

THE HEART OF THE RED FIRS

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HEART OF THE RED
FIRS ***

Produced by Al Haines.

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Cover art

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*"He looked down into her lifted face, believing yet not believing."
Frontispiece. See page [312](#).*

THE
HEART OF THE RED FIRS
A STORY OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

BY
ADA WOODRUFF ANDERSON

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES GRUNWALD

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TO THOSE FEW REMAINING PIONEERS,
WHO KNEW THE NISQUALLY TRAIL INTO THE GREAT SOLITUDES,
IN TIMES BEFORE THE LOGGING RAILROAD DEVASTATED
THE PUGET SOUND HILLS, AND THE WILDER-
NESS BEGAN TO RECEDE AT THE
COMING OF THE BUILDER
OF TOWNSITES.

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"He looked down into her lifted face, believing yet not believing" . . . Frontispiece

"She paused, swaying in the hot gale"

"I like you as well as I could like any American with un-American ways"

"He turned and looked into the fire"

THE HEART OF THE RED FIRS

CHAPTER I

THE TEACHER AND THE FREAK OF THE STRANGE THOROUGHbred

The children were putting away their books. The afternoon sun, streaming through the uncurtained windows, made patches of heat on the hewn cedar flooring, and the new, unpainted desks sent forth pitch and the fragrance of fir. Suddenly a shadow crossed one of these squares of light, and Lem Myers, who was seated nearest the raised sash, whispered an audible warning: "Mose, your dad's comin'."

The boy sprang to his feet and stood facing the open door. The intruder entered without ceremony. He had the lank black hair and mustache, eyes flashing under shaggy brows, of the Canadian-French, and the powerful shoulders and sinewy frame of a voyageur of the Hudson Bay Company. Two hounds which followed him, stopped with their forepaws on the threshold and reconnoitered the room suspiciously.

He strode directly up the aisle to the waiting boy, and laying a hand roughly on his neck, said, with growing heat, "Din' I tell you doan' tek dat gun? Oui, two, t'ree tam I ees say let eet 'lone."

Mose rocked under the grasp but he bore it with the silent fortitude inherited from an Indian mother; the white in him only found expression in the dull glow of his cheek, the tense arms and the hands clenched at his sides.

"Din' I say A'm goin' t'rash you? Nawitka, for sure. T'ief! Cultus Siwash!" And with a climax of invective, hurled forth in a mixture of French, English and Indian, the man raised his hand and struck a hard blow.

Before he could repeat it the teacher stepped between them. She had a bright, speaking face, eyes that laughed or stormed on occasion, a mouth mobile, alluring, with charm of lurking merriment, and a chin delicately square, that

lifted when she spoke, with an indescribable air of decision.

"How do you do, Mr. Laramie," she said, and offered her hand, while, at the same time, with the other palm she impelled Mose back into his seat. "You are just in time to hear us sing."

He had ignored the hand, but she quickly placed her chair for him, smiling, and commenced in a clear, full mezzo:

"We now are youthful sailors, we are not far from shore,
But soon we mean to journey the ocean o'er and o'er."

She lifted her music book from her desk and found the place for him, but he

refused it with a shake of his head, and taking the seat with manifest reluctance, pulled his old squirrel-skin cap over his brows, scowling first at her, then more darkly at Mose, and finally in general at the school.

The children swelled the chorus lustily. And the Canadian liked music. It was his vulnerable point. He began to beat time to this brisk measure with his clumsy boot; cautiously at first, then with great vigor, while his voice broke into a hoarse hum.

The song was hardly finished when she tapped the bell for dismissal.

"It ees gre't museek," said Laramie, rising. "Oui, a gre't song." His glance moved, challenging possible contradiction, and rested on Mose's seat. It was vacant. "Dem it," he cried with returning wrath.

But the teacher went swiftly down the aisle before him. "Here is your gun," she said, and dragged it from behind the door. Her voice trembled a little; entreaty rose through the courage in her eyes.

He took the rifle, turning it in his brawny hands to give it a close scrutiny. When, with a final click of the hammer, he raised his glance, the entreaty was gone; she stood with her arms folded, chin high, watching him. It was as though she measured him.

His mouth worked in an unaccustomed smile. "Say, Mees," he said, "what ees dis you tole dose chillun 'bout de eart' ees roun? You mek fun for dem, yaas?"

There was a silent moment while the amazement came and went in her face; a touch of merriment dimpled her mouth. Then, "It is quite true," she answered, gravely, "the earth is round."

"Roun'? Sacré, Mees, but we mus' fall off."

She shook her head. "Come, I will show you." And she led the way back to her desk, and taking a small globe in her hands, went through the usual explanation slowly, simply, with infinite patience, as she would have told a little child. But Laramie had convictions of his own. He had seen the great Pacific, oh,

yes, often, when he had journeyed for the fur company to Nootka; and he had watched ships approach from the far horizon, but to see the masts first proved nothing; a vessel was most all sail. And it was true that once he had met a sailor who said he had taken a ship at Quebec and sailed straight on and on, and without turning back had found himself again at home. But plainly the man had lied, for how could one make la bon voyage up the Fraser, through the big lakes and down the St. Lawrence in a great vessel? Bah, every one knew it could only be done in a canoe. "De eart' roun'?" he concluded. "No, no, Mees, you doan' mek me beli've dat. But it ees gre't joke; oui, a gre't joke, ha, ha. Well, good-by, Mees. Tek care yourse'f."

He shouldered the gun and strode away through the door. At the same time there was the snapping of a twig and a glimpse of retreating bare heels at the corner of the house, and while the Canadian moved down the river trail a pair of keen eyes, set in a ferret-shaped face, peered at him from behind the angle. They were the eyes of Lem Myers. When he had satisfied himself that Laramie was truly on his way he came cautiously to the threshold. The teacher was seated at her desk using her pencil with rapid, decisive strokes. He crossed the floor to the platform before she was conscious of his presence.

"Well, Lem," and she smiled down at him, "are you waiting for me?"

"Wal, yes; thort I'd wait an' see it out." He slipped up behind her chair to look over her shoulder, bending his head as she moved her hand, the better to follow her work. "Oh, gee," he exclaimed suddenly, slapping his knees, "gee. You're a-settin' here a-makin' er picture of him, an' I 'lowed all ther time you was scared."

"Scared?" She suspended her pencil to look at him.

"Yes, Mose was gone an' ther wan't nobody else ter hit."

"Hit? Do you mean he might have struck me?" She rose to her feet, facing the boy. "Do you— Do men in this settlement ever strike the women?"

He gave her a sidelong glance and thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. "You bet," he answered.

There was a brief silence, then she said, and the vibration had not gone from her voice, "No, Lem, I was not afraid, but I might have been if I had known. Where I have lived men never strike women; they have other ways. I was just thinking of Mose. I wanted to ask Mr. Laramie not to be hard with him."

"Oh, don't you bother 'bout Mose. He kin take care hisself. He's got more muscle now'n any other boy in ther hull deestric, an' it won't be long 'fore he kin turn in an' thrash ther ole man."

There was another silence; the merriment again dimpled her mouth and she looked off through the open door. Lem stooped and picked up a loose sheet that had fluttered from the sketchbook to the floor. "Gee," he said, "gee, but you

kin draw.”

”Yes?” Her glance returned and rested on the sheet interestedly. ”What is it, Lem?”

”Why, it’s er picture of ther timber-cruiser an’ that ther black horse o’ his. Here’s ther same nice little star atween ther eyes, an’ I’ve seen him fling up his head an’ point one ear jes that erway.”

”So you know Colonel,” she said, flushing, yet pleased at the recognition. ”Mr. Forrest bought him when he was a colt. He broke him, and I am the only woman who ever mounted him.”

”I ’low then you kin ride some. Ther ain’t never be’n no sech stepper in this hull deestricht. Mill Thornton calc’lated he hed er prize when he raised ther sorrel filly, but gee, I’ve seen ther black leave her clear out o’ sight in less’n er minute.”

The teacher laughed softly. ”I know, I know, the beauty. And his master, Lem. Did you ever see such a man in the saddle? So straight, so easy, so ready at just the right instant with a quiet word, or else that soft whistle.”

”He kin ride,” admitted Lem. ”I’ve never seen him fizzle, an’ he’s be’n out here off an’ on considerable; timber-cruisin’ first an’ then prospectin’. He ’lowed last year he’d struck er gold mine or somethin’.”

”I know,” she repeated, ”I know. It was only a few miles from here he found those splendid indications.”

”Yes,” said the boy with his impish smile, ”an’ lost ’em.”

”The mineral is there,” she said with an upward tilt of her chin. ”The ore he brought down assayed remarkably rich. But he had broken his compass that day and a heavy mist settled over every peak and spur. There was absolutely nothing to mark a course from. Still, it’s there, Lem, locked in the heart of the hills. He will find it again, sometime.”

She went over and took her hat from its peg on the wall, and Lem followed, waiting on the steps while she locked the door.

”There will be no more timber-cruising when he takes his position at the new mills,” she said as they started up the trail; ”no more chances to prospect. But he is coming out to the settlement before he goes to Seattle, for a last trip into the hills, and, if your mother can go with us, he intends to take me, to see the Cascades at close range, and the canyon and the leaning tower, and spend a night or two in his favorite camp at the headwaters.”

A few rods from the schoolhouse the trail to the Myers clearing, which was her boarding-place, began an abrupt ascent across the face of a burned over ridge. They made the first part in silence, then she paused to look back on the desolate waste. ”Oh,” she said, ”it’s like the end of the world. It’s always so wretchedly hot on this dead side-hill; the gravel shifts so underfoot. It’s very different on the

Tumwater road.”

”Whar’s that?” asked Lem.

”Why, it’s the way from Olympia to the Tumwater mills where Mr. Forrest has lived since he was a small boy. And it’s through the woods and down a great ridge, with glimpses of blue sea between the firs, and always, even in warmest weather, a cool, salt breeze. The lower falls of the Des Chutes plunge into the Sound there, at Tumwater, and their thunder fills the gorge. We used to go down often, walking or riding, and sometimes when the wind and tide were right, we sailed. I suppose, Lem, you never have seen a yacht?”

”Wal, no, I dunno’s I hev.”

”Then you have missed a great deal. But the first time I go down to the Sound I’ll take you; and Mr. Kingsley, my brother-in-law, will have us aboard the *Phantom*. Then, out past the old monastery on Priest Point, we’ll catch a swinging breeze, and all the running waves will toss their whitecaps,—you’ll like that, even if the scud whips your face,—and someone, my sister perhaps, will start ’The White Squall.’ It’s the best sea song, made for the accompaniment of water on a cleaving keel.”

For a moment she forgot the boy. She stood looking off across the charred stumps and skeletons of trees, as though she saw far away that blue sea she loved, and expected to hear that rush and gurgle along a moving keel. And he, this urchin who had lived his life among the weasels and squirrels in the heart of the great forest, who knew nothing of whitecaps, to whom scud was a new and vague torment, waited with his ferret eyes upon her, sharp chin lifted, lips apart. Her glance fell. Their eyes met and she laughed. ”Would you like to make that trip down to Puget Sound, Lem?”

He dropped his head, and slipping back to his place at her heels as she resumed the climb, answered with brief emphasis, ”You bet.”

At the top of the ridge the trail entered the forest. The boughs of the friendly firs clasped overhead; a carpet of needles was underfoot. Moss rioted everywhere, on logs, rocks, the trunks of the living trees. Still, it was less insistent than the salal, which pushed its stiff glossy leaves through dense growths of alder and hazel, and the fern, which sent up slender stems, forming a lattice for honeysuckle and pea, and high above her head spread umbrella fronds. It was cooler and she quickened her pace. Lem began to whistle, then to answer the birds, and presently she, too, was calling, cautiously at first, taking lessons from the boy, and all the wood was full of voices.

At length there was the noise of running water and they came down to a brook. It was their half-way place. Mid-channel, Lem had built a water wheel. He had set a squirrel trap on the bank, and a larger one for mink, and had made a bench for the teacher, by rolling a short log against a trunk, securing it with

stakes. She seated herself and he waded out into the stream. He plucked a leaf from an overhanging bough, and shaping a drinking-cup, brought her a draught. She laid her hat in her lap and resting her head on the trunk, idly watched him while he examined the traps, and drew from a hollow cedar his alder pole, equipped with primitive line, and baited the hook with a grasshopper. But while he tried pool and shallow ineffectually, her glance moved absently up-stream, and presently she sang in a soft undertone:

She shone in the light of de - clin -
ing day, And each sail was
set, And each heart .. was ... gay:

[image]

Music fragment

The noise of running water became the music of the sea; the bole on which she leaned was a heaving mast, and the stir of hemlock boughs above changed to the bellying of voluminous canvas. Once more the moon hung low over the Tumwater hills, silvering the cove, and on the port bow the Des Chutes plunged out of blackness and swayed, sparkling, like a curtain of roped pearls between beetling cliffs. Her sister's contralto, swelled by Kingsley's tenor, took up the chorus, but clearer, close beside her, subduing his fine baritone to her own voice, sang Paul Forrest.

At last she drew a full breath and returned to the present. She brushed her hand across her eyes and looked at Lem. The next instant she was on her feet. She ran down the bank and out upon the stepping-stones, watching the boy. "Play him, Lem," she cried softly, "play him, tire him. Don't be in a hurry."

"Gee, gee!" Lem set his teeth between the exclamations, and gripped the pole in both hands. "Oh, gee!"

He began to move down-stream, splashing ankle-deep, plunging over his knees in hollows. His steps quickened. He tripped on a sunken snag, recovered, fell sprawling across a dipping log, and was up instantly, steadying, playing the jerking line.

"That's right, Lem, slowly, tire him. Now—" She clasped her hands over an imaginary rod, lifted in unison, and as though she felt that great weight on the boy's line—"Now. Oh, you haven't, you haven't lost him?"

The chagrined sportsman stood regarding his remaining bit of string. Then

he threw the pole down disgustedly and returned to the crossing. He gave the teacher one sidelong look and dropped his eyes.

"Never mind, Lem," she said. "It was fine. The gamiest I ever saw."

He lifted his head. "You kin bet on that," he answered. "Ther's jes one of him in this here creek. He's ther great Tyee. But gee, gee, I don't see how he hed water 'nough ter keep him erfloat."

The teacher laughed softly. She started on over the stream, but, lifting her glance from the dripping boy, she met suddenly the amused gaze of an auditor who had stopped on the bank. His mount, a dappled chestnut with a silver mane, the alert head, depth of chest, long, sleek body and nimble limbs of a thoroughbred, was, in that forest settlement, remarkable, but the man himself possessed a striking personality. He carried his large frame with almost military erectness and yet with the freedom of young muscles bred to the saddle. He wore cavalry boots and English-made riding-clothes, and his coat opened on an immaculate silk shirt bosom. His face, stamped with inherited fineness of living, was undeniably handsome, but his lip took a mocking curve when he smiled, his chin had length rather than breadth, and in his eyes, which were singularly light under black lashes and brows, smouldered a magnetic heat; they drew or repelled.

The rise from the brook was abrupt, the path narrow, and the teacher waited on a larger stone while the stranger rode down into the ford. He removed his hat with the usual salutation of the trail, and crushing it carelessly under his arm, would have passed directly on, but the horse, suspicious of some movement of Lem's, made a sudden *détour* that brought him almost upon her. She started to spring to another rock, her foot slipped, and to steady herself she threw up her hand. It came in contact with the chestnut's bridle below the bit. Instantly he reared, wheeled, and coming down, gripped the bank with his forefeet, and was off like a bird.

Lem crawled out of the pool into which he had plunged to avoid those striking hoofs, and the teacher hurried on over the crossing. But, unexpectedly, at the top of the bank she met the rider returning, and she and the boy crowded quickly into the *salal* to give him room. He still carried his hat under his bridle arm; a rifle in a leather case swung, undamaged, from the saddle; a small canvas-covered pack rested, unbroken, above the crupper, and the thoroughbred paced gently down into the stream and moving on slowly, trotted up the opposite side and disappeared among the firs.

"He kin ride," said Lem at last. "An' I 'low that ther chestnut kin travel. But he'd be mighty oncertain in er race. Ef it kem to it,"—he paused to follow the teacher back into the trail,— "ef it kem to it, I dunno but what I'd resk my pile on

ther timber-cruiser an' ther black."

CHAPTER II

THE LEANING TOWER

Suddenly Forrest, who had taken the lead, turned and laid his hand on his horse's rein. "Back, Colonel," he said, "back. Steady, now, steady."

The trail, which ran between the edge of a windfall and the brink of a cliff, was cut off by a slide.

Presently, when there was room, the teacher slipped down from the saddle, and Forrest turned the black and led him into a small open on the level shoulder to which they had climbed. Below them they heard the voices of the settlers urging Ginger, the other horse, up the sharp incline; then, with a final clatter of tin and scraping of hoofs, he appeared over the spur. He dropped his muzzle abjectly to the heather, showing covertly the whites of his eyes; his legs seemed to shorten like set posts, while Mrs. Myers, who followed closely, stopped to look at the pack. She tucked in a loose end of canvas and made a new hitch in a length of rope. She had a deft yet masculine touch, and it was her husband's standing tribute that she knew more about packing than he did; when Marthy fixed a load, it stayed.

There was nothing weak and little effeminate about Martha. Her scant cotton gown, without decoration, was shortened above a streak of coarse gray hose; her shoes were of calf, heavy, unshapely, and her hat, Eben's winter one, had seen protracted service. It shaded a face darkened by exposure to wind and sun, and seamed not by age but habitual anxiety.

The settler mounted a log and cast a slow glance along the windfall. There were mighty firs, centuries old, with their trunks hurled in air; boles of ancient cedars snapped mid-length; giant hemlocks held uptilted and forming a breast-work for living trees; gnarled roots locking with green branches; all dropped together like jackstraws, the playthings of Titan winds. Presently Martha joined him and they began to work along the labyrinth, picking a course for the horses.

Forrest had tied the black, and, taking advantage of the delay, led the teacher to a better view-point of the canyon, which swept below them, rounding the opposite ridge in the shape of a crescent. A granite tower, crowning a higher cliff, held the curve. It was a curious pile, of boulders fitted nicely, block on

block, with loophole and parapet, and the whole structure tilted slightly, leaning towards the precipice.

The girl seated herself on a stone in the shade of a stunted fir, and Forrest, a little worn from the long tramp, threw himself on the ground, putting aside his hat and resting his head on his hand, his elbow on the earth, while he looked off down the gorge. "Somewhere in there," he said, "beyond that curve, I ought to find my lost prospect. The mother lode should crop out in one of those lower bluffs towards the Des Chutes. The thunder of the river reached me not long before,—I remember that clearly,—but I wish the place I staked that day had only been in range of that fine old landmark, the tower."

She looked down thoughtfully into the wooded gorge. "In such a tangle you might pass the place a dozen times. Your stakes must have been overgrown in a few weeks with fern and salal, or shoots of alder. It's really beginning again."

"Almost." He set his square jaw and a vertical line deepened between his eyes. "Still, it's there and sooner or later I'll find it. But I must make the most of this trip; I can't hope for many days off at the Freeport mills. That's the worst of it,"—he smiled, shaking his head,— "no more timber-cruising; nothing to take me out-of-doors."

"Do you know, I can't think of Tumwater, the mills, the falls, the ridge road, without remembering you? You've been a part of it, Paul; the spirit of it all."

"That's nice of you." He gave her a swift look of appreciation. His eyes, a deep, clear hazel, were his most expressive feature; they put weight and character into his slightest remark. "But a man must step out of his cradle, sometime, and Judge Kingsley has made me a fine offer. He is sure to gain the election,—no man is better known, or as popular in the whole territory; no one has the interests of the country more at heart. And when he goes to Congress he means to leave the Freeport mills under my management altogether; that is with the co-operation of Philip."

"The co-operation of Philip? Do you think because Phil Kingsley has put his money into that property it will make any difference?"

"The Judge thinks it will be the making of him."

"Phil Kingsley's gain," she said slowly, "is always someone else's loss. You ought to know it."

Forrest laughed, his short, pleasant laugh. "I think," he said, "you can trust me to take care of myself. Of course you know," he went on presently, "Phil means to live at the mills. His uncle opposes it. If he goes to Washington the house at Olympia will have to be leased to strangers or closed, and it will be a miserable place, at the mills, for your sister and little Si. She had better take a house over the harbor at Seattle. But she is going to live at Freeport. Like you she is determined."

"Freeport is different. It's just a bleak, wind-swept beach, shut off from the green earth by a towering bluff. Indeed, I wouldn't live there. Here, I have the woods and mountains all around. And I love the Nisqually. It's freedom."

"Your sister will be disappointed. She still hopes that when the novelty of all this has worn off, you will be ready to come back and make your home with her."

She shook her head. "I never can do that again. I can't help disapproving of Philip. The habit grows. I object to him more and more. We often quarrel—now."

Forrest laughed softly. "Of course you do; of course. But the Judge," he went on gravely, "is miserable. He says if you won't let him help you it isn't necessary to bury yourself out here in the wilderness, in a nest of outlaws. If you are determined to be independent, you could teach or paint, or put your music to advantage in town."

"Oh," she answered, "he doesn't see. I was meant for a pioneer, Paul; it's in the blood. You ought to understand. I love the great spaces, just as you do, and your life in the big out-of-doors."

A soft enthusiasm shone in her face; she looked off absently at the tower. Her hands were clasped loosely on her knee, and the sunlight, sifting between the boughs of the fir, brought out the gold in her hair; the wind roughened it under her close velvet cap, and twisted it into minute spirals about her neck and ears. The young man watching her set his lips over a quick breath and turned his eyes away. She loved these things, yes, but as a bird loves light and air; not as he loved them, to work for them, to build, reclaim, spend himself for them, fight if the time came. No, not for one foolish moment could he expect it of her.

"Was ever anything as nicely balanced as that tower?" he said. "To look like a touch would send it toppling and yet to withstand the gales that sweep these hills. But the eternal forces are busy around it; some day it will go."

"It's wonderful," she answered. "It looks like it had been built there to protect the gorge. What a stronghold it would make."

"Stronghold? For whom?"

"Why, for Pete Smith, Dick Slocum, any of them."

"Who is Slocum?"

She shook her head slowly. "I don't really know. But he came in while we were at dinner the night before last. His clothes were torn and his hat gone, and there were twigs and needles clinging to his hair. He was very hungry. The sheriff and a posse were hunting him. They had passed up the trail half an hour before, and he hurried, scowling at every one, and before any one spoke was gone, taking part of the meal in his hands."

"Freeport couldn't be as bad as this. Own you were afraid."

"Afraid? No, why should I have been? It was Dick Slocum who was fright-

ened. He was running away. Mr. Myers said he had shot a man. But," she admitted grudgingly, "I was afraid of Pete Smith, and of the bear."

"Smith?" He changed his position a little, dropping his arm and resting his shoulder against a rock. "What of Smith? I thought he was safe in the penitentiary."

"He escaped. It was very stormy the night he came back. Trees were falling on the ridge, and after school Lem and I went home with Mose. Mr. Laramie was away with his traps, and his wife, you know, is a Yakima, the daughter of Yelm Jim. It would have been all right if the boys hadn't entertained me with stories of the rising, but they were dreadful to hear with the wind whistling, boughs sighing, rain driving on the shingles, and just the light of the backlog in the fireplace. When Lem followed Mose off to bed in the barn loft I was a little unnerved.

"There were two beds in the room; mine was curtained. But I couldn't sleep. I kept listening and waiting for something to happen. There was a rifle on the wall near the door; I began to wish I had it. Mose's mother was surely asleep, I heard her regular breathing from the other bed, and finally I crept over softly and took the gun down. It was heavy and I let the stock strike the floor. Still she didn't move, and I hurried back and stood it inside the curtains where I could reach it instantly, felt safer then and at last went to sleep."

She paused, looking off again absently to the tower. It was as though she saw that room, the sleeping squaw, she herself in the curtained bed with the rifle at hand. "It must have been nearly morning when I wakened. There was still light from the smouldering backlog, and between the curtains I saw Mose's mother standing near the door and talking to a man. His clothes were wet and torn as if he had pushed through underbrush; an old, soft hat shaded his face, and perhaps it was the shadows or the flicker of the firelight, but it seemed the most hideous face in the world. She pointed to my corner and he started towards me. My heart leaped, But she stopped him. He spoke to her in Yakima, throwing off her hand and stamping his foot. Then she came over cautiously and looked in at me. I pretended I was asleep, but the perspiration started; I could have screamed. I quite forgot the gun until I felt she had taken it and was going quickly back to the man."

She paused again to give her listener a swift look with the mounting fun in her eyes. "He took the rifle," she added, "and went out."

Her laugh was irresistible.

"And it was Smith?" he asked directly,

"Yes, it was all explained the next morning when Lem noticed the vacant place on the wall and said, 'I see Pete's out again; he's be'n fur his gun.'"

Forrest laughed again at her perfect mimicry of the boy, then he turned his

face again to the gorge. He thought of a good many things, but he felt the futility of saying any of them. He only asked finally, "And what of the bear?"

"Oh, he was berrying, I suppose, and I happened to overtake him on the trail, I had been down the river making a sketch of Yelm Jim, fishing, and Lem had gone home without me. I noticed the bear moving ahead of me towards the creek, but I thought he was just a great pig until he lumbered around to look at me. And the moment I caught his profile, you may be sure I turned and went flying back to the river, on over the log where I had left the old chief—he gave me right of way—and into the midst of the Laramie barn-raising. 'Come, quick,' I said, 'I have seen a bear.' And they all came; two had guns. But he was gone; he hadn't left a track, and I found myself, suddenly, standing there under the scrutiny of the whole settlement. It was only my second week, then, and teachers, up the Nisqually, are more unusual than bears."

But the amusement went out of Forrest's face. "You should have at least the security of a good horse. You must take Colonel. I can't use him at the new mills," he explained quickly, "and I don't want to sell him. He never knew another master. Will you keep him while I stay at Freeport?"

"I keep Colonel? Oh, there's nothing I should like better; nothing. You are the best, the most generous man I ever knew." She leaned a little towards him, all delight, eagerness, charm. "I can't ever hope to repay you, Paul, but I'd be glad of the opportunity to do anything—anything in the world—for you."

"I wish I could be sure of that. See here,"—his voice deepened and shook,— "I don't ask you to come to Freeport, or anywhere, until I can offer you something worth while, only—if you care enough for me to wait for me, Alice—tell me so."

She drew back; the delight went out of her face; she rose in consternation to her feet. "You," she faltered. "You— Oh, what made you, Paul? What made you?"

"How could I help it?" He, too, rose and stood looking down into her flushed face. "I always have loved you, Alice,—don't you know it?—even when you were a small girl and I carried your books to school. Once I was late and you came up the road to meet me.—Don't you remember?—It was my last year at the Academy, when you were twelve. You were reading your first Waverley novel, and you told me that morning, some day your knight would come riding down the ridge. I never forgot. I was the better horseman for it. Long afterwards, when I bought Colonel, I thought of it. I always meant to be that knight."

He smiled, half ashamed of that boyish dream, but she drew herself straight and turned her eyes again to the tower. "You," she said, "whom I have known my whole life through."

"Yes, does that count so much against me?"

"I'm so sorry. You've been the best friend I ever had; the one I could always

depend on. Oh, I wish—I wish it hadn't happened."

He laid his hand, bracing himself a little, on the bole of the fir, and turned his own face away, looking off once more down the canyon. Myers, coming back to the edge of the windfall, called, but neither of them answered. Presently she reached and broke a sprig from a lower bough and began slowly to strip it of its needles. "But I see—I see—how much I've been to blame," she said. "I can't forgive myself, ever. I never thought of you—in—that way, Paul. You never seemed—like other men. And I see—I see—I shouldn't have spoken, as I did just now, about Colonel."

"Why, it's all right." He swung around and looked at her. "It's all right. Don't let it trouble you; don't give it another thought. And, of course, you will keep Colonel."

She shook her head. "How can I?"

"Don't make me feel you hold him in the light of a bribe. Understand, it's just a favor to me. I think a good deal of my horse; it means a lot to me to be able to leave him with some one I can trust."

Her lip trembled; she brushed her hand across her eyes. "You are the best—the noblest man in the world," she said.

Eben called again and Forrest answered with a clear "Hello." He began to walk back towards the windfall. Presently he stopped to pick up a small, morocco-bound book which she had lost from her pocket in crossing a boulder on the way out to the cliff. He slipped the volume into his own pocket and turned to help her over the rock. "See here," he said, "I want you to know that I'm glad to be that best friend, the one you depend on. You needn't be afraid of me; you've given me a character that I've got to live up to."

"You mean—" the light came back to her face—"you do mean you are not going to let it make any difference between us."

"Of course. Why should it? Only—tell me this—" the rock was smooth and difficult; he watched her footing—"is there some one else?"

"No, there is no one else—yet."

She paused on the word, for suddenly, lifting her glance beyond Forrest's shoulder, she saw the stranger she had met at the creek on the school trail. He stopped a few yards from the boulder, and, dismounting, took the chestnut's halter, and, making it fast to a sapling, stood waiting.

Forrest gave him a straight look and slight nod, and would have passed directly on, but the man smiled and held out his hand. "I hope you have not forgotten me," he said. "I am Stratton, lately of Victoria. I met you with the Kingsleys, when you came over to see the new mills at Seattle."

Forrest gave him another look from under slightly knotted brows. "I remember. You were going on a cruise with the Captain in the *Phantom*. I've

heard, too, of you through my friend Bates, of the Customs Service."

Stratton dropped his disregarded hand. A wave of color swept his face, and the latent heat flared and died in his eyes. Then he said, evenly, "I am out here on a little hunting trip, and, incidentally, to see what can be picked up in the way of furs. I am interested in the trade, as you probably know, and I find Laramie has been taking some prime beaver." His glance had moved to Alice; apparently the explanation was meant for her, and she looked at Forrest, waiting for the obvious introduction.

It was withheld.

"But," Stratton went on after a moment, and he moved a few steps in the direction of the gorge, "I was stopped just now at this windfall. Myers told me the trail was impassable, and he spoke of a curious old tower worth turning aside here to see."

"Yes," answered Forrest, "it's the most prominent landmark in these hills." And he walked on towards his horse.

Alice went with him, and directly Stratton halted to send a look after them. "So," he said softly, "so it is what you have heard, through Bates, against the friend of a Kingsley. But you were rash to show your hand, young fellow, you were rash." Then his glance rested on the girl and he smiled. "I never yet wanted to know a pretty woman," he added, "that I could not find a way."

He turned and walked out to the cliff. He stood for an interval under the stunted fir, and scanned the gorge, bluff after bluff, down to the tower; afterwards he went along the precipice a short distance and climbed a bald knob of rock. He waited again, posed, with his head and shoulders etched on the sky, while he searched the opposite heights, the walls of the canyon; then, with a sweeping glance behind him, he looked once more in the direction of the leaning bastion. Presently he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and held it by one corner at arm's length to the breeze. In a little while a thread of smoke rose from the rear of the tower. He took out another handkerchief, a black one, and repeated the signal, twice. Almost directly the smoke ceased. He left the place then, and went back to his horse. Picking up the trail, he rode along the front of the windfall, on over the shoulder of the hill which he had lately climbed, and returned towards the settlement.

CHAPTER III

THE CAMP AT THE HEADWATERS

At last Forrest and Alice stopped before a huge fallen cedar; its boughs, still green and fragrant, were under their feet. Some distance beyond the settlers had paused to choose a way, and the horses, heated and thirsty, stood in a small open between.

"I knew the trip would be rough," he said, "but I didn't expect this; we should have turned back at the slide."

"Back? No, no." Her face was pink and moist and she spoke between short, quick breaths. "You should know, Paul, when once I undertake a thing, it's in me to carry it through."

"Come, then." He found footing on a higher bough, and leaping on the log, turned to reach his hands down to her. "Come." And when she had gained the place he was on the ground again, calling her attention to the surest step. But she took it incautiously, missed, and fell.

He could only throw out his arms to break the fall, and for that instant her head was on his breast. Their young eyes met; a mist was in hers and the pink deepened in her face. "You do love me," he said. "Some day you are going to tell me so."

Then he put her on the boughs at his feet, and turned and looked off over the windfall. His lips were set and his brows contracted in a deep, vertical line. But when Martha moved on with Ginger he went to his horse and brought him back to the cedar. "I think we are through the worst," he said quietly, "and if you are rested, you can ride now."

He stooped, offering his hand for her foot, and when she was up, he led the horse, stopping to hold aside a trailing bough, breaking another short off, making Colonel step the logs, or if that were impossible, skirting and doubling to avoid the leap. But he had nothing more to say, and he kept his eyes turned resolutely from her, with still frowning brows.

The ascent became steeper. They emerged from the windfall and took breath on a rocky shoulder. Over them rose the round crown of the great hill-top, bald or tufted with heather. The settlers, picking up the trail, pushed on. From time to time a stone gave under the reluctant Ginger's hoofs and rattled down the incline. In places he stopped morosely, setting his legs like posts. Then Martha tugged vehemently at the halter, as though she hoped to uproot him bodily, while Eben, with the judicious use of a hazel, admonished and urged from behind. When these resources failed, Colonel charged the little cayuse, nipping him smartly in the flank, and started him in a panic. But at last the final stretch was finished and they were on the summit.

Alice dismounted and they walked a few yards to the eastern side, which broke away in great, treeless steps. Far below, the forest stretched like a smooth plain, through which the Nisqually trailed and doubled like a changeable ribbon

in the sun. But the girl's eager eyes turned first northwestward, where, sixty miles distant, the Olympic Mountains shone dimly through summer haze, a pastel of blue and white, and enclosed in their hollow a turquoise sea. Was that bright moving speck a bit of cloud or was it the *Phantom* with the light on her sails? Her glance came back and before her clear-cut, near, rose the bastioned heights of the Cascade Range, and, over-topping icy minarets and domes, vast, mighty, in Alpine splendor, loomed the triple crest of Mt. Rainier.

"Well," said Forrest finally, "is it worth the effort?"

"Effort?" she repeated. "I could fight a hundred windfalls for this." She paused, swaying in the hot gale that swept the hilltop. "But this isn't enough, Paul; I must go there."

[image]

"She paused, swaying in the hot gale."

"To Rainier?"

"Yes, if I were only a man I shouldn't wait a day; I'd push right on to-morrow."

Forrest smiled, shaking his head. "The only two men who ever made that summit," and he looked off again to the brilliant slopes, "nearly perished. But Philip is talking of a trip to the mountain. He has promised your sister that he will bring her out to the Nisqually to see you before they go to Freeport, and he thinks he can go on, then, to Rainier."

"Then he must take me." She lost her hold against the wind, and for a moment it beat her back, struggling, laughing, from the bluff. "There are Indian trails," she went on. "Though they are afraid of the mountain, they go as far as the warm springs and hunt on the lower slopes." She battled another interval and ended by staying herself with her hand on Forrest's arm. The touch, her nearness, shook him more than the gale. "But," she finished, "Phil Kingsley will find a way. He loves an adventure; it's the one point where we ever agree; and if he goes to Rainier, I know he will take me."

Forrest laughed, again shaking his head. He turned and looked back along the face of the ridge. There was that landmark, the leaning tower, holding the curve in the sister height, but the canyon had lost those familiar lines he expected to see. From this view-point the second sweep of the gorge, doubling the hill, seemed to terminate abruptly. It was baffling, mysterious, altogether strange; yet, somewhere, in that rough corner of the landscape, unrolled like a map at his feet, he should be able to locate his lost prospect.

But it was impossible to linger on the hilltop. The heat was growing intolerable, and not a fissure or depression in the rocky surface held water; the flask, filled at the last stream, had long been empty. They returned to the horses, and trailed down the southern slope, into a cool glade which was carpeted with short, thick grass. It became a natural park; trees of mighty girth, almost free of undergrowth, rose in straight columns, one hundred and fifty feet to the lowest limbs. They were ringed by centuries, yet were sound to the core.

Finally a moist breeze drew between the boles and brought the noise of running water. Colonel pricked his ears sensitively. He swung, looking towards a line of thicket that marked the watercourse, then he broke into a trot. The sound became the thunder of a cataract. Alice leaned low in her saddle; her wide eyes tried to penetrate the jungle ahead. The black pushed on between boughs, snorting gently, tossing his mane. There was a flash of foam through the foliage, then, clear, cold, fresh from near snowfields, plunged the upper falls of the Des Chutes. Her foot was out of the stirrup; she slipped to the ground, and reaching the brink, threw herself full length, and stretching her palms down to the torrent, and bringing them up, cuplike, drank. She laved her face, and putting her hands together, dipped and drank from their hollow, again and again.

There were two falls, and the ledge upon which she had thrown herself projected over the second plunge. It was narrow and thin, and trembled with the shock of the torrent and with her weight. When she lifted her eyes the spray of the upper cataract was in her face; looking down, she saw a great square room cut from solid basalt, which received the second fall and poured it, seething, through a fissure, set doorlike in the lower wall.

She shrank back to her knees, overcome with sudden dizziness. The next instant she was drawn to her feet, then lifted off of them by a pair of unsteady arms, and put down on firm earth. She looked up and laughed.

But Forrest's face was white and stern. "Why will you risk yourself like this?" he said. "Why will you?"

Camp was made in a small open on the base of the slope. Dry branches were gathered for the fire, a tent pitched for the women, and bedded with boughs made springy by sharpening and planting the butts in the earth. Then Martha set out her fine butter and light loaf, and lifted the coffee-pot from the improvised tripod, and brought venison steaks, broiled to perfection over the red coals.

"I dunno," said Eben, putting down his cup and smoothing his long black whiskers, "I dunno's I ever hed your 'pinion 'bout that ther leanin' tower. How do you 'count fur it?"

"Why," answered Forrest, "the blocks are of granite. There was probably a formation of granite and limestone, and the softer rock crumbled away."

There was a brief silence, during which the settler meditated profoundly,

then Martha spoke. "I 'low he's 'bout right, Eben. Ther ain't never be'n no man 'round here could a hefted them stones, let erlone piled 'em that erway, cantin' right over ther gorge. An' ef ther was, an' he'd hed ther help an' tackle, what in all creation 'd he do it fur?"

Another profound silence, then Myers said, "I 'lowed it might a be'n done by my petrified man."

"Your petrified man?" repeated Forrest.

"Yes." The settler cast a sweeping glance behind him, as though he feared the young man's incautious tone might have reached some eavesdropper lurking in the thicket, and screening his mouth with his hand, echoed softly, "My petrified man."

"It's true," said the teacher gravely; "he is excavating a petrified man. I've seen it, or rather parts of it. He keeps it in a blue chest with a padlock under my bed."

Martha rose with suppressed energy, and lifting a bough, laid it on the fire. "He's be'n nigh onter all winter an' spring gettin' out ther legs an' arms," she said, resuming her place, "but he calc'lates ef he kin only find ther hull thing ther's folks 'ud pay consider'ble fur it."

"I 'lowed mebbe, fur instance," explained Myers, "that ther museum ter Washington, what that Gov'ment man was talkin' 'bout last year when he was stoppin' here, would give me er pretty good price. He says they buy up old bones o' anything curious or over-sized."

"No doubt," said Forrest slowly, "no doubt. But I believe, Eben, the time spent on your ranch would count for more. That's a fine meadow you have, and a few additional acres cleared and seeded with alfalfa would mean almost riches to you."

Myers struck a match and, screening it with his hand, lighted his pipe. Martha watched him. Her lips twitched a little and an unspoken appeal rose in her anxious eyes. She only said, presently, "Mebbe he's right, Eben. That ther meadow's be'n a mighty good pasture. Before we hed it you used to spend er sight o' time drivin' ther cattle over here to ther south slope in ther cold spells. Onct," she paused, looking off through the great natural park, "when Lem was a baby I kem over ther hills an' toted him in my lap. It commenced ter snow an' I lost ther trail."

"An' it was yonder," said Eben, pointing riverward, "close onter that ther black snag, I found her. She'd hitched ther cayuse an' took off his pack, an' Lem, ther little bugger, was did up in er extry blanket, peart as er chipmunk in er hole. She was settin' down by er good fire a eatin' her supper."

Martha smiled, her shadowy, brief smile. "I counted on his lookin' fur me," she said, "an' 'lowed he'd scent the bacon. His rations was erbout give out."

The long Northern twilight deepened; the nearer trees stood out tall and spectral against vague shadow; a bat with low swoops approached and was lost in the gloom; a white owl settled, dazed, on a fir bough, and from time to time mingled his hoot with the note of the cataract. Once the sound of sliding rock came from some high shoulder and was followed by a rush of earth lower on the slope.

Alice leaned back comfortably on an old cedar trunk with chairlike arms, and lifted her face, listening. "How the hills answer each other," she said; "every sound multiplies."

Forrest settled himself in one of his easy attitudes in front of the fire. "It reminds me of a trip I made last year over the new railroad in Oregon." He paused and his listeners waited, expectantly. He had a deep, pleasing voice and the gift of the story teller. "They had taken me aboard a construction train. There are points on the Columbia where the slopes rise abruptly eight hundred feet, and the soil is loose with a perilous mixture of boulders. They had scores of Chinamen at work to bulkhead these places, and the big timbers up there looked like scaffoldings of toothpicks. But a whole crew of track-walkers couldn't keep the danger off, and we were speeding along when suddenly there was a terrific sound. It was like musketry multiplied by echoes on echoes. Then looking up we saw ahead an immense rock moving down the mountain. The engineer reversed his lever and jumped. The next instant the boulder struck the engine and hurled it into the river."

She caught her breath. "And you, Paul?"

"I?" He turned to her with his smile of the eyes. "Why, I was in the caboose. The coupling broke and separated the rest of the train from the engine. It was the closest shave I ever had."

"And you never told me."

"The greatest devastator is the frost," he said after a moment. "It drives the wedge ready for the heavy rains. But I remember a place on the Snoqualmie that has been crossed by an avalanche of snow. It has left a clean-swept track through the timber, and the trees, hurled with incredible force, block the river from bank to bank. It's the most terrible jam ever heard of. You know the place, Eben?"

But the settler answered only with a gentle nod. He sat with his chin on his breast, holding his empty pipe on his knee. Martha nudged him, but he slept placidly on.

Alice lifted her glance once more to the shadowy slope. Presently she began to sing in a sweet undertone, "The Day Is Done." And after the first measure Forrest took up the song, and the two voices, rising, swelling, started a refrain from cliff and spur. The last echo drifted and died in a far canyon. A great hush rested on the wilderness. There was a soft illumination on a high peak, then

every crest and shoulder was silvered by the rising moon.

The song was followed by many; the parts of old operas which they had been accustomed to sing with her sister and Philip, on winter evenings in Judge Kingsley's parlor, or in summer time becalmed aboard the *Phantom*. And at last it was Schubert's "Serenade."

Forrest rose to his feet and stood with his arms resting on the top of the trunk behind her. This song had always been a favorite; they sang it well together. But a new personality crept into the familiar tones; an awakened sadness. And the romance of the place, the mystery of night and the near heavens, gave setting to his part and spoke for him.

She took up the song, but it became suddenly, for the first time, too difficult to sing. Her notes faltered and broke. He finished the part alone.

CHAPTER IV

"THER BIGGEST COWARD IN THER WOODS"

Forrest was lying on his blanket, his feet to the camp-fire, hands clasped under his head, his wakeful face raised to the near stars. An arm's-length from him Myers slumbered, audibly. Stillness rested on the small white tent. But presently his horse tramped uneasily, pulling on his picket rope, and the young man rose and went over to him. "So, Colonel," he said softly, "restless, too, are you? Steady, now, steady, we'll work it off, old fellow, so."

He found the bridle and, mounting without a saddle turned up the lofty slope. The horse flung his head, and with some airy stepping by the white tent, set himself willingly to the ascent. The firelight, as he passed, brought out the silver star between his intelligent eyes, the one marking, from the tips of his sensitive ears to his nimble hind feet, in a handsome, jet-black coat.

The settler stirred and rose on his elbow with an inquiring "Hello!" And Forrest called back, "I'm just going up to the summit for another look around, and to try to shape a course for the day's tramp."

Myers laughed and settled back comfortably to his blanket. "I 'low," he told himself, yawning, "he ain't likely ter see much more'n fog."

Half way up the hill Forrest halted, breathing his horse on a level spur, and looked down over the tops of the firs. "It's a natural town site," he said aloud; "and when the country opens it's bound to be a mining center. There's a fortune in that

water power, but I should set up my own stamp mills there at the falls, and build cottages for the men to the right on that knoll. And meantime—meantime—what an Eden it would make.” He turned with a quick upward lift of his head. “Come, Colonel, come,” he said, “we must keep a tighter rein. It’s summer now, and she isn’t over the novelty; but it won’t last through the first September rains. Even if she loved me—I could never ask her to bury herself up here in the wilderness; her—with her ideals and dreams, and all those nice, luxurious ways.”

He rode on in silence. The moon paled; there were no longer stars, and, as he reached the summit and looked eastward, he saw the first streak of light broadening and toning to green on the horizon. The peaks and shoulders of the Cascades loomed against it purplish black, but all their base, the valleys, foothills, sank in a white fog that lifted slowly to meet the dawn. The sky warmed to yellow; a far spur flushed. He felt the rising moisture in the air, drew a damp breath. A belt of high cloud crimsoned, and he saw nothing more.

The fog closed in, billow on billow, flooding the canyon, lapping the ledge where he stopped. Then for a moment the white sea parted, and the granite tower hung tilting over the abyss. It stood solitary, like a lighthouse on a stormy coast, and in another instant was blotted out.

He dismounted, and with his hand on his horse’s neck, his hat pushed back, stood watching these waves, flowing, separating, rolling together, rushing out. “And it’s something you can’t grapple with, or put down,” he said at last. “You’ve got to push into it, blind, or wait for it to break. It’s like the future. That’s it; I could give a year or two to the grind at Freeport, easily enough, if I was only reasonably sure. But it’s all a chance. A chance that no other man will stumble on my find, or want this section, or the water power, a chance,—” he began to smooth the black’s mane gently,—“a chance, old boy, that she will care enough for me, some day, to wait for me.”

The defiance faded from his face. He took his lariat coil, and seating himself on a rock, allowed the horse to go the length of the rope, seeking a scant forage. Presently he breathed a whistle; it settled into a definite tune:

[image]

Music fragment

He went over it again and again, with variations that were not the notes of a flute, nor yet of a thrush but something of each and more; an expression so sweet, so tender, so full of subtlety, that you must have guessed the meaning even though you had never heard the words of the song.

He broke off finally and sat for a long interval looking absently into the fog. When he started to his feet a brisk wind was blowing and overhead the mist was like pulverized gold. "Come, Colonel," he said, "we must get out of this; I can't afford to wait any longer and you must put me back in camp inside an hour."

But suddenly, as he turned his horse, picking up the thread of trail which on rock and heather was repeatedly lost, a broad shaft of sunshine struck the hilltop, and directly the crest of Mt. Rainier rose like a phantom from the rushing sea. Then everywhere, through the fog that parted and closed, and parted again like a rent curtain in the wind, dome and pinnacle gleamed opal or rose in the full glory of the morning. And the sun went with him down the slope, touching the higher spurs, the tops of the firs, and finally the small white tent in the open, and the edge of the dense undergrowth that followed the watercourse.

Myers welcomed him with a long "Hello," and the teacher waved her hand and stood for a moment watching him as he wound down between the great boles, then she turned her attention to the broiling trout which she herself had caught below the falls. The soft flush of the early morning was on her cheek; its sparkle was in her eyes.

But during breakfast he had little to say to her; he seemed more interested in the settler and his views of homestead and pre-emption rights, timber laws and government surveys.

"I 'low," said Eben, "you ain't countin' on takin' up ord'nary land, yourself? You're jest huntin' fur a gold mine."

"There's nothing I would like better than to find and open up my lost prospect," answered Forrest, "but, if I could spare the time now, to-day, I should file on this section, right here in the heart of the red firs. It's the best vacant piece I know of."

"Do you mean," asked Alice, with awakened interest, "that you would homestead it, like any settler?"

"Yes; and put a timber filing on the quarter adjoining to take in those fine old trees up the slope. It's one of the best stretches of red fir in the whole Washington forest."

"But," she said thoughtfully, "there is plenty of fine standing timber close to the Sound, where transportation to the lumber mills is easy; here it would be a tremendous problem."

"True, and I shouldn't think of spoiling this park for years. It's just a good section to hold for the future. And, well, I'm fond of the place; I shall be sorry to know any other man has taken possession."

"I see," she said after a moment, "I see. And of course you would secure the water power at the same time. And while you lived here you would be close at hand to carry on your prospecting, perhaps development."

"Yes, that's what I've wanted to do, but"—he shook his head and looked at her with his smile of the eyes,— "that position at the Freeport mills was too good to refuse; and if I do find my mine, it's going to call for capital at the start. I can't expect to interest other money until I am able to make some sort of a showing."

He rose to his feet and stood looking off to a high shoulder of the hills. Then, presently, he and Eben were starting on their tramp, the day of search for the lost prospect. The sun fell in long shafts between the boughs and her glance followed him from light to shade. Martha also, standing a few steps away, looked in the same direction, her head bent a little forward, her knotted fingers shading her anxious eyes.

"Ther ain't many like him," she said at length, dropping her hand.

"No," answered the teacher, absently, "no; walking or riding, it's a pleasure to watch him. He is so strong, so self-reliant and yet so—kind; in every way he is the finest man I know. He stands alone."

"I meant Eben," said Martha with her shadowy smile. She paused, watching the teacher's face, for she flushed hotly to the ears. "He's good-looking, an' he's got consider'ble grit when he gets started. He's always a plannin' an' a studyin', but he ain't ever hed er show. Ef he hed, I don't s'pose I'd ever a got him."

"I'm sure," said Alice warmly, "Mr. Myers himself won a great prize. Why, you plow, sow, reap; you milk and drive the herds. You carry on the whole farm. He never could do without you."

"He always 'lowed I was a good worker," and Martha turned to gather up the breakfast things.

Presently the teacher asked, "With a clear trail, about how long would it take to ride from here to the schoolhouse?"

"Why, I jedge you could do it in erbout five hours. It's roundabout, you see, an' you'd hev ter go clear to our place an' ercross."

"But with a new branch cut directly through?"

"Land, you could do it in half ther time, an' take er stepper like Colonel, he could make it in two hours, or likely one an' er half."

The teacher began to walk back and forth through the open. Her hands were clasped loosely behind her, she looked off absently through the trees, and her swift thoughts alternately clouded and brightened her speaking face. After a while she approached Forrest's picketed horse. He lifted his head from the luscious grass and she stood for a moment smoothing his ruffled mane. "If we only could do it," she said softly, "if we only could, Colonel; it would pay your hire."

Later, while they were walking to the river, she, herself, displayed a sudden interest in homestead laws, gathering from Mrs. Myers both small and valuable detail as to the methods of clearing land and building a cabin.

Martha found a seat below the falls and took out her knitting, a sock for Eben, while the teacher chose a place a little down-stream and opened her sketch-book. She began to outline the cataract, but she studied the perspective less and less and finally not at all. Then for an idle interval she leaned on the boulder at her elbow and looked dreamily up through the great park. When she bent again to her work, behold, the torrent was but a background for a figure, young, well-knit, in short sack coat and trousers bound in leggins. And so engrossed was she in producing those strong lines of brow and chin, the quiet, searching, humor-haunting eyes, the mouth severe yet tender, that she did not know that Martha had risen quickly, and stood listening with her alert gaze searching the jungle directly behind her. She was only roused by the close snapping of a branch and a sudden sense of peril.

She started to her feet, dropping the book, and faced the thicket. The color went from her lips. There, in a tangle of hazel, tawny, handsome, with swaying tail and brilliant eyes fixed on her, stood a well grown cougar.

The next instant Martha reached her side. She had caught up from the ground a stout bough, and she swung it, thrust it at the brute, shouting. Alice, quick to grasp the expedient, armed herself with another fallen branch. The beast gave back a step, another, and the two women pressed him slowly, cautiously. At length he turned and slunk reluctantly away into the timber.

"Ef Eben hed left ther gun," said Martha, wiping the perspiration from her face, "it 'ud saved us consider'ble bother. But I jedge we best get back ter the open an' hev er look at ther horses."

