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“Colorado Jim”

By GEORGE GOODCHILD



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COLORADO JIM

CHAPTER I

A SON OF THE WEST

Out of the brooding darkness was born the first timid blush of the morn. It sprang to life along the serried edge of the Medicine Bow, a broadening band of blood-red light. For one instant it seemed that some titan breath had blown at the source, darkening the red to purple; and then, with startling suddenness, the whole wide range flamed up. The full red rim of the sun smote aloft, sending the shades scuttling down the valleys, to vanish in thin air.

The man at the window of the Medicine Bow Hotel drew in his breath with a slight hissing sound, as the whole magnificent landscape sprang into dazzling light. It had always taken him like that. He remembered the day when, as a boy of seven, he had first seen the sun soar over the ridge, from the old "Prairie Schooner" encamped in "The Garden of the Gods." No less wonderful was it now; for Jim Conlan, late owner of Topeka Mine, and almost millionaire, was but a magnified version of the boy of twenty-three years back. Time had brought its revenges, its rewards, its illusions; but the great winds, the everlasting hills, and the wild life of the West had combined in cementing the early resolutions and ideas.

He had won through by dint of muscle and hard thinking. He saw now that the secret of his success was determination. He had earned a reputation for never letting go anything to which he had put his hand. Men feared him, but loved him at the same time. He had proved himself to be a staunch friend but an implacable enemy. His six feet three inches of bone and sinew was usually sufficient to scare off any trouble-seekers. Colorado Jim, as they called him, was the product of primal Nature, unpolished, rough as the gaunt mountains of the Medicine Bow, and as inscrutable.

All through the short summer night he had sat at the window waiting for the dawn. The man who never let go had let go something this time, and that something was nothing less than his whole life. He never believed it would hurt him like it did. For the past three years he had been restless. The soul and mind of him ached for expansion. The chief incentive to work had gone. He had more money than he could spend—in the West. Yonder was New York, Paris, London. Alluring visions of civilization flashed through his brain. What was the use of money if not to burn, and where in the whole of Colorado could one burn money and get full value?

The idea to sell out began to obsess him, and in the end he sold. Hating sentimentality and fearing any demonstration of such, he had packed up secretly and left the rough shack by the Topeka Mine for the comparatively Arcadian comforts of the hotel in the township ten miles back. In a few hours he would be on the train bound for the East—and the future.

Thorough in all things, he had packed his bags overnight, leaving but a few necessities such as razor and tooth-brush (recent acquisitions) to complete. He left the window now with a curious sigh, and gave a last pull on the strap of the largest bag with his big, muscular hands. Even now, with the ramshackle stage-coach almost at the door, he could not bring himself to believe that the old life was over and done with. What the devil was he up to, anyway, hiking around in creased trousers and black boots? Colorado Jim bound for Europe—London! It sounded impossibly fantastic. But there it was, written on the labels of his bags—"James Conlan, London, via New York." He tucked the rebellious collars of his soft blue shirt into his waistcoat, and pulled out an enormous watch.

"Rob ain't on time," he muttered; then, "Emily!"

A voice that sounded like the action of a saw in contact with a nail came from below.

"Yeah?"

"My bill—quick!"

"But you ain't had no breakfas' yet."

"Ain't takin' none. Come along right now and give a hand with these grips."

The owner of the voice, a shriveled-up, extremely untidy girl of about eighteen, with her hair in "crackers" and her eyes scarcely more than half open, entered the room, and stood gaping at him. She had gaped at him consistently for two whole days, and he didn't like it. He wasn't used to women—didn't understand them and didn't want to. He didn't even understand that the romantic Emily had fallen passionately in love with him exactly forty seconds after her sleepy eyes had first beheld him.

"For God's sake don't stare at me! Take the grips, gal, take 'em. Not that one, it would dislocate your internals."

She dropped the big one like a hot brick and grabbed the two smaller ones. At the door she found opportunity to scan him once more, and to murmur under her breath, "Lor', ain't he wonderful!" before her master came along and ended her rapturous soliloquies. He entered the room and nodded to Jim.

"So you're making out, Jim?"

"Looks like it."

"Wal, I'm sure sorry, and there ain't a guy in these parts who ain't sorry too."

Jim shrugged his big shoulders and jerked out his chin.

"Maybe there ain't one more sorry than yours truly."

"What!"

"Jest that."

"It's junk you're talking."

Jim smiled whimsically.

"Nope, it's God's truth. I didn't figure it all out till I came here. I wish I hadn't sold out. I guess I'm best fitted for running mines or herding cattle, Dan. And I'm leaving all the boys who know me for those who don't—and I don't git on with folks who don't know me. God knows what persuaded me to sell to that macaroni-eating swab. But it's done, and there ain't no manner of good wailing about it."

Dan laughed lugubriously.

"A man that can knock a million out of a mountain can git along most anywheres, I guess. Wish I had your chance."

"What'd you do?"

"I'd hitch up to some smart gal in New York or London and start a family."

Jim made a grimace.

"Pears to me you ain't strong on originality. I'd rather run a cattle ranch—they don't talk back."

"Gosh! man, wimmen's all right if you know how to treat 'em. They're like bosses, they want careful breakin' in."

Jim shook his head. He remembered the time when a girl from down East, on a holiday tour, had looked over his mine. Her eloquent blue eyes had made him feel decidedly sheepish. Colorado Jim, who had tackled most of the bad men around Medicine Bow, and had tamed the wildest bronchos that ever roved prairie, was lamentably lacking where the fair sex was concerned. He didn't know what to do, what to say, or how to say it.

"Dan," he said, "you hev to have a gift that way—an' I ain't got it."

"My lad, you've got a figure and a 'physog' that'll sure turn every gal's head that takes a slant at 'em."

"Let up!" growled Jim.

"It's honest truth, laddie. Gee! I gotta hankering for the bright lights myself. I lived in New York once. *Some* village. And with a million in your wallet ... Ah!"

He gave a long sigh as he reflected upon the quantity of "bright lights" a million would purchase.

"I'd have three houses, a hundred suits, a footman with a powdered wig like I seen in the magazine pictures. I'd have a bath each night in eau-de-Cologne, and go to roost in real silk peejamas. I'd larn to dance, and have a valee to dress me and shave me...."

"Yep," mused Jim, "and then you'd wake up, Dan. Here, where's that bill? You talk too much. What in hell is that?"

A terrific hullabaloo came up from below. A roar of laughter and the babble of male voices was mixed with the rumble of wheels and the pistol-like crack of a whip.

"Looks like a celebration," said Dan.

Jim sauntered to the window. Underneath was Rob's coach, packed full of miners. They slid from the roof of the vehicle and from inside, and began to fire revolvers and dance around like niggers. Then one of them saw Jim.

"Hi, Colorado Jim, come out of that!" he bawled.

Jim ducked back from the window as a roar came up from below.

"Looks like they're for giving you a send-off," said Dan.

"Who told them? I kept it quiet—can't stand ceremonies."

"It must have been Rob."

"Confound him! There's no time for kissing. It's fifty miles to Graymount, and the train is scheduled for noon. Send 'em away."

Dan opened his eyes with horror at the suggestion.

"I ain't takin' risks. You got heaps of time. It's only five o'clock and the road is good to Graymount."

"More'n Rob's hosses are. That off-side mare's like a sausage on four crooked sticks."

"Jim! We want Colorado Jim!" was howled up from below.

The much desired went to the window.

"Boys," he bawled, "you all run along home. I gotta catch a train."

His voice was drowned by horrible threats of what they would do if he didn't hike down immediately. He turned to Dan.

"They're a darn fine lot of boys, but I wish they wouldn't git so worked up. Where's Emily?"

Emily, who was standing in the doorway, ogling him unseen, came forward.

"There's something to buy a dress with, and see here, don't get a draughtboard pattern. If there's any money over, buy soap—scented soap."

Emily's eyes almost fell from her head at the sight of the fifty-dollar note. She rubbed her hands down her dress and took it. Jim had grabbed the heavy bag and was half-way down the stairs before she could summon enough breath to murmur the incessant refrain, "Ain't he jest wonderful!"

At the door Jim was grabbed by a dozen hefty pairs of hands and hoisted on to shoulders. One man took the big bag, and with remarkable skill flung it clean on the top of the waiting coach, much to Rob's disgust. The hurtling missile came down like a thunderbolt, and nearly went through the roof.

"Don't get fresh, boys," pleaded Jim. "These are my Sunday clothes."

They ran him twice up the main street, yelling and whooping like a pack of wild Indians. A queer awry figure stuck its head from the window of a tumble-down shop and, seeing the cause of the disturbance, shook his fist and yelled:

"The sheriff ought to be fired, to allow ..."

A shot from a revolver shivered his shop-window to atoms, and a ten-dollar note was flung at him. He slammed down the window, realizing that discretion was the better part of valor. The high-spirited men went on their way, rousing the whole population as they progressed. After about twenty minutes of these capers they reached the hotel again. Jim was praying that the business was over. He fought his way to the ground, but was immediately hoisted on to the top of Rob's coach.

"Give over, boys ..."

"Who is the whitest man in Medicine Bow?" sang Ned Blossom.

"Colorado Jim!" howled the chorus.

"Who is the huskiest two-hundred-pounder in the hul of Ameriky?"

"Colorado Jim!"

"Who is it the gals all lu-huv?"

"Colorado Jim—sure!"

