth moved convulsively, like an ugly trap ready to devour its prey. His hands were curiously beautiful—long and slender, with almond-shaped nails. The care he bestowed on them to keep their beauty in the midst of his rough life, the gorgeousness of his leather chaps with their mounting of silver, and the embroidery on his waistcoat betrayed his salient weakness—inordinate vanity. He was handsome in a cruel, hard fashion. Of his power as an athlete there was no question. In the saloon many could testify to the devilish cunning of those supple hands.

"Got a bottle of ink handy, Nick?" he said, when he had insolently surveyed the assemblage, who, after a pause, were beginning to talk and settle down to new games.

Nick, who wished to be friendly with all who patronized him, answered:

"Ink? Ink is a powerful depressing drink, Cash."

"Drink!" Cash's face grew livid with rage. "You see here, Nick, don't you joke with me; I ain't in the humor for it. People has to know me intimate to joke with me—savvy? You get me a pen and a bottle of ink P.D.Q. I'm buying some cattle of Tabywana, the Ute chief—savvy? And he's got to put his mark to the contract."

With swaggering gestures Cash announced his business so that all could hear him. Bill whispered to the boys, who, going on with their game, were still listening and watching Cash intently:

"You know what that skunk's up to now. He's got Tabywana drunk—been at it for days—in order to swindle him out of his cattle."

Shorty, with all of the cow-boy's intolerance of the red man's rights, snapped, "Well, it don't make much difference about Injins."

"No," growled Grouchy, "guv'ment supports 'em anyway."

Nick had unearthed a bottle of ink.

"Well," he said, as he handed it across the bar, "that was ink once, Cash. 'Ain't had no use for it sense my gal throwed me. Gits more people into trouble. Often wisht I was illiterate." Nick's dry humor betrayed his descent from the Emerald Isle.

Cash paid no attention to Nick's attempts at conversation. He was filling his glass and surveying the crowds at the various tables. It annoyed him that no one had greeted him with any particular show of enthusiasm. Save for a "How d'ye," or a nod from some of the hangers-on, no one had particularly noticed him. He stood against the bar, and without turning his body directed his words towards Big Bill and Jim's men at a table near him. With a truculent swagger he blew his cigarette smoke through his nostrils.

"There's just one thing I can't stand for," he began, "and that's an Englishman." There was a movement from Jim's men, but it was quickly controlled. Cash went on: "He's a blot on any landscape, and wherever I see him I shall wipe him off the map. He is distinctly no good. We whipped 'em once, and we kin do it again. They 'ain't never whipped nuthin' but niggers and savages. The Englishman is a coward and any American who works for him is a cur."

With one movement Andy, Shorty, and Grouchy rose and their hands went to their guns, but almost before they had clutched them Bill was towering over them. With one hand he pushed Grouchy, and with the other gripped the shoulders of Shorty and Andy, until he forced them down into their chairs.

"Leave him to me," was all he said, and the men sullenly subsided under their foreman's orders.

Bill stood looking at Cash. He wanted to gain time and not take any notice of insults from him until it was so directly levelled that they could no longer endure it. He wished Jim would come; it was time for him. He wanted to finish some details of the shipping and then get their men to leave Maverick.

Cash saw Bill's command of the men; he ground his jaw with ugly grating sounds from his big white teeth. Looking directly at Bill, he said, "There is a certain outfit been a circilatin' reports derogitory to my standin' in this here kummunity, and before the day is over I will round up said outfit and put my

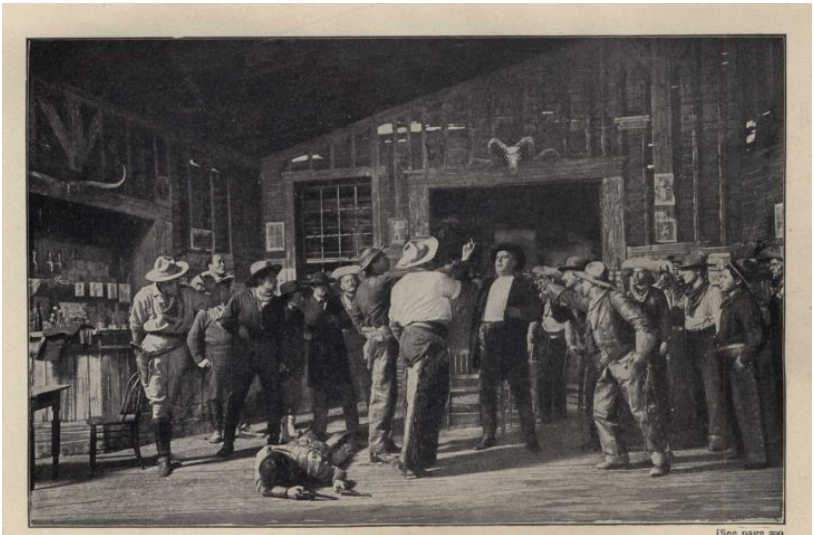
brand on 'em." As he spoke he touched his gun.

"Same as you been a-puttin' it on their cattle?" Bill remarked, coldly.

This was what Cash wanted; but he saw Tabywana coming along the platform, and there was too much at stake to allow him to gratify his feeling of anger against Bill then. He gave a low, chuckling laugh.

"A remark I overlook for the time bein', as I ain't agoin' to take advantage of the absence of the furrin gent that owns you."

He came towards Tabywana, who, halting and stumbling, was trying to cross the room. Cash laughed malevolently as he noticed his helpless condition. The Indian was trailing his blanket along the ground, his feathers were broken, and all intelligence—even cunning—was blotted from his face. The unconquerable dignity of a fallen aristocrat alone remained, and even handicapped as he was by his inebriated condition, he stood out against the others in the saloon as the one true claimant of America's royal race.



"ALMOST AS ONE MAN THEY THRUST THEIR REVOLVERS INTO BUD'S FACE" [See page 200

"ALMOST AS ONE MAN THEY THRUST THEIR REVOLVERS INTO BUD'S FACE" See page 200

Cash caught him by the arm and steered him to the bar. "Hello, Chief," he began, most affably; "come over here and we'll close our trade in a jiffy."

He spoke lightly, but his mouth began its rapacious twitching—Cash was

really a little nervous over the deal. The government once in a while remembered its people, and took up the claim of the red man. He drew from his belt a paper.

"Ther's the big treaty, Chief," he hurriedly began to explain. "Now all you got to do is to make your mark to it." He spoke aloud so that all could hear as he said, "Heap good trade." Cash was clever enough to know that if the deal took place in the saloon in the presence of Nick it would seem, if inquiry were made later, a fair deal.

But Tabywana's mind had been tortured by one desire—more drink from the bottle that the white man controlled.

He mumbled helplessly as he leaned against the bar and began soliciting Nick for a drink.

"What's that? You don't want to trade?" Cash burst forth. "Why, damn you—" Then he paused; to lose his temper would accomplish nothing. A little patience and he could force Tabywana to make his mark. He glanced about the saloon. The others were paying little attention to him—a drunken Indian was of no moment to them. He signalled Nick that he would take the responsibility of giving the Indian liquor. Both knew it was against the law, but both also knew that it was a law daily broken.

"Touge-wayno fire-water," wailed Tabywana.

Cash took hold of him. "What's the matter, you—"

Tabywana turned to him. Yes, for days this Cash Hawkins had given him his drink; why shouldn't he do so now? Nick was watching them from over his shoulder as he took down a bottle of rye. Tabywana pointed to him.

"No give 'em, me—heap like 'em—big medicine, sick. Me all time heap sick." By his gestures he indicated that his body was suffering for the medicine. "Wayno medicine," he continued. "Pretty soon, more fire-water, catch 'em. Pretty soon—maybe so—no sick." Incoherently he tried to explain that the drink would cure him at once. If not, then pretty soon he would be very ill.

Even at a moment like this Nick could not resist the temptation to tease the Chief. He poured out some whiskey, Tabywana tried to reach it, but Nick lifted the glass and drank it. The sight of it maddened Tabywana: with his two fists he struck the bar and gave vent to his rage in a loud voice.

Cash saw it was time to finish the business. He put his arm about Tabywana, while he directed Nick to give the Indian the bottle.

"It's agin the law to give you whiskey, Chief. 'Tain't every one's got the nerve to treat you like a white man." By this time he was holding the bottle high up in the air. "But there ain't no one hereabouts goin' to question any trade I make. Every man has an inalienable right—say, 'inalienable's' great, Chief—that's good medicine," he translated—"inalienable right to git drunk if he wants to, and I'm agoin' to protect you in your rights."

He held the paper close to Tabywana; he lowered his voice.

"Now just put your mark to that paper and you get this bottleful and the time of your life." The words were accompanied with explanatory gestures so that Tabywana could understand.

The Indian tried to reach the bottle. Then he saw the paper; he took hold of the pen and bent over it. As he did so a girl's figure slid in between him and Cash, and the bottle went smashing out of Cash Hawkins's hand up against the bottles and glasses on the shelf at the back of the bar. There was a crash of breaking glass and a snarling curse from Hawkins.

Tabywana stood dazed for a moment at the sight of Nat-u-ritch, who silently faced him and Hawkins. He made a sweeping gesture of fury, and attempted to strike Nat-u-ritch, but she cleverly dodged him. The force of the unarrested blow carried Tabywana against a table, he stumbled into a chair, made an attempt to rise, but, after a desperate effort, fell back in a drunken stupor, oblivious to his surroundings. The sudden burst of anger was the natural climax to days of dissipation.

The crash of the glasses and the sudden entrance of the girl attracted the attention of the gamblers. Some of them, scenting a fracas, stopped playing; others merely looked up, and then went on with the game. What did an Indian, male or female, matter to them?

Cash propped himself up against the bar. For the first time he really was brought within close range of Nat-u-ritch. Silent and immovable she stood, guarding the sunken form of her father. Her head was erect and she looked her contempt and scorn full in Hawkins's face. In her hands she held the fallen blanket of her father.

"Well, what d'ye think of it, eh?" Cash finally ejaculated. His eyes took note of the girl's physical perfection. "Say, fer spunk and grit dam'f I ever see her equal. Say, she can have me, kin Tabywana's squaw."

Nick interposed sullenly as he straightened up the disordered bar.

"She ain't Tabywana's squaw—that's Nat-u-ritch, his gal—his daughter."

"Daughter or squaw, don't make no difference to me." Cash slouched up to Nat-u-ritch and insolently surveyed her. "She's puty, she is, and I'll include her in the deal. Say, sis, I like your looks. You please me a whole lot, and I'll buy you along with your father's cattle—savvy?"

Still she made no answer—she knew what the white man was suggesting. That she had accomplished what she had dared to save her father now frightened her. She wanted to get him away and escape with him. But how? She could not leave him. She only clutched the blanket tighter.

Cash caught sight of the half-breed Baco, who was often called in to act as interpreter by the white men. "Baco," he called, "what's her name mean?" He

designated Nat-u-ritch with his thumb.

Baco grinned: "Purty little gal." He had cast his own eyes unsuccessfully on Nat-u-ritch.

"Well, she lives up to the name all right. Ain't she hell?" Cash drooped lower against the bar. "Say, Nat-u-ritch, you take chances with me when you interfere that way like you did jest now."

Along the platform Jim swung, the gray dust whitening his leather chaps and dusting his shirt and hat with a heavy powder. He had ridden hard to keep his appointment with Bill and his men. As he entered the centre door of the saloon he watched Hawkins and the little Indian girl with curiosity. He took in the situation at a glance. The drunken Chief, the tigerish Hawkins bending over the girl like an animal about to crunch a ewe lamb, and the contents of the smashed bottle that Nick was wiping away told him what had occurred. Cash was saying:

"Nat-u-ritch, you spoiled a very puty deal, and I ain't complaisant a whole lot with people as do that, but I'm goin' to pass that up, 'cause you please me, and I'm goin' to annex you. You're comin' to my wickyup—savvy? And to seal the bargain, and to show you that I ain't proud like the ordinary white man, I'm goin' to give you a kiss."

Before Hawkins could catch the resisting girl in his arms, Jim quietly stepped between them.

"Drop that, Hawkins." The voice of the Englishman was electrical. Jim's men jumped to their feet. At a move of Cash's hand to his belt they grasped their guns. "Don't pull your gun, Cash," Jim said. "You want to get your gang together before you do that. My boys would shoot you into ribbons." Jim was smoking a long cigar. He coolly took it from his lips, knocked off the ashes, then bent over Nat-u-ritch and whispered to her. Her eyes alone answered him. He was about to join his men when Cash Hawkins swaggered up to him.

"Say, son, ain't you courtin' disaster interferin' in my private business?" he threatened. He knew he dare not fight alone against Jim and his men, so he played for time. If only he had his gang!

Jim replied: "Do you call it 'business' robbing Indians when they're drunk, and insulting women?"

The cow-boy honor—for Cash had a crude drilling in the laws of the West—flamed at the last words, and in all sincerity, true to his American point of view, he answered, hotly:

"Don't you accuse me of insultin' women. She ain't a woman—she's a squaw."

Jim turned away. Why argue?

"Bill," he said, "you and Grouchy put Tabywana on his pony. Nat-u-ritch,

pike way, and take your father with you." He knew she could manage the ponies and arrive at her wickyup in safety; in fact, the pony would take the Chief home as he would a dead weight, if Tabywana was once strapped on his back.

The men struggled with the heavy body of Tabywana, and they finally succeeded in dragging him across the room, followed by Nat-u-ritch carrying the blanket. Cash could only watch—he was helpless—so he snarled:

"You've spoiled my trade, eh?"

Jim turned to him. "The bar is closed to Indians in Maverick." He meant Cash to infer that he could make it unpleasant for him if he called the government's attention to the matter.

But Cash only sneeringly asked, "By whose orders?"

"Uncle Sam's orders, and they're backed up by the big 'C' brand."

At these words Shorty and Andy both pulled their guns, and stood ready to defend Jim's statement. Cash gave a loud shout, then threw himself against the bar as he screamed to attract the people in the room.

"Gents," he called, "the Young Men's Christian Association is in the saddle. Say," he wildly went on, "it's goin' to be perfectly sweet in Maverick. Nick,"—he turned to the bartender, who now wished that Hawkins would go—"I'll be back for a glass of lemonade." Then he came to Jim, and, bowing low, he said, with all the venom and malice of his nature, "And say, angel-face, when I come back you better be prepared to lead in prayer."

He made a lunge at Jim, but the sharp eyes of his men never left his hands. Cash gave a wild roar of derisive laughter, flung himself across the room, turned at the door, pointed to Jim, again laughed wildly, and then disappeared. Shorty and Andy followed him to the door. Jim, indifferent, with his back to him, walked to a table at the farther end of the room.

The place was silent now. Jim knew he had received a direct challenge. According to the laws of the West, Cash was entitled to get his men together to meet Jim and his men. Every one in the saloon was on the alert. The Englishman was not well known there, but from what they had heard they knew he was courageous. Would he prove it now? If so, it meant that he would be there when Cash returned. Shorty turned from the door.

"He'll be back," he said, without looking at Jim.

Jim went on smoking. "Of course," he answered. He deliberately seated himself at the table and began shuffling the cards.

Then Shorty and the crowd knew that he meant to see the thing through. It was a quiet way, but, they all agreed, a good way of accepting it. Shorty exchanged glances with Andy. The boss was of the right sort. A little more dash would have pleased them better, still—

"Und say," Andy said, "und with his gang." He didn't want the boss to make

too light of the proposition.

But Shorty, who now was sure of Jim, answered for him, "So much the better, eh? We can clean 'em all up together. Say, boss, what did you let him make it a matter of Injins fer? You got the sentiment of the kummunity agin you right from the start. Looks like fightin' for trifles."

Grouchy, who had the news from Andy, who was now explaining it to Bill, straddled into a chair as he said, "Yes, it's some dignified to fight over cattle, but Injins—pshaw!"

Jim knew it was useless to try to explain. Their opinions on these matters were as separate as the poles; but they were a good sort, and served him well and faithfully. Personally he did not care for this proposed fight with Hawkins. He wanted peace—some days when he might dream and drift and watch the sand plains, when the work was done. The broils of the saloons, the point of view of the crowd, the honor of the West really mattered little to him, but for the sake of the boys, and that their pride in him might not suffer, he often accepted their definition of the code of life that was followed in Maverick. He knew how to win them, so he began:

"Well, boys, I don't want to drag you into my quarrel. If you feel that way about Indians—" He was about to add that he did not, but Shorty interrupted:

"Pull up, boss; 'tain't fair to make us look as if we were trying to sneak out of a scrap. It was only the cause of it. You ain't got a quitter in your gang, and you know it."

"I know it, Shorty." Jim was obliged to laugh at the eager faces of the three men who stood close to him, like excited children waiting to be understood.

"Well, don't say anything more about it, will you? Let's—" Shorty put out his hand.

Jim grasped it. "Let it go at that," Jim finished. "You understand that you are to leave Cash to me unless more get into the game."

Bill, who had been listening to it all, drew Jim aside. He preferred peace, but knew that they and Carston's ranch stood marked for the crowd to jeer at for all time unless they did what was expected of them by the laws of the cow town, made by its men, not by the government that they abused.

"Jim"—Bill spoke over his shoulder—"Bud Hardy, the County Sheriff, is standing just behind you at the bar, and he's particular thick with Cash. Got to take him into account."

Jim nodded; with his arm through Bill's he crossed to a side entrance and stood under the porch. He wanted to discuss with Bill what was best to do. Shorty and Andy stood up against the bar and treated their particular friends to drinks. They felt it was going to be a red-letter day for Carston's ranch.

Outside the Overland Limited tooted at intervals, and sent up shrill whis-

tles, but made no attempt to leave Maverick. One official's information was denied by the next one. Passengers had come in and had gone again—some of them frightened, some disgusted by the life of the saloon. A little farther down the line others of the passengers were being amused by some Indians who, at the news of the train's stopping, had hurried to the railroad.

Cash's departure had allowed the place to grow quiet. Even Nick hoped he would not find his men and return. There was a sudden shunting of the train, and the rear car moved back in to more direct view of the saloon. Diana, tired of the wait, had finally persuaded Sir John and Henry to alight and see the place. They all entered together.