Alice stood with her eyes fixed on the point where the cougar had disappeared. Her breast heaved with deep, quick breaths and she still grasped her heavy hemlock bough with both hands. At last she dragged her gaze away and met Martha's serious glance. She could not speak but her spirit rose and recognized in silent tribute, the great soul of the pioneer.

Martha put her shoulder to an encroaching bough and led the way back to the stream. Presently she stooped and picked up the sketchbook, and, having smoothed the leaves, gave it to the artist. Then Alice said slowly, "I shall always remember—as long as I live—what you did."

"Oh, land," and Martha smiled, "it wa'n't much ter do. An' a cougar's ther biggest coward in ther woods. He wouldn't dast ter tech er man, lest he was cornered or hungry; but I 'low he hed er pretty good chanct when he kem ercross you."

A little farther on she possessed herself of her dropped knitting, and, having gained the path, she moved towards camp, setting her needles and picking up lost stitches. But her knotty fingers worked mechanically; they trembled slightly, and her anxious eyes repeatedly swept the jungle. She knew that a cougar, hunting,

does not so easily abandon his quarry. Though cautious, hesitating, he trails his game for hours, constantly preparing for, while he is diverted from an attack. She also knew that, like the human coward, once assailed and cornered, he becomes a fury.

In the open they found Ginger standing with hoofs planted like a figure in stone; but the black, in his terror, had circled and recircled the alder to which he was tied, winding his lariat, and, reduced to an arm's-length of rope, he made short and frenzied plunges to break free. Suddenly he stopped, dragged back the limit of the line, and stood trembling.

Instantly Martha understood. She ran forward, dropping her knitting, and picked up another bough. The cougar had reached a vine maple a few rods from the black. She saw his tawny body outstretched on the great curving branch of the parted bole. "Pile them pieces o' spruce on ther fire," she said coolly. "Make er smoke. Then slack up Colonel's rope an' get him back behind it."

She stepped between the horse and the cougar, again lifting the heavy limb, swinging it, thrusting it, but avoiding direct contact with the beast, and renewing her shouts. Before she had finished her directions Alice had caught up a resinous branch and thrown it on the embers. It crackled noisily and sent out a great cloud of smoke, which the wind, setting from the river, carried directly into the eyes and nostrils of the panther. He began to retreat, snarling, along the maple. Presently he dropped to the ground, and while Martha pressed him, step by step, the girl, who had succeeded in loosening the lariat, urged the horse around the fire.

Again the cougar turned and disappeared. Colonel was finally picketed near the old cedar trunk, and they piled fresh boughs on the fire, still pursuing the panther with thick, pungent smoke. Then they rested, gathering themselves, in the brief reprieve, for his certain return.

The black, less panic-ridden, continued to listen or tug at his rope. The other horse began to browse. The suspense pressed. Then, suddenly, a rifle shot startled the solitudes. And while the two women stood marking the puff of smoke, which rose a few yards off, there came a clamor of snarls. Two hounds slunk through the underbrush into the open and waited, shaking. A second report rang through the hills, then, the cries having ceased, one of the dogs plucked up courage and sounded a clarion. After a moment his mate returned into the thicket, alert, cautious, feeling ground. The first hound crept in his wake, and directly their baying, multiplied as by a score of throats, filled the wood.

The dogs were Laramie's, and the women followed them, seeking their master, but the hunter was Mose. The cougar was stretched in his death throes before him, on a bed of trampled fern and broken boughs.

"Saprie," he exclaimed as the teacher approached, "if I ees have dat gun of

Laramie's I doan' have some trouble to keel heem de firs' shot. But dis gun dat Yelm Jim ees lend to me, he ees buy long tam 'go to de Hudson Bay Companee; an' for sure dey ees sell heem one no 'count Injun gun."

"Oh," said Alice, her voice shaking, "it was a grand shot—Mose. And you—you came—just—in time."

"Monjee, Mees, ees it dis cougar ees give you some trouble, a'ready?"

She could not speak again directly; she could only nod her head, affirmatively. But Martha smiled grimly. "Wal, yes," she said; "he's be'n er trailin' us, off 'n on, fur a good spell; an' Eben, he's prospectin' down ther canyon with ther rifle."

"So," said Mose, "so, but it ees good t'ing I come 'long den. You see dose dogs ees track me las' night to Yelm Jim's cabane, an' I ees keep dem to hunt some mowitch to-day. Dey ees fine dogs for trail de deer, ya-as, but A'm mooch shame how dey ees scare' of dis cougar. Cultus Pichou." He paused to cuff aside one of the snuffing hounds. "So you ees come back now, hey? You ees have de brave heart now dat you ees see dis cougar ees be keel. Nawitka, Mees, you doan' have to be some more 'fraid. Dis sacré cougar," and he thrust his foot against the lax body, "he ees sure 'nough dead."

They went back to the open, but in a little while, when Mose had been shown the maple where the cougar had crept in ambush, and the clump of hazels where he had first appeared, the boy returned to secure the pelt. Martha joined him, but Alice stopped at the old cedar trunk and sank down into its chairlike arms. On a log near her Mrs. Myers had left the provision bag, and not far from it, against a fir, Mose had stood the musket. She felt a security in the gun and in having him within call, and she closed her eyes, relaxing her strained muscles and nerves.

She was roused by some moving body in the underbrush, and she started up instantly, at tight tension once more. A man was retreating from the open into the jungle, riverward. He looked back, scowling over his shoulder at her, and she recognized the shaggy, unkempt head and gaunt face of Slocum. The next moment he was gone, and with him had disappeared the food supply and Yelm Jim's musket.

She ran, calling Mose, and met him returning with the pelt. But there was nothing he could do. It was useless, unarmed, to trail the trespasser. He stood staring in the direction the man had taken; the color glowed in his cheeks. He dropped the skin in a heap on the ground and clenched his hands, slowly, twice, as he had the day at school when Laramie struck him. But his volubility died. The Indian in him wakened and effaced the White. His lips set in a thin line; his face became a mask through which his eyes only flamed heat. Presently he turned and stalked swiftly away, towards the settlement. He stopped once to whistle

the dogs, but when Alice followed him, calling him back, it was as though he had not heard.

"Oh," she said, returning to Martha, "Yelm Jim will blame him. He may punish him, cruelly."

"Land, no," answered Martha. "Ef it hed be'n Laramie's gun, I 'low Mose 'ud get licked in an inch o' his life, but Yelm Jim ain't goin' ter blame him. He's more likely ter watch fur a good chanct to take it out'n some white man. Don't matter who, long's he's white."

She went over and picked up the cougar skin and spread it on the earth, showing it from tip to tip. "Mose took him here in the shoulder," she said, "an' his second shot fixed him right atween ther eyes. Measures 'bout nine feet."

But the teacher had turned away. She went back to the cedar stump and stood leaning weakly on it, looking off in the direction of the canyon. It seemed very far off.

Presently Martha joined her. She had prepared a pointed stick by holding it in the fire, and the end of it still smouldered. "I'm goin' down-stream ter dig wapato," she said. "Them two prospectors is goin' ter be terrible hungry when they get back, an' it'll taste pretty good."

Alice had seen this edible root, which is a favorite food among the Indians; it grew in profusion along the watercourse. "I will go with you and help," she said, "unless I had better stay to watch the horses."

Martha stood a thoughtful moment looking at the black. "I dunno," she said, "how Dick Slocum kem to leave Colonel. He hed er mighty good chanct to take er horse that 'ud carry him out er ther country, easy. But he was mighty scared o' makin' er noise, an' got erway in er terrible hurry. I jedge he didn't 'low ther was only one gun in ther crowd; he hedn't located Eben an' ther rifle."

But evidently the outlaw had located the rifle, for, lifting her keen eyes Martha discovered Forrest, the gun in the curve of his arm, coming swiftly down the glade. His glance swept the open anxiously, as he approached, but at sight of the girl, unharmed, the tense lines softened in his face. "I thought I heard a shot," he said, and his look again searched the place for the hunter; "I fixed it at about here. But I see I was mistaken. The truth is," he shook his head, smiling at his folly, "I got it into my head that you needed me. I couldn't think of anything else. You see you were so incautious yesterday, at the river; then, too, I blamed myself for leaving you without the protection of Eben's rifle. And I had forgotten to give you your book. You dropped it yesterday at the canyon, and I was afraid the time would drag without anything to read."

He drew the little volume from his pocket, and flushing, conscious of the shallowness of his excuse, looked off, riverward.

"I jedge," said Martha briefly, "ef you head right off fur ther river, up-stream,

you kin hit Dick Slocum's trail. He's jest gone off 'ith ther rations, bag an' all. Keep ther rifle handy; he's took Mose Laramie's gun."

Then for the first time Forrest looked straight at the girl. The line drew black between his brows. He saw that her face was grimy with smoke and moisture; that the hand which had taken the book was scratched, bruised, stained. "Slocum? Then I did hear a shot." His voice was quiet, but it took a new quality, the streak of iron outcropping in the man. "He did not offer to touch you?"

"No, oh, no." She swayed a little on her feet; it was difficult to find words. "The shot you heard was Mose's. He—"

But that was enough. Forrest was off, pushing swiftly towards the river, picking up the fugitive's trail. Martha followed him a short distance, then turned down-stream. It was not her way to wait in idleness for the chance rescue of the provision bag, and she began industriously to dig the wapato. Presently she selected a more stubborn plant and dropped to her knees. "He kem back jest ter bring that ther book," she said slowly, thrusting the sharpened stick deep into the earth, "an' mebbe ther rifle. Lost 'bout half er day's prospectin'. An' he 'lowed he only hed one ter spare. Ef it don't beat all."

But the complete day was lost. The rich ledge, of which he had once found strong indications, remained locked in that secret passage of the hills for any chance comer to stumble upon. The search for Slocum also proved fruitless. Even Myers, who sauntered into camp an hour after Forrest, to learn what kept the young prospector, failed to trail the outlaw beyond a rocky point half a mile upstream, where he presumably had taken advantage of low water to push up the gravelly bars of the river bed.

The two searchers returning met near camp. "I jedge," said Eben dryly, "ther next time we count on doin' any prospectin', we'll leave ther women folks ter home."

Forrest made no answer and the settler put his shoulder to a clump of alders and pushed through. The late sun, slanting between the branches, was in his eyes, but across the open he saw his wife at the camp-fire, preparing her dish of wapato. "I dunno," he added, "but what Marthy's er pretty good hand ter have erlong sometimes. An' I 'low ef she hed hed ther rifle she'd er fetched that ther cougar. Marthy's er mighty fine shot."

"Cougar?" repeated Forrest, "what cougar?"

Eben stopped and looked back. "Didn't they tell you 'bout that cougar? Mose kem erlong an' killed him; they was keepin' him off with bresh. An' Mose was takin' ther pelt when Slocum sneaked in an' lit out with his gun."

Forrest asked no more. He pushed by Myers into the open, and stumbled over something damp and soft that clung to his shoes. It was the skin; the hairy side, turned back at the end where he had tripped, was of the tawny, unmistakable

color familiar in those days to every woodsman on Puget Sound.

Alice was coming across the grass to meet him. He moved back a step, steadying himself with one hand on an alder. His whole young, well-knit body shook. "Alice," he said, and his voice rang, deepened, and broke. "Alice—what happened?"

"Nothing—" she looked at the skin,— "Mose killed him. Nothing happened. But Paul,—it was the closest—" she laughed a little, bravely—" *the closest—shave—I ever had.*"

CHAPTER V

STRATTON'S WAY

"Yes, sir, he's ther great tyee, an' I've hed him spotted sence spring." Lem waded a few steps to a flat rock under the bank and seated himself disgustedly. "An' I hed him hooked, an' er clawin' fur all he was worth in er riffle, 'ithout 'nough water ter carry him over, when you kem poundin' up ther trail an' scared him clear outn his skin. Picked hisself up like er reg'lar grasshopper an' got erway 'ith er bran' new line."

"Too bad." Stratton checked his restless horse and sat looking down at the boy with his mocking smile. "But here is the price of the best tackle to be had at Yelm Station. Better luck next time."

Lem caught the piece of silver and studied it closely.

"Oh, gee!" he began but clapped his hand over his mouth, and put the coin swiftly away into his pocket. He sprawled out on the rock and trailed the toes of one bare foot sensuously in the stream, regarding the rider with a sidelong look that said plainly, "I bet you want somethin' o' me."

"I suppose," said Stratton, "that Miss Hunter, the teacher, has gone home?"

"Naw." Lem cast up his eyes with a grim smile. "She stopped ter write er letter to her sister after school; takes her a good spell, an' I kem on erhead to wait round here at ther creek. She ain't needin' me so much on ther trail sence ther timber-cruiser left his horse fur her."

"The timber-cruiser?" repeated Stratton. "I see, you mean Forrest. And he left the black for her use?"

"You bet; ther ain't nothin' half-way 'bout him; an' I 'low he thinks when it kems to ther schoolmarm ther ain't nothin' too good fur her."

"Yes?" Stratton checked his horse again, watching the boy quizzically. "What grounds have you for believing that, Jonathan?"

"My name's Lemuel; you kin call me Lem fur short." He paused long enough to give the correction weight, then said, "I dunno. He ain't ther kind ter make much show, but I bet ther roots strikes deep. An' ma, she calc'lates he thinks ther sun 'bout rises an' sets in ther school-marm."

"Yes?" repeated Stratton dryly. "Well, I should not wonder. Your mother is a shrewd and practical judge."

"Dad," the boy continued, warming to his subject, "he 'lowed ther school-marm must have give him ther cold shoulder that time up in ther hills. He didn't seem to care er durn 'bout losin' his hull day o' prospectin'; never said er word, an' he'd be'n countin' on findin' that ther lost mine o' his fur more'n er year. But ma, she jedged he was jest all broke up on 'count o' that cougar."

Stratton had heard the story. It was one to carry far, to gather weight with repetition, and Eben, as the settlement historian, had been particularly glad to add it to his repertoire. There was a brief silence, during which the rider waited, smiling a little, and Lem thoughtfully trailed his other foot in the current, then, "Mebbe she has took the bit in her teeth fur er spell," he went on, "but ef he jest keeps er stiff upper lip she'll kem 'round. Er girl's bound ter show some spirit ef she's any 'count. Er man's got ter handle her 'bout like that ther sorrel filly of Mill Thornton's. He kin chase her all over ther pasture fur half er day, an' she'll keep gettin' more skittish an' shy, but ther minute he lets on he don't give er durn, an' goes an' sets down by ther bars fur er rest, she'll kem nosin' over his shoulder, huntin' his pockets fur sugar. Mill hisself 'lows girls is 'bout that erway, an' he'd order know."

"Yes? And why should he, particularly, know?"

"On 'count o' Cousin Samanthy. Ther hull settlement's be'n calc'lating what she'll do 'bout Mill, fur ther last year."

"And who is Cousin Samantha?"

"Land, don't you know? Her dad owns that ther ranch down ter the prairie, close ter Yelm Station. Likely she was tendin' Post Office, ef it was train time, when you kem past."

"Yes, yes, she was." Stratton laughed softly, and allowed his horse to pace down into the stream. "So that pretty coquette I saw at the Station is your cousin. Well, well."

"You bet. I 'low she's pretty 'nough, an' sassy, too, as ther Lord makes 'em. An' she always lets on she thinks er sight more o' that there sorrel filly than she does o' Mill."

Stratton laughed again, and the chestnut splashed on through the ford and trotted up the opposite bank. A little later he stopped at the schoolhouse, and

the young man dismounted and went up to the open door.

The teacher was there, writing at her desk. She looked up, and, seeing him on the steps, continued her paragraph. She had thought over that chance meeting at the canyon a good many times, wondering at Forrest's behavior, yet assuring herself that his reason was just; it gathered weight since he had not been able to give her an explanation. Paul was not a man of moods; it was his way to see any man's best until he had strong proof of his other side. Still, this stranger was so interesting, so polished, so well accoutered, so altogether different from any she had met on the Nisqually trail, or for that matter, anywhere, it was a pity there should be something objectionable in the way of knowing him. She told herself this while she wrote her signature, and folding the sheet, fitted it in an envelope, which she sealed and addressed before she again raised her eyes.

He waited, watching her, smiling a little, interested, but embarrassed not at all. "Now may I come in?" he asked.

She did not answer, but she rose from her chair, and surprised, holding her head high, stood with the lovely color coming and going in her face, while he walked up the aisle.

"I am sure, Miss Hunter," he said, "that you must have heard all about me by now. I know your sister so well; but I have somewhere,"—he felt in one pocket, then another,—"the necessary introduction from the Captain, your brother-in-law. Ah, here it is."

So he had a letter from Philip. Of course that changed the situation. She could not be rude to him, but—she *would be careful*. And his manner in presenting the note was after all irreproachable. He had at once the grace of a Southerner, and the unhurried pose of an English gentleman; there was, too, the touch of an accent in his deliberate speech, at times almost a drawl, that made her wonder if it had been inherited, with his long black lashes, from a French or perhaps Spanish mother.

"Of course," she said, "I am always glad to meet my sister's or the Captain's friends. You must have come directly from him; perhaps you have seen her lately."

"Yes, I saw them both in Olympia the day before yesterday. In fact your sister made me the bearer of a good many messages to you. I wish I could remember them all. But, most important, she is coming out, herself, to see you within a week. The Captain is getting an outfit together for a trip to Mt. Rainier, and he hopes, if you can arrange for a short vacation, to take you and Mrs. Kingsley as far, at least, as the warm springs."

"Oh," she said, and the coolness dropped from her face like a broken mask, "it will be lovely. Lovely. I knew he would let me go. And I can arrange a week of vacation; the directors have been considering it, for the older boys are needed through harvest."

"Then," he said, and his own face seemed to catch and reflect the light in hers, "I am doubly glad that the Captain has asked me to complete the party."

Her position on the edge of the platform brought her eyes almost on a level with his, and she met his look for a steady, searching, questioning instant. "Lem is waiting for me at the creek," she said, and went down and took her hat from its peg on the wall.

CHAPTER VI

MOSE

Yelm Jim sat brooding in his lodge. He was wrapped in his blanket and an old campaign hat shaded his eyes from the fire, which was kindled on the packed earth floor, and found partial vent through an opening in the roof, around which hung haunches of drying venison and bear. The squaw Clak-la-sum-kah was cooking bread, an unleavened mixture of flour and water, in a frying-pan over the coals. At the same time she watched some fine trout, which were suspended from a rod set in forked stakes above the embers. Mose, who had caught these fish, lounged on a couch that, built of shakes, extended along three sides of the room, and was furnished with woven mats of ribbon grass or the bast of cedar. The wall behind him also was covered with this fabric, which was of the color of ripened maize.

It was one of those intervals when the boy, having incensed his father, sought refuge with his mother's people while Laramie's wrath cooled. At such times the Indian in Mose effaced the white. He bound his head in a crimson handkerchief, and wrapped himself in a blanket, which Clak-la-sum-kah had adorned with many buttons for her grandson's use. He looked a true Klickitat, straight as a young hemlock, lithe as a nearly grown cougar in the woods. His face was a bronze oval, sharply chiseled, and he had the eyes of a hawk. He recalled to the old chief his own youth, when, having a different and much hyphenated name, he had been a leader among the young braves of the powerful Yakima nation beyond the Cascades; when, hunting the buffalo, he had crossed the Rockies and skirmished with the Blackfeet, or, exacting tribute from weaker neighbors, had driven home numberless horses to pasture on the vast Palouse plains. He found in the boy an appreciative and tireless listener when he recounted these past glories, and he painted them brilliantly, in sharp contrast to the colorless present.

Mose had no brave companions, no followers in the hunt, no tribe.

And the whites were responsible for this; they only were to blame. Not the Hudson Bay men, who, trading for furs, brought guns and many useful things to the Indians, but the "Bostons," who came at the first to rob them of their country. From the beginning the Yakimas had understood and opposed them, and, when at last a thousand warriors had crossed the Cascades to fall on the white settlements of the salt water, Yelm Jim had been among them. They had met defeat, and he, himself, had spent breaking years in the strong house of the "Bostons," and at the end of his captivity he had found himself poor and forgotten and another tyee raised in his place. For this reason the old chief had not returned to his people, but had buried himself in the forest.

But already the white settlers pressed hard on his retreat; axes, the rasp of saws, their shrill voices scattered the deer. He must go farther and farther in search of grouse that once had nested almost at his door; and now, since Slocum had robbed Mose of the musket, the old chief must set laboriously to work and shape the miserable arrow points of agate.

When Yelm Jim thought of this final outrage he drew yet more fiercely at his pipe, and in the shadow of his ragged hatbrim his brows beetled and gloomed. It was not the right moment for young Kingsley to darken the doorway.

One of Laramie's hounds, which had again tracked Mose, sprang up growling, but at a word from the boy settled back whimpering, with his nose between his paws. His mate, snuffing suspiciously, moved to the intruder's feet.

His familiar "Clahowya," said in a big, frank voice, startled the lodge and the first dog belled a note.

"Clahowya," he repeated. "Hello."

Still no answer except a longer note from the hound.

The young man stopped in the entrance and took off his hat, using it slowly as a fan. His close-cropped hair clung in damp, blond waves to his shapely head. The tan of a brief outing had not spoiled his unusual fairness; his face in the shadows was white, but his black eyes gathered depth and brilliancy.

"I think you are the young fellow I'm looking for," he said, addressing the indifferent boy on the couch. "It's dark to one coming in from the sunlight, and that blanket and handkerchief hardly tally with the description I had of you, but you must be Mose."

The boy regarded the trout which the squaw was turning. "Nawitka," he said.

"You are? Well then, Mose, I want you to guide us to Mt. Rainier." He paused, but the boy was silent and the old chief continued to draw deeply at his pipe. "You understand," he went on, "we are going to the mountain and want you to show us the way. If the weather stays fine I mean to try for the summit. Nika

cumtux?" And he repeated in Chinook with an elaborate gesture, "Copa si-yah top."

Mose expressed his appreciation of the man's attempt at the language in a fleeting smile, but he made no reply. Yelm Jim also was silent, but he drew yet more furiously at his pipe.

"Let him go with us," continued Kingsley, addressing the chief, "and you shall have that pair of brown blankets you were so interested in yesterday, at the camp."

Still another pause. "If he goes with me up the mountain you can have all my blankets, the tents, the whole outfit, when we come back," added Kingsley.

Then Clak-la-sum-kah rose from her squatting posture by the fire and said in her vehement guttural, "Wake, wake. Mose wake clatawa. Wake clatawa copa si-yah illahee. Tyee Sahgalee hyas solleks. Hy-as solleks. Mose wake clatawa."

Kingsley looked from her to the boy, puzzled. "What is it she says?"

Mose rose from his lounging position and drew his blanket close. "Clak-la-sum-kah ees say 'no.' You mus' un'stan' Tyee Sahgalee ees same you all tam call God. Dat top of Rainier ees His plas. He doan' lak it for sure, we go dare. Sacré, dat mountain ees goin' shake an' smoke an' mek mooch fire we go dare, you can beli've it. But ya-as, Yelm Jim ees see it do dat long tam 'go. He ees say Tyee Sahgalee, ees be mad, because de firs' white man ees come."

Kingsley threw back his head and laughed. "I see," he said, "I see. And your Indian God wanted to reserve this country for his favorite people. But it's all foolishness, Mose; you ought to know it. That priest of your father's, who has been coming out here every month from Olympia, must have taught you different. You don't believe any such heathen nonsense. And you will show us over the trail. You aren't afraid to try the summit with me, though I doubt there's another boy in the settlement would dare."

"I ees hunt on dat mountain, si-yah, to de red snow," answered the boy slowly; "no Indian ees go pas' de red snow."

There was another silence. Kingsley ran his hand lightly down a tawny pelt that hung in the doorway. "Miss Hunter showed me that other cougar skin," he said. "She thinks you saved her life." He paused a grave moment, still stroking the fur. "And I know the story of this one. It's the pelt of the one you faced on that log crossing over the Des Chutes. You stopped to take careful aim, with the brute snarling, and the log dipping and heaving to the freshet underneath. And when he dropped no one else would have plunged into the flood as you did; not even to save this skin."

Mose's lips parted in his fleeting smile. "Dat ees not good plas to swim by Laramie's claim; monjee, no."

Yelm Jim shook his head slowly, and for the first time broke his silence with

a profound, "Ugh."

"It was all the woods afloat that day," said Kingsley, "Myers told me,—and the drift tearing down a current gone mad." He paused again and his glance moved to a great shaggy trophy against the matting on the farther wall. "And that," he added, "must be the pelt of the cinnamon bear you met up in the hills, single-handed, with just your knife."

"Nawitka." A sudden fire leaped in the old chief's eyes. "Hy-as close peltry. Mose hy-as shookum tumtum. Hy-as skookum."

"Mose has the strong heart," interpreted Kingsley. "Strong heart, yes. I tell you I'd have paid a stiff price to see that encounter."

"It ees good skin," said Mose, simply. "Oh, ya-as, for sure."

"See here, Mose,—” the young man drew nearer,—”in the face of all this you can't make me believe you're afraid of Rainier."

"A'm not 'fraid anyt'ing dese woods; bear, cougar, hi-yu water, snow, doan' mek me 'fraid. But Tyee Sahgalee, ugh." Mose drew his shoulders high in eloquent conclusion, and resuming his place on the couch, turned his face.

Kingsley laughed once more. "Oh, well, think it over. We shall start for the mountain anyway, whether we have a guide or not. We shall break camp the day after to-morrow. Let me know if you make up your mind to go, Mose; and you had better look at those blankets. They are pretty fine."

He turned away then, taking the river trail, and, as he went, his lips shaped a gay whistle. Once, as he approached his camp, he turned from the path and stepped out on a fallen fir that served as a footbridge to a green island, and looking up-stream saw the splendor of a northern sunset on the mighty dome. "I don't wonder they believe it," he said. "I don't wonder."

Almost an hour later Mose also stopped at this crossing and lifted his eyes to the mountain. It loomed, vast, white, symmetrical against the darkening east, its consecrated summit touched with a holy fire. He waited while the glory paled to opal and to a cold silver. When he turned from the log his lips set in a thin line; his eyes narrowed; his face hinted of cruelty.

Laramie's hounds had followed him; they crept through the underbrush at heel. But suddenly, on the edge of the mam trail, he stopped and laid his hand on one of them. "Back, Pichou," he said. "Monjee, down, down, so."

He remained almost hidden by a tangle of alder, while two riders passed. Neither noticed him; the teacher was talking, and Stratton, though he might have lifted his arm and touched the boy, turned his head to watch her face. They moved slowly, at a walk, until the thoroughbred, sighting the waiting figure, started, and, dancing, crowding the black, circled suspiciously by. Then, directly, both horses broke into a light canter, taking advantage of the bit of wider track.

Mose stepped out into the trail and stood looking after them, but his gaze

rested on Stratton's mount. He loved the thoroughbred, coveted him, every inch of the long sleek body, the slender limbs, the swelling chest, the dappled shading, that, like a reflection of leaves on a forest pool, ran through the shining, chestnut coat. Surely there was never another like him. Even among those fine herds of which Yelm Jim boasted this horse must stand the chief, the glory of the whole Palouse plains, the envy of the proudest Yakima.

He walked on towards the bend around which the horses had disappeared. The noise of the river was in his ears. After a while the air grew resinous with burning furboughs, and finally, through the trees, he caught the glow of Kingsley's camp-fire. He and his wife had chosen to pitch their tents here on the bank of the Nisqually, rather than to share the cramped quarters of the settler.

She was seated with the teacher on a log in the full light of the blazing boughs, when Mose stopped on the edge of the open to reconnoiter, and he saw instantly their resemblance to each other. The two men, resting a little apart, listened amusedly to their eager conversation, while nearer, but to the right, Mill Thornton stood with his hand at the bit of the young sorrel, waiting for a last word with Samantha Myers.

She had joined the camp to "help an' hev er little fun." And she was a slim, graceful girl,—“all tech an' go,” Eben would have told you,—with the beautiful color that is as delicate as the tints of a seashell, and yet impervious to life out-of-doors. Her hair, as fine as corn silk, was pale red, and when she bent over the tin reflector, in which she was cooking some very light rolls, her head seemed to catch the vital charm of the flames.

"But," Thornton was saying, "kem to think of it, I never see er Myers yet that wasn't er good cook. Ther's your Uncle Eben, when he's driv to it, he kin stir up a flapjack, an' turn her at eggsactly ther minute. Beats all. Yes," he resumed in afterthought, "take 'em as er fambly, ther Myerses is er pretty smart crowd; but you, well, I don't keer how many's on ther tree, Samantha, you're ther peach."

She stood erect and flashed him a look that startled the boldness from his young eyes. "Mebbe I am, Mill," she said, gently, "but I bet, even ef you do think so, you wouldn't spare the sorrel long 'nough fur me to ride ter Rainier."

"No," he answered, flushing, "no, I wouldn't. She ain't well 'nough broke. You oughter not ask me."

"I'd resk her," she urged still, sweetly, and smiled into his troubled face; "I'd love ter ride her, Mill. But," she went on after a pause, and shrugging her shoulders, drew herself aloof, "you're jest like Jake. He's turrible 'fraid I'd get Ketchem killed."

"And yourself, too," he said warmly.

"But Uncle Eben," she added, "he 'lows I kin ride. He ain't so powerful scared 'bout—*Ginger*."

With this she laughed, her hands on her hips, her elbows shaking, and Thornton, himself laughing deeply, in keen appreciation, turned to set his foot in the stirrup. "You're all right, Samantha," he said. "You're all right, but I 'low it wa'n't a peach I meant; it was jest er sassy sweetbrier rose. It's so blame' innercent lookin' an' soft, but er feller can't tech it 'thout feelin' ther thorns."

The horse started, but she tripped after him a step to say softly, "Say, Mill, why don't you call it eglantine?"

He wheeled. "Who calls it eglantine?"

She laid a warning finger on her lip. "Mr. Stratton. But I never sensed what he was talkin' 'bout tell he showed me that ther sweetbrier growin' ther by the table."

"Was he meanin' you?"

She started back to the reflector, but paused to nod her head over her shoulder; a hundred imps danced in her eyes. "I'd love ter hear you call me that, Mill. My stars—eglantine!"

Her lips bubbled laughter; it followed him, teasing, taunting, as he rode on through the wood.

Mose, passing him, stalked into the open and towards the farther group. Kingsley waved his hand in careless recognition, and rising, threw back his tent-fly and drew out the blankets. "Well, Mose," he said, "what do you think of these?"

The boy bent to feel their texture gravely. "Dey ess plent' good 'nough blankets, monjee, ya-as, an Yelm Jim ees tell me—go. But Tyee Sahgalee ees goin' be hy-as mad. Sacré, it ees pos'ble he ees keel you. Den, merci, some more white man doan' lak go Rainier."

He turned with this and stalked swiftly back into the gloom. Alice rose in astonishment. Kingsley laughed. "If I should lose myself over a precipice," he said, "or drop into a crevasse, I suppose he would believe it was all the vengeance of his Indian God."

"But," she answered, "his father is a devout Catholic. The priest is making an acolyte of Mose." She sank back, helplessly, into her place. "I—I suppose it's impossible for him to grasp everything"—she was thinking of Laramie and the globe—"at once."

Her sister leaned towards Kingsley. A sudden apprehension rose in her great, dark eyes, and her voice, in emotion, dropped to contralto notes. "I wish you would give up that idea of trying for the summit," she said.

He laughed again, tossing his fine head. "Oh, don't bother, Louise; I shall be safe enough with Stratton along. He never takes a risk."

Stratton smiled and adjusted the rolled blankets to his back, leaning on them comfortably. "The Captain's right," he said. "He knows me. I always ask myself first, 'Is it safe?' And then, 'Is it worth while?'"

The teacher looked at him a searching moment and arched her brows. Then she reached and lifted her sister's guitar from the end of the log. Her fingers trailed briefly over the strings and settled in a thread of tune. She repeated the accompaniment, singing softly, inviting Kingsley's tenor.

"She shone in the light of declining day,
Each sail was set, and each heart was gay."

And presently the other man hummed an undertone, but Louise was silent. She had changed her position a little, clasping her hands loosely around her knee, with her face slightly lifted and turned to the darkening wood. It was the face of a dreamer, rapt, sensitive, who peopled the shadows, and to whom the many voices of the night tuned in unbroken symphony.

In the interlude Kingsley turned to her. "Where is your voice, Louise? We need the contralto."

She started and looked at him, smiling. It was then she resembled Alice. The expression was there and the charm; but softened, finer, as the painting of a master may be reproduced in pastel.

Her voice was beautiful. She took up the song, subduing her notes to her sister's lighter compass, but the music, that had been simply pleasing, assumed, suddenly, the touch and finish of grand opera.

For the white squall rides on the surg-ing wave, And the
bark is gulph'd in an o-cean's grave, For the
white squall rides on the surg-ing wave, And the
bark is gulph'd in an o-cean's grave, in an
o-cean's grave, in an o - - ocan's grave.

[image]

Music fragment

CHAPTER VII

THE INSTRUMENT OF TYEE SAHGALEE

The summer day breaks early in the Puget Sound country. It was not yet four by Stratton's watch when he stepped from his tent and stood analyzing the weather, but all the sky overhead was changing to yellow, and directly, while he looked, to streaks of flame. The heights, towering a thousand feet on the opposite side of the gorge, were burnished copper, and Rainier, walling the top of the canyon, warmed to amethyst and rose. Its crest, at an altitude of nearly fifteen thousand feet, was hardly seven miles distant.

But the great forest that hemmed in the small open where the camp was pitched, still gloomed in shadow, and the air was sharp with the breath of near glacier and snowfield. Stratton saw that Mose had left his blanket, gone already to bring up the horses, and the close report of a gun told that Kingsley was off in search of the early bird. Then Samantha came from the other tent and stirred the smouldering fire. She added a dry hemlock bough, watching the roused flames fasten on the resinous wood.

"Good morning, Psyche," he said.

She lifted her glance, nodding. She had a mouth like a Cupid's bow and the short upper lip twitched with enforced gravity before the shaft sped. "Ef you hed er wife, I 'low she'd get er new name 'bout every day, an' mebbe twicet. Land, it 'ud keep her busy rememberin' who she was."

She tucked her sleeves up from her tapering arms, and kneeling, dipped them deep in a bubbling pool. Stratton laughed softly, enjoying her, and lifting his bag, crossed the open seeking a warm spring, which, screened in a network of young cedars, afforded a morning plunge. All along the valley iron and soda deposits discolored the earth, and mineral water, hot or sharply cold, sparkled in crystal basins.

An hour later the little cavalcade formed in line, with Kingsley leading on his big white horse, followed by Samantha, whose clear piping voice rose in alternate upbraiding or admonition, for she rode the indifferent Ginger. Mose, mounting Yelm Jim's piebald pony, crowded the cayuse with the two pack animals; then came Louise and the teacher, while Stratton closed the rear.

The trail became more and more precipitous, switch-backing across the face of a spur, taking the edge of a cliff, breaking into sharp pitches to a rushing ford. Trunks, logs, netlike boughs, shelving rock crowded close. The head of the Nisqually and its glacier were not far off. Then finally they turned up its beautiful tributary, the Paradise. Over the stream Eagle Peak, the first of the Tatoosh Mountains, lifted a tremendous front, and boulders, hurled from it, blocked the limpid current, creating innumerable cascades. The air was flooded with drifting spray, and the wet, luxuriant earth, reflecting the sun, filled the gorge with playing color.

At last Alice drew rein near the brink fronting a great cataract. Stratton

dismounted and went to tighten her horse's girth. "Are you a little afraid?" he asked.

"Afraid? Of the trail? Oh, no. I love it; it's my element. And Colonel can go anywhere. He picks his way through bogs, pits, better than I could, and he runs straight up these rocky stairs. I have only to cling on," and she laughed.

"Well, you can trust him." Stratton's glance moved from her horse to his own mount and back to the black. "Sir Donald has found his match. But, how was it that Forrest gave up his horse?"

"He hasn't. I am only keeping Colonel for him, while he is at Freeport."

"I see," said Stratton slowly, "I see. I hope if the time comes when I must part with Sir Donald, I can leave him in the same hands."

At this she swept him with a swift, critical look, ruffling her brows. "I have known Paul Forrest all my life," she said, and turned her eyes again to the cataract.

"I understand." He smiled a little, both nettled and amused. "Before I can venture to ask a favor of you, you must know and like me better than you do now."

She flashed him another look, tilting her chin. "I like you as well as I could like any American with *un-American* ways."

[image]

"I like you as well as I could like any American with un-American ways."

For an instant he betrayed his surprise, then, "Well, thank you," he said; "I appreciate your frankness; and perhaps you are right. My mother was more a French woman than an American; she was a Creole of the Mississippi. And my grandfather, on the other side, was a factor of the Hudson Bay Company. My father, I suppose, passed over with New Georgia into the hands of the United States. After all, it is hard for most any American to tell in just what generation he began. But I admit I have lived close to the border, Miss Hunter, often on the other side. In fact I haven't always been able to determine the line."

"And I," she answered, with a gathering storm in her eyes, "I have lived all of my life close to the boundary, but in a different way. The best patriot is he who fights for his home while he defends his country, and the sun for my family rose and set in 'Fifty-four, forty or fight.' We know the line; we never crossed to the other side. My grandfather died with Marcus Whitman."

She spoke then to her horse, starting him briskly. Stratton vaulted into his saddle. "You touch-me-not!" he said under his breath. "You touch-me-not!"

Far ahead Samantha approached a second cataract. It was a perilous place, for the trail, skirting a precipice, rose from a bog in rocky and winding stairs worn smooth and slippery by continuous spray.

Kingsley's horse cleared the morass; his iron shoes struck fire from the shelving granite and he set himself to the steps. His master looked back. "Make him leap," he shouted to Samantha, and while he spoke was carried beyond a turn.

But Ginger delayed. He snuffed the ooze with disfavor. The girl jerked his muzzle high. "Heft yourself, Ginger," she shrilled, and cut him sharply on the flank. "Now, now, Ginger, get up."

And against belief, Ginger gathered himself, but the effort fell short. His forefeet grappled the rock and he sank back floundering in the ooze. The trained pack horses halted, and Mose threw himself from his pony and pushed swiftly around the bog, through underbrush, to Ginger's head. But Samantha had already slipped from her saddle, and worked herself free of the struggling horse. She moved back coolly from the abyss and emerged from the mudhole, dripping, but unhurt.

She drew a full breath and looked about her. Stratton, who had arrived, grasped the situation and drew in his horse, humorously regarding her. "Ain't I a sight?" she asked.

"Yes, Aphrodite, you are. You are a vision to haunt a man's dreams."

"I jedge you're 'bout right." She paused and the imps danced in her eyes. "But I 'low it 'ud be er turrible nightmare."

She reached and broke a low branch of hemlock, with which she began hastily to brush the mud from her skirt. Beyond the bog, Mose, who had extricated the unfortunate pony, urged him up the granite stair. His flanks were slippery with ooze. "My stars," she said, "I'm glad Mill didn't kem this trip. I'd never hear ther last of it. He'd run er joke ter death."

The ax was brought, and the bog was hurriedly bridged with corduroy for the remaining horses. Then finally they trailed out of the heavy timber into the parks of Paradise. A succession of emerald slopes opened before them, broken by clumps of amabilis fir and mountain hemlock; where a higher top rose out of a shapely mass it became a cathedral spire. Sometimes the way wound through an area of blooming heliotrope or asters; banks of gorgeous snapdragon or flaming Indian paintbrush gave color, like landscape gardening, to whole hillsides. Then behind them, pinnacle on pinnacle, closed the Tatoosh Range; a last sharp ascent and they were on that small and lofty Plateau, at an altitude of five thousand feet, since called The Camp of Clouds, with the splendor of the great summit almost overhead.

The tents were pitched; horses picketed. It was hardly mid-afternoon. "By

this time tomorrow," said Kingsley, "if this weather stays with us, we shall have made and I hope passed Gibraltar."

Stratton, lounging on a blanket, looked up to the black cliff, which, rising sheer fifteen hundred feet, stood like a mighty fortress against the whiteness of the dome. "I hope so," he answered, "but, Captain, I never saw anything look so tremendously like work."

Louise rested on a grassy knob, her hands clasped loosely on her knee, inspiration in her lifted face. She hardly heard her husband's remark, or the other man's reply, but Alice started from her place beside her. "Phil," she said, "take me with you. You can't understand what it means to me, to be so near, to see the summit shining there, and go no farther. I'm very strong, Phil, and clear-headed. I'm not afraid of things. I—oh, you don't understand, but the mountain seems to beckon."

Kingsley walked a restless turn. "I do understand," he said. "I feel it myself. But we don't know what we are going through, and we can't be sure of the weather an hour ahead; clouds are manufactured right here at a moment's notice. But wait, don't tease, and we'll compromise. I'm going off now to reconnoiter. I believe the most feasible start is from that ridge across this valley of the Paradise, but I want to be sure. There'll be no time to waste in doubling back for fresh starts to-morrow. And Mose has been up that way; he says, with care, we can use the horses as far as the old snow. A glacier cuts in there, probably the source of the Cowlitz, and he thinks we should be able to reach it in a couple of hours. I'll take you that far—to the glacier."

At this Mose started from his recumbent position on the earth. He threw out his arms in protest. "No, no, Mees," he said. "It ees bes' you doan' go dare. Sacré, no."

"I'm not afraid," she answered smiling, "and if I'm a trouble I'll turn back. I promise."

"You doan' be some tro'ble, Mees," he said quickly. "No, no, it ees dat Tyee Sahgalee ees goin' be mad. Mebbe he ees mek dis mountain burn an' break an' fall down. Monjee, monjee, Mees, you can' ride quick 'nough away."

She laughed, shaking her head. "I don't believe that, Mose," she said, "and you won't, after we have been there. Tyee Sahgalee don't care how many of us go creeping up there, any more than we care about the ants and spiders that crawl to the cabin door."

"You mean it is you who don't care," said Stratton. "You are ready to take the risks, whatever they are. And if you are determined to go on braving Providence, or Tyee Sahgalee, or whoever it is, the rest of the day, I'm going to join the expedition; that is, unless Mrs. Kingsley is afraid to stay here alone with Samantha."

"Oh," answered Louise, at last awake to the situation, "I want you to go."

"I thought so," and he smiled. "I've proved something of a mascot on occasion, and I'll look after the Captain."

The horses were brought and presently they were trailing away up the pathless slopes in the wake of the piebald pony; fording countless streams, leaping them, sinking in pitfalls through treacherous banks of bloom. When, switch-backing up a lofty rise, Alice ventured to look down, all the colored breadth of Paradise park unfolded like a map, and the dome gathered majesty at every turn. They gained a shoulder, rounded a curve, and before them stretched the levels of a plateau carpeted with snow. Then, as they moved across this field, mountain on mountain opened, shading to blue distance. Through a gap, out of a woolly cloud, shone the opal crown of Adams, and presently, far off St. Helens rose like a floating berg on an upturned sea.

They dismounted at the foot of a knob flanked by loose rock. The red stain of old snow was under their feet and beyond the spur shone the clean, blue-green edge of the glacier. "We are higher than the treeline, now," said Philip, "and above the clouds."

She drew a breath of delight, lifting her glance to the near dome. "And it looks as though we could reach the summit in fifteen or twenty minutes. Oh, Phil, come, let's go."

Kingsley laughed. "We haven't climbed nine thousand feet; the hardest third of the ascent is above us. Don't you remember, the only two men who ever made that summit were half a day in just passing Gibraltar. We may find it no longer passable."

While his look rested on the grim fortress a thin cloud rose like smoke from its base. It covered the cliff swiftly and trailed across the dome. "Out of nothing, without notice," and he shook his head; "that's what I've heard."

He turned. Stratton was busy searching for a safe hitching-place for his horse; he never stood well. But Mose had stepped nearer Kingsley. The boy's shoulders were inclined forward, and his eyes, in that instant, were those of a crouching animal about to spring.

"Well, Mose," he said carelessly, "your Tyee Sahgalee is hiding his face. I suppose you think we've come far enough. But we'll show him."

He moved on with Alice up the knob, and Stratton joined them. But presently Mose stalked by leading the way to the glacier. His face had the gray look of fear, but his lips were set in the thin line that gave him an older, sinister touch, the shadow of cruelty.

He moved swiftly and surely. He did not once look back. He gave no direction or warning. They followed, slipping and stumbling through the moraine, and gaining the ragged brow of the knob, found themselves suddenly on the

brink of a mighty precipice. Far, far down, the infant Cowlitz sprang into life and struggled out between stupendous columns and needles. Locked in the opposite pinnacled cliffs shone the sheer, blue-seamed front of the glacier, and the throes that gave the river birth resounded through the gorge.

Stratton uncoiled the spare lariat he carried, and taking an end, with Philip closing, and the girl between, drew slowly along the rim. Mose, curving far ahead, came out on the slippery incline of the glacier. Finally he stopped under a great upheaval of ice, and resting against a block, waited, with his back turned to them and his face lifted to the clouding dome.

Behind them another cloud formed over the Tatoosh Mountains, driving fast to meet the advancing column from Gibraltar; and, in a little while, when they had come out on the ice, and made slow headway up the tilting surface from the abyss, mist lifted swiftly, flooding, giving immensity to the darkening gorge. Kingsley walked a trifle in advance of Alice, with Stratton abreast of him. Suddenly Mose's tracks, on a recent light snowfall which had offered foothold, swerved, and both men stopped. They were on the brink of a narrow, deep, incredibly deep, crevasse.

Alice moved back, shivering. She looked, a mute question trembling on her lips, at Mose. But he continued to stand, oblivious, with his eyes fixed, expectantly, on the clouding dome.

"See here," called Philip, "see here; next time you let us know." Then his glance returned to the crevasse. "Reminds me of a tremendous white water-melon," he said, "with just one thin, clean slice gone."

"Yes?" questioned Stratton, smiling, "it strikes me differently. I thought right away of some curious metal, with just enough taken, by some nice process, to shape a gigantic blade."

"A blade, yes," said Alice, "for the hand of Tyee Sahgalee."

Stratton's eyes met hers amusedly. He wondered if she was capable of superstition. "Even then," he said, "it is only a surface impression, lost the moment you look down. It's an ice-crevasse; nothing else." He turned to Kingsley, who was already studying the glacier ahead. "Of course this will not delay us to-morrow, Captain, but it is time, now, to turn back."

"In a moment. There's a streak on there that bothers me. Looks like a more serious break. I want to see it at closer range. Wait here; I won't be fifteen minutes."

He moved back impetuously, and, giving himself short headway, took the crevasse in a leap. Showers of loosened ice clinked down from the rim. Most of the particles struck the sides that closed in twenty feet below, and rebounding, dropped again and sent back faint echoes from the last level of the abyss.

Stratton stood watching Philip up the glacier, but presently, Alice drew

away from the crevasse and turned to look back down the gorge. The sun no longer shone. All that brilliant vista of opal peak and amethyst spur, shading to blue distance, was curtained in closing sheets of mist. There a great crag loomed an instant and was gone. Here an up tossed pile of ice-blocks flashed a sudden prismatic light and grew dim. Then they themselves were wrapped in a noiseless, drenching cloud.

At the same moment she was startled by Stratton's brief note of surprise and felt behind her a sudden jar. She turned. Mose was hurled sprawling at her feet, and, clutching her skirt, was up instantly, panting, with quivering nostril, eyes ablaze. Then, in the recoil, Stratton reeled on the brink of the crevasse, recovered, stumbled on breaking crust, and went down.

She stood for an interminable moment, waiting, listening, numbed, body and mind. Then she was conscious that Mose was going, and she went after him a few steps, calling his name. But his receding shape drifted faster and faster, a fading shadow in the mist. She turned back, lifting her voice in a great cry to Philip. And she was answered from the abyss.

She dropped to her knees and crept close to look down. Stratton was there, where the pale, green walls narrowed. He rested wedgelike, caught at the armpits. He looked up and saw her. "Be careful," he said, "I am all right."

Instantly the executive in her rose. "I have the lariat," she said.

"Fasten it to the ice where Mose stood," he called. "I can work along that far."

He remembered that the rope was new and strong, one he himself had selected as a reserve in picketing his own spirited horse. The question was whether the ice would take his weight. He worked carefully, laboriously along by shoulder and elbow, his body swinging from the waist, starting a rain of ice at every move. At last, where the wall crumbled, leaving a ledge, he was able to draw himself to his knees. He cut foothold with his knife, and other niches higher up for his hands, and pulled himself erect on the slippery shelf.

Beyond him the chasm widened between sheer walls, and it was in this shaft that the lowered rope hung. It swung for a moment, like a failing pendulum, and each oscillation, though he stood alert, missed his reach a little more. The girl, peering into the abyss, understood, and again disappeared. The line was drawn up, and presently it dropped almost at his shoulder. He caught the end and, looking up, met her eyes over the rim. "That's better," he said.

"Wait—one moment," she called and was gone once more. She did not return this time, but her voice came to him, "Now, now, all ready."

The lariat tightened. It creaked, ground on the edge of the chasm; ice chips fell ceaselessly. He swung out. He was a big fellow, heavy. Would the support hold? Would Mose, his fury cooled, be neutral? Why, yes, surely the boy was

even setting himself to ease the strain. He could feel an unmistakable give and pull above on the rope, as he climbed, hand over hand.

He gained the top. He reached a palm around a slight pinnacle, for a final grasp on the line, and pulled himself slowly out on the surface of the glacier. He was a strong man, physically, a man of steady nerve, one accustomed to take risks with Nature, as in those times a man of the Northwest must, but what he saw, in that brief pause, sent a shiver through him. He closed his eyes like one brought suddenly into intense light.

The rope was fastened, as he had directed, to a thick column in the upheaval, but it stretched diagonally to the projection on the brink of the crevasse. And it was Alice, not Mose, who steadied it, throwing her weight on it, twisting it on her hands, digging her heels in a shallow cleft, straining back to ease the pressure on the knob. Suppose the support had given way; suppose he had dragged her—this brave girl, all life, charm, loveliness—down to destruction. It was horrible to think of. Horrible.

Seeing him safe, she relaxed her hold and drew back, making way for him. She breathed deeply, her chest heaving, and a moisture not of the cloud clung to her lip, her brow in drops.

He pulled himself together and got to his feet. He did not speak to her, then; he could not. But he put his hand to his mouth and lifted his voice in a great hail. Kingsley responded, but his "Hello," came faintly, through billows of mist. The calls were repeated. "We cannot wait," Stratton said. "We must follow that rascal's tracks down, while they last, to the horses."

"What made Mose do it?" she asked. "Oh, what made him?"

"Why, just Indian, I suppose; or say he was an instrument, self-appointed, of his Tyee Sahgalee. But he shall be punished." He closed his lips over the word, and a heat, like the flash of a blade, leaped in his eyes. But when he took her hands to help her to her feet the look changed. The light returned, yet softened, steady, and currents of tenderness, long pent in the man, surged to his face. Her palms were bruised, cut, cruelly. He lifted them, one, and then the other, swiftly, very gently, to his lips. "You did this—for me," he said. "You could do it—for me."

"Of course," she answered quickly, and drew the hands away, "I must have done my best for anyone—for Mose, if things had been reversed. But, if I hadn't been able, Phil would have come back in time; no doubt he could have seen a better way."

She met his look briefly, but long enough for him to fathom the clear depths of her eyes; and suddenly, before her dauntless white spirit, his own soul, for the first time, shrank. It was as though another unsounded abyss yawned between them, that the exigency of this hour could not bridge.

They hurried on then, groping and slipping down the glacier, taking Mose's

trail. Sometimes they stopped while Stratton renewed his shout, waiting always for Kingsley's answer, and they knew when he had crossed the crevasse in safety, and that he followed on to the gorge.

They made the rocky knob and finally, out of obscurity, she caught Colonel's familiar neigh. The call shrilled again, inquiring, peremptory. But when they came to the end of the moraine where they had left the horses, they found them gone.

The neigh was repeated once more, coming back faintly, from far across the snowfield. "Mr. Stratton," she cried, "what has happened? Where is Mose going?"

"Over the mountains to the Palouse plains, I haven't a doubt," and the blade flashed again in his eyes. "It's the first thing a halfbreed does, and they always drive stolen horses over there; it is impossible to find them among those big, feeding bands of the Yakimas. He will stampede the rest in the valley, and Yelm Jim will probably meet him somewhere below the springs and help him take them through the Pass."