Jim swung his big figure over the side of the coach. He grabbed two of his tormentors by the scruffs of their necks and jerked them on to the ground.

"I'm through with all this," he cried. "Rob, get that animated bunch of horse-hair going."

Ned Blossom held up his hand.

"Cut it out, boys," he ordered. "See here, Jim, we got wise to this absconsion of yours, and we thought we'd jest bunch in. The boys are feeling queer about it, though there ain't much show of handkerchiefs. We—we thought mebbe you'd accept a little—kinder keepsake. It—it ain't much, but—but— Wal, here it is."

He jerked something from his pocket and put it into Jim's hand. It was a gold cigarette-case, with an inscription worked in small diamonds: "To Colorado Jim from his chums." Jim stood gazing at this token of their regard. He hated sentiment, and yet was as big a victim of it as anyone. When he spoke his great voice wavered.

"I'm going a hell of a distance before I find boys like you. I wish I wasn't going. I—wish—"

He grabbed Ned's hand quickly, and then that of each of the other men, and jumped into the coach. They understood the emotion in the big heart of him. Rob started the team and away went the coach in a cloud of dust. Hats went up in the air and revolvers barked.

"Good-bye, Colorado Jim! Good-bye!"

Emily at the door, clasping the fifty-dollar note in her grimy paw, waited until the coach was a mere dot in the distance. Then she rubbed a sorrowful eye.

"Gee, but he was jest wonderful!" she moaned.

THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

New York brought Jim Conlan up with a start. Everything was amazing; everything was bewildering. He felt like a lost soul, stunned with the noise, dazed by the sights. In the fastnesses of his beloved West he had never imagined that such a place existed on the face of the earth. He felt stifled and ill at ease. His clothes were different to those worn in this city. People gave him a quick passing glance, knowing him at once for a Westerner. Feeling a trifle embarrassed under their glances, he reflected upon the advisability of buying new and more appropriate garb. A tailor was requisitioned and, finding his client to be indifferent in the matter of costs, fixed him up with a fine wardrobe—and a fine bill.

Jim spent the best part of two hours trying on the new things. The long mirror in his bedroom did its best, but it wasn't good enough for Jim. He groaned as he saw this stranger staring at him from the mirror. He wasn't built for that sort of garb. The hard hat looked perfectly idiotic and the starched collars nearly choked him. Eventually he tore the offending article from his sunscorched neck and flung it across the room. The other things followed. He stood once more in the rough gray clothes that served for "best" out West, and jammed the comfortable Stetson hat on his head.

"I'm darned if I'll wear 'em!" he growled.

A few days of shopping and theaters, and he began to grow homesick. Thoughts of Colorado and the boys constantly flickered in his brain. Here he was an outcast—a nonentity. He was not good at making friends, and the New Yorkers were not falling head over heels to shake hands with him, though more than one pair of eyes looked admiringly at his magnificent physique.

The loneliness of big cities! How terrible a thing it was. Never at any time had Jim felt so lonely. The rolling wind-swept prairie had at least something to offer. In every manifestation of nature he had found a friend. The wind, and the hills, and the wild animals seemed in some queer way sterling comrades; but here— He began to hate it. It was one huge problem to him. How did it live? What did all the millions do for a subsistence? It was the first time he had seen the poor—the real, hopeless, inevitable poor. He had seen men "broke," down to their last cent; men on the trail, starving, and lost to all sense of decency. But that was merely transitory. These people were different; they were born poor, and would be poor until their bones were laid in some miserable congested cemetery. He found them actually reconciled to it—unquestioningly accepting their fate and fighting to postpone the end for as long as possible. It sickened him.

Oh, Colorado! With your wide prairie and your eternal peaks, your carpeted valleys and your crystalline streams, your fragrant winds and your gift of God—good men!

He was sitting in the lounge of his hotel one evening, feeling more than usually homesick, when he noticed a beautiful woman sitting near him. Her evening dress was cut well away at the shoulders, displaying a white neck around which a pearl necklace glowed in the light. A mass of auburn hair was coiled up neatly round her head, with a rebellious little curl streaming down one ear.

The curl fascinated Jim. He thought it ought to be put back in its proper place, but a second's reflection revealed to him the fact that it was intended to trickle thus alluringly. It was there for effect. It enhanced her considerable charm. In the midst of his interested survey she turned and caught his eye. He began to study his boots with an embarrassed blush. When he ultimately stole another glance at this wealth of feminine beauty he found she was busily engaged in similar scrutiny—of himself. They both smiled. Then she stood up, languidly, and came across to him.

"Pardon me, but you are from the West, aren't you?"

"Right first time."

"Ah, I thought so. You Westerners can't disguise yourselves. I love the West. I was born in Wyoming."

Here at last was a sympathetic soul. Jim edged along a little. She sat down.

"You don't like New York?" she queried.

"I don't," he replied emphatically. "It leaves me gasping for breath."

She nodded.

"I felt like that when first I came down. I wish I were you to be going back again."

Jim laughed.

"But I'm not going back."

She opened her brilliant eyes and then laughed.

"I know. You've made a pile and are now seeing life. Is that it?"

"Something like that."

"I knew it."

Jim was getting his nerve back. It was the first time he had been in close proximity to a powdered back and rouged lips, and the sensation was curious. No man with blood in his veins could help admiring the soft lines of her neck and arms—and Jim had plenty of blood about him.

"Where'd you say you hailed from?" he queried.

"Rock Springs, Wyoming. D'you know it?"

"Know it? I should say! Wal, if that ain't the pink limit!"

"We ran a ranch there," she went on in a rich musical voice. "I wish I was there now, but there's a spell about cities. You'll find that out soon enough."

"I ain't seen much spell about this one," retorted Jim. "Gee! I've never seen such a bunch of blank-mangy-looking men. The wimmen ain't so bad."

She laughed.

"Thank you!"

"And cyards! Suffering Moses! I seen a guy deal a straight flush to himself and no one savvied he'd got the pack sandpapered. Out in Medicine Bow he'd hev' bin filled up with lead to his shoulder-blades. I guess this is a darn bad place."

"You're lovely!" she said merrily. "But when in Rome, do as Rome does. Do you go to dinner in that rig-out?"

Jim felt nervously at his throat.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing. It suits you admirably. But the hotel won't like it."

"See here," he retorted, "I don't give a tinker's cuss what the hotel likes. Anyway, it's decent, which is considerably more'n some of the dresses I've seen. There's a gal with nothin' more'n a bit of muslin she could fold up and put in her mouth. She's got Mother Eve beaten to a frazzle."

They gossiped for half an hour, and then Edith (he heard a friend call her by that name) left him and went to dinner. The next meeting happened on the following day. Edith's company appealed to him. She certainly used a lot of "make-up," and creams that smelt like a chemist's shop; but all New York smelt vile to Jim, so he didn't complain.

Taking his courage in both hands, he invited her to dine with him. She accepted with as much eagerness as maidenly modesty would permit, and Jim went off to lunch in the best hotel in town, to take careful note of the proper procedure of a gentleman "standing treat" to a lady. He got it off fairly well, making notes on a sheet of paper. Then he went to his room and rehearsed it all. He started dressing himself about five o'clock, and had nearly got his clothes to his satisfaction by the appointed time—seven-thirty.

The dinner was a roaring success. Conversation was feeble because all his time was taken up in observing correct decorum. Edith sat and regarded him with curious eyes. She wondered, for good reasons, what the emotions of such a man might be. Behind those quiet, simple eyes of his there occasionally flashed something that made her afraid—dreadfully afraid. She had not wasted time that day. She knew this big, uncultured fellow was James Conlan, late of Topeka Mine—a millionaire.

Jim breathed a huge sigh of relief when they left the dining-hall and walked through the lounge into the wide balcony. He was standing looking out over the street when he noticed her totter and clutch a chair.

"What's wrong?" he gasped.

"I—I feel faint. I——"

She closed her eyes. Here was a situation that had not been rehearsed by Jim. He wondered whether he ought to ring the fire alarm or call the police. Edith solved the problem.

"If—you will assist me—to the elevator——"

He had never thought of that. He grabbed her arm and helped her to the elevator. She still looked pale and distressed.

"Fourteenth floor. No. 633!" she murmured.

They left the elevator at the fourteenth floor. No sooner had the lift disappeared than Edith collapsed on the floor. He looked round for a friend in need, but the corridor was deserted. The door near at hand was numbered 630. So 633 must be near by! He stooped and picked up the still figure as though she were a child. In half a dozen strides he was at 633. The door was unlocked, so he pushed it open and entered. He found the electric-light switch, and then placed his burden gently on the bed. He was drawing his arm from under her when she opened her eyes.

"Water!"

He searched and found a water decanter and a glass. She seemed too weak to sit up, so he helped her by placing one arm under her head. She sipped the liquid and looked into his eyes. Then to his utter amazement she clasped both her arms round his neck and pulled his face close to hers.

"Hell!" he muttered.

"I love you!" she said. "Don't you see I——"

"Say, you're bad!" he said. "Drink some more water——"

He strove to free himself, but finding he could only do so by hurting her, refrained, and tried to bring her to her senses. Undoubtedly she had suddenly gone mad! The ingenuous Jim could find no other solution. He was telling her to "be a good kid" and not "to get fresh," when the door opened and slammed. He looked round to find a tall dark man, in evening dress, surveying him fiercely.

"Good-evening," said the stranger cuttingly. Jim broke away and faced the latter.