"By Jove, what a rum hole!" Sir John exclaimed.

"Hello, there's a faro-table!" exclaimed Henry.

All that Diana said was, "I thought you had given up play, Henry."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, my dear, but a little sport to kill the tedium of this infernal wait—the monotony of the thing is getting on my nerves. John, will you look after Di while I at least watch the game?"

"Delighted," Sir John replied, but his anxious face showed that he thoroughly disapproved of the proceedings. "Really, Diana," he began, "let me prevail upon you to leave here. Any one who remains in a place of this kind is taking chances—oh, believe me—"

"Nonsense; it all looks deadly dull to me."

The men, recognizing a quietly gowned gentle-woman, paid no attention to them.

"Why, I'm not afraid, John. What's liable to happen?"

Sir John Applegate's mind was filled with stories of the West he had heard and read in his boyhood days.

"Why, these desperadoes are liable to come in here and request you to dance—dance for their amusement, by Jove!"

"Well, what of that? We don't do it," Diana teasingly interrupted.

"Oh yes, my dear Diana, we *do* do it. The request is an order, you know—obligatory—oh, quite? Because, believe me, if we do not accede to their absurd request, they playfully shoot your toes off, by Jove! They are shockingly rude, by Jove! these chaps, believe me—oh, shockingly!"

Diana looked about the room.

"I've read of such things, but I don't believe they happen—do you?"

Henry was lost to them in the crowd around the faro-table. Several other passengers from the train had joined him. Sir John really did not like the look of the place; at the moment he caught Pete's eyes fastened in amusement on him. He drew Diana to one corner, and as he did so they came within range of Jim's

sight. He was coming in to join Shorty and explain what he and Bill had decided to do when Cash returned. As he saw Diana he involuntarily drew back. It was only one of the old tormenting visions that had returned, he thought. He drew his hands over his eyes—but no, he saw her again! Impossible! He leaned forward—it was Di, and in Maverick! In spite of the sudden pain and bewilderment he smiled as he realized how the unexpected played its part in life. Di in Maverick!

There was no time to reason it out. He could not see Henry, only Sir John. He saw Diana watching with curiosity the place and its occupants. He mingled quickly with the crowd at the bar, hoping they would leave shortly.

Sir John was continuing his tirade against the ranchmen, and vainly trying to persuade Diana to return to the car. She was examining some crude pictures on the walls.

"When they wish," Sir John said, "these fellows shoot out the lights, the windows, and the bar furnishings. They are very whimsical—that's the American humor that they talk so much about. I don't care for whimsies myself." Diana began to laugh. Really, she was thinking, she had never known how absurd and old-womanish Sir John could be. But he continued: "Then, if you don't see fit to respond to their silly gayety, they kill you, by Jove! that's all. I can't see the joke of it, you know. For example, one of them comes in here and invites us all, believe me, to drink with him. It's not the proper thing to reply, 'Thanks awfully, old chap, but I'm not thirsty,' or 'I've just had a drink,' or 'Excuse me, won't you,' because if you say that, he's very angry, don't you know. You have offered him a deadly insult; he does not know you, never saw you before, hopes never to see you again, and yet if you do not drink something which you do not want he kills you. That's deliciously whimsical now, isn't it?"

"Cousin John, if I didn't know your reputation as a soldier, I'd think you were afraid." Diana, followed by Sir John, moved nearer the corner where Jim was standing.

Jim could see the sweet beauty of her face. He felt a sudden dizziness. It was more than he could endure. He started to leave, when he felt Bill's hand on his shoulder.

"This place is too stuffy for me; I must get out into the air," he explained.

"Leave the saloon now, Jim!" Bill exclaimed, in amazement. Surely Jim was not weakening. "If you ain't here to face Cash Hawkins when he comes back you lose your standing among the people with whom you live. You ain't agoin' to do that, are you, boy?"

"Oh yes—Cash." With the remembrance of Hawkins came the resolve to remain in the saloon until Diana left. He must be there to protect her if necessary. "I'd forgotten Cash; I was thinking of something else, Bill." Then, as he encountered Bill's searching eyes, he added, "Oh yes; remember, if Cash returns, each

of you pick your man and leave him to me."

He drew closer to the crowd at the bar; Diana was not likely to venture there. She had joined Henry, and, with Sir John, they were about to leave the place.

Suddenly there was the sound of the clattering of a troop outside. At every entrance to the saloon—and there were four—a man entered flourishing a gun, while through the centre door rushed Cash, who by this time had worked himself up into a frenzy of passion. Straight into the ceiling he shot his revolver, and said:

"Nick, every one in the Long Horn drinks with me."

Every means of egress was barred by Hawkins's men. Jim drew behind Bill's burly figure. If only Cash would allow the strangers to go, was his one thought. Henry looked at Sir John; Diana, half frightened, grasped a chair. The men in the place made a hurried rush towards the bar; deep in rows they stood there. Then Cash noticed the three figures; but it only added to the zest of the situation for him. Diana, watching his cruel face, realized that Sir John's yarn of adventure might prove a true one.

The saloon waited in silence.

CHAPTER XVI

Cash had been drinking heavily all day, but there was no sign that it had weakened his faculties. On the contrary, the exhilaration of the liquor served to strengthen his dogged humor as he compelled the inmates of the saloon, strangers and all, to do his bidding.

"By Jove, Di, we are in for it," Sir John muttered. Then he turned irritably to Henry, who was close to him, "You have let us get in for a nice mess up." He was not afraid, but more than anything in the world he disliked a scene. He had travelled enough to know that they were at the mercy of the rough humor of these men. When occasion warranted he could match others in decision and courage, but he also knew that the consequences of the present situation were apt to be needlessly unpleasant. From the beginning he had been averse to Henry's allowing Diana to come with them; however, they must find a way out of it. He began to survey the crowd of men critically.

Jim, who was watching Diana, spoke, though still hidden among the crowd at the bar.

"There are some outsiders, Hawkins, from the train. You don't care to mix them up in our festivities, I suppose." By humoring Cash he also hoped to find a way out for Diana and the others. His voice attracted Sir John's attention.



[See page 202.

"SHE DREW HERSELF UP CLOSE TO HIM, AND SAID 'ME KILL 'UM'"

"SHE DREW HERSELF UP CLOSE TO HIM, AND SAID 'ME KILL 'UM'" See page 202

"Quite so," he rejoined. "We have had a delightful time, don't you know." Then he turned to the desperado, who, with the smoking pistol still in his hand, was leaning against the centre-table and laughing at the strangers' discomfiture. "Awfully jolly of you to invite us, but circumstances over which we have no control, don't you know—" He grew painfully muddled.

"That's right, pane in the face," said Cash.

Sir John dropped his eye-glass in disgust.

"Circumstances over which you have no control," sneered Cash. "You describe the situation accurate. I'm a-runnin' this here garden-party, and I ain't agoin' to let anybody miss the fun—savvy?"

Jim's intervention had only hurt their chances of escaping from the saloon. Cash motioned his men, with their drawn guns, to stand close at the entrances. Jim saw Diana turn pale. He forgot everything; he only knew that she stood there—that at this moment Henry and Sir John were powerless to help her. He

must get her away from the place; he would agree promise Cash whatever he wished in return—only Diana must be allowed to leave.

"But the lady—you won't detain the lady against her will?" He knew the weakness of Cash's nature; to appeal to him as a gallant might be efficacious. In his earnestness to carry his point Jim stepped out from among the men around the bar.

Almost simultaneously a low cry of "Jim" broke from Henry and Diana. It was followed by an ejaculation from Sir John. It passed unremarked, and Jim determined to ignore what his impetuous folly had brought upon him. Cash was oblivious of everything save his revenge. He bowed low to Diana—he would be polite to the lady, even if the request came from Jim.

"I am going to give the lady the chance to see how an Englishman looks when he has to take his medicine." He looked at Diana. "She's sure a thoroughbred—she ain't batted an eye nor turned a hair. I'll bet a hundred to one she stays."

Diana could at that moment have passed out of the saloon, leaving Henry and Sir John there, but she saw only Jim. It *was* Jim—Jim in those strange clothes—Jim so bronzed, so strong, so masterful. What a contrast to Henry!

Cash waited for her answer. He adored playing to the gallery—this was heightening the situation beyond all expectation.

"She stays," he finally said. "Good! Gents, this is to be a nice, quiet, sociable affair—ladies are present. Any effort to create trouble will be nipped in the bud. Gents, to the bar."

He turned to Henry and Sir John as he spoke. He had a contempt for the men, but there was something about this quiet, dignified woman that embarrassed him, though he would have been the last to admit it. A few more drinks and he might be dangerous, but at present he was still master of himself. His game was to make Jim and his gang ridiculous before the strangers. Afterwards—well, then the serious settling of their score should come. He took a glass that was handed him across the bar and gulped down its contents.

Henry was whispering to Diana, "For God's sake, go—you can, and later we will follow you. This will be over in a minute." But Diana only held tighter the rail of the chair.

"We can't drink with this confounded bounder, Henry," Sir John expostulated. "It's too absurd, you know. Her Majesty's officers can't do a thing like that, now can they?"

"We must humor the drunken brute, Sir John, that's the only way out of it."

That Jim was there none of them acknowledged to each other. Events were assuming a strange unreality. What had been meant for a half-hours diversion was involving them in a highly dangerous situation. The saloon grew hotter—

little air reached them through the barred doorway. Still Diana did not go. The old imperative cry, stifled for the last two years, awoke again. She forgot the dust, the hot saloon, the swaggering crowd of ranchmen. The noise and wild excitement fell on her unheeding ears. Jim was there, and his presence held her rooted to the spot.

Jim had moved into a corner at the lower end of the bar, and furtively watched Cash and his men.

"Step up lively, sonny," Cash called to Sir John and Henry, "or you may have to dance the Highland fling."

Sir John stole a look of self-justification at Diana, but she did not see it. It was turning out just as he had told her.

"And shoot our toes off, by Jove," he whispered to Henry. "And he'll do it, too, confounded bounder!" he muttered, as both men went towards the bar and were met by Pete, who handed them each a glass of evil-looking whiskey.

Cash began to direct the scene. "Hand out the nose-paint, gents."

Every one took a drink, Jim too; for her sake he would do as Hawkins wished. It would be the quickest way to end this part of the business. The serious end of it would follow when they were alone.

Suddenly Cash, whose last two drinks were rendering him more offensive, and who was determined to annoy Sir John as well as Jim, said, "Gents, to the success of the Boers."

To the crowd it was a foolish toast; it meant nothing to them. But they had hardly begun to toss off their drinks when there came a crack of glass, as Sir John Applegate threw his tumbler on the floor and said, "No, I'll be damned."

Cash turned on him with an imprecation, and started to cover him with his gun. This unexpected diversion was the chance that Jim had been looking for. In an instant he had thrown his untasted liquor into Cash Hawkins's face. It blinded Cash. Involuntarily he fumbled with his guns, and in an instant Jim had thrust his revolver into Cash's side. There was a moment of pandemonium as Cash's imprecations filled the air. The men at the door started forward, but they had to pay for the moment's lowering of their guns. Big Bill and Jim's men had been eagerly watching their opportunity, and speedily covered Cash's gang.

"Put your hands up quick," Jim ordered.

Cash, with visible reluctance, complied. There was a suppressed madness of excitement in Jim's voice as he said to Sir John Applegate: "Oblige me by relieving the gentleman of his guns; it will tire him to hold it up there too long." Sir John obeyed. It was a critical moment—one never knew which way a crowd in a saloon would veer, and there might have been a riot if Cash had been more popular. As it happened there was a laugh at Jim's words. Sir John reached for the guns. Cash, gaunt and terrible to look at, stood still while they were taken

from him. The pressure of the muzzle at his side caused him to loosen his final reluctant finger.

"Delighted, charmed, I'm sure," Sir John agreed.

Jim, still covering Cash with his gun, drove him up against the bar. Those of the crowd who knew him realized that they were seeing a new man in the Englishman. He was conscious of Diana's luminous face back of him, of Henry's gray countenance close to her as he quietly expostulated with her. The crowd swung close to the new boss. This was what they wanted. They believed he would prove the new leader for Maverick.

"Every man's hands on the bar," the Englishman called, and he and his men covered the crowd at these words. "I ask you," Jim quietly said, "to drink with me to the President of the United States."

Men who had cursed their President, defied the laws of the country that had elected him, and who were fugitives from the justice of their land were touched by the simple and tactful toast. All glasses were raised. They were about to drink, but the first sentence was followed by the words:

"And to her Gracious Majesty, the Queen."

This time Jim stood ready to shoot; but it was unnecessary—the crowd echoed the toast. Why not? The Englishman was right. Their country—then his. Not a bad sort. So the murmurs went around.

Suddenly Hawkins said, as he watched Sir John:

"Your little glass-eyed friend don't drink."

Sir John's glass was still untouched.

"Oh yes, he's goin' to drink," Shorty cut in, as he crossed to the group near the table.

"Ain't nobody excused on a formal show-down like this!" Bill called.

But Sir John, carried away by indignation at Jim's daring to propose that toast to the country and the sovereign he believed Jim had so dishonored, vehemently answered:

"I'm an officer in her Majesty's service, and, by Jove! I won't drink with a man who fled from England after robbing the widows and orphans of the Queen's soldiers, and you can do what you jolly well like about it."

All eyes were turned on Jim. Would he kill the stranger? Henry held Diana by the arm. Jim grew pale under the strain of the moment's intensity.

Cash was the first to speak. "What do you say to that?" he drawled, after a prolonged whistle.

But Jim kept his eyes fastened on Sir John. "If I were the man you think me," he said, "you would never have finished that sentence. You have evidently mistaken me for some one else. My name is Jim Carston, and I never took a penny that did not belong to me."

Even to Sir John the words rang true, but he had lost all control—he was determined to avenge the old score of dishonor against his regiment.

"Why, confound your impudence, there stands your cousin, Henry Kerhill!"

The crowd swung around. This was the moment—it had been a day for Maverick. What were they now to learn of Cash's "angel-face"?

Henry crossed to Jim and faced him. There was a pause. "Yes," he answered, with as much nonchalance as he could assume, "I believe the gentleman does bear a certain bald resemblance to the man you mean, but it is evidently a case of mistaken identity." Diana's eyes were following him with their mute appeal. He continued: "You will observe, Sir John, that I drank the toast. I trust you will not refuse to drink to our Queen with these gentlemen in a foreign country."

The ranchmen liked these Englishmen. They were being treated with great consideration; the little one was amusing but he was all right. So ran the verdict of the Long Horn saloon.

Sir John Applegate stood unconvinced. Henry's eyes were fastened on him, and he read there something that held a reason for his denial. At all events he had been most unwise—he knew that now—and he must, for Diana's sake, undo his hasty words.

"Well, of course," he began, as he realized that further comment would be futile, "I was under the impression that I hadn't had a drink—not one, by Jove! Well, I must be squiffy." The cow-punchers laughed. "Here's," he finished, "to her Gracious Majesty the Queen—God bless her!"

Big Bill, who would have been an arch-diplomat in another sphere of life, said:

"Not forgettin' his Gracious Majesty the President, you know."

Sir John rose to the occasion. "Oh, quite so—his Royal Highness the President—God bless him!"

The men slapped one another in appreciation of the joke. Sir John tried to drink the whiskey of the country, but with a sigh he said, after the first taste, "Say, as I must drink, please make it Scotch."

During the scene in the saloon the car had drawn down the line and was shunting up and down the rails in a way comprehensible only to the powers that control an engine. Henry apprehensively looked towards the car, and went to meet Dan, whom he could see at the farther end of the platform. The meeting with Jim had been painful, and he was almost at his wits' end. As he could not force Diana's prompt withdrawal, he would fetch Dan to insist upon the passengers' return to the car.

Jim had seen Henry slip away unobserved. Would Diana and Sir John never go? He could see that the excitement was beginning to tell on Diana. Suddenly she swayed—yet he dared not go near her.

"Bill," he called, "the lady looks as though she were going to faint."

Sir John and Bill started towards Diana, but Bill was the first to reach her. He quickly grasped her by the arm and steadied her.

Diana smiled at him. "Thank you, I was dizzy for a moment."

"On behalf of the genuine cow-boys present, I must apologize to this lady for being forced to remain in a place like this. You may go, madam." Jim spoke without looking at her.

"Thank you," Diana answered. "I am a bit shaken, but I'm glad I stayed."

Bill was still holding her hand as he drew a chair towards her. "You're tremblin', lady. Nick"—he turned to the bar—"ain't you got nothin' in the way of a ladies' drink?"

"Right off the bat." Nick took a bottle from the pyramid behind the bar. "Here's a bottle of Rhine wine as has been an ornament here for fifteen years." As he spoke he dusted the slender-throated flagon. "It's unsalable. I never tasted it but once, and I hardly knowed I had had a drink. It was just like weak tea; but it's a regulation ladies' drink, and if the lady will honor me, it's sure on the house."

Diana had sunk into the chair—she was too dazed to know what to do. Sir John was near her.

"That's very kind of you, I'm sure," Diana said. She took the glass from Bill's hand. "I feel better already."

"It 'ain't got no real substance to it, lady, but it's the best Nick's got, and we'd like to have you accept it, jest to show that you know that all Western men ain't bad men and all cow-boys ain't loafers."

As he spoke, Bill bowed low. Like a gallant of old, he trailed his sombrero on the ground. Some of the men began to feel sentimental—they were like weather-cocks, responding readily with their susceptible natures to the swaying influence of the moment.

Hardly knowing what she was doing, Diana sprang to her feet. Jim would not look towards her—well, then, she must send him some message. "I think I understand," she said to Bill. "If you will let me, I would like to propose a toast—will you let me?"

The room echoed the assent of the men. They were all cavaliers—all sombreros were off and all bowed low before Diana. The cow-boy has much of the player in him. Hardly able to steady her sweet, tremulous voice, Diana turned directly to Jim and moved nearer to him, while she lifted her glass high in the air.

"To the Queen's champion, Mr.—" She paused, her eyes were blinded, her brain clouded. What was the name he had called himself? "Mr.—" she again repeated.