She stood for a moment with her head high, lips set, looking with storming eyes into the mist. Then, "There isn't any time to waste," she said. "We must take him this side of the springs." And she began to trail the horses on across the snow.

"I wish there was a chance of it," said Stratton, "but you will only spend yourself uselessly. You are miserably tired now. The horses will make the down grade to the springs very fast, and you must see that the trail through the timber, afoot, is simply impossible at night. We should bury ourselves in one of those mudholes or plunge over some cliff. We could never make the fords."

But she hurried on. There fell a long silence. It grew rapidly colder; the winds freshened, tearing the cloud-wrack, driving it this way and that, bringing the ragged ends together in bursts of hail or flurries of snow. The girl's drenched skirts hampered her, still she pressed resolutely on. Once she said, "An accident somewhere might delay the band." And Stratton caught at the hope. He told her Mose would probably try to mount Sir Donald, the fleetest horse, and that he had some unexpected tricks. He was as full of coquetry as—well—a pretty woman, though as easily managed, if a man knew him.

It was twilight and they were descending the final pitch into the park when Kingsley at last overtook them. The camp-fire, which Samantha had kindled with infinite difficulty on the plateau, burned like a beacon in the gloom. "You should have seen that second crevasse," he said. "It was tremendous. No way over, no way around; I tramped both directions to see. We've simply got to choose another route, to-morrow. But what became of the horses?"

"Mose took them." It was Alice who answered. "He took Colonel. But I

shall find him. I've got to find him if I have to walk every step of the way over the mountains and through the Palouse. You know how much Paul thinks of his horse, Philip. Oh, I can never face him; I can never tell him—the truth.”

She started on uncertainly, stumbled, and fell. Stratton lifted her, and carried her a few steps over a rough place. “You mustn’t trouble so much,” he said gently, “We are going to find that black if it takes a year. Yes, we are and punish that Klickitat.”

CHAPTER VIII

"I'M GOING TO MAKE HIM WHITE"

The night was terrible. The wind became a gale. It assailed the tents; in the near hemlock grove it wrenched off great boughs; it lifted lighter brands from the fire and scattered them broadcast. There was a constant watch, which Samantha shared, to drag aside and beat out dangerous embers. The fire was enclosed in a circular windbreak of rocks, and other stones were brought to pin down the bellying canvas and ballast the working stakes. Up the mountain clouds clashed in thunder; the plateau was pelted by swift and furious storms of hail.

The final watch fell to Stratton. The wind was piercing and for warmth he tramped the earth. Once he stopped to lift a fresh log on the fire, and, drawing himself erect, his eyes rested on the women’s tent. “She must be sleeping,” he told himself. “I hope so; she was so unhappy about that black. That is her way—to take things hard—pleasure or sorrow. Jove, how she could love a man. But—she would hold him to his best, always, in every common move of every day.” He shrugged his shoulders and swung on his heel to look out into the darkness of the valley. It was so dense that the flame-illuminated plateau seemed to rim an abyss. “That was it—the reason I went so nearly to pieces for that minute, there on the glacier. I felt the Puritan in her all at once demanding the best in me. And there was no best; there never can be.” He tramped another interval. “But,” he said at last, and the steel flashed again in his eyes, “there is not a man living I am afraid to face; and if I ever loved a woman—or thought I did—sooner or later she was glad to have me tell her so. I never have failed to get what I wanted, all my life, and I am going to want—*her*.”

At daybreak it was snowing on the plateau. He roused Kingsley. “Captain,” he cried, shaking the sleeper, “Captain, wake up; we must hurry.”

Philip rose, stretching himself, stiffly, and drew aside the tent-fly. "It doesn't look much like the summit to-day," he said.

"Summit?" repeated Stratton with disgust, "summit? What we have to think of, is the quickest way to get these women out of this."

A gust of wind rushed through the aperture, past Kingsley, and filled the tent. It lifted the canvas, balloon-wise, scattering the ballast, up-pulling the stakes, and carried it far afield. It led the men a chase, but they secured it and struggled with it back to the plateau. Truly it was not a day for mountain-tops.

Camp was broken hurriedly, each of the men taking the necessary shoulder pack, and leaving the bulk of the outfit to be sent for when they should find horses. They pushed quickly down from the snow, which became rain in the woods. And Alice led the way. She studied the trail continually, separating the tracks of the ponies, where they struck the path down the valley, from the deeper, water-filled impressions of the American horses. She set Stratton a pace, and kept it almost to the ford of the Paradise. Then suddenly she stopped an instant, listening, and ran on along the bank to an old log foot-crossing. There on the end of the bridge, sheltered by a trailing cedar, were her bridle and saddle; and picketed on a grassy knoll under some alders she saw the black.

"Oh," she said, and took his head in her arms, "you beauty! You heart's desire! But I knew—I knew Mose couldn't take you; I knew it."

Stratton stood for a moment watching her. "So," he said, "so the rascal was white enough to leave your horse. He brought him this far with the others to avoid pursuit last night."

Alice looked off a thoughtful moment, through the dripping trees. "I knew his white conscience would get to upbraiding him," she said. "But I can't help feeling glad he chose Colonel for the compromise."

Stratton laughed. "I hope it will upbraid him some more," he said, "and induce him to leave my horse."

She would not mount, but waited for Louise to take the black. She herself was not tired, and she moved lightly up the log, pausing fearlessly, mid-channel, to watch Colonel feel his steps through the ford and leading him up the bank and on some distance, until she was assured he would carry her sister quietly. The rain fell with renewed downpour, but she walked unmindful of boughs that drenched her shoulders, and dripping skirts that weighted her limbs. Delight shone in her eyes; whole face seemed to reflect some far illumination. She had recovered Forrest's horse; the day was faultless.

But at last she was in the saddle and descending to the ford of the Nisqually. The cloud-wrack was breaking then, and shafts of sunlight struck the wet, green earth. Stratton walked a trifle in advance, looking for a safe crossing over the rising channels. Suddenly he stopped, and the black also halted, tossing his mane

and shrilling his ready, challenging neigh. There, moving out of the stream, up the opposite bank, was a riderless horse. It was Sir Donald.

Stratton whistled, a soft, imperative note. The chestnut wheeled. The man repeated the call, and the horse trotted gently back into the channel. He halted once more on a gravel bar, his head high, ears alert, then came on across to his master.

"So," said Stratton, slowly, "So, Donald, you showed the rascal your little trick. You see, Miss Hunter, it was as I thought. Mose chose the best horse. But he never mounted him. In his hurry he laid his hand on the bit, and Sir Donald never allows that; he was trained that way."

With this he vaulted into the saddle and led the way over from bar to bar. He returned bringing the black, and while the others made the crossing Alice waited, seating herself on a rock in the sun, and lifting her face to the upper canyon. Presently the clouds parted like a rent veil on the mountain. Once more Gibraltar menaced and the summit shone in splendor.

"After all," she said, when Stratton rejoined her, "I can't blame Mose for that belief. I felt it myself, for a moment, there on the glacier. It was the steps of the Great White Throne. You can't understand."

"No," he replied, "No, you are right, I cannot. I am outside the circle."

He bent and offered his hand to mount her on his horse, her sister having kept the black, and she sprang lightly up. "Then," she said, while he adjusted a stirrup, "you see no excuse for Mose?"

"No," and his face hardened, "No, I only see the half-breed threw me into that crevasse. He took me off guard. And he left us miles from anywhere, on that unknown mountain, in a storm, without horses. His motives do not count."

Sir Donald started, trailing after the black. The little company filed slowly down to the mineral springs. And there, in the open, unpicketed, ready for the long trail, they found the other horses quietly feeding in company with Ginger and the pack animals.

While Samantha made a fire and prepared the coffee the two men caught and picketed the herd, reserving the few horses necessary for a hurried trip back to the plateau for the outfit. And it was Alice, who, going for a drink from her favorite well, discovered Mose. He was lying semi-conscious on the wet earth, and over his black brows, branded with the tip of an iron shoe, Sir Donald had set his mark.

The teacher dipped her handkerchief in the basin and bathed the hurt. She went to ask Stratton's flask of him, and mixed the boy a draught, and, a little later, when the young man followed her to the spring, he found Mose able to recognize him. He stood a silent moment watching him with hard eyes, and the boy met the look steadily; his muscles stiffened as they had that day at school, when he

braced himself to Laramie's blow. Stratton's lip curled in disgust. After all, he could not punish the fellow, down, helpless like that. He swung on his heel.

"Wait," said Alice, "it was just as you thought. The scheme to steal the horses was Yelm Jim's; he was to meet him at the branch to the Pass and help drive them over the mountains to the Palouse plains. But he meant to leave Colonel; he only brought him as far as the Paradise to avoid being overtaken. And that trouble at the crevasse was unpremeditated. He was terribly frightened by the gathering storm. He believed it was a judgment coming on us all, and he took the opportunity to—use you—for a propitiation. Afterwards, in the night, he crept back up the valley far enough to see the camp-fire, and you, safe—and keeping watch on the plateau."

There was another brief silence. Stratton stood, still hard, uncompromising, frowning down at the boy. "Be merciful," she said. "Think; you were not hurt; you have Sir Donald, unharmed. Be generous. Sometime,—who knows?—you yourself may ask it."

"No," he flashed, "No. I live my life; I do as I please. I ask nothing of anyone. And in the end—I take what I deserve. That is my creed. The boy must be punished."

He turned away, but she followed. In her earnestness she laid her hand on his sleeve. "He has been punished," she said. "Look. He will carry Sir Donald's brand all his life. He's just a boy, Mr. Stratton. He left home angry, outraged, and Yelm Jim took the opportunity to make him his tool. But he has good in him, I know. Remember, too, he saved my life. And I need him; I'll be responsible for him."

Her eyes were raised to Stratton eloquent with appeal; the hand on his arm trembled. "You need him; he saved your life." He paused and the hardness went out of his face. "And you saved mine—you saved mine; I do not forget that. And perhaps you were right just now; sometime I may ask that mercy. I may ask it of—you."

Her hand fell from his sleeve; she drew back a step. "I will be ready," she said slowly, "if you are good to Mose." She looked back at the boy. He was watching her. His lip quivered and his eyes filled with unaccustomed tears. "I'll be responsible for him," she repeated, "I'm going to make him white."

CHAPTER IX

UNCLE SILAS

It was the morning following his election and Judge Kingsley was taking a late breakfast in his dining room. He had laid aside the newspaper,—an interesting number, devoted chiefly to his final speech, a personal and flattering editorial, and the returns,—to conclude some business details with Forrest, who, seated near the open French window, overlooking the terraced orchard, made brief memoranda in his note-book.

The Judge, then, was a man in his first prime, with that commanding presence that does not challenge attention or respect, because he has long been sure of both. He carried with ease a suggestion of coming weight, and his voice, deliberate, sonorous, was that of a born orator. "There, Forrest, I believe that is all." He pushed back his chair and crossed his hands on his ample front. "Your father knew how to manage men, and, there at Tumwater, he gave you a thorough apprenticeship. He left you his executive ability and his knowledge of timber. But, if the Freeport mills pay expenses these first two years, and Philip learns something of business and the value of money, I shall have accomplished my purpose."

Forrest smiled, his smile of the eyes, shaking his head. "I'm not much of a diplomat; what I say is always just what I think. But I'll do my best." He put the notebook into his pocket, and looking at his watch, rose and took his hat. "I shall be able to catch the down steamer," he said.

"Better wait over a day or two; the young people would miss you tonight at the ball. And I want to speak to you about another matter." The Judge paused, stroking his blond beard. "I want to speak to you about—Alice."

Forrest returned to his chair. His eyes sought the window, avoiding the Judge's scrutiny. Louise was there, swinging her child in a hammock under the cherry trees. Her supple body swayed to the effort in unconscious grace; the loose sleeves of her house gown fell away from her uplifted, lovely arms, and the pose of her head brought out the beautiful lines of throat and oval chin, but he saw her absently.

After a moment the Judge added, "You never knew her mother."

"No." The young man turned in quick relief. "No, I never knew her. I was still a small boy when my father came to take charge of the Tumwater mills, and that tragedy of the Cowlitz had happened several months before. It has always seemed unaccountable to me; those old voyageurs understood a canoe; they must have made that trip down to the Columbia a good many times."

"True," answered the Judge, "but there was a strong spring chinook blowing, and the sudden melting of snows at the headwaters. The river was flooding; the current changed and the accident occurred at a shifting log jam."

There was a brief silence, then he went on, "She was on her way with Philip's mother to visit their early home in Oregon. There was something fine

in that friendship of those two young women. Their lives had begun together in that small frontier settlement; they married at the same time men who were, themselves, warm friends, comrades in adventure and endurance; and they came that double wedding journey by canoe and trail, to start a social foundation here at the new capital of the young territory. And later, they faced their tragedy of the Indian war, when both husbands fell, fighting in the same skirmish. It softens the terror of that last journey to know they met the end together.

"But I shall always blame myself for letting them go down the Cowlitz without me;" and his voice vibrated a soft undertone. "I loved Alice Hunter. We were to have been married when she returned."

Forrest met the Judge's look; a sudden intelligence, sympathy, shone in his young eyes. "I understand," he said slowly, "I understand."

"I loved her always, from the first time I saw her, riding her little pony along the bluffs of the upper Columbia. It was the day I reached the river after my long journey overland, from New York. She was the first—the one woman. And—she had promised to be my wife—before John Hunter came."

"I understand," repeated Forrest, and his glance moved in delicacy to the window. "I understand."

He saw clearly, in that moment, this great man's devotion, through years, to that memory; the fineness of his solicitude for her children. They had shared the home he had established for his brother's boy. He had lavished benefits upon them; borne the expenses of their liberal education; made himself their natural protector, guardian, friend.

"And the new Alice is her reincarnation."

The Judge paused and Forrest gave him another look, swift, searching, and rose from his chair. He stood like a soldier at attention; or, like a man who sees certain danger, yet prepares himself for that inevitable of which he is afraid.

"She has the same bright face, the same quick intelligence, the dauntless spirit speaking in her eyes; the same decided uptilt of the chin; the same ruddy, shining hair." The Judge rose and moved a step towards him. "I was still a young man when I brought her home, Paul, and I have watched her grow. You cannot understand that. What it meant to see the child unfold; what it cost me later, to be her every-day companion, friend, to shape her pliant mind, and yet to—make no sign."

Forrest moved to the window, squaring his back to the room. He stood looking down across the orchard and the maple-lined streets of the town, to the shining sea; but his hand groped for the casing and held it with a steadying grip. The Judge drew nearer. He dropped his hand on the young man's shoulder, and the tender, insistent pleading that was the chief charm of the orator dominated his voice. "I know I am facing very possible defeat. It is natural that you two

should think a good deal of each other, Paul, and there isn't another man on earth to whom I could better trust her. I am fond of you; I believe in you; I have called you the man of the future Northwest. Still she has chosen that hard life up in the wilderness, and you are leaving her there. If there is nothing between you, if you do not love her, I shall ask her to go to Washington with me—to be my wife."

Forrest turned. His face was gray; suddenly older. "I don't stand in your way," he said. "I am just her friend, the one she depends on. That's all. She refused me."

"She refused you?" The Judge laid both hands on the young man's shoulders, compelling his look. "She refused you? And you love her—*like this*."

Forrest drew away from his detaining grasp. "I must catch that steamer," he said. He went back to his chair and picked up his hat. "Good-by." He lifted his head, smiling a little, and offered his hand; but his glance moved beyond the Judge to the window once more, and he started. "She is here," he added unsteadily. "She is there with her sister on the terrace. Good-by and *good luck*."

He was gone and the Judge stood regarding the closed door. Then a light step on the threshold of the open window roused him and he turned.

"Good morning, Uncle Silas," she said, "I had to come right in and congratulate you on the election, though Louise told me you were talking business with Paul."

Her glance searched the room. Disappointment clouded her face.

"He was here," answered the Judge. "He hurried away to catch the steamer back to Freeport."

"Why," she said in surprise, "Louise told me he came over with them in the *Phantom* to hear the returns, and I thought—of course it was expected he would wait to go back with them after the ball. But," and she turned with recovered brightness to the small boy who stood waiting on the threshold, "this is Lem Myers, Uncle Silas. He came to see town and the salt water."

"Good morning," said the Judge, weighing this future voter with speculative eyes. "Good morning. You are just in time for a cruise. To-morrow my nephew will show you what the *Phantom* can do. I suppose you never have boarded a yacht?"

"Wal, no," Lem moved towards the chair the politician offered, stepping high in new and unaccustomed shoes. "No, I dunno's I hev."

"But of course the first thing, you want to try Olympia oysters. Hop Sing manages a good pan roast." He rang and gave the order to the Chinese cook, and Lem proceeded to adapt himself to the elegant appointments of the table.

The teacher had taken the opposite chair. "Oh," she said presently, "I know I have missed things; torchlight processions and rallies, and orations,—I shall read

that last speech directly,—and I'm sure you have been serenaded by all the bands. I do love a band, Uncle Silas."

"They will play again," said the Judge, laughing, "and I hope one at a time, and tonight you can enjoy the ball. But no doubt that is what brought you all the way from Nisqually. You expect to lead that ball."

She shook her head. "Your first dance belongs to Mrs. Governor, Uncle Si; we can't choose. That's the penalty of greatness."

The Judge laughed again, a soft rumble. "My dear," he said, after a moment, "isn't it about time you left off calling me Uncle?"

She looked at him, flushing, with quick surprise. "I understand," she said softly, "I understand. I should have thought of it long ago. Of course I always speak of you differently to strangers, but among ourselves—why— It was you who taught me, at the first, when I was a little girl."

"Oh, but you don't understand," he replied hurriedly. "I mean—you see, my dear, when you were a child a young man seemed so much your senior; the years between us do not count so much since you are a woman. In short, it should be more natural to call me just Silas—or even Si."

"Call you—Si? Oh, how could I?" and she threw her head back and laughed and laughed. "Good morning—Si. I congratulate you on the election—Si—" the words came with difficulty, between trills of merriment. "I am very proud of you—Si. But it was what we expected; you are the one man big enough for the place—Si—and all the territory knew it. Oh, indeed, indeed, I cannot. It's so ridiculously familiar. But, yes, I will do it, I'll try if you—" she paused and looked away through the open window. "The truth is—of course I want to go to the ball, immensely, but I came from Nisqually really—because—to ask—"

The Judge laughed, his pleasant undertone. "I see," he said, "I see, you are ready to come home. I've expected it; I've waited for it, and I've missed you more than you can ever know. But things are changed. I am going East in a few months and the house here will be closed. You do not want to make your home with Louise at Freeport." He broke off and walked over to the window. Directly he turned, and, with his back to the light, his hands clasped loosely behind him, stood regarding her. "The home here was broken up when you went away," he added, "and I shall find it lonelier still at Washington—unless—"

"Oh," she interrupted brightly, "I'm sure you will be very gay there. Think what it means; to be the representative from the big new Northwest. A man distinguished, almost rich, and a bachelor. Why, you will never have a dull moment—Si."

He caught the swift look from under her lashes and smiled. "You are still laughing at me, yet that life at the capital would suit you well. You were meant for pleasant places, to hold your own among bright women and distinguished men.

And I am eager to show what manner of woman the crude West can produce. My dear, you would outshine them all."

"Oh," she said, and clapped her hands an instant to her ears, "you need not practise those fine speeches on me, your success is assured; you will live in a whirl. And don't trouble about me, Uncle Silas; I'm not asking to come home. I—I only want you to go to the Land Office with me. I—I am going to—file a claim."

"You are what?"

"I am going to locate a homestead." And her voice tripped on the word.

"You are going to locate a homestead? You?"

"Oh, Uncle Silas,"—she rose and walked a few steps, then turned facing him with tilting chin and ruffled brows. "Why do you stand and frown like that at me? I'm not the first woman to take up Government land. Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't? I'm native born, and I'm twenty-one."

Lem cast an appreciative wink at the Judge, and, having reached familiar terms with the dish which Hop Sing had placed before him, he devoted himself to a second generous installment of Olympia oysters.

"But," said the Judge, "you are not going to improve that homestead like any settler? You do not intend to live there?"

"Yes," she answered, her voice again wavering, "I do. I am having the trail cut through to the schoolhouse now; Mose Laramie is doing it, and I have made a contract with him to cut the logs for my cabin. In payment he is to have the best gun I can find in Olympia. I want you to help me select it. But this is the piece,"—she paused to draw a township plat from her pocket. "It is all that's required; the soil is a good loam; a fairly level bottom-land at the foot of a great side-hill. And at the same time, I want to make a timber filing on the adjoining quarter up the slope. It is almost free of undergrowth except along the stream. There are some fine old trees. You see, too, the section is at the headwaters of the Des Chutes and I want to secure the water rights to these falls."

She was unmistakably in earnest and the incredulity in the Judge's face changed to dismay. He took the map and studied it. "I see," he said slowly, "I see." There was a brief silence, then his voice, that voice of the orator, took its pleading undertone. "Why will you do this thing? If you must create your own opportunities, there are other ways. Why, it is unbelievable. If ever there was a woman made for civilization, you are that one, yet you choose to bury yourself in the wilderness; to take up a claim in the heart of a jungle; to share the hardships of rough and ignorant pioneers."

"But I am a pioneer," and he saw the rising storm in her eyes, "the daughter of pioneers. You taught me to be proud of it, Uncle Silas; you loved to remind me my mother was born on the Columbia, and that her father, a New England missionary, followed Marcus Whitman to Oregon. You never let me forget that

my other grandfather was among the first to enter the Straits of Fuca, and sailed his own ship a hundred miles, straight up Puget Sound, without chart or pilot. You called it a great record. And my father was the pioneer surveyor. You talked about those seasons you spent in camp with him, while he blazed the great military road through the forest, running his section lines over rocky spurs and through cedar swamps, until I should count it a triumph to have carried chain for him. You see it was born in me, Uncle Silas. I can't help it—and I've got to turn it to the best account. It was my only inheritance."

Her voice broke at the last, and the assurance dropped from her like a shell. She stood before him, lovely, irresistible, extenuating a weakness.

"Oh," he said in evident distress, "you have misunderstood me. I wouldn't have you any different. Surely you know it? To me you are the embodiment of all that is fine and sweet and best in this great Northwest that I love. You are the spirit of it all. And your people were above criticism, Alice. Only, the memory of their fortitude makes me tremble for you. Your father, that splendid young fellow with almost a lifetime before him, was cut off in ambush; and your mother—was drowned in the Cowlitz. I want to have you—safe."

He began to walk the floor, slowly, with his hands still clasped behind him, his head bent, a cloud on his face. And she waited in respectful silence, watching him with a sweet and regretful tenderness in her eyes. She believed she understood those memories from which had sprung all his great kindness to her. Finally he stopped at the table and again spread out the plat. "This must be near the section Forrest told me about," he said. "Why, it looks like the very one. He was debating on taking it up, himself, at the time I offered him the management at Freeport."

Her glance fell before his inquiring look, and the ready color flamed. "Paul doesn't know," she said. "Please say nothing about it to any one. You see, Uncle Silas,—you see—the country is being settled very fast, and if I don't make this entry, some one else will."

There was another brief silence, then the Judge said, "Poor Forrest! you are even bent on taking his chosen section of land."

The color leaped again in her face. She moved a few steps to the window and stood with her back to him, looking down through the orchard to the shimmering Sound. "He told you?" she said.

"Yes, he told me. I asked him. It had always seemed so natural you should care something for him; he is well worth caring for. It seems incredible that you should refuse a fine, interesting young fellow like him." He paused, and his voice took its soft undernote. "I asked him, Alice, because I want to take you to Washington. There is only one way I can ask you to go. My dear, you understand—I love you."

She moved, startled, and laid her hand on the casing, where Forrest's had been, waiting. It was the gesture of a woman who feels suddenly, without premonition, the foundations of her world shake. He saw her shoulders lift; her whole body trembled. His glance passed from her, through the window, and on down the slope to the shining sea, and slowly returned. "It is, then, impossible," he said. "I am impossible. Well, forget all about it, little girl; it's all right. It's all right. Your happiness first; nothing else counts."

"Dear Uncle Silas." She turned, smiling, though her lip quivered and she brushed her hand across her eyes. "*You* count. I owe all I am to you. And you—are not impossible. I—I'm very fond of you. Its true—Silas." She nodded her head brightly, and dashed her hand again across her eyes. "And I will go to Washington—I'll be—glad—proud—to be—your wife—as soon as the homestead is safe."

CHAPTER X

LEM AND THE PHANTOM

Lem never forgot that ball. The teacher found him a nook from which he overlooked the entire floor; and he never tired of recounting to the always newly impressed settlement, the glories of the pageant. How "ther Jedge led ther parade an' was ther biggest toad in ther hull puddle." How "two fiddles an' er pianer an' er horn kep er goin' all ter oncet. An' clothes—ther Nisqually hedn't never seed sech clothes. Why, ther schoolmarm herself was fixed ter beat ther band, in er dress as soft an' thin as tons o' tissue paper, an' er gold chain, fine as er thread, clamped 'ith shiny little stones; an' she hed er mighty fine an' sassy feather—he couldn't fur ther life of him tell off'n what bird—stuck in her hair. An' pretty, land, ther wa'n't a girl there could hold er candle to her. An' ther boys all knew it; some of 'em, Mr. Stratton fur one, 'lowed they wouldn't dance 'ith nobody ef it couldn't be her; an' ther minute ther fiddles struck up somebody was on hand ter streak her off. Gee, they'd orter seen her. She jest picked up er handful o' white goods, an' her little feet went chasin' in an' out like er couple o' chipmunks foolin' in er holler cedar stump."

But if the ball was unforgettable, the cruise on the *Phantom*, the following day, marked an epoch in Lem's life.

"I think," said the teacher, as they approached the water front, "we shall

come back at flood-tide with a fine, choppy sea." Her eyes caught the sparkle of the waves, and she inhaled the salt air in deep, full breaths. There was the noise of running water about the piers, and the flat kerthug of the *Phantom* as she rose and dipped uneasily; but no whitecaps as yet, though the Sound, whipped by passing gusts, darkened and ruffled fitfully.

"Oh," said Stratton, who had joined the little party, "you will come back in the teeth of a gale, I promise you."

Philip stood regarding Lem with quizzical gravity. "I never knew it to fail with a new hand aboard, and this time I believe we're shipping a Jonah."

Stratton laughed softly, and handed the ladies aboard. Lem watched the feat with growing concern.

"There was once a man from Missouri," said Kingsley seriously, "who had to be lassoed the first time, and brought aboard."

"I'll risk it," and Lem pushed hastily forward, setting his feet on the gang-plank and reaching for the Captain's hand.

"That's right, my boy; and it may encourage you to know that Missourian lived to be our mayor in time."

The *Phantom* swung out with a lurch, and, slipping into the seat next the teacher, Lem grasped firm hold. Stratton took the helm and Philip went to the shrouds. The sails swelled to a scurrying gust, then flapped loosely. They filled again from another quarter and the yacht careened to the swinging boom. Lem's clutch tightened. Alice covered his hand with her palm. "Isn't it fine?" she asked.

"I'd ruther be erstride o' Ginger." He met her smile with a sidelong glance and looked again with apprehension at the flapping canvas. "But Jake 'lowed I'd git used to it."

"Who is Jake?" inquired Stratton.

"Jake?" Lem relaxed his grip on the rail, for the *Phantom* settled steadily. "Jake? He's my cousin; Samantha's brother. An' he's be'n clear ter British Columby. He went over oncet fur ther Queen o' Victory's birthday."

"And he had a great time, I'll wager," said Kingsley, coming back to the helm.

"Yes, but he counted on seeing ther Queen. He 'lowed she'd be to ther head o' ther parade, 'ith her gold crown on, an' ther rest o' her fine truck."

"And wasn't she?"

"Naw, she wa'n't ther. Aunt Lucindy 'lowed ther hull thing was er fizzle; but then she counted on bringin' back er lot o' goods; cloth an' hats an' shoes; I dunnot what all. You kin get 'em twice as cheap over to Victory ef you don't hev ter pay no duty. An' she made errangements 'ith ther neighbors ter do buyin' fur em."

"And," said Kingsley, "I suppose she made other arrangements to elude the

Customs officers?"

"Ef you mean she laid out ter fool ther Gov'ment men, you're right. She made er mattress ter fit over ther one on the steamboat, an' she filled it 'ith ther goods. But they was too sharp fur her. Fust thing she knew ther boss was haulin' off ther covers, an' er rippin' open that ther tick. An' he poured ther stuff all out onter ther cabin floor, 'ith ther hull crowd lookin' on; an' Jake says they laughed like all purzest. An' he took the goods,—Jake 'lowed he kept ther pile,—'ith Aunt Lucindy er cryin' an' er takin' on."

"But it was smuggling, Lem," said the teacher in dismay. "I hadn't believed a Myers could do a dishonorable thing."

Lem threw back his head and narrowed his ferret eyes. "You kin jes' bet er Myers ain't er goin' ter let er good chancet slip; not ef he knows it; no, ma'am."

He thrust his hands into his pockets and leaned back comfortably in his seat. But if the temporary ease of the yacht had lulled his apprehensions they were speedily revived by a lurch that carried away his hat and enveloped his head in spume. He sprang to his feet, spluttering, clutching at the helm, losing his foothold on the slanting deck, while the *Phantom* raced down before the sudden flaw.

"Why, Lem, it's all right, there isn't a bit of danger. And you shall have a new hat." The teacher placed a dry cushion and drew him down into his seat. She wrapped him in a shawl, pulling it snugly over his head, and he cuddled in it like a frightened squirrel, making a peephole for his small, bright eyes.

Her own hat was gone and she bent to search a locker trying at the same time with one hand to secure a loosened mass of wet, curling, wind-roughened hair. Presently she brought to light an oilskin hat, which she drew over her head, tilting the brim so that the rollicking wind had still a chance at the shorter hair, tumbling it, twisting it into burnished spirals about her ears. She stood for a moment, catching easily the swing of the yacht, and looked far out across the stirring reach of blue. And surely the spirit of that dauntless explorer, her grandfather, dominated her; there was an exaltation in her face; delight in every breath she drew.

Stratton watched her in undisguised pleasure. "There is no other country as favorable to the traffic," he was saying. "It is utterly impossible to guard the whole border. A regiment of soldiers might be able to patrol the woods on the mainland, but it is easier to trail an Indian than to follow a fleet craft through the Archipelago de Haro."

"No doubt that's the way most smuggling is carried on," replied Kingsley. "And it's an open secret that there are men on Puget Sound, living right in Seattle, fine, well-established men, who wouldn't defraud each other or any business man out of a dollar, yet conduct a systematic and successful opium ring."

Louise turned to him in protest. "Oh, Philip, you don't know such men, personally. You ought not to repeat such an idle rumor. Of course, if you had grounds for the suspicion, knew certain circumstances, you would do all in your power to aid the Government to apprehend these men. To stand neutral is to connive in—*crime*."

"Oh, Mrs. Kingsley, that is a harsh word." The quick flush that leaped in Stratton's face as quickly died, leaving it pale. His glance moved seaward. "There are enormous duties on some things, for instance—opium." He paused and his look returned; he smiled. "You forget you, yourself, are descended from people who objected, strenuously, to the payment of exorbitant duty. But we should hardly say that those exemplary Bostonians, who appropriated a whole cargo of tea, committed a crime."

"Oh," she said, with growing indignation, "how can you draw such a comparison? How can you? We are a young territory, Mr. Stratton, with a wide, unsettled border. What will become of us if the few educated and able men among us fail? If they wilfully break established laws; sink to the level of common smugglers, thieves?"

She rose in fine scorn from the place beside him and took a distant seat. Stratton's look followed her and the flush again left his face pale. "But I forgive her," he said at last, softly, "I forgive her, she is so charming when she is angry. Where most any other woman's voice would shrill, hers always drops to that nice contralto note."

"And you know she is right," said Alice, taking the vacant place. "It's just what I should have said, if she hadn't."

"Yes?" And he smiled again. "That surprises me—after that experience on the mountain."

"That was different. Mose believed he was justified. He was true to his traditions. That summit was his holy of holies and we were vandals come to desecrate." Her eyes turned to the great crest of Mt. Rainier, looming out of the southeast, its crater hollowed gently, like a throne between its triple alabaster domes. "Whenever I try to shake that belief I feel guilty, Mr. Stratton. It's so much more beautiful than any I can offer in exchange. After all, the most I can do is to educate Mose in other ways, and give him an occupation. The rest may come."

"I am hopelessly dense," said Stratton. "I fail to see why you draw the line so sharply. You forgive that young rascal of a horse thief and help him. But you are uncompromising, exacting, if a man has the misfortune to be—well—a gentleman."

She gave him a level look. "I consider the motive; whether he knows better."

"Oh," said Philip, laughing, "you don't know her, Stratton. In her secret

heart she'd love to be a smuggler and a pirate, and defying the Government, go sailing down among those purple islands of De Haro. And principle or no principle, it would be great fun, I confess, to match my little boat against a revenue cutter. Only give me the wind and a fair start, and I could set a pace for the best of them. There isn't a channel I haven't taken her through; and I'll wager I know every tide-rip and shoal the Sound over."

Kingsley said what he pleased; his life was an open sea. If sometimes he ran too close into the wind, he knew, or he thought that he knew, how to recover, but his glance moved to his wife and rested a moment.

But clearly Louise no longer listened. Her face, the face of a dreamer, rapt, sensitive, was turned to the Olympic Mountains, shining across the ruffled sea. It was as though she saw farther than other women, and beyond those amethyst peaks and shoulders, breaking through cloud, up at the source of those shafts of mellow light, that struck the gorges between the blue foothills, she found a higher country all her own.

He drew his frame erect and began to whistle, lifting his eyes to the swelling sails. Then Alice took the guitar from a sheltered place and caught the accompaniment. And presently they began to sing.

"'Twas a gallant bark, with a crew as brave
As ever launched on the seething wave."

The *Phantom* swung out from the old monastery on Priest Point, and coming

around, raced back before the still freshening wind. They skirted the Olympia peninsula, and moved on up the narrowing arm. Here were the white walls of the capitol, rising from a grove of young firs, and across the channel opened the wooded capes off Cleale Place. Then came the promontory, breaking from Tumwater ridge; the Indian burial ground, where the blankets, which screened the canoes of the dead in the treetops, hung against the dark face of the bluff like gaily painted squares. And at last the yacht began to feel a back current and stalked gently up towards the white mills.

This was that "cradle" out of which Forrest had stepped, and there off the bow rose the glooming cliffs, where the lower Des Chutes hung a curtain of roped pearls, and the long pale lips of the rapids curled and menaced below.

Stratton took the guitar and repeated the tune, droning a pleasing under-note. And presently Louise awakened, and the receding promontory, catching the contralto, held the song a tragic moment and returned it transformed to a requiem.

”For the white squall rides on the surging wave,
And the bark is gulfed in an ocean’s grave,
In an ocean’s grave; in an ocean’s grave.”

But the soprano was silent.

CHAPTER XI THE HOUSE-RAISING

”I’ve travelled all over ther country, prospectin’
an’ diggin’ fur gold;
I’ve tunnelled, hydraulicked an’ cradled, an’ I hev
be’n frequently sold.
An’ I hev be’n frequently s-o-old, an’ I hev be’n
frequently sold,
I’ve tunnelled, hydraulicked an’ cradled, an’ I hev
be’n frequently sold.”

Mose rested on his ax and listened. It was a boy’s voice, loud and clear, though it slurred over difficult notes, and filled in uncertain words with a whistle. And it startled the woods, rising above the thunder of the cataract, and rang a hundred echoes from cliff and spur.

”So rollin’ my grub in my blanket, an’ leavin’ my
tools on ther ground,
I started one mornin’ to shank it, fur a country
they call Puget Sound.
Fur a country they call Puget So-ou-ound—”

”Saprie, dat ees Lem Myers.” Mose lifted his ax and lopped off a branch which trailed over the rustic table he had completed. All the space around him was filled with building material; straight logs cut into even lengths, rows of cedar shakes, piles of hewn flooring, posts and rafters, newly made by hand from the

felled timber of the small clearing, and surrounded by a resinous litter of boughs and chips.

"Arrivin' dead broke in mid-winter, I found it
 enveloped in fog,
 An' covered all over 'ith timber, thick as hair on
 ther back of er dog.
 Thick as hair on ther back of er do-o-g, thick as hair
 on ther back of er dog,—"

Aw, git up ther, Ginger, git up, I tell you."

Lem rounded a fallen hemlock, tugging at the halter of the reluctant pony, who, heavily laden with hampers, tinware and sundries, sidled this way and that at the obstructions which culminated at the end of the new trail. He lunged back from the long table, and rolling his eyes, came to an immovable standstill.

Mose laid down his ax and walked over to the pony, "Saprie, it ees not'ing to tek dese t'ings 'cross." And he waved his hand with pardonable pride towards a small pavilion roofed in fir boughs.

"Guess we'll hev ter," answered Lem, surveying the scene with evident satisfaction. "This here no 'count cayuse knows he ain't erlowed in nobody's front room. No, sir, ther ain't no use tryin' ter make him budge." And he lifted his bare foot and gave the horse a resentful thrust, which was received with a slight flinching of the flanks, and increased exhibition of the whites of his eyes.

"Hams?" enquired Mose, inhaling a deep breath while he unbuckled the straps of a hamper.

"You bet," answered Lem. "Hams and chickuns. Ole Mother Girard cooked 'em."

"De ole madame ees be one good cook, for sure. It ees fine t'ing her Baptiste ees die, an' dat she ees able sell de ranch, for it ees pos'ble she can stay all tam to de cabane to work for de te'cher."

"This here," said Lem, lowering a second hamper to the ground, "is princely cake. An' you kin jes' bet ther ain't never be'n no sech cake in ther hull deestrect. Ther schoolmarm made it herself, an' it's full o' ceetron, an' raisins; I dunno what all. She gimme this here knife fur takin' ther seeds out. I'd er done it fur nothin' but I wa'n't goin' ter refuse no sech whittler's that." He took the knife from his pocket and exhibited the blades. "I 'low it's ther same one I hed my eye on down ter Yelm Station."

"Nawitka," answered Mose, returning the knife after deliberate inspection, "it ees bran' new. But to me she ees give a'ready one piece gold monies, for dat I ees work on de trail. For dese logs an' shakes, an' dese posts dat I ees help Mill

T'ornton mek, she ees lak give me one gran' new gun."

"Les see ther gold piece," said Lem.

"But no, it ees not here. It ees bury in ver' good plas to my fader's gardeen."

"I'll bet you was erfraid Mill er John Phiander'd git it erway from you."

Mose flushed under the taunt and began to turn up his denim sleeve. "It ees bes' you doan' say dat to me," he said slowly. "I am but 'fraid I lose dat gold monies for it ees be so small. Sacré, I t'ink I doan' have some trouble to trash dose boys." He doubled his arm, clinching his hand. "Feel dare, Lem Myers, and dare. Since I ees work to dose logs, Laramie, heemself doan' have so beeg muscle."

Lem laid his fingers on the tense cords with a gradually increasing pressure, while his glance moved from the splendid forearm to the boy's frowning face. "Oh, gee," he said reverently, "gee, but you've growed some, Mose. I'd like ter see you tackle 'em both. I 'low you could lick either one of 'em 'lone, 'ith jes' one hand, or mebbe 'ith your little finger."

Mose smiled his fleeting smile and relaxed his arm. "Saprie," he said, and turned again to the hamper, "I beli've A'm able, ya-as."

"She baked this here cake in ther cookstove down ter Yelm Station," said Lem, "an' it filled ther hull oven." He unfastened the lid of the basket and Mose came around and looked over his shoulder. The cake was wrapped in a piece of muslin. Lem brushed his hand across the seat of his jeans and lifted the end of the cloth with the tips of his thumb and finger. "It ain't white clear through," he added softly; "she made er kind o' whitewash out'n eggs an' reg'lar first class sugar."

"It ees ver' gre't, for sure," said Mose, and he raised a side of the hamper as though it was something holy, and helped Lem carry it across to the pavilion.

When the remainder of Ginger's pack had been stored they lingered in the arbor, making conjectures, and certifying them, as to the contents of various bags and bundles, until further investigation was stopped by the voice of the teacher in the clearing.

It was a bright day at the end of February, the Puget Sound spring, and she had found and fastened on her breast a first cluster of Oregon currant. The heart of the blossoms was reflected on her cheeks; the light of the early morning was in her eyes. "Oh," she said, "what a splendid table, Mose." And turning to the town carpenter, who accompanied her, "Isn't it fine? And this is the boy of whom I told you. He has split all of the shakes, hewn flooring, cut logs. He has done everything except what the young ranchers could do for me in a few odd days."

The carpenter admitted that Mose had done "uncommon well." Then while the boy, pleased and embarrassed, led away and picketed the horses, she showed the man the building site and talked over the material and plans. But, presently, there were voices on the trail, and here were the Laramies, the Phianders, with

Eben Myers and Martha and Mother Girard, followed by the people from the prairie and many more. The men walking, bearing axes, saws, sometimes a rifle; the young folk afoot also, while the older women and children rode double and by threes on mules, draught horses, steers and Indian ponies. Then, were not those the hoof-beats of John Phiander's Baldy, timed by the rapid pace of Mill Thornton's sorrel? And the plodders in the trail must press quickly forward or crowd into the thicket, to give the young blood room.

But these gay fellows were capable of sobering down. They were ready to "match muscle," urging each other with dares and taunts to set their swelling chests and heaving shoulders to the heavy timbers. And surely the Nisqually had never seen another such raising; never so great a company. People from Yelm and Tenalquet were there, and from Tacoma, in Pierce County beyond the Puyallup. The walls went up apace; the huge fir rafters were swung into position, and then appeared a wondrous gable, its sloping eaves arching a roomy balcony. Surely the settlement had yet to see as fine a cabin. Wild things crept to cover. And the southing of the chinook in the branches, the distant thunder of the falls, the falling of rock up the mountain, were not to be heard in this tumult of construction, the babel of voices, multiplied by the answering clamor of the speaking hills.

But while these experienced settlers, men who had themselves conducted raisings and superintended the building of a score of cabins, moved about, taking meekly the orders of the town carpenter, their wives followed the novel directions of the young teacher. Never before had the Nisqually looked on such a table. All the long board was fringed with cedar and twigs of flowering dogwood; turkeys and chickens placed on huge wooden platters were garnished with the glossy leaves of the Washington holly; hams in big trenchers, bearing yet the fragrance of pine, were decorated with crisp sprigs of salal; and there were haunches of venison and rounds of bear meat, or at intervals a wild goose, a brace of ducks, all decked with bright shoots of spruce or fir. But the center of the board was given to the great white cake, throned on a bank of moss and embellished, to Lem's delight, with small flags. Others, of a larger size, intermingled with Japanese lanterns, were fastened in groups and singly among the trees which bordered the clearing. The boughs over the table flamed with them.

"I give it up, but I 'low ther's 'bout five hundred." Lem cast a final calculating glance over the table and the surrounding decorations. He was seated on a lofty stump, his arms folded, his bare heels beating a slow tattoo on the bark. "Ther small ones down to Yelm sells fur ten cents er half dozen." He paused, then added speculatively, "I wonder what she's goin' ter do with 'em when she gits through?"

His reverie was broken by a summons to table, and in the general rush, he slipped from his perch and ferreted into a place at the foot of the board. Only

the men were seated, while the women served; the children played or loitered about, watchful of the chance attention that sometimes fell to them. At last in her rounds the boy's mother detected him. "Wal, ef you don't beat all," she said, stopping short with a huge tray of carved venison in her hands. "You git right up an' make yourself scarce tell ther men's through."

Lem sat with his head bent, hands folded meekly; Ginger himself had never shown greater dejection, and, like Ginger, he did not move.

"Oh, let him erlone," said Mill Thornton, lifting his tankard and including the company with a bland smile. "He's goin' ter sing ther Ole Settler fur us."

"I ain't nuther; I dunno it. Ask Cousin Samanthy." Lem cast a sidelong glance at the young man, who blushed hotly and put down his embarrassment with a draught from the tankard. "She'd be mighty disepointed ef you didn't ask her; she's be'n gittin' ready fur a week."

With this Lem helped himself liberally from the platter in his mother's hands, and cast another look at Samantha, who, also flushing pinkly, stood in amazement, while the coffee-pot which she carried poured a brown stream on the earth.

"Pshaw, 'tain't so," she said, drawing her breath quickly. "Lem 'lowed all along he'd sing it ef I'd learn him ther words. Fur ther land sakes," she added, addressing the coffee-pot, which she speedily righted; and at the same time she caught the skirt of her pink cotton frock out of range.

"I dunno 'em all," said Lem, and boldly held out his empty cup.

"Guess you'll hev ter, Samanthy," said Eben, laughing. "Come, now, tune up."

At this, a cry repeated warmly by a score of throats, the girl put down the coffee-pot and darted away. It then became Mill Thornton's office to pursue and bring her back. He was encouraged by shouts and laughter as the pink dress appeared and disappeared among the trees.

She stopped at length all flushed and panting, and turned her face shyly to her pursuer. "I guess I'll hev ter, Mill. I'm ready ter drop."

"You're mighty pretty that erway," he said softly, putting his hand on her arm,—he felt its plump roundness through the thin sleeve,—"I'd like ter kiss you, ef I 'lowed you could stand it to hev that ther tiresome crowd laffin'."

"My stars, Mill," she said and all the imps in her eyes mocked him, "ain't you good? You're most er an-gel. I'll bet under your shirt you kin jest feel ther wings er sproutin'."

But even then his courage failed him. "Oh, kem on," he said, "ther ain't er girl in this hull deestric kin beat you singin'. I'm ready ter lick ther fellow says so."

He led her back towards the waiting company, his grasp tightening on her

arm. She hung her head and came reluctantly, catching at a branch, dragging her feet.

"Well," said Eben, putting down his mug and drawing his hand across his whiskers, "ef you're done er bein' bashful, now, Samanthy, we're ready ter listen."

She straightened herself with a little cough and looked at her audience. Then her glance fell and she shrank behind her captor with a faint, "I don't like ter."

But the young man did not relax his hold, and though his face crimsoned, he impelled her forward, closing his lips firmly over locked teeth, and watching her warily, as an athlete measures an uncertain antagonist. And he confessed to her privately, afterwards, that it "took more nerve" to make her sing than was required later "to put a head on Pete Smith."

She met his look helplessly, but straightened herself once more, with that little cough, and commenced in a clear quavering soprano.

"I've travelled all over ther country, prospectin'
 an' diggin' fur gold,
 I've tunnelled, hydraulicked an' cradled, an' I
 hev be'n frequently sold."

The men grew silent, those to whom the song was new giving attention only to the singer, the others dividing interest between her and the table. But the words appealed to most, and convinced that, well started, she would brave out the ordeal, Thornton resumed his place. He masked his face in a set expression of indifference, but when his glance moved to Samantha, his bold young heart leaped and proclaimed itself through the batteries of his eyes.

She finished the song and took up her interrupted work of pouring coffee. Eben cleared his throat, and parted his beard, stroking it gently. "That ther chase you jest hed, Mill, 'minds me of er time I hed over to Montaner. I dunno's I ever let on 'bout that ther hunt o' mine."

He paused, still stroking his whiskers, while the audience grew attentive. "It was er full grown grizzly," he went on, "an' I'd give her a mighty mean shot, so't she was fightin' ugly. I hedn't another catridge an' I dunno's I'd hed time ter load up ef I hed. I natu'ally hed ter light out, an' ther wa'n't er tree in sight; nothin' but er few scrub hazels. But I got ter circlin' round them, ther bear after me, tell ther first thing I see we was wearin' er reg'lar ditch in ther ground. When it got 'bout's high's my head he let up er minute ter get his wind, an' I see my chanct ter climb out. I was jest dead beat an' all I could do was ter lay down close ter that bank an' watch that ther grizzly chase hisself—didn't seem ter miss me—tell he dropped."

There was a pregnant silence, then young Thornton said gravely, "It was er mighty close call, Eben, sure; 'bout ther closest you ever hed. But I 'low you never showed us that ther grizzly's skin."

There was another brief silence, during which Eben thoughtfully regarded his empty plate. "You're right," he said at last, "you're right, Mill, but that ther pelt wa'n't worth keepin'. You see when I clumb down after it I see it was spoiled. That ther ditch was mighty narrer, an' scrapin' round so long he jest natu'ally rubbed ther hair clean offn both sides."

The men, laughing, rose by twos and threes to return to their work. It was then, while the women and children closed in around the table, that Stratton rode into the clearing. Though he had travelled far that day his person was not the worse for it; and Sir Donald's shining coat, his long, lithe body, slender limbs and swelling chest, must have delighted more critical eye than Alice Hunter's.

"This is very nice of you," she said, going to meet him. "I was just feeling a little homesick for a face from the Sound. But Judge Kingsley is in Washington, and no one else knew of the house-raising. What happened to bring you?"

"Why, this quarter section caught my fancy the first time I saw it, last summer, and I made up my mind to take it. But I heard, yesterday, an entry had already been made, by a woman; probably one of these Canadian daughters of the settlement, and the easiest course was to hurry straight on to the headwaters, and ward off her improvements, and buy her off."

"She is not to be bought."

"You think not? Then,"—he gave her a side glance and finished tying the knot in Sir Donald's halter,— "I may decide to contest."

"Contest—this claim? you wouldn't do that?"

"Oh, yes I would." He paused to break a sword fern, with which he flecked off nicely a remaining bit of dust from his riding-boot. "I think I could make out a very good case. I should cover it with a timber filing."

"A timber filing," she replied quietly, "doesn't hold over a homestead right. At least, the exception is rare."

"But I should prove the exception. I should prove that the land is worthless for agriculture, and the timber entry of the adjoining quarter would strengthen the point. I might, however, find it advisable to make the location under mineral rights."

"But there is no mineral, to my knowledge, on this tract; though beyond, somewhere, in these hills, I have heard—there are indications."

"Then," and he waived that possibility, "it is enough that it is one of the best timbered sections in the Puget Sound Basin. These are fine old trees. And"— He paused to flick an ant from his sleeve—"I have friends at court."

"Doubtless." Her patience was exhausted. "Such as those irreproachable

men of whom Phil Kingsley once told us." She flashed him a look with that swift uplifting of her chin, and turned her face to the high shoulder of the hill. Her lips closed firmly; her breath came a little hard and quick; the ready color burned in her cheek.

Her retort brought the steel to his own eyes, but he had no answer. Her glance returned. "How could you find a timber claim desirable in this mountainous place? Twenty miles from a railroad, and on the Des Chutes, where to raft logs, or even dream of it, is sheer madness?"

"But suppose I should wish to put up a sawmill, and cut the timber right here on the ground? It would be a great thing for the settlement." His smile, which always hinted of mockery, lingered, and he watched her with the quiet enjoyment of the true angler, who is sure, but plays cautiously, to lose nothing of the sport.

"It might benefit the settlement," she said, and flashed him another look of fine scorn, though he saw her lip tremble, "but it would be years before you could hope for returns on the investment."

At this he laughed outright. "I withdraw," he said, "I withdraw. You are in fighting trim to your fingertips. You know too much about land law, Miss Hunter; the Judge has been a thorough instructor, and what you do not know about logging and milling, I am inclined to think is not worth knowing. But the homestead is yours. Now please establish a record for hospitality. I've had a long ride since breakfast."

"Do you mean—" She paused, flushing, then lifted her face to him all sudden brightness and charm. "Oh, you do mean it; I see—I see. You were only teasing me. It's hard, sometimes, to tell just where your jest breaks off—or begins. But did you really want this section?"

"Yes, I looked it up at the Land Office, as I came through Olympia, intending to make a timber entry, and found the homestead filing under your name." He had followed her to the table, taking the seat beside her. And he stopped a moment, while he divided a roasted pheasant which he shared with her, then he said, "I do not pretend to fathom your reasons for burying yourself here in the wilderness; it is enough for me to know that you want this land. And the next quarter, on the other side of the cataract, is vacant. It is unsurveyed, but the squatter's right will serve me as well. I only want the place now for a sort of shooting-box; somewhere to stay in the hunting and fishing seasons, and, incidentally, to carry on a little traffic with Laramie and one or two other trappers, who have shown me already some very good furs."