"Who in hell are you?"

"Ask her."

Jim turned to Edith. She seemed strangely perturbed.

"My—my husband!"

"Wal, I'm glad to meet you," said Jim coolly. "Your wife had a fit or something, so I jest brought her along. I guess I'll be mushing."

To his amazement the man barred his path.

"A nice story," he said.

The eyes of Colorado Jim narrowed to the merest slits. He turned to the woman.

"Tell him!" he growled.

She shrunk before those terrible eyes of his, and gripped the pillow with nerveless hands. Her lips opened but she said nothing. Jim started, and then caught her by the shoulder.

"Did you git me? He's wanting to know why I'm here. Tell him."

"How can I tell him?" she wailed.

The man laughed.

"You needn't waste breath. So this is how Mr. James Conlan spends his time. It'll make a fine story...."

Jim's brain was working fast; but he was slow in the uptake in such circumstances as this. The woman had seemed so genuine. Why did she maintain silence? It was a novel experience in his life. All the ways of this strange city were foreign to him.

The man's voice broke in:

"A fine story it will make in the press."

"Eh—!"

"The morals of a millionaire."

"Eh!" growled Jim again.

"Maybe you wouldn't like this to appear in print?..."

And then Jim saw it all. It was like a story from a magazine. He had never believed those things could be true. But here it was in real life. A frame-up—a dirty piece of blackmail.

"Can't we come to terms, Mr. Conlan...."

The suave voice got no farther than that. He saw six-foot-odd of bone and muscle rear up like a piece of steel and descend on him. A great hard hand caught him by the neck and bounced him up and down the room.

"You swab! You tinhorn! I've manured a potato patch with better stuff, by Gawd! And she's your wife, you dirty trash! She ain't your wife—no, sir. I savvy what she is. Suffering rattlesnakes! I'm waitin' to hear about it. When did you frame to put this over me? Talk up or I'll yank you outer the window into the street."

"Damn you—let me go!"

"I'll 'damn you,' you muck! Take that!"

A resounding slap sounded as a hand like leather met the man's face. Edith screamed.

"Talk up!"

"We—arranged—it—this afternoon," gasped the man.

Jim flung him to the floor and advanced on the pallid Edith. She retreated before him. He was about to clasp her when a voice rang out.

"Hands up!"

He swung round to find his late victim brandishing a revolver. An ugly leer crossed his face. He evidently meant business. Jim stared at the revolver.

"Put 'em up or I'll drill you. I can plead the unwritten law. I've got you now, my buck-jumping desperado."

Jim coolly blew his nose.

"Put 'em up!"

He put up his hands and dropped the handkerchief. He stooped to pick up the latter and, with a lightning movement, caught the edge of the mat and pulled with all his strength. The man, standing on the end of it, came to earth with a crash. Jim flew at him and made for the hand that

held the gun. Over and over they went like cats. Then it was that Edith lent a hand—to her confederate. She ran to the dressing-table and took up a small penknife. Jim was leaning over his victim, wresting the gun from his hand, when she reached him. The knife came down twice in his shoulder. The intense pain caused him to drop the gun, but he picked it up again, hurled his inert opponent across the room, and went to Edith. The knife dropped from her fingers as she saw the blood streaming down his white shirtfront.

"I don't fight wimmen," he growled. "There ain't nothing I can do to you, 'cept this."

He suddenly caught her and, holding both her wrists in one hand, with the other tore every shred of clothing from her.... Then without a word he strode out of the room.

"I'm through with this place," he muttered. "Bright lights! Gosh, I'm looking for where they don't shine so strong."

Somewhere in England were the graves of his ancestors. He didn't want to see the graves of his forefathers, even if he could find them, but the desire to give London the "once over" was now stronger than ever. The next day he booked a steamer berth and packed his bags.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT

Jim's first impression of London was an ocean of flying mud, through which myriads of phantasmagorical creatures and things moved in sullen, unceasing procession; an all-enveloping wall of brown fog; and a roar like unto some monster in pain. When he stood on the Embankment and strove to get a glimpse of the river, he came to the conclusion that "the hub of the Universe" was not up to specification. The famous Strand amazed him by its narrowness and its shortness. The buildings were dirtier than any buildings he had ever seen before, and the people cold, self-contained, units who seemed visibly to shrink back into their shells at his every attempt to hold conversation.

For a whole week the fog and the drizzle continued as though no sun existed, or ever could exist. He wandered aimlessly, like a lost sheep, wondering how long a man could swallow quarts of dirt with his oxygen without getting permanently transformed into a human sewer.

But he was getting a grip on things. His brain was gradually adapting itself to changed conditions. No longer did he gasp when a child in Stepney picked up orange-peel from the gutter and ate it. Here was the unending manifestation of Nature's inexorable law, the survival of the fittest, more clearly and cruelly displayed than in New York. Wealth and Poverty were more definitely marked. If they merged at all, it was away in the suburbs, or in the Jewish quarter, whence issued, on Saturdays, thousands of dark-skinned lads and girls, westward bound, to spend one hectic evening in the pleasure-ground west of St. Paul's.

The East End, strangely enough, appealed to him more than the West. He took expeditions down among the docks, and sat in squalid public-houses listening to the coarse conversation of their habitués. There was always something new to shock, or interest, the eyes. It was no strange thing to find a woman performing certain domestic avocations before a pot of beer. Some of them brought potatoes and peas, peeling and shelling these in the bar in preference to the hovels which they inhabited. The "pub" was their club and general meeting-house.

Once he managed to get into conversation with one of these products of "the hub of the Universe." Her point of view staggered him. Her meek acceptance of her lot sickened him. Why didn't she fly—she and her man—away to green fields and fresh air, away from this plague-ridden, dismal city? The suggestion brought from her a peal of mirthless laughter. Later he arrived at the truth. These people suffered from the greatest disease of all—*The Fear of Living*. Their hearts were rotten. They lived and died, rooted to some few acres of mud and muck because they feared what lay beyond. Like children they feared the unknown. Daylight lay beyond the jungle, but they believed it to be the pit of doom—of empty stomachs and endless tribulation.

Nothing could be done for them until the system was smashed. Unsophisticated, uncultured as he was, he succeeded in grasping the root of the problem—Education. They were living a lie. The very environment conspired to perpetuate that lie. When one among them stood up and averred that Life meant something more than this, that Man was not made to eke out his life in bitter misery, that the result of the toil of the worker was filched by some inexplicable process, he was immediately voted "balmy." They were not ripe for fighting. There was as yet no clearly seen Cause that would rouse them from their torpor. But one day the flood would burst the dam of besotted ignorance, and the human cataract would descend with appalling force.

Colorado Jim, born out of Nature, succored by the sweet winds of heaven, was learning things. When at nights he stood at his window, at the top of the hotel, and gazed over the vastness of this squat monster, London, Colorado seemed very far away.

Hitherto he had been a poor reader; he had had no time for books. Now a book came into his hands. Feeling lonely, he dipped into it. It was Reade's "Martyrdom of Man." All night long he sat and read. All the civilizations of earth passed before him in perspective. It gave him a new interest in life. He wanted to go out and take this London by the throat. It was a mockery of what civilization should be. It was an insult to dead generations of men. Man had fought and suffered and died for—this! Humanity had labored for tens of centuries to give birth to—this!

But his healthy mind recoiled from morbid speculation. He took a trip into Devonshire, and found there a recrudescence of the old calm joyousness that he believed had somehow left him. He roved the Devon hills in wind and rain, drew into his lungs the fragrant breath of the moorland, and felt a better man. He sang as he walked—a great deep song that went echoing along the valleys. Space—space! There was the magic potion. What were Money, Success, Power, compared to the free delights of Nature?

On his return to London he seriously reflected upon the advisability of going back to Medicine Bow. Man is a gregarious animal, and Jim was feeling the need of friends. What envy was his when he perceived little groups of friends, gathered together around some table, laughing and making merry! He had found the big London clubs astonishingly exclusive. A man had to be proposed and seconded, and what not, by existing members, who had to vouch for his moral or social standing. Jim felt an outsider; an alien among strange people, whose ways were not his ways. It might have been Colorado for him but for a totally unexpected occurrence.

He was returning from a trip to the Crystal Palace, and was waiting on the railway platform for his train, when a drunken man started a commotion a few paces from him. Exhibiting signs of violence, two porters came forward to remove him. That was, apparently, exactly what he wanted. He slipped off his coat and danced round in ungainly fashion. The porters advanced. He lunged out and caught the foremost man a heavy blow under the chin. The man reeled back and collided violently with an immaculately dressed man who was standing on the edge of the platform. The latter staggered, lost his balance, and fell on to the line. A frenzied voice screamed:

"Oh, my God, the train!"

The locomotive arrived with a roar. The man on the line tried to rise, but the sight of the approaching doom paralyzed him. Women shrieked and men stood rooted to the spot. No one saw the big form of Jim descend like a thunderbolt on the back of the terrified man. An instant later the engine passed over them....

Underneath the moving mass Jim's fourteen stone of human tissue was pressed close to the form beneath him. He was scarcely conscious of taking the leap. His brain had yelled one distinct order to his active limbs: "Keep him down flat!" He had obeyed that subconsciously. For a second or so it was pure oblivion, and then he realized what had happened. If there should not be enough clearance?... Any considerable projection would mean....