Bill's voice answered, "Jim Carston's his name, lady."

Higher she held the glass. Jim had turned in amazement. Her eyes met his.

"Mr. Jim Carston." Her voice rang clear and vibrant this time.

"And every son of a gun in this hole drinks to that, or we'll know the reason why—eh, boys?" Bill jubilantly cried. Their boss had brought glory to them that day.

"Jim Carston! Jim Carston!" The name rang through the place, and the toast was drunk with enthusiasm. In the midst of it all the centre door was thrown open and the conductor's big voice bawled:

"All passengers for the Overland Limited—all aboard!"

CHAPTER XVII

The tooting and whistling of the train began. The men filed outside. In the crush Cash Hawkins, who had been drinking steadily until he was now in a decided state of inebriation, slunk down to the other end of the platform. Henry and Sir John assisted Diana to the car. The cow-boys swarmed along the platform—Jim alone stood in the deserted saloon.

Before he was aware of what was happening—that the train was about to carry away this tie of his former life—he heard Diana's voice call "Jim." She slipped from the lower step on which she stood and ran towards him.

"Diana!" He seized her out-stretched hands—he must say something to her, but she would not let him speak.

"I shall always thank God for this day, Jim, I couldn't believe you were—I never have. Now I know the sacrifices you have made for me—now I know I have the right to ask God to bless you and keep you and make you happy." Her voice broke; tears were falling on his hand.

Lady Elizabeth or Henry would never discuss the cause of Jim's departure. She had always persistently defended him to the world, and to-day her intuition had told her that for her sake Jim had shielded his cousin—her husband! How could she accept it?

"And you, Diana—tell me you are happy."

"Happy?" Her eyes told him that it was only possible for her to be happy now that she knew the truth. "I sha'n't mind the future now so terribly, because I can respect somebody."

Dan passed the open door. "All aboard, lady," he briskly called.

"Good-bye, Jim. God bless you!" She felt herself being helped aboard by

Dan; she tried to wave her hand to Jim. The car moved, the whistling and ringing of the bell told of their departure.

It was Henry who led her to a chair and left her there. That day he paid in full for his life's misdeeds.

Jim never attempted to see the receding car; he could hear the noise of the departing train and the cries of the boys as they hooted their good-byes.

"Kiss the baby for me." It was big Bill's voice.

"What a baby Bill is himself!" Jim found himself saying.

"Tell Sadie to write," called Shorty.

"Und say—say for me too, you bet." The voice of the German was drowned in the roar from the rest of the boys. Only Grouchy, in silence, looked on contemptuously.

From down the platform came the yells of the men. Even Nick had deserted his bar. Still, Jim did not move. He could hear it all; he knew what was happening—that the train was steaming away. He found himself watching flies settle on a beer-glass. Then he fell into a chair, let his head slip on to his arms that lay across the table, his back to the big entrance and to the smaller one at the other side of the room. There was no movement from him that told of the agonies he was enduring. The flies buzzed at will about the place.

The door at the side swung silently open and Nat-u-ritch slipped into the room. In her soft moccasins her steps made no sound. She crept towards Jim, amazed to see him lying thus. She shook her head—she could not understand this mystery. She was about to move closer to Jim when she heard some one coming.

Through the door at the back she could see the crowds returning from the departed train, while from the other direction came Cash Hawkins—she could see him clearly. Closer came his steps. Quickly she slid behind the door, and from without peered into the saloon. Cash, aflame with passion and liquor, entered and saw that Jim was alone.

He drew both his guns. With an evil smile he advanced upon Jim. "Damn you, I've got you!" he hissed; but before he could pull the trigger there was a flash, a report, and Cash's hands were thrown up in a convulsive movement while he pitched forward on his face. Dazed, bewildered, Jim got to his feet and mechanically pulled his gun; then, before he was aware of what had happened, he was bending over the body of Hawkins.

The report was followed by an excitable rush of the crowd into the saloon. The gamblers and cattlemen were headed by Bud Hardy, the County Sheriff. Big Bill, Andy, Grouchy, and Shorty went at once to Jim, who still stood close to the prostrate figure cf Cash Hawkins. Pete quickly knelt beside the body, and turned Cash over to examine him. Bud Hardy stood in the centre of the room.

"Hold on there! Nobody leaves without my permission." Then to Pete, "How is he?"

"He's cashed in, Sheriff. Plumb through the heart. Don't think I ever see neater work." He laid the body on its back and crossed the arms over the breast.

Hardy walked direct to Jim. "Jim Carston, hand over your gun."

"And who are you?" Jim asked, as he looked at the tall, bulky figure of Bud Hardy. He had forgotten that Bill, earlier in the afternoon, had pointed out this man to him, and warned him of his friendship with Cash Hawkins.

Gathered about Bud were Hawkins's faction, who resented the Englishman's presence among them, and with them several who, only a few hours ago, had been cheering Jim. Bud Hardy answered his question with tolerant amusement.

"The County Sheriff," he said.

To the surprise of all, Jim advanced and handed his gun to Bud.

"Come on, you're my prisoner." Even Bud felt that this was extremely difficult. No resistance from the prisoner—no denial! It was unusual. But as he stepped towards Jim he was stopped by Bill.

"Wait a minute, Bud; don't be in such a ferocious hurry. Where you goin' to take him to?"

Bill's heart beat fast, but he gave no sign of the fear that filled him. He knew what this might mean for the boss. The faces of the other men of Jim's ranch grew gray—they too realized, far more than Jim did, that it was not the justice of the law that was to be his, but—well, the crowds grew blood-thirsty sometimes in Maverick. They had seen sights that the boss had not—an ugly swinging vision passed before their eyes, but no hint was given of this by the men. Each one knew that it would be the most unwise move they could make for the boss's sake.

Bill's big, slow voice was heard again in its careless drawl. "Wait a minute, Bud; don't be in such a ferocious hurry. Where you goin' to take him to?"

"County jail, of course, at Jansen," was Hardy's answer.

Bill then asked, as he surveyed Hawkins's gang, who were whispering together with several of the hangers-on of the place, "How do you know the friends of the deceased won't take him away from you and hang him to the nearest telegraph-pole, eh?"

It was lightly said, and as he said it Bill laid his big hand on Bud's shoulder. He must conciliate the Sheriff, gain time—anything.

But Bud shook Bill off. "Are you goin' to interfere with me in the discharge of my duty?" he blustered.

"Not a bit, Bud, not a bit," Bill said; then, with sudden resolve—it would mean his life, and the lives of others against them, perhaps, but he meant to fight

if necessary—he added: "But we're goin' to see that you do it. We ain't afraid of a trial and a jury." He took the crowd into his confidence. "There isn't a jury in the State that wouldn't present the prisoner with a vote of thanks and a silver service for gettin' rid of Cash Hawkins."

He turned to Bud with his men about him. "Who's goin' to help you take him seventy-five miles to jail?" he demanded. "Will you swear us in?"

But Bud only answered, "You can't intimidate me, Bill."

"As defunct has a gun in each hand it's a plain case of self-defence, anyway." Bill pointed to the two revolvers still clutched in the dead man's stiffening hands.

"I don't stand for this," thundered Bud. "Clear the room."

He had been rather a friend of Big Bill's—most of them were in Maverick—so he had listened to him longer than he would have to any of the other men, but now he was through with his arguments, he must assert his authority.

"Clear the room; this prisoner goes with me."

There was a movement from the crowd. Bill looked appealingly at Jim. Why would not the boss speak? Just as the crowds had reached the doors Jim said to Bud, who was advancing to formally arrest him:

"Wait a minute. Take the trouble to examine my gun."

Bud lifted Jim's gun and looked at it closely. "Well?" he asked.

"You see it hasn't been discharged."

Bud quickly verified the fact that the gun was completely loaded. He paused a moment irresolute. Then, with a sudden suspicion, he said:

"You've had time to reload it."

The men were eagerly watching the scene between the two men.

"Smell it," Jim said, quietly. "I haven't had time to clean it."

"Ah!" Bill breathed. It was like Jim to play the trump card.

Bud Hardy lifted the revolver to his nose. It was as clean and fresh-smelling as a bit of cold steel. There could be no doubt that it had not been used, and Jim had all these men as witnesses to prove it. It would be useless to try to make a case of this. Bud knew when he was beaten. He took the revolver and handed it to Jim.

"Well, who did it, then?" He glanced at Jim's men. "Would you's all oblige me by giving me a sniff of your guns?"

The relief was so great that the men hysterically crowded Bud, and almost as one man they thrust their revolvers into Bud's face.

"Here's my smoke," said one.

Bud drew back. "One at a time—one at a time," he gasped—"if you please."

Then one by one the men filed past him as each held his revolver to Bud's nose.

"Here's my smoke-machine," Bill said. It was passed by Bud without a word.

"Und mine," said Andy.

Grouchy jerked his into Bud's face with the words, "Here's mine, and not a notch on it." And Bud could not deny the truth of the assertion.

All that Shorty nervously demanded was, "How's that?" as he jerked the revolver into Bud's face.

In Maverick this was evidence enough for Bud—evidence that so far all were free to go.

"Why didn't you's all say so before?" he growled, annoyed at the turn affairs had taken. Then he saw the expression on their faces, laughter and glee as they crowded around Jim; when they looked at him, tolerant amusement. The smelling of the smoke-machines they regarded as a fine new move on their part.

"Damn it," Bud thundered. "You've been astringin' me while the guilty man's escaped; but I'll git him—I'll git him yet."

Jim saved! It was all that the boys wanted. With a whoop-la, they tore after Bud. Down the platform they fled, all in excitement with the new sensation of the moment—the hunt with Bud for the guilty man.

Near the table lay a gray glove. Jim stooped and picked it up, and put it quietly to his lips. Bill, who had lingered near the door, suddenly turned and came back to Jim and put his arm about him.

"You just escaped lynchin', Jim." And Jim knew that Bill spoke the truth.

He held the glove folded close in his hand as he answered, "Yes, I'm almost sorry."

Bill's face became grave. What did the boss mean? Was the game too hard for him? Was he afraid he would lose on the ranch deal? He patted him tenderly, almost like a mother humoring a wayward child, without saying a word. Jim sank into a chair. Bill understood—the boss would like to be alone, so he sauntered up to the back and joined Nick. In his heart there was but one thought: Jim should see how well they would all serve him. He swore a mighty oath that he would see the others did so, too.

Left alone, Jim sat staring straight ahead of him. Suddenly he realized that the body of Cash Hawkins was still lying there. He shuddered at the cruel forgetfulness of the men. He leaned forward and spoke his thoughts aloud:

"Who killed Cash Hawkins?"

He felt a sudden touch on his hand; he turned; there, kneeling at his feet, was Nat-u-ritch, who had entered unobserved and crept beside him. As he looked at her she drew herself up nearer to him, and, leaning her chin on her hand, said:

"Me kill um."

Jim's only answer was to place his hand over her face while he hurriedly looked about the saloon. No one could have heard her. He drew her to her feet and motioned her to go, saying that he would follow shortly.

That night Jim learned the truth, and his friendship with Nat-u-ritch began.

CHAPTER XVIII

After this Jim often met Nat-u-ritch. On his trail across the country he would see her on her little pony galloping after him. Sometimes she would join him and silently accompany him on his search for the cattle that had strayed beyond the range.

Nat-u-ritch's life with her father, Tabywana, was passed in days of uneventful placidness. Since the death of Cash Hawkins the Chief had given her no cause for anxiety. Concerning the murder, neither she nor her father spoke. Tabywana admired Jim Carston; he seemed to realize instinctively what Jim had saved him from that day at the saloon, and his unspoken devotion, sincere and steadfast, often caused him to serve Jim without any one's knowledge.

Sometimes when Nat-u-ritch returned from a long day's ride her father would scrutinize her, and as he read in her the call of her nature for the Englishman, a curious smile would light up his face in sympathy with her. He saw the unmoved impassiveness that she showed to all the young bucks that sought her, and without protest let her go her way, and her trail always led towards Carston's ranch.

Winter came with its treacherous winds, and Carston's ranch was more desolate. Of Nat-u-ritch's unspoken devotion to him there was no doubt in Jim's mind, and the temptation to take her proffered companionship into his lonely life rose strong within him. After Cash Hawkins's death, Jim, had he cared for the life, might have been a leader in the Long Horn saloon, but a bar-room hero was not the role that he wished to play. His own men—Grouchy, Andy, and Shorty—openly expressed their disappointment to Big Bill at the boss's indifference to the position he might exert as a power in Maverick, and even Big Bill only vaguely understood Jim's unappreciative attitude. He often watched Jim smoking his pipe and peering into the heart of the embers that glowed on the hearth, and as he saw the careworn face Bill's great heart ached with sympathy for him. But Jim, as he realized the difficulties of the fight in which he was involved, only clinched his fists the tighter and accomplished the work of three men in his day's toil.

At these times the physical drain on him was so great that there was no opportunity left in which to realize the biting ache of his loneliness. So one bleak

day succeeded another, with the slim, mute figure of the Indian girl ever crossing his path.

The early spring brought with it a sudden melting of the snow-capped hills and the ice-covered pools. The cattle grew more troublesome. They seemed harder to control, or else the boys were more indifferent to their disappearance. Big Bill had gone away on a deal for new cattle, so Jim's energies were redoubled.

One day as he rode across the plains searching for a lost herd that had wandered towards Jackson's Hole, the longing that the awakening spring had brought with it grew more insistent. Life surely held for him possibilities greater than this, he told himself. He resolved, on Bill's return, to arrange with him to sell the place. He could not conquer the craving for the old haunts of civilization that took possession of him. He closed his eyes to shut out the endless stretch of prairie. Lost in his dream to escape from his lonely life and to take part again in the affairs of men of his own class, he failed to notice the small pony that followed him carrying Nat-u-ritch.

On he went, so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not notice how close he was to Jackson's Hole. Big Bill long ago had warned him of the treacherous ridge that lay near the gulley, but Jim had forgotten Bill's words. Unconscious of the danger ahead, he galloped towards the edge of the broken precipice. In the distance he espied the marks of a herd of cattle that had passed around to the other side of the ridge. Jim urged his horse forward and started to jump the small, deceptive span that covered the hole. A sharp cry came from Nat-u-ritch, who had quickly gained ground on him as she saw his intention. But Jim, unheeding, gave a sharp command to his horse and urged him over. There was a sudden breaking of ground; then a whirling, dazed moment through which flashed an eternity of thought, and Nat-u-ritch stood alone, clinging to her pony as she peered over into the dark pool of broken ice around which stretched chasms of impenetrable blackness.

Two weeks later Jim opened his eyes to consciousness in Nat-u-ritch's wickyup. No man of those summoned by Nat-u-ritch to help had dared venture into the dreaded abyss, so Jim had been abandoned as dead. But the depth of her love gave the Indian girl the strength to accomplish his rescue. Jealous of her treasure, she dragged the unconscious body to her own village, which was nearer than Jim's ranch.

Then followed an illness from the long exposure in the gulley. Big Bill returned, only to find the ranch without its master, while Jim lay in the squaw's wickyup, with the Indian girl fighting to save his life, her love and loyalty making her his abject slave.

Weeks followed, and one day Big Bill and the boys brought the boss home. Then came a relapse, and again Nat-u-ritch's devotion and courage gave him back his life. This time Bill watched a double fight: the fight on the part of the woman to save the man so that she might win him for herself, and on Jim's part an effort to resist the mute surrender of the woman.

Without the boss's supervision the ranch had deteriorated, and Jim's affairs had become so involved that he recovered only to find that all thought of abandoning the place was now impossible. His dream of escape was now a hope of the past. And so life began afresh for him on the plains.

Jim stood outside of the window of an adobe hut. From within he could hear the low moans of a woman and now and then the wail of a child. He was alone, save for the missionary who had married him a few months before to Nat-u-ritch, and who was now inside helping the sick woman. Big Bill had gone to fetch an old squaw who had promised to come to the ranch. As Jim leaned against the post of the porch he was stirred by a multitude of emotions. The wails from within grew louder and more fretful. As he watched the heavens, ablaze with a thousand eyes, he wondered why the old woman had failed to come in time. He hardly realized what the past hour had meant to him. A child had been given to him! Something of the wonder of the eternal mystery was numbing his spirit. The sick woman's moans grew fainter, only the cry of the babe persistently reached him.

At last the missionary came to him: Nat-u-ritch was asleep; he would go, he explained, and hurry along the Indian woman who was coming with Big Bill to the ranch. The cry of the child seemed to become more pitiful. Jim tiptoed to the door of the inner room. On the cot lay Nat-u-ritch. He softly crossed to the small bundle of life rolled in the blanket and lifted it in his arms. The warm, appealing little body lay limp against him. He began swaying to and fro until the cry grew fainter. Soon the babe slept; but Jim still stood rocking his son in his strong arms.

CHAPTER XIX

One year slipped into another, until five had passed since the birth of Jim's son Hal. The cattle did well and ill by turns, but mostly ill. The trusts were making

their iron paws felt by the grasp in which they held the ranchmen—absolutely dictating their terms. A dry season often further augmented the disaster of Jim's ventures. Without repining he fought on, with only great-hearted Bill's advice and confidence to help him through the wearing time.

Green River, which had been the excuse for Carston's ranch, was in low spirits this sizzling summer afternoon. Throughout the long day the alkali plains had crackled under the withering sun, until the entire place lay covered with a heavy powder of dust. Even the straggling scrub-oak and green sage-brush seemed to be only nature's imitation of asbestos, so persistently were they radiating the heat of the past week. The adobe stable glared at the low adobe dwelling opposite. Neither gave evidence of any life within. A decrepit wagon with its tongue lolling out lay like a tired dog before the stable; beside it was heaped the dusty double harness with its primitive mending of rope and buckskin, while near the house a disordered hummock of pack-saddles and camp outfits further increased the disorder of the place. An unsteady bench, holding a tin basin, a dipper, and a bucket of water, and a solitary towel on a nail near by, were the sole tributes to civilization.