She looked him over interestedly from this new point of view. "So," she said, "So, you are to be my nearest neighbor, with just the river between. Last autumn I thought I should have all the big heart of the hills to myself, but since

Christmas Mill Thornton has taken up the next section but one on the school trail, and now you follow. The country is being settled very fast." She turned her eyes again to that high spur. After a moment she asked, "Have you been in Seattle lately, or at the mills?"

"Yes, I was there two days ago and saw your sister. She was well, but I think that the isolation wears on her, though she will not say so. She admits, however, that she misses you, and she and the Captain are planning a cruise among the islands. They are timing it for your spring vacation, confident you will join them."

"Oh," she said, and delight shone in her eyes, "you don't know how that tempts me; it's my favorite cruise."

"And you will arrange to go?"

She shook her head. "How can I? That short vacation means so much to me; I've planned it all away. Mose is going to clear a strip towards the river, for Colonel's pasture, and it must be big enough for the two Jerseys which Judge Kingsley is sending me. And I must furnish the cabin and take actual possession. But I don't know what to say to Louise. She doesn't know about this homestead, Mr. Stratton; I don't want her to know. You see it's all a venture; I might have to relinquish; I might—fail."

"I understand," he answered, again laughing, "and I promise to keep the secret from the Captain,—he can ridicule,—I promise, provided you go that cruise."

"I'm afraid I must." She shook her head again, ruffling her brows. "After all I ought to be able to spare this one week to my sister; she's going to think I'm forgetting her, often enough, before I'm through."

While they were talking a man had entered the clearing from the river side. He moved with a noiseless, sliding motion, and, seating himself at the lower end of the table, aloof from the children, who still loitered there, began unceremoniously to appease a prodigious appetite. Alice watched him in half recognition. His face in the strong light of midday was more than forbidding; it repelled while it also possessed the fascination of extreme ugliness. His old ragged hatbrim, turned back from a slanting forehead, left unshaded a pair of small, beadlike, shifting eyes. Suddenly she remembered where she had seen him before. It was at Laramie's cabin the time she had taken refuge from the storm. He was that midnight visitor, Smith.

None of the settlers gave him special attention, though Samantha filled his cup and Martha supplied him with an abundance of meat and bread. That was the unwritten code of the wilderness; no man was ever turned away hungry. And this man, though an escaped criminal, convicted of some crime against a remote Government, belonged to the community; as long as he respected its primitive laws he might come and go unmolested. But to pillage his neighbor—that was the unpardonable sin. And presently, at the moment of his departure, Smith crossed

this line.

A short cruiser's ax, which young Thornton always carried in his belt over a new trail, was lying on a fallen tree directly in the outlaw's way. He was hampered by his gun, as he vaulted the log, but, by some sleight of hand, he slipped the ax under his blouse. Instantly there was a loud outcry, and before he could reach the cover of the jungle a cordon of settlers cut him off.

He swung about to break for the thicket at another point, but there the crowd closed. He stood motionless, weighing the odds, then he put his gun aside, setting the stock against a stump, and the ax reappeared, resting in the hollow of his arm. He caressed the edge of the blade lightly, with his long nervous fingers, and at the same time raised his shifting eyes to the owner, who confronted him. "A'm have some look at your ax, Mill," he said at last in a thick, choppy voice; "mebbe I lak to buy heem, ya-as, you want to sell heem, hey?"

Thornton drew a step nearer. "I 'low," he answered with slow emphasis, "you've examined that ther little ax of mine mighty close, Pete."

Smith understood. There was little use of subterfuge or denial. This cordon of men had become a tribunal, that, having already condemned, awaited the transgressor's punishment. His only escape hung on action, swift, sure. He swung the ax lightly, in a flash, but the instant it left his hand, the young rancher dipped his great shoulder, and rushing under the hurled blade, grappled with him. The confusion he had expected to create failed; his chances of reaching the friendly jungle shrank again. He writhed, twisted out of Thornton's grasp, and, snakelike, struck. Harder pressed, he fought, without system, ferociously, like a cornered rat, squeaking horribly and using his teeth.

There could be no doubt of the outcome. Nature, in creating Thornton, had made an athlete, and the great primal passions, latent in every man, sprang unleashed to meet the beast with whom he had to deal. His quick blows gathered impetus. His victim gave back slowly, snapping, snarling, steps he made no effort to regain. And the human ring moved with them, riverwards. It was miserable, but very swift, and the finish came when the retreating man tripped backward over a root and went down.

Laramie sprang to raise him, but at the same instant the teacher, throwing off Stratton's detaining arm, pushed into the circle and stood before the fallen man. She did not speak at once; the words, struggling in her throat, choked. But Thornton's great doubled forearm relaxed and dropped at his side. He met the command, the reproach in her brave eyes and the fury in his own died.

"I will not have it," she said at last, and her voice rang. "Remember,"—her look swept the cordon,—"*from this day I will not have fighting on my land.*"

There was a brief silence. Laramie moved back to his place. Behind her the outlaw rolled on his side, then to his stomach, and began to worm himself

towards a cedar that had broken the ring. No one stopped him. He covered the ground with incredible swiftness, with a writhing motion, learned of necessity and long contact with the jungle, and like some hideous goblin crawled under the dragging boughs of the tree.

Myers cleared his throat. "Pete orter kep' erway," he said mildly. "I 'low he didn't get mor'n was due him. Tell you, I've seen er man over in Montaner catch it er sight worse fur doin' less. That ther's a mighty good little ax o' Mill's."

Stratton, who had followed Alice closely, lifted Smith's rifle and walked coolly over to the cedar and passed it between the boughs. The outlaw was on his feet, and he clutched the gun and ran across the remaining bit of open, and dropped out of sight in the dense undergrowth.

"Of course," she said, replying to Eben, "I understand that. The man must be punished; but there are better ways."

"Ther highest sheriff," said Eben, still mildly, "lives to Olympia, sixty miles straight. That's ther closest jedge, too, an' court."

"Still, here are men enough to hold him," and her voice deepened to a dominant note; "lock him in his cabin, guard him until the right officers can arrive. He should have been turned over to the Government long ago, you all know it, for greater crimes. It must be done now."

She set her lips and turned, and for the first time realized Smith was gone. Stratton stood waiting near the cedar. He saw the sudden relief flash through the consternation in her face. "You let him go," she said slowly. "You could have stopped him. It was your duty."

"Yes," he came towards her, "I let him go. I even helped him off. Pardon me or—punish me."

She stood for a moment looking up into his face, but he bore the scrutiny easily enough, smiling, with a tinge of mockery. "Oh," she said, "how could you? How could you? But I know the reason; it was an impulse—of the heart—to take the losing side. It was wrong—but I—like you for it."

"You like me?" he laughed softly, "You like me?" He paused, enjoying the confusion in her face. She turned it away. "So," he went on, "So you think I sided with the under dog? No, no, Miss Hunter, I am not that kind of a man. It just seemed the quickest way to terminate that miserable row. You should never have witnessed it; you should not have been here. This wilderness is no place for you."

Instantly her confusion was gone. "Oh," she said, "surely this has been proof enough. It is the one place, the right place; the settlement needs me. But—it's going to be the hardest work," she shook her head gravely, "and I want you to help me." She stood another moment searching his face, then, "You are a strange man," she added. "Why is it you cover your best and delight in showing your worst side?"

"There is no best," he answered quickly. "I am past appeal." And he turned and walked swiftly away towards the river and that section of land he had come to see.

Smith was gone; the episode was closed, and the men had resumed their interrupted work. Then, presently, the teacher called Mose and the older children to her assistance, and an arch was formed of stout saplings twined with hemlock and cedar. And when Stratton had returned and it had been set up on the finished floor, he helped to decorate it with flags and yards on yards of gay ribbon, in loops and bows and streamers. There were also, nodding under the smartest twigs, mysterious little packages wrapped in bright papers with fringed ends, so that Lem with increasing difficulty held his wonder. Garlands strung from the rafters, were studded with other flags and supported every variety of Japanese lantern.

The day drew to a close. On the ashes of last year's camp-fire, Mose kindled a new blaze, and the people gathered around it for a brief interval of rest. They discussed the gabled roof, the roomy balcony, and then the conditions of the soil. And afterwards Myers spun a grizzly yarn, rivaled by Laramie's recital of the elk hunt from which he had lately returned. And the women, brought together from remote solitudes, exchanged small personalities, sure of a sympathetic ear. They took up the misfortunes of Slocum's family, left without a head, and the fatal accident that had befallen young Girard, soothing his mother with a reminder of the good bargain she had made in selling the ranch, and the comfortable home she was to find with the teacher.

But when the round moon looked over the high shoulder of the slope, and the lighted lanterns began to show blue or red or orange spheres along the edge of the clearing, and filled the cabin with a soft illumination, Eben brought his violin, and with various trials of the bow upon the strings, led the way into the building. Then, when Mill Thornton had danced a hornpipe, and all the young folk had warmed their blood to the tune of Money Musk, followed by a stirring jig, the teacher led them a new step, fitting to the music of the settlement the qualities of the cotillion. She came under the arch, and reaching, took one of the small flags. But it was not to Stratton that she gave it, but to Laramie, who stood frowning in the doorway. Laramie, who had not danced these many years. And to the astonishment of everybody the Canadian answered the salutation of her pretty head, and sticking the flag in his buttonhole, commenced with much shuffling of the cowskin boots, a series of gyrations and curvetings that filled the newer generation with amazement and delight.

It was an easy matter for Samantha to learn that little novelty as to the flags, and the more difficult methods with the ribbons. Lem, there in the corner, with folded arms and watchful eyes imitating Laramie's wild motions, saw the teacher open that first package with the fringed ends, and still with that swaying

movement, unfold and place on her head a yellow tissue hat. Then here were all of these large girls following her example, and Laramie himself pulling off his old squirrel-skin cap, and flinging it aside for a red bonnet. Mill Thornton too, and all the boys from Yelm and Tenalquet, were rigging themselves out in every kind of head-gear, and with flags and ribbons; making their best steps, and cheered on by the shouts and laughter of the older people ranged along the walls.

The bow ran faster and faster, as though it laughed in its sleeve at the wild figures they cut. Then, at length, the teacher slipped aside to relieve Eben. It was a different music, sweeter, softer, that she drew from the old cracked instrument, and she kept time with one foot, thrust a little forward; a smile played on her lips, there was a shining light in her eyes, and the yellow hat was pale against her ruddy hair.

But finally the measure changed. The revellers quieted under the unfamiliar strain. It was no longer dance music but Schubert's Serenade. A far-away look came over her face; a sweet tenderness. Her soul was in her touch; she called a speaking sadness from the strings. A great hush fell over the room.

CHAPTER XII

A FACE IN THE NIGHT

Mason, the watchman at the Freeport mills, stood as was his habit when off duty, quite at the end of the dock, his red hair blowing in the wind, his hands thrust in the pockets of his oily brown jeans, and his feet planted firmly apart, notwithstanding one was an insecure wooden peg around which the leg of his trousers fluttered loosely. It was after the hour of closing, and about the doorways of the cabins, which nestled well under the bluff. groups of workmen loitered, or like Mason, enjoyed the breezier, salter atmosphere of the wharf. The sound of bagpipes came from a distant quarter up the beach, and the rival notes of an accordion floated over from a passing fishing-smack. But above all rose the deep wash of the sea. A lumber ship, with the light lines of her deckload showing above her low black hull, swung out from the upper dock and took on a boatful of tuneful sailors who had crossed the harbor from the town. Her tug, lying to the northward, awaited her cable. And out beyond the headland and its black reflection, the late sun reddened the *Phantom's* sails.

Mason's nautical gaze rested on the yacht, and he said, addressing Hop

Sing, the cook, who had been transferred from the Judge's house to the mills, "A fine craft, ay, sir; a bit too narrer at ther beam, but a fine craft, sir."

Sing smiled blandly and tucked his long yellow finders into his wide sleeves. "*Phlantom*, she all lit-e," he admitted. "Mlissar Phil, he all lit-e."

The yacht swung into the shadow of the Head; the lightening cable between the ship and tug crossed her bows. The steamer with increased belching of smoke and pounding of machinery forged away and the vessel slowly answered the straining line. Mason leaned forward with a low exclamation; then, no longer able to hold himself, he lifted his voice in a hoarse shout. "Luff, luff 'er."

Even as he spoke the *Phantom* veered suddenly, and came around close-hauled, all but grazing the stern of the ship. And Mason saw the master at the helm, his cap pushed back, his eyes on the flapping canvas, while his lips coolly shaped the end of a chorus. A woman, young and pretty, with a cloud of blond hair, was seated near him, strumming time on a banjo, and, as Mason moved to take the line, she looked up at him with a gay laugh.

Stratton relieved Kingsley of the tiller while he went into the bows with the coiled line. The old sailor caught it and made a twist around a pile, hauling taut. "It wore neatly done," he said with the pride glowing in his homely face; "ay, sir, but it wore a close call, sir."

Philip laughed. "Not much of a trick if you know the *Phantom*, Mason. No, I'm not coming ashore. Here, give these packages to Mr. Forrest. Tell him I'm taking a run over to Tacoma. Will look in at the camp about those logs. That's all. Cast off."

Mason watched the *Phantom* swing out, then went up the wharf to the store. It was a long, low building with few windows and a massive door. The interior was gloomy, musty; sacks of flour piled in great lines partitioned the room; hams and bacon hung from the ceiling. At one side of the entrance the office was separated from the main floor by a latticed railing, and gave the manager an opportunity to work at his desk, and at the same time see those who entered. The window at his elbow overlooked the dock and informed him if an arriving vessel demanded his attention there.

Several men sauntered after Mason and joined the group gathered at the door. One entered, and Forrest turned from his desk to take the day's tally from him. Presently Hop Sing slipped through the idle and jeering crowd to collect an allowance of groceries. Mason laid his packages down and waited, leaning on the railing. His glance moved from the cook to the sawyer, a heavy, burly fellow, who stood in the entrance. As the Chinaman passed out this man turned with a sudden thrust of his powerful shoulder and Hop Sing plunged headlong on to the dock. There was a round of applause while he floundered in a broken crock of molasses and a burst bag of buckwheat, and the sawyer moved back with a gruff

laugh. At the same instant something was thrown behind him, and he, too, fell, sprawling on the floor. The cry of derision was transferred to him, and Mason, having recovered his equilibrium, stooped and gravely felt of his wooden leg. "When a man's er peg like this," he said aggressively, forestalling the sawyer's anger, "he aren't to be walked over. I've known 'um to crack."

And the crowd cheered, for there was a story current at the mills that Mason had once, in an emergency, unstrapped this leg and used it for a weapon; not only to the discomfiture of his antagonist, but to the serious damage of the instrument, both having been laid up, afterwards, for extensive repairs.

The amusement shone for a moment in Forrest's eyes, but his face was tired and worn; the line between his brows had grown habitual. It deepened when the old sailor repeated Kingsley's message. He took a small packet of mail which the watchman had brought with the bundles, and hastily cut the string. "Here, Mason," he said, "take these letters over to Mrs. Kingsley.

"Ay sir." The answer was hearty, but Forrest caught the consternation in the tone. He knew that it took less courage for this crippled sailor to brave the sawyer than face a woman; and he understood, when Mason stopped at the corner outside to light his pipe, it was a subterfuge to gain time.

The Captain's house, like the cabins, stood in an enclosure filled with slabs and sawdust and covered with rough planking. The board walk, which led from the store to the cookhouse and mills, branched to this building, and, raised on higher piling, extended on around the headland to an old abandoned hotel. It was there, going slowly with her toddling baby in the direction of the ruin, that Mason discovered Mrs. Kingsley as he crossed up from the store.

The waves broke in a continuous swash under the planking, casting at intervals a piece of wreckage or rope of seaweed on the shore. The collection of drift there was wet from the ebbing tide. Far out, beyond the shadow of the Head, a pink flush still rested on the water, and the *Phantom*, moving into this glow with all her white sails set, heeled gently, a golden craft on a painted sea. And it was in that direction, towards the receding yacht, Louise's face was turned. She had stopped and the child, steadying himself with his hand on her skirt, stood dropping pebbles slowly between the rails.

Mason slackened his pace, setting his wooden peg lightly. It was difficult to approach any woman, but this one, young, pretty and with her back turned— He halted, waiting, with a forlorn hope that she would look around. But she did not. He coughed softly and pulled off his cap. Still she stood with her eyes towards the *Phantom*. He put on his cap and removed his pipe from his mouth, regarding her in mild helplessness. The small, proud head, the high, soft knot of dark hair, the graceful, slender figure in its trim gown, the shapely hand that rested on the railing; he noted all with growing awe. Then his clutch tightened on the letters

and he cleared his throat with a gentle thump of the wooden peg.

She turned, startled, and looked at him. Her eyes were full of tears.

He thrust the letters into her hand in speechless haste and fled.

"Mason," she said, "oh, Mason." But he failed to hear. She did not repeat the call; she waited, listening to the thump, thump, of the receding peg, then her glance fell to the articles he had given her. One of the letters was pencilled and unstamped. She read it first.

"DEAR LOUISE:—

"I am sorry, but business kept me in town again last night, and I am on my way now to Tacoma. I have to hunt up a boom near there, and am taking a little crowd along for company. We will look in on the Yacht Club's dance and I wish you were coming. You really ought to find some sort of a nursemaid. I would stop off half an hour to see you, but must make the most of this wind. Will be back tomorrow evening.

"Yours, "PHIL."

The hand holding the note trembled a little, and she lifted her clouding eyes again to the *Phantom*. "It is of no use," she said slowly, "I might as well be any piece of drift thrown here out of the tide. But—I had to try it. It was the only way."

She stood for a long time watching the yacht. It moved a lessening shape on the fading sea, and swung at last behind a point into the long southward sweep of the Sound. Then she was conscious that the child had left her. He was toddling to the ruin. She ran to overtake him. "Silas," she called. "No, Silas, no." But her voice and her rapid steps only hurried him laughing and crowing through the open bar-room door.

The broad floor of fine planking was still firm and smooth except about the place where the pool table had stood, and in front of the bar. The baby ran to hide there, peeping out at his mother with little exultant bursts of delight.

But this old bar, the last remaining bit of furniture in the place, guarded the sagging door of a small ell evidently once used as a tap-room. It stopped at the first story, and the flooring, made of rougher, wider lumber than that in the main building, was laid in short patched strips. It was rotting about the rusty nailheads; sometimes there were breaks. All this was lighted dimly by one small

window, high up in the unfinished wall and curtained by the bluff, and she saw a dozen pitfalls in the ruin, yawning for her baby's feet. She drew the door shut, but it was without a lock and dragged back a foot or more.

The great rear door of the bar-room also stood open; it was loose on its hinges and grounded on the floor. The threshold dipped to a balcony, dismembered of railing and stairs. She caught the child up in her arms and hurried out through the front entrance back along the walk.

It was twilight when she entered her gate. A first star glimmered over the mills, and on the water front across the harbor Seattle's lamps shone whitely. Close at hand the burning slabpile at the end of the waste-chute took on a redder glow, sending long searching tongues of flame into the gloom of the bluff. She went in and lighted a swinging lamp. Its crimson shade sent a pleasing warmth through the room, which possessed the attractive element that follows the touch of a refined and orderly woman. There were no housemaids in that milling camp; no other women. The few men who had wives made their homes over in the town, where they spent the week-end. Once during the day Mason came in to make things "ship-shape," but he took the hour when she was at the cook-house, where the meals for the Captain's family, which included Forrest, were served in a small private dining-room off the main hall.

The night was cool and she lighted the fire in the grate and seated herself in a low wicker chair to read her remaining letter. It was from her sister, briefer than usual, for she expected to follow it within the week to go that promised cruise among the islands.

"... The country is being settled very fast," she wrote. "Mill Thornton is clearing on his new homestead for a cabin, and Mr. Stratton has built a charming little lodge of cedar shakes thatched with bark, on his timber claim up the headwaters. It is tucked away in a clump of fine old trees, and the first time I saw him there, leaning in the doorway, with one of Laramie's dogs fawning over him, and bargaining with the trapper over a beaver pelt at his feet, I couldn't help calling, 'Good morning, Robin Hood.' It was so pleasant to find the place unspoiled, for most of the settlers set up their homes in a great burn, with not even an alder saved; not a flower or blade of grass left to ease the eyes."

But, though she had so much to tell about these matters, of her own homestead there was not a word. Louise folded the letter, puzzled, and laid it aside. She sat for an interval looking absently into the fire. "I don't understand," she said at last. "I don't understand why she is staying up there in the wilderness. She has promised to marry Uncle Silas, and yet she has let him go to Washington without her. She is willing to have the whole continent between them; and when a woman loves, as she should love the man she is going to marry, she is ready to shape her plans and interests to his. She wants to give him her companionship,

to be at hand to help him the first moment he may need her. But Alice seems happy. I wonder what her reason is."

She had learned in this solitude to think aloud, gathering comradeship from the sounds of her voice, and young Silas, growing tired of his playthings, came over to her knee. He looked up into her face gravely, trying to fathom her meaning. She laughed softly and lifted him to her lap. He was a lovely child; a little copy of Philip Kingsley in form and gesture; he had the same close-curling blond hair. He returned his mother's caress warmly, putting his stout arm about her neck and kissing her mouth, her cheek, again and again. Presently she undressed him, but she deferred the bed-going, enticing him, with surprise and frolic, to stay awake. She dreaded the silence that was to follow; the interminable loneliness of the slow night. But at last he went to sleep in her arms.

When she had tucked him away in his bed in an inner room and returned, she moved about restlessly, giving housewifely touches to things already arranged. "After all, it is the business," she said. "It must be—nearly always—the business. I am too exacting. I expect too much."

She reached the window and lifted her hand to draw the blind. But she started and dropped her arm, letting the shade spring back to the roller. Someone stood on the walk without. His long figure rose in the square of light which, blocked on the piazza, included the breadth of fence where he leaned. His dark, repulsive face was raised to her, and he seemed to fix her with his small, snakelike eyes. The next instant he dropped his goblin shape and shrank writhing away into the gloom.

She shivered and her fingers trembled when she reached again for the cord and drew the blind. She went into the hall and pushed the heavy bolt above the lock on the front door. When she had gone through the house and secured every door and window, she came back, still shivering, to the fire. "It is nothing," she told herself, and put her hand on the mantel, reassuring herself as a woman must when denied human support, "it was nothing. The man stopped a moment in passing, attracted by the light. I must have some—courage. But his face—was terrible."

Presently she went over to the piano and began to sound the keys; she struck loud, clarion chords, martialling forces to put down her fears. Her shaking fingers grew surer; she commenced to shape a bit of Wagner, and then a fragment of Schubert. That was the music she loved. She opened a folio of sonatas. She played with ease and skill and her frame swayed with a slight, rhythmic motion. Her soul was in her touch and in her eyes, grown large and misty. It was then her face was beautiful.

At last she turned a page and a loose sheet fluttered out. It was that sea song of Barry Cornwall's, that had been a favorite quartette in the old days aboard the

Phantom. She began to play it, and presently her voice flooded the night.

"For the white squall rides on the surging wave,
And the bark is 'gulfed in an ocean's grave,
In an ocean's grave; in an ocean's grave."

Forrest, coming that way from his customary rounds of the mills, heard it, and the passion, the despair of it, held him at the gate. But he dropped his hand from the latch at the end and turned away. "There is nothing I can do for her," he told himself. "She is past feeling the solitude now. She is past being afraid."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRESSURE OF THE THUMB-SCREW

The following night Forrest was seated near the open fire in his room off the store. His journal and ledger were on the table before him, and opposite Kingsley tilted his chair comfortably, and clasping his hands at the back of his head, lifted his glance to the lamp-lighted ceiling. He was smoking and looked a trifle bored.

"It amounts to this," said Forrest; "lumber has dropped to eight dollars a thousand and we've simply got to cut down expenses." He paused with his hands on the arms of his chair, his body slightly inclined forward, and looked at Philip with clear, stern eyes. "I am running the lightest possible force; I have dispensed with a bookkeeper and am doing his work nights. But here are still unpaid bills for machinery, saw-logs and towing; some weeks it even comes to a question of the wages of the men. I could, though, have met these demands better if I hadn't been so handicapped. For instance, in the matter of the *Corona*. I made out the bills of lading; I relied on the funds at a certain time and gave promises of payment. And then found out you had received the checks and had them cashed, and put most of the money to personal use. It not only places me in a difficult position but weakens the credit, the standing of the mills."

"I suppose so," said Kingsley, knocking the ashes carefully from his cigar. "I suppose so; I hadn't looked at it in that way. But the *Enterprise* will be here in a few days and her shipment ought to make things straight."

"Temporarily, yes. But see here, why can't you limit yourself to a salary?"

Say two hundred a month? If you could do this, and devote a definite time to work, I should know what to depend on, and we could pull through the year without calling on the Judge."

"Two hundred a month?" repeated Philip, and laughed.

"Yes. You know the Judge advised a regular salary."

"You seem to forget I have practically a half interest in this property."

"On the other hand, it is that I remember," answered Forrest dryly. "If the mills should go under it would bar me, of course, from another position of trust; but for you it would mean financial ruin."

Kingsley smoked for a brief interval in silence. Then he said, "I don't see the necessity of all this. There's Stratton, now, talks differently. He thinks I have a sure thing; that another year or two will see the opening of a great lumber traffic with the Orient. He calls Puget Sound the Gateway of the Pacific. I wish you could hear him."

"I have heard him," answered Forrest, again dryly. "But with me, his opinion doesn't count for much. To hold my faith a man has got to do the things he talks about. And Stratton isn't a man who works. In short, it's a problem where he gets his money. My friend Bates, of the Customs Service, has been in Victoria a good deal; he knows something about Stratton's family. His father, before he died, made a fortune in the fur trade, but his mother, who lived a rather smart life over there, spent it faster. Stratton is like her."

"He has taken up his father's business," said Kingsley warmly. "He is building a fine coasting schooner, now, to carry on an extensive trade, northward, with the Indians."

Forrest shook his head. "That's just it. A man dabbling spasmodically in furs, and living extravagantly most of the time about town, is hardly expected to have capital to invest in a fine steam-schooner."

Philip watched a puff of smoke rise and expand in blue haze above him. "I know what you're driving at," he said. "You're referring to his possible connection with a smuggling ring. Stratton told me all about it. There's nothing in it. Bates happens to have a grudge against him."

"Bates is hardly the man to satisfy a personal grudge in that way. He merely answered a question or two I asked him." Forrest paused and went on in a slightly deepened tone. "It seems to me incredible that you should let a fellow like Stratton manage you."

"Manage?" The Captain's chair came down abruptly on its front legs. "See here, even you can't say that, Paul. Stratton is my friend; I'm fond of him, but I do as I damn please."

Forrest was silent.

Kingsley rose to his feet and threw his cigar in the fire. "It's time I went up

to the house," he said. "The crowd will be ready to go on to town, soon, and I've hardly seen Louise."

Forrest pushed back his chair and rose. "You agree, then, to the two hundred," he said quietly.

"Oh, come, you are worse than thumb-screws." He laughed a short, constrained laugh and looked at his watch.

"The Judge, you remember, takes it for granted."

"Oh, well,"—he ran his fingers swiftly through his close-cropped hair, and repeated the movement,— "I don't see how I can do it—but—I suppose so for awhile—yes."

He picked up his cap and started out through the store. Forrest followed him to the outer door. But there Philip stopped. "Come up to the house with me," he said, "and bring your violin. I've been telling them about you."

He stood jingling his keys in his pockets, and whistling in snatches, much like a schoolboy who tries to forget, yet remembers the unpleasant ending of a scrape, while Forrest went back to his room for the instrument.

It was a moonless night, but in the direction of the mills the burning slabpile brought out the lines of the bluff. It lighted the upper wharf and the great piles of finished or rough lumber. The whitewashed walls of the cabins reflected the glare. Everywhere, in the open doorways, seated on timbers or blocks in the vicinity of the fire, wherever there was protection from the north wind, or the flames threw heat, groups of workmen loitered. Suddenly Kingsley said, "I would like to see the whole thing dumped into that slabfire."

Forrest put his hand on Philip's shoulder. Both stopped and the light shone on the manager's face. The laugh lurked in his eyes, and the lines about his mouth softened. "And you'd like to see me at the bottom of the heap."

"I'm sick of these mills," said Philip petulantly. "I hate the place."

"And me. Come, say so."

"Well, then, yes, and you, since you are determined to put me through." He threw off Forrest's hand, and seeing the old watchman approaching on the branch walk, went a step to meet him. "I want you to go over to the cookhouse, Mason," he said, "and tell Sing to bring a little supper up. Take him down to the *Phantom* and get a dozen of champagne from the port cabin locker. Here's the key."

He rejoined Forrest and they finished the distance in silence. But when they entered the parlor, where Kingsley's friends awaited him, his manner changed. "You must blame Paul for keeping me," he said lightly; "he was determined to talk. When he has a point to gain he has the grip of a vise; never lets go. You've simply got to yield through sheer weariness."

Every one laughed, and he crossed the room to seat himself beside the girl

with a small blond head, who had accompanied him the previous day with a banjo. But his glance moved again and again to his wife. For the first time it nettled him to see another man interested in her. And Stratton was interested; Stratton, who was undeniably hard to please. It is the way of some men to appraise their wives according to the value placed on them by other men, and Kingsley began to make an inventory of her points; that was a nice flush in her cheeks, and he had nearly forgotten about that lighting of her dark eyes. And, too, that was a pretty way she wore her hair. Then he remembered how splendid it was unbound, for it rippled to her knees, and was soft as a black velvet cloak. And when she sang, presently, to the accompaniment of Forrest's violin, the Captain told himself she had never been in better voice. He resolved to be at the mills oftener; on the whole, if he had not just been forced into that miserable limit of two hundred dollars, he would like to set up an establishment over in town.

When she went from the room to consult Sing about that little supper, Philip followed her. She believed he had come to look in at little Silas, and she quietly threw open the inner door. The light streamed into the dark interior, showing the small white bed, the charming face of the sleeping child. There was a rosy glow on the round cheek, and one stout, dimpled arm, bared to the elbow, encircled his curly head.

Kingsley stood watching him a silent moment, then he put his arm around his wife and said softly, "He's all right; yes, he's fine. But he's been growing since I saw him; I hadn't thought it was so long. I must get home oftener. Do you know you were in great voice to-night; I never heard you sing so well."

"Yes?" she answered, smiling, "I am glad you think so. I sang for you."

"And this color in your cheeks; is it for me, too?"

"You know that I am glad to have you home."

He bent and kissed her. Her head rested an instant on his breast; he brushed his cheek against her hair. "You miss me, then, when I'm away?"

"Yes." She lifted her face. An intensity of expression that he had seen rarely, and always disliked, came over it; the force in her low voice jarred. Why couldn't she stay pleasant, as she had been there in the crowd. "I would do anything to keep you at home, Philip. Anything, if you would spend your evenings with me; your nights, as you used to."

His arm fell. "I thought you understood the outside business would keep me away," he said coolly. "I explained it at the first when you wanted to live here at the mills."

She moved a step away. Her heart cried, "It is not the business," but she said aloud, turning to him again with a smile, "A woman doesn't often reason; she only feels."

"That's the trouble; you feel too much; more than most women. When you

are not serious, though, you are a very attractive woman."

She stood quite still, with her slender fingers locked, and that intensity growing in her eyes. "Do you know, Philip, sometimes I wonder how you ever could have cared for me; for the best that is in me is what you have overlooked. I should think,"—she paused and forced again that brave little smile,—"I should think that you might be—happier, if you had married a different kind—of woman."

At this he laughed. So she was a little jealous, that explained things, and of that flyaway, there in the other room. "There's the woman one marries," he answered lightly, "and the woman with whom one has a good time; they are seldom alike."

She was silent. There is nothing so cuts a proud and refined woman as the enforced knowledge of her husband's coarser grain; but her disappointment finds no expression; she covers her shame.

"But I don't blame you," he went on, still lightly, "I don't blame you; I don't deny you've had cause. I'm coming home oftener, after this, though; or, perhaps, before long, I can arrange to take a house in town. You would like that?"

"Yes. The loneliness is harder than I believed it could be; it wears on me. And I can't grow accustomed to the mill people. Last evening I saw a strange face at the window. It haunts me. I woke up in the night time, seeing it. It was—terrible. I have never been a brave woman, Philip. I am—afraid."

Her whole body trembled, overcome by the recollection of that face. But Kingsley laughed again. "Well, I don't wonder. For sheer physical ugliness, this crew Forrest has picked up might, almost to a man, dispute the palm. But Alice is coming; she'll show you pluck; she has it to spare. And we'll have that cruise through the islands. We'll make it a small family affair and take along little Si. Meantime Paul must see that the night watchman gives the house special attention, and I'll ask him to come in oftener with his violin."

CHAPTER XIV

THE SALMON-TROLLERS

"O-h, o-h, Mason, I hate to, but I've got to let you land him. He's a *wh-a-le*." She spoke softly; her eyes shone. She put the line in the old sailor's hands. "Now, now, Mason; oh, I don't mind a little water; that's all—right."

But it was a deluge, for the great salmon floundered first against her, almost

in her lap, and then into the bottom of the skiff, at her feet. Mason bent to remove the hook, and Louise, in the bow, held little Silas over to see the big fish. "Mighty purty play; weighs all o' twenty pund; bet you a bottle."

"I believe it's a Chinook," said Alice.

The sailor's homely face glowed. He looked back to be sure the child's view was unobstructed. "Aye, sir, it's a Chinook, an' big's they make 'em. Bet you a bottle."

But the wager passed again unchallenged, and having met Louise's amused glance, Mason took up his oars abashed. Nothing but the excitement of landing that fish could have so loosened his tongue. He pulled a good stroke that brought them quickly to the shore. The wind came in long puffs from the north and the sea broke on the beach in a deliberate swell. The water was a cold blue, shading to brown in the shallows, for it was ebb-tide. They drew up to the float between the wharves and Mason steadied the boat while Alice lifted the baby out and, giving him to his mother, stopped to take a great bunch of flowering rhododendrons from high in the bow. Then he raised the salmon by the gills and stumped proudly ahead up the walk.

Alice looked at her sister and smiled. "There's a watch-dog you can trust," she said. "Yes, I mean it. He has a big, warm heart underneath, and little Si knows it, already."

"I think you are right," admitted Louise, "but it is strange it should have taken you hardly twenty-four hours to find it, while I have been months getting within speaking distance."

"I suppose," said Alice thoughtfully, "it's a way I have of wanting to utilize the material at hand. There's something, too, in meeting a man on his own ground. When you want to reach a sailor," and she laughed softly, "take a boat. Oh, Mason," she called, for he had made the turn up the branch walk to the house, "wait. Come around and weigh the salmon at the store."

She led the way, and the gloomy building seemed to gather a sudden radiance when she entered the door. Her face reflected a soft illumination from the showy pink flowers heaped in her arm. Forrest stepped down from his stool at the desk, and came outside the railing to meet her. Then, "What's that, Mason?" he asked. "You don't mean to tell me she really did catch a fish."

"Aye, sir,"—Mason stopped to put the salmon on the scales,— "twenty-two pund."

"That's so," said Forrest incredulously, "twenty-two and a quarter; well, for a Chinook that's a prize."

But the smile in her face died. Looking across the rhododendrons at him, it came over her again, as it had when she met him on her arrival the previous day, that he was losing his boyish color; that he was harassed and worn. "Don't

you ever go fishing, Paul? Or cruising, or anywhere?"

He shook his head, smiling a little. "Hardly, this year. It's impossible to get away."

Little Silas, tugging at his mother's hand, drew her to the door. But Alice lingered. "Can't Phil Kingsley manage these mills yet, for even one day?"

He glanced in warning at Louise. "It takes us both," he answered quietly. "This milling business is pretty big; it reaches out; and he tends to the other end. But I'm all right. I like to work; I'm used to it. And I need it, lots of it, to keep me level-headed."

"You are that, but shall I tell you what I think, Paul Forrest? I think it's making you old, fast; or else, you are not well."

"Oh, yes, I am. But, I was up late last night; I was bothered some about a trial balance; that's all. I'm going to take this evening off. I want to try that accompaniment, if you will sing that new serenade for me."

He stood watching them from the entrance, Mason following with the salmon, while they crossed up the dock, then he went back to his desk. She had reached over the railing, in passing, to lay on his ledger a branch of rhododendron. He picked it up, smiling a little, and looked at it. No one else was in the store at the moment, and he touched the petals gently; his hand moved over the stiff, spiky leaves. "So," he told himself, "So, she has left me a bit of the woods. And she is like this plant; straight and self-reliant and independent like the stem; and with this same nice color of the blossom in her cheek." He laid the cool pink cluster against his own face; he pressed it with his lips. Then, suddenly, his whole frame began to tremble; his shoulders heaved. "I love her; I love—her," and he crushed the flower between his palms and threw it down. "My God, how can I help loving her?"

Two hours later, when Forrest had finished his rounds of the mills, he found her with Mrs. Kingsley at the burning slabpile. Mason, with his wooden peg planted firmly in the sawdust as a brace, steadied the baby on an inverted keg, and whirled chips into the fire for his amusement. The strong light brought out the indigo anchor tattooed on the sailor's big, rough hand. The young mother watched his maneuvers. She leaned with her elbow on a projecting shelf of lumber, and her head and throat were wrapped, Madonna-wise, in a black lace scarf. Alice was seated near her on a great fir block. The flames illumined her uncovered ruddy hair. She was interested in the efforts of a workman who, a little apart, but availing himself of the firelight, was mending a pair of jeans. Another patched a shoe, and farther still, a trio drew up an empty box, and converting it into a table, started a spirited game of poker. She commenced to hum a bit of the gypsy chorus from the Bohemian Girl; and as Forrest approached she looked up smiling, and took up the words. He seated himself by her. Louise's contralto

caught the measure, and presently the harmony was rounded by his fine baritone. They sang on through all the familiar parts; the arias, duets, choruses; and once more the romance and mystery of the place and night gave setting to this man and spoke for him. The girl looked up absently to the trees on the bluff. High up a fallen hemlock, caught on a stony spur, reared its gnarled roots from the gloom. Had they not rested today on the brink of the canyon? Had they not threaded the windfall? And this sound of running water, was it not the near thunder of the Des Chutes?

At last the child grew tired and his mother took him away to bed. Forrest went down to the store for his violin, and Alice walked that way with him. "I want to speak to you about Louise," she said. "She tells me nothing, she is so proud, but something troubles her. You have noticed it?"

"Yes," he answered, "yes, I have noticed it; but I know she is a very sensitive woman. She would face any hardship from a sense of duty; it amounts to martyrdom. She exacts, also, considerable from others."

"Oh, I understand all that. Of course she came here to the mills because she thought she owed it to Philip. But he is seldom here. Is it really the business keeps him away?"

"Yes, it's business, sometimes, and—sometimes—well, if you must know, it's a gay crowd and a pleasant evening over in town."

"I was confident of it." She paused, ruffling her brows, then she added earnestly, "But you don't know what a security it is to me, Paul, to feel that you are here, and will take care of her."

He shook his head. "I will do what I can always, of course, but it's less than you think."

"It's more than you think. It's meeting the small emergencies of every day; sometimes through Mason or Sing; sometimes personally, in your quiet way. And it's tiding her through the slow evenings when you can; she loves your violin, and the practice will be a help to you both."

"All right," he answered, smiling, "I promise that much."

They had reached the store and she waited on the edge of the dock while he went in for his instrument. When he came back they lingered, listening to the swash and gurgle of the tide among the piers. "You always liked this," he said presently; "you must often miss the sea."

"Yes," she answered, "you don't know how I've missed it. Sometimes, I've wanted it beyond anything." She looked at him. In the semi-darkness of the not yet risen moon, his face seemed to gather paleness. It touched her as its strength never had. The maternal down in the depths of her stirred. "And of course," she added gently, "you know, Paul, I couldn't think of the Sound, or indeed of any of the old life here, and leave out you."

It was not the words alone, nor the kind, sweet tone, nor yet her dear physical nearness, but rather that the silence which followed was eloquent with unspoken thought. It was as though he heard her spirit cry suddenly, "I can never leave out you."

"You do know it," he said. "You do know it." And then it broke from him. "What made you promise to marry Judge Kingsley? What made you, when you knew how much I thought of you?"

She did not answer, but she turned and walked up the dock towards the house. After a moment he overtook her. "Don't hurry so," he said. "Are you afraid of me? I won't hurt you."

"Hurt me? You? Oh, I wish you would." But she continued to hurry and he suited his steps to hers. They reached the gate. "Wait, just a moment," he said. "You are going away tomorrow. I know I shouldn't have said—what I did; it was worse than unfair to the Judge; but I want to know this—why did you put off that marriage? Why didn't you go to Washington with him, as he hoped? As I hoped, for there, at least you would have been—safe!"

"Please don't worry about me, Paul," she answered, and looked past him, steadily, holding her chin high, "I can take care of myself. You ought to know that. I'm very strong-minded; it grows on me. I like to do things; be the head. And I love the settlement; I want to finish my work. Sometimes—sometimes, when I think of it, I'm afraid of Washington. I shall find it too crowded; I'm so used to lots of room." She paused, but silence was harder than speech and she went on quickly, "Not one man in a thousand would understand me, but Uncle Silas—dear Silas—" she dashed her hand across her eyes and turning, ran up the steps to the door—"knows how to manage me. He—" she groped for the knob—"He is ready to—wait."

CHAPTER XV

THE MAN IN THE TIDE-RIP

On Orcas, one of the larger islands of the Archipelago de Haro, there is an eminence of several thousand feet. The eastern side rises in abrupt benches from the sea, but westward it breaks less precipitously to a narrow, bluff-locked harbor. Stratton objected to this anchorage; it was a place of strong currents and shallows. But Kingsley laughed. He knew Orcas like a book. He had been up to

that summit and the view was worth stopping over a day for. There was a ranch on the shore of a lake high up in the timber where the night could be passed comfortably, and a couple of horses, the only ones on the island, could be secured there for the trail. The party could divide, Alice going up with Stratton that afternoon,—it was a matter of a few hours,—while he and Louise would ride up early the following morning.

In the end Philip had his way, and Stratton, who had exerted himself, hitherto, to make the cruise one of unalloyed pleasure, lapsed into moody silence. He found himself, late in the afternoon, riding with Alice, up a sharp pitch of the mountain. Below them dipped a cross-cut of trail, and overhead another section of the switchback hung like a tilting shelf under a knobby shoulder that concealed the true dome. They gained the spur and halted, breathing the horses on a breadth of level. The girl turned a little in her saddle to look down. There was the inlet where the *Phantom*, like a toy ship, rode at anchor; and there was the lake, a big, opal-filled bowl, with the farmhouse, where they had left Philip with Louise and the child, balanced like a tiny box on its rim. Northward islands on islands rose purple or amethyst out of the sea; southward and westward the Olympic Mountains stretched a gleaming barricade, and the Straits of Juan de Fuca divided like the fingers of a great reaching hand.

"I love it; oh, you don't know how I love it." Her glance returned to Stratton and she started; the glow in her face died. "But you—I see it doesn't compensate you for the rough trail and this excuse of a mount. When you ride you want Sir Donald."

"No, it is not that." He smiled briefly, with effort, and pulled his shoulders straight. "I happened to remember a man—I once knew. He was wrecked off this island; there on the north shore. It was another such day as this, clear and shining, but his sloop was caught in a tide-rip. You can see it down there; that creeping, white-lipped streak. The rocks under it grip like teeth." He paused and the hand directing her attention fell. He lifted his hat and wiped a sudden moisture from his face. "It all happened in a moment," he added, "and the boat was broken into kindling."

"But he, your friend,"—she leaned towards him all suspense, sympathy, charm,—"he was saved?"

"Yes, he was saved. But it is a long story. Wait until we reach the summit; I can tell you better up there."

He turned his horse, falling behind her as they resumed the climb. Presently they entered a cool belt of timber. The air was freighted with the balsam of fir and pine, and she looked about her, drawing full breaths; a soft delight rose in her eyes. "Isn't it the best perfume on earth?" she asked. "At Nisqually it just lacks the tang of the sea. And there are the Alaska cedars they spoke of at the

farm. The stream should run through them."

The horses quickened their pace and stopped where the rill widened into a pool. They dropped eager muzzles and began to take long, still draughts. She freed her foot from the stirrup and slipped lightly down. "We must fill the flask," she said, "where the spring bubbles through the rock."

Stratton tied the horses and followed her up the bank. She reached the place and stooped to fill her saddle-cup. "Oh," she said, pausing between draughts. "It's the kind of water to dream of hot summer nights; the kind you think of on dusty roads and want desperately."

She waited while he drank, watching him expectantly. "Yes," he admitted, "it is a spring to remember in a desert."

He stooped to fill the flask, but he did it clumsily, without his usual care, and drenched his sleeve. The pleasure in her face faded; she continued to watch him, but with ruffled brows. "Oh," she said at last, "I wouldn't have believed you could be so unrelenting; but you are determined to remind me, every step of the way, that you didn't want to stop at Orcas Island. You're the most unsatisfactory man, on a trip, I ever knew. Still, you were different last year, on the Paradise trail."

"Was I? Well, you see, I keep thinking of that man—in the tide-rip; he stopped here at this stream, to rest."

"The man who was wrecked? Did he come up here?"

"Yes, he thought that he was on the mainland. He tried to reach the settlement this way. But there isn't time to tell the story here."

He turned and led the way quickly back to the horses, and they mounted and rode on through the wood. At the foot of the final pitch they left the horses and pushed up over shelving rock to the bald summit. The sun was low in the west and the light touched the houses of a little seaport, eastward on the mainland; and above the craggy heights that overtopped the town a snow mountain caught the glory. Far southward the crown of Rainier seemed to rise like an opal island straight out of the shining sea.

Suddenly Stratton laid his hand on her arm. "Wait," he said, "this is the end. The summit breaks there, a sheer drop of a thousand feet, with a lake below.

"You know," she said. "You've been here before?"

"It is plain enough. Look down."

She looked; but she was obliged to creep another step and drop to her knees before she saw the lake, far, far below, tucked like a great sapphire in a high pocket of the mountain. "Oh," she said, "it seems fathoms deep; and there isn't a lasting snowfield on this mountain. What feeds it?"

He helped her back from the precipice and to her feet. "It is probably one of the Cascades' reservoirs," he answered; "supplied by some subterranean stream

under the bed of the Straits."

She walked back a few rods and seated herself on a bench of rock. Her glance moved from the great white dome, on along the craggy peaks of the Cascades, northward. "Of course," she said presently, "that dim line of shore off there is the Vancouver coast. Think, Mr. Stratton, how near we came to losing all these lovely islands. While Congress was calling them 'a number of barren rocks, not worth the hour of discussion,' Sir Douglas was grazing great flocks of sheep on the fertile slopes of San Juan,—that must be it, that long, even shore between us and the end of Vancouver,—and investing its best harbor with British soldiers. Doesn't it rouse your blood, even now? Can't you almost hear that old pioneer slogan, 'Fifty-four, forty or fight?'"

Stratton laughed. "I am afraid not. You see I have lived in Victoria, and I have heard a good deal more about that old explorer Vancouver. You know he claimed all of this territory in the king's name. He called it New Georgia by right of discovery. And I have known some pretty fine people across the border, Miss Hunter. In fact they have treated me better than some I have known on this side. But there is hope; with you to teach me I may turn out a fairly good American patriot—yet."

She shook her head, looking him over gravely, and he laughed again, and seated himself near her on the ledge. "Now, I am ready for that story," she said.

He looked off to that far line of the British coast. "I am almost sorry I promised to tell it," he answered; "still, you may hear it sometime, through others, and understand it less. I, well, I think a good deal of him; I want you to see it from his side. He was just a boy, Miss Hunter; a dare-devil sort of boy, fond of adventure and proud of his little boat. He never had been taught to regard the Government patriotically, as you do, and the men who tempted him were upright, irreproachable men,"—his lip curled,——"the ones of whom the Captain told you. One of them had been a close friend of this boy's father, and held a Government position of trust; the other, in whose office the boy was reading law, was a prominent attorney known all over the Northwest. They both knew how to appeal. His mother lived in Victoria at the time; he had made several trips across to see her in his new sloop; and they told him, laughing, he could go unsuspected anywhere, he looked so honest."

Stratton paused and his listener turned her face to him, waiting. "I understand," she said at last, and set her lips, "it was a case of smuggling. There was—a ring. And of course it was opium. Uncle Silas says it usually is opium; the duty is so great, and there is such an immense profit on a smuggled lot."

"Yes, it was opium." He turned his face a little more from her, watching still that far amethyst coast. "And there was a ring. He was to have a third interest in the profit to start a business he liked better than the law. But the revenue officers

saw the chest carried to his sloop. They followed. There was a splendid breeze at first, and he led them a chase, dodging between these islands, cross-cutting from channel to channel. But the wind fell at sunset, or rather shifted, and he found himself in unfamiliar water. Still he slipped the cutter off this island and made a landing. He concealed the stuff, intending to return for it when the pursuit was over. But he was slow in finding a safe hiding-place and the tide changed; and when the sloop swung out on her first tack she was caught in that tide-rip."

Stratton paused. He passed his hand across his eyes, but Alice was silent. She looked off at the white mountain, and waited, holding her chin high and creasing her brows. Clearly the man in the tide-rip had lost her sympathy. Her attitude said, "It was what he deserved."

"He was thrown ashore," Stratton continued, "with wreckage, and he spent the night miserably, crawling under cover with his cache. At daybreak he found this trail; he believed he was on the mainland and that this was the way to that town over there, where he had arranged to meet his accomplices. He decided to carry the chest with him to the edge of the settlement. But the sun beat down mercilessly on that switchback, and he had eaten nothing since the wreck of his sloop. The chest gathered weight with every step. He travelled slower and slower, at one moment determined to abandon it, and the next reminding himself that it must pay for the loss of his boat. At last, from that high shoulder where we stopped to-day, he saw the revenue cutter creeping up the cove. That spurred him on to the stream. There, tired out, indifferent, he threw himself down to ease his aching muscles and take breath. He fell asleep. When he wakened it was late; the sun was almost gone. He rose and took the chest and hurried on to this final pitch. But looking back, he saw the Customs men below, finishing the wood. He found nowhere to hide the stuff; he dared not leave it, and, with increasing panic, he reached this summit, and ran on down, to find himself cut off by that cliff."

Stratton's even voice caught and broke. His forehead was wet with big, clinging drops, as though he himself had just made that great physical effort. His glance moved from the precipice, and, meeting the girl's clear, direct look, a sudden quiver swept his face. "And?" she said.

"He saw no way around," Stratton resumed quietly, "and in his extremity, he sent the chest over the brink. Then he came back to this bench and waited for the officers. They recognized him; one, the captain of the cutter, had known his father well, for years. 'There was a man above us on the trail,' he said; 'we hardly could have passed him, but he may have passed you. He carried a small chest or box.'

"And the boy looked him straight in the face and smiled. 'I guess you've missed your trail, captain,' he answered. 'You see this path ends here; be careful, it's a frightful drop. It looks like an old Indian trail; there at your feet are the ashes

of signal fires. But the road you want branches below the switchback. Your man probably doubled back through the timber and struck across to the south shore.' And then he added frankly enough, 'I, myself, came up here for a sight of my sloop. She was stolen, and an Indian I met on the mainland had seen such a boat near this island. He put me over in his canoe.'

"Oh," said Alice, "you call him a boy, yet he could stand and say all that like any hardened criminal."

"No," Stratton flushed hotly, and for an instant the steel flashed in his eyes, "even you should not call him that. He had been told, and shown, that some of the best men on the border took advantage of the Government; that the United States was able to stand it. You should remember, too, it was his first—offence."

She gave him a straight, uncompromising look. "Was the chest found?" she asked.

"No. There was no trace of it below the cliff; he looked, afterwards, and the lake is very deep, as you thought. There was no proof against him; those inspectors never for a moment doubted him. The man, whom they had seen boarding the sloop with the chest at Victoria, was a desperate character, under suspicion before; they believed he had stolen the boat, and that he had come upon the Indian waiting for his passenger, and had bribed him to take him off the island instead. And the boy went with them down the switchback, and identified the wreckage on the north shore. And they took him aboard the cutter and landed him at home, in Seattle, the next day."