But something happened which drove the specter of fear away. There came a sharp pain in his back. It grew to intense torture. A small, red-hot cinder from the engine was eating into his flesh. He wanted to raise his head, to put out his arm and remove this merciless thing. But Will prevailed. The pain grew less. The roar ceased. He realized that the train had stopped. He could hear the excited murmur of voices. Everyone seemed to be talking at once.

"There's another there—that big man. I tell you...."

"Mary, come away...."

"It went right over him. Oh, poor fellow!..."

"The big man was holding him down. They're safe, I tell you."

A quavering male voice—that of the guard—came down through the space between the platform and the footboard of the train.

"Hel-lo, down there!"

"Yank your darned train out. There's a cinder half-way through my back," growled Jim.

Shouts were heard and the train began to move. It seemed an eternity before the last coach passed over them. By that time the cinder had grown cold. Jim kneeled up and gasped. He caught the other man in his arms and climbed on to the platform. The crowd rushed forward to shake him by the hand. He could have kissed any woman there without asking, but it never occurred to him. His one idea was to get away from this hand-shaking crowd. He made for the waiting-room, still carrying his man.

"For Gawd's sake keep that crush out," he begged of the station-master. The latter carried out this difficult task with ultimate success. When he came back the immaculate one had recovered his senses. He was still suffering from shock, but he found enough strength to wedge a monocle into his eye and to survey Jim, wonderingly.

"Great Scott—what a feat!" he exclaimed.

Jim was rubbing his injured back.

"My deah fellah, it was positively superhuman! You saved my life—what!"

"Oh, that's all right."

"Bai Jove, I should think so! It was positively and indubitably the most courageous thing I have ever seen or read of."

His cultured lipping speech and his well-bred air interested Jim. Here was one of the upper ten thousand, the real flower of British aristocracy. Jim's eyes traveled over him, noting the cut of his clothes and his general air of careless lassitude. It had taken ten generations to produce that finished article, and the man from the "Wilds" wondered what was the real nature of the animal. Physically he was a degenerate. His hands were long and tapered, and his limbs were exceeding small. But he possessed grace of movement. Jim felt a sneaking admiration for the hundred-and-one little tricks of movement that characterized the Immaculate One. But was it only veneer? Were these polished externals without inward counterpart? In the meantime the Immaculate One had taken stock of his saviour. He found much to admire in this amazing giant, with swells of muscle outlined behind the cloth that covered it. No man of his set could have done what this man had done. Sensitiveness, Culture, seemed to negate spontaneity of action. Reason had usurped the throne of Will. Colorado Jim only reasoned in his immature fashion. He acted without reason, on the impulse of the moment. Impulse had its advantages. Had he stopped to reason, the Immaculate One would have soon been the object of a Coroner's jury. Jim found the slim white hand extended towards him. He shook it.

"I should—ah—like to know to whom I am indebted?"

"Jim Conlan, but it don't matter a cuss."

"It matters a great deal—to me. I should like to give you my card."

He produced a gold card-case and extracted a thin piece of paste-board. Jim scanned it: *Alfred Cholmondeley, Huntingdon Club.*

"I gather you are not the sort of fellah who loves a torrent of oral thanks," drawled Cholmondeley; "but if at any time I can be of the slightest service to you, you have only to command me."

It was then that an inspiration came to Jim. He scanned the card again.

"Say, you mean that?"

"Try me."

"Wal, if you'd like to balance the account good and proper, git me into this yere club."

Cholmondeley stared, and coughed.

"It's—ah—it's a deuced expensive club."

Jim's face relaxed.

"I guess I can stand the pace."

Cholmondeley was at his wits' end. Of all the impossible things on earth Jim had asked the most impossible. The Huntingdon was the doyen of London clubs; its titled members could have filled a very large volume. And here was this primal man of the wilderness seeking admission!

"It don't matter," said Jim, with a curl of his lip.

Cholmondeley set his teeth.

"I'll do it," he said. "It's going to be demned difficult, but it shall be done. What's your address?"

"Hotel Cecil."

"Count it as done."

The great feat was ultimately achieved. Jim received notification to the effect that he was now a member on probation. By pre-arrangement with the Immaculate One he turned up one morning at the big building in Pall Mall. Cholmondeley, who met him in the vestibule, nearly had a fit when he saw him. He had tacitly thrown out a hint that the Huntingdon was correct in the matter of dress—and Jim turned up in his usual garb.

The wind was knocked clean out of Jim's sails by the commissionaire's greeting to Cholmondeley, "Morning, your Lordship."

"What did that guy say?" he exclaimed.

"I forgot to tell you I'm a Viscount," replied Cholmondeley.

"Gee, what's that?"

"It's a title conferred on one of my ancestors for something he did for his king. But it's not of the least importance."

Jim felt nervous. He wished he might have fallen through the earth before suggesting that he should become a member of a club of this sort. Cholmondeley was mildly amused. He had fought tooth and nail against the prejudices of some of the blue bloods, who had never heard of James Conlan in their lives and had looked him up in Burke in vain. Cholmondeley, half-way through his adventure, was beginning to enjoy it. He had come to like Jim immensely, though the latter's speech at times wounded his tender susceptibilities.

"My deah fellah, we have a stormy—ah—passage to weather. If I may be allowed to tender a little advice, don't talk too much—yet."

Jim's brows clouded.

"I get you. They won't like my kind of chin-music?"

"They certainly will not. Let us now have a drink to celebrate this extraordinary occasion."

They were sitting in the lounge when a boy came in with a telegram.

"Lord 'Chum-ley'!" he yelled.

He eventually spotted Cholmondeley and gave him the telegram. Jim's eyes opened wide.

"Say, that ain't your name, is it?"

Cholmondeley nodded.

"Wal, if that don't beat the band!"

A man that could make "Chumley" out of Cholmondeley was certainly a juggler with letters.

"Why in hell do you spell it that way?"

"Euphony, my deah chap—euphony!"

Who "Euphony" might have been Jim hadn't the foggiest notion. He relapsed into a moody silence, wishing the club at the bottom of the sea and himself back at Medicine Bow, where men pronounced words in the way they were spelt—more or less.

Jim's career in that club was anything but smooth. Under the wing of Cholmondeley he was saved from absolute ostracism. Two weeks of utter purgatory were lived through, but Cholmondeley was staunch. Every day he turned up at the club and bade Jim, on peril of his life, do likewise.

"Stick it out, Conlan," he argued. "They're expecting you to run away and die with humiliation. When they discover you are not a—what was the word you used?—ah—quitter—they'll begin to appreciate you."

Jim hung on. Even when Cholmondeley was not present he used the club. His personality began to have effect, and he soon made two or three firm friends. One of these was the Honorable Claude Featherstone, a healthy, good-looking youth, without a trace of snobbishness or social pride in his composition. He had been the first to come to Jim with extended hand.

"You're American, aren't you?"

"Nope, I'm English all right, but America's my country."

Claude's eyes traveled over Jim's muscular figure.

"Ye gods! they breed 'em big where you come from. I don't think I'll try catch-as-catch-can with you. What do you think of this menagerie of ours? That fat man over there is the Duke of Aberdale. If he comes and tells you a tale about having left his purse at home—beware!"

Claude's acquaintanceship ripened into intimate friendship. It may have been pure hero-worship, but the fact remained that he thought Jim the finest specimen of manhood he had ever known. Jim, on the other hand, began to drop a few of his early prejudices. He came to realize that all men have something in common, and that accident of birth placed no insuperable bar between one and another. Once penetrate that icy reserve, and more often than not there was a stout heart behind it.

Jim began to get popular. It was rumored he was fabulously wealthy—a slight exaggeration—and this helped him through, for the money-worship fetish prevailed even among "noble lords." Cholmondeley, who knew all the ropes in this intricate mesh of British social life, intimated that a peerage might be bought for £50,000. But Jim wasn't "taking any of that dope."

"It won't make my blood any bluer, I guess," he said.

In two months he had thoroughly established himself—a plebeian had taken root in a forest of belted earls and lipping aristocrats. But it stopped at that. A retired "cowboy" was all very well in a club. If he chose to take up "gun-throwing" or garrotting, there was always a score or two of hefty servants to deal with him; but in a man's home, with wives and daughters present, well—! So Jim's meteoric social ascent went no farther than that. Even Cholmondeley, who was his eternal debtor, never took him to house parties. Jim had introspection enough to see the barrier.

It was towards the end of winter that Jim created a commotion which was nearly the cause of his being "blackballed." But for the intervention of his considerable circle of admirers, who believed his action to be justified, and threatened to resign *en bloc* if the matter were not quashed, Jim would have shaken the dust of the Huntingdon from his feet.

It was in the afternoon, and a trio of men were seeking for a fourth to make up a card party. Seeing Jim lounging on a settee they invited him to join in. He rather reluctantly assented, for one of the players was Meredith, a man he disliked intensely, which dislike was thoroughly reciprocated.

They played all the afternoon, and Meredith won steadily. He talked a lot about his abnormal luck, but one man present seemed to be constantly on the fidget. Jim had been weaned on cards in a place where gambling was the salt of life, and "tin horns" were as plentiful as mosquitoes in summer. He kept his eyes on the slim, nimble hands of Meredith, and what he saw did not please him.

Meredith was in the middle of a deal when Jim suddenly flung his cards across the table and stood up.

"I'm through with this," he growled.

The other players gasped, and Meredith's brow contracted. By this time the room was full of members lounging and talking before dinner. The tone of Jim's voice suggested that something

was wrong.