Big Bill, whose eyes were accustomed to the place, seemed indifferent to the unspeakable desolation of the ranch. He sat on a log that lay before the door of the hut and was used for social intercourse or wood-splitting. He was intent on braiding strands of buckskin, the ends of which were held by little Hal, who had grown into a winsome little lad and was the pet of all the men and his father's constant companion.

Across the river, towards the west, the same desolation met the eye. Even the sage-brush and scrub-oak seemed to have abandoned life in despair, and the Bad Lands stretched lifeless to the foot-hills of the snow-capped Uinta peaks. Even more poignant than the cruel ugliness of the place was the feeling that the great gaunt bird of failure brooded over the entire ranch.

As Bill clumsily twisted the braid the child eagerly watched him.

"Is it for me, sure, Bill?" he asked, as he slid close to the big fellow.

"Yes, old man," Bill answered, as he stooped to pat the dark head. "This is going to be for you, and there ain't any old cow-puncher can beat Bill making a quirt. No, sirree."

While he talked lightly to the child his mind was busy with unpleasant thoughts. The boys were about to strike for their money. Their wages had been overdue for some time, and the boss, finally driven to the wall by disease among the cattle, had been unable to satisfy them. So far there had been no outbreak, but Bill expected it every moment.

For days Jim had hardly spoken. That there was some important decision about to be made by him, Bill guessed. He sat and played with the child, but in

reality this was only a ruse by which he might keep close to the place and await developments. From down the road he could hear the men coming and calling to him, but he gave no sign. He went on knotting the strands, and steadied little Hal's hands when the child grew tired of holding the quirt.

Shorty was the first to arrive, carrying his Mexican saddle and lariat. On his diminutive face was stamped an aggressive pugnacity. He was followed by Andy; Grouchy slouched in last, whittling at a piece of wood. As Bill surveyed them he knew that they had been talking things over and had arrived at some conclusion. They had been good workers in their time with him, and he knew even now, at heart, that they were not bad, but that life had tried them severely with its failures and disappointments. He waited for them to speak. There was a moment's silence, then Shorty, as he flung himself down on the bench, said:

"Say, Bill, I s'pose you know the boys is gettin' nervous 'bout their money, don't you?"

Bill just looked up, and then went on with his work as he answered, "To-morrow's pay-day." He would not anticipate them in their rebellion; he would make it hard for them to declare themselves.

"That's what," Shorty went on.

"Well, it's time to get nervous day after to-morrow." And still Bill braided the leather.

"They're goin' to make trouble if they don't git it." Shorty acted as spokesman. Grouchy and Andy only nodded their heads in approval of their leader's words.

Bill stopped his work as he picked Hal up in his arms. "Are they?" he said. "Well, I reckon Jim Carston and me can handle that bunch." He spoke as though the others were not present.

"Maybe you kin; maybe you kin," Shorty retorted, as he flung the saddle against the walls of the cabin.

"Und say, Bill—und say—to-morrow's pay-day." Andy's voice trembled as he spoke. He was a gentle-mannered German, and the sight of Hal was not a good incentive for him to fight against the boss.

Hal began to listen and to look from one to the other. Bill noticed the child's look of inquiry and set him on the ground.

"Son, you run in and help your mother with the milking." He slapped his hands together as though a great joy were in store for the child, who laughed with glee as he hurried across to the stable.

The men waited for Bill to say something, but he only stood twisting a straw about in his mouth and pulling his hat-brim.

Again Andy's courage rose and he walked close to Bill. "To-morrow's pay-day, Bill—eh?"

"Is it? Do tell! Ain't you a discoverer! Say, Andy, you're neglectin' the north pole a little."

This time it was Grouchy who answered, "Well, I want mine," and he viciously dug his knife into the hitching-post.

Bill looked from one to the other. Surely they would be reasonable; he would try them.

"Boys, it's seven years since the boss bought this ranch, and he's had an up-hill fight. Every one's done him. He bought when cattle was higher than they've ever been since, and you know what last winter did for us; but he 'ain't ever hollered, and the top wages he paid you at the start he's been a-payin' you ever since."

"Oh, what's the use!" Shorty interrupted. "The money is owed us. The only question is, do we git it?"

Backed up by Shorty, Grouchy began again, "Well, I want mine."

Only gentle Andy was silent. He could hear little Hal laughing as he played in the cow-shed.

Bill dropped his persuasive tone as he wheeled around on the men and in a sudden blaze said:

"Well, you know Carston and you know me. If you're lookin' for trouble, we won't see you go away disappointed." He squared his shoulders as he spoke. "Oh, shucks!" He looked at the boys again. "It's no use," he began, more good-naturedly. "It's the business that's no good. Nothin' in it. The packers has got us skinned to death. They pay us what they like for cattle, and charge the public what they like for beef. Hell!" he grunted, as he turned on his heel. "I'm goin' into the ministry."

This time Grouchy's "Well, I want mine" was extremely faint.

Before the others could speak again Bill quickly called, "Here's the boss now," and signalled the men to be silent.

They were touched by Jim's haggard face. They had not seen the boss for several days; he had been busy with accounts, Bill had told them. They began shuffling their feet as though about to leave. Each one thought perhaps it would be as well to wait until the next day. Shorty signalled them to come on, but Jim stopped them.

"Boys, I hear you're getting anxious about your pay. I don't blame you. My affairs are in a bad way, but I don't expect any one to share my bad luck. You've earned your money. I'll see that you get it."

As Jim spoke he drew from his pocket several small boxes and from his belt an old wallet. "I have some useless old trinkets here that have been knocking around in my trunk for years. If you will take them to town, where people wear such things, you will get enough for them to wipe out my account and something

to boot for long service and good-will." Andy's sniffles were the only answer that followed. Jim turned to him, "Andy—"

But Andy refused the package. "Und say, boss. Und say, I ain't kickin'. Und say, I can trust you."

Jim only tossed the box into his hands. "Shorty," he said, as he slapped the wallet across the little fellow's shoulder.

"Oh, I'd rather not," Shorty shamefacedly answered. "Gee, but this is tough work," he muttered to himself.

Jim smiled. "You must take it, please. The man who refuses throws suspicion on the value of my junk. You won't do that, I'm sure." And the wallet slid into Shorty's hand.

"Grouchy, you can have my repeating rifle," he added. "And now, good-night. I'll see you to-morrow for the last time."

So this was to be the end of their association with the boss. Would he try to shoulder the work of the place without them? A second's reflection told them that this would be impossible. It was to be really the end of Carston's ranch. The three men stood staring at Jim. Bill, at the back of the hut, as he heard the words, sank down on a rough bench. This was what had come of the days of silence on Jim's part; in each man's heart there was an unspeakable emotion at the dissolution of their companionship.

Suddenly down the road they heard the clatter of horses. Then the whoopla of a crowd of men, and a stentorian voice called:

"Hello, any one to home at Carston's ranch?"

Shorty and Andy hurried to meet the new-comers. It was Bud Hardy, the Sheriff, with a posse of men. In they rushed, swarming all over the place, and carrying with them the smell of alkali and the heat of the plains. Dripping with perspiration, stained and worn with their travel, they seemed like part of the desert, so covered were they with a heavy caking of dust. One felt the parched fever of their thirst as they stood asking hospitality of the ranch. Jim advanced to meet them.

"Hello, folks," Bud called, as the men of the ranch welcomed his men. Then he came towards Jim, who shook hands with him.

"Why, how are you, Sheriff?"

Since the day at Maverick, when the Sheriff had tried to arrest him, Jim had often seen Bud. He was never sure of the honesty of the man's intentions, ne and Big Bill had often discussed Bud's unfitness for the power he held in the place, but he gave no sign of this in his greeting.

Bud's great frame towered above the others. He seemed more effusive and excited than the occasion warranted, and Big Bill's brows rose questioningly as he saw the demonstrative way in which he greeted Jim.

"Howdy, Mr. Carston—howdy? Knowin' the hospitality of this here outfit, we most killed ourselves to git here, to say nothin' of the horses. We left them leanin' up against the corral, the worst done up cayuses." Then directly in appeal to Jim, he said, "We simply got to stay here to-night, Mr. Carston."

With a cordial gesture of invitation, Jim said, "You and the boys are welcome, Sheriff, and what we lack in grub and accommodations we'll hope to make up to you in good-will."

As Jim spoke, Bud quickly glanced in triumph at Clarke, a prominent worker in his posse. The pale face of Clarke gave back a glance of comprehension as he lowered his white-lashed eyelids over his bulging eyes. All this was observed by Bill, who sauntered towards the Sheriff as Bud answered Jim.

"What's good enough for you all is good enough for us, you bet," and he wrung Jim's hand again. "Why, hello!" he finished, as he saw Bill and turned to greet him.

"Any news?" Bill laconically asked, as he studied Bud and his men.

"Nothin' of any consequence," said Bud. "We just had a little fracas down at the agency. Total result, one Injin killed."

A shout of approval rose from the boys, but Clarke broke in with another guffaw. "And the joke of it is, Bud killed the wrong man."

"But nothin' to it. All in a day's work," Bud laughingly explained.

"You look tired, Sheriff," Jim said. "The boys will take you to their quarters. Shorty, you and the others make the Sheriff and his people feel at home."

There was a murmur of approval. "Come on," said Shorty, and the men started for their quarters. Shorty, who loved bossing an affair almost better than teasing, swept them all on before him. Then he linked his arm through Bud's.

"Say, Bud, I'll bet you a saddle to a shoe-string you never roped the man who killed Cash Hawkins at Maverick."

Clarke, who seemed deliberately to keep near Bud, gave an involuntary look of surprise at the Sheriff, but the flash of anger on Bud's blowsed, crimson face quickly cowed him.

"Oh," Bud said, lightly, "that was years and years ago, Shorty," and with his arm about him he followed the men towards their quarters.

Clarke lingered to cast a furtive glance at the hut and stables, but only for a moment, for he quickly realized that Bill was intently watching him.

Jim turned to go to the house—then paused. He could see Bill against the hitching-post tearing a straw into wisps that fluttered and fell lifeless to the ground. There was not enough breeze to carry even a strand away. He must speak to Bill, but how could he express anything of the desolation he felt at this parting of their ways.

"Bill," he began, in a low voice—and Bill, who divined the words that were

about to follow, made no answer; he only held tighter to the post. He could hardly see the boss; a blur swept before his eyes. He made no effort to move; he felt he could not.

"Bill," said Jim again, as he came to him, "you must get out and look for another job." Jim clinched his hands tight as he added, "I'll be sorry to lose you, old man."

"I know you will," Bill huskily answered, as he kept his eyes lowered to the ground. Then, almost in a growl, he questioned, "And what are you going to do, boss?"

The despair of a broken man's life answered Bill as Jim said, in a level, flat tone, "Sell out—move on—begin all over again—somewhere." Then with the indomitable will that was ever a part of him, he added, more hopefully, "There must be a place for me somewhere." Mastering himself, he added, as he took Bill's knotted hand in his, "I won't offer to pay you, Bill."

And Bill, who knew by this fineness of perception on Jim's part why he loved the boss, answered, "You better not," and wrung Jim's hand in both of his.

"Not now," Jim said, with the old hope again rising to encourage him, that later he might be able to help Bill. "In my life I've had one friend and only one." He laid his hands on Bill's shoulders and looked straight in his eyes.

But Bill could not stand the strain of it any longer. "You make me tired," he gulped, and Jim smiled.

"Why did you pay those cayotes three or four times what you owe 'em?" Bill scolded, gruffly, but kindly. "It's wicked, Jim. You're a sentimental fool."

As though bestowing a final benediction, Jim answered, "And you're another—God bless you," and then dropped on to the log and seemed to forget Bill and all about him.

Bill stood a moment, then tiptoed away while Jim sat watching the afternoon shadows beginning to creep up towards the hut.

CHAPTER XX

Towards noon the next day, Bud sought Jim to ask further hospitality. The horses were still in bad condition, he explained, and he would esteem it an invaluable service if he would allow them to remain another night on the ranch. Jim readily acquiesced. Now that he had taken the final step to sever himself from the ranch,

there were many details to be personally directed and settled. Bill and he were often in conference, and the sale could be accomplished within a few days. While Bill worked, he watched Bud and Clarke. Of his suspicion that they were trying to take some unfair advantage, he did not speak. Only his ferret-like glances constantly followed them. And his instinctive distrust was further aroused by a visit from Tabywana.

As he and Jim sat before the house, with a list that Jim was explaining to Bill, Baco, the half-breed who worked about the place, suddenly called in greeting to Tabywana. With his bonnet of gorgeous feathers trailing down his back, his body draped in a blanket, and in his hand the peace-pipe, the Chief entered. "How!" he answered, as he passed Baco. Both Bill and Jim arose.

"Why, hello Chief! Where'd you blow in from?" Bill called.

Again Tabywana answered, "How!"

Jim advanced. "How!" he said. "The peace chief never comes except to do us a favor. Baco, ask him what we can do for him."

As Tabywana pointed to his pipe he spoke to Baco. "He says, 'Let us sit down and smoke,'" interpreted Baco.

"Certainly," Jim answered. His years of living among the Indians had accustomed him to their ceremonies, and the four men crossed their legs and seated themselves on the ground, forming a half-circle. Tabywana began filling and lighting his pipe.

"Baco," Jim commanded, "tell Tabywana that we are always glad to meet him and see him face to face. He is our friend."

Baco quickly translated the message. Tabywana began passing the pipe from Jim to Bill. As Bill puffed at it he said to Jim, "Say, when the old Chief gets as formal as this it means business."

The men, although eager to begin the proposed conversation, did nothing to urge the Indian to declare himself. Both courteously awaited the Chief's information, although both chafed at this delay in their work. When the pipe had been returned to Tabywana he deliberately extinguished the flame, and, holding the pipe under his blanket, began monotonously to speak in his own tongue.

Jim and Bill both tried to follow the words, but their knowledge of the language was exceedingly limited, so Baco translated for them. "He says a stranger has been asking for you in the settlement."

"What kind of a stranger?" Jim asked, his mind turning at once to the sale that was about to be effected. The Indian agent again interpreted the Chief's reply. "One who jumps up and down in his saddle."

Bill smiled as Jim answered: "Oh, an Englishman. What's his business?"

"The Chief says he does not know, but be on your guard."

Bill and Jim exchanged glances. Surely it was not for this that Tabywana

had paid this formal visit. But Jim, who knew the wary, slow methods of the Indians, and who felt that something of more importance was coming, looked straight at Tabywana, as he asked, "Is that all?"

Tabywana understood more of the language of his conquerors than he admitted, and quickly answered the question through Baco. "No, something else—very important." Then Tabywana himself added, "Bud Hardy is here."

At these words Bill, who had been listening listlessly, turned sharply to watch the Indian's face. In the crafty, restrained expression he could read the effort at control that the Chief was exercising as he emitted the sentences Baco translated for him to Jim. "That is bad—very bad. Trouble will follow. He says Hardy has been talking and drinking a great deal, and has begun to talk about the death of Cash Hawkins, and Hardy will, he is afraid, soon arrest some one."

Jim did not answer. Tabywana moved a little so that he could watch Jim. His face wore an expression of great curiosity as to how his words would be received by Jim. The Chief had never known the exact truth concerning the killing of Cash Hawkins, but he had often guessed that Nat-u-ritch and Jim did. Jim did not answer. Bill spoke to him as Baco, having performed his duty, sank back and began playing with some straws.

"Jim, the old Chief is trying to tell you that Hardy has been bragging that he was going to arrest the fellow that killed Cash Hawkins." Jim gave no sign that the news in the least disturbed him.

"Tell the old Chief it's the fire-water that's talking."

Bill sank deep into a reverie. So Bud was up to some devilment—but what? Then he heard the words:

"The Chief says that Hardy is no friend of yours," and Jim's quick reply, "Tell the Chief I didn't kill Cash Hawkins, so I'm not afraid of arrest." Jim smiled reassuringly at the Chief, who constantly watched him. After all, what could Bud do to Jim? "He's a blow-hard, anyway," Bill muttered.

Jim was about to rise and end the interview when, looking cautiously about him, Tabywana began speaking in a lower tone. Baco translated without pause the thoughts that were troubling the Indian. "The Chief thinks that Hardy thinks that maybe Nat-u-ritch killed Cash Hawkins."

Jim only let slip the word "Nat-u-ritch," but his eyes quickly sought the Indian's, and in them he saw there was fear for the woman. To Bill this seemed nonsense. There had never been an atom of suspicion attached to Nat-u-ritch, so he lightly dismissed the idea with a laugh as he said, "Bud must have been unusual drunk." Bill had never understood the affair. He now began to feel the old suspicion creeping back. Had the boss, in self-defence, done the deed? If so, he must keep his watch all the closer on Bud and his men to see that they left the ranch as quickly as possible.

Jim quietly and calmly gave this answer to the Chief:

"So Bud thinks Nat-u-ritch killed Cash. Why, there isn't a scrap of evidence pointing towards Nat-u-ritch. Ask him what makes Bud think so." This time Jim listened intently for the answer.

"He says he doesn't know. But that Bud Hardy is bad medicine, and he wants you to make Bud Hardy move on to the next ranch."

Bill grunted his approval at this.

"That is impossible. The Chief knows that we cannot refuse shelter to the white man."

Bill this time upheld Jim's attitude in maintaining the laws of the place as he added, "Even though he is a bad man."

Tabywana looked from one to the other. There was a piteous look of baffled hope on his face. In his heart he was wishing that they would not take his words of wisdom so lightly, but it was difficult to explain more to them. Despairingly he offered further advice, and Baco repeated it for him, but Jim answered:

"The Chief knows that the rights of hospitality are sacred. Besides, I do not anticipate any trouble."

He rose to his feet. He would be extremely wary of Bud Hardy, but he felt no great concern. The affair had passed for five years, and it was simply some drunken bravado on the Sheriff's part that had frightened the old Chief. He laid his hands on Tabywana's shoulders. For Nat-u-ritch's father he had a tender regard, and the generous tolerance he had for, and the defence he constantly made of, the red man's rights, caused Tabywana to lay aside all cunning in his dealings with Jim, and to completely surrender his affections to him and the tiny child.

"Baco, tell Tabywana that no harm shall come to Nat-u-ritch while I live, and say to the Chief he is a good friend and I thank him for coming, and I would like him to accept this tobacco."