"I understand," she said slowly, "it all rested with him. It would have been a triumph, his salvation, if he had confessed."

"I knew it." Stratton's face hardened. "I knew it. You sit here like young Justice, inexorable; you who never were tempted; never made a mistake; and nothing but the fundamental right will do. But think how that confession would have hampered him. A story like that clings. His whole future hinged on that day. And he had the confidence of those prominent men; the truth must have involved them. After all," he added, "the opium was lost. He gained nothing, and he had his punishment in the wreck of his sloop."

"Yes," she admitted, "he was punished in a way, but—"

"Listen," he pleaded. "He was reared very differently from you. His father was a man of honor, true, but he had business interests that kept him long intervals from home. And his mother, I think, hardly gave him much thought when he was a child. She was a very beautiful woman with luxurious tastes. There was most always a gay company around her, and it could never have greatly concerned her how her husband's money was made, so that she had it to spend. I will not say much about her,—she is gone, now, out of his life,—but the boy was taught early not to trouble her, and to look out for himself. I believe the only

lessons she ever gave him were in quick, flippant retort, and to cover his hurts. He learned early, too, that the surest way to please her was to amuse her friends. Once, when he came into a room, unexpectedly, and conversation dropped, she looked at him, smiling, and said, 'Boy, what is disgrace?' And he answered directly, 'Disgrace, mother, is being caught.'

"And she?" said Alice, after a moment.

"She? Why, she laughed, I think, with the others, and tapped him on the shoulder with her fan; or perhaps that time she clapped her adorable hands." He rose to his feet and stood looking off to that dim British coast. A great weariness settled over his face. "You see, in the end, it amounted to this; he thought, when he thought at all, that wrong rested only in detection. One must make and leave a good impression, but right motive, sincerity, in his world did not count. Then things changed. He saw life differently, through the eyes of the woman he loves."

Stratton's voice vibrated a little on the word. He turned and looked down at her, and that quiver again swept his face. But she did not see it. Her glance rested thoughtfully on the white peak, eastward, across the channel. That reference to the boy's mother, his training, home, struck the maternal chord, so strong in her, and she saw suddenly, clearly, the other side. The mountain began to flush with a sunset glow; a gentleness, almost tenderness, rose in her face.

"She is not like the women he has always known," Stratton went on. "She walks a higher level. Sometimes, she is so much a saint, he is afraid of her. He dreads her judgment, and yet he dreads more to have a suspicion of the truth reach her, some day, through others. Lately there are rumors afloat touching those men, who made a tool of him, and any time, a chance word from one of them may involve him. What do you think, Miss Hunter? You see she is like you in some ways; she takes your Puritan view of life and has your habit of sifting things. In her place would you think better of him if he told you? Could you, yourself, forgive him if—you loved him?"

She did not answer directly; she was weighing the question. At last her look came back from the mountain; she rose to her feet. "Yes," she said slowly, "Yes, I think that I could forgive him; it was a first offence. Of course it must have been the only time. I should forgive him for the same reason, or much the same reason, I did Mose. But, I could never love such a man, Mr. Stratton. Even if I never knew the truth, I should feel the stain. And I am the kind of woman who builds love on respect. The man I am going to care for, in the way you mean, has lived a clean life. He stands a man among men, sound to the core."

With this she turned and began to go down to her horse. Stratton waited a silent moment, watching her move lightly over the steep and jagged path. "The man she is going to care for," he repeated softly; "she means, of course, the Judge. But she will never make that marriage, never." He started to follow her, then he

stopped and looked off once more, to that far Vancouver coast. "Strange, after these years, the sight of this place should make me go all to pieces. And strange how I bungled into that story. I had to tell her. That insistent something in her had me promising, down there at the switchback. Still, I could have told another woman easily enough, and won her to my side. Why am I always losing my hold when I talk to her? But I shouldn't have come ashore; I should have stayed aboard the yacht. God, how I hate this island."

He hurried on then, for she was already waiting in the saddle. She watched him with a grave kindness as he drew near. "You are still thinking of your friend," she said, "but please don't rely on my opinion. There are sweet and gentle women in the world who live just to forgive. Perhaps she, the one you mentioned, is one of them." She turned her horse into the trail, but glanced back over her shoulder to add, smiling a little, "You've been a good champion; tell him, when the time comes, to let you say a word for him."

"Trust me for that," he answered, and started his own horse; "if—the time comes I will speak for him."

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIERY LANE

Once, during Alice's brief stay at the mills, she had overheard Forrest censure a workman for finishing his pipe inside the restricted limits. This gave her an opportunity, that evening, to lead adroitly to the subject of forest fire. It was a perpetual menace in the settlement, she said; it sprang sometimes from almost nothing; a match dropped in a dry place, or a burning fragment shaken from a pipe; embers left alive by a passing camper; and oftener yet, it began with the ignition of slashed underbrush, when, to clear a bit of open for his cabin or pasture, a settler devastated whole areas of fine trees that could not be reproduced in a century. She wondered if Forrest, who so well understood the dangers as well as the values of timber, had ever devised a scheme, some practical, inexpensive method within the reach of ranchers, for its protection. And he had answered that of course the settlers should make it a local law never to start a "burn" in the dry season. But any man who knew the Washington woods, had learned that one of the surest ways to handle a first blaze was to smother it with shovelled earth. Even in midsummer the ground under the forest litter was damp; it was

made porous by a network of roots and held moisture like a sponge; the trees drew from innumerable small reservoirs. But if he himself owned a section he would take the precaution to cut a broad swathe around the unprotected sides; and, if it was near a considerable water power, for instance those upper falls of the Des Chutes, he would keep in readiness a length of canvas hose, the big kind used for carrying a stream some distance in hydraulic mining, and be able to tap the river at a moment's warning.

She was particularly interested in this scheme, and gathered small details as to the size and make of the hose, and how he would connect it with the stream. He drew a rough plan on a card, showing a point where the river could be tapped with little trouble, by taking advantage of a certain jutting rock, to brace the necessary bit of flume and sluice-gate. "But," he had added, throwing aside the sketch to take his violin, "the chances are some other man will file on that section; he may even hit upon this little mechanism and have it all constructed before I see the headwaters again."

Afterwards Alice found that card, on Louise's table where he had left it, and saved it for future reference. The hose could not be secured in the Puget Sound towns; she could not obtain it in Portland; but finally it was purchased through a house carrying mining supplies in San Francisco.

Mill Thornton, who managed its final transportation, over twenty miles of trail from Yelm Station, was greatly interested in the innovation. She showed him Forrest's drawing, explaining it, and read to him a circular, which was enclosed with the hose and described its use. Then they went down to the falls and located the stone ledge. And in the end she contracted with the young rancher to do the mechanical work, in exchange for enough of the water power to supply a small flume to his claim. This was really another stroke of policy to insure her own trees, and Eben, who came out to "hev er look at ther water works," laughed. "Fur long-headedness," he told Thornton, "yes, an' grit, I 'low I'll stake my next pile on ther schoolmarm; yes, sir, ther schoolmarm, an' ergainst any durn man in this here hull deestricht."

It was Alice's intention to keep the canvas stretched in position during the dry season. Later, if the cleared land should cease to husband moisture, she might utilize it for irrigation. It had been laid for trial across the new meadow, which, cutting a wide swathe through the jungle, reached from the small open that surrounded the cottage to the river; but Myers having brought two Jerseys, which he had pastured several weeks, and turned them into the field, it was necessary, until a track outside could be leveled, to store the hose in the stable.

The meadow fence was built of heavy cedar rails, fixed horizontally and without nails. They needed no fastening but the uprights that held the crossed ends of each section. Parallel with it and forming a lane, ran a pile of dry brush,

accumulated in clearing and ready to burn after the first rainfall. Backward from it and the untouched jungle that bordered the stream, sheltering that nest of a cottage pushing up and up the grassy slope, rose the ranks of the trees, free of undergrowth as a park, and including what Forrest had called "the heart of the red firs."

Time was precious on school mornings, and the teacher, early astir, was leading the black to water. She saw the sun touch the tops of the higher trees as she crossed the open from the stable. She noticed that the light wind drew from the river and was fragrant with balsams, and that it brought, already, a promise of heat. Then suddenly she stopped and inhaled a deeper breath, that was a different pungence. It was, unmistakably the burning resin of boughs. In the moment she waited, trying to locate the fire, Mother Girard with her empty pail, hurried from the meadow. She came to say that one of the Jerseys had been milked, and that the trail of the trespasser was still fresh on the dew. It left the lower end of the field, and, skirting the brush pile, turned up-stream. And it was there, at the farther end of the slashing, that, while she listened, the teacher saw a thin line of smoke.

Mose, working on that track for the hose near the upper end of the meadow fence, dropped his spade and ran. He tried to beat out the breaking flames, but others were eating under and through the dry criss-cross of branches; every instant they seized on a new layer, snapped, crackled, sent out another jet of smoke. It was not a case for shovelled earth. The pile was too high, too porous; it exposed a dozen open draughts on all sides, and the breeze, sucking in, found as many flues. Clearly the brush pile must burn, and only a miracle could save that portion of the fence bordering the narrow lane. He hurried to the corner to disconnect the rails. At the same time a standing tree, the first in a clump of young firs at the end of the slashing, ignited. The resinous needles sized, popped like a string of firecrackers. With the wind pulling as it did from the river, this meant the fire would sweep directly into the big timber, and in that event the cabin also was doomed. He left the fence, running to bring an ax to cut away some hazels adjoining the dangerous clump. Then, as he went, he suddenly remembered the canvas hose. In a moment he was at the stable and met the teacher and Mother Girard dragging the roll through the door.

The three together got it to the meadow and over the lowered bars. But while they ran, unrolling the canvas towards the river, two other trees in that clump began to send out those ominous little reports. The field was long, it seemed to increase in length, but before they reached the end of it Thornton came. He was able alone to finish stretching the hose and connect it with the flume, and sent Mose back to the nozzle end. The old mother hurried to drive the Jerseys to a safer distance, and Alice started to return to the maple near the

stable where she had tied the horse. But, as she followed the fence, she noticed that some of the dead branches which littered the lane outside were burning. Every moment flames crept from another undermined section of the brush pile, but every moment counted. Any instant the big canvas would begin to fill; it was yet possible to save the fence. She climbed up and swung herself over into the lane. She ran along, pulling away the more dangerous limbs. And it grew hotter with each step. She covered her cheek with her hand; that too seemed to blister. She stumbled around, baffled, and looked towards the river. The whole clump of young firs was a blazing mass, and the hazels adjoining shrivelled and crackled. She started to go back into the field. Then she saw that smoke was rising in little puffs all among the rails. A curling red wave rippled along the top one, reaching for her hand; tiny blue tongues, orange ones, lapped and licked the scorching cedar everywhere. Then, while she wavered, trying to choose the less dangerous bars, she was enveloped in a great outpour of smoke. She staggered a few steps stifled, blinded; her feet tripped over a tangled mesh of twigs and she went down.

Beyond the fence the canvas began to distend. It rounded full; like a waking leviathan it stretched, squirmed. Thornton, running with the flow to help Mose at the nozzle, passed without seeing her. Then Stratton came. He had hurried from his lodge at the first hint of smoke; he had learned, in a word from Mose, where to look for her, and he discovered her. He put his shoulder to an upright and wrenched it away. He grasped the rails,—his hands blistered,—and flung them down. He bent to lift her, shielding her with his body, but at the same time a burning sapling, looped in the slashing, sprang, released like an unstrung bow, and struck the back of his head. He pitched, groaning, face downward. The smoke thinned but the brush pile became a roaring furnace. He got to his knees, groped for her, and half dragged, half carried her out of that fiery lane.

Her dress was burning; he smothered the flames, turning her on the meadow grass; he strangled more persistent vipers with his arms. But the pain from the blow was very great. He saw things all red, all black; they mixed in a blur. He stretched himself on the earth a breathing space and closed his eyes. "Great God," he muttered, "Great God, she must not have inhaled fire." And the words begun in imprecation ended like a prayer.

When he recovered enough to see, he found her sitting up, dazed a little, trembling, but watching Thornton and Mose, who at last had turned the flood on the blazing brush pile. The spray of it drifted over them, and presently a cloud of steam. With Stratton's help she was able to rise, and they went up through the field towards the cabin. Sometimes he put his arm under her shoulders, holding her on her feet; and sometimes he stumbled apart and stood for an instant with his eyes closed, while his teeth gripped the nether lip. Neither spoke until they reached the balcony steps. Then they stopped and she looked back at the men

with the hose. "They will save the trees," she said. "See, the fire is under control; they have saved the trees."

But Stratton was looking at her. The coolness and mockery had dropped from him in that hour, like a broken mask. The emotions and passions kept in leash through months fought in his face. He saw her rock unsteadily again on her feet, and new strength surged to his arms. "Damn the trees," he answered, and lifted her and carried her up to the door. "Damn Slocum and his pipe; damn—myself."

She did not hear him. Her body had yielded to complete collapse. He watched her still face, cradled in the curve of his arm, and once while he crossed the room he bent his lips to her cheek. But something, that indefinable something that had baffled him on the glacier, seemed to push him back. It was as though her white spirit cried "no," and again his own soul shrank.

He laid her on a couch. He brought water and bathed her face. One cheek, the right one, was blistered; her lips were scorched; and one hand, also the right one, was burned horribly. He found olive oil in a small cupboard and, with little further search, some cotton stuff which he tore into bandages. He wrapped the hand,—both of his own were smarting, miserably,—and fixed an oiled pad for her cheek; and he moistened her lips, pouring oil between them, generously.

At this she opened her eyes and smiled. "Don't trouble," she said, "I didn't inhale any fire. I remembered to cover my mouth." Her lids drooped again, but she added softly, "They are fine—old—trees."

"The finest in the world," he answered, "but the price—was too high."

He lifted her other hand to bandage a slighter burn, and his own fingers trembled. When he finished he did not release it directly, but sat looking down at the uncovered, gently hollowed palm. She had very nice hands; he had always noticed that; not too small but beautifully made. Then it came over him where, once before, he had seen their loveliness spoiled. It was that day on Mt. Rainier when she had rescued him from the crevasse. And now, at last, he had been able to square that debt. He bent suddenly and kissed the palm. "Keep your trees," he said; "stay here in the wilderness as long as you want to, but give me the right to be near you, always, and protect you."

Her eyelids fluttered open. She looked at him startled. He leaned nearer. His voice quickened; it became a sensitive, soft-toned instrument, vibrant with tenderness. "Marry me, Alice," he said, "and I will shape my whole life to yours. You shall never see a city or a crowd if you say so. I will create an Eden out of this homestead; and when the settlement grows too civilized, when there is nothing left to reclaim or build, I will take you to new solitudes; I will carry you away in that schooner of mine, up and up into the Alaska wilderness, and on some unknown fiord set up another Paradise."

"Oh," she said at last, "please, please don't say any more." She tried to rise but her lips went white and she sank back on her pillows. In her haste she had pressed on the maimed hand. "I shouldn't have allowed you to say this," she hurried on with great effort, "but—I am very—tired. I—I don't think clearly. Wait. Listen. We have just come through a desperate time together. You saved—me. How can I be angry with you—so soon? But you have no right to speak like this to me. I have no right to hear you. You know I am going to marry Judge Kingsley."

"You are not. Unless," his voice held a threat, "you believe that you love him."

She closed her eyes again; the lids quivered, her lips, her whole face. "If I had not," she answered, and the words were almost a whisper, "could I have promised to marry him?"

He was silent then. He leaned back in his chair. Presently he reached, groping, and found a strip of the cotton stuff, which he dipped in the basin of water, and laid on his eyes.

Finally she looked at him. "Oh," she said, "you were hurt. You should have told me. I should have seen. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," he answered, "nothing, thank you. It is a pain in my head that takes me from time to time. Something struck me, I think, out there in that fiery lane."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said. "I'm so sorry—in both ways. Please don't think I'm ungrateful. I have always liked you, and believed in you, even when you seemed to lose faith in yourself. I knew, underneath, you were all right. And if it was friendliness you asked—"

"Friendliness?" He threw the bandage aside and started to his feet. "Friendliness? No. It's you I want—all of you—heart and body and soul—to have—to keep." He moved, stumbling a little to the door. He put his hand to his eyes and waited a moment, then he turned and came back half way. "I was wrong," he said, and his voice struck a lower key, "I was wrong, pardon me. And I accept that friendliness, yes, as long as you say so."

He swung on his heel then, and went out of the room. That night, in his lodge, he laid ink and stationery on his table and commenced a letter. He wrote the date, and under it, in a large firm hand:

"JUDGE SILAS KINGSLEY,

"WASHINGTON, D.C.

"MY DEAR SIR:—

Then he paused. He laid the pen down and leaned back in his chair for a long

interval in thought. But when he resumed the task it was with quickness and decision and no further halt.

"I am addressing you, as Miss Hunter's guardian, to let you know that today I have asked her to be my wife. Though I had contemplated this for some time the matter was precipitated by a serious fire on her homestead, during which I was privileged to be of service. She was rescued from a dangerous position, painfully, though not deeply burned, and I trust will send you the particulars soon.

"It is natural you should wish to learn something further in regard to my financial circumstances and social standing, and I am enclosing the cards of several Seattle friends whom it is very possible you know; also the address of Sir McDonald of Victoria, who was my father's close friend and can tell you all about me. You will remember I have taken up my father's business of fur dealer, which he carried on so long and successfully, and, as soon as the construction of my new steam-schooner is completed, I expect to equip her for extensive operations northward in Alaska, making a specialty of sealskins and sable, with what can be secured of otter and silver fox. I believe I may be considered in a position to support a wife comfortably.

"As to the rest, I have every reason to think Miss Hunter is not indifferent to me, though she feels, in honor, bound by her promise to you. I trust you will understand it is most difficult for me to make this statement, but I am confident you will not care to longer hold her to an engagement, which she made in gratitude and through a conscientious sense of duty, and which I believe was urged on your part, simply through a desire to see her future secure.

"Most sincerely and respectfully yours,
"MARK DOUGLAS STRATTON."

He folded this letter slowly and put it in the envelope, which he addressed carefully. The pain had returned to his head. The Judge's name seemed suddenly to be written in blood. It trailed from his pen. Still he finished, and groping in his pocketbook found a stamp.

Then he rose to his feet. He closed his eyes and clasped his hands at the back of his head. "My God," he groaned, "Oh, my—God!" He went over and threw himself face downward on his bed. But in a moment he was up again, stumbling across the floor, in agony. Finally he stopped and knelt near the inner wall and felt for the third board. It was of hewn cedar and heavy enough to go unnailed. He raised it, not without difficulty, and found a long narrow box set in the earth,

underneath. He lifted the lid and took out one of several packages that filled it. He unrolled the wrapping of coarse flannel far enough to reach a small tin; then he laid the bundle aside and stood turning this in his hands. It was a five-tael opium can such as is used in transporting the crude drug. "Well," he told himself, "why not? The stuff is sold, daily, over every druggist's counter, for pain not half—as horrible—as this."

He took his knife and sprung the end of the tin enough to pour a little of the thick, sticky substance into a glass. "It is—strong—of course," he said; "a drop or two, diluted, ought to be sufficient." He added the water, stirred it, and drank it off.

In a very short time the relief came. He sat down on the edge of his bed and drew off one of his riding-boots; then he tried to pull the other and failed. He stretched himself, dressed, on the couch, and groping weakly, found a blanket and succeeded in covering his knees.

When he wakened it was daybreak and some one, a man, was working in the room. He was kneeling by that uncovered box and removing the packages to a canvas sack, open beside him on the hewn floor. Stratton watched him a silent moment, then, "Where is Slocum, Smith?" he asked.

The man turned on his knees. It was a writhing movement and he threw his head like a startled snake. "Slocum hyas scare," he answered. "He doan' come here today."

"Afraid of me, is he? Well, he has reason to be. I told him to keep away from that homestead. I told him, when I gave him that tobacco, to be careful where he smoked."

"Slocum hyas cultus," said the man. "Slocum no count." He resumed his work, but after a silent moment, he reared his head again to say, "Mose find some plas where Slocum ees sleep. He ees see Slocum's blanket by one beeg cedar log, an' some brush on top, nawitka, to mek roof. An' Mose ees know it ees Slocum's bed, for he ees fin under dat blanket, Yelm Jim's gun."

Stratton understood. He seemed to see Alice, now, with that bandaged hand, following Mose through the underbrush to see for herself that human lair. His glance moved from Smith and that stuff on the floor. A great revulsion suddenly came over him. The pain in his head was dull; it no longer troubled him, but he turned his face to the wall and set his teeth over a groan.

At last he heard Smith put the plank back in its place and start with the filled sack across the floor. He stopped him at the door. "It will be safer for Slocum, after this," he said, "to stay on the other side of the Pass. Let him help

you through the mountains, this trip, Smith, but see that you leave him there.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN WHO BUNGLED

Early in the autumn Samantha and young Thornton were married. The teacher, in a letter to her sister, said it was a charming wedding. She told how the school-house was converted into a bower for the occasion; how all the settlement was there, displaying heirlooms of finery, but nothing equalled Laramie's vest of blue and crimson satin brocade, which he wore over a new woolen shirt, and with an extra polish of the cowskin shoes. And she told how, when the old minister, imported from Olympia for the ceremony, stood waiting on the platform under a canopy of fern, and she, herself, commenced a bit of Mendelssohn's march on Eben's violin, the bridal couple in the doorway made a picture to remember; how Samantha was delightful in a crisp white muslin, and when she hung back shyly, Mill grasped her arm and dragged her up the aisle. How his face was red—possibly his stiff collar was a size too small—and his eyes flashed defiance, like a pirate convoying a risky prize. She told also how, when the ordeal was safely through, and Samantha rode the sorrel to her new home, Thornton walking at her side, all the district followed for the housewarming. But though she described minutely this cabin, and the improvements and values of the claim, of that other section almost adjoining, where lived their nearest neighbor, she still had nothing to say.

And it was an early autumn morning, a few days after the wedding, that the bars of the lower meadow fence were found down, and Mother Girard again discovered that one of the Jerseys, straying or driven out under cover of the timber, had been milked. The impressions were still fresh on the dew and the teacher joined Mose in search of the trespasser. This time the track skirted the jungle, and, rounding the slope, entered the canyon, where they met a beaten path leading from the upper end of Stratton's quarter-section. The river was bridged there by a fallen tree, below which it widened into a ford, and this new trail wound up the precipitous side of the gorge, some distance beyond the cliff that was capped by the leaning tower. The footprints took that direction.

Suddenly they both stopped and stood looking up at the stronghold. Then they turned to each other. A line of smoke, rising behind the tower, marked a

camp-fire.

"But," she said at last, "if he wants milk he must ask me for it." And she started bravely up the side of the canyon.

Mose pressed after her closely. Finally he said, "It ees bes' you let me go firs', Mees. He ees have one good gun, for sure."

She swung around. "Isn't it Slocum?"

Mose shook his head. "No, Slocum doan' come roun' dis ranch some more. Monjee, he's too mooch 'fraid to stop roun' here. But Pete Smith, he doan' care, so long he ain' see Mill."

"Pete Smith." She paused, shivering a little, then she laughed. "It's funny, Mose, how creepy just his name makes me feel. I—I guess I will let you go first—if you aren't afraid. But wait, what makes you think it is Pete Smith?"

"For dat las' night, when A'm come back wid dose trout I catch down stream, I see heem by Mo'sieur's plas. Sacré, but he ees going fin' he ees lose some blankets, an' flour an' sugar, 'bout ev'ryt'ing, when he comes home."

"You mean Pete had broken into the lodge. Oh, you should have gone directly for Mill Thornton. But you tried to stop him, Mose? You at least warned him that you surely would get word to Mr. Stratton?"

Again Mose shook his head. "You mus' on'stan' it ees bes' I let Pete 'lone. He doan' want me talk to heem dare. Monjee, no. It ees lak I doan' see heem. Nawitka, I come straight 'way home."

He moved his rifle into the curve of his arm, and pushed by Alice, leading on up the bluff, through labyrinths of hazel and alder, up short sections of gullies. Just under the summit he stopped. "I doan' lak lose dis fine new gun," he said softly, and began to fondle the stock. "She's mooch more fine dan dat good gun of Pete Smith's. Nawitka, Mees, mebbe he ees watch us come 'cross de gorge. Mebbe he ees goin' have one drop on us. Den it ees bes' I leave dis gran' gun here; you think so, ya-as?"

"Perhaps, Mose. I hadn't thought of—that. It seemed safe to have it along. He's the most hideous man. But he can't help that. And if he is on—guard—well, leave the gun, Mose. Of course he wouldn't harm us. He wouldn't dare."

Mose stood the rifle carefully in a hollow trunk, and moved on cautiously. She kept very close to him up to the top of the bluff, and there she laid her hand on his arm. "I'm frightened, Mose," she whispered. "I'm frightened."

He looked at her gravely. "Mebbe you doan' care so mooch 'bout dat milk now," he said.

She pulled herself straight. "It isn't the loss of the milk, Mose; you should understand that. It's the principle. He can't take anything of mine. It's wrong. Besides, if I let this go, unnoticed, we might wake up any morning to find greater things missing. We might even find Colonel gone."

She lifted her head higher and moved forward with new resolve. Mose kept pace with her, and presently they halted, screened by a mesh of young hemlock boughs, and looked out into the boulder-strewn open behind the tower.

Smith was there. He was removing from the fire a trout which he had cooked on a long sharpened stick. He worked with a noiseless, gliding motion, and even when he seated himself on the flat rock, which became at once both chair and table, and fell hurriedly to eating his breakfast, he kept up a ceaseless pantomime; beating the earth softly with his foot, starting up, subsiding, shivering, looking behind him, listening, and like an animal long hunted, again starting.

Two horses stood near him accoutered for the trail. One, his own, brought from Laramie's meadow, where at intervals it was pastured, carried saddle-bags and a snug blanket roll at the crupper; the other was an indifferent pack-animal laden with camp supplies.

"He ees tek de long trail, for sure," whispered Mose. "Monjee, how ees it he ees leave Colonel?"

"If those are Mr. Stratton's things he's got to take them back," she said. "Come, we must make him."

Mose shook his head. "We doan' be able."

"We must." Then she squared her shoulders and walked forward with a clear "Good-morning."

Instantly the man was on his feet, and grasping the rifle which stood at hand, against the tower wall, he dropped to his knee behind the improvised table. The gun rested across the rock and he took sight carefully.

The girl came on into the open. "Don't be afraid of me," she said and steadied her voice, "I only want to talk to you."

He lifted his head and looked at her in astonishment. She came a few steps further, and Mose, silent, alert, stalked after her and stood waiting. "I came to speak to you about milking my cow," she said, and ruffled her brows. "You should have asked me."

At this Smith laughed and rising from his knee, seated himself again on the rock. But he held his gun in readiness.

"I suppose," she went on, "it seems—to you—a very small matter, compared with breaking into Mr. Stratton's house."

He laughed again, loudly, insolently.

She watched him with the rising storm in her eyes. She was no longer afraid. Clearly the man was unashamed; the spark of good that she had been taught to believe was latent in the breast of the lowest man, was lacking here. He must be the exception that proved the rule. "You've got to take these things back," she said at last, decisively, yet holding her voice in check; "now, at once."

Smith lifted his gun higher, scowling. "You go home," he said gruffly. "Mose, you go. Be quick 'bout it."

She remembered suddenly the day at school when Lem had admitted that men in the settlement sometimes struck women, but she did not move. Then she was conscious that Mose was walking back towards the wood. "Mose," she said, and turning, stamped her foot, "stay here."

He stopped and looked over his shoulder. "It ees bes' dat you come right 'way," he said. "Mebbe Mill T'ornton ees able to do somet'ing, you spik to heem."

The man laughed still more insolently. "You go," he repeated.

The next instant he sprang to his feet and faced the wood on the other side of the open. There was a brief interval filled with the sounds of bodies moving through low boughs, the snapping of twigs, the striking of hoofs on loose rock, then Stratton's smooth, deliberate voice said, "Well, Smith, I think I have a horse now that won't refuse his pack, and I have tested him at a ford."

Smith put down his gun and hurried to take the led animal, and Stratton rode on past the clump of scrub firs, where the waiting horses were hitched, and saw suddenly the girl by the tower. A great wave of color surged over his face and left it white. His big frame rocked slowly as though he gathered himself from a heavy and unexpected blow; then he sat motionless.

"Oh," she said, and hurried to meet him, "I'm so glad you came this way, instead of going straight through to the bridge. This man has looted your lodge. I was just trying to make him take back your things."

Stratton drew a great breath. He shook himself like a man throwing off a weight, and swung himself down from the saddle. "You were? Well, thank you, Miss Hunter, but he should have told you that I gave him the key." He paused and his eyes moved to Smith, who had gone to an aperture in the tower, and was lifting from it other supplies for the fresh pack-horse. "In fact," he added, "I have engaged Pete to go over the Pass with me, to cook and look after my outfit."

Her glance moved to Sir Donald's full leather saddlebags and snug blanket roll, and returned to his master. "You have engaged this man," she said slowly, "to go over the mountains with you?"

"Yes, I am starting on a long hunting and trading trip, through the Palouse and Big Bend country, and Smith knows the plains and the Indians. He will be invaluable to me in that uncertain wilderness. But I shall probably go down the Columbia, when I strike the railroad, and come back to the Sound from Portland, by way of the Northern Pacific."

"You are going a long hunting trip," she repeated, and met his look steadily. "You have engaged this man, this outlaw, for your camp cook and guide. You know you are helping him to elude the Government. Oh, how can you, an intelligent, educated American, be so indifferent to the laws? I don't understand you."

I don't understand you."

She turned away.

"Wait, just a moment," he said. "Is the case so different from your own? You took this other half-breed Indian into your house; you gave him a new start; yet the rascal had stolen our horses; he had left us high up, nine thousand feet, on Mt. Rainier in the face of a storm. He did even worse."

"Hush," she said. Mose stood, waiting, a few yards off. His face was turned to the lower gorge and she looked at him with apprehension. "There is no comparison," she went on softly. "You know it. He was just a boy, untaught, his character unformed, and he believed he was right. There was plenty of good in him, ready to be brought out by any one who cared to take the trouble. I have proved that; he has repaid me a hundred times. But this fellow—this desperado—think of his record. Look in his face."

She moved on with this, to join Mose, but her foot struck something that clinked against a stone, and she stopped to look down. Then she stooped and picked up the object, turning it curiously in her hands. It was a small tin receptacle, unlike anything she had ever seen before. There were some strange characters marked on it, presumably Chinese, and while she studied them she noticed that the can had sprung a little at the upper edge, and a sticky substance began to ooze into her palm. It emitted a sickish odor and she held the thing out to Stratton in sudden disgust. "What is it?" she asked. "Do you know? Did you drop it?"

Again he pulled himself together. He took the tin and hurled it over the cliff. Some distance down it struck a projecting ledge, and sent back, faintly, a clink. "I know what it is, yes," he said grimly. "The man who dropped it—bungled."

His glance moved again to Smith and the steel flashed in his eyes. But the outlaw had not heard. He was engrossed in a full canvas bag which he was adjusting to the pack saddle.

"Come, there is water here," Stratton went to the rock where Smith had breakfasted, and lifted a flask. "Hold out your hands."

She held them out, turning them under the stream he poured. "Rub them," he said; "it stains. Again, the odor clings. The stuff should never have touched your hands."

"What is it?" she repeated.

He was silent.

"What is it?" she persisted. "Can't you tell me?"

"Yes, yes, I can—if I must." He threw his head with a sudden reckless decision. "It stands for shame, ostracism, degradation, according to your code. The man who touches it takes his fate in his hands. It sticks, its slime covers him, sucks him down. Look in my face."

But at the look she gave him, that straight, searching look, which forever expected a best in him, the boldness went out of his face. A quiver swept it, as though he felt deep down the twist of a probe. "Once, up there below the Paradise," he said, "you promised your mercy. The time has come; I ask it—now."

"You mean it is"—but her voice failed. Her eyes widened with fear, and yet there rose in them an appeal. "You mean," she repeated, "you were going to—" But the word would not out; it died in her throat. Then, "Promise me you will not," she entreated. "Promise—no matter how desperate you may feel—you will always put the feeling down. I should blame myself; I should feel someway responsible. I couldn't help it. It would spoil my life."

He drew his hand slowly across his eyes and moved back, leaning on the tower wall. So she thought that. She believed that he had contemplated self-destruction, and in that crude, spectacular way. And of course she attributed his reason to her rejection of him. He could have laughed aloud at his escape. "I promise," he answered. "I promise. I will leave it to Nature. When the time comes she can provide a way."

"Thank you, I trust you." She gave him her hand. "Good-by."

She hesitated, glancing once more at the outlaw, but of him she had nothing further to say. Stratton stood watching her down the trail; when she disappeared he moved to the edge of the cliff and waited for a final glimpse of her, far below in the canyon.

At last he noticed that his guide was ready. "Ride on with the pack-horses," he said. "I will overtake you in time to make Nisqually ford. And the next time you find a leaking can, Smith, be careful where you throw it."

When the man was gone he sank down on a rock and dropped his face in his hands. Finally he lifted his head and sat for an interval looking down the gorge in the direction she had taken. "She is so bright and quick," he told himself, "and yet she could not see the truth. With all of her knowledge of smuggling, and opium and rings, she has never seen or had a description of the stuff. It is strange, strange—for I went all to pieces, there, for a minute. It must be, after all, because she is so ready to take a man on trust. She is so tremendously honest herself, she won't accept a man's own doubt of himself. But I—I—had a narrow escape. Strange, too, what a hold she has had on me from the start. I would have braved it out, lied to a man; I would have laughed it off with any other woman; but she lifted her eyes, probing for that everlasting best in me, and I babbled like a fool."

Presently he drew a letter from his pocket. It was an answer to the one he had written the Judge. It had miscarried at first, and he had travelled so much the last weeks, it had been forwarded and missed him repeatedly. He had received it that morning at the Station on the prairie below the Myers claim. He opened the

sheet and re-read it slowly.

"WASHINGTON, D.C., July 20th, 18—.

"MY DEAR STRATTON:—In response to your letter I want to remind you that I knew your father, John Stratton, well. He was a strong and capable man and always a gentleman. I am certainly interested in the career of his son. I also satisfied myself somewhat as to your standing, before I came East, because it is my custom to know about my nephew Philip's friends. I learned nothing of a disparaging nature.

"But in regard to the initial point of your letter, I can only say that a release from a marriage engagement should depend altogether on the direct request of the lady.

"Very truly yours, "SILAS KINGSLEY."

Stratton held the letter a thoughtful interval, then he rose and went over and laid it on Smith's smouldering fire. He stood watching it break into flame and curl up like a brown, dead leaf. "But it will influence him," he said. "He can't help it; it will raise a question."

He turned to untie his fretting horse. "So, Donald, old fellow, there is light ahead; we are almost out of the woods. A little more dishonor," he set his foot in the stirrup and swung himself up, "and we can afford to make a fresh start."

CHAPTER XVIII

WATER-LOGGED

At Freeport the following winter was severe. Snow lay for weeks, thawing, freezing, accumulating with every squall that came over from the mountains, and falling in small avalanches which started landslides all along the bluff. On some mornings the upper part of the harbor below Duwamish flats was covered with ice, which the rising tide lifted and broke into sheets. The logs taken from the water were glazed, and in still places inside the boom, ice packed solid. And with

the unusual cold a lull in construction settled over the Northwest; there came a second drop in the prices of exported lumber. Many of the smaller mills closed under a subsidy. But the Judge, in answer to Forrest's statements of the situation, advised the cutting down of expenses to a minimum, and keeping things going, if only to give employment to the men. He had heard the Puget Sound country was flooded with idle mechanics, laborers, hundreds of construction hands discharged since the completion of the Northern Pacific. And of course the prevailing Eastern panic had in many instances caused the recall of invested capital. But he was confident that another half-year would see a pronounced revival; at any rate he would be able to make a trip home by that time, and he wanted to be on the ground and see conditions for himself before he came to a final decision.

At the close of January the men still received "reg'lar pay," to quote Mason, but the books showed that the manager's salary was accumulating to his credit. Other accounts indicated that the junior partner was overdrawing. He had his impulses of industry and economy when he tried to balance a considerable delinquency by spending an interval at the mills; but he always annulled the results by a yet deeper plunge, and his only systematic restriction was in deferring to take a house in town.

Forrest was thinking of Kingsley while he finished his rounds of the mills. It was at the close of a bleak day; there was an increasing wind; ragged cloud scurried overhead, the forerunner of the black masses driving up in the southwest. Philip was presumably in Victoria. He had not heard from him for a week. "But," he told himself, as he came down the steps from the landing to the walk, "it's useless to bother the Judge with this side of it, now. It's as he says, he can't understand things fully until he is on the ground."

He stopped at the branch to Kingsley's house to speak to the old watchman, who was stumping up from the lower dock. "Well, Mason," he said, "it's another blow."

"Ay, sir." The old sailor swung around to look at the running sea. He knew the ships over the harbor were taking precautions against the growing storm; stretching an extra hawser, dropping a second and third anchor, clearing decks. But there was no vessel at the Freeport wharves; the bark that had sailed that morning left no other receiving.

"Keep the slab-fire low, Mason, and have an eye to the boom."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"And, Mason, go back and put the signal out for the *Success*. Let me know when she's in sight."

"Ay, sir?" The old sailor's voice took a rising inflection; his unlovely features worked.

"Yes," said Forrest, "I'm going over to Seattle for the doctor. Little Si is

worse."

He turned then, and went up to the gate. Louise heard him on the steps and met him at the door. He followed her silently in to that inner room where little Silas lay. His head was propped high with pillows and the place sounded with his labored breathing. Forrest stood for a moment watching him: the heaving of the breast under the loose white gown; the flutter of the half-closed eyelids; the milky whiteness of the forehead between the crayon-like brows and rings of tumbled hair. The child was very lovable; he had always shown his fondness for him in demonstrative, winning ways; and in the earlier stages of his illness he had called for him, begging to be carried or rocked, and Forrest had devoted late hours to him, sharing the mother's vigil; ready with the comfort and security of his strong arms. Now, while he looked at the unconscious face, this large-hearted, homeless, home-loving man seemed to feel a small hand on his heart-strings; the touch tightened when the baby coughed.

He turned to Louise. "I'm going over on the *Success*," he said. "The doctor will come back with me. Is there anything else I can do?"

"No, unless—you can find Philip."

"I am afraid he is still in Victoria. He would hardly have started to cross the Straits in this storm."

"No," she assented, "not in this storm." She lifted her hand to her head in a bewildered way, and turned to her baby with the mechanical effort of one long worn out with anxiety and watching. But when the child coughed again, a harder paroxysm, the motherhood leaped to her eyes. "Paul," she cried, "oh, Paul."

He did not try to answer that appeal; he could not look at her. But he took the child's medicine from the table and stood for a moment, thoughtful, irresolute. A man who has the charge of workmen in an isolated place, out of range of a physician, picks up the rudiments of medicine and surgery, and presently he went to a stand holding a few general remedies. He poured a little of the liquid from the bottle he carried, into an empty vial, and added several drops of ammonia. He gave the baby a potion from the mixture, lifting the blond head higher, rearranging the pillows gently, with a woman's touch. He waited a brief interval, watching the result. "It's a very strong stimulant," he said. "Only use it every alternate time, or—if the attack is bad. I won't be longer than I can help."

While he walked down to the store he saw Mason's signal-light on the wharf, but the little mail steamer, plying between Seattle and a near port, was not yet in sight, though nearly an hour late. Forrest unlocked the door and lighted his desk lamp. "There isn't a rowboat on this beach," he thought. "Nothing but Sing's dugout; and what could she do in this sea?"

He began to post his books, but the child's face drifted between him and the open page, and that appeal of the mother's rang an undernote to the rush and

scream of the wind. He laid his pen down and sat staring, absent, harassed, up at the rafters. A timber creaked; the great building shook in a heavier gust, and the sea swept with a long hiss and swash on the beach under the piling. Then presently above all these noises there came the shrill toot of a whistle.

It was a sound that brought him to his feet. He threw his books into the safe, lifted his overcoat from the counter, and was about to extinguish the light, when the door opened and Mason entered with a rush of sharp air. "She's gone by, sir," he said. "Headlight stove in, sir; sea smashing on the wheel-house."

The manager's hand dropped from the burner.

"But she answered the signal, Mason; she whistled the landing."

"Ay, sir, an' wore away, sir, er rollin' like er porpoise."

"Well, Mason, it means the dugout. She's on the beach above the float."

Mason's watery eyes blinked. "Ay, sir, an' more'n half full, sir."

"Then we'll bail her."

He laid his top coat back on the counter and turned out the light, and while he led the way down to the float, he blamed himself and excused and blamed himself anew, for depending on that little steamer.

Sheltered though it was by the wharves and the headland, the small landing rose and dipped; breaking crests swept sheer over it. Mason set his lantern on a pile and the manager helped him turn and empty the beached canoe. Roughly hewn from a cedar log, with bow and stern cut square and hollowed slightly like a scow, it had a clumsy appearance even as dugouts go, and in mild weather two men together could hardly have risked passage in her. Launched, she swashed in the tide like a thing water-logged.

No one knew how the craft first drifted to Freeport, though Hop Sing had appropriated her, to use on still evenings during the salmon run, when he visited his friends employed at the cannery a mile up the coast. The paddle was not in its usual hiding-place, a niche under the flooring of the nearest dock, and Forrest hurried up to the cook-house.

"Give me the paddle to the dugout, Sing," he said, stopping on the threshold; "I'm going over to Seattle."

The Chinaman whirled on his cork soles and looked at him. Then he swung his towel over his shoulder and his face expanded in a smile. "What for you jokee me, Boss? Hully sit down. I bling supper belly click. Steak muchee cold."

"Never mind supper, Sing; or just give me some coffee right here, while you find that paddle."

He poured the steaming coffee, black and bitter from long waiting, and gave the cup to Forrest. "What for you takee dugout? He no good. Too muchee blow, blow." His voice shrilled incredulously, but something in the manager's face made him turn abruptly and trip across the kitchen to his own private closet, where,

after a brief search under his bunk, he brought forth the missing paddle.

He had a catlike aversion to moisture and cold, but Forrest had eased him through many a buffeting from the mill crew, and presently he lighted his lantern and followed him down to the float. He found Mason steadying the lurching dugout while the young man took his place forward of the stern. And he waited silently, but with growing concern, until the old sailor cast off the painter and gave the great even push which propelled the craft out between docks, then he, too, held his light aloft, vying with the watchman to illuminate the way. The wind filled his wide, white sleeves, baring his arms above the jade bracelets; it played havoc with his unwound cue and set all his loose garments fluttering; but he stood there long, shivering, with teeth chattering, holding the lantern yet higher and straining his eyes to follow that small, receding shape.

As he swung clear of the wharves Forrest felt the strong ebb, and low as the dugout was, she careened to the wind when she drifted out of the protection of the headland. A wave broke, drenching him through. Far to the northward he saw the revolving light on West Point; then a smaller flame appeared on the opposite shore, and he knew by the position of these lamps when he had reached the open, where the gale had its fullest sweep of the Sound. Another crest broke over him; another; still he made headway and held his course quartering to the trough. The deep whistle of an ocean collier came to him, and off the point he saw her lamps; a tug passed close at hand. He heard plainly the noise of her screw, but she went by without heeding his hail, and he caught the counter motion of her wake. Presently he noticed water about his knees, and groping, found the can; and while he bailed he tried with one hand to keep the dugout under control, but she swung broadside, taking a sea. He dropped the can and grasped the paddle with a great dip that brought her slowly around. His muscles ached; his fingers cramped; how that year of confinement at the mills had unfitted him.

When the beacons disappeared he knew that he had made a little more than half the distance. But the dugout never headed for the city lamps; she drove before the wind, and the most he could do was to swing her out of the trough, and ease her northeast by north, hoping to strike the point which marked the harbor entrance above the town.

A passenger steamer rounded the Head behind him, her brilliant windows now thrown high, now showing a narrow rim as she rolled in the trough. She came rapidly and passed far to leeward. While he watched her, shouting repeatedly, against reason, the dugout shipped a sea that all but swamped her. He threw off his coat; loosened and kicked off his shoes. He bailed for a time, then, ceaselessly. The water was very cold; it swashed over his limbs, numbing him to the core. A cloud broke overhead, pelting him with a storm of hail. The stones cut the waves with a sharper swish, hiss; they stung his face, his hands. When

he stopped a breathing space the thought of little Silas spurred him, and again and again Louise's voice seemed to reach him, audibly, in desperate appeal.

The hail passed. The city lights grew clearer, off the starboard but falling astern. Then at last he noticed that a deeper stroke of the paddle swung the dugout eastward and kept her headed so. The tide was running in. A black hulk loomed out of the darkness, showing a red lantern at her bow. Was it not the old collier that was burned at the coal bunkers, years ago, and towed here to beach north of town? This light, standing out in advance of all others, became an inspiration. The lines of a trestle detached from the gloom. His paddle struck something, presumably a sunken pile, and snapped at the handle, the blade whirling away in the darkness. He heard the sea breaking on a gravelly shore; felt the undertow. A crest swept over him, and another heavier comber lifted the dugout and hurled it full against the trestle. When the water receded he found himself clinging to a pile; the solid beach was under him, though the surge washed to his armpits. The next wave cast him on the gravel.

He dragged himself higher and rested briefly, pulling himself together, then he rose and made his way, in the teeth of the wind, down to the water-front of the town. He found a small tug, that sometimes did towing for the mills, under steam. He hailed her from the dock, sheltering his numb body behind a pile of cord-wood, while he waited for the master to answer him. Then, "I'm Forrest," he said, "of Freeport, and I want you to put me over at the mills as soon as you can. I came for a doctor and I'll have him down here in fifteen or twenty minutes."

"All right," the man replied, "I'm just starting for a run down to the Straits, but glad to accommodate you. Hell of a night."

Forrest was already out of hearing. He left a summons as brief at the doctor's door. "Tug's waiting," he called back. "Arlington Dock."

Then he hurried on to the hotel which Kingsley frequented. He glanced at the office clock as he entered the lighted room. It was a quarter past eleven. He had been over three hours making that trip across the harbor; a distance of two miles.

There was a stove near him and he put his numb hands out to the heat while he asked for Philip. It was as he had feared; the Captain had not come back from his last little run to Victoria. The sudden warmth made him faint, but he leaned on the desk, trying to shape a telegram.

His effort was manifest and the men around the stove watched him curiously. He was hatless, coatless, without shoes; and the steam rose from his remaining clothes; the water, dripping from them, formed in pools on the floor. The clerk went over to the bar and brought him a glass of brandy. "See here, Forrest," he said, "drink this; then tell us what happened to you. How did you come over from the mills?"

He drank a part of the liquor and set the glass down. "In a small boat," he answered briefly, "and I made a bad landing."

"Looks like it," the clerk said, dryly. "Come in here and get into some clothes of mine."

"No, thank you," replied Forrest, "I'm going right back; have a tug waiting. But lend me a coat, Charley, if you can, and some sort of a fit in shoes."

He wrote his telegram while the man brought the things, and he threw on the coat on his way to the door.

"Never saw such a man," said the clerk, addressing the group near the stove. "Ready to tell a story when it's another fellow, just spreads it on, but when it's himself won't say a blamed word. But he's got the nerve; yes, sir, he's all nerve and—backbone."

When Forrest reached the wharf he found the doctor waiting with the tug-master in the little pilot-house. They made a place for him, but he turned aside into the engine-room, and sinking down on a bench near the boiler, stretched his hands out again to the heat. The steam and odor of oil, the lurching of the boat, following that draught of brandy, affected him strangely. In the uncertain light the engineer seemed to expand into a figure foreign and grotesque. Once when he stooped to open the furnace door he paused, looking up at Forrest with a laugh. With the red glow on his grimy face it became an impish, insulting laugh, and the manager drew himself up to resent it; but he did not; he was too weak.

The next time he was roused was when the tug bumped the Freeport dock. The piles all seemed to be swaying and lifting when he stepped ashore, but the fresh air steadied him, and the sight of Mason's rugged face helped to clear his vision. Here also was Hop Sing out again with his lantern, and his smile rivalled the welcome of the old watchman. The sailor made fast the line with an extra flourish and thump of the wooden leg, and the cook demonstrated his satisfaction in a pigeonwing or two, as he lighted the way to the house.

Forrest was not the man to let these attentions go. "Well, Sing," he said, "I'm afraid you won't see that boat of yours again."

"Oh, I no clare, Boss, I no clare." He wheeled on his cork soles, showing his yellow teeth. "Mason, he makee belly good fire your loom. By me by, plitty click, I bling supper; oyster soup, flied chicken, belly hot, nicee."

But Forrest was looking up across the gate and his steps quickened. The door had opened and Louise stood against the flood of light. She came forward to the edge of the piazza. "There has been a change," she said softly. "He seems to be in a quiet sleep."

Forrest waited in the parlor while the doctor followed her to that inner room. It seemed a long time before they returned, but he was rubbing his plump hands. "Mrs. Kingsley was right," he said, and smiled. "There has been a change,

undoubtedly. And you should have a diploma, sir; that ammonia buoyed the child over a crisis. But it must be used sparingly; sparingly." He opened his medicine case and laid out a box of tablets and a vial with a few brief directions. Then he took up his hat and top coat,—the tug was waiting for him,—and went to the door. "Of course, he is still a very sick child, but, with careful nursing, and I see he has that, he will pull through. Good night; yes, your baby will pull through."

Forrest closed the door softly and came back to the fire. "Phil wasn't in town," he said, "but I left a telegram to be forwarded. He will be able to catch the mail steamer in the morning, if he isn't already on the way."

He lifted a piece of bark from the wood-basket and laid it on the fire. She watched him. Little clouds of steam began to curl up from his clothes. Suddenly she put her hand on his arm. "Paul," she said, "what happened? How did you cross the harbor?"

"Why, the *Success* went by without stopping, and I took a small boat. I'm going now to change my clothes. When I come back you must lie down; you need some sleep."

"But there wasn't a small boat; the *Phantom* is away with the tender; there isn't a ship's boat; not any kind of a rowboat on this beach. Unless—Paul, you didn't go in that dugout?"

"Yes," he said lightly, "that's what made me so long. She isn't fleet."

"Fleet." She knew what it meant. He had shared her anxiety and care; it had been one more responsibility thrust upon him; and now, in her extremity, he had risked himself for her child. She could not tell what peril the dugout had lumbered through, but it had been peril in the darkness and that sea. And Philip, her husband, who should have been the one to face it, was doubtless passing the night gaily, in some warm and brilliant room. Oh, the shame of it, the bitterness, the sting of it! A sob broke from her lips. She sank down on a sofa and dropped her face on her arm. "I cannot—bear it," she said. "I—cannot—bear—it."

She did not cry as another woman might; there was no easy rush of tears, but the long pent grief of months, borne silently through weary days and slower nights, welled and found vent to the search of a probe.

A glory from the crimson lamp-shade touched her hair, which was unbound for comfort, and held half its length in two loose braids, as she had worn it when they were children. The strained position of her arm, thrown up over the head of the sofa, pulled back her sleeve, showing its smooth whiteness from below the elbow; it tapered perfectly to the wrist. The slender, shaking figure, her whole attitude, was an unconscious appeal to him, and roused a tumult of feeling; not only resentment against Philip, but immeasurable pity, tenderness for her, out of which rose a sudden and overwhelming desire to take her in his arms and comfort her.

He turned and looked into the fire; the frowning line deepened between his level brows. "Don't make so much of it," he said. "I'm none the worse for a little wetting."

[image]

"He turned and looked into the fire."

"None the worse?" He started at the vibration in her voice. She rose to her feet. "Do you think I do not know you have done a desperate thing? Do you think I have no gratitude?"

"Oh, no," he answered smiling, "I couldn't think that."

She came a little nearer. "You have a bruise on your forehead; your hand—I noticed it when you lifted the wood—is cut—terribly." She took the hand in her own palm and examined the hurt, touching it gently with her handkerchief. "How was it, Paul? Tell me."