"What's the matter?" asked one of the players.

"I don't like the deal."

Meredith leaped from his chair.

"Do you dare insinuate...."

"I don't insinuate nothin'. I jest ain't playin' this hand."

Claude came behind him.

"Careful, Jim," he whispered. "You are making a very serious accusation."

Meredith came across and stood within a foot of Jim's taut face.

"Mr. Conlan," he said, "I am waiting for an explanation."

"Where I come from," said Jim grimly, "men who slip cards that way are lynched on the nearest tree."

A gasp came from the company. Never in the history of the club had anything like that happened.

"You liar!" snapped Meredith.

Jim's hand came out. His fingers buried themselves in Meredith's shoulder, till the pale face winced with pain. His great body tightened up and his eyes were like cold steel. No one had ever called him "liar" before. It aroused all the innate fury within him. The other hand was drawn back to strike—and then he remembered. He gave an almost pitiful grunt and released his grip. Cholmondeley and a few others dragged him away.

"Conlan," said Claude, "you oughtn't to have said that. It isn't done."

"There's no way out," whispered Cholmondeley. "You'll have to apologize."

A dapper little man, a bosom friend of Meredith's, hurried forward, bristling with indignation.

"You have grossly insulted a member of this club, sir. We demand an apology," he said.

"Better apologize," whispered Claude.

Jim was trying to be a "gentleman," but the word "liar" from the lips of a card-sharp had pierced the thin veneer that a few months of sophisticated environment had brought about, and scratched into the coarser material beneath. Restraint went to the winds.

"Apologize!" he roared. "Apologize to a swindling tinhorn? I should smile!"

CHAPTER IV

ANGELA

The Featherstones were a remarkable family—remarkable in their unparalleled irresponsibility. They had a house in Grosvenor Place and another in Devonshire. The latter, like the Featherstones, was gorgeous in its external aspect, but thoroughly unstable in its foundations. The instability of Lord Featherstone was of a financial character. He, like the rest of his family, believed in giving a wide berth to such sordid considerations as money. Whenever he wanted money he called in the family solicitor, who promptly raised another mortgage on something.

Featherstone was so used to signing his name on pieces of paper that custom grew into habit. Lady Featherstone still gave expensive house parties, and the Honorable Angela acted as though all the wealth of the Indies was behind those magic signatures of papa.

Young Claude, with a liberal allowance per annum, managed to wring a few thousands overdraft from his banker by dint of a plausible tongue and a charm of manner. When the crash came and Featherstone was forced to face realities, the house was like a mortuary.

"But surely you can raise the wind, my dear Ayscough?"

The aged solicitor, an intimate friend of the family, shook his head.

"There's Little Badholme."

"Mortgaged to the last penny. It was never worth the ten thousand they advanced."

Featherstone paced up and down and blew rings of smoke into the air.

"We shall have to economize, my dear Ayscough. We shall have to economize."

He had said that so many times before, that like the production of his autograph it had become a habit. Ayscough, seeing Carey Street looming in the distance, was unusually glum. Economy was scarcely an antidote at this stage, for mortgagees were threatening foreclosure.

"I rely upon you, Ayscough. I rely on you absolutely."

Ayscough looked blank. It was no use trying to explain to Featherstone the exact state of the family's finance. Generations of Featherstones had eaten well into the coffers. Prodigality was their outstanding characteristic.

"If I might make a suggestion——"

Featherstone was in the mood to consider the wildest suggestion. He had none of his own.

"There is—er—Miss Angela."

"There is, Ayscough. Precisely—there is." Then he suddenly halted and looked at the lawyer. "By Jove! I see your point. But it won't avail us. Angela is a queer girl. She has distinct aversions to marriage."

"But if she knew that a wealthy—er—fortunate marriage would save you and Lady Featherstone a certain amount of anxiety——?"

"I doubt it. Besides, wealthy husbands are not so easily picked up. There are a dozen girls after every man of ample means. No, I think we may discard that possibility. Think it over, my dear Ayscough. I leave it entirely in your hands."

Ayscough had been thinking it over for the last three years. He went away with visions of the fall of the house of Featherstone at no very distant date.

At that moment the Honorable Angela was busily engaged sending out invitations to a dinner party. She was two years older than Claude, a typical Featherstone, fair and straight of limb, with finely chiseled features and delicate complexion. Her eyes were large and long-lashed, but somewhat cold. A life of indolence and luxury had bred a certain air of imperiousness in her. She was known to her friends as Angela the frigid. But this appellation was not quite justified. At times she was far from frigid. Under different circumstances she might have been as warm-blooded as any Southern peasant-girl, but pride of birth and breeding had dampered down most of the natural emotions. She was exquisite in every physical detail.

She had almost finished her list of invitations when Claude burst into the library. She turned her head for a second and went on writing. He strode up to the table and began to read the cards.

"Please go away, Claude. Don't touch them. They're still wet."

"Great heavens! You aren't asking Mrs. Carruthers!" he ejaculated.

"Why not?"

"She's simply impossible. Angela, take her off the list."

"This is mother's list, not mine."

"But that woman—Angela, she isn't proper."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know."

"I don't."

"Well, ask any of her friends. Oh, by the way, I want one of those cards. Thanks!"

He took one, to her great annoyance, and then asked for a pen. She gave it to him with a little sigh. He filled in the blank card and read it with a grin.

"Mother will be annoyed if you send out invitations without consulting her."

"I'll tell her when I've posted it. It's to a fellow I know very well."

Angela took the pen. She began to write the last card, hesitated, and then asked:

"Who is he?"

"Man named Conlan."

The pen dropped from her fingers.

"Not your cowboy friend?"

"Even so, fair sister. And why not? I tell you Jim—Conlan is the greatest thing on earth. Oh, you'll love him."

She frowned.

"Don't be ridiculous, Claude. You simply can't ask that man here. You told me he swore and——"

"But only when he's annoyed. You swear when you are annoyed, don't you? I've heard you."

"Claude!" She jerked her beautiful head upward.

"Swearing isn't a matter of words entirely—it's an emotion. You say 'bother,' I should say 'damn,' and Conlan would say something far more effective, and they each express exactly the same emotion. But you can't judge a man by his vocabulary."

"I judge him by your description of him—a retired cowboy, with few manners and less morals——"

Claude put the card into an envelope and sealed the latter with a heavy blow of his fist.

"Angela, you are perfectly cattish at times. Why shouldn't I ask Conlan here? He's as good as

you or I, or any of the people who visit us. That he is rough in his ways and speech is due to the fact that he has had to work for his living."

Angela's lips curled a little.

"And, moreover, unless something happens to prevent it, I shall in all probability have to solicit orders for motor-cars, or some other necessary evil. You, Angela, may have to write figures in a ledger, or look after somebody else's children."

Angela treated him to a withering glance.

"It's not so big an exaggeration after all," he resumed. "You've seen Ayscough hanging around of late, haven't you? What does it convey? We're broke, Angela. Lord, we are an extraordinary family! Broke, and sending out invitations to scores of the high and mighty as though we owned the earth!"

Angela flushed. Even now the specter of bankruptcy failed to affect her. She had never reckoned luxury in terms of money. Money values she was positively ignorant of. Things were ordered and delivered, and there was an end of it. She suddenly burst into laughter.

"You are most amusing, Claude. Bring your American Hercules here and we'll charge half a guinea for a sight of him."

Claude said nothing. He posted his letter, and meant to make it clear to Angela and the family that Conlan was a friend of his, and therefore should be treated as any other guest would be. When, later, he confessed his escapade to his parents, they were almost too shocked for words.

"You must write and tell him it was a mistake," urged Her Ladyship.

"My dear Claude!" expostulated Featherstone. "You let impetuosity carry you to the verge of insanity. What can this poor fellow—"

"Poor fellow be hanged!" retorted Claude, now thoroughly roused. "He's no more poor fellow than you. He's rich enough to buy us up lock, stock, and barrel; and he is as proud of his name as we are of ours, though he doesn't make a song about it."

Featherstone looked hurt at this exhibition of filial revolt. Being a wise man he dropped the subject *pro tem*. Later Claude went in and apologized.

"Pater, I particularly want you to meet Conlan. He isn't what you think him to be. If, when you see him, you don't approve of him, I'll never ask him home again."

Featherstone gripped his son's hand.

"Very well, my boy. You can rely upon me. But I do hope he won't swear—much."

Jim's sensations at receiving the invitation were indescribable. Claude's people were the cream of English aristocracy. At first he decided he wouldn't go, but second thoughts brought him to realize that Claude must have arranged this, and his regard for Claude was very deep. He hunted out the discarded dress-suit and tried it on again. Certainly he felt more at home in it than of yore. The collar caused him less torture, and he managed to keep the "breastplate" of the shirt from buckling, which it seemed to delight in doing. He had lost some of his facial sun-brown, and this lent him a more refined appearance.

"I'll go," he muttered, "if it kills me."

When the great day arrived he felt as though some invisible being were pouring quarts of ice-water down his spine. He had already made himself acquainted with "Enquire Within," and found that Claude's mother should be addressed as "Lady Featherstone"; but the question of Angela caused him anxious moments. He thought "Honorable Miss" sounded a little too Japanese. He tackled Claude on this delicate problem.

"Oh, call her anything," said that worthy. "What do you say to 'Angy'?"

Jim didn't feel like jesting on so serious a subject. He decided that in Angela's case he would drop the ceremonial form, and call her Miss Featherstone.