The eternal child in the Indian answered the last words, as Jim handed him the gayly embroidered pouch, with a quick smile and nod of appreciation. He was about to protest further, however, when Shorty interrupted them as he came running in. "A stranger out here wants to see the boss."

Ah, this was about the ranch, no doubt, so Jim said, "All right, Shorty, bring him to me."

"All right, boss."

"Bill, show Tabywana on his way," Jim directed, as the Indian seemed loath to leave him. "Adios amigo," he called to Tabywana, as Bill gently pushed him away. Baco followed him.

"I beg your pardon. I am looking for Mr. Carston."

Bill amusedly surveyed the new-comer as he answered, "There's Mr.

Carston," and as he disappeared behind the house he muttered to himself, with a backward glance at the visitor, "Looks as though he blew off a comic paper."

CHAPTER XXI

And it was to this that James Wynnegate had come, was the first thought of Malcolm Petrie as he surveyed the crude place with its marks of poverty and failure. Like all those intimate with the Wynnegate family, he knew of the mysterious disappearance of Jim Wynnegate at the time of the embezzlement from the Relief Fund. Although his brother, Johnston Petrie, had been the active adviser of the family, he had personally known Jim's father, and as he watched Jim now he began to feel a new interest in him. Since the death of his brother Johnston he had assumed control of the Kerhill estate. As he studied the worn man who stood in the strong light of the afternoon, dressed in faded and patched riding-breeches, with a flannel shirt, and careless kerchief knotted about his throat, and with roughened hands that showed their service in manual labor, he thought of him as the soldier he had often seen in the London world. But could those be the eyes of a man who was hiding from justice? Again he looked at the slip of paper which was marked, "Jim Carston, of Carston's Ranch."

Instinctively Jim placed the man who stood before him. Even though he had never seen him before, the resemblance to his brother, Johnston Petrie, was unmistakable. The light began to deepen into crimson shadows, and a stillness hung over the ranch. All the men were away in their quarters, with Big Bill guarding them so that the boss should not be disturbed in what he supposed was a possible chance to sell the place.

Diplomatically, Malcolm Petrie began, "This is Mr. Carston?"

"And you?" Jim questioned.

Petrie handed him a card as he said, "Malcolm Petrie, of the firm of Crooks, Petrie & Petrie, solicitors, London, and at your lordship's service."

Before Jim could speak, Petrie continued: "Pardon my abruptness in coming on you unawares. Most of the time I allowed myself has been given to locating you."

"Well, Mr. Petrie, go on," was all Jim said, as he turned the card in his hand. He hardly knew what course to pursue. Should he deny or acknowledge to this trustworthy man, who was regarding him with such sympathetic interest, that

he was Jim Wynnegate? A hunger to learn something of the world he had left, to be allowed to listen longer to the cultivated speech that fell with such beauty on his starved ears, assailed him.

"Crooks, Petrie & Petrie have been your family solicitors for so many years that I had hoped to be remembered by your lordship." Petrie was determined not to allow this man to escape for a moment from acknowledging his identity, so he pressed him close with his knowledge.

"Mr. Petrie," Jim said, "we are plain people out here, where every man is as good as every other man—and a good deal better," he added, as he remembered the democratic status of the boys. "So please address me as Mr. Carston. Won't you be seated?" As he spoke he pointed to the bench near the hut.

Petrie adjusted his glasses, the better to observe the man, as he said: "Since you desire it. Only I have come a very long way to inform you that you have a right to the title."

The cause of Mr. Petrie's presence flashed through Jim's mind. "Then my cousin—"

"Is dead, my lord—Mr. Carston."

Monotonously Jim repeated: "Dead. Henry should have outlived me."

"I am sorry to be the bearer of distressing news, your lordship—"

But Jim interrupted. "Don't humbug, Petrie. There was no love lost between Henry and me, as you know, though I've tried to forget that."

When he had recovered from the first surprise of this meeting, and had more fully grasped the significance of Petrie's news, he inquired, "I suppose Henry left a statement at his death."

"Statement?" the lawyer inquired.

Jim further explained. "Something in the nature of a confession."

"Confession?"

"By Jove! he might have done that."

"His late lordship died very suddenly."

But Jim waited for no further details. "So he died without a word. He died leaving me a fugitive from justice. So they still think me—" Then quickly the real facts of the case began to straighten themselves in Jim's mind. If Henry had not spoken—had left no confession—how and why had Petrie sought him? Then he asked:

"Why have you come here?"

Petrie, who was constantly watching the effect of his every word on the man who more and more confused and interested him, slowly answered, "I am here because your cousin, Lady Kerhill—"

"Diana?" Jim softly breathed the name, but said no more.

Petrie continued: "Believes that if you will speak—if you will break the

silence of years, you can return to England and assume your proper place at the head of your house, and in the world."

So it was to Diana he owed this. "Then there is one who still believes in me. God bless her!" All restraint fell from Jim as he sat himself beside the solicitor and said, simply, "I did it for her sake, Petrie." Then, as though unconscious of the other man's presence, he sat staring ahead of him.

His surmise had been right, Petrie thought. This man was not guilty. The case began to assume new interest and new complications. He must hear more. Jim roused himself. From an inside pocket of his shirt he drew a small bag which held a sheet of faded paper.

"You are familiar with the late Kerhill's writing. You are also familiar with his character and life. I have never allowed this paper to leave my body." As he spoke he handed the paper to Petrie. "But death has cancelled this agreement."

Petrie read the document. Jim sat motionless. As the sun dropped lower and lower towards the west, bolts of scarlet and purple seemed to be hurled from its blazing brilliance down on the cabin and the yard. Petrie broke the silence.

"So you took upon your shoulders his guilt?" In his tone there was no great surprise.

"Not for him, Petrie—for her. It was too late for her to find out—well, what he was." The rebellion against the dead man seemed to choke him. Then he added, "I did it for her sake, Petrie."

A restlessness took possession of Jim. All the old memories and sorrows began to lay their withering hands upon him. He crossed to the hitching-post and leaned against it as he watched with unseeing eyes the purple-and-red rays tipping the Uinta peaks.

Petrie read the document again, and as he did so he wondered how much of this Lady Elizabeth had known—how much Diana suspected. He could see now why she had decided to come with him to America. He thought of her as he had seen her a few days ago at Fort Duchesne, of her eyes as she had asked him not to fail in his search, and of her disappointment when her cousin, Sir John Applegate, who accompanied her, had protested against her riding out with Petrie on a venture which might take days, to end only in disappointment.

He went to Jim's side. "Lady Kerhill," he said, "will be more grateful than you know, for I am here as her ambassador to beg you to come back home."

Into the face of Jim came a wistful longing, so tender and yet so tragic that Petrie turned away from this glimpse into a hurt soul. He only dimly saw the man as he heard Jim's whispered words:

"Home, eh? Go back home! By Jove! what that would mean!" Then, as though a panorama were passing before him of his life on the ranch, he went on: "And I've been away all those awful years in this God-forsaken place." There was

a break in the low voice and the echo of a sob as Jim turned his back on Petrie.

Again the unlovely surroundings, with their evidences of pinched means, their stamp of neglect through want, impressed the solicitor. Very quietly he said, "It does look a bit desolate, Mr. Carston."

Jim, now master of himself, turned, and as he looked at the dusty plains, the sun-baked cabin, the parched, feverish land about him, cried: "Desolate! It doesn't look much like Maudsley Towers, with its parks and turrets, and oaks that go back to William the Conqueror, does it?" Before his eyes there came a picture of the home of his youth, of the place of his manhood's joy. The word seemed to burn and tear at him with its possibilities. "Home, eh? I love old England as only an exile can—"

He forgot the West, with its disappointments, its scars, and its days of pain, when memories of the past would not be stilled. He came over to Petrie, and in a burst of almost boyish confidence poured out his inmost feelings. "I love the English ways of doing things"—laughingly he looked at Petrie, and added—"even when they're wrong. The little ceremonies—the respectful servants—the hundred little customs that pad your comfort and nurse your self-respect. Home, eh?" The word was like a minor chord that he wished to dwell upon, so lovingly did he repeat it. "Home, eh? And I love old London. I think I am even prepared to like the fogs."

Amazed at the change in the man before him, Petrie sat spellbound as Jim jumped to his feet.

"Do you know what I'll do when I get back? I'll ride a week at a time on top of the 'buses, up and down the Strand, Piccadilly Circus, Regent Street, Oxford Street. And the crowds!" Before his excited eyes came the rush, the very smell of the smoky city with its out-pouring of humanity. "How I love the crowds—the endless crowds! And, Petrie, I'll go every night to the music-halls, and what's left of the nights to the clubs—and, by Jove, I'll come into my own at last!"

Carried away with the enthusiasm that was inspiring Jim, Petrie entered into the spirit of his joy as he cried, "The king is dead—long live the king!"

"Into my own at last! And I'm still young enough to enjoy life—life—*life*!" Into Jim's slender figure, with its arms out-stretched to the past, which was to be his future, there leaped the fire of immortal youth. It was his moment of supreme exaltation.

Suddenly from the stable door opposite came a glad cry of "Daddy! daddy!" as Hal, attracted by the loud voice of Jim, peered from behind the door. Then the child darted across to his father, who still stood with his arms out-stretched to his dream, and clasped his knees. Frightened at the stranger's presence, Hal quickly buried his face against his father's body.

The ecstasy faded from Jim's eyes as the cry of the child brought him back

from his dreams to the affairs of earth. Slowly and with infinite tenderness his eyes rested on the bent head of the child. The twilight, which is short in the Green River country, had slipped away, and the angry sun disappeared behind the mountains. Petrie noticed the chill in the air that comes at evening on the plains.

The cry of the child revealed a new phase of the situation. Silently he watched Jim, whose glance went towards the stable. He saw the figure of a beautiful Indian girl emerge, carrying a pail of milk. He saw the shudder that passed over Jim as Nat-u-ritch, unconscious that she was the central figure in a tragic moment, moved slowly before them to the cabin opposite. Her master was busy with the white man, so her eyes were lowered; she did not even call to the child to follow her. Jim's glance never left her until the door had closed. Then his eyes rested again tenderly on the little head which nestled against him, and a sigh broke from his lips. He stooped and drew the little hand in his as he turned the child towards Malcolm Petrie. The words of his glad dream seemed still filling the air as Jim said: "Petrie, you've come too late. That's what would have happened; it can never happen now."

Gently he urged the child forward as he said; "Hal, shake hands with Mr. Petrie. This is my son, Petrie."

CHAPTER XXII

The news was not so very surprising to Malcolm Petrie. In his years of practice as a solicitor many similar cases had come to his notice. He had often remonstrated at the folly of sending the younger son of a great family to these lands, and at the unwisdom of parents who found the problem of guiding a wayward boy too hard, and so let him go to the West, to be left to the mercy of its desolation and to the temptation of such entanglements. But that it would be a new difficulty he foresaw, and as he took the child's out-stretched hand he remembered the proud woman waiting at Fort Duchesne. To him, as a man of the world, the affair was understandable, but to Diana! He began to regret that she had come. There was no suggestion of these thoughts in his manner as he kindly said:

"How do you do, my little man?"

"How do you do, Mr. Petrie?" the child answered, and then ran back to his father's side.

The dark head with its faint trace of the Indian blood was extremely beautiful, but Malcolm Petrie noticed a much stronger predominance of the Wynnegate features.

With his hand on the child's head, Jim said, "You see, Petrie, we have to-day and to-morrow—but never yesterday." In the man's voice was so much despair that Petrie found it impossible to understand it.

"I don't quite follow you," he said.

Turning in the direction in which the Indian girl had disappeared, Jim answered, "That was Hal's mother."

"Indeed!" And still Petrie was puzzled at Jim's attitude.

"There isn't any place in England for Nat-u-ritch." Then, as Jim bent over the boy, he held him close and said, "Kiss me, dear, and now run in and help your mother." Jim followed the boy to the cabin door.

Malcolm Petrie said, tentatively, "And that Indian squaw—woman, I mean—is your—"

But Jim stopped the word that he felt Petrie was about to speak.

"My wife," he said. Petrie dropped his glasses and turned sharply to Jim. "My wife," Jim said again. "You don't suppose I'd let my boy come into the world branded with illegitimacy, do you?"

To this Petrie gave no answer. Under Jim almost defiant gaze he found it impossible to argue, but there must be a solution to this problem. He moved away as he almost lightly said, "An awkward situation, Mr. Carston—quite an awkward situation," but the words conveyed no idea that he felt there was a finality about the matter. His lawyer's brain would unravel the knot. Jim could still have his freedom. Then he said, "But these matters can be arranged. You will be in a position to settle an income on her which will make her comfortable for life, and some good man will eventually marry her."

Jim almost smiled. There was so much of the conventional standard in Petrie's speech.

"Wait a bit. You don't understand." He motioned Petrie to be seated again. He hesitated, then determined to tell his story. It might as well be done now; it would save further discussion.

"I first saw Nat-u-ritch at a bear-dance at the agency. The Indians reverse our custom, and the women ask the men to dance. Nat-u-ritch chose me for her partner. We met again at Maverick, where she killed a desperado to save my life." These words Jim almost whispered to Petrie, who leaned forward to catch every syllable. "The next time I saw her—Oh, well, why tell of the months that followed? One day I found myself lying in her wickyup. I had been at death's door fighting a fever. Searching for strayed cattle, I had tumbled into Jackson's Hole and had been abandoned for dead. Nat-u-ritch went in alone, on snow-

shoes, and dragged me back to her village. It was a deed no man, red or white, would have attempted to do. When I grew well enough she brought me here to my own ranch, where I had a relapse. Again she nursed me back to life."

He paused. How should he tell this man of the days of blinding temptation the loneliness of his life had brought with it? Petrie waited. Jim moved a little closer to him as he went on:

"When I grew stronger, I tried my best to induce her to leave the ranch, but she would not go. She loved me with a devotion not to be reasoned with. I almost tried to ill-treat her. It made no difference." Again the despair that Petrie had noticed before crept into Jim's voice. "I was a man—a lonely man—and she loved me. The inevitable happened. You see, I cannot go back home."

No, this was not the usual case, Malcolm Petrie told himself. Even he had been impressed by Jim's recital of the story. It was this man's attitude towards the woman that gave him more cause for anxiety than the squaw's position in the case, so he said:

"Don't you think you take rather too serious a view of the case? You can explain the situation to her and she will be open to reason."

But Jim interrupted him. "I wouldn't desert a dog that had been faithful to me. That wouldn't be English, would it? The man who tries to sneak out of the consequences of his own folly—"

"Believe me," the lawyer protested, "I would advise nothing unbecoming a gentleman. But aren't you idealizing Nat-u-ritch a little?"

Jim's answer was not reassuring. "On the contrary, we never do these primitive races justice. I know the grief of the ordinary woman. It doesn't prevent her from looking into the mirror to see if her bonnet is on straight; but Nat-u-ritch would throw herself into the river out there, and I should be her murderer as much as if I pushed her in."

Then Petrie devised a new scheme to test Jim's resolution.

"Why not take her with you to England?" he asked.

"Impossible!" Jim answered. "We'd both be much happier here. Even here I am a squaw man—that means socially ostracized." A bitter laugh broke from him. "You see, we have social distinctions out here."

"How absurd!"

"Social distinctions usually are," and Jim laid his arm on Petrie's. He was growing tired of the discussion. Petrie felt that Jim wished to dismiss it, so he determined to play his trump card. This sacrifice of a splendid fellow was madness. Years from now, Jim would thank him that he had urged him to abandon this life to which he clung with his mistaken sense of right.

"I think I am justified in violating my instructions," Petrie began. "You were not to know that Lady Kerhill accompanied me to this country."

Jim's hands tightened on Petrie. "Diana here?" Furtively he looked about him, as though fearful of seeing her. "In America?" He waited to be quickly reassured that there was no danger of her coming to the ranch.

"I left them at Fort Duchesne—her ladyship and her cousin, Sir John Applegate. I was to bring you there and give you what was intended to be an agreeable surprise—but—"

"Thank God you did not bring her here."

Jim moved away, with his hands clinched behind him. Petrie followed as he urged. "She will be disappointed, deeply disappointed; she is still a young and beautiful woman."

If there was temptation in the words, Jim did not betray it. Quite simply he said, "She must be."

"With many admirers, it is only natural that she should marry again."

And Jim answered, fully aware of the torturing methods used by the man who wished to conquer him, "It is inevitable."

This time Petrie's quiet voice rose in an almost impatient intolerance as he questioned, "And yet you feel—"

But Jim stopped him. There was agony in his voice. "Petrie, don't tempt me. I cannot go. My decision is made and nothing on earth can change it." He walked towards the house as he felt the sudden need of comfort. He wanted to feel his boy's arms about him; that would be his solace. At the window he saw Hal, and a nod brought the child to him.

As he watched him, Petrie said, more to himself than to Jim, "The sentimental man occasions more misery in this world than your downright brutally selfish one." To Jim he put the direct question, "Your decision is final?"

"Final."

"Too bad. Too bad. You are condemning yourself to a living death."

"Oh no; I have my boy. Thank God, I have my boy."

And in those words Petrie knew that the child meant more than all the rest of life to Jim. He knew the type—a type that prevails more especially among Englishmen, perhaps, in whom the need of fatherhood is strongly dominant. Almost prophetically the lawyer laid his hand on the head of the boy, who was standing on the bench playing with his father's kerchief. "The future Earl of Kerhill."

Jim answered, defiantly, "My boy is my boy."

If Jim persisted in refusing to accept the position as the head of his house, then this child was the stake to play for, Petrie decided.

"Well, think of him—of his future. He has the right to the education of a gentleman, to the surroundings of culture and refinement."

As Petrie spoke, his glances took in the shabby little chaps, the feet in their worn moccasins, the coarse flannel shirt; and Jim saw the look and understood.

He almost hurt the boy, so tight was his grasp as he lifted him down and held him in his arms.

"One moment, Mr. Petrie. I see your drift," he savagely answered. "But you sha'n't do it, sir. You sha'n't. I won't listen."