"Why, I hadn't noticed it, but it probably happened when I made a landing." He winced slightly under her soft dabs. "I ran the dugout in at that old trestle above town, and struck a pile. Now you know the worst; there's nothing left to imagine." He laughed and drew his hand away. "I'm going down to my room now, but I shall be back in a little while. Sing is bringing me a supper."

He opened the door and went out, closing it softly. "To have a wife like that," he thought, "and yet neglect her."

CHAPTER XIX

"ANDROMEDA HAS FOUND A PERSEUS"

The great boom which cleared Duwamish Head of its big timber and cut the cable car-track across the face of the promontory, created also frequent and heavy landslides that changed the gravelly beach at Freeport into the broad and sandy expanse which became Seattle's favorite bathing resort. In the earlier times, beyond the old hotel, the high tide washed sheer to the foot of the bluff, and the incomparable view of blue sea and wooded island, framed by the shining Olympic Mountains, was limited to the outlook from the balcony at the rear of the ruin.

Louise stood upon this balcony, facing the northwest. The bluff was on her

left, so near she might have lifted her hand and touched the damp soil. It was midsummer and a resinous fragrance mingled with the salt air. The distant coast was veiled in smoke, and the sun, low in the west, barred the Sound blood red.

The swell broke with a long swash and gurgle under the floor; a passing gust set the door behind her creaking; the heavier one at the opposite end of the bar-room was also swinging, and between its widening crack Stratton appeared on the walk. At sight of her he started and paused, then he came on into the ruin. His glance swept the interior, from the threshold, and rested on the door behind the bar. It was closed and fitted with a new, strong lock.

At the sound of his tread she turned, and he came forward quickly, smiling and offering his hand. "Good afternoon," he said, in his conventional way, "it is rather nice here, isn't it? I hope I do not intrude?"

"No," she said, and answered his smile, "I am glad to share it. Did the *Phantom* bring you?"

"No, the *Success* left me." His gesture called her attention to the small mail steamer moving westward. "I ran over about a little matter of business. I saw young Silas on the dock with that old character Mason. The boy is growing."

"Yes, he lives out of doors so much. They are great playfellows, and I can trust Mason. He takes him rowing every afternoon, often twice, out of the shadow of the Head into the sunshine."

"But you,"—he paused with a light emphasis, looking down into her sweet, inscrutable face,— "you stay in the shadow. Do you know what I thought of just now, coming up the walk? It was Andromeda—chained."

"You had the sea," she looked about her thoughtfully, "and this bluff; Andromeda—perhaps—but without a Perseus."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes." She met the unmistakable admiration in his eyes with a clear look and a slight uplifting of her oval chin. "It is too bad, but the comparison is misapplied."

She moved towards the doorway. He waited a moment, watching her in mingled amusement and pique. "Another touch-me-not," he told himself; "I had not thought she could be so like her sister. Don't let me take you back," he said aloud, following a step; "it is pleasanter here, away from the interminable buzz of those saws."

But she moved on into the building. He joined her. "We are sailing over to Tacoma tonight," he said. "The yacht club is arranging a little hop. Come with us. Go over the harbor with me, when the *Success* picks me up on the return trip. I will give you a merry time, I promise you."

"It is always that on board the *Phantom*," she answered brightly. "And of course Philip would run in for me, if I could leave little Si. You see I have only Mason to depend on, and at night he is on duty."

"But bring the boy. We will tuck him away in a berth down below. He will like it. Why, he took that cruise among the islands last year like an old salt, and then he had just begun to toddle."

She shook her head. "He is better off at home. He couldn't sleep; not in that gay company."

Stratton wondered how far she meant to disregard that matter of his escort. He was not accustomed to indifference from a woman. And any other, in a like position, would grasp at the opportunity he offered. "My dear Mrs. Kingsley," he said, and his voice was no longer conventional, "throw aside those Puritan scruples, for once, and let me show you how easy it is to accomplish—what you desire. I know the Captain. Come, go with me on this moonlight excursion, tonight."

She met his gaze bravely, smiling a little, but there was in her eyes the look of one who has felt in a wound the quick turn of a probe. "Thank you, no," she said.

The child was coming up the walk and she hurried to meet him. "Muvver," he called excitedly, "Mason can take us to row, now." Then he stopped, looking at Stratton, and added doubtfully, "The boat is big 'nough for you, too."

Stratton laughed and took out his watch. "Thank you. I have over an hour to spare, but you must put me aboard the *Success*, sure, when she comes back."

Mason, who had waited at the branch walk, turned and stumped ahead to the landing. He held the boat steady and the young man stepped into the stern and lifted the boy in. But when he offered his hand to Louise she drew back and said, "Oh, I am not going; did you think so? Good-by, Silas. Take care of him, Mason."

"Ay, mum?" The old sailor's voice held a note of inquiry. He had lost his shyness, in a measure, at the time of the child's illness. And since then Forrest had seen that there was always a rowboat at the mills. He had made it Mason's duty, during the boy's convalescence, to take him and his mother out in search of the sunshine. She had rarely missed these little trips.

But whatever chagrin Stratton may have felt was not apparent. He settled into his place, lifted his hat to her, and taking a cigar from his case, occupied himself, while the boat was under shelter of the wharves, with getting a light.

She watched them out, waving her hand and smiling an answer to her baby's repeated "Good-by." Then she turned and went up from the landing. "If it was a way," she said under her breath, "then I have let it go."

She walked in the direction of the mills, on past the last cabins, to the beginning of a path that zigzagged up the side of the promontory. She pushed up quickly, finding in the tangible difficulty of the ascent relief for her hot thoughts. Sometimes the earth gave under her and she sprang to a spur of rock; she grasped

the tough, springy boughs of young firs to ease her weight. She invited the touch of the prickly needles on her hands and face, and she drew full breaths of the fragrance exhaled from her palms.

She gained the summit moist and panting, and paused to look down on the rowboat, and on across the harbor to the infant city on her hills. There was no dwelling near; the trail took the contour of the bluff, which in places became a precipice, and everywhere around her stretched the forest or the sea. She crossed to the westward side and stopped where a fallen hemlock had cut a swathe through the timber, creating an unobstructed view. Out of the smoke film that shrouded the distant shore, rising columns parted in dun rolling clouds, showing where the forest fires burned; but the Olympics reared their giant heads from the pall, sometimes thrusting a shoulder through. And to this woman it was not solitude; she had come into the presence of old friends. She turned her eyes to that grand company of peaks and forgot the narrow limits of the life below the bluff; she stood above the drift and shadow and, for a moment, Philip.

Her hands were clasped loosely behind her; her lifted head exposed the beautiful lines of throat and chin; her breath came a little hard and quick and there was a soft color in her cheeks. The likeness to her sister had never seemed as marked to Forrest as it was then, when he came upon her unexpectedly, by the fallen hemlock, on his way to the mills. Was not this the trail to the headwaters? Had they not paused to choose a way through the windfall?

She did not see him, and he waited, mastered by that brief illusion. And while he watched her face she saw the heights of the Olympics change from rose to burnished brass; every peak and spur flamed a signal to the departing sun.

"But breathe the air of mountains
And their unapproachable summits will lift thee
to the level of themselves."

She repeated the words softly with a clear modulation, deepening to a contralto note, and after a moment added a preceding line.

"Assert thyself; rise up to thy full height."

But there she stopped, and lifting her arms with a little outward gesture, expressive of futile effort, let them drop, and turning her face, saw Forrest.

He came forward quickly to say, "I've only been here a moment, and I couldn't help listening; I'm fond of those lines. But, when did you ever assert yourself?" He looked down at her with his smile of the eyes. "It's there the resemblance stops."

"You mean to Alice?"

"Yes, sometimes you are very like her," and he turned his glance to the mountain-tops.

"You mean physically. I think, in other ways, I must often seem purposeless, even weak—to you."

"Ob, no," he said quickly, "I couldn't ever believe that. You are stronger than most women; strong to endure. But you lack her executive ability." Then he stopped, for he saw that she had given his words a personality he had not meant.

"What would you have me do?" The vibration in her voice hurt him; he could not meet the intensity of appeal in her eyes. "It had commenced before we came to Freeport. I felt that he was growing tired of me, but I believed, if I could be alone with him, in a dull place like this, I might win him back. It seemed the only chance; but—it has failed." The tears were streaming down her face; she reached out her hands to him. "What would you have me do?" she repeated. "Tell me."

Forrest had never known her to lose her self-control but once before; the night he had crossed the harbor in the dugout. Even then it was quickly over; she had not spoken of Kingsley's neglect; he had never heard her so much as breathe a reproach. His great heart ached for her, while he felt the futility of any sympathy he could offer her. He broke away some young growth in front of the fallen tree, and she allowed him, passively, to seat her in the crotch of a great branch. "You are pretty tired," he said gently. "It's a hard pull up the bluff. And this solitary life is telling on you; I feel the strain of it, myself, sometimes. We will both be glad to get away from Freeport."

She threw her arm up over the bole, and dropped her face on it, sobbing. He stood looking seaward. Far out the water was still barred blood-red. Presently he said, "You know the mills are about to shut down? We have been waiting for the Judge, but he will be here in another month, perhaps sooner. There isn't a doubt he will close. You know we are falling behind. Lumber has dropped to seven dollars a thousand; the San Francisco market is glutted; the bone-yard there has stopped receiving."

She knew that he had said all this to give her time, and she struggled with those crowding emotions, trying and failing, and trying again to beat them down. He waited, with his back towards her, his face to the painted sea. He was a resourceful man, quick to grasp a difficulty and its solution, for others as well as himself, but now he halted, baffled, like a man come to a blind wall. His mind ran through that first slow year at Freeport, and it flashed over him what an interminable blank it would have been without her. Confined as they were to the narrow limits of the mills, it had been as close as life on shipboard. They had taken their meals together; they had met, passed and repassed countless times

daily on the short walks. He had been glad to show a helpful interest in little Silas. He had fallen easily into the way of spending his evenings, when he could, with her; she loved his violin. He saw now how those hours had dulled the poignancy of putting Alice out of his life. He remembered how he had commenced to watch in Louise for a repetition of those many little airs he liked; the lifting of the chin, the high pose of the head, the ready change of color; all modified, it was true, softened and blended with much that was not her sister's, but there, palpable, near, breathing, flesh and blood. And most of all he understood what she had done for him when that business depression laid a fatal hand on the mills. He had meant to do great things and he was one to take defeat hard; but she, this sweet, proud woman, with the courage in her voice and the heart-break in her eyes, had taught him by example how to fight a losing battle to the end, and—like a man.

The silence was broken by the neigh of a horse. It was unusual on that promontory; saddle-animals never took the foot-path over the bluff to the mills, and afterwards Forrest remembered the sound. Then, though he turned and looked in the direction of the neigh, he gave it small attention. His glance fell to her; and that attitude, the hidden face, the slender shaking figure, brought back an onrush of the tumult he had felt the night she so nearly lost her child; bitter resentment against Philip, immeasurable pity, tenderness for her, and a desire to take, and protect and comfort her.

"See here," he said, and his deep voice vibrated a little, holding each word like a caress, "See here, don't make so much of it; he isn't worth it. No man on earth is."

She became suddenly still. Her hand clenched on a fold of her skirt, but she did not lift her face. Her head was uncovered and he stood regarding the blue and purple lights of that high, dark coil of her hair. "See here," he went on finally, "I can't let you be discouraged. You've done too much for me. Don't you know it? Of course you made a mistake; you should never have come to the mills. But it was my mistake, too, and I don't like to think what this life here would have meant without you. Why, you and little Si have stood for what I like best; you've made a home for me. Without you I should have lived like a miserable castaway."

She lifted her face with a supreme effort. Her eyes said, "Thank you," and her lips shaped an explanation he was not slow to grasp. "You were right, it's the solitude. I exaggerate—lately—I am annoyed by the—smallest things. Just now it was Mr. Stratton. He happened—to ask me to go—with him—on an excursion aboard the *Phantom*. As if—Philip—would not run in for me—any time—that I wished. But, Paul, if the mills close, what will you do?"

"I?" he answered and smiled, "why, there's a piece of land out on the upper Des Chutes that I've been anxious to secure for a long time. I'm going to home-

stead it and, incidentally, prospect the hills. You see this business depression is giving me an opportunity I've been waiting for."

"The upper Des Chutes," she repeated. "I see, you are going to take up a systematic search for the lost prospect, and make your headquarters on the ground."

"Yes," he said, "or pretty close to it. I can't tell you how I want to find myself in the thick of the timber again. You don't know how I hesitated between that homestead and this position at the mills. My inclinations, every fiber in me reached out to that section at the headwaters, but, of course, I needed a little more capital to start with; that is, to carry on the developments I had in view. I am afraid, though, it was Alice who turned the scales." He paused, smiling a little and shaking his head. "You see I hadn't learned, then, to take defeat, and I never could believe her refusal was final. I couldn't ask her to bury herself up there in the wilderness."

"You mean you asked Alice to be your wife, and she—refused. Oh, Paul, how could she?" She rose to her feet. Her voice was low and thrilling, and she looked at him again through springing tears. "How could she? To—to think we have always taken so much—your best—and in return have given you—worse than nothing."

She held out her hands once more, and this time he took them in his friendly grasp. "You forget," he said, with his smile of the eyes, "You forget all I've been saying. The debt is on my side. I never can do as much for you."

While he said this a workman came down the path. He was the sawyer at the mills. Her hands dropped and she stepped back to the seat she had left. The man looked at her and then at Forrest as he passed, turning his head slowly to prolong the stare.

"I didn't know the mill men ever came up here," she faltered.

"They don't, often." Forrest stood watching the curve where the man had disappeared. "A lighter grounded on Alki Point; he has been helping to float her. That's what took me up the trail." He began to walk in the direction the man had gone. Presently he looked back. "I must hurry on," he said. "Come with me, if you are ready; I would be glad to help you down."

She followed him in silence along the promontory. When they passed beyond the curve another man pushed out of the thicket into the trail. He ran with a gliding, half writhing motion to a point where a branch track, faint, little used, dipped over the Head. He took this course, twisting, swinging himself by low boughs, doubling where the path was lost in a precipitous gully, and so gained the beach. He crept under the bluff, rounding it and splashing ankle-deep in water, for the tide was running in, until he reached the rear balcony of the old hotel. He paused a moment, listening, with his beady eyes fixed on the walk stretching

from the main entrance; then he laid the saddle-bags which he carried on the platform while he swung himself up. He waited another instant,—the sea broke with a gurgle among the piles; a passing gust set one of the doors creaking,—and picking up the empty bags he ran through the tap-room behind the bar. He found a key, strung on a cord around his neck, and fitted it in the new lock and opened the door. When he came out the saddle-bags were filled, and heavy, for he made his way up the promontory with difficulty. As he reached the summit the stillness was again broken by the neigh of a horse.

Forrest heard the sound faintly, while he helped Louise down the last pitch of the trail. But again he gave it little attention, for he noticed that the sawyer was the center of a small crowd at the corner of the cookhouse. The whole group turned to look at these two as they approached; curiously, as though they were strangers but just arrived.

She raised her face to Forrest with a mute question. He felt it, though his own gaze was directed straight ahead to the quiet harbor. The right hand at his side clenched, twice, and the line deepened to a great cleft between his brows. But he knew this crew and the futility of trying to put their rough conjectures down. To call the sawyer to account was to invite a wider notoriety, such as this woman could not endure. "I have been a fool," he told himself; "a blind fool. My God, the shame, the folly of it. And the most I can do is to keep it from her."

Aloud he said, and met that question in her face with his quiet smile, "I'm afraid that was a pretty steep grade for you; I hope the outlook up there paid you for the climb." His glance moved then over the stacked lumber of the mill yard, and he paused to say to a man in the crowd, "Dickman, that pile of scantling is listing; see to it in the morning, the first thing. And say, Johnson," he added, stopping again, "that new chain came today; I'll give it to you, now, at the store. You'll need it in the morning when you hoist that big red fir from the boom."

The rowboat was waiting for the *Success* outside the docks. The little steamer, veering from her course, slowed down to take Stratton aboard. He sprang lightly over the side and stood watching Mason pull away. Then he looked shoreward. He lifted his hat and smiled at the man and woman on the walk, and his lingering glance said, "Andromeda has found a Perseus."

CHAPTER XX

THE GRAND COUP

The *Phantom* was becalmed. The heated atmosphere was freighted with smoke that hung tissuelike along the shores of the Sound, showing only the ghostly lines of the forest. The deck and the white sails reflected, intensified the glare of the sky and the shimmering sea. The top of the cabin and the seats were sprinkled with fine white ashes, and flakes sifted slowly through the still air.

"Some rancher starts his brush pile burning, or a prospector fails to put out his camp-fire, and to pay for it, here is the whole country ablaze; it ought to be a state's prison crime." Kingsley pulled his cap over his cloudy brows and leaned back in his seat, tired and bored.

Stratton, to whom the remark was addressed, made no response. He was stretched full length on a blanket spread on a shady strip of the deck. Like the sea, he was motionless, and a silk handkerchief, laid over his face, outlined his features gruesomely.

Presently Philip started erect and took off his cap. He threw it on the seat beside him, and ran his fingers, defining wavy ridges, through his hair. "It's no use, Stratton," he said, "I'm in a hole. Come, wake up, I want to talk things over."

Stratton swept aside the handkerchief and rose on his elbow. "I am listening," he answered, "but I am afraid of this glare; it brings on this infernal pain in my head. I must get to New York or somewhere, and see an oculist. Anyway, what is the use of going all over the ground again, Captain? We discussed it thoroughly yesterday and the day before. It amounts to this,—you have plunged a little beyond your depth. You are afraid that the mills will be attached for your own personal debts, and when Judge Kingsley comes home, in a few weeks, he is going to find, well, not what he expects, unless—"

"He's going to find that I've made a tremendous mess of things," Philip broke in. "I've got to ask him, first of all, to put up for me, and he can't afford to. Why, he won't be able; he can't sell anything; real estate is dead, completely; he's land-poor, like everybody else these times. Besides, he's gone security for people; he's been ready to stake any one who voted for him—or says he did. They've got him all tied up in new town sites, fisheries, every sort of a scheme."

"If my schooner had made good," said Stratton, "I would be glad to tide you through. But that was pretty hard luck, Captain. I put my faith in her; I could have sworn by that master and crew. And she had picked up a fine lot of peltries, fifteen hundred prime sealskins, when she struck that rock off Unimak Pass and went down. She cost me a good deal of money; I was hard pressed to outfit her, and now—nothing to show for it."

"Too bad," answered Kingsley thoughtfully, "too bad. I guess, Mark, we're in the same hole, together."

There was a brief silence, then Stratton said, "There is just one way out, Captain."

"You mean—well, just what do you mean?"

"I mean with your standing, your family relations, above all to Judge Silas Kingsley, it would be perfectly safe; the *Phantom* could go unsuspected anywhere; carry anything. And you know every island, current, tide-rip, shoal from Seattle to British Columbia. Then—there is that lonely old ruin around the bluff at Freeport. Why, at high tide you could run almost under the walls."

Philip laughed unpleasantly. "You are reckoning without my wife. She's the sort of woman to make it a matter of conscience and give the whole thing away."

"She would, I have no doubt of it, if she knew." Stratton paused a moment, then said, "It is very unfortunate you never took that house you talked so much about taking, in town. But how is it you never bring her with us on a cruise, now? She used to like the water."

A wave of color crossed Philip's open face. "See here," he said, "leave my wife out."

"As you like." Stratton shrugged his shoulders. "But if you had set up that establishment in town it would have been the best thing for her, and—for Forrest."

"For Forrest?"

"Yes. When two are young, you know, and have practically no other companionship—"

"Oh, you don't know her," Kingsley interrupted lightly; "you don't know Forrest."

"I know that she is a very bright and pretty woman; one of the most interesting I ever met. The kind any man would look at twice. And Forrest is a well set up fellow; the sort all women like. Then, too, music is her passion, and you know what he can do with his violin; he makes it a voice; it speaks for him."

"Paul is a good fellow," answered Philip, growing annoyed; "one in a hundred; a man you can trust. I've known him all my life."

"Possibly," said Stratton, "possibly, but when you have a man to deal with, it is safer to appraise him as such and not as a saint. But, Captain, leaving Mrs. Kingsley out, there is some one I could put in charge of it—there at the ruin. He is familiar with the network of by-ways south and east to the Cascades; under pressure he can travel on his own trail. He could carry the stuff from the top of Duwamish Head by horse, directly to that lodge of mine up the Nisqually. The country there is so rough, so full of natural hiding-places, above all it is so far from the border, it could be cached indefinitely, until I was able to dispose of it in lots at Portland. Or, I had rather convey it in large amounts over the Pass to the Palouse wilderness, and board an east-bound train on the Columbia, somewhere, with a view to making a hunting trip to the Yellowstone. It could be easily forwarded in the camp outfit, and so on to Chicago—perhaps New York."

"You seem to have it pretty well planned," said Kingsley dryly.

Stratton met his look steadily. "I have," he answered.

"Great Scott. Great Scott, it's true, then. Forrest was right; Bates was right; you are connected with that ring."

Stratton smiled. "I admit I once served an apprenticeship."

"You once served an apprenticeship?" repeated Philip quickly. "You mean you are now able to conduct one of your own. And—you know a man who can take charge of the dope at that old hotel. See here, tell me this, have you tried the experiment there, already?"

Stratton nodded his head. "Several times. I had to, Captain. It was my only way to make the final payments on my schooner; she cost me more than I expected; and I had to outfit her."

"What I want to know is, did you smuggle any of the stuff over on my yacht?"

Again Stratton nodded. "You see how well the scheme worked. You never suspected it."

"I could inform on you," said Kingsley hotly. "I will do it, by George, the first time I see Bates."

"No,"—Stratton watched his victim's face,—"you will not, Captain, when you stop to think."

"Why not?"

"Because you yourself would be implicated."

Instantly Kingsley was on his feet. His brilliant eyes flashed. But while he expressed his indignation Stratton remained in his lounging position, smiling, mocking, almost indifferent. "I would like to know, though," said Philip at last, with tempered heat, "just how you would settle the question of the purchase price at Victoria."

Then Stratton rose and came over to the helm. "Leave that with me, Captain," he said. "Understand, all you've got to do is to run the *Phantom*; nothing else concerns you. And I promise to hurry the business through, and see you out of the hole, with firm ground to stand on, in one grand coup."

Kingsley was silent. Presently he went forward into the bows, and stood looking off to where the silver smoke film met the shining sea. Finally his lips breathed a whistle. Stratton had taken his place at the tiller. He lighted a cigar and settled himself comfortably, but his eyes were fixed watchfully on the man forward. It was the look of a gambler who has staked high, and is sure, yet not sure of his antagonist.

At last a shadow cut the Sound far out, northward; the streak broadened, the mainsail flapped loosely, and the *Phantom* heeled to the sudden flaw. Kingsley sprang to the sheets. The gust passed but was followed by another, veering

westerly, and another still, that steadied to a freshening breeze.

Philip came back to the helm. "Well," he said, "it looks like Seattle to-night, after all; dinner, perhaps, at the Arlington."

But Stratton, looking in his companion's face, started a little, and with his hand still on the tiller, swung the *Phantom* slowly around, shaping a course for Victoria.

They did not dine in Seattle that night, but the next evening found them at *table d'hôte* in the English city. Later, in the long northern twilight, the little yacht crept out of the winding harbor and coasted the island northward to an obscure, forest-girt cove, where she came to anchor.

CHAPTER XXI

HIDE AND SEEK

An hour after the *Phantom* left her moorings in Victoria harbor, Bates, of the United States Customs, reported to his superior officer on board the cutter at anchor in the stream. When he had finished with the matter on which he had been detailed, he stopped to state that on his way through Chinatown he had noticed Stratton entering the house of a certain merchant and highbinder. "And," he continued, "returning, probably two hours later, my attention was attracted to a coolie who came out of the same place. He carried the baskets of a vegetable vender, suspended from the usual shoulder pole, but it was singular that, at the close of the day, and so far from the Chinese garden tracts in the suburbs, from which he must have been supplied,—those baskets should be full. I was walking in the same direction, and, at the end of the second block, a second fellow came up the cross street and fell in behind. His baskets also were heaped, apparently with produce, to the brim. They moved away in their swinging trot, more and more rapidly, and so bent on a direct course, that I felt justified in taking a hansom and following. On the edge of the town they turned out of the main thoroughfare, which would have led them to the gardens, and entered a little used trail; what seemed to be a short cut through the forest to some obscure harbor on the coast. I could go no farther in the cab, but, coming back by the park road, I saw from a height of Beacon Hill, which overlooks the channel, a small yacht with the lines and rigging of the *Phantom*, stealing up the shore."

This self-imposed task had delayed Bates an extra hour, during which he

had held the cutter, which was under steam and ready to make the run across the Straits to the American port of entry. But his commanding officer accepted the information without comment. However, when the revenue boat had steamed out of the Arm, headed for her home port, he remained on the bridge, searching with his binoculars, first the Vancouver coast astern, and then, slowly, the great reach of running sea, that stretched away to the distant and tawny pall which hung over the American side and showed the vast sweep of the forest fires.

There was a strong wind, drawing in from the Pacific, and the little steamer labored in an ugly trough. When she staggered, quivering, up a mother wave, she plunged down, and half seas over, in the next crest. She made her harbor, decks streaming, port light stove in, at midnight, and, after a brief stop and slight repairs, she was under way again, moving southward into the smoke. Finally, at the end of several hours, she was brought to, and, under slow bells, began to patrol a certain course.

The smoke gathered density. It was permeated with a lurid glare, and, driven by cross winds, it moved around a center, enfolding the cutter with the effect of a vast, brassy, electrical cloud. It was also a place of conflicting seas. The long, white, wicked fingers of a tide-rip reached out ceaselessly, and withdrew to the center of the whirlpool. The moon hung like a crimson lantern directly above and cast a red trail through the vortex. Then suddenly, while the little steamer skirted, listing to the maelstrom, a great gust tore the smoke asunder and Foulweather Bluff loomed through the rift. At the same moment a small yacht, under full sail bore down upon the headland.

The next instant she veered and coming around in the narrow space between the cutter and the cliff, raced out, all but grazing the side of the steamer, and heeled to the whirlpool. Her great mainsail dipped lower and lower; the white fingers of the tide-rip clutched at it, caught it, held it, dragged it slowly in. The decks were awash. Then the grip of the maelstrom relaxed; the little craft righted, shivering; her canvas filled with a big gust from the Straits and she swung away into the night.

It all happened very swiftly, and the smoke closed in, curtaining Foulweather, with a greater density. Bates, who was on the bridge, had seen that the yacht carried no headlight, and he had recognized clearly, one of the two men who sailed her. The face of the first was hidden, for he leaned, straining every muscle, on the stumbling helm; but the second stood on the slanting deck, bracing his back on the canting cabin, alert, watchful, like a man on guard. His glance was raised to the steamer's bridge, and fixing his eyes on the inspector, his right hand crept to his hip pocket. There was no doubt; he was Stratton. And even while the little vessel hovered on the edge of the maelstrom, the officer gave the command to back, turn, go ahead. The cutter was in hot pursuit. Directly the

gun on her port bow boomed through the thick atmosphere. No response. Again the report rang peremptory, threatening. And still no answer.

At daybreak the steamer doubled back on her course and headed for the lower end of Whidby Island, which divides the Sound into two long broad channels. She patrolled this point for a long interval, and finally the lookout saw the bowsprit and rigging of a small yacht detach from the gray pall that shrouded the west passage. But instantly she swung away from the cutter and vanished like a phantom in the smoke. Once more the gun thundered a halt; and once more the silence was broken only by the noise of the ship's machinery, and the breaking of the sea on the cutwater. The revenue vessel steamed on under slow bells toward Seattle.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR LITTLE SILAS

The lamps across the harbor began to show red spots through the smoke; the nearer lights on the landings of the mills, and at the ends of the wharves, shone with pale rings around their disks. With twilight a fog was creeping in. The burning slab-pile sent up its great tongues of flame against the blackness of the bluff, and became a beacon for such craft as groped along the Head, feeling a way to the city. It illuminated the usual groups of workmen, and singled out the old watchman's square figure. He was seated on a block, shaping a miniature boat for little Silas, and the child, standing by his knee, with his hands clasped loosely behind him, awaited the results with grave interest.

The boy's mother had just left him, with permission to stay until the toy was finished. She felt the increasing dampness in the air, but she stopped at her gate, shrinking from the silence of the house, and looked back to the group at the fire. Presently she turned and walked slowly in the direction of the old hotel. The swell broke with a long tramp and swash at the foot of the bluff, for it was flood-tide. In dark places, where the water ruffled about the piers, there were flashes of phosphorous light. Louise watched it, leaning from the railing. It was a light she loved. She liked, too, those night voices of the sea. They intruded on her loneliness with a mild insistence; in sympathy, yet expostulation.

But it was at such times she most excused Philip. "Men seldom are as constant as women," she told herself. "Marriage to them can never mean as much.

Our work, our whole living must hinge on it; every hour is shaped to it; but with them it is only a halt at the end of the day."

She lifted her glance and started erect. She brushed her clouding eyes and stood staring out into the thick atmosphere. Something loomed there from the sea. It was the bowsprit and forward rigging of a small vessel, close in beyond the walls of the ruin. There was a familiar dip in the lines of the loosely furled jib. "The *Phantom*," she exclaimed. "She has missed the landing in the smoke." And she hurried up the approach to the front entrance and on through the empty bar-room to the rear balcony.

But the hail that sprang to her lips failed, and she shrank back into the shadow of the interior. This craft carried no lights. There was no stir of landing; none of the excitement of going unintentionally aground. Instead there was a great hush, strange, sinister. Then, while Louise wavered, afraid of she knew not what, a tender pushed out from the side, and was pulled with muffled oars to the ruin. She heard the bow touch the piling, and the two men in her stood up, head and shoulders above the platform. But the light was too uncertain for her to determine whether or not one was Philip, and she withdrew farther into the room.

They lifted some bulky object, apparently a trunk, up to the balcony. She lacked the courage to stay and meet them, and she ran softly through to the walk, but there she wavered again. It flashed over her that if this were not Philip it might mean some peril to the mills; something that Forrest should know about. She went back and concealed herself behind the bar. It was very dark there, and she dropped to her knees, creeping under and drawing her skirts close.

The men brought their burden in, walking with the crunching sound made by rubber boots. They came behind the bar to the tap-room door and set the chest down, while one felt in his pocket for a key, and groping, found the lock. It seemed, in that strained silence, they must hear the thumping of her heart. They went in and left the chest and came out directly, closing and relocking the door. But as the key was withdrawn it fell with a muffled clink to the floor. She knew that it rested partly on the edge of her skirt but she dared not stir. She remained crouching, on her knees, another breathless interminable moment, then one said impatiently, "I've left my match-safe on board."

She knew that quick, incautious voice, and yet she could not master her unreasoning terror. It was Philip, but Philip shrouded in mystery; and the Philip she had known, with all his faults, had been open, above concealment, clear as day.

"Hush, you don't want any matches here," the other answered softly, and he dropped to his knees, feeling the floor. "Never mind," he said, rising, "Smith has the duplicate. Come, we must get away."

Louise waited, listening, until the tender pushed off, then she took the key and rose from her cramped position. She walked unsteadily around the bar and stopped, supporting herself on it for a moment. She was facing the dim square of light that marked the rear entrance, and she saw the mast of the little vessel rising tall and spectral through the gloom. Then presently her jib unfolded, her mainsail ran up, and she stood away and like a phantom dissolved in the smoke.

Louise turned and walked to the front door and on down towards her gate. Her fingers locked and unlocked over the key. "It was Philip," she told herself. "He comes here to the mills, secretly, at night, where he is master, and puts something in hiding. And I—I dared not speak to him. I crept like a coward—out of sight. I had done nothing—wrong—and yet I was—afraid."

Little Silas was waiting with Mason at the gate. She stopped in the light of the slab-fire to admire the fine lines of the finished boat. The old sailor stumped away radiant, and she went in with the child and lighted the swinging lamp and set the crimson shade. She drew the blinds and seated herself in the low wicker chair by the open fire to give the boy his hour. But afterwards, when he had been tucked snugly in his bed and she came back to the room, she took the key from her pocket and studied it, turning it slowly in her hands, as though she expected to find in it some difference from other keys; some clue to that mystery in the tap-room. There was a lurking dread in her eyes; lines settled at the corners of her sweet mouth. "The other man was Mr. Stratton," she said at last. "And some one else has the duplicate. Oh, I don't understand. I don't understand."

She returned the key to her pocket and went over to the piano. But she played mechanically, in fragments. Why had the tap-room been fitted with a strong lock? What was this terrible thing Philip had brought ashore? Awful crimes she had read of in newspapers flashed through her mind. What did this chest contain? She rose and began to walk the floor.

Suddenly the great silence that hung over the mills at night was broken by a hoarse whistle. The color went from her lips. Her body rocked slowly; she stood locking and unlocking her slender hands. The echo died along the bluff. She drew a great breath. "Why," she said, and laughed mirthlessly, "it is only one of the tugs; the *Tyee* probably, coming in for wood or water."

But her hand stole to her pocket and closed over the key. She went to the front door and stood alert, listening, on the piazza, straining her eyes to define the lines of the steamer which was making her landing in the mingled smoke and fog. "Of course it's one of the tugs," she repeated, and walked the length of the porch, hurriedly, and halted, again listening.

The few men who had lingered near the slab-fire commenced to go down to the dock. She watched their figures grow dimmer, until they were only moving shadows in the thick atmosphere. The moon, rising above the lower, heavier

strata, began to show a crimson run. Then, after a while, she heard Forrest's step on the walk. She went to the steps to meet him. She saw that two men waited a few yards behind him at the branch walk.

He followed her into the hall, and pushing the door to, stood with his hand on the knob. "The revenue cutter is here," he said. "The inspectors think they have located dope. They are coming in here, now, to go through the house." He paused, looking down into her white face. "I tried my best to prevent it," he added, "but they will do it very quietly. One of them is my friend Bates. You have nothing to fear."

But the terror grew in her eyes. She made an effort to speak, but the words failed her. She shaped her lips again. It was hardly more than a whisper. "What did you say they were looking for?"

"Opium. It generally is opium, and of course it's just a matter of form to come in here. A man is detailed to go through the mills and he makes a clean sweep of every building."

She caught the sound of the clicking gate. "Paul," she said, "make some excuse for me. Do it. Stay yourself, and light them through the rooms. Delay them if you can."

She turned and ran through the hall, and pausing to snatch up Mason's candle and matches at the back door, ran out around the house to the walk, in the moment Forrest admitted the officers.

It did not seem strange to Forrest that she had wished to avoid these men; he, himself, had felt the humiliation of their visit, for, though it was not remarkable that suspicion should have fallen on any of that rough Freeport crew, it was carrying the matter pretty far to include Mrs. Kingsley's home. He had asked the inspectors to exempt it, but Bates had replied, "I'm sorry, but the fact is, Forrest, that's the place I'm detailed specially to search." And what had she meant by "Delay them if you can?"

He took a lamp and lighted the officers through the rooms. Little Silas wakened and sat up in his bed, rubbing his eyes. He saw these men open his mother's bureau, drawer after drawer, and thrust their hands through her things, and he turned to Forrest for explanation. But the young man stood back, waiting in silence, with frowning brows.

There was no one on the walk when Louise hurried to the ruin. The fog and smoke had become very dense along the front of the bluff, but the moonlight filtered through enough to show objects, with the indistinctness of wet nights. The walls of the hotel loomed out of the pall, lonesomely. The floor complained at her tread. She went quickly behind the bar, and drawing the key from her pocket, found the lock. Inside the tap-room she lighted the candle. The floor was strewn with sand, dust, pebbles and bits of broken board. The tide still swashed

under the worm-eaten planks; they shook at her step.

She put the candle down and tried to move the chest. It yielded slowly to her straining effort. Her first impulse had been to drag it through to the rear balcony and push it over into the sea, but she had not considered its weight. She locked the door and stood briefly scanning the floor. The short, uneven strips were rotting about the old nail-heads, which in places had worked up from the boards. There were widening cracks where ends joined. She knelt down and tried to start some of these rusty nails, but they were firmer than they looked. She moved from one to another in growing haste, still on her knees, and tugged at the stubborn iron with her tender hands. The jagged roughness tore her fingers, imbedding splinters at every wrench. She reached a looser nail. Her renewed effort forced the wood around it, and she began to use it as a claw, prying and digging faster and faster, working out the next. Presently she was able to lift this plank, and she used it as a lever under the second, bearing gradually with increasing weight. It gave without breaking and she laid it aside while she raised a third strip. There was an increased rush of air. The flickering candle-flame was snuffed out. Still the light from the high window showed the chest, and she dragged it to the aperture. It fell slanting, and caught in the flooring. At the same instant some one outside tried the tap-room door.

She grasped the chest with the strength of desperation. It slowly righted and went through. The tide closed over it with a deeper swash.

Again she heard that cautious noise. Some one was trying to force a key in the lock. It was obstructed by the one she had left there, and the attempt was followed by a muttered curse. She laid the planks back in their order, and brushing the sand and pebbles hastily over them, rose, panting, and faced the door. There was no further disturbance, but the room suddenly darkened. She turned, lifting her eyes to the high window, and saw against the light the head of a man. It appeared briefly and moved down, but she caught the brutish profile. It was the face that had once alarmed her, peering into her room out of the night.

She threw the door open, and relocking it from the outside, ran swiftly through the bar-room and down the walk. Presently she glanced back fearfully, but the man had not followed, and she paused to hurl the key and the candle far out in the tide.

As she approached her gate she saw that Forrest was waiting at the foot of the piazza steps, while the inspectors came along the side of the house from the rear. They moved slowly, prodding the sawdust and planking that built up the yard, and she hoped to gain the porch before they came that far. But they met her while she was still on the walk. Bates swept her with his keen glance, but the lantern, which the other man was adjusting, flashed that moment full in his face, and, blinded, he passed without stopping her, going in the direction of the

ruin.

Forrest saw her and stood holding the gate. The slab-fire suddenly burst into brighter flame. It showed him clearly the stains of earth and brine upon her gown; the grime of dust and moisture on her worn face. She raised her hand to ward off his look, and her sleeve, rent to the elbow, fell back from her beautiful forearm, baring a long deep, bleeding hurt, ploughed there by the brass-bound end of the falling chest. "Louise, Louise," he said. "What is it? Tell me."

She pushed him aside and went up the steps.

"Trust me," he said. "Let me help you."

"No," she answered, "No. Don't ask me." Then she turned and looked down at him, and through the anguish in her eyes he saw the old heart-breaking appeal. "I—I did it—for—little Silas." Her voice broke in a great tearless sob. She went in and closed the door.

After a moment Forrest turned and followed the officers around to the ruin. As he approached he heard the sound of blows. What wall had they found to require such battering? He was there in time to see the hinges of the old tap-room door wrenched out of the soft wood. It fell inward, starting a cloud of dust from the rotting floor. Bates stepped on it, and flashed his lantern over the interior. His keen eyes swept the empty place and came back to meet the glance of the other inspector. He laughed. "Well, Bates," he said, "I guess we're fooled."

Bates's eyes moved to the fallen door. "This lock was put on this room for a purpose," he said. "And the *Phantom* could land almost under these walls at high tide. She may be stumbling around out there now, feeling her way in through the smoke."

"The *Phantom*?" Forrest started. He leaned an instant on the bar behind him, then he pulled himself erect and stood staring into the empty tap-room. The lantern shining in his face showed it hard and gray with the deepening furrow cleaving his brows. "The *Phantom* was here," he told himself. "The stuff was left in there—and *she*—knew it. She concealed it, moved it, somehow, while those men were at the house."

Bates turned and looked at him. "I suppose, Forrest," he said, "you can't account for this lock? You could hardly think of using this old ruin for storage purposes."

"No, no." His voice rang. He met the inspector's look clearly, with his quick, upward fling of the head. "I ought to know all about it, but I never saw it before. My work kept me in the other direction, at the mills."

"Of course," said Bates slowly, "of course, as I thought. I've simply got to patrol this beach, to-night, and wait for daylight to pick up a clue."

Forrest walked with the officers back towards the cutter. "I should have known about that lock," he told himself. "I should have found out why that horse

was up there on the bluff that day. I should have learned what brought Stratton here alone. A little investigation would have shown how things were going. I might have kept Philip out of the scheme; brought things to a climax in time."

When the trio made the turn in the bluff that shut them off from a view of the ruin, Smith swung himself down from the rear balcony to the rim of beach which the ebbing tide had bared. He groped under the stringers and found a dark lantern, which he lighted and held beneath the building. It showed the top of the chest above the water, and he pushed along between the wall and the bluff to the side of the tap-room, and dipped under the floor. Presently he emerged, dragging the chest. He stooped and lifted, worked it on to his shoulder, and went splashing knee-deep and waist-deep in hollows, around to the western exposure of the headland. When it seemed accessible he used his lantern again and found the path. A short distance up he wormed himself, crouching, through a tangle of hazel and salal and reached a little spur flanked by an old cedar snag.

He put his burden down, and by the light of his lantern took two pairs of saddle-bags from the hollow heart of the trunk, and filled them with the contents of the chest. What remained he put into a coarse sack. Then he picked up the empty chest and ran back a pace or two and hurled it out into the tide. He waited, listening, but he heard only the rush and ebb of the sea, and he returned to the cedar, and taking the weighted bags on his shoulders, pushed on up to the summit.

He stopped there, gathering breath. The ledge where he stood seemed to run shelf wise along an abyss. The mingled fog and smoke gave immensity to the distance below. He bent his head, listening again, and caught faintly the voice of the sea, nothing more. Then suddenly out of the night behind him there came a gentle nicker. His big lips broke in a leer. He ran, groping along the ridge trail to his horse.

He threw the bags across his saddle and stopped to fold the sack inside his blanket, which he carried rolled at the crupper. Then he moved away up the ridge, running afoot with the horse. Once he swung himself up behind the load for a brief interval, while he gathered wind, but he was down again directly and slipping over the ground with the same ease.

Finally he halted. Out of the stillness he heard the sound of hoofs crossing a bridge. He fell to his knees an instant with his ear to the ground, and when he rose his lips again broke in their horrible leer. He moved on to a point where the trail cut a thoroughfare, and, presently, Stratton joined him. He took one pair of the saddlebags with him on the chestnut, and Smith mounted and they rode on

together in the direction of the Nisqually.

CHAPTER XXIII

"AS LONG AS WE TWO LIVE"

Forrest stood on the upper landing of the mills. It was hardly midday and the air was charged with the singing and buzzing of saws and the rumble of the tramway. The town across the harbor was hidden in the thick pall, and the sun hung overhead a blood-red ball. Ashes and cinders fell everywhere; one breathed, tasted smoke.

The cutter, which had steamed over to the town during the night, had returned and was lying at the lower wharf, and Forrest was watching Bates. He had stayed to patrol the mills but had gone aboard when the steamer arrived, and had now come over the gangway and was walking up from the dock. Presently he mounted the stairs to the landing, but the manager did not turn, and he came over and stood by him, looking off into the smoke. "Of course, Forrest," he said at last, "you think a lot of the Judge. You are under obligations to him."

"I think a great deal of him, yes," Forrest gave the inspector a level look. "He is one of the best friends I ever had; but 'obligations' is hardly the word." He paused, looking off again into the smoke, then said, "Judge Kingsley is able to meet and brave through—what he must. It's Kingsley's wife I've got to think of. You don't know her, Bates." He paused, steadying his voice. "She has the old, rigorous New England sense of duty; the blood and principles of generations of Puritans are condensed in her. And yet she is so gentle, so sweet—but you can't understand without seeing her."

"I see," said Bates slowly, "I see. But, Forrest, suppose Kingsley is left out of this, could you put us on Stratton's track?"

Forrest swung around. "You ought to know, Bates, I'm not that sort of a man. And she— isn't that kind of a woman. She would wring the misery out of a thing like this, as no other woman would, and suffer the shame of it all her life,—but the expiation would mean something to her. She could stand the disgrace better, when it came to it, than covered guilt."

"I understand all that, Forrest," Bates lifted his hand with a sweeping gesture that dismissed that side of the question,— "but it's this way: the *Phantom* was at her moorings over there at Seattle, when the cutter ran across last night. The

captain boarded her immediately, and found Kingsley sleeping like a kid in his cabin below. Stratton had come up from Victoria with him, yes, but he had gone ashore. He couldn't tell just where he was at that time, but he usually put up at the Arlington. And, yes, they had run pretty close to Foulweather Bluff, just as we saw, and he was sorry about the matter of the headlight,—the glass had smashed in and he hadn't the chance to rig another,—but he was ready if they had come to collect the fine. And of course he had heard the cutter's salute, but it was too great a risk to bring the *Phantom* around in the smoke; we had just come mighty near a collision. Then, when the captain told him he would have to make a thorough search of the yacht, he sat coolly advising him where to look. Hadn't he better cut up the cushions? He never had been certain what was inside. And there was a place on the port side that had always sounded a little hollow. They would find a hatchet in that locker if they wanted to rip off a few boards. In short, Forrest, there was absolutely nothing to show, beyond the fact that the *Phantom* brought over our man. But, whatever Kingsley knows, or doesn't know, I must get on Stratton's track right away. That thoroughbred which he usually keeps in the Arlington stables when he is in town is gone; and that's about the only clue I have to work on."

"Then," said Forrest, with another level look, "if I were you I would go up to the top of this bluff and look around."

Bates started. A sudden understanding leaped in his face.

"And," continued Forrest, "if I happened to miss my trail anywhere up the ridge, I think I would shape a course straight through to a shooting-box he owns, up the Nisqually."

"Thank you for that, Forrest," Bates grasped his hand warmly, "thank you. When you went into the milling business the Government lost the chance of a mighty good man."

He turned with this and ran lightly down the stairs. A moment later the noon whistle sounded and the workmen began to come out on the landing. Forrest stood waiting while Bates hurried back to the cutter. A small vessel moved out from the shrouded city front, her set jib showing lighter in the dense grayness, and like a spectre drifted towards the mills. But Forrest saw her absently. He was thinking that he must go over to the little dining-room. Louise had not met him there at the usual breakfast hour, but she would hardly miss the mid-day meal. Young Silas would make it necessary for her to come. And he must sit there, passively, as though nothing had occurred, while she was in such desperate straits. How could he look into her face? How could he crush down any longer what he thought of Philip? What he hoped for Stratton? The recollection of him, his handsome, mocking face, his fascination, incredible power over Kingsley, most of all his responsibility for the wrecked life of this sweet woman,

made his muscles tingle, and sent the blood with a rush through his veins. It was the passion of a strong and much-enduring man brought to his limit. His arms ached for physical contact. Some day, soon, he would like to set his hands on Stratton in one tremendous, unforgettable grip.

But Louise was not coming to the dining-room. Little Silas, mounting the stairs with Mason, was saying so. His "muvver" was not hungry; she was going to have some tea at home. But he was ready, and he had told Sing to watch, and when he saw him coming with Uncle Paul, to bring in the soup.

Forrest went over to the dining-room with the boy, and a little later the *Phantom* swung in to her wharf. Kingsley came ashore and went directly up the walk to his house. His wife did not meet him at the door. He did not find her in the parlor. Of course she was at lunch, or was it dinner here at the mills? He sat down to the piano and ran his fingers over the keys. Presently the noise brought her into the room, and he looked up with a nod and smile, drumming on to the end of his tune. Then he wheeled around on the stool and rose to his feet. "Well, Louise," he said, "I have good news for you." She received his kiss on her cheek, at which he laughed, and putting his hand under her chin, compelled her sweet lips. "We are going home to Olympia."

He waited for her to speak, but she did not. She only stood locking and unlocking her slim hands, and looking at him with tragic, circle-rimmed eyes. "You'll be glad to get away from Freeport," he added.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I shall be very—glad—to leave Freeport; I am going—but not to Olympia; not with you."

"You are not going to Olympia, Louise? Not with me?"

"That is what I said." Her breast heaved and she went on with apparent effort. "We made a—terrible mistake; I have known it for a long time. Still, I believed we could live out our lives together—for the sake of little Silas."

"Do you mean—our marriage, Louise? Do you think that was a mistake?"

"Yes." Her face grew very white, and she put one hand on a table, leaning a little on the support.

His own face clouded. It was the way of this man to value things according to the difficulty of possession; and he found himself suddenly shaken by a new and strange tenderness for his wife, while at the same time he felt a swift and bitter suspicion. He turned and walked the floor, retracing his steps, and going the length of the room again. "It is true, then," he said. "It is true."

"What is true?"

"What Stratton told me. This thing the mill-hands are bruited about." She started and stood quivering from head to foot, and he added slowly, watching her, "This story about you and Paul."

She did not speak directly. She was like one brutally struck. Then infinite

contempt rose in her face; her deep eyes flamed, and her voice, when she found speech, took its contralto notes. "You say that. You. When you know the situation was thrust upon him. When you, yourself, left me alone with our baby, in this rough milling camp, for weeks together, with no possible protection but his. Think of it. When I told you I was afraid, you asked him to see that the house had special watch at night; when I said that I missed you, you asked him to bring his violin and spend his evenings with me; even when Si's hard illness came, it was not you who shared my anxiety; it was not you who quieted him, carried him in your strong arms. No, it was not you, but Paul Forrest. And he saved—little Silas; you know he risked his own life for him." Her voice broke. "Oh, you must see that he was forced into it; you must. He had enough else to do—but—you left him no alternative."

"I left him no alternative? Well, I own it. But you, Louise, come, out with it. It's true. You do love him."

"No," and her voice thrilled him, "No. When a woman is married and has her little child—to think of, she doesn't turn so easily to—other loves."

At this he began to walk the floor again. She watched him with lifted head and flaming eyes.

"I wonder," he said, stopping suddenly and regarding her with a touch of humor in his face, "I wonder if you think I don't care anything for you."

"Yes, you have led me to think so."

He laughed aloud. "Why, I couldn't care that," he snapped his fingers, "for any other woman. I couldn't love any woman but you. Don't you know it, Sweetheart?" He put his arm around her, drawing her head against his shoulder. "Come, say you forgive me."

But she drew away, freeing herself desperately with her two arms. His own fell. She moved back and the step was immeasurable space between them. "No," she said. "No. Do not ask it."

He took another turn across the floor, uncertainly, his hands seeking his pockets. "Tell me this," he said quietly, stopping before her. "Is there something else? Something more than—well—my neglect. Something I don't know about."

"How can I tell you?" She pressed her hands to her head and let them fall, meeting his look. "Your way of loving has never been my way. I could never make you understand how much I cared for you. You were everything to me, Philip; everything. I worshipped you. To have you indifferent, away, to lose you as I did, was to have nothing. But I still could teach Silas to respect you, to believe in you. No slight, no neglect of me could make me doubt you in—other ways. You were a man of honor among men; you had your place—until—last night."

His glance wavered while she spoke. He felt an unaccountable weakness, a sudden tightness at the throat, and he reached back to a chair behind him and

sank down.

"Philip," she said, "how could you do it? How—could—you?" Tears rushed to her eyes; she brushed them impatiently away. "Think of it. To lend the *Phantom*, that clean, white yacht, to an opium smuggler; to make him your companion, friend; to be his willing tool. Oh, the shame of it! The shame of it! How could you?"

He dropped his face in his hands. He felt suddenly that a court of justice might be more merciful than this proud, sweet, unrelenting woman. Then he made an effort to pull himself together. "I see," he said, "you saw the revenue boat and you accepted Forrest's version. The captain of the cutter would have told you different. There is some suspicion hanging over Stratton, I admit, and those inspectors were looking for the *Phantom*, in fact they boarded her, merely because he happened to make the cruise with me over from Victoria. They of course found nothing."

"No," she said slowly, "they found—nothing." There was a brief silence, then she went on. "I was there, in the old hotel, when you landed. I often walked that way when the house seemed too—unbearably—lonely. I liked the sounds of the tide. I believed, at first, the *Phantom* had missed the dock in the smoke; then I thought it might be another boat, and some secret plot going on about the mills; something Paul should know. I am not a very brave woman, as you have often said, and I crept under the bar to wait. I was even afraid when I knew it was you. The key you dropped fell on my skirt. Afterwards, when the cutter came, I understood. And while the inspectors searched through these rooms, I went back to the ruin and lifted enough of the floor to get—the chest—through."