The memory of that evening is destined to live as long as the body of James Conlan inhabits this mortal coil. When he gave the servant his hat and stick and the footman his card, and heard that powdered monstrosity bawl "Mr. James Conlan" to a room filled with shimmering gowns and glistening shirt-fronts, Jim's flesh went cold. But the vigilant Claude helped him through. Claude was like a streak of greased lightning, bouncing Jim here and there to be introduced to a hundred and one people, leaving our hero a nervous wreck.

Featherstone and his wife acted in the most courteous fashion, her Ladyship having been coerced into accepting the inevitable with as good a grace as possible. Featherstone himself was instantly impressed by this muscular giant, who looked like an enlarged statue of Phœbus Apollo. He adjusted his monocle to get a fuller view.

"Claude has spoken a good deal about you, Mr. Conlan," he drawled. "It is a pleasure to meet you here."

Jim, scarcely trusting his voice, carried out a bow, at which much practice had been put in.

"Say, kid, how did I do that?" he whispered.

"Fine!" said Claude.

They found Angela strolling with a girl friend in the conservatory, which was gayly illuminated with Chinese lanterns. They turned at the sound of footsteps. Angela wore a dress of deep

mauve, against which her pale Grecian face and her exquisite neck shone with enhanced beauty. The other girl was literally outshone by her beautiful companion. Jim felt a hot wave run through him. Never in his life had he seen anything so amazingly beautiful as Angela. He heard Claude's introduction, and bowed automatically. Then Claude did the most outrageous thing: he took the arm of Angela's companion and tripped away with her.

Jim was horrified. He looked round seeking for some way of escape, but there was none. Angela's face relaxed in a cold smile as she realized the terrible nervousness of this big uncouth man. It pleased her somewhat to feel that she was the cause of it.

"You are a member of my brother's club, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yep—yes," he stuttered.

He wondered if he ought to offer his arm as Claude had done to the other girl, and escort her back to the house; but he dare not. There was a seat near by. Angela sank into it.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

He did so, with a sigh of relief. He was more at his ease sitting than standing. For the first time in his life he was ashamed of his size. Angela's delicate limbs and hands made his, by contrast, appear elephantine.

"Have you been long in England?"

"Few months."

"And what do you think of it?"

Here was a question that was easy enough to answer.

"I guess it's a cute little country, but it ain't big enough for a man to breathe in. There's no wind, no sunshine. And the people are as cold as the climate."

Angela laughed.

"So we are cold?"

"Oysters. I came the hul way from Devonshire to London in a train with another guy—man. 'Good-morning,' says I. 'Good-morning,' says he—and that's all there was to it. It beats me, this frostiness—ain't natural."

Angela winced at the speech. The mutilated Anglo-Saxon caused her almost physical pain, yet the voice was musical enough and deep as a bassoon.

"All you Americans say the same thing."

"But I ain't American. I was born in Cornwall. Went to Colorado in '82 and sailed round in a prairie schooner, with wild Injuns after our scalps. I reckon that was no picnic for my people. I was a little fellow then—not big enough to tell an Injun from a bear. We didn't find gold, but we found God's own country. Wal, I can't remember much about it—thank God, I can't remember much."

She looked at him, amazed by the tenseness of his words.

"What don't you wish to remember?"

His brows contracted and the big hands closed till the knuckles almost penetrated the skin that covered them.

"The Injuns got us in the end," he said huskily. "I jest remember the huge red sun going down on the prairie, with the wagon and two tents down by a stream, where the horses were watering. There was a kind o' grotto affair beyond the stream. Old Sam, the driver, came and yanked me into that. I was young, but I savvied what it meant.... It was hell arter that—shooting and screaming.... When I came out.... When I came out...."

He said no more. His eyes were staring into nothingness as through his brain flashed the dreadful scene of youth. He remembered running and crying—running and crying into the wilderness until a party of emigrants rescued him from madness.

Angela sat with parted lips. It was strange to be sitting there listening to such horrors. She was conscious of the giant personality behind his nervousness. The great voice commanded her attention. In those few moments she was afraid of him.

"Let us go in," she said.

The rest of the evening was a dream to Jim. Occasionally people stared at him as though he were a creature from a menagerie, and several adventurous folks actually talked with him. But all this was like a hazy background against which shone the almost unearthly beauty of Angela. A new phase had been entered in the life of Colorado Jim. Passion, long dampered down by wild living and arduous toil, leaped up in one soul-consuming flame. He was in love with a woman—a woman as far above him, and as unattainable as a star. He moved about like a drunken man, bewildered by this new and terrible desire.

"What do you think of Angy?" queried Claude.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he said fiercely.

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me she was like that."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

Jim shut his mouth with a snap.

"Nothin'," he said.

These Featherstones knew how to enjoy themselves. For hour after hour the dreamy strains of waltz music came from the string orchestra, and couples moved rhythmically round the big room, as though fatigue was a thing unknown. Once or twice Jim caught sight of the angel of his dreams, with face no longer pale, hanging on some man's arm, immersed in the all-consuming measure. It was maddening....

He was sitting in the conservatory, smoking, when Featherstone came out. All the evening he had kept an inquisitive eye on Jim. This was Featherstone's mental day, and one of those rare occasions when he thought about money and things.

"Ah, Mr. Conlan," he drawled. "So you don't dance?"

"No—leastways, not that sort."

"Pity. Dancing is a fine exercise."

"I guess I'm not in want of exercise."

"No?" He looked at Jim's huge figure. "'Pon my word, I think you're right... Are you settling down in this country—buying a small estate, making the most of your fortune, and all that sort of thing?"

"There ain't no place in this country big enough to hold me long. I could swaller all the oxygen in the Strand in one gulp."

Featherstone laughed amusedly.

"London isn't England. It's a growth upon the land. There is still Wales, Scotland, Devonshire —"

"Ah, Devonshire! Now, that is some pretty little garden, I agree."

"Oh, you like it?"

"Sure."

"So do I. Wish I might live there always, but one must consider one's family, and Bond Street and the Opera have their attractions for the young people. That is why I am selling the Devonshire place. Can't let good property lie unoccupied, and letting is so devilishly unsatisfactory."

He was congratulating himself he had wrapped that pill up not so badly for an unbusiness-like man. Jim took the bait quite well, too. He didn't want to buy any property, but he wasn't averse to keeping on the right side of Featherstone. Where Featherstone was there was Angela, and he might extend negotiations over months of time and then "turn down" the proposition if he felt like it.

"Say, is that property sold yet?" he queried casually.

"No. It was only recently that I decided to sell. I have another country place in Kent, much more convenient."

"Mebbe I could see it?"

"Certainly. My agent will be pleased to show you over."

As an afterthought he added: "Better still, we are spending a fortnight there, and I should be happy if you would spend the time with us. You could—ah—then examine the place at your leisure."

Jim's eyes glistened. The prospect of a fortnight in close proximity to Angela—it was magnificent, unbelievable! He strove to control his eagerness.

"I'll be sure pleased," he said.

Jim went home with his brain in a whirl. Love had come, late, but with tremendous fury. He gained no sleep that night. The star of his desire shone like a mocking mirage before his mind's eye. It was all impossible, hopeless, but to love and lose were better than to live in ignorance of life's strongest passion. To dally with the impossible were sheer madness, he knew that. But what was to be done but obey the yearnings of his heart, though it brought its own revenge?

The next morning saw Featherstone in a perfectly angelic mood. The cause was soon revealed.

"My dear," he confided to his wife, "I have sold Little Badholme."

"Claude!"

"Ah, I thought that would come in the nature of a surprise."

"But you said it was mortgaged?"

"Quite so, but I shall get a sum much in excess of the mortgage."

"But who—?"

"That American fellow—Conlan; not a bad chap, not at all a bad chap."

Lady Featherstone looked a trifle hurt. She looked more so when her noble spouse added:

"So I've invited him down with us for a fortnight to look over the place."

"Claude! Whatever has taken possession of you? I thought we had done with that man. And besides, I am not going to bury myself in Devonshire at the height of the season."

"If you don't, my dear, there is likely to be no season—for us. You must look realities in the face. If I can sell Badholme—"

"But you said you had sold it!"

"Tut—tut! It is as good as sold. He can't refuse it after having stayed there with us. Besides, the fellow is as rich as Cræsus!"

It was accordingly settled. Featherstone sent volleys over the telephone.

"Get the place thoroughly redecorated, Ayscough. It has to be finished in three weeks. Armies of workers.... And the blue room on the first floor, put in a new ceiling, something elaborate. What's that? Can't do it in three weeks? But it *has* to be done. I leave it to you, my dear Ayscough.... Oh, the garden wants seeing to. I must have the garden put straight.... And the paths graveled.... A few sheep in the park might lend a nice effect.... Don't talk about impossibilities. This is a very urgent matter. Do you think you could hire half a dozen horses?"

When Claude heard the extraordinary news that the family was leaving for Little Badholme in three weeks' time he wondered what was in the wind. When he subsequently learned that one James Conlan was to visit them as guest, his suspicions overleaped his delight. Angela, the imperturbable, merely went on reading Bernard Shaw.

CHAPTER V

FROST AND FIRE

Little Badholme hung on the sheer edge of a precipice. Its hundred acres of park and meadow wooed the blue waters of the Atlantic on the western side, and climbed dizzy heights on the southern, affording the spectator an uninterrupted view of the Dartmoor Tors. The front of the house faced seawards and, in bad weather, the spindrift, hurled over the cliff, drenched the windows and the rather unsightly stucco which the position of the house rendered necessary.