But Petrie now knew that he had touched Jim's vulnerable point, and that he was capable of making the sacrifice for the boy.

"I speak as the trusted friend of your family, as the advocate of your child." He told himself he was justified in asking what he did.

"Before you came," Jim said, "I was a ruined man—stone broke, as we say out here. I had to begin my life all over again. But I had Hal, his love and his life to live in day by day, and now you want that, too. I can't do it. I know it's selfish, but life owes me something, and that's all I ask. I can't let him go. I can't—I can't!"

But Malcolm Petrie persisted. "You're responsible for that child's future. You don't want him to grow up to blame you—to look back to his youth and his father with bitterness, perhaps hate."

Jim, as he held the boy from him and studied the tiny face, cried, "You'll never do that, will you, Hal, my boy?"

"What, daddy?"

"Think badly of your father?"

"No, daddy, no," and the child's arms were thrown about Jim's shaking body.

Petrie touched Jim's arm quietly. "You're robbing your child of his manifest destiny."

"What do you want?"

"Send the little man home with me."

With eyes almost blinded with emotion, Jim looked into Petrie's face. "Have you any children, Petrie?"

The solicitor shook his head, and in Jim's words, "I knew it—I knew it," he understood what he meant.

Like a father who sympathizes, yet must be firm in his efforts to convince his son of his wisdom, Petrie spoke.

"I am thinking of Hal's future, as the friend and adviser of your family. I am thinking coldly, perhaps, but, believe me, kindly."

Jim could not doubt his sincerity. He buried his head against the child. "You don't know what a lonely life I led until Hal was born, and how lonely I'll be when he is gone."

Gone! Could he agree to this separation? The word frightened him. "Gone! Oh, my God, no!" He could not.

Then Petrie appealed to Jim's conscience. "You know the trite old saying,

'England expects that every man this day shall do his duty.'" So simply, so seriously did Petrie quote the well-worn phrase, that its shaft went home.

Duty! Duty! Ah, one might squander control of one's own destiny, but for another, for the child whom the parent has brought into life—how answer that? It was the duty of the parent to the child—in that lay the whole definition of the word. He held the tiny face in his hands as he whispered: "Well, Hal, old chap, it's a tough proposition they've put up to your daddy, son. But what must be must be. You'll be braver than I am, I hope." He forgot that the child could not understand him. Sobs shook him as he held the boy tight against his breast. Hal sought to comfort his father with soft, loving pats.

Jim raised his head. "Petrie, you've nailed me to the cross. He goes back with you."

"You'll never regret this," and Petrie laid his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"Ask them to teach him that I did this for his sake; but he'll forget me—you'll see. Some one else will take my place, and he will learn to love them better than he loves me."

Petrie tried to comfort him. "No, he shall hold you in his memory always—always."

Suddenly Jim remembered. "What about his mother?"

"If you can make the sacrifice, she must. They say Indians are stoics."

"I can understand the reason for it, Petrie, man. It will seem a needless cruelty to her. She's almost as much of a child as Hal. I'll try—I'll try."

Holding Hal by the hand, he walked to the cabin and called: "Nat-u-ritch, Nat-u-ritch, come here, little woman. I want you."

CHAPTER XXIII

Nat-u-ritch, with slow impassiveness, obeyed. She came from the house with hardly a glance at the stranger. She had changed but little; still slender and childish in form, motherhood and the past five years seemed to have left no mark upon her save, perhaps, for a more marked wistfulness of expression, especially when she looked at Jim and the boy. Her life was complete; physical deprivations or disappointments mattered little to her. Taught by Jim the ways of civilization, she tried to apply them to her surroundings, but it seemed to her a waste of the golden hours when she might be following her master instead across the plains

or playing with her child. It was almost piteous to see how she controlled the instincts of her savage desire for freedom, and in her primitive way cared for the little cabin so as to please Jim.

Malcolm Petrie noticed at once the difference between Nat-u-ritch and the other Indian women whom he had seen during the past days, and was impressed by it.

Hal, at sight of his mother, quickly responded to her out-stretched hand.

"Nat-u-ritch, this is my te-guin—my friend," and Jim indicated Petrie. She inclined her head to the solicitor and said, "How?" As her eyes met Petrie's shrewd glance an instinctive apprehension caused her to tighten her arm about the child.

"Te-guin—big chief from out yonder—over the big water," Jim explained, but her unflinching gaze made it difficult for him to go on. He whispered to Petrie: "I don't know how to do it—-I don't know how to do it." Then he summoned all his courage, and with a forced smile said, pleasantly, as though humoring a child, "Nat-u-ritch, te-guin—big chief—come for little Hal."

She flung her arms about the sturdy little fellow, and a sharp exclamation was her only answer.

"Pretty soon make Hal big chief. Touge wayno—te-guin—good friend—take Hal long way off." A shudder ran through her. She began to grasp what the stranger's presence meant. He was of her boy's father's race, and for too long she had forgotten, what in the beginning had so often troubled her, that Jim would some day want to return to his own people. This had been her great fear, but his kindness all these years had lulled to rest that ache of the early days.

While these thoughts tormented her, she could hear Jim still explaining. "Long trail, heap long trail—over mountains, heap big mountains—Washington."

She slipped the child to the other side of her, that he might be farther away from the silent man who was bringing this woe to her, and her clutch grew tighter at the word "Washington." Jim explained to Petrie, "Washington means a lot to them." Then he came closer to Nat-u-ritch as he said, impressively:

"Big Father—send for little Hal. Say make him big chief—te-guin cross wide water—heap big boat—Hal see the rising sun. Pretty soon, some day, Hal heap wickyup—heap cattle—heap ponies—pretty soon heap big chief."

He waited the result of his words. He thought to appeal to her pride and ambition for the boy; but she only shook her head and gazed at him like an affrighted animal whose young is about to be torn from her.

Jim's fortitude began to desert him. "She doesn't understand. She can't—she can't," he almost moaned, as he turned away, while his clinched hands and the stiffening of his body showed the strain that was proving almost too great for him. "This is a hard business, Mr. Petrie," and Petrie could feel the vibrant

emotion of these two victims of fate. As Jim moved a step away, Nat-u-ritch, still holding the boy, started forward and caught his arm as though to hold him back. Her mind was in a daze—she could utter no word; but Jim understood the pantomime.

"She thinks I'm going, too," he said, and hastened to explain away her anxiety.

"No, Nat-u-ritch—Jim stay here always with you." Something of her agony was relieved and she loosed her hold on him. "Always with you," Jim repeated tenderly, looking into the tragic eyes as she eagerly followed every word. "Only little Hal."

As Nat-u-ritch fully grasped the meaning of the words, there broke from her lips the one English word "No!" which rang out on the evening air with a wild, dry sob of protest. It was the anguished cry of universal motherhood. The Indian woman sank on her knees, with her arms about the boy, her face buried on his breast. The crouching figure betrayed the old savage instinct of the female covering her young from the ruthless hand that would snatch it from her.

This time both men turned away. A purple gray light fell over the yard, the last traces of the sun's glory disappeared, and the air grew chilly.

Jim was the first to speak. Kindly, but as a master who must have obedience, he said; "Nat-u-ritch, I have taken counsel. My heart is good. My word is wise. I have spoken. Go." He gently disengaged the boy from her grasp. Nat-u-ritch looked long into Jim's eyes, and as she met his immovable determination, without a struggle, and with a calmness terrible to see, she released the child.

Jim lifted her to her feet. With her big, stricken eyes still fastened on him, she stood silent for a moment; then the bent, half-stumbling figure slunk past him. Jim dared not watch Nat-u-ritch, though he could hear her heavy breathing and the flapping of her beaded robe against the ground as she crossed to the stable. Once Petrie saw her sway, but she had steadied herself before he could reach her. As she reached the corral she stopped, and, turning, flung out her arms in appeal to Jim; but his back was towards her, the child hidden in his embrace. Then he heard the quick patter of her feet as she fled out into the night—away from these aliens, back to the hills to abandon herself to her grief.

As Jim rose he resolved that when the boy had gone he would try to make her understand that this sacrifice was forced upon them, that for the child's sake they must both bear it, and in the future she should receive even greater care and comfort from him.

"This is harder on her than on me, Petrie," he said, as he lifted Hal up on the bench and knelt beside him.

"Where is she going?" Petrie asked, as he walked towards the corral behind which she had disappeared.

"Out into the hills to fight it out alone. Mr. Petrie, this is going to be hard on the boy, too. He is a shy little prairie bird and has been a great pet."

He was thinking that perhaps he could arrange to let Nat-u-ritch have the boy a little longer and keep Petrie with them awhile. "It would be rough on him to leave us all so suddenly and go away with a perfect stranger. Can't you stay here a week or two to let him get used to you?" Jim proposed. "By that time you will have won his confidence."

Petrie answered, "I am sorry, but that is impossible. I have overstayed my time some weeks. I left important business interests in London to undertake this mission, and I must return at once."

"But," Jim pleaded, "It can't be as bad as that. Well, then, only a week."

"I am sorry, but I have already used up all the time I can spare, in finding you. If the boy goes with me it must be now." Petrie knew that Diana was waiting for Jim's arrival; he must reach her with the news as soon as possible. Every hour was of moment to them. She had been persistent in her desire to accompany him, and two days had passed since he left her at Fort Duchesne. He feared some complication might arise from her woman's impatience, and as it was, he would not be able to leave the ranch before daybreak. Night was already beginning to close in on them.

Jim began to realize the wisdom of Petrie's decision. It would only prolong the agony. He must make it easy for the boy; afterwards—well, afterwards— But he dared not picture the desolation which would be his.

"Hal, my boy, my darling, I must tell you something. You know you want to be a soldier like the ones you saw at Fort Duchesne. Remember? With the yellow plumes and tassels and swords and things?"

The boy was growing sleepy, but at these words roused himself and delightedly exclaimed, "Yes, yes!"

"Well, Mr. Petrie is going to make you one." Hal looked over in approval at their visitor who was to make his dream come true. "Only," Jim continued, "you'll wear a fine red coat instead of a blue one, and Mr. Petrie's going to make you a big, fine soldier man. So daddy's going to let you go. Isn't that fine?"

"You, too, daddy?" the child questioned.

"No, dear; I can't go. When you go away there'll be nobody but me to take care of little momie."

"I won't go alone," Hal protested.

"Yes, dear, if father wants you to," Jim persuaded.

But the child only cried, "I won't—I won't—I won't!" as he flung his arms about his father's neck.

Jim felt it would be useless to argue further now. It was past the boy's bedtime, so he only said, coaxingly, "Yes, yes, you will." A scheme to help the

boy to bear the separation began to formulate in his mind. They should take him away while he was asleep, and he would send Big Bill along with him for a few days if necessary.

"Now, old man, tell Mr. Petrie good-night."

The child did as he was bid.

Quite hopefully Jim went on talking to him as they crossed to the cabin. "All right. And now daddy will undress you and hear your prayers, and we'll have our usual romp, and then the sandman will come." Then, as the sleepy child, yawning, drooped his head, Jim lifted him in his arms and cried: "Kiss me, dear. Oh, don't ever forget your daddy!"

So engrossed was he that he failed to hear in the distance sounds that told that visitors were arriving at the ranch. But Petrie, who was ever alert, had been aware of the first clatter of the horses' hoofs, and now turned in the direction from which came Big Bill's voice, high above all the others, saying:

"Well, I guess not. Ain't none of us ever forgot that day at Maverick. My, he'll be glad to see you!—Mr. Carston," he called.

But it was the triumphant call of "Jim, Jim!" that made him turn to see Diana. In it was all the hope that had been buried so long—all the loving joy which she meant to lavish on the man whose starved life had been one long sacrifice for her She had imagined this moment—lived it again and again, and now it was hers.

Gracious and beautiful she stood in the dim light, holding out her hands in welcome. Behind her stood Sir John, while Petrie's face betrayed the surprise that he felt, although he knew he had been fearing such an occurrence. Jim saw them all. One hand still kept its hold on the child, who at the voices had hidden behind his father; he raised the other to his head. He simply spoke the name "Diana."

"Why, Jim, I don't believe you're glad to see us!" Diana cried, as he made no attempt to take her hand.

"Oh yes," he answered. "I'm dazed, Diana—dazed." Then he turned in appeal to Malcolm Petrie. "Petrie?" he questioned. It would have been too cruel if this had taken place with Petrie's knowledge, but he could not doubt the truth of the solicitor's words.

"This is as much of a surprise to me as it is to you, Mr. Carston."

Diana smiled at Petrie. She had taken her own way in spite of his and Sir John's remonstrance. But they could not understand her—Jim would. What did they know of the Fairies' Corner—of the long torment she and Jim had shared?

"We simply couldn't wait any longer, Jim. We've come to take you home—you'll come home now, Jim, won't you? Come home?" And as she spoke she meant all that the word implied in its completeness. She was suing Jim to let her

give him all that he had desired in the long ago.

"Home—home," Jim repeated. Was he always to be tortured by what he never could have? His eyes fell on Hal, who was peering out from behind him. As Diana saw the tiny figure in its strange garments, she involuntarily exclaimed:

"Oh, what a dear boy!"

The child stared at her.

Smiling, she knelt before him. "Whose little boy are you, dear?" she asked.

Hal glanced at his father and his look said, "Shall I go to the strange lady?" Jim nodded his head. Shyly the child advanced towards her. "Jim's boy," he said.

Diana was holding the child's hands in hers. At the words she lifted her face to Jim and mechanically repeated, "Jim's boy?" Then she looked from the dark head, with its curious foreign beauty, up to the man who stood there with blanched face and sorrow-stricken eyes. Gradually she began to comprehend the meaning of the boy's words. Again she mutely questioned Jim.

He came to the boy and laid his hands on the little fellow's head. "Yes, Diana. My boy—my son."

She had dropped the child's hands at his first word. She looked about her, but everything was dim and ghostly in the dim light. She felt the child's hand on her sleeve. She could see only Jim's eyes in the boy's face inquiringly regarding her. Above him, Jim still stood, silent and constrained. Petrie and Sir John, with Big Bill, had left them. Only a moment did she waver, then with a quick, impetuous cry she caught the boy to her heart, and in that cry was expressed all the starved maternity of her barren life.

CHAPTER XXIV

Jim and Diana sat late into the night while she listened to the story of his life in the West. Urged by Sir John, it was arranged that she should leave the ranch the following day. Bitter as was her disappointment, Diana accepted it without comment. Now her concern was chiefly for the boy, and she eagerly awaited Nat-u-ritch's return, hoping she might help the little woman to see the wisdom of making this sacrifice for her child's advantage.

Down the hills towards midnight Nat-u-ritch stole, an elf-like creature, with her clinking, beaded robe gleaming in the moonlight. Past the men's dwelling she went, and on to the cabin for a last sight of her sleeping boy. From

his spying-ground Bill saw her, but made no effort to detain her. He knew that the arrival of Jim's kinsmen had caused a strange turmoil in his life, and made him forget that Bud Hardy might still prove a menace to him. So Bill kept his faithful vigil; but once fatigue caught him and he closed his tired eyes for a brief space. It was just the moment that Kid Clarke, the Sheriff's watcher, had been waiting for. Unobserved, he slipped away to follow the trail that Nat-u-ritch had taken when she fled from the house in the afternoon. Bud Hardy had cautioned him not to lose sight of the squaw, and to report to him in the early dawn at the cabin. Like Bill, he saw Nat-u-ritch make her way to the cabin and saw her return; then, as he felt secure that she was safely out of the way, he lay in the loft near the cabin and waited for Bud.

But Nat-u-ritch had not succeeded in seeing her child. As she peered into the windows of the cabin she saw a beautiful woman and another stranger seated near Jim. For a long time she watched him as he talked to the woman, who now and then went to the door of the room in which the child lay, and listened as though afraid that their voices might disturb the boy. The woman's presence became an added complication in the impending tragedy that engulfed Nat-u-ritch. She longed to creep into the room and kneel beside Jim, to beg to be allowed just to be near him; but she was afraid—afraid of the curious glances of the strangers. Intently she watched the woman and saw the look on Jim's face as he talked long and earnestly to her. How he had changed! She remembered him as the young, strong, handsome buck whom she had met at the bear-dance. For the first time she seemed to see the whitened hair, the tired, patient eyes, and the marks of sorrow on his face. Once she saw him lean forward and gently argue with the white woman. She dimly understood the difference between his attitude towards this woman of his own race and to her. Gradually a new pain was added to the hurt that tried her endurance; she could not explain it, but Jim had never looked at her like that. He treated her as he did little Hal, while he regarded the woman with him as his equal. She began to sob piteously, like a child who is suddenly asked to face something it cannot understand. It was useless to remain there longer. Back she hurried to the hills, more desolate than when she started to see her child. Through the long hours that followed she made no effort to reason or to control her emotions, but abandoned herself to her grief.

Just before daylight Tabywana crept silently along the road and hid behind the wagon that stood near the house. He had been following Bud Hardy, whose early visit to the cabin had aroused his suspicions. Although Jim had dismissed his advice yesterday, the Chief was determined to see him again as soon as daylight should come. He was impatient to disclose to Jim the fear that tormented him for Nat-u-ritch's safety. As he watched for the first faint streaks of dawn, from his hiding-place Tabywana saw Bud Hardy emerge from the men's quar-

ters and steal towards the cabin. Bud tiptoed about the place, then crossed to the loft and gave three short whistles. Almost immediately Kid Clarke appeared and leaned out of the loft door.

"Well?" Bud called, as Clarke, dazed, rubbed his sleepy eyes.

"Nat-u-ritch has disappeared—her trail leads to the hills. Carston hasn't been to bed at all. He went away about half an hour ago."

Bud glanced quickly about the place. "No one in the room, then?"

Kid nodded.

"All right—come down," Bud said.

Kid disappeared from the aperture in the loft and Bud went softly into the house.

Silently the Chief slid down under the porch of the cabin. As Bud came out of the house he saw in the Sheriff's hand a small thirty-two-caliber revolver which he was smilingly examining. Before he could pocket the weapon Tabywana leaped upon him and clutched the hand that held the gun, but Bud, with a muttered imprecation, deftly threw the hand with the revolver over Tabywana's shoulder, but only to feel an iron fist beat his knuckles. Involuntarily he loosened his hold and heard Bill's voice say:

"Put up your gun, Clarke."