"You did that? Oh, Louise, Louise!" He dropped his face again in his hands. He saw in a flash the magnitude of what she had done; the terrible moral as well as the physical effort it had cost her. But he felt more, in that bitter moment, that it was to her, the one in all the world from whom he had most cared to hide his dishonor, he owed his salvation. "Oh, Louise," he repeated, "and you did it for me."

"No." Her voice rang. "No. I did it for little Silas; to save him the disgrace. I am going to take him away, where the smallest hint or suspicion can never reach him. But I will not have a divorce—unless you wish." And the break in her voice, the white stillness of her face more than her words convinced him.

He rose to his feet. "The scheme was all Mark Stratton's," he said. "He took advantage of my being in a tight place. He promised to assume the whole risk; let him shoulder the disgrace."

She was silent.

"Louise," he said desperately, "you can't be so hard. I know what I did. I know there isn't the shadow of excuse for me, but you can't be so hard. You don't

mean a separation. You are only trying me. Fix a limit; give me a certain time to prove myself. Give me some sort of hope, Louise."

He was very handsome at that moment. He possessed great personal magnetism; his emotion softened his voice and the brilliancy of his black eyes. He came a step towards her, opening his arms impetuously. "I will do anything you say, Sweetheart; only don't leave me."

She stood shrinking against the table. "I could never respect myself—again," she said slowly, with manifest effort, "unless—you accepted your share of the atonement; and—my own confession—would follow; but—little Silas—would begin life—handicapped."

"Silas. Well, it's all right, put him first; I deserve it. But count in old Si, too; it would cut him pretty bad. After all, we are in the same boat. Let us forget it and make a new start." Her face was very white; her body rocked. He thought that she was falling. He took her in his arms. "Sweetheart," he said, "don't send me away; I love you so."

But she laid her palms against his breast, holding herself aloof. His arms fell. "Then make it a probation," he pleaded. "I will be good. Promise me you will come back—in a year."

She shook her head. She was almost past speaking. She braced herself with her hand on the table again, her whole body trembling. "No," she said at last, "no. Please go; don't say any more. It must be separation—nothing less—as long as we two live!"

CHAPTER XXIV

"A MAN OF STRAW"

Smith, having slower horses and the bulk of the outfit, started for the Pass at daybreak, with the understanding that Stratton would overtake him at the crossing of the Nisqually; and it was hardly two hours later that the thoroughbred forded the Des Chutes above the lodge, and, followed by a pack-animal, made a sharp ascent to the rock tower, where his master halted to load the remainder of the cache.

The forest fires that had been the salvation of the *Phantom*, had proved a disadvantage on the road from Seattle. The two horsemen had been forced to make wide détours around blazing timber; sometimes the trail was lost in the

charred ruins of burned out tracts, and arriving at the ranch where Stratton had expected to pick up pack-animals, they found the buildings completely wiped away, and all signs of humanity and life gone. But Smith annulled these delays by starting a red trail backward from the Nisqually plains through the untouched woods they had travelled; cutting off any chance of pursuit for several days.

Stratton had been further handicapped by the pain in his head, which the heat and glare brought on with increasing violence. There were moments when riding became impossible, and he threw himself from the saddle, prone on the earth, to wait for harder paroxysms to pass. But as they approached the headwaters, they came into the shade of clean, unbroken timber; the smoke decreased to scarcely more than a haze, and, while Smith pressed Laramie to forage for the necessary pack-horses, Stratton was able to allow himself twenty-four hours of absolute rest, induced by a few drops of the mixture he had learned to use in the solitude of his lodge, and this put him on his feet again.

Still he made slow progress down the rough path from the tower that morning, and even when he struck the main trail he halted repeatedly, like a man of two minds. Finally he wheeled and, encumbered by the pack-horse, which led indifferently, paced back, and turned into a by-way that brought him into the school branch. He held Sir Donald at a walk and studied the ground, until, though he noticed Mose's footprints in a moist place, he was satisfied the black had not yet passed. Presently he stopped, listening. The track, there, doubled a trunk of great girth; a hollow cedar stump, roofed like an arbor by the branches of young alders, which also screened a break in the inner wall, like a curtain before a door.

The sound became a brisk and steady lope. To this man, who had waited for it often, who was accustomed to read the individuality of horses as a psychologist studies men, it was unmistakable. He backed the pack-animal into the salal, and held the thoroughbred in, while Colonel, falling to a gentle pace, rounded the curve and came to a playful standstill.

"Good morning." Alice's glance moved from Stratton to the laden pack-horse. "But it looks like good-by," she said.

"Yes, I turned back to say it. I missed seeing you at the homestead, yesterday, and I am starting on another trading and hunting trip. I should find elk now, in the mountains, and I hope to bring you the horns of a goat."

"I'll have a place for all you bring," she answered, her lips dimpling. "Mose told me you were going. But," she added seriously, "I'm glad you are going alone. Mose saw Pete Smith, late last evening, creeping along from the foot-bridge, and this morning, of course you know, Mill Thornton's horse was gone."

"Not the sorrel?" Sir Donald, accustomed to every fluctuation of his master's voice, trembled and wheeled. But the hand on the bridle steadied and brought him around. "No," Stratton added, "No, I had not heard. I came the

other way, by the ford and the canyon trail, and so missed seeing Mrs. Mill. And Thornton believes it was Smith?"

"Yes, he is sure of it. There was a clear track on the wet grass across my claim to strike the canyon trail. He followed it far enough to be certain, then started for the prairie to get Jake's horse. Ketchum is very swift and he expected to bring the Government detectives back with him. They have tracked Pete to the settlement, and spent last night at the Myers homestead."

Stratton put his hand on the black's glossy neck, giving it a quick, firm stroke. "And they are looking for—Smith?" he asked.

"Yes. He has committed some new crime; Samantha didn't understand what. I doubt if the man who told Mill knew. But," she halted an instant, compelling his eyes with her clear, steadfast look that seemed to expect a best in him, "you will help the Government now. You will stop him if the opportunity comes. And you know how Mill needs his horse. Think if it was Sir Donald; think how it must go all against the grain of a fine, mettlesome creature to be touched, even, by those unclean, wicked hands."

"I will do what I can about the sorrel," he answered. "But I am going a long and hazardous journey; I may never see you again." He gave the black another quick, firm stroke, then, meeting her eyes, once more lost himself. "Smith is with me," he said. "Those men are looking for me. Think. Go back to that day at the tower when you stumbled on that strange, leaking tin. Go back farther to that time on Orcas Island; the story I told you there on the summit. I was that boy."

"You were that boy?"

"Yes. The time has come; I want you to know it from me. I was that boy. And you,"—he paused, and the quiver that was the surface stir of unsounded depths swept his face. "You were that woman. I can't give you up. You don't know how I love you. Wait. Listen. Never mind that friendliness; I break the truce. Never mind your impossible duty to the Judge. When a woman loves a man, as you are capable of loving, she doesn't hold him off the breadth of the whole continent; she goes when he calls. Wait. Listen. Forget that Puritan conscience of yours, this one half-hour, and I pledge myself to live up to it the rest of my life. Trust me. Promise you will join me in Chicago, New York, Montreal, whenever, wherever I write."

The color flamed in her face. "I shall be late to school," she said. "Turn Sir Donald, please."

She spoke to her horse, but the thicket crowded close and the chestnut continued to hold the way. "Wait, just one moment more," Stratton went on, "you do not understand. I will take you away, to the ends of the earth, if I must, and make a new start. I can do it; I can become the most rigid patriot, I swear, with you to back me. It rests completely with you, to make of me your kind of

man, or to send me—I don't care where."

"I could never be any man's prop," she answered. "I thought you knew that!" Then suddenly her manner changed. Her face softened; her eyes filled with a great appeal. "Face it out, pay the price," she said. "I will help you; only be the man of character, of force, I have believed you to be, and not—a man of straw."

"Force," he caught at the word. "Force. Would you like me better if I should carry you away? I could do it, now, to-day; over the mountains, into the big Palouse wilderness. Sir Donald is very fleet,"—he watched her narrowly,— "and so is the black."

"Carry me away? Carry me?" Again her manner changed. She tipped back her head, laughing in soft derision.

"I know every byway northward to the British boundary and far beyond," he went on hurriedly. "Only give me the start over the divide, and the whole roused Northwest could never find you."

"But you forget my part; I should find a way back." And she laughed again, less merrily, still in derision.

He backed his horse a little among the alders, close to the cedar trunk, and swung himself from the saddle, moving to the chestnut's head and thrusting his arm through the bridle. The position brought him again to the neck of the black, and he slipped the same hand on through the coil of Colonel's lariat. "At least you are not afraid of me," he said. "I am glad of that."

"Afraid? Afraid of you? Oh, no. Why should I be? But the children will be waiting." Though the words were brave her voice trembled. It was not the first time she had tried to laugh this man off dangerous ground, but now, suddenly looking into his face, for the first time, she felt he had passed beyond her influence.

She was afraid. This was not the Stratton she had known; whose companionship hitherto had seemed a security on the trail; whose frequent visits to the headwaters had kept her in touch with the outside world; the friend who had once saved her from fire; whom, earlier, she had rescued from an ice-crevasse. That Stratton had been mocking, debonair; a few times she had seen him shaken with passion, but he had shown her strong under-currents of fine feeling; and, always, in any mood, he had remembered to be courteous, chivalrous; that was bred in the bone. But this man—it was as though she had not seen him before. His face was determined, hard. It might have been chiseled of rock. His silence was a threat. And, clearly, he did not mean to let her pass.

She turned in her saddle to look at the space behind her and gathered her rein. And instantly Stratton laid his palm on her hand and drew the bridle from her surprised hold. "You will hate me at first," he said, "perhaps hard and long;

but—I can be patient—you will love me in the end and marry me.”

He made a hitch in the rein and dropping it on the black’s neck, lifted his hand to the silk handkerchief knotted at his throat.

“I will not,” she said, and caught a great breath, “I will not.” She reached for the bridle, but again his hand closed over hers. She flashed him a look; unspeakable contempt, aversion, rose in her face. “You ruffian,” she added. “You common ruffian, outlaw.”

And he let the hand go. He released, too, his hold on the coiled lariat, and stood back like a man unexpectedly struck. He had ceased to bar the way; she was free to ride on, but she failed to notice that. She saw only this “ruffian” and her eyes stormed. “Listen,” she said, and her voice, like her sister’s, deepened to contralto notes. “I warn you. I can die just once and it will come to that before I ever bring myself to marry you. As long as I live I shall never love any man but—*Paul Forrest*.”

So, at last, in this moment of great anger, the truth which she had not even admitted to herself, was surprised from her. Then she was silent. A wave of color surged and ebbed in her face. She began to tremble, a little at first, then harder; her whole body rocked.

And Stratton watched her. The light like a blade flashed in his eyes, but he gathered himself, slowly, in check, the Stratton she knew once more. “So,” he said, finally, “so, after all, it is the black’s master, as I thought, as I feared at the beginning. You might have told me; it was hardly fair to me to fabricate that yarn about the Judge, and stay by it so long.”

“It was not a fabrication. I am going to marry Judge Kingsley,” her voice broke and she finished almost in a whisper, “as I told you.”

“I see,” he answered slowly, “I see.” He paused and went on yet more slowly. “To think of it, the irony of it, that Forrest should love your sister.”

Colonel had started, but she drew him in and turned, again facing this man. “Hush,” she said, and he saw that she shook once more, from head to foot. “Hush. Deny it. Own that you know, it isn’t true.”

He folded his arms, one drawn still through his bridle, and met her look steadily. “But I believe it,” he answered. “I am sorry, but I believe it. How do you know it isn’t true?”

“You know them both, yet you can ask. You—you must have seen that she could never care for any man but Philip Kingsley.”

“I grant that,” he answered and smiled. “I spoke merely of Forrest. It is he who is generally blamed.”

“Blamed?” She lifted her chin high; her eyes storming.

“Yes, it is common talk among the mill men; I have overheard it discussed in a hotel lobby at Seattle, and at Olympia, where they are generally and intimately

known."

"But you—you have denied it?"

He shook his head. "I am sorry, but how could I deny it?"

"Because Paul Forrest isn't that kind of man; you know it. You know he is as true, as steadfast as these hills."

"True to her," Stratton persisted softly, "true to her, yes."

"No—to me."

Then suddenly on the silence there rang an ominous sound. Colonel wheeled and looked, head up, sensitive ears playing, towards the Nisqually trail; he wheeled again and she allowed him to set the pace in the direction of the school.

Plainly there were many hoof-beats and they struck into the branch leaving the river trail. Stratton spoke to the indifferent pack-horse, touched him smartly on the flank and sent him careering after the black. Then he urged the thoroughbred quickly along the trunk to the break that was like a door. There was barely room to press through, and the chestnut's head rose among the alder branches that roofed the stump. But a word, a firm touch on the forelegs, and the trained animal dropped to his knees. Another word and he rolled to his side with his head flattened to receive his master's weight. It was the method used in breaking a cavalry mount for field drill; and Sir Donald remained motionless, while Bates and his deputies thundered by with Thornton, in hot pursuit of the black and the laden pack-horse.

Stratton rested lightly, easing his weight by bracing one knee on the earth. A bough rustled outside of the trunk; a twig snapped faintly, and he was conscious that a pair of ferret eyes peered cautiously, briefly, around through the aperture. But he made no sign until the posse had passed; then he threw out his arm, feeling, and drew Lem, struggling, towards him. "You spy," he whispered, and the anger flashed in his eyes; "you spy. Tell what you know and I will skin you—by inches—alive."

Then he tossed the shaking boy aside, in a heap, and in another instant had his horse up and out of his hiding-place, and mounting, galloped lightly back in the direction of Nisqually crossing and the Pass.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ROCKSLIDE

Stratton made a steep rise and stopped, breathing the chestnut on a level shoulder of the Pass. Behind him a clump of mountain hemlock and some scrub pines marked the tree line, and, looking ahead, he saw, rounding a bald and higher spur, a rider with two pack-horses. For a brief interval these figures moved, well-defined, gathering nearness in the slanting rays of the low sun, then a black buttress closed, shutting them out like a mighty door. The man was Smith. He had not waited at Nisqually ford and he rode Thornton's sorrel.

Stratton whistled, a soft, peremptory note, and the thoroughbred sprang, moving swiftly down a short incline, and up towards the buttress. The passage grew difficult. The trail, which took the edge of a precipitous slope, was obstructed by fallen rock. Presently these loose accumulations increased to a slide. Sir Donald dropped to a walk, picking his way lightly. Finally, under the cliff, he halted, balanced nicely on a huge rocking slab, and inspected with suspicion the pitfalls before him. His master waited, motionless; the bridle hung loosely, but in a firm, alert hand. "It's all right, old fellow," he said, "It's all right, but take your own time."

The chestnut shook his mane in remonstrance and put one forefoot out cautiously, trying for hold. Then he withdrew, backing carefully, swiftly, off the slab, and with hoofs set, head high, whole body quivering, waited. The next instant the solid earth shook, and like a sprung mine, clang, clash, roar, a terrific cannonading filled the gorge.

Stratton understood. Smith had seen him at the lower curve, and, bent on deferring a meeting until the return of the sorrel was impossible, had pressed hurriedly on. The autumn frosts, thawing by day, continually split and loosened rock on the face of the cliff, and this incautious passing of the horses, a false step, a stumble, had been the slight jar necessary to start a fresh avalanche.

The final echo died far off; the profound silence which had followed him all day settled again like an intangible presence over the gorge. It was a stillness to challenge the very breathing of a man, if he lived, and Stratton waited, listening, for any slight disturbance beyond the buttress. None reached him. But the sorrel was fleet. She would have sprung like the wind at the first crack of the catastrophe; and if there had been space to pass the pack-animals, it was possible she had carried Smith out of the track of the slide.

But clearly this portion of the trail was now impassable. He backed Sir Donald slowly away from the bastion, and when he was able to turn him, rode down to a point where a rivulet, cascading from a hidden snow field high up, formed a gully in the slope. He took this rocky stairway, dismounting where he must, swinging into the saddle again, making détours through crumbling earth, on over slippery stone, doubling back, pressing up once more, and so gained the summit of the cliff. He left his horse and crept to the eastern edge and looked

down on the slide. It was terrible. For half a mile, obliterating the trail to the next curve, stretched ruin. Midway a crag, like a broken mainmast, dismantled, toppled out of the wreckage, and at the same time a warning and a menace, held the Pass. It was also a monument. There was no longer room for doubt; somewhere down there in the bottom of the gorge, under tons of rock, the unfortunate sorrel was buried with Smith.

Aside from the light provision Stratton carried in his saddle-bag, and his blanket rolled at the crupper, the camp outfit and the remainder of the opium had gone down with the pack-horses. But he could not return to the Nisqually. Even if Bates had given up the pursuit, the roused settlement, by this time holding him responsible for Thornton's horse, would keep a tireless watch for him. He must go on.

He drew back from the precipice and stood erect. The buttress was only the advanced paw of the monster height that loomed above him. He looked up, measuring its sharp pitches, trying to shape a course around the slide. The sun dipped behind a spur, and the wind, pulling up the defile, sharpened. Then suddenly the great peaks that encircled him seemed to draw closer. They gathered personality; they became a tribunal, austere, uncompromising, sitting in supreme judgment; ready to follow quick sentence with swifter execution. Each mighty, hoary head turned to him, waiting, watchful, and a voice, intangible yet dominant like the silence, said, "Next."

"No," he answered aloud, and set his lips, "No, not yet. There is a way through, or else I can make one."

But close on this challenge there rang a rifle-shot. He swung around and dropped to his knee. Looking over the opposite edge of the buttress, he saw three horsemen at the curve which he had lately passed. Bates he knew instantly, from the powerful, white-faced bay he rode; and the big fellow, holding the rifle in readiness, while he checked in the long-limbed, nervous brown mount, was of course Thornton; the third was probably a deputy, and presently, while they waited reconnoitering the cliff, Myers joined them, urging Ginger. Then they all came slowly forward, and disappeared under the rim of the bastion.

Instantly Stratton was up. He threw himself into the saddle and put Sir Donald to the slope. The men would stop at the slide; they would turn back and doubtless pick up his trail at the rivulet. They would follow to the surface of the cliff and from there he would be an easy target along the bald face of the mountain. He pushed on tirelessly, winding, doubling, looking back often, listening, but keeping a course, always, for a small spur capped by two tilting tables of granite. He made the last steep stretch on foot, and Sir Donald, protesting, yet invariably obedient, pricking this ear, the other, to his master's brief, low command, followed to the level. The slabs, in falling from a higher ridge, had pitched

shedwise against a wall, and Stratton crowded the chestnut into the hiding-place they roofed. Again, as in the hollow cedar trunk, there was not standing room for the horse; but a soft, peremptory word, a light blow on the forelegs, and he dropped to his knees, to his side, and became motionless. From his position, while he held down Sir Donald's head, Stratton looked out through the crack where the tables joined. It gave him a view of the buttress and a breadth of the trail approaching the lower curve.

Presently he saw Bates ride back to this bend with his deputy, and, after a brief halt, again to reconnoiter the top of the bastion, they rounded the curve and were gone. A moment later Thornton appeared on the top of the buttress, followed closely by Myers. They had left their horses, but the young rancher still carried his rifle, and when they had inspected the slide from the cliff, they took up the trail of the chestnut. But the light was failing, and the tracks were often lost on rocky stretches. They were forced to turn back repeatedly for the clue. Finally, not far from the granite tables, they stopped. "I 'low you might's well give it up, Mill," said Myers. "Ther sorrel was stumbling consider'ble on that ther last grade; she was losin' her nigh shoe. An' this here horse is pickin' up his feet like he was ready ter walk on air. It's ther chestnut, sure; he's er mighty good stepper in er mean place."

"An' it's Stratton I'm lookin' fur," answered Thornton grimly. "I don't keer what anybody says, he's responsible fur my horse. It was his business ter watch Smith; an' ef my little filly was cut down in that ther slide, Stratton's got to reckon 'ith me. He was here, standin' on that ther rock, when we kem 'round that curve; I saw him, an' so'd you, plain's day. He must hev gone up 'round ther slide, I dunno how, but he must hev, while we was foolin' erlong fur his blamed trail."

"Ther's somethin' mighty curious 'bout that ther chestnut," said Eben, dropping his voice and casting an apprehensive glance along the impossible way; "don't act like er nat'ral born horse. I dunno's I'd like ter ketch up 'ith him after night. You know that ther deputy 'lowed he got over ther woods, from ther schoolhouse trail, 'ithout leavin' er sign; an' Lem's ready ter swear, up and down, he see 'em, horse an' man, fade out o' sight close by that ther cedar snag. Mebbe it ain't so, but where in tarnation did he go? An' that boy kem home skeered out'n a hull year's growth."

"I dunno's I've figgered out these here inviserble folks correct, myself," said Thornton with deep irony, "but, fur a spirit horse, ther chestnut is able to take his fodder mighty reg'lar."

Eben stroked his beard and laughed softly. "Oh, I 'low he kin stand it ter hev his wings clipped, when he strikes ther bunch grass country. An' ef Bates catches ther Northern Pacific fur Portland, say to-morrow night, like he counted

on, he'll hev time ter make ther upper Columbia an' lay fur his man, all right."

"I count on takin' him this side ther Pass, myself," answered Mill. "Bates 'lowed ther Government 'ud set up a mighty good reward; mebbe five hundred. An' ef that smart little filly o' mine went down in ther slide, I 'low an extry pack-horse went with her. Stratton can't go far 'ithout his outfit; he's got to sneak back sometime fur rations."

Eben already had started back down the gully, and Thornton followed. In a little while Stratton saw the two men riding towards the curve below. When they rounded it, he brought the chestnut from his hiding-place and in the deepening twilight resumed the perilous détour around the slide. The lack of "rations" need not trouble him. He knew the art of woodcraft too well; he could snare a bird, take a beaver like an Indian, and the Palouse wilderness before him was an open book. But had he not his rifle, with ammunition in the saddle-bags; besides his full cartridge-belt and good pistols? There was no further use of taking that overland train, and, once through the Cascades, he would shape his course northward for the Fraser. Bates—he laughed aloud—Bates might lie in wait until he rusted, there on the upper Columbia.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE JUDGE

Already Nature stretched busy hands out of the shadows of the great park, and with manifold browns and greens softened the newness and crudeness of the little homestead enshrined at its heart. The clearing teemed with fresh life. The charred rails of the meadow fence were overgrown with tangles of wild blackberry and raspberry, with which the stiff foliage of the Washington holly disputed room. Ferns, springing from the ashes of the fire, reached a height of eight and ten feet and opened umbrella fronds. At the cottage sweetbrier and wild honeysuckle interlaced with the tendrils of a Virginia creeper and climbed to the eaves; maidenhair unfolded pale canopies over the shallow boxes on the edge of the balcony, where were planted sweet peas, and a syringa, supported by a pillar, offered its branches to trellis the insistent hopvine, which dropped from the gable a misty curtain of green. Backward, towards the small stable, and the huge hayrick thatched with lichen-bark, a wild cherry held its own among thrifty young orchard trees, and vigorous shoots of alder and maple pushed up hedge-

wise along the corral. Everywhere Nature had been encouraged to retouch, and eradicate and bring to a finish the general plan.

Still, had you approached the clearing that September afternoon,—however wayworn, however surprised, charmed,—you must have allowed your glance to rest longest on the bit of life in the landscape. The teacher had laid aside her pruning shears, and taking a rake from the wall, proceeded to draw weeds and clippings into a neat hummock. Her simple gown of brown barred gingham, catching a breath of wind, stirred gauzily. Upon her head the broad sun-hat with muslin bow and strings became a picture hat, quaint, pleasing. Still, had you once known her, you must have noticed that her figure had lost a little of its roundness; the skin its old transparency and velvet smoothness; shadows lurked under her brave eyes, and, sometimes, her sweet and mirth-provoking mouth stiffened into a patient self-suppression.

She stopped at length to rest, leaning on the gate, and looked up the trail, which began a level stretch through pale alders, dipped to a hollow and rose over a knob where, set like a flaring torch, a first changing maple illumined the way, and was lost to reappear briefly on higher ground. It was there on the hillside she presently discovered Mose. He came with his swift swinging stride his gun on his shoulder, a brace of birds in his hand, and was hidden directly in foliage. She waited, and when he came over the lower knoll, under the flaming maple, she drew the wooden pin and threw the gate open. "Grouse, Mose?" she asked with evident interest. "What beauties."

"But, ya-as, Mees," he answered, and smiled broadly, "I ees keel dem by Myers' plas. You know where de creek ees come roun' dat ole fir log; well, it ees dare I shoot dem. Dis one she ees come tek drink; she doan be so hard shot, for sure. But dis one, saprie, he ees fool me gre't; running an' flying, w-r-r-r, w-r-r-r, an' hiding heemself unner dat beeg cedar stump."

His enthusiasm was reflected in her face; her eyes caught from his a sudden fire. "Oh," she said with a soft intake of breath, "I know just how it happened. And he was out again in a flash, almost at your feet; you hadn't room to aim, but you waited and held yourself in, till he rose; then you took him, nice and clean, in the wing."

"Monjee, Mees," he said, and laughed aloud, "but you ees on'stan' lak you ees dare." He shifted the birds to the gun hand, and closing the gate, set the pin. "But it ees good t'ing I ees fin' dose grouse, nawitka; for I ees see mo'sieur, de Judge, down to Myers' plas. He mus' be long here 'bout dinner tam, for sure."

"So soon?" she answered in surprise. "I thought from his last letter that he would be delayed longer at the mills. But it is fortunate that we have the grouse," and the corners of her mouth lifted and dimpled; "we'll show him the right way to serve a bird."

"Nawitka, Mees." Mose was feeling in the depths of his blouse. "But Eben Myers, he ees go pas' de Station today, an' he ees tell me to bring you dis mail." He paused to scrutinize the address and weigh the letter speculatively in his palm. "Saprie, it ees good t'ing Mose Laramie doan' have to write so mooch spelling, an' mebbe read it all. Monjee, he doan' be able, den, to shoot some birds, an' fish by de Nisqually. Den, Mees, it ees pos'ble you ees be, sometams, hongry."

She laughed, shaking her head. "But you are learning, Mose. The trouble was in having three languages forced on you at the start. They were bound to tangle, and I guess the English was caught in the first knot at the bottom of the snarl. But it's all right; we only need a little more patience and time."

She walked on with the boy towards the cottage, opening the letter as she went, but when she glanced down the page the humor faded from her face. She reached the branch path to the river, and turned that way.

The letter was from her sister; the first she had received since Louise's rupture with Philip. She dwelt on the Judge's return and the closing of the mills. He had told her that Forrest had saved the property; that he had met emergency after emergency with a level-headedness not one young man in five hundred could have shown. Why, there were times when he had done the work of three responsible men, and most creditably. But at last, when she had finished the Judge's eulogy, to which was added one gently eloquent of her own, she took up briefly the matter of the separation.

Alice turned back and slowly re-read this portion.

"... I am leaving my husband. I can never explain it to you—please let the question rest—but Uncle Si will tell you I am right. It was necessary to tell him the truth and he admits my only course is a separation. There can never be any sort of a compromise, as long as I live, and I hope I shall never be obliged to see Philip Kingsley again.

"I am starting home to Olympia with Uncle Si today, but if you know of anyone in the settlement who can take me in, with little Si, I would rather go out there and stay, until I can shape my plans. Possibly, when you give up the school, I may be able to fill your place as well as any. Uncle Silas, however, is urging me to go, at least for a time, to Washington. I own it will be hard to have you both so far away, and I am tempted by the security of a strange city, with the whole continent between me and—what is past."

"Oh, Louise, my poor, sweet Louise, I'd love to see Phil Kingsley taught his lesson, but I know you, dear." Alice walked on the remaining distance to the falls. "You shall come and stay with me, as long as you want to, but you're going to forgive him, yes, you are, the first time he asks it."

Still, Louise had explained to the Judge; why should she find it more difficult to tell her? And just what was this reason, anyway? Then suddenly, in one

great shock, the wedge which Stratton had tried to fix, drove home. She stood, white, tense, on the trembling ledge, and stared with unseeing eyes into the upper cataract. Its thunder and passion were lost in the greater forces that engulfed her. All that Stratton had said in their last interview, his whole monstrous story, rejected hitherto, surged back, statement on statement, and compelled her belief. She saw now what that friendly intimacy of nearly two years, in that isolated place, must have meant to both Louise and Forrest. How she had created for him his only social and home life; how, day after day, countless times each day, she must have felt his quiet sympathy, helpfulness, in sharp contrast to the neglect and irresponsibility of Philip. And they had played, sung, innumerable evenings together; no man on earth could so appreciate her beautiful voice, her personal sweetness; and she had always loved his violin. How could she—how could any woman—have remained indifferent? And he—how could he help forgetting there were other women in the world? All men, good, strong men, had their fancies when they were boys in school; it was afterwards that they found the right, the one woman.

For a long time the thought of Forrest had seemed to bring him near. She felt his presence; it was as though he stood there, behind her on the ledge, watching her with clear, reproachful, almost frowning gaze. The color surged and went in her face; her shoulders shook, and the letter, which she had crushed in her hand, dropped from her relaxed hold. The torrent swirled it away. "I don't blame you," she said, and to her halting phrases the cataract stormed accompaniment, "Oh, I don't blame you. I know how you have fought it—stamped it down. But you can't kill it—it springs and springs again; it can't die. I know—I know. I've been through it—all."

At last she walked back through the meadow. The sun was dropping behind the purpling hills; birds piped night calls in the thicket; one of the Jerseys was lowing at the bars.

"Patience, Blossom, patience," she said, "Now, then, slowly, slowly." She laid her hand lightly on the tawny neck, and the cow picked her way over the lowered rails and turned towards the corral.

It was there, milking Blossom, that the Judge discovered her, when he came from the stable where Mose had helped him put up his horse. He did not speak directly, but stopped, leaning a little on the fence, his arms resting on the top bar, and watched her. There was in his eyes the look of a man who has found at last what he has long desired.

She did not yet know that he was there. Her shoulder was turned to him and she was looking up absently to a high spur of the slope. "My dear," he said, "My dear—it is a long time since I climbed a fence, but no doubt I could do it unless there is a gate."

She started and gave him a quick, backward glance, while her hand sent a swifter stream into the pail. Then she sprang up from her stool and hurried smiling to the rails.

But, presently, when she had shown him the little wicket, screened by two infant alders, the Judge found himself squeezing through, to wait for the almost filled pail. "It isn't nearly as difficult as it looks," she said, and her eyes challenged him over her shoulder.

"No, thank you," he answered laughing, "I like, better, just looking on."

But he lifted the brimming pail and carried it, not without difficulty, to the house. He set it down in the living-room and stepped back into the cool doorway, where he stood, fanning himself slowly, with his hat, and surveying the interior with growing approval.

Mose was already seated in the chimney corner, turning the roasting grouse on their spit. At the same time he tended a savory haunch of venison, while the old madame divided her attention between a boiling pot on the crane, and a tin reflector set in front of the fire.

"You see it's all very primitive," said Alice.

The Judge's eyes rested on the spit with manifest satisfaction. "It is the only right way to cook a bird," he answered.

"Nawitka," said Mose gravely. "But de mowitch, too, dis tam de year, ees gre't."

"And this was the finest stag brought in this season," said the teacher. "Mose trailed him to Nisqually ford. Those are the antlers." And if she, herself, had been the hunter, she could not have shown greater pride in the trophy over the doorway. "And this is the pelt of the cinnamon bear I wrote you about. The one Mose tracked with her two cubs. She was very savage and it was his last cartridge. Isn't the fur splendid?"

"Bien," said the pleased and embarrassed boy, "dat ees nothing. Dat ees one ver' fine gun de Mees ees give to me. It ees mooch too fine for no 'count half-breed lak me. Laramie, my fader, ees say so."

The Judge went up the little stairway built across the living-room, to the low gabled chamber under the eaves; and when he came down, presently, brushed and freshened, he found Alice laying the cloth in the balcony. She had changed the brown cotton frock for one of soft pink, and where the surplice crossed below the full throat, she had fastened a bunch of sweet peas. Others were tucked in her belt, and she gathered more from the long box on the edge of the veranda, and with a handful of mignonette, arranged them in a crystal bowl for the center of the board.

The light paled in the west; the high spur darkened; a few thin clouds parted over a far crest, and showed a young, ring-defined moon. A gust of wind fluttered

the cloth and roughened her hair. The Judge lighted the lamp on the wall, and set the pink shade as she would have it, so that a soft glamour fell on the modest array of glass and china. He filled the water pitcher and placed the rustic chairs; and finally they were seated and he found himself carving the savory grouse.

"What an Arcadia you have made of it," he said at last. "But it is simply sorcery; nothing else. Any other woman must have failed; or, succeeding, would have made a wreck of herself and spoiled her life. Even a man could only have accomplished it through hardship and long toil. But you—you have a charmed life. You have looked—you have cast your spell—and presto it was done."

"It took more than that," she answered and shook her head gravely; "you should know it."

"Yes, yes," he said quickly, "you are right. And I do know it."

"It was work, the hardest kind. Mose can prove it. He helped Mill Thornton clear the building site; he helped the settlers the day they came to slash and, again, to burn the brush piles. He cut logs for the cabin, shakes for the stable, rails for fencing. He opened the new trail."

"And wasn't that sorcery? To make a steady laborer of Mose? To coerce all of these young ranchers into service?" The Judge laughed softly, deeply.

"You know it was the pioneer spirit," she answered. "Nothing else influenced Mill Thornton to drive oxen for his neighbor, grubbing out stumps, when his own clearing was hardly under way, and Samantha wavered in the balance. Nothing else led Mr. Myers to lend his cattle for the work, in plowing time. And this same spirit, that calls the whole district out in a body to fight a forest fire, or hunt a trespasser, brought these men together to give their best effort to my house-raising. It meant a step further for the settlement, and each man takes a personal pride and interest in the new homestead he helped to make. Can't you understand that? And, dear Uncle Silas, can't you see what it means to me?"—Her voice was low and vibrant; her eyes gathered a soft brightness.—"I worked for it—endured—it's mine. Every foot of this ground is dear to me; every log in these walls. You mustn't expect me to love any other home—as well."

"I understand," said the Judge slowly, "I think that I understand. But—Forrest will be here in a few days; he intends to take up a systematic search for that lost prospect. And his heart is still set on this section. What will you do?"

"Meet my promise," she said, "of course. What else can I do? I will commute it, if you advise that, or relinquish, or sell him my right. I'm ready any time. But,—" she rose from her chair and looked off to the meadow, "I must go down and bring Colonel in. Wait here, won't you?—and have your cigar."

"I would rather walk with you," and he rose and went with her down the steps. "I noticed that meadow from the spur up the trail; it is a fine field."

"And you noticed my hayrick," she said quickly. "That was the best yield of timothy, to the acre, in the settlement this year. Jake Myers came from the prairie with his father's team to help me with the harvesting. I undertook to drive in a load,"—she paused, and he felt rather than saw, in the uncertain light, that her face rippled a smile,— "and Mr. Stratton rode down the trail just in time to see me spilled, hay and all, into the field. He was over the fence, in an instant, to rescue me from the bottom of the heap. And he stayed to help me reload, though he must have found it hard learning to use a pitchfork that warm afternoon."

The Judge laughed. He knew how she had looked at that moment, standing all flushed, irresistible, with a sweet quiver of her mobile lips, and the unconscious appeal growing in her eyes. And clearly Stratton had made the most of his opportunities, as any man must; as he had feared. "So, even Stratton came under the spell," he said; "you made him spoil those immaculate hands. And there was that other time, in the dry season when this meadow slashing accidentally burned. You did not tell me fully, but I understood he arrived, then, at the right moment, and helped to prevent a bad blaze."

"It was a bad blaze; it looked for awhile as if the whole fence, the buildings, the timber would go. And he found me fallen, my dress afire, and he risked himself to save me. He stayed hours, afterwards, bandaging my burns, bathing my face, doing all he could, when he, himself, must have been suffering agony. Dear Uncle Silas," her voice broke, "I believed in him; he disappointed me, but I'm not ungrateful; I shall never forget."

"I understand," the Judge answered slowly, "I think that I understand. And I appreciate, I am more than grateful, for what he did, but I did not know he was hurt. How was it?"

"I had fallen close to the burning slash pile, and, when he bent to move me, a blazing sapling sprang out and struck the back of his head. I didn't realize it at the time, and he always avoided speaking of it if he could, but it seemed to have left some permanent hurt that affected his eyes; any over exertion or exposure to strong light brought on paroxysms of pain, and once, when he had been taken by an attack on the trail, he was forced to stop here. It was then he told me and that he meant to go to New York and consult an oculist. He was only waiting for his schooner to come back from the North with her cargo of furs. You know she was wrecked—a total loss; and the trip East, the services of a specialist, demanded a great deal of ready money. Sometimes—sometimes—I believe that tempted him to—do what he did. It makes me feel responsible."

"I understand," said the Judge; "it is natural you should feel so, in a measure. But, my dear, he is not what you think; he lived a dual life."

"Oh," she said, "of course you think so; every one must. He persisted, always, in showing his worst side. But I knew him very well. He told me things

about his early life; he was handicapped from the start, but he was a man of fine and deep feeling—at heart. In spite of everything I shall always believe that.”

“Perhaps, I do not dispute you.” And he added after a moment, “Stratton himself wrote me something about that fire; I doubted you knew it, but he asked me to release you.”

She stopped, surprised, and tried to read more than he said in his face. “To release me?”

“Yes. I refused. I answered that the request should come from you. Sometimes, off there in Washington, I have expected it, Alice. You seemed so happy here; so—almost—eager to put off our marriage. And Stratton has a handsome face; personal charm; he was right here on the ground. My dear, tell me this; if that schooner had returned, if he had not been tempted, would you have wished my answer to him any different?”

She turned her face away, looking up to the black shadows of the park. “Dear Uncle Silas,” she said, and steadied her voice between the words, “if you—don’t want me—I shall never marry.”

“Want you?” The wind, drawing from the river, brought a closer booming of the falls. It toned with his pleading undernote like a great minor chord. “Want you? I want you so much that I am not willing to share even your gratitude with any other man. I want you—your best—your love—nothing less will do.”

They had stopped near a clump of alders, where, in making the clearing, she had preserved an old cedar stump with chairlike arms, overrun now with vines. A little farther on Colonel waited at the meadow bars. She walked a few steps and halted in uncertainty. The Judge moved enough to rest his arms on the flat surface of the trunk, and stood leaning a little, watching her. The noise of the cataract filled the interlude. A branch rustled and a shower of dead leaves fell, slanting from the alders to his feet. Then she turned and came back.

“Dear Uncle Silas,” she began, and meeting his look, repeated, her voice shaking, “Dear Uncle Silas, I’ve got to tell you. It’s—Paul. It always was—Paul—before I knew it—when I was a small girl and he carried my books to school. But he—he—” Her breast heaved; she turned her face away once more, to the gloom of the park. “You know—what happened. Louise told you—the truth! It changes things, and, if you still want me, I’ll try my best to—get over it, and make you the best wife—that I can.”

Colonel moved restlessly and she walked the remaining steps to the bars. The Judge followed and dropped the rails and she led the horse through. Then, “It is all right, little girl,” he said, slowly; “it is all right; as it should be. But, whatever you heard through Louise, you have made a mistake. My dear—my dear, you should have written me all about it at the start. It could hardly have made me happier, in the end, to know I had spoiled two young lives, that were

meant for each other.”

CHAPTER XXVII

LEM CREATES FICTION

Lem’s treble piped above the low of the cows and the answering bawl of the calves outside the corral. He was seated on the top rail of the fence with a short piece of maple in his hand, out of which he was trying to shape a flute.

—“An’ I hev be’n frequently so-o-old, an’ I hev
be’n frequently sold;
I’ve tunneled, hydraulicked, and cradled—an’—

Oh, shet up, Shorts, now do.”

He closed his knife with a snap and, slipping down from his perch, opened the wicket and let the white-faced calf through. Martha poured the foaming milk from her measure into a pail and changed her seat. At the same time she lifted her glance to the county road, winding up northward from the meadow. “I should jedge,” she said, shading her eyes, “I should jedge that ther’s Jake’s horse, but it don’t look nothin’ like Jake.”

“Naw, it ain’t,” answered Lem, raising his ferret eyes to the horseman. “I’ll jes’ bet it’s Mr. Forrest; yes, sir, it’s him. He’s borried Ketchem down by ther station, seein’s he couldn’t git word out fur his own horse.” And he put the flute to his lips.

“I’ve travelled all over ther country, prospectin’
an’ diggin’ fur gold.”

It was a discordant peal and the lad knew it. He also felt that this rider, descending now into the lane, regarded him with laughing eyes. Forrest drew his rein outside the bars and Martha came over to the fence. “How do you do?” he said. “You’re looking well.”

“Wal, yes,” she answered with her serious smile, and wiping her hand on her apron, she grasped the palm he offered across the rail, “I’m fair ter middlin’. I calc’late you’ve kem prospectin’, but Eben’s off in ther hills; he ’lowed he was

gittin' powerful clost ter ther head o' that ther petrified man, an' you're likelier ter find er needle in er haystack 'n him. But ef you'll stop over night 'ith us, mebbe he'll kem in."

"Thank you," said Forrest, "but I'm going right on to the headwaters. It's a long time since I had a night under the stars. I promised to leave Jake's horse with Thornton. I suppose Colonel is here; I'd like to see him, and Miss Hunter too, for a few minutes, before I ride on."

She shook her head. "You'll find her an' ther horse out to ther new ranch."

"Then," said Forrest, "I'll water Ketchem and go on; but I would like a drink of that milk, first, if you have it to spare."

"Land, yes." She dipped the great tin measure into the pail, and having wiped it also on her apron, handed it to him over the rails.

"It always seems to me," he said, pausing between draughts, "that this milk is a little better than any other."

"That's what ther schoolmarm always 'lowed. She said she tasted ther buttermilks in it. But that was before ther Jedge sent her them Jerseys."

"So," said Forrest, amused and puzzled at the strangeness of the gift, "So Judge Kingsley sent her some cattle?"

"You bet," Lem answered for his mother; "an' ther ain't never be'n nothin' ter kem up ter them two cows in ther hull deestrick. 'Bout ther color o' young squirrel, an' slick's er peeled fir. Ther Jedge he kem out here las' week in his dogcart. He'd heard 'bout ther new trail an' 'lowed he'd drive straight through." The boy paused to swing himself over the fence and down into the lane. "But Mose, he didn't count on no dogcarts when he done ther slashin'. I went er piece ter show him ther branch. You'd orter o' seen him;—thort I'd bu'st;—a-holdin' onter ther reins 'ith one hand an' ther seat 'ith the other; a bumpin' over logs an' snags; a gittin' ther wheels all tied up; a grabbin' fur his hat an' yellin', 'Whoa, whoa, Carlyle.' Oh, Lord, I thort I'd die."

He seemed in imminent peril now; writhing, twisting, bending his small shape convulsively, and finding vent at last in explosive shrieks of laughter. Forrest laughed, too, from sheer sympathy, and turning his horse, rode over to the trough. So the Judge had presented Alice with some cattle,—he smiled again at the quaintness of the gift,—and she was boarding out at Thornton's new ranch. Strange she had not mentioned that, in some of those letters her sister had given him to read; but she had had a great deal to say about the clearing and Samantha.

Martha fixed her stool and resumed her milking, while Lem, having recovered poise, followed the young man slowly. He raised the flute to his lips and piped softly, then held the instrument off and eyed it with growing dissatisfaction. Forrest watched the eager horse plunge his muzzle in the cool basin, and after preliminary splashing and stamping, settle to a still, long draught. Then his

glance moved to the boy. "What's that you have, Lem? A whistle?"

"Yes, but I can't make her work."

"Let me try it." Forrest took the flute and the knife and made several careful cuts in the green wood. "This is a fine knife," he said.

"You kin jes' bet your life on that; ther schoolmarm give it to me."

"Yes?" said Forrest. "How is she, Lem? She must feel the long trail sometimes; in hot weather or when it rains."

"Oh, I dunno. She 'lows it don't 'mount ter much, long as she has Colonel, an' all summer, off an' on, she's be'n havin' pleasant comp'ny. I mean Mr. Stratton. He wa'n't huntin' any ter speak of."

A quick flush flamed in Forrest's face. He gathered the bridle and raised the flute to his lips. The strain was soft, no longer discordant, and Ketchem stood moving a sensitive ear. "So, Stratton rode with her. He has a fine horse."

Lem took the instrument and examined the improvements. "You kin jes' bet on that. Ther ain't never be'n no sech stepper in this here deestrick, leavin' out Colonel. But ther ches'nut's mighty oncertain. I'd hate ter resk my money on him; ef it kem to it, I'd hate ter resk myself." He paused to try a measure. "She blows pretty good," he said, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "Yes, we 'lowed Mill Thornton was powerful sweet on Cousin Samanthy, but land, he couldn't hold er candle ter Mr. Stratton. He was over to school 'bout every day, when he was here. Ef it rained he kem in, but mos' gen'ly he waited outside, er walkin' his horse up an' down tell school let out. You'd orter o' seen him." And with a sidelong glance at Forrest, he raised the flute again and piped a surer strain.

Forrest was silent. Lem repeated the blast with his eyes on the startled young horse. He moved forward, suddenly, with a last shrill note, bringing the whistle close to Ketchem's ear. And he stood grinning his satisfaction, while the animal lunged, reared, and was brought down, trembling, by his rider's firm hand.

"You kin ride. You kin keep your seat 'bout as good as Mr. Stratton. Dunno but what I'd resk you on that ther spirit horse o' his. I 'low you heard 'bout ther way he give them Gov'ment men ther slip?"

"Yes," answered Forrest, "yes. I learned through Mr. Bates. I happened to meet him the day I left Seattle. It seems Stratton used this shooting box out here to cache his dope in. He was bringing it through, with Smith's help, in small lots from Victoria. And the officers cut him off going east towards the Pass. They took his pack-horse, and he, himself, barely escaped on that chestnut."

Lem laughed, a noiseless contortion. "Them dep'ties was mighty puzzled 'bout jes' ther way he give 'em ther slip. Not one in ther hull bunch ever s'picioned that ther chestnut jes' natu'lly lifted his four feet off n ther face of ther earth; yes, sir, and flew clean over ther heads 'mongst ther trees, an' struck back

to ther Nisqually, while they was a chasin' on after ther rest o' ther outfit." Lem caught a quick breath; his ferret eyes fell before his listener's level look, and he hastened to add, "But that ther pack-horse was John Phiander's Baldy,—he got er good price for him,—an' when the Gov'ment men found him he was up to his old tricks, a rollin' in er wide piece o' ther trail, tryin' ter get rid o' his load. Oh, gee, I thort I'd bust; you'd orter o' seen him. Them little cans, what you call dope, worked loose an' scattered all over creation. But Baldy'd never o' hed that chanct, an' they'd never o' sighted their man, ef he hedn't stopped ter kidnap ther schoolmarm."

"What?"

Lem started and his sidelong glance moved from the young man's challenging eyes to his strong whip hand. "You ain't heard 'bout that, hev you? I was chasin' round after Shorts an' that ther red heifer, an' I kem ercross 'em up ther branch. Baldy was standin' quiet, an' ther chestnut was stampin' an' rubbin' hissself like all pursest on er alder. Colonel he was snatchin' er mouthful o' grass, an' ther schoolmarm was sittin' in ther saddle 'ith her back to me. I thort she was jes' listenin', an' never sensed things tell I sneaked up close behind an ole cedar snag an' see her hands was tied 'ith er big silk hankerchief, what he wears roun' his neck. He was passin' er hitchin' strap 'cross her lap an' makin' it fast to ther cinch, an' he says mighty softlike, 'You will hate me at first fur this—mebbe a good spell—but in the end you air goin' ter love me, an' marry me.'"

Forrest frowned darkly at the water trough. He reached and swept the brimming surface with a sharp cut of his whip. Lem's lips twitched with keen appreciation. "But," he went on slowly, "she jes' looked at him 'ith her chin up in ther air, an' says, 'You ruffin'—you outlaw. I kin die jes' once an' it's goin' ter kem ter that before I ever marry you.'"

Forrest struck the flooding trough again, still more sharply, so that the fretting young horse lunged and wheeled, and Lem sidled out of possible range. He saw Ketchem brought firmly back, then went on cautiously, "He stood watchin' her a minute an' I see his face was whiter'n ashes, an' er kind o' white fire was blazin' out'n his eyes. Then he says powerful slow, 'Is it ther black's master?'"

"An' she looks off down ther trail 'ith her cheeks gittin' pink as rhododendron flowers in ther springtime, an' says, 'As long as I live I shall never love any man but—'" Lem paused, smiling his impish smile,—"Jedge Kingsley," he added.

Forrest's whip hand fell limp at his side. He drew a sharp breath and looked at the boy. The sternness went out of his face; there came over it a great weariness; his eyes brimmed misery.

"Gee, gee," said Lem, "I wisht you'd a be'n there. 'You are goin' ter marry me,' says he. An' he unslung Colonel's lariat an' jumps on ther chestnut. But he wa'n't countin' enough on that ther pack-horse. I shied er stone at him an' it

took him smart on ther flank an he broke away like mad fur Salal prairie. Colonel he flung up his head, an' 'fore he could make up his mind bout Baldy, he heard them ther Gov'ment men poundin' up ther trail. The same minute he felt his rope, an he jes' give ernother fling an' jerked clear, an' swung 'round an' fit out fur ther schoolhouse. A bird couldn't o' ketched him. An' when he got ther he gentled down, nice as er kitten, an' waited fur Mose,—I 'low it must o' be'n Mose,—ter kem an' untie ther schoolmarm."

There was a brief silence, during which the young man again regarded the brimming trough and Lem watched him. Then the boy said, arbitrating with some remaining atom of conscience, "I 'low I hedn't no call ter say what I did 'bout ther Jedge."

"No," answered Forrest quickly, "No, Lem, you're right. But I'm hardly the man to repeat it, and I happened to know it already. I've known it for a long time." A pull at the bridle; a word to the horse. "Good-by, Lem," he said. Then, as Ketchem broke into a canter, he turned in his saddle to throw a piece of silver to the rogue.

The lane was muddy, after a heavy rain, and the coin dropped into a little pool. But Lem secured it, and having wiped it on the seat of his trousers, examined it narrowly. "It's a dollar," he exclaimed. "A hull dollar. Beats me what it's fur. Mus' be fur talkin'. I wisht,—" slowly, as one who sees lost possibilities,— "gee, gee, I wisht I'd a said more." He slipped the money into his pocket with a swift look at his mother, milking still in the corral, "Ef dad knew he'd 'low it's bout time fur me ter be payin' board."

Forrest found himself not in the old rough track of the herds, but following a well beaten though narrow trail, from which branched many paths. Then at length he rode along the frowning front of a great hill, and looking up his eyes traced sections of an abandoned switchback which he and Alice had pushed up that day, to find it lost in the slide on the edge of the windfall. And here, on the bank of the creek that skirted the hill, was a deserted shepherd's hut, where Eben had cached a deer, that he had shot on the trail that morning. But the roof had fallen in, and between the fragments fern and salal crowded, waist-high from the earth floor.

Forrest had believed that all he needed was to be out-of-doors; to get in touch with the growing timber again; to ride or tramp all day through the great stillness; to have the opportunity to think over and outline, undisturbed, his contemplated work, and he would be himself once more. But now, a bit of ruined cabin, the sound of running water, the pungent wind idling through a glade, a hundred small associations, brought the old futile desire sweeping back with the force of a sudden mountain flood. It was as though he saw her up there, easing her weight as Colonel set himself to the pitch; how graceful she was, dipping

this way and that to his steps; avoiding encroaching boughs; sending him a swift glance across her shoulder, with the delight shining in her eyes. And how fond she was of a horse, of the forest, of all out-of-doors. She was so bright, so warm, so full of life, sparkle, charm. How could he ever forget her? How could he ever ride or tramp the woods without remembering her?