Featherstone had shown considerable acumen in giving Jim the corner room on the first floor. It looked over country of unparalleled beauty. Patchwork farmlands stretched away, on the one hand, extending to the estuary of the Teign; whilst from the windows on the western side the rolling ocean shone under the summer sun. All the best furniture had been placed in that room, including a genuine Hepplewhite suite of beautiful design. Jim had no eye for antiques, but he had a fine appreciation of scenery.

Ten days had passed on wings of magic. He saw Angela every day and Claude all day. Featherstone was perfectly charming. He could not have exhibited greater solicitude for the comfort of his guest had he been the Shah of Persia or the Prince of Wales. Lady Featherstone was polite, and no more. Angela was frigid. She seemed to be beyond his power to excite. Once or twice she showed a slight interest in his actions or reminiscences. She had even openly admired his wonderful horsemanship; but she never failed to make perfectly clear the huge gulf that loomed between a "cowboy" and a daughter of British aristocracy.

The ingenuous Claude was feeling extremely uncomfortable. He could not bring himself to believe that his father's extraordinary behavior was genuine. Politeness was one thing, but flattery was another. All that "attention" seemed so out of place with His Lordship, who was notoriously vain of his name and antecedents. Claude himself was a little sick of family pride. He had even on one occasion intimated to his mother that he knew for a fact that the first Featherstone got his Letters Patent for the noble act of assassinating a certain Duke whose wife Henry Eighth had taken a violent liking for, a remark which so upset Her Ladyship that she took to bed for ten days.

On convenient occasions Featherstone appropriated Jim to himself and deftly led the conversation into channels most dear to him. What did Conlan think of the property?

It was by pure accident that Claude stumbled across the plot. Featherstone was speaking to Ayscough on the telephone, on the question of the price of Little Badholme. Claude was flabbergasted—£25,000 for a place that was leaky and draughty through half the year, and which showed a tendency to slide seaward! The whole business was disgusting. He waited until his father had finished, and then interrogated him.

"Pater, you—you aren't trying to sell this place to Conlan?"

Featherstone shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Conlan approached me on the matter."

"But it's not worth that price."

The noble lord resented this remark.

"Claude, isn't this a matter that concerns Mr. Conlan and me? It's not at all pleasant to find you—eavesdropping."

"Eavesdropping—great Scott! You don't mean you think...."

Featherstone came up to him.

"I didn't mean that. But this is a matter of business. Mr. Conlan wants to buy and I want to sell. He's a perfectly free agent in the matter."

He abruptly left the room. Claude felt sick, humiliated. It was all so perfectly clear. Jim knew nothing about English property. It was only natural he should place himself in Featherstone's hands. He determined to put a stop to such a swindle as was contemplated. But his plan to warn Jim was frustrated by the later realization that Jim was madly in love with Angela. This astonishing fact was sufficient to drive everything else from his mind. He had no delusion as far as Angela was concerned. Dozens of men had tried their luck on Angela, and Angela remained as frozen as the North Pole. Poor Jim! He blamed himself for having been instrumental in bringing this meeting about. In her proud heart Angela would merely despise any advances that Jim was foolish enough to make. He watched Jim carefully for the next two days. The evidence thus gained was painful to bear. The honest, magnificent, unsophisticated Jim was torn and tortured by a mad, hopeless love. Claude could stand it no longer.

"Jim," he said, "don't think me impertinent. I can't help noticing—you're in love."

Jim started and the color flamed up in his cheeks.

"Wal."

"It's mad, Jim, mad. She has no heart. You don't know her as I do. She's my sister and I love her, but I can't bear to see you living on hopes that are doomed to be fruitless. If you speak of this to her she'll hurt you. She doesn't mean it. It's her temperament. Don't you see that to a girl of Angela's social status a proposal from a man—like you is——"

Jim's eyes narrowed. He didn't like this.

"Jim," added Claude swiftly, "don't do me an injustice. I'd be damned proud to have you as a brother-in-law. But don't court disappointment and pain by speaking to her——"

"Who said I was going to speak?"

"I can see it—in your eyes."

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"You're right. I am," he jerked out.

Claude drew in his breath with a little hiss. Jim suddenly swung round on him.

"See here, I'm not quitting on this. I've never been a quitter and I've clinched bigger propositions than this. What's wrong with me, eh? I guess I've bin taking a lot lying down of late. Last night I see it all—cut and dried. There ain't nothin' in this blood business—nothin'. If your family sprang from William the Conqueror I guess mine was there at the time. If there's anything in that Adam and Eve yarn, I reckon they were my grandparents as well as yours. What's wrong with me? Am I blind, lame, consumptive? See here, kid, I know what it is to work. I know what it is to starve. I've never stolen or lied or murdered.... There's never been a gal on this earth that had cut any ice with me. I've bin too busy working to go galivanting after skirts. But this 'ere's different. I—I—wal, I guess I love her some. Oh, I know she's proud and cold and thinks there ain't nothin' in trousers good enough for her. But I'm obstinate and I'm free with my tongue—at times. So we both got our faults. They kinder equalize. Anyway, I love her, and that's good enough excuse for anyone who cares a damn about himself. And there ain't no law on this earth, sir, that says a man can't put a straight proposition to a gal he loves—no, by God!"

There was something different about him. He had changed in one day. The old nervousness had gone. He was dogged, determined. There was nothing to be done with him. He meant to speak to Angela, though she took the compliment as a dire insult. Claude, fascinated by the ring of his bass voice and the flash of fire from his amazing eyes, wondered if, after all, he had not cause for courage—and optimism.

But something strange happened the following morning. Angela, with a smile, asked Jim to go riding with her. It was the first time she had expressed the slightest desire for his company, and it sent thrills of delight running down his spine. They took the best two of the borrowed horses, and under a perfect July sky rode out into the moors.

Jim was like a boy. The intoxication of her presence sent all the foreboding from his brain. He did riding tricks, at her request, and set her marveling at his uncanny control of his mount. He seemed to be on intimate terms with the latter, stranger though it was. Weird "cluckings" from his mouth were understood and obeyed without use of spurs.

"It's marvelous!" she said. "He seems to understand all those noises."

"It's horse language," he replied simply.

"Oh, come!"

He made no reply, but dismounted. The horse stood perfectly still.

"You watch out," he said. "I'm going to tell him to walk forrard."

He made a queer noise, like water running out of a bottle, and the animal walked forward. A slight variation of the sound, and it stopped. He laughed at her mystified expression, and bidding her ride on, ran at his horse and with a magnificent leap sprang clear on to its back. In a second he was rushing like the wind across the moor. He jerked up the animal until it stood almost perpendicular on its hind-legs, and came back to her.

"It's jest thinking in horse-sense," he said. "I ran a ranch for seven years, and you can't do that without thinking like a horse."

They sat on the top of Hay Tor, and looked across the tumbling country to where the sea lay like a strip of cloth twenty miles away. Right across the moors came the steady westerly wind, sighing and sighing, touching their cheeks with its fresh fingers.

"Is Colorado better than this?" she queried.

"You shouldn't ask me that."

"Why not?"

"It's your home, and one loves one's home."

"One loves one's home." The phrase amused her. He must have read that somewhere. She laughed, and instinctively he knew the cause of it. He bit his lips in anger as he realized that she merely mocked his attempts at better speech.

But he forgot that later as they rode home through the gloaming. Once only it occurred to him that to mock her horsemanship would be scarcely worse than jibing at his mode of expression—a thing which would have seemed sacrilege in his eyes. So all the culture—if culture meant refinement of thoughts and actions—was not confined to the blue-blooded aristocrats!

Sweet dreams, Colorado Jim! Dreams of a pair of blue eyes in the face of a Greek goddess, with limbs that Praxiteles never surpassed. And these to be won by a man from the wilderness! He awoke to despise the day with its uncertainties. She might be cold again this morning—cold as she had been the day before yesterday.

But it proved to be otherwise. She greeted him with a soft "Good-morning," and walked with him into the garden, among the roses and sweet-smelling things of summer. And then—oh, wonderful, exquisite marvel!—plucked a sprig of mignonette, smelled it, and placed it in his buttonhole.

After breakfast he bought the property; and he bought it in a manner dear to the heart of the vendor. He wrote a cheque, then and there, for £25,000, and took a receipt, intimating that the "lawyer-man" would see to all the details later.

Something wonderful and mysterious had happened to Angela. Jim was too dazed to do anything but sit and gasp. He had held her hand, and she had let him do it. He had, with amazing intrepidity, taken her arm walking down the long avenue of trees, and she made no attempt to withdraw it. Quick work was needed before some fly came and settled in the ointment! He got in his quick work that evening after dinner.

"Won't you come to the top of the hill? It's a full moon and a fine night," he whispered.

She nodded and, getting a scarf, went out with him. Blue, brilliant moonlight flooded the country. From out of the trees came the eerie cry of owls, and crickets sang out of nowhere. A few bars of gold still lingered in the western sky, deepening as the world moved over.

"I'm going back to-morrow," he said suddenly.

"Ah——!"

Was it a sigh, or merely an indifferent ejaculation?

"This holiday has been right down beautiful."

"I'm glad of that."