Kid had reached there just at the end of the struggle, and had started to pull his revolver to assist Bud.

Holding the captured revolver in his hand, Bill said: "Why, what's the matter, boys? I don't allow no gun-play on this ranch—not while I'm foreman of it."

In the first faint light of the rising sun the three figures were like ghostly silhouettes against the gray background.

"I want that gun," Bud replied.

"How did you come by it?" Bill demanded.

Before Bud Hardy could speak, Tabywana grasped Bill by the arm and by pantomime indicated that Bud had crept into the house and stolen it.

Bill turned sternly to Bud. "What do you mean by sneakin' into other peoples' houses at night an' takin' their property? Why"—as he examined the revolver—-"this gun belongs to Nat-u-ritch."

Almost savagely Bud interposed: "Oh, it does, does it? You heard that, Clarke? Well, that's all I want to know."

Bill saw that Bud had gained evidence against the little woman. "Well, it ain't all *I* want to know. You'll have to show me, Bud—you'll have to show me why you're combinin' the trades of burglar an' sheriff." Then, with a change in his voice, he said, "Better sit down and we'll discuss this amicable."

Bud seated himself near Clarke and Bill; Tabywana remained standing near them, eagerly trying to grasp all that was being said. Bud was not averse to taking

Bill into his confidence. He felt that with Clarke as a witness to Bill's statement he had gained the essential point his case needed.

"You fellers have guyed me for years about Cash Hawkins's death, 'ain't you? Now it's my turn."

So Bud was going to try to make a sensational arrest through Bill, and thus win the county over to him and secure another election to the office of sheriff! Should he call Jim at once, Bill wondered. He determined to wait and see if Bud meant to declare his intentions.



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"'YES, DIANA. MY BOY—MY SON'"

"'YES, DIANA. MY BOY——MY SON'" See page 257

"Ancient history that, Bud," he said, "Forgotten long ago."

But Bud answered, "Not by his friends and relatives about Jansen."

"Oh, they're still looking for somebody to scalp, eh? Better let sleeping dogs lie, Bud." Perhaps he could reason the Sheriff out of this scheme; perhaps convince him that it was not a profitable move on his part, and that he would in such case have the other party against him if he ever attempted to use these unfair means.

His thoughts were interrupted by Bud, who said, with a knowing look at Clarke, "You'll have to hand that gun over to me, Bill."

"Will I?"

Bud rose, and with a certain amount of assumed dignity said, "I demand it in my official capacity." As he moved towards Bill he felt Tabywana creeping behind him. Irritated, he turned and faced the Indian as he said, "Say, we 'ain't got to take Indians into our confidence, have we?"

Bill, who saw that he might accomplish more if left alone with Bud, said, kindly: "Tabywana, get Baco up, will you? I want him."

Tabywana knew that he was dismissed, but he trusted Bill, so he only muttered a warning as he started to do his bidding.

"All right, I can take care of myself, Chief."

Then the Indian left him.

"Come on, Bud, I call you. You got to show me your hand."

"Well, if I want an election it's up to me to make good with Cash's outfit, ain't it?"

"So you're due for a grandstand play, eh?" was Bill's comment. The way events were shaping themselves worried him. These rough-shod political aspirations often led men like Hardy to play to the gallery in order to win a high-handed election.

Bud went on, sure that Bill would see the reason of his adventure, "I have always had the bullet that killed Cash, and that's been the only clew I've ever had."

Dryly, Bill interrupted. "It hasn't led you very far, Bud."

But Bud did not notice Bill's remark. Impressively he said: "It was a thirty-two. Now no man in this country ever carried a toy like that. That's a woman's weapon." Then slowly pointing to the revolver in Bill's hand, he said, "That gun of Nat-u-ritch's is a thirty-two."

If this was all the evidence that Bud had, the case was not so serious after all, so, much relieved, Bill said, lightly: "Bud, you're a joke. Because Nat-u-ritch happens to own a thirty-two—"

Bud maliciously interposed: "Don't be in such a hurry. The last time I was over to Maverick I happens to ask Nick, the barkeep, for a light, and he lets me help myself from a squaw's beaded match-safe." Bud cautiously drew a tiny

blue-and-green embroidered bag from his pocket. "'Hello,' says I. 'Where did you get that?' 'Oh,' says he, 'I've had that for years—ever since the day that Cash Hawkins was killed. Found it in front of the side door down there.' And I bought it of him then and there"—Bud looked straight into Bill's eyes as he finished—"cause I recognized it as one I had tried to buy of Nat-u-ritch."

But even this statement apparently did not startle Bill, who met Bud's glance squarely as he said, "And so you jump at the conclusion that—"

"Nat-u-ritch killed Cash Hawkins." Bud took him up. "There ain't a doubt about it. You see that thirty-two is minus just the shot which she done it with."

Bill paled a little. So Bud had noticed the missing bullet. He knew that since her marriage Nat-u-ritch had never carried the revolver. It had been put away on a shelf to be out of the child's way.

Bud reached his hand towards Bill. "I've shown you my hand fair and square—man to man—now I'll thank you for that gun."

But Bill, who caught sight of Jim coming through the corral, said, "That's up to Mr. Carston, and here he is."

Bud turned sharply. He would have preferred to meet Jim some other time, but it was too late to retreat now.

Bill went to Jim. "Hello," he said. He decided to blurt out the whole affair to Jim at once. He knew then that the squaw would be safe; the boss would see to that. "Mr. Carston," he began, "our amusin' little friend over there is a-contemplatin' of arrestin' Nat-u-ritch for the killin' of Cash Hawkins."

"Oh no; you must be joking," Jim said to Bud, too worn out to give vent to the anger that began to surge through him.

Bill was relieved at the light manner in which Jim seemed to take the news. "Well, that's what I thought, but he takes himself kind of serious."

Furiously came Bud's next words. "Anyway, I've got evidence to arrest her."

Showing the revolver to Jim, Bill contemptuously added, "And which said Sheriff steals out of the house of said trustin' and confidin' friend."

Jim stared in amazement at the revolver. Yes, it was Nat-u-ritch's. He had never looked at it since that day at Maverick when her hand had saved him from the cowardly attack of Cash Hawkins. He did not speak.

Bud moved closer to him. He pointed to Bill. "And which he said belonged to Nat-u-ritch." Triumphantly he pointed also to Clarke to indicate that he had him as a witness.

Jim motioned Bill to the house. "Put that revolver back where it belongs," he said, and Bill obeyed.

Bud darted forward as though to stop Bill. "I demand the custody of that myself, Mr. Carston."

"Let's understand each other, Sheriff." As he spoke, Jim deliberately blocked

Bud's way. "Nat-u-ritch is as innocent of wrong as a bird that flies. It wouldn't do to confine her in that dirty little jail in Jansen. It would be murder."

"You're a law-abiding citizen, Mr. Carston. You ain't agoin' to resist the law?"

But Jim stood firm in front of the cabin door. "There are cases, Sheriff, where justice is superior to the law, and the white man's court is a bad place for justice to the Indian. Fortunately for all of us, Nat-u-ritch has disappeared."

As Jim spoke, Bud realized that if the Indian woman were there Carston would not be so calm.

"But you couldn't arrest her, Sheriff—not while I live. Bill"—he turned to the foreman, who came out of the house—"I'm not in a mood to discuss this with Sheriff Hardy, and I don't want to violate the laws of hospitality. But just one word, Sheriff—you've eaten my bread, slept under my roof, and now you sneak into my house to get evidence against the mother of my boy." Jim hesitated, and then as he left them he quietly finished, "Bill, I think you'd better see the Sheriff safely on his way."

And Bud knew that for the time being he had lost his game.

CHAPTER XXV

"Carston's locoed. He's plumb crazy. There can't be a jail for whites and a palace for Injins. He don't suppose he can stop me, does he?" Bud began, excitedly.

Bill, encouraged by Jim's mastery of the situation, chaffingly answered: "After you arrest Nat-u-ritch you'll never hold office, Bud. You may hold a harp or a coal-shovel." Then he laughed.

"My! You're making a fuss over a squaw," said Bud, who could see no humor in Bill's words.

But Bill replied, "Arrestin' the mother of innocent kids will not be considered a popular form of amusement around here, Bud."

"Kids? What's that got to do with it?"

"Well," said Bill. "The kid's an influential citizen hereabouts. He's our long suit, and there ain't a live thing on the ranch that would let you arrest his rag doll. You couldn't get away with it, Bud." And as though it were his final word on the subject, Bill said, conclusively, "Better get elected some easier way."

A new idea fermented in Bud's brain. If he failed in his scheme to bring to

trial the murderer of Cash Hawkins, hundreds of men to whom he had blustered and sworn that he would accomplish the deed would no longer believe in him and he would probably lose the election. Why not try to gain some compensation if this must be the case?

"Git our horses ready, Clarke," he said and watched his assistant leave the yard. Slowly Bud hitched his foot on a log, and, as though he were about to confer a favor upon Jim, spoke with condescension. "Mr. Carston takes this too much to heart, Bill. Perhaps we can come to some understanding."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he's come into some money, ain't he? Of course I might lose this match-safe crossing Red River." He lovingly fingered the little bag. Bill drew nearer. "And I might"—Bud continued—"be made independent of the job of sheriff, if it's worth the boss's while." There was no mistaking the intention of his words.

"Bud!" For a moment Bill could say no more. In the past he and Bud had been friends—bar-room friends, it was true—but lately he had begun to suspect much about the Sheriff's career that was unsavory. Until to-day, however, he had had no proof that Bud could behave like a blackguard. "Bud," he rejoined, "you're goin' to make me lose my temper, and I 'ain't done that for twenty years." As he spoke he raised his foot on the log beside Bud's and in deliberate imitation of him leaned his elbow on his knee while he stared straight into the Sheriff's face.

"Don't be foolish," Bud began. "I can put you to a lot of trouble, and I will. I'll arrest these English people and put 'em under bond to appear as witnesses. They were at Maverick that day, and I got my posse ready and waitin' to obey orders." This, he thought, was the final shot to bring Bill to his senses. He waited.

With a tolerance that did not hide his contempt, Bill spoke. "Except for Jim's orders, I'd throw you off the place. Get agoin', Bud—get agoin'—and don't stop to pick flowers."

Bud knew that Bill was conveying a threat which, he felt, as he watched his face, it were wiser not to disregard. He walked towards the barn, stopped, ground his teeth, and looked back at Bill; but the big fellow stood motionless and in supreme disgust watched the Sheriff. Bud uttered a low oath, then hurried down to the corral.

Still, Bill did not move. He did not hear Diana as she opened the cabin door and, drinking in the fresh morning air, said, "I feel as though I should suffocate in there." Her looks told that something more than the close air of the cabin room was stifling her. As she came from under the porch she saw the immovable figure of the foreman leaning over the log with his head on his hands, watching several men down the road who were mounting horses and preparing to make a start.

"Oh, Mr.—" She paused.

Bill turned. He saw she had forgotten his name. "Bill, miss," he said.

"Mr. Bill—"

But Bill interrupted as he raised his hat. "Just plain Bill, if you don't mind—and there ain't anything too good for you at Red Butte ranch, lady."

Impulsively Diana held out her hand to Bill, who took it. "Thank you, Bill. It's good to feel that I'm among friends, because I feel so strange, so bewildered." She had learned of the foreman's devotion to Jim and knew that she could trust him. "Bill," she asked, "what do they mean by 'squaw-man'?" There was so much she could not say to Jim, so much that had puzzled her, and she longed to unburden her heart to some one. This faithful soul would understand her, and would, perhaps, help her to learn more about Jim and the Indian woman, concerning whose fate she was now growing anxious.

Bill seated himself. "Well, it's the name some people give a white man who marries an Indian squaw." Then quickly he added: "But I want you to understand, miss, Jim's respected in spite of the fact he's a squaw man. He's lived that down."

"Of course it was a great surprise to us all at first."

"Natural it would be, miss. Of course no ordinary white man would have done it. But you mustn't think any the less of Jim for that, miss."

Quickly Diana answered, in sympathetic accord with Bill's loyalty to his master: "I think all the more of him, Bill. It's only another of Jim's glorious mistakes." Then again she thought of the woman. "I wish I could see her. What is she like?"

Bill could not understand this interest in Nat-u-ritch. "Just a squaw," he said, indifferently. "She's got two ideas, and I guess only two—Hal and Jim."

He liked the little woman, but he could see where she had been a great disadvantage to Jim.

But Diana's voice as she said, "A mother and a wife—that's a good deal, Bill," made him realize that perhaps he was not doing the Indian girl justice. He could see the tears in Diana's eyes as she spoke. "And her boy goes back home with us."

Bill rose. "Kind of tough on yours truly, lady, bein' as Hal and me are kind of side-partners, but then I got to recollect it's the best for the kid. That's about the size of it, ain't it?" This time it was Bill who solicited comfort from Diana. The thought of the child's leaving them had been a difficult proposition for the boys, and they had discussed it long and excitedly when Jim told them the plan the night before.

Diana understood. "It involves a lot of suffering all around, doesn't it, Bill? But it seems to me Nat-u-ritch gets the worst of it."

True to his opinion of the red race, Bill answered, "She's an Injin—used to takin' things as they come," and he hardly heard Diana's words:

"Poor little savage!"

This lady had appealed to him—why shouldn't he ask her advice? It was all very well for him to have frightened the Sheriff into leaving the place, all very well to appear sanguine and hopeful while the boss stood near him, but in his heart he knew he was afraid. Something in the shifting, malicious look of Bud Hardy's eyes as he left the place told Bill that there might still be trouble. Twisting the rim of his big hat nervously, he said:

"Say, miss, you got a lawyer in your party, 'ain't you?" Diana turned to listen to him. "Oh, but pshaw!" he went on, trying to reassure himself even while he spoke the disquieting words. "It 'll never get to the lawyer, cause Jim 'll never let him arrest her—never!"

"Arrest her!" Diana exclaimed, in surprise.

Bill explained. "Nat-u-ritch. The Sheriff thinks he can prove she killed Cash Hawkins—that day you were at Maverick."

Jim had not recalled that incident to Diana last night. He had told her he owed his life to the Indian girl—how and why he had not explained. Eagerly she leaned towards Bill as she cautiously said, "Why did she kill him?"

"Well, if"—and Bill dwelled on the word—"*if* she killed him, she did it to save Jim's life, and it stands to reason Jim ain't goin' to see her suffer for it." Then as he saw a troubled look on Diana's face he regretted the admission of his worries. "Say, miss, I'm awful glad that you an' Hal are goin' to pull your freight, for there's goin' to be merry hell around here."

He quickly begged her pardon for his involuntary slip, but Diana had hardly noticed it. This would mean new worry for Jim. Then she comforted herself with the thought that perhaps this kind-hearted soul was exaggerating things. Surely, if there were cause for anxiety, Jim would have spoken to her about it.

"Is there nothing that can be done, Bill?"

He shook his head.

"Well, is there anything that I can do?"

"Don't see how, except to git away as soon's you can." And then he told her of Bud's proposition to obtain money from Jim, and that the Sheriff was willing to sell his evidence against the Indian girl. "Why," he added, "I 'most kicked him off the place; and Bud will fight, you know."

But Diana was only concerned to know whether the Sheriff was safely out of the way. "You say the Sheriff's gone?"

"Thank Heaven!" Bill answered. "And, by-the-bye, just to be more cantankerous, he threatened to hold up you and your party as witnesses; but that wouldn't be legal, would it?" As he remembered the boys he added, chuckling, "It certainly wouldn't be popular."

Before Diana could reply, Jim interrupted them. Like a restless spirit he had

been wandering over the place, from barn to cabin, from Hal's sleeping-room to the boys' quarters; accomplishing little and vainly trying to accept the events that had crowded into his life during the last hours. The Sheriff, he felt sure, could easily be managed, but Nat-u-ritch's disappearance was causing him anxiety. He knew it was a trait in the Indian character to hide away and stoically endure its grief in silence. Every moment he expected her to return. Stronger than all these thoughts was the desire that Diana should go at once, and little Hal with her. This speedy termination would make it easier for them all, he told himself, and then there were matters enough to claim his attention. So he reasoned as he came from the back of the house, where he had been brooding over a valise containing the child's belongings. As he saw Diana sitting there deep in conversation with Bill, he stood amazed at the simple adaptability that made it possible for her to adjust herself to these primitive belongings and people. Bill was already regarding her as a friend. Then he remembered that he must see Tabywana to tell him of Nat-u-ritch's disappearance, and arrange a plan with him to help her to evade Bud for several days.

"Bill, I wish you would get Baco. I have sent for Tabywana, and want Baco to interpret for me."

Bill's heavy boots creaked down the corral.

"I hope you've rested well, Diana," Jim said.

"I haven't been to bed, Jim. I've been trying to think it all out." She rose and came to him. "Would she be quite impossible at Maudsley Towers?"

Jim knew she wanted to take up their conversation where it had stopped last night. They had discussed the subject already, and he felt the futility of going over the same arguments. It only tormented him, so he answered, "Quite."

Diana persisted. "Couldn't she be sent to school for a few years?"

"It's too late. That might have been done when she was a child, but now she's a woman."

"And a mother." Then hurriedly, as though fearful that she would not have the courage to express to Jim all her concern for Nat-u-ritch, she said, "Jim, I wonder if we are treating her quite fairly?"

"I hope so." And in Jim's voice there was a prayer.

During the night many thoughts had haunted Diana. The soft little arms that had clung to her the night before troubled her. What would their loss mean to this child-woman of the woods? She decided to make one more appeal to Jim and frankly lay before him the conflicting emotions that had torn her since her arrival at the ranch.

"At first, Jim, I hated everybody, then I pitied you. Now I am thinking of her." Jim listened intently. She laid her hand on his arm. "Civilization has bred in people like you and me many needs and interests. But this helpless child-mother

has just her child and you, and we are taking the child away. Oh, have you the right to sacrifice her even for the child?"

Jim could not argue. He had made his decision when Petrie wrested from him the concession to let the child go to be prepared for the life he had no right to deny him.