But he must forget. He couldn't go on feeling like this about another man's wife. And he was glad she loved the Judge. Yes, since she was going to marry, he was glad she loved the Judge. Sometimes—he had been a little in doubt. Still—what did all this Lem had told him really amount to? Of course the young imp had exaggerated, for instance there was that yarn about Stratton's horse, still—just what shreds of truth had he possessed, out of which to fabricate the story? Another time he could have laughed at the boy's rendition of Stratton's careful language, but had this man approached her, disgraced, outlawed as he was, in that way? Yes, he was bold enough; he had stopped her, spoken to her, pressed his case; that much was true. The thought of this quickened Forrest's blood; it ran hot in his veins. Once more his hands tingled, burned, for close physical contact with this man.

When he was again conscious of his surroundings it was twilight in the forest. The trees no longer stood out singly but in confused masses. Light fog began to lift from the hollows, wet still from the recent rains; the air grew chilly. Then presently, through an opening ahead, appeared the knob-like crest of the south hill, girdled with a ribbon of mist; and as he rode towards the clearing, there unfolded a company of peaks, shading from copper and amethyst to a purplish black. He passed a branch trail, rising and winding up in the direction of the canyon, and making a final curve, came upon Thornton's cabin, and Samantha churning and singing in the little porch.

"How do you do?" he said, swinging down from the saddle and taking her offered hand; "I sent my congratulations to Mill, through Miss Hunter, some time ago, but I must congratulate you both on this homestead. It makes a great showing. I'm coming back in a day or two to look over the section, but tonight I'm going right on to the falls."

"You'll kem ercross Mill down ther," she answered, smiling. "He 'lowed he'd hev er look at ther river. It's out on a reg'lar tear. You kin hear it, can't you? It's ripped out ther teacher's sluice-gate, an' carried away a mighty nice little bridge Mr. Stratton put in below ther falls."

So Alice had built a sluice-gate. He smiled, puzzled, and then with a flash of understanding. Of course it was she who had taught Thornton the problem of bringing the stream to his land. It was she who had suggested the line of sluice-box he had noticed ahead, along the trail. Well, he could spare the water. He was glad to.

"I promised to leave Ketchem with Mill," he said, and loosened his snug blanket roll from behind the saddle. "Jake expects him down at the Station tomorrow. I would like to have a look at my own horse, and see Miss Hunter for a moment before I go on."

"Why," said Samantha in surprise, "she ain't here. I 'low she's too powerful busy tendin' to her own ranch."

"Her own ranch?" he repeated.

"Yes. Fur ther land sakes, don't you know she homesteaded that ther piece to ther falls?"

Forrest stood a silent moment. His look moved from Samantha's face to a high spur of the hill. His breath came a little heavily, with a slight uplift of the shoulders, and he raised his hand to the handkerchief, knotted loosely at his throat, and eased it, as though it choked. Then he took up the strapped blanket from the step and swung it to his back and started on down the trail. He had forgotten to say good-night, and Samantha waited, watching him curiously, and holding in the fretting horse. Presently he stopped in uncertainty, like a man lost, and turned and came back.

"I didn't expect to find a house at the falls," he said and forced a smile; "and, you see it seems pretty good to me to get out-of-doors again. I've been looking forward to spending tonight in the open air. I think, if that branch I passed back there around the curve, goes to the canyon, I'll try it."

"Yes, it does," answered Samantha. "It goes up past ther granite tower an' down to ther ford above Mr. Stratton's place. I 'low Pete Smith blazed that ther branch ter skip our ranch. He wa'n't goin' ter resk no chances o' kemin' ercross Mill."

"Then," said Forrest, "that's the trail I want. I intend to prospect south from the canyon. And I ought to find it dry up there for a camp tonight; it's pretty wet in the timber, and the tower should make a good windbreak from this Chinook. But I must hurry to make it before dark."

"You better stop 'ith us," said Samantha, her warm heart creeping into her tone. "It's lonesome up ther, an' I could cook you some mighty nice trout."

But he would not, and Samantha tied Ketchem and walked with the young man as far as the curve. "Say," she said impulsively, breaking the silence, "don't you feel so cut up 'bout that ther homestead. Uncle Eben always 'lowed you wanted that piece, an' 'at she knew it; an' I dunno what she done it fur, but you jes' wait tell you find out ther reason. She ain't ther kind ter do a mean thing."

"Oh, I know that; I know that," he answered quickly. "Don't think I blame her. It was her right, if she wanted the land. I don't need another reason. Good-night."

But Samantha followed a step further. "Say," she called, "ef she hedn't filed

on that piece Mill would. He counted on homesteadin' that one, 'stead o' this. She got in ahead o' him, but he jes' hates to own he got cut out by er girl."

Her little, uncertain laugh, meant to cheer him, followed him up the trail. Then presently he reached the branch and pushed up swiftly towards the tower. "If I had stopped at Olympia to make the entry at the Land Office, I should have discovered the truth," he thought. "And of course—of course Mill, or some other man, must have taken it long ago, if she had let the opportunity go. Tomorrow, tomorrow—I'll go down and see what she has made of it. I couldn't now. Not tonight."

He stumbled through a darker tangle of undergrowth and came out in the open at the tower. But the forces at work earlier in the Pass had lately been busy here. Suddenly a great crack yawned at his feet. It seemed to mark off, accurately, as though a master hand had drawn the line, the whole jutting front of the cliff, and like the beginnings of a moat enclosed the leaning column. He moved back a few yards to the trees, and found a dry place for his blanket, under the spreading boughs of a fir. Presently the light of his camp-fire cut the gloom, and the air was redolent with the savor of toasting bacon.

Twilight deepened. The voice of the cataract came up the wind. Somewhere a dead bough creaked. He lounged, his elbow on the blanket, his head propped on his hand, and looked off absently across the darkening gorge. Did he not see once more, at the foot of a near and familiar slope, a small tent white and silent under the dew and starshine?

His lips began to breathe a whistle. Presently it rose, still soft, sweet, tender, in Schubert's Serenade.

[image]

Music fragment

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PRESSURE OF THE WILDERNESS

The wilderness has great adaptability. She fits herself to the man; she plays on his moods. To Stratton she became an inquisitor, tireless, implacable. She

wracked him with his defeat; she taunted him with memories. At last the hour came, when, far on his retreat to the border, his worst perils past, he turned his horse and started back.

There were nearer approaches to the Sound through the mountains; a day's ride southeastward would have taken him to the railroad on the Columbia, but he chose to recross those miles of hostile country, where, to the horsemen of the plains, Sir Donald had long been a coveted and marked prize. He had not known the full value of Smith's service on those previous trips; his Indian blood had been a passport where a solitary white man could not go; and, while he had something to gain, the outlaw on the night watch had been vigilant, safe. During this last journey it was only through strategy and an incessant fighting off of sleep, that Stratton had been able to save the chestnut, probably his life. And now, returning, he was forced to make wide détours, avoiding his former course. He spent whole days, watchful, under cover of shallow coulees, and pushed on warily at night, riding knee-deep through arid tracts of sage brush, hiding his trail when he could, in the meager channel of a stream, or the rocks of a wash, keeping away, always, from beaten tracks.

In that great silence, where the report of a gun carried like a thunder-clap, he could not risk a shot at passing game. Once he snared a bird; again a squirrel; and several times he caught fish, which he ventured a small fire to prepare. But his food supply, divided into rations, and after a few days reparcelled, fell to almost nothing.

Finally the chestnut's hoofs struck the familiar upward trail to the Pass. His alertness quickened but his master's dropped away. He rode indifferently, mechanically; his eyes gloomed retrospective under his black contracted brows. His face had lost its faultless contour; lines seamed it. He was like a man who had lived hard and fast, tragic epochs in brief days.

It was midday when he lifted his head and looked about him. The horse had stopped on a grassy bench. A slender rill cascading from a lofty spur formed a limpid pool, and overflowing, rippled between sunny banks and was lost in a clump of pines. Sir Donald had dropped his eager muzzle to the basin.

Backward the autumn wind drew sharp across the great plains, and upward, far up, a first snowfall held the Pass. Stratton swung himself out of the saddle and loosened the thoroughbred's girth. He picketed him near the trees, and with the limp saddle-bags flung over his arm, stood for a moment watching the horse. His handsome coat, ungroomed for weeks, was dappled with foam; dry froth discolored his heaving rib-defined sides; burs tangled his silver mane; and the wet square where his blanket had been was divided by a lurid galled spot. Yet he stood all spirit, head high, looking at his master with steady expectant, almost human eyes, turning a sensitive ear for the anticipated word. "Now make the

most of your hour, Donald, old fellow," Stratton said. "It's a long pull still to Nisqually ford."

The chestnut, satisfied, fell to cropping the long grass by the stream. Stratton felt in his saddle-bag and drew out a biscuit tin and another of sardines. The first had been previously opened, but he stood turning the second in uncertainty, in his hands; then, looking up to that cloud over the Pass, he put the can back. He took three biscuit from the remaining box, recovered it and dropped it into the bag.

While he ate the biscuit a flock of geese passed, honking, far below him over the sun-baked plain. He stood watching the wavering line until it disappeared, then he unstrapped his blanket and spread it on the bank and threw himself down. He closed his eyes, but he did not sleep. His features worked, and from time to time he moved his head uneasily. "Yes," he said aloud, at last, "that was the weak link in the chain; I failed to ingratiate myself with Forrest. I could have done it—I could—if I had foreseen the end. It all hinged on him. Granted Kingsley's wife saw us that night; granted she moved the stuff, concealed it, as Smith said, under that rotten floor; she went to Forrest right off, I swear, and eased her conscience. And he put two and two together, in his calculating way; he guessed at the clue and sent Bates to look for it—at the top of the bluff. Always, everywhere it has been Paul Forrest. He built on a first word or two of suspicion from Bates, and tried to set the Captain against me; he spied on me, thwarted me—made himself my foil. I could have won out; I could have covered the disgrace; made a fresh start; lived it down; proved myself her kind of man—if he had not stood in the way. And I would like just once—before the finish—to meet him, hand to hand—and have it out. Damn him!"—he stretched his arms; the cords knotted; his fingers seemed to grasp something tangible; they clenched, relaxed, clenched again,— "Damn his righteous, irreproachable soul."

After an interval he spoke again. "But it is too bad about the Captain. I will do my best for him; I will shoulder it all; and with the Judge's influence he should pull clear. Why,—" he started to his elbow with the shadow of his old, mocking smile,— "his wife can't witness against him, even if she wants to. A wife's testimony isn't allowable in a Washington court." He passed his hand across his eyes and sank back on his blanket. "I am sorry for that little woman though. She is so proud—so fine; it's going to cut—deep. She never liked me. Once, that last time I met her there at the ruin, she lifted her skirt and walked around the place where I had stood. How she must hate me now. But sometime, since it has made a reason for her to break with Kingsley, she ought to thank me."

Then finally, after another interval, he struck the keynote of his return. "My God, I had to come back. It was impossible, unbearable to ride on; day after day, alone—through the awful silence. To see her face—that last look she gave

me, the contempt, the aversion of it—following me, crowding me, haunting every sage bush. I have got to change it. She used to like me—she would have loved me—and she will forgive me. She promised me, that time up at the Paradise, she promised me her mercy. She will forgive me—she must. I have got to see her—speak to her once more. And I am ready to—pay the price.”

He rose to his feet and looked about him. He started, shivered a little, and drawing his hand across his eyes, fixed them on the feeding horse. But it was the narrowed, strained effort of a dulled vision. Sir Donald seemed a long distance off; or was it later than he thought? He looked at his watch, and finding a match, held the flame close to the face.

”It is nothing,” he muttered, and dropping the match, put the watch back into his pocket. ”It is nothing—it has happened before. I have been staring too long at the glare of the sun on those yellow plains. It will pass. In a moment or two—it will pass.”

He began to walk slowly, unsteadily towards the horse. He put out his hand like one who feels his way in the night. ”Donald, old fellow,” he said. ”Donald, we are getting to the end of the—rope.”

Then he touched the chestnut’s mane, and, at the contact, his iron nerve gave completely away. His whole frame trembled. His arm sank over the arching neck. He dropped his face on it, sobbing, not as he had when he was a child, but as such a man, not all men, can sob—just once in a lifetime.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CRACK OF DOOM

Once more, up in the Pass, the glare of the sun on the fresh snow brought on that dullness of vision, and Stratton was forced to halt, creeping, groping out of the bitter wind to the shelter of a crag, where he spent the night, miserably. It was after that, though his sight returned, he discovered it had lost accuracy. Twice, when the prize seemed sure, he missed his aim. The first time it was a young elk, lagging behind the herd in a green pocket of a gorge; and again it was a stag that crossed the trail in front of him. Later, in making the dangerously high water at Nisqually ford, his ammunition became wet and useless. But on the final morning, at his old way camp hidden among some alders near the river, he succeeded in snaring a squirrel. This, with some late blueberries, which he

had gathered on a higher slope the previous day, served to temper the keen edge of his hunger.

The snowfall in the Pass at a lower altitude had been a heavy rain, and when he mounted and turned into the trail, taking up the last stage of his journey, clouds still brooded over the hills; the gorges steamed fog that lifted and fell, directly, in sheets of mist, through which again filtered the mellow autumn sun. Water dripped from boughs, formed in every depression, and behind him the flooding Nisqually thundered a deepening chord. He avoided the main trail past Thornton's homestead and the teacher's claim to the bridge, taking instead the canyon branch to his lodge, where he expected to find a change of clothing. The suit he wore was frayed at knees and elbows, and, still damp from yesterday's ford, it absorbed moisture speedily. He must shave too, at the lodge, and breakfast,—there was coffee there and an excellent ham,—and put himself in condition for the interview with Alice. Afterwards he would ride on and give himself up to Thornton. The reward, if there was one, might compensate the young rancher for the loss of his sorrel.

Everywhere the changing dogwood and maple flamed through the October woods, and the brilliant leaves fell in showers, through which Sir Donald paced lightly, with suspicion. The wind, which drew with him up the ascent, billowed the tops of the firs below; the sound of them was like the rush and wash of a great sea, but the drifting mist closed in, obscuring the sun and the farther bluffs of the gorge. Then presently, looking up through the trees, he saw the tower, pushing out of denser cloud like a lighthouse on a gray and unfamiliar coast. A moment later he was conscious of a foreign and pleasing aroma in the air. It was coffee, the kind he had anticipated,—he had always been particular about the brand he used and how it was prepared,—and it flashed over him, with disproportionate heat, that some passing woodsman had filched it from the lodge. The next instant, riding up to the open, he came upon Forrest.

He was seated on a rock, with a plump and primely broiled pheasant on the boulder before him, while he filled his tin cup from a small coffee-pot which he had lifted from the coals. And Stratton's alertness failed him. He forgot the peril of capture, now, before he was ready; the significance of surrender to this man. He thought of nothing but the fragrant cup and that savory bird.

Paul looked up. He put down the coffee-pot and sprang to his feet. But his hand had hardly touched Sir Donald's bridle—close under the bit,—when he dipped as quickly back to escape the striking hoofs of the rearing animal.

Another moment, and, wheeling lightly on his hind feet, the chestnut brought his master's shoulders in contact with a stout bough, and he was unhorsed. Then, as he had been taught, the thoroughbred was off; skimming the trail like a bird back to the main track and on to the lodge.

His backward movement to avoid the horse took Forrest, stumbling, across the crack in the cliff which moatwise shut off the tower. The seam had widened during the night, and was full of water, which, where the rock formation failed, was undermining the soil, carrying the wash down through a small subcut into the trail towards the ford.

Stratton threw out his hand, grasping the fir to break his fall, and staggered erect. Blood streamed from his lips, which had struck the rough bole; but he set his teeth under them, hard. The steel flashed in his eyes. He turned on Forrest and all the latent passion in him broke into flame. The fineness in him, the high resolve shrank small. He confronted suddenly, in this man, the instrument of his disgrace and many-sided defeat. The three words he spoke were repeated slowly, in a low tone, and yet they seemed hurled by some force from the depths of his chest.

Forrest did not answer. He glanced behind him measuring the ground, which lifted a little to the left of the tower and dropped again abruptly to the precipice. It was this sink at the foundation which lowered the outer column, tilting the whole structure. He threw off his coat and moved back a pace, taking advantage of the rise, which brought him nearer Stratton's height, and waited, watchful, eyes steady, head up, feet firm, hands loose at his sides. His whole altitude said plainly, "I'm ready; come."

It all happened swiftly. In the moment Stratton crossed the break there came a tremendous jar. Instantly he recoiled. Behind Forrest the whole tower toppled, block on block, over the abyss. The cliff under him heaved; its face split, detaching at the seam. He ran, clearing it in a leap, and, like the crack of doom, the sounds of that downfall filled the gorge. He felt the next layer, a strata of soft earth, give beneath his feet. He struggled for firm ground; he would have gained it, but Stratton blocked the way. He thrust a hand against the shoulder of the reeling man, gave him backward impetus, and sprang away. Another instant, and with the last onrush Forrest went down.

Stratton retreated a little further. He turned, feeling his steps, with one hand outstretched, the other pressed to his eyes. Then he stopped, listening, fixing his fogged gaze on that awful brink, while the grinding, the striking of rock on rock, the crash of falling trees, started anew by that slide of soft earth, reverberated, multiplied echo on echo, from bluff and spur. He called once, but there was no human response. Then came—*Silence*.

He made his way to the rock which had been Forrest's seat, and sinking down, set his elbows on the larger boulder and dropped his face in his palms. It rained for a time heavily, but he paid little attention to the pelting drops which the wind brought slanting upon his head. After awhile the aroma of the cup which the lost man had filled, seeped over his senses. He drank it off at a draught, and

groping for the coffee-pot, carefully, with difficulty, his hands shaking, poured a second cup; another. But the savor of the pheasant no longer attracted him.

"Oh, my God," he said at last, "what brought him to this place? What insane weakness brought me back? But I must see her. My God,"—his voice rose half in threat, half prayer—"I must see her, before—he—is found."

He got to his feet and commenced to grope his way down to the main trail. He was able to see the path, but a yard ahead it ended in a blur. It occurred to him that, at the time of the slide, the teacher must have started to school, and when he reached the better track he turned back towards the Nisqually as far as the cut. He made frequent stops, resting on logs or stones and closing his eyes to husband that glimmer of sight. Sometimes he stretched his spent body in complete relaxation on the wet leaves. The drip, drip of the foliage was continuous around him, but he knew when the rain ceased, for, though it was not possible to distinguish objects more clearly, he saw the filtered brightness of the sun among the trees. Then again the mist closed in, cloaking the timber. His wet clothes gathered weight; they chilled, numbed him. He quickened his steps and other footfalls seemed to follow. It was the tread of that unseen presence, which he had felt and defied, the day Smith was overtaken, and he stood on the buttress above the rockslide in the Pass. Always it stalked with him, behind him, beside him; when he halted it crowded him close.

He had hoped to meet Alice returning through the cut, but he reached the schoolhouse finally, only to find the door locked; the children and their teacher gone. He turned on the steps and looked up that steep trail through the burn. "She must have taken that way, around by the Myers claim, on some errand," he told himself. Then it flashed over him that somewhere, during those wretched halts in the wilderness, he had lost a day; this was not Friday, as he had conjectured, but Saturday, the week-end holiday.

He sank down on the steps and looked back over the level stretch of track he had just travelled. It was impossible to take up the return tramp to the headwaters so soon, but Laramie would give him some sort of bed and supper, and in the morning it might not be too late. He pulled himself together and rose. Then he stopped, listening. He had caught the sound of galloping hoofs. In a moment he whistled, his old, imperative note, that Sir Donald so well understood. The hoof-beats fell to a trot and the chestnut appeared. Stratton repeated the summons, but with a new, uncertain key, for his lip, stiff and swollen from the accident at the tower, had lost flexibility. The horse halted, head up, ears erect, sensitive, eyes dilating. But when his master started towards him he wheeled a little, and the stirrup, swinging high from the shifted saddle, struck him smartly. He crashed off through the jungle. His dragging bridle looped a snag, but he jerked free, and, making a *détour* around the clearing, struck the trail, breaking again into a mad

gallop, back in the direction of the Nisqually.

"So, Donald, so—you too. Well, I don't blame you, old fellow; I don't blame you." But this disappointment, following so closely on the other, told on Stratton. He sank down again on the steps.

After awhile he took out his pocketbook, and, finding a piece of paper and a pencil, wrote without superscription or signature,

"I came back to see you—I had to. Not to excuse myself, but to ask of you that mercy you once promised me—there below the Paradise—and then to take—what I deserve. I have fallen pretty far since that day on Mt. Rainier, and you are going to wish, all your life, you had left me in that crevasse. Great God, you don't know how I have wished it, too, out there in the terrible stillness of the Palouse; how miserably I wish it now. I would pay any price to see the old friendliness in your face again. But, this morning, up at the tower, I lost the chance. That is all. It cannot help you now, to know I would give anything to have Forrest safe—and be in his place—buried deep in that slide."

All the sheet was a wavering scrawl, but the last lines ran together word over word. He folded the paper, but after a thoughtful moment opened it and added at the bottom of the page, "I want Thornton to have my horse." Then he refolded it and slipped it under the door.

He stood for an interval looking towards the Des Chutes. "She will not find it until Monday," he said, "and by that time if I have not seen her, it will be too late." And he went down the steps and took the trail to Laramie's.

He heard the increasing roar of the freshet as he walked, and presently, when he reached the curve where the trail turned down-stream, he found the flood over banks; currents eddied through the underbrush, undermining the trunks of hemlocks and firs; carrying out detached boughs and logs. At the crossing to the Phiander claim the rustic footbridge was gone.

But Stratton remembered the banks were higher at Laramie's homestead; the old fallen fir, which bridged the channel there, had withstood the shock of many floods. He moved on, quickening his steps where he could, but, now that he had left the gravelly soil of the ridges for the loam of the bottom-land, walking became more difficult. The mud clung to his boots; in places footing oozed under him, and repeatedly, in lower levels, he was forced to make wide détours, leaving the path to push through tangles of alder and hazel or cottonwood. Often water washed above his ankles; at intervals it splashed to his knees.

At last he struggled up a little rise and came out on a low bluff. The great uprooted trunk of the fir footbridge was at his elbow, and he stopped, taking breath, and sank into a half sitting position on the knuckle of one gnarled root. His rain-soaked clothes shaded into the color of the dead, earth-stained tree, so that he might have been a part of it.

The fir had fallen with a downward slant to the farther bank, its top driving wedgelike between two cedars. These trees were standing with their trunks submerged, and, mid-channel, the log swung to the current and formed a dam, holding back an increasing collection of drift, through which the water rushed with the roar of rapids. The whole jam rose and fell with a concerted upheaval.

The roots of the fir, ballasted by forest litter, formed a short stairway up to the crossing, and presently Stratton mounted, slowly, with difficulty and began to feel his steps over the bridge. At the same time a great fallen hemlock swung down-stream, its upreared trunk coming foremost, a tremendous battering ram.

It was over in a moment. He stopped, mid-channel, listening, and turned his clouding eyes up-stream. The hemlock drove through the crunching drift and ploughed on through the bridge. He plunged forward, face down, with a sharp cry, and, impaled by a broken, submerged root, was swept out with the wreckage.

Mose, coming from his father's cabin, heard that cry, and quickened his pace to a run. He reached the place where the footbridge had been, and stood crossing himself as he had been taught by the priest. "Jesus—Mary," he whispered, and then, "Oh, Sahgalee, Tyee Sahgalee."

But the hemlock had grounded at a bend below. Its palisade of green boughs fringed the rampart of a fixed jam. He turned and ran, wading, down between the alders and cottonwoods, and Laramie's dogs came splashing after him, taking advantage of logs or any slight rise, but swimming where they must. He came out on a low bluff above the drift, and when he saw what silent shape it carried, he crossed himself once more. Then he grasped two stout trailing boughs and swung himself down on the jam.

Two sections of the footbridge held the body wedgelike, but the face and breast were awash. Mose fell to his knees and tried to turn and lift the face from the water. "Mo'sieur," he said, in an agony of entreaty and fear, "Mo'sieur, you can' be hurt mooch."

But there was no answer.

"Mo'sieur," he repeated, and shifted his arm lower to raise the submerged breast; "Monjee, mo'sieur, you mus' help yourself, some."

Still no response; and the boy made no further attempt to rouse him, for he had felt, suddenly, the grip of the hemlock. He withdrew his arm, and, cuffing aside one of the snuffing hounds, laid his hand on the neck of the other and rose. Then he took breath and lifted his voice in a great shout. The dogs swelled it, belling a prolonged note. He listened and repeated the call with his palm to his mouth. This time it brought a faint reply from Laramie, and the hounds sounded a louder clarion.

And the storming Des Chutes swept away the deep, full-throated cry, and

the speaking hills caught it and sent it back like a lament from far promontories.

CHAPTER XXX

THE LOST PROSPECT

Below the falls the overflow had formed a backwater through the meadow, and that Saturday morning Alice took the Jerseys from the higher ground of the home enclosure, and put them to graze on the slope. She intended to ride directly on to the Station for the mail, and made a short cut through the park to strike the trail beyond the first knoll. It was then, while the black paced slowly among the wet trees, that the sound of the landslide clashed through the hills. Colonel stopped, trembling; hoofs planted, head up, nostrils wide and quivering, then, panic driven, broke. A little later, when she had drawn him down, and still quieting him, turned again towards the trail, Stratton's horse, arrested by the washed out bridge on his way to the lodge, thundered back in the direction of the Nisqually.

There was a flash of the chestnut coat between the branches; a glimpse of the empty saddle and he was gone. But instantly Alice saw that Stratton had returned. He had, of course, taken the branch through the canyon and the thoroughbred had refused the swollen ford; he had bolted, skirting the submerged jungle to the main trail, and left his master unhorsed, perhaps hurt, at the crossing.

She turned and rode back towards the gorge, expecting to pick up the trail at the foot of the bluff, where it wound down from the tower. "It's all right, Colonel," she said, "it's all right. You ought to know a slide by this time. But I don't blame you; it was a monster; it sounded like the whole canyon wall coming down."

Dropping from the open park to the underbrush of the gorge, she turned the horse into a thinned way, evidently once blazed by some passing woodsman. Then, presently, looking up between boughs, she saw a low cloud, trailing over and blotting out the summit where the tower had stood, and below it the demolished front of the cliff. At the same moment, Colonel, pushing through a tangle of salal, stumbled to his knees. She glanced back to see what had caused the fall and her eyes rested on a weather-beaten stake, such as a surveyor or prospector uses in marking off land, driven close to alow, outcropping ledge. A few steps

farther on she noticed a blaze in the bark of a hemlock, in which had been cut a small arrow, pointing downward at this rock.

The horse moved on and she lifted her eyes again to the cliff. Midway the slide had shaved off a jutting spur, and, suddenly, a shaft of sunlight filtering through the clouds, struck from this new surface a blaze of colors. Instantly she thought of the samples of ore Paul Forrest had once shown her. Here were the same blues and purples, the shine of silver, the glint of dull yellow. It was, she knew it was, the lost prospect. It was Paul who had driven that stake. It was here in this canyon, while he groped a way out of the hills, he had stumbled on his find. The mist, hanging over as it did today, had obscured the tower and given the gorge a different aspect than later, in clear weather, it had shown. But this was the place and the slide had uncovered the mother lode.

She sat for a moment, holding in her horse and looking up at that dazzling ledge. She drew full breaths with parted lips; the bloom of a wild rose was in her cheeks; a soft brightness shone in her eyes. Then she was reminded of her present duty by a voice; a man's voice calling faintly, "Help, oh—help."

A little below the broken spur the cliff began to dip outward, forming an incline to the bottom of the gorge. Trees had found hold on this pitch, and where the top created a narrow bench, the uprooted trunk of a giant fir, flanked by the stub of an old cedar, timbered a barricade of splintered rock and earth. The last soft downrush had nearly filled this rampart, and streamed out through the dip between the felled boles, covering slabs and boulders, evening the slide to the appearance of a newly graded roadway. It was there, directly under the mineral ledge, that Alice located the voice. She concluded it was Stratton's; that he had not been thrown at the ford, but on the cliff; and he had been caught in the avalanche.

She answered the call, but it was not repeated, and she quickly chose a way to reach the shelf. She saw that the trail from the ford up the bluff was lost in shifting granite; and, for a long distance, passage up the fir was obstructed by a network of boughs; but the fallen cedar, slowly dying, had lost many of its branches; those remaining were still pliable. She left her horse, and, pushing through a litter of snapped saplings and broken limbs, reached this tree.

Its top was splintered and set like a brace against the trunk of a standing hemlock. Ragged boughs at first retarded her; she was forced to work on her knees, through their meshes. Sometimes she swung herself down to trudge ankle-deep, knee-deep through the soft fill around a barrier. She crawled over suspended boulders, under tilting slabs that had found lodgment on the great bole. In one of these places, where a mighty fragment of rock had struck, the bark was stripped loose in lengths. Later she remembered this.

At last she gained the end of the tree, and sinking in an accumulation of

earth, found the support of a root and drew herself up, slowly, bringing her eyes to the top of the barricade. The color went from her face; her shoulders shook; her limbs; but she pulled herself higher and leaned on the rim. This man was not Stratton. His body was buried; only his head and one shoulder were uncovered; the face was turned from her. But this man was not Stratton.

She drew herself over the rampart and ran, stumbling in loose mold, to reach him. But when she saw his face a hand of iron seemed to tighten on her throat; her limbs gave under her. "Paul," she said. "Oh, Paul, Paul!"

The next moment she started up, her weakness gone. Her cheek had touched his; it was warm. A light breath had come from his lips. And he had called, he had been able to call, not long ago. She began to throw the loose earth from his chest, his breast; digging, working like a beaver with her two hands. Presently she laid her palm on his heart and caught a faint action. She felt in the pocket of his shirt for the emergency flask a timber-cruiser keeps about him in the wilderness, but it was not there. Still, the pocket was shallow, it might have dropped near, and she resumed her task, prodding at intervals for the flask. She freed his arm; his side. She had found no rocks around the upper part of his body; nothing but soft soil. To be quite sure she reached, feeling, under his back. And this brought from him a groan. A quiver swept his face, but when she had withdrawn her arm, he rested white and still as before.

The dirt had filled deeper over his abdomen, but she hurried to the rim of the rampart and selected a splinter of rock which she used as a scoop. At last his whole trunk was released, but his limbs were planted deeper yet. He seemed to have fallen feet first, and settled, afterwards, a little to one side. If only those feet had not struck rock. She was afraid—afraid—of—what she might unearth. Still she worked. And the faith of her missionary grandfather rose strong in her, and battled with her fear. "Dear God," her heart cried, "do not let him have touched rock. Show me—show me the best thing to do."

It commenced to rain heavily, and she stopped to turn his face directly to the shower, throwing off her jacket and using it to prop his head. She spread her handkerchief on a clean slab to catch the moisture, and, when it was wet, pressed the drops from it, between his lips. But they were so few. If only the slide had opened a spring in the cliff; if only she could find the flask.

She went back, fighting down her despair, to her work. A moment later she heard him sigh. Relieved of the pressure of earth, his empty lungs had slowly filled and at last expelled their first good breath. She looked at him over her shoulder, holding her own breath, kneeling still with her hands in the mold. He opened his eyes—she dared not move—and saw her, blankly at first, and then with swift intelligence. "Alice," he said, "why—Alice. See here—I'm all right. I can wait. Please don't. That's work for a—man."

Instantly she was up and at his shoulder. "Don't try to talk," she said. "Don't move; but can you remember if you had your flask?"

He knit his brows. "It was in my pocket—the coat. But," he added with second recollection, "the slide must have brought it down with me."

"All right, I'll find it. Don't say any more; don't try to think, or move, or do anything. Rest."

He smiled a little and closed his eyes, and she hurried back with fresh effort to her task. Presently she was able to run her hand down, through the loose soil, to the end of the right limb. It was straight, and not the crumpled mass she had feared. But, working her arm through a wider range, she felt, a few inches from the leg, the edge of a slab. Then, directly, while she followed its contour to satisfy herself it did not touch him anywhere, her fingers came in contact with woolen cloth. She dug faster and faster, and finally unearthed the end of a sleeve; his coat sleeve which trailed from beneath the rock. She pulled at it, tried to shift the stone, alternately strained and dragged at the garment. But it was of no use. Her glance wavered despairingly to that second, still buried, limb, then she began to uncover the slab. And while she labored tirelessly, her heart cried, "Dear God, let me be able to lift it; do not let it be very—big."

At last she uncovered the outer edge. A little more digging along the thin side and again under the sleeve, then she set her hands, the strength of her young arms to the rock. It eased up slightly. She put her knee to it, bracing it while she tugged at the coat. It slipped a trifle. Again a lift, a wrench, a slip, and here was a pocket exposed, and in it she found the small metal flask; jammed, flattened, leaking a little, but holding, still, brandy.

She poured it hot between his lips, and presently he again opened his eyes. "I'm all right," he repeated, "yes—I am. Don't trouble; don't stay here—in the rain. I can wait for Thornton or—Myers. I'm all—right."

To prove the point he tried to get to his elbow, but settled back, going white again to the lips.

She turned her face away. Her eyes were dry, but the dread in them was beyond tears. After a moment she compelled her glance to meet his. Her lips moved, but the iron hand again seemed to strangle the words in her throat. "Is it"—they were out at last—"is it—your—back?"

"No, oh, no." He smiled his old smile of the eyes. "It's only a dislocated shoulder. With Thornton to help me it won't take long to straighten it out."

She returned to that second limb. "Dear God," she still prayed, "I am so afraid. But—if it is hurt—don't let it be past help." Aloud she said, and steadied her voice, "Mill was to have gone to the Station this morning."

"Of course—of course—I had forgotten. I left Ketchem for him last night. But Myers is somewhere here in the hills."

"Then the noise of the slide should bring him this way." She thrust the scoop carefully along the side of the uncovered knee. "Mose," she added, "went home with his father, yesterday, to help drive the sheep to high ground. Sheep"—her voice broke—"sheep—are so foolish—in a flood."

She laid the scoop down. There was no further need of digging; the leg was doubled back from the knee, in a heap. She got to her feet and turned, meeting his look again bravely. "You see," she said and smiled, "there isn't a man; you'll have to use me. What would you have asked Mill to do?"

"Why, set this arm. You could do it—it's simple—but I don't like to ask it of you. You take it—like this"—he reached and she knelt beside him to allow him to demonstrate with hers,—and pull it out as far as you can—so—only harder—much harder. It's going to hurt some, I'll probably make a fuss, but never mind—pull. Then let it settle back into the shoulder socket—so. You've seen the round bone that fits in a shoulder of veal. Well, just think of that."

"I understand the—movement," she said, and steadied her voice again, "and I'm—str-o-ong. I'll do my best."

It was quickly and successfully done, and he did not make a fuss. He only closed his eyes at the last and set his teeth on that pale under lip until it bled. And afterwards he rested so motionless that she gave him another draught from the flask. Then finally he was able to sit up and examine that injured leg. It was broken in two places, he said; at the ankle and midway to the knee. There was too, he noticed now, something wrong with that left side; probably a fractured rib. It was work for a good surgeon, yes, but nothing to worry over. And he would have a look at that slide, right away, and see what the possibilities were of getting down.

He worked his way to the rim of the ledge and she moved with him, watching his face; every shadow of pain that crossed it brought the anguish springing to her eyes. He raised his head, propping it on his hand, his elbow on the rocks, and his clear glance swept the fallen trees, and then more slowly the pitch stretching like smooth roadway between.

Her eyes moved from him to the incline and back to his face. "Colonel is down there in those standing alders," she said. "Could we risk him anywhere on the slide?"

"No." He shook his head. "No, my only chance is to coast."

"To coast? You mean"—and quick understanding leaped in her face—"you want a sled. There's a strip of bark down there, you can see it, where that piece of granite struck the cedar; it ought to make a good toboggan."

"The best kind," he answered, "if you can find some one to bring it up."

His glance came back from the slide while he spoke, but it moved no higher than the rim of the barricade. It had stopped raining and a shaft of sunlight, pierc-

ing the mist, flashed on a fragment of rock. He reached and took it, turning it in his hands slowly, to catch the play of colors. Then his eyes swept the splintered ore that spilled over the rampart, and he swung himself a little, starting up, though he was forced to sink back directly, in an endeavor to see the ledge overhead. Finally his gaze met hers.

"It looks like my lost prospect." His voice vibrated a little; his face had grown suddenly young, boyish, and the hope in it brought an answering light to her own. "Here are the same traces of free gold, the rarest find in the world, with this deposit of copper; and just a nice showing of silver. But I could have sworn that outcropping was at least a mile from here."

"Your stake is just down there, on a line with those alders. Colonel stumbled on it when we came through a little while ago. And, you can't see it from here, but the slide"—she paused, her lips trembling yet dimpling—"the slide has opened a great mineral vein, right above us."

He started up again, forgetting his injuries, and again sank back. "What luck," he said softly, "what luck. Strange," he added after a moment, "how I made that miscalculation."

"I think it was easy. You had broken your compass that day; you hadn't a glimpse of the sun; the whole top of this cliff must have been in cloud as it is today; the tower shut off completely. But, I'm going now." She bent to leave the flask beside him, propping it carefully to avoid loss of that remaining potion of liquor through the leak. "I may be gone a long time, but I'll hurry. I'm glad you have the prospect—to think of."

She stepped up on the edge of the rampart. "Promise you won't try to do anything," she said.

He shook his head, watching her with his smile of the eyes. "It's a safe promise. I wish it was harder to make."

She paused another moment, sitting on the edge and feeling for foothold on the root she had used in coming up; then she swung lightly off. Her eyes met his an instant across the rim. "Good-by," she said, and dipped from sight.

He raised himself a little higher, bracing his shoulder on a tilted slab, and waited for her to reappear on the bole below. She made her way quickly and surely down.

He believed she had gone for help, how uncertain and remote she had let him know, but, while he still watched that clump of alders, in which she had disappeared, she came back; and she carried a rope, presumably Colonel's lariat, coiled on her arm. Presently she put it down and began to cull out dangerous, snagged boughs from the debris at the bottom of the pitch. Where immovable rocks and stumps menaced, she heaped springy branches. And Forrest understood. She was guarding against his possible impact with the wreckage.

But at last she picked up the lariat and started back up the cedar. He saw her purpose and, also, the futility of any effort of his to stop her. "I might have guessed it," he said, and set his lips; "it was like her."

She reached the place where the slab of granite had stripped the bark, and selecting a piece, made the lariat fast, and began slowly, laboriously, to drag it up. Sometimes the soft soil banked in front of the tow, so deep she was forced to tie it to the log, while she slipped down to clear the track; and in one of these places she looked up and saw Forrest's face, showing white above the ledge, and she called an encouraging "Hello."

He answered in a soft whistle, and because she seemed to work less desperately, he repeated the note at intervals. It settled into snatches of a tune; a tune so sweet, so tender, sometimes, she could hardly endure it, and yet again so full of appeal it drew her on; the loveliest parts of Schubert's Serenade, over and over, with the variations of a flute, and the soft, full-throated cadence of a bird.

At last it came no more. She had reached the barricade. She paid out the tow-line, and with its noosed end over her arm, mounted the trunk. She halted on the root, her breath coming hard and quick, and met his look again across the rim. "What made you?" he asked, his voice shaking. "What made you? You might have slipped. You might have started the whole slide."

She did not answer; she could not; she was tired beyond speech. She climbed slowly, with great difficulty, up over the edge, struggled to her feet, stumbled, and sank down.

He could not break her fall, as he had once, long ago, in the windfall, but he moved enough to draw her head to his shoulder. "What made you?" he repeated. "I'm not worth it. What made you?" And he kissed her lips.

He relieved her arm of the dragging rope, and tried to draw the tow up between the two trunks; but she stopped him. "You mustn't," she said. "You need all your strength. You must save yourself for that ride. I—I'm very str-o-ng, Paul. Only wait—just a moment."

"Of course we'll wait." He anchored the tow by slipping the lariat noose over the jagged top of the slab on which he leaned. "It's all right. There's no hurry."

The chinook caught her loosened hair and it fell like a shaken web, over her drenched shoulders, her waist. The sunlight struck from it the best colors of his prospect; glints of copper shading through the gold. He never had seen anything as beautiful except her face.

She gathered the shining mass in her hands and tried hurriedly to divide it in a braid, but he put his arm around her again and drew her head against his breast the contact of her hair thrilled him; spirals of it caught and clung to his hand. His immeshed fingers lost their power. Then he felt her whole warm body

tremble. "It was too hard for you," he said. "You shouldn't have tried it. But I love you for it; I love you."

"I don't know how I ever could have doubted it." She lifted her head and looked at him. A flush rose in her face; she saw him through sudden mist. "I did doubt; I heard a monstrous story and I—believed it."

"Was it about Louise?"

"Yes," her voice was almost a whisper,— "Louise and—you."

His arm fell from her shoulder. He turned his face to the gorge, knitting his brows. "I want to explain that story," he said. "I want to explain it now before we start down. I was to blame, I should have looked ahead, and yet I don't see how it could have been avoided; not while she stayed alone there, and I kept my position at the mills. But—I never saw her in the same light as other women; she was so far above reproach, so spotless, so nearly—well—a saint. And it was so evident, always, she couldn't give a thought to any man but Philip. Then, too, I had known her all my life, and she was your sister; like you in so many ways. And she was so solitary, so unhappy, troubled. I was so sorry for her, and that life there under the Head was so miserably dull for us both. We came to depend on each other to tide over those slow evenings." He paused, resting a moment, then went on. "You must see what it meant to me, a homeless fellow who is pretty fond of a home. I liked those hundred comfortable little turns she gave to a room. And I thought a lot of young Silas; he had a way of claiming me. Then, there was the music; it was her inspiration and mine. After all I can't hope to make it clear to you. I don't excuse myself, I don't want to, but—well—I had just given up you. She was a kind, sweet friend, in trouble, and sometimes, at the most, a very nice reproduction, call it a picture, of you. If I stumbled, anywhere, it was the weakness of a man who has been desperately hurt, crippled, and is trying his best to get on his feet again."

"I understand," she said, "oh, I understand; but tell me this, in the end, if there had been no Philip, would it have made a difference?"

"No." His look returned to her face; his voice deepened and shook. "You ought to know that. You ought to know there never can be a living woman so dear to me as just the memory of you. It came to that, a memory, the day Judge Kingsley told me—how much he thought of you. I saw you were meant for that future he had to offer; and I promised—I promised not to stand in his way."

The furrow deepened between his brows, and he moved a little and laid his hand on the rope. She rose, gathering her hair swiftly into that braid, and hurried to relieve him of the strain. And, presently, when the improvised sled was drawn close up between the trees, and he had dragged himself aboard, and stored the useless leg, he gave the word and she cast off the line.

She propelled him with a careful shove out between the trunks, and gath-

ering momentum, he moved more and more swiftly, ploughing a trail through the soft mold, drawing small avalanches behind him that might at any instant result in the fresh start of the whole slide. She followed down the cedar. It was impossible to overtake him on the higher and sharper portion of the pitch, but midway the sled entered a deeper fill. The incline lessened there, and the bark clogged with accumulations, which taxed Forrest's strength to clear. At last he could do no more. The toboggan stopped, crept on, and stopped again, fixed.

Instantly she was down from the log and making her way out to him. She gave him the remaining draught from the flask, and, clearing the track, started the sled with a long push, that carried it into the sharper pitch below. The next moment, while she turned to regain the cedar, she knew that the danger, which had been so imminent above, had overtaken them. The slide was in motion.

She ran with it, yet contrived to shift her course diagonally, back to the log. Crowding rock underneath began to lift points and edges through the soft fill. They tripped her, cut through her shoes. Still she kept her footing. A bough heaved up and, for a moment, its meshes entrapped her; but she held herself erect, and, like a river man, going with a swift and riffled current, swung alertly on. Presently she noticed that the avalanche did not gain impetus; then that it lost a little, and finally, almost as suddenly as it had started, it came to a halt. Looking down, while she finished the remaining steps to the cedar, she saw that Forrest had been carried before this upheaval. The sled was slowing at the end of the slope. A good yard short of the wreckage it came to a stop.

At the same time Eben Myers, coming up the canyon, skirted the standing alders, and stopped to look at the demolished cliff. The cloud was lifting from the summit; it parted in trailing ends, showing where the granite bastion had stood. "Kingdom Come!" he said slowly; "it was ther tower. Thundered like—"

He paused in astonishment, for, his glance moving down the pitch, rested on the teacher, making her way through the boughs of the fallen cedar. "Well, I be durned," he added, and, seeing the figure stretched on the improvised toboggan, he repeated profoundly, "I be durned."

He was the first to reach the sled. Forrest stirred and looked up at him with a faint smile. "Hello Eben," he said weakly. "How's the petrified man?"

Myers laughed, half in relief, half in embarrassment, and lifted his hand to part his black whiskers. "I dunno," he said. "I'd orter o' got ter his dum head by now, but I ain't lit on it this trip, an' my rations is plumb give out. I dug, you kin bet on that, I dug ter satisfy that ther blame Gov'ment dep'ty, Bates. You see he's b'en ter Washington, an' let on he knew er sight 'bout museums, an' mummies, an' stuffed animals, an' bones, so's I showed him them ther legs an' arms. An' he 'lowed they wa'n't nothin' but petrified trees."

"No? Well, that's too bad, Eben. I always wanted to have a look at your

find; I know a little about the subject, and I might have saved you trouble and time. I don't like to believe you've thrown away these two years."

Eben lifted his eyes again to the cliff. "Kingdom Come!" he said once more. "But where was you?"

"Up there, at the top. You see, Eben,—don't you?—what that landslide did for me. That's it; that streak of mineral, shining up there, is my lost prospect. A dynamite blast couldn't have been surer. It opened my mine."

"Pears that erway," Eben answered slowly, "an' I 'low that ther vein shows up all o' twelve feet. But," and his look returned to Forrest, "'pears, too, like ther Almighty teched off that ther blast er little too quick."

"Oh, I'm all right. It's only a broken bone or two; nothing a surgeon can't fix. I came down in that last layer of soft earth, and Miss Hunter," he steadied his voice, "found me and helped me out."

But if Forrest's light mention of his injuries had deceived Eben, the teacher's manner quickly convinced him there was little time to waste. She brought the horse from the alders, and despatched the settler with her saddle cup to fill at the stream which flowed through the gorge. And when Paul had taken a long draught, and she had covered his chilled shoulders with her rain-coat, which she had carried strapped behind the saddle, she found in one of the pockets a pencil, with which, on the blank page of a letter, she wrote a telegram to the Judge.

Eben, who was converting his blanket into a sling for Forrest's injured limb, promised to take the message straight to Yelm Station, and she could trust Judge Kingsley to send a surgeon, the best in Olympia, without delay. But her heart sank at the long and unavoidable interval he must spend on the road. "Dear God," she cried, under her breath, "hurry them; hurry them; let him come in time."

At last the saddle sling was ready, and Myers tucked the folded paper carefully into his pocket, weighing it down with his small prospector's mallet and a ragged plug of tobacco. Forrest's eyes moved from the mineral ledge and rested an instant on the place where the tower had stood. "You may meet a runaway horse somewhere on the trail, Eben," he said. "If you do, don't try to take the bridle close under the bit. He has been taught a mean trick."

"Oh," said Alice, "you mean Sir Donald. I had forgotten. Mr. Myers, you came down-stream. Did you see Mr. Stratton near the ford?"

"Did I see him?" Eben smiled his wide smile. "Well, no. Ef I had, I jedge I'd er took him."

"I saw him." Forrest's brows contracted; the line between them grew black. "He was up there at the tower, but the slide left him safe."

"And you," she exclaimed, "you tried to stop Sir Donald."

"Yes. Stratton was unhorsed; that's all. Now, Eben," he added, turning a

little and reaching for the settler's hand, "now, your shoulder, please; here, at the armpit. So."

Alice ran to the black's head. It was miserable. Miserable. He closed his teeth hard over that white nether lip, but the groan would out. And, up in the saddle, his shoulders sagged forward. He could have buried his face on those old familiar withers, and cried. But he pulled himself together; for the sake of this brave girl, who had worked so tirelessly for him, who moved, now, ahead of him, pushing down the encroaching salal, smoothing the way through tangles of hazel and fern, he must hold himself in check. And presently the agony eased a little. He could look about him; he was able to identify that stake, to which Alice called his attention, while she led the horse carefully by. Then, after another moment, he assured Eben that he could ride well enough, and urged him to go on to the Station and hurry that telegram through. Afterwards he could come back with Thornton and beat the timber for Stratton. Mill would be the one to take that chestnut; he was a good man with a horse.

But all this did not deceive Alice. Her eyes were too accustomed to every light and shade of Forrest's face; she knew each fluctuation of his voice. Still, though she understood, she made no sign. She talked sometimes, to carry her part, but oftener she moved in silence her hand on Colonel's bridle, watching his steps. And so they passed out of the park and into the trail above the knoll.

Then, suddenly, his strength reached low ebb. He dipped forward to the black's neck. She sprang to support him. "Paul, Paul," she encouraged, and raised herself a-tiptoe on a bit of higher ground, to bring her shoulder against him in a bracing lift; "you mustn't let yourself go! It's only a little farther; don't you hear the falls? Paul, Paul, we're almost—home."

He roused himself a little, and looked at her. "Paul Forrest," she said sharply, "*be a—man.*"

He flushed, catching the taunt, and with a mighty effort, both hands on the saddle horn, forced himself erect. Her eyes, dark with entreaty, across her shoulder met his. "You see, Paul—dear," her lip trembled, "if you should fall—I—could never put you up—alone."

"I won't fall." He gripped the bridle. "Don't be afraid—I won't. But I hear a stream somewhere—close—and I'm—thirsty."

"It's here, the tiniest rill, at the bend. Hold Colonel, if you can, just a moment."

She caught the water in the flask, rinsing it quickly to get the last of the brandy, and poured it into the cup. The slight stimulant and the brief halt helped him to gather himself once more. They moved on around the bend.

Somewhere, down the wet, sunlit trail, a meadow lark started a soft, deep-throated prelude; and was it not

"All things—all things—come round to him—to him—who will but wait."

Alice laid her hand on the rein; the horse stopped. And there below them, at the foot of the knoll, its shadowy eaves and roomy balcony clear against that background of old trees, rose the cabin of his dreams.

The trail narrowed and dipped from the curve, skirting a spur of rock, and she stepped on this ledge to give the horse room. It brought her nearer Forrest's level, and she waited, her hand still on the bridle, watching his face. She saw his surprised glance linger on the cottage, and move slowly to the clump of cedars she had saved from the slashing to shade the western wall, and on towards the meadow, seeking between the group of alders and the other of maples, now turned scarlet, the old gnarled trunk with chairlike arms.

That was her crowning hour, the thought of which had buoyed her through days of weariness and made toil possible. "Paul," she said at last, and her voice vibrated its contralto note, "you understand. I did it—I filed on the homestead—to hold it—for you."

He looked down into her lifted face, believing yet not believing. "You—did it, to hold it—for me?"

"At first," she went on hurriedly, "I planned it in payment for the use of Colonel. I meant to commute it, when you were ready to take it, or else relinquish my right. But I knew you would oppose me, Paul; I dared not tell you. And, afterwards, I learned to love it. You don't know how I love it. It would be hard to give it up."

"I understand," he answered slowly. "But don't let it trouble you. I have the mining claim; that's enough. Hold your homestead, Alice. It's yours; you worked—how you must have worked—for it. The Judge—will find it a great country place."

"Dear Uncle Silas. It shall always be his resting place. You have seen him, haven't you, Paul? He has told you that—he knows?"

Forrest did not answer. His face was very white. She believed his strength, once more, was going, and she moved closer, raising herself a-tiptoe on the rock, to brace her shoulder again to his weight. "Oh," she said, "we shouldn't have stopped here; we should have hurried straight down."

"Why, I'm all right." He leaned a little in spite of himself, and the arm on her shoulder shook. "Yes, I'm all right. But see here—see here—what does the Judge—know?"

She waited a moment, and the lark, nearer now, repeated his prelude,

"All things—all things—come round to him—to him—who

will but wait."

Then she answered, almost in a whisper, with her lashes fallen and a soft brightness in her face, "That I—love you—Paul."

Colonel started, for the old madame, seeing them on the knoll, had crossed the yard to open the gate. Then, suddenly, as they went down, breaking the cello interlude of the falls, the voice of the lark, full, tender, impassioned, rose in full song.

THE END.

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