A slight breeze blew the scarf from her neck. He took it and replaced it, and his hand touched the soft warm flesh. It stayed there. He had no power to remove it. This girl of unearthly beauty and fascination paralyzed him. To think that he should be sitting there with the perfectest woman God ever made——! The storm within him broke. His body quivered, and his great hand took the warm slim one and held it like a vice.

"Angela—I've gotta tell you. I—love you. I've loved you since the first night I saw you. I've never wanted anything in my life like I want you."

He stopped, realizing that he was gabbing at a terrific rate.

"I'm rough—real rough, I know. But a man's a man for all that, I guess. And what can any man offer you better'n love—love that ... I'm no good at words—you'll understand that. Chin music ain't my line. But I'm sure crazy about you."

The hand he held trembled a little, but it stayed there.

"Angela—will you marry me?"

Her head turned. He saw the moon reflected in two glorious eyes.

"Yes," she said slowly.

"You mean—you mean that?" he gasped, his voice almost choked with unutterable joy.

"Yes—I mean that."

In another second she was swept up in his arms. All the world went out in that passionate embrace. For the first time in his life his mouth touched a woman's lips.

Featherstone paced up and down the library under the strain of considerable emotion, not to say excitement. Her Ladyship sat with an unread book on her knees gazing into nothingness.

"They're a long time," said Featherstone.

"Perhaps Angela—"

"Angela was sure," he interrupted. "Dear, dear! I wish they'd come back."

Lady Featherstone fidgeted.

"Claude, I don't like this business at all. Oh heaven! to think of Angela married to a parvenu—a common *nouveau riche*!"

"She might do far worse. Angela herself realizes that. Conlan undoubtedly loves her. It's for him to win her love. Once the marriage is celebrated, she need see him no more—er—that is to say, they can make arrangements whereby they do not become a nuisance to each other. He is apparently fond of this place, and Angela is not. What could be more natural than for Angela to take a flat in town and Conlan to live here?"

Lady Featherstone shivered.

"You think this man will reconcile the situation, once it becomes plain to him? Claude, he is a veritable giant. I—I don't like the look of him at all.... Oh, why couldn't we have waited and found a husband for Angela in her own set!"

Featherstone shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Time brooks no delay. We are, my dear, in a pretty devilish position. Thank God Angela realizes that. Rich husbands are not to be picked up every day, and it is essential that Angela marries a wealthy man, and that immediately."

"But to marry a—a cowboy!"

"He may make the best of husbands. Titles are to be bought. I think I could arrange that. No, on the whole I think it is a perfectly happy arrangement for us—and for him. As Angela's husband he will have access to certain houses and clubs that otherwise would be closed to him."

Lady Featherstone lapsed into gloomy silence.

"Claude was coming back to-night, too," said Featherstone. "I don't like the idea of that boy spending nights in Town. He's getting blasé, and at times very out of hand. What business could he have in Town—?"

Voices drifted in through the open window. A few minutes later Jim came into the library. Lady Featherstone immediately departed.

"I'd like a word with you, Lord Featherstone."

"Certainly. Take a seat."

Jim sat heavily in the armchair which Featherstone offered.

"To come to the point right now—I'm in love with Angela, and we want to get hitched up—er—married."

Featherstone looked surprised.

"I guess it's a bit of a blow. But you needn't fly off the handle. I love her all right, and I ain't 'xactly penniless."

Featherstone stroked his chin.

"There are certain conditions to my approval. You will realize that Angela occupies a prominent position in the social world, and I should naturally like to be assured that you are in a position to provide for her in a way commensurate with her needs. There would be, of course, some marriage settlement. But I do not wish to deal with that side. My lawyer, Mr. Ayscough, is a very old family friend. He has Angela's interest at heart no less than I. His assurance on the—er—financial side would be sufficient guarantee. In such circumstances I should see no reason to withhold my consent."

"Thanks. Put it there!" said Jim. "Now, where does he hang out?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Where does he live?"

"Oh, Ayscough? Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"Good. I'm off. I'll be along there first thing in the morning and get that settlement fixed up. I ain't a man that wastes time."

The meeting between Ayscough and Jim was very brief. Ayscough explained the position in choice language, and hit up for £50,000 marriage settlement. Jim, who didn't quite see why he couldn't be trusted to look after his own wife, agreed without demur and went out like a

whirlwind.

"Gee, it's all over bar shouting," he muttered. "Jim, you husky, you're sure a lucky feller!"

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT AWAKENING

The marriage of Colorado Jim with the Honorable Angela created no great stir, for the simple reason that it took place in a registry office and received but two lines' notice in the "social" column of the press.

Jim was surprised that the family should wish to keep it so quiet, but as he himself much preferred that method of getting "hitched up" he made no complaint. He drove away with his beautiful bride, feeling that the greatest step in his life had been taken—which was certainly the case. Where that step was to lead him he was fortunately unable to foresee.

The attitude of Claude puzzled him. Since that day in Devonshire, when Claude had endeavored to intervene, the latter had spoken scarcely a dozen words to him. He shook hands with Jim at the station and with Angela, but his congratulations sounded weak and insincere.

Jim speedily forgot him in the thrill of the moment. Nice was their destination—Nice in all her October glory. He was actually on honeymoon with the object of his dreams and ambitions!

This chapter in Jim's life need scarcely be dwelled upon in any detail. It was so amazing, so unexpectedly baffling, that it sent him clean off his pivot of balance. All that marvelous happiness in his heart was shattered little by little. The first night at the hotel at Nice left him pondering. It wasn't due to the fact that Angela occupied a separate room, but that he heard her *turn the key in the lock!* He sat up half the night "browsing" on that singular occurrence. The second night, and every night after, the same thing happened. Nothing else was needed to send him into fits of inward rage. Not for all the wealth of the Indies would he have touched the handle of that door! Verily he was learning. Each day drove home the lesson, until he writhed under the lash of it. He had married an iceberg.

He found himself very much alone. In Nice Angela met scores of familiar faces. She spent most of her time with these friends, leaving Jim to the terrible naked truth—to wrestle with it as best he might. He had kissed her at Little Badholme, had apparently thawed for ever the chilly heart of her. But here it was again—the frigid exterior that no kisses could melt. What had happened to her? Was it that she had never cared at all—that her acceptance of his marriage offer was dictated by ulterior motives?

Before it was time for them to return to England the last scrap of illusion was knocked out of him. More miserable than ever he had been in his life, he sought for some solution. It was so obvious she didn't care for him. He saw that, in the company of her "high-browed" friends, she despised him. He found himself sitting down under this contempt—meekly accepting the rôle of enslaved husband, hand-servant to a beautiful and presumably soulless woman.

On the night before they left she came back to the hotel very late, to find him sitting in a brown study. He watched her, furtively, discarding the expensive cloak, and taking off the heavy pearl necklace he had been fool enough to buy. He stood up and stared for a moment, in silence, out over the moonlit sea. When he turned she was going to her room.

"Angela!"

She stopped, not liking the imperative note in his voice.

"What's wrong?"

"Wrong?"

"Yep—with us?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I wasn't aware that anything was wrong."

He leaned across the table.

"Angela. Why did you marry me?"

"Because you asked me."

"No other reason, eh?"

"Isn't that reason enough?"

His mouth set in a grim smile.

"I thought that when wimmen married men there was usually another reason. To take a man and not to tell him the truth ain't 'xactly on the level."

"Don't begin recriminations," she retorted.

"I'm not beginning anything," he growled. "I'm jest telling you we can't go on like this, living in the same place and acting like strangers. I'm beginning to get wise to this queer shuffle of your family's—"

She shivered a little as his intense gaze searched her face.

"It wasn't a straight proposition, because all the perticlers wasn't put in. I didn't know I was buying a woman—"

She flared up in an instant.

"How dare you—!"

"Wal, put it how you wish, it comes to the same thing in the end. I fell to it all right, and I ain't squealing. If I was the sort o' man you, no doubt, take me for, I might want value for money, and I'm big enough to get it... No need to get scared. Though you love me like you might a rattlesnake, I happen to love you. You might as well know it."

His calmness amazed her. She had half expected a furious onslaught. On one point she wanted to put him right.

"You think I despise you, but that's not true," she said. "I couldn't have married you had I despised you. But I can't love you—I can't. Can't you see that our ways lie far apart? All your life, your very mode of thought and speech, are the direct antithesis of mine. Isn't it plain—wasn't it plain at first that it was a mere bargain? You and I can be nothing to each other but—friends."

"No, it wasn't," he growled. "If you'd have told me that, I'd have seen you to hell before I married you, or even kissed you. Blood is blood, and nature's nature, and passion's passion, and gew-gaws don't count—no, nor polite chin-music either. You were my woman, and I wanted you before all the other wimmen on God's earth. It's the little things that don't matter that fills your mind. If men were all tea-slopping, thin-spined, haw-hawing creatures like some I seen here, with never a darned notion of how to dig for their daily bread, though they talked like angels and acted like cardboard saints, this world 'ud be a darned poor show.... Anyway, you've got to learn that.... We're going back to-morrow, and I guess we'd better finish this play-acting. Devonshire's good enough for me if you'll take the London house."

She nodded. That had been her own innermost desire. She was glad he made the suggestion himself. Before coming away he had leased a house in Maida Vale, and had given instructions to Liberty's to furnish it. It would be pleasanter there, in the midst of friends, than planted away in the wilds of Devonshire with a "cowpuncher."

The months that followed were purgatory to Jim. Once or twice he ran up to the club, where he heard things that were not conducive to