"I have done the best I know how, Diana," he said, simply. "We must leave the rest to God," and Diana knew that the words were the result of his own bitter struggle and she could no longer doubt their wisdom.

She stood silent. Jim looked at her. Of their own love that had endured all these years, neither spoke. It was Jim's moment of greatest temptation. He longed to say something to her that might express what he felt; but again he conquered himself.

"Will you take Hal?" was all he said. "I want you to get away before the heat of the day."

And Diana left him.

CHAPTER XXVI

Jim waited anxiously for Tabywana, to enlist his services in protecting Nat-u-ritch. Impatient of delay, he started towards the bunk-house. On his way he met Bill, who informed him that Bud and his men had gone. Tactfully, Bill avoided any reference to Bud's last threats, and Jim was comforted with the news of the Sheriff's departure. It only remained now for him to send Tabywana in search of Nat-u-ritch. He found the Chief and Baco, and in a few words told Tabywana that Nat-u-ritch had gone into the hills because he had decided to send the child away, that she was very unhappy, and that he wished him to go to her. Unmoved, the Indian listened, and only at the end of the words that Baco was translating for him made answer that Jim had spoiled Nat-u-ritch, that she must obey her master, and that he would insist upon her returning at once. But Jim explained that he wished her to remain hidden a little longer, until he was sure that the Sheriff had really left the neighboring country, as he was fearful that Bud Hardy meant mischief. Through Baco and Tabywana he would send her food and clothing, he added. Gradually he made the Chief see that this way was the wisest, and Tabywana left, breathing vengeance on Bud, and swearing that a war should follow if the Sheriff dared to arrest Nat-u-ritch.

Jim found the boys assembled before the cabin on his return, while Bill was directing the hitching of the horses to a wagon that was to carry Diana and Hal to Fort Duchesne.

"Everything ready, Bill?" he said, bravely.

"Yes, sir, everything ready."

Jim called to Hal and Diana, who came from the house. He picked the boy up in his arms and a sudden terror overcame him. He must be alone a moment, to gain the courage necessary to face this last ordeal.

"Take him, Bill," he said, "while I go and get his bag," and he went into the cabin.

The foreman nodded. He held the boy high up in his strong arms while the men crowded around him. He must try to make it easy for the boss; there must be no tears. Diana and Sir John, from under the porch where they were standing, watched the men with the child, and during the years that followed it was a memory that often recurred to them.

"Fellers," Bill began, as he enthroned Hal on his shoulder—"fellers, he's agoin' to Duchesne—savvy? Gee whiz, don't I wish I was goin' to see the soldiers and flags and drums and brass bands and everything! Ain't he goin' for a fine time!"

The child answered with glee, "Sure," and the men's laughter rang out at the child's use of their own mode of expression.

Carrying the bag, Jim came from the house. "It won't hurt anybody to carry his belongings; it's almost empty."

Shorty sniffed as he peered into it. "'Tain't very full." Then he threw into it the old jewel-box with the trinket which Jim had given him. Jim saw and understood. The men had come for their final leave-taking of the boy; they wished to prove that their animosity was over, that they recognized that misfortune had come to them through no fault of his.

"Hold on, Shorty." Jim tried to prevent the little fellow from getting the valise, but Shorty took the bag out of his hand as he snapped:

"That's Hal's trunk, ain't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"It ain't yourn." Ever aggressive, Shorty finished, "You don't want to fight the outfit the day your boy's agoin' away." And he pushed Jim aside as he carried the valise over to Grouchy, who was holding up a villainous-looking jack-knife to the child.

"Say, old man," the slow, lumbering ranchman labored, "you wanted this for a long time. I wouldn't give it to you, 'cause I was afraid you might cut yourself, but I've been a-savin' it for you. When you get bigger, you can make things with it."

Grouchy threw the knife into the bag, while Shorty, deeply touched, muttered, "That's the longest speech Grouchy ever pulled off." After all, the box with its trinket had been a gift to him; he must give something to the child that had been his very own.

"Say," he began, "I'm in on this; he's admired my saddle for a long time."

But Jim protested, "Shorty, what on earth is he to do with it?"

And Shorty answered, as he flung his saddle into the wagon. "I'll bet they 'ain't got nothin' to touch it in England."

Bill approvingly observed, "That's right; he's a cow-boy and needs a real saddle."

Quietly Andy pressed forward and diffidently began, "Und say—und say—und sure—the boy you know—und, by golly, he's got to have something to remember old Andy by—fadder or no fadder." As he spoke he drew from his belt his revolver, carefully emptied it, and held it up to Hal, whose eyes gleamed with joy at this especially desired gift. "Maybe dot don'd tickle him, eh?"

"Andy, is that sure for me?" Hal gasped.

"Sure," Andy said. "Und say, old man, it's a good one—und say, it's the best ever; und, by golly, been a good frient to me, und come in handy some day for you; und you remember old Andy by dot better than anything."

Shorty opened the bag and dropped the revolver in. The German held out his arms and in a trembling voice said, "Kiss me, you rascal," and the boy jumped into his arms.

Bill, who had been listening and watching the men, was tugging at his waistcoat. "And here's an old watch with a horse-hair chain—he's had his eye on it for some moons. He'd 'a' had it before," he explained confidentially to Jim, who was trying to prevent Bill from loosening it, "only it belonged to my mother." He knelt down on the ground and opened his arms. "And now, old man, give me a long hug. Don't ever forget your side-partner." Bill felt he must be careful. The men were beginning to move away, and surreptitiously to dig their knuckles into eyes that were showing their emotion.

Elated and excited by what seemed play to him, Hal said, as he patted the foreman, "Be good, Bill," and the men laughed as Bill answered:

"Sure I will—sure—sure."

The horses began to stamp impatiently as they grew restive under the attack of the flies. Diana looked at Sir John. They must start shortly, she knew; but who would make Jim realize that the final farewell to the child must be spoken. Petrie, who through a feeling of delicacy had kept away from Jim and the boy all morning, came to Sir John and Diana with a whispered message from the driver, who was anxious to make a start.

As though divining their thoughts, Jim went to Bill, who was still holding

Hal. He threw his arm around the big fellow's shoulder. "Aren't you goin' to drive to the fort, Bill?"

"No, I think you need me more than he does."

"Oh, I'll be all right."

Jim's eyes searched the child's face. For the boy's sake he must control the aching sense of desolation that beset him.

The cow-punchers silently made their way up to the wagon and began adjusting its contents. No one noticed the dark, tragic face of Nat-u-ritch peering out of the loft door down at the child and the strangers that stood prepared to carry him away. Returning a short time before from her hiding-place by another trail, she had eluded her father, and crept into the barn while the men were absorbed in bestowing their farewell gifts on the child. Hidden among the bales of straw, she looked down on the scene. In her eyes was an almost fanatical calm, so stoically did she watch the child. She seemed in some dumb way to have reached a solution of her problem, but in conquering herself she had paid heavily, and this abnormal expression of hopeless resignation which her eyes held betrayed a terrible possibility.

Bill waited for Jim to speak. As he held the dark little face between his hands, Jim softly whispered, "I wish his mother could see him once before he goes; but nothing would ever reconcile her to it, I suppose.

"It's a heap sight better for her as it is," Bill brusquely said. "I told Charley to drive like hell; the quicker they're out of sight the better." Bill turned to the porch, where Sir John Applegate, Malcolm Petrie, and Diana stood, and his glance told them that they must end the strain and get away at once.

"Well, Jim," Sir John said, "our horses are tied to the corral; everything is ready." He took Jim's hand in both of his. "Good-bye, Jim; sorry you're not going with us."

"Good-bye, John," was all that Jim said.

Jim was conscious that the last moments he had dreaded were becoming a tragic reality. There stood Diana ready to start on her journey; on the other side of him Petrie advanced with out-stretched hand; while at the back of the yard he could see the boys clustered around the wagon waiting for the final moment. He realized that the sun was rising higher and higher in the heavens and that it was growing hotter. He must send them away. A strange veil, that dimmed all about him, seemed to hang between him and his surroundings. Finally he turned to Petrie, who stood on the other side of Bill. "Good-bye, Mr. Petrie." Jim held his hand out to the lawyer, in front of the child, and in a low voice said, "You've won your case against me; see that my boy gets all that is coming to him."

Petrie gravely answered, "You may trust me, sir." Then he joined the others at the wagon.

Jim stretched out his hands in silence to the boy. The child jumped from Bill's shoulder and nestled against his father. Bill left them; only Diana remained near Jim.

"And now, old man, kiss your daddy."

A troubled look crept over the child's face. It had all been great fun, but now—he was growing frightened. His hold tightened around his father's neck. Jim quickly saw that he must divert the boy's mind.

"Take good care of Cousin Diana, won't you?"

At this appeal the child, who was a masterful little fellow, used to being treated as an equal by the men on the ranch, answered, "Sure." And as Diana came to him he leaned down, smiled, and said, "I like you."

Diana smiled as she kissed him, and said, "And I love you, God bless you!"

She could scarcely bear the look of pain in Jim's eyes as they went from the boy's face to hers, then back again to the boy. In silence they grasped each other's hands, then Diana walked over to Bill, who tenderly helped her into the wagon.

Jim was alone with his boy. There was much that he wished to say, but he dare not speak. He could see the wistful look beginning to return to the child's face.

"Good," he said, lightly. "And now be off." Close he pressed the child's face to his lips. "There's a brave boy—with a smile and hurrah!"

How could he place the child in the wagon beside the waiting woman, whose face was turned away to hide her pain! His voice dropped low and almost broke. "Some day, when you have a son of your own, you'll know what this means," they heard him whisper. "But no Wynnegate ever was a quitter, and so we'll take things as they come."

Still no one turned to him. Diana felt the child being lifted in beside her and the baby fingers fasten around hers. She turned her face to Jim, but almost savagely he called:

"Drive on, and never look back."

And Charley, who had remembered Bill's words "to drive like hell," with a crack and a slap let the impatient animals go. The men started after the wagon.

"Give 'em a cheer, boys," Jim cried, and the place rang with their shouts.

Petrie and Sir John galloped alongside the wagon, with Grouchy, Andy, Shorty, and Bill following as fast as they could run. Cheer after cheer sent back its echo, while Jim stood alone listening as he watched the swaying, rumbling cart raise its cloud of dust, through which he could barely see the men still running and hear the faint echoes of their cries of "Good-bye, Hal."

Like a symbol of broken hope, he stood, a solitary figure in the dreary, deserted place. His hands were still out-stretched towards the receding wagon.

The deep-tinted, rose-colored rocks glowed more and more radiantly, until the blinding glare from the plains made Jim shield his eyes.

"There they go"—he strained forward closer to watch the wagon—"down into the ravine—out of sight—and out of my life forever."

As the dip in the land engulfed and shut out his last glimpse of the travellers, he dropped inert and clinched his arms over his head, while his heavy, dragging steps were the only sounds that broke the terrible stillness that had fallen over the yard. Almost mechanically he reached the bench and sank down upon it. Nat-u-ritch, from her hiding-place above, could hear the sobs that came from the crushed and broken man.

CHAPTER XXVII

Nat-u-ritch stole down from the loft and crept to where Jim had stood. Unconsciously she repeated the same picture of desolation he had made as he stretched out his arms and strained his eyes to see the wagon disappear down the ravine, which the Indian girl could now see far off, like an ant on a hill, as it crawled up the dun-colored mound. Like him, she folded her arms and stared ahead for a long time—even though the blinding light blurred and made the landscape a chaotic meeting of sky and earth.

But, unlike him, no sobs shook her tiny body; erect and resolute she stood, then turned and noiselessly came down behind the weeping man. In wondering pity she watched him, then crossed to the house and entered it. She quickly returned with the small revolver in her hand; but her soft-shod feet made no sound, and Jim, unconscious of her presence, still sat with his head on his knees. As she caught sight of the tiny moccasins the child had left lying on the bench, she wavered a moment, but she only paused to pick them up and press them against her wildly beating heart. She had but one thought—escape from the pain that gnawed and tormented her.

Without the boy, and with the look she feared she must face daily in Jim's eyes, she knew she could not endure life. There was no rebellion, only acceptance of her fate, as she crept close behind Jim, the moccasins covering the steel weapon. Worn out, Jim still remained with head bowed, a physical stupor of fatigue almost dulling his sorrow. Nat-u-ritch's quick ear heard the voices of the returning men, and she darted across to the corral and disappeared behind the

barn. But even that did not arouse Jim.

Shorty, Andy, and Grouchy hurried after Bill, who was coming back to look after Jim. Shorty grasped Bill's arm, wheeled him about, and pointed in the direction the carriage had taken.

"What are they bringing them back for, Bill?" he asked.

Bill swore a mighty oath as he saw the wagon headed for the cabin, with Bud and his posse surrounding it. He must prevent a meeting between Jim and Bud if possible.

"Don't say a word," he whispered to the boys as he caught sight of Jim. "We'll get him into the house."

He came down to Jim and tenderly laid his hand on his shoulder. "Jim, old man, you haven't had any sleep; go in and rest awhile."

Jim looked up at Bill, who pulled him to his feet, then started to lead him towards the cabin. He could fight the physical weariness no longer.

"Oh, I'll be all right soon, Bill."

Bill, as though humoring a child, said: "Sure. We've all got to get kind of used to it. Sleep's the thing to put you right."

They reached the cabin door. Jim dully echoed, "Sleep—sure, sleep, Bill." Then Bill closed the door on him.

"Shorty," he called, "you and Grouchy stand outside of that door, and don't you let him out of there until we can get Bud Hardy away." He meant to hurry and meet the wagon before it could reach the yard, but as he spoke he heard the men and horses and knew that it was useless.

Andy, who had been watching farther down the road, ran towards him. "Bill," he called, "Bud Hardy's here." As he spoke, Bud and his men advanced, followed by Diana and the child, while Sir John and Petrie stood close to them.

"Bud," Bill began, in a quick, low voice, "Jim ain't in any mood to be trifled with to-day. What in hell do you mean by stopping these people when I ordered you off the place?" He blurted out the words as though fearful of the impulse that drove him to do bodily harm to the Sheriff.

With a sneer Bud answered, "I told you I would hold these people as witnesses, and now I want Nat-u-ritch."

Before Bill could remonstrate, there was a hoarse cry from the house. They heard Jim wildly saying, as he rushed to Bill:

"Where is it? Where is it? It's gone—gone! Who took it? Bill, did you put that little gun back in the room as I told you?"

"That I did, boss."

As Jim stood in the yard he failed to see Diana or the child. He saw only the great form of the Sheriff, with his men around him, and he knew that mischief was afoot.

"You here, damn you!" He made a movement to reach Bud, but was restrained by Shorty and Grouchy. Then he saw that the entire party had been taken into custody. Before he could expostulate, a shot rang out.

"What was that!"

Bill ran to the barn. Jim followed him, but was stopped at the door by Bill.

"Jim," he cried, "it's Nat-u-ritch."

Before either of them could reach the tiny form they saw Tabywana lean over and pick up the child-woman in his arms. He had found her, but too late.

Diana, holding the child and followed by Petrie and Sir John, drew back into the corner of the porch. Bud and his men, who had lost their prey, slunk away. Only his faithful men stood by Jim as Tabywana advanced, carrying in his arms the dead Nat-u-ritch. From her hands dangled the tiny baby shoes.

Tabywana held out the lifeless body to Jim. In death as in life, she belonged to her master.

"Poor little mother! Poor little mother!" Jim whispered.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The fields were golden-tipped with mustard-flower, while a haze as golden touched and glinted the green of the encircling hills. A riot of vernal glory met Jim's eyes as he walked through the lanes that led to the Towers.

Six months had passed since Diana and Hal had left him, and until now the West with its memories had held him. He had written that he would be with them on this day, but he wished to return quietly. Only Diana and the child knew of his expected arrival.

The soft summer heat had brought into blossom every wild flower in glen and roadway; the great trees seemed heavy with the fragrant breezes that wafted through their leaves. As he had gone from home, so he wished to return to it—alone. A tumult of emotions battled within him as he approached the entrance to the Towers. He found the heavy doors opened wide as though expectant of a visitor. As he stood on the threshold the clock of the church-tower struck twelve. It was noon—the high noon of his life.

From the hall he heard a voice cry, "Welcome home, daddy!"

He turned to see his boy, changed even during the short separation—but stronger, more beautiful, a veritable princeling—holding out his eager little arms.

And his boy, standing alone in the great hallway of the home of their ancestors, welcomed Jim to his own. As he held the child close to him, his eyes searched for Diana, and as the boy rained kisses on his face, Jim said:

"Cousin Di—where is she?"

The child smiled, and, slipping down to the ground, took hold of his father's hand and started to draw him down the corridor that led to the garden.

"Cousin Di is waiting for you in the Fairies' Corner," said the child. "We go there to play, you know, and listen for the fairies."

Jim did not speak, but the child prattled on as he led him across the green grass, past the swaying, flaunting hollyhocks and the beds of old-fashioned, fragrant flowers that lined the walks. The songs of birds filled the air—linnet, lark, and thrush seemed carolling a welcome to him. But Jim hardly heard what the boy said. He could see only the waving tree-tops of the mysterious Corner in the distance.

"Cousin Di!" the child called, as he ran ahead to herald his father's coming.

Beyond, the path and garden were bathed in strong sunlight; the heavens were full of drifting azure clouds. Over all was the dazzling, bewildering glory of the noonday splendor, and before Jim stood Diana, a gracious figure, at the entrance to the enchanted spot. On her face a tender love answered all that his eyes asked. Behind her he could see deep into the Fairies' Corner; in there all was peaceful; only golden cobwebs of sunlight dappled the leaves and scattered the enshrouding gloom.

Neither Jim nor Diana spoke. The boy's attention was claimed by a vivacious wag-tail that chirruped at his feet, then fluttered away to be pursued by him. Once he turned to smile back a reassurance of his joy at his father's return, but he could not see him.

Diana and Jim had entered the Fairies' Corner, and this time they heard the flutter of wings—the wings of their love as it enfolded them in its peace and holy joy.

THE END

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SQUAW MAN ***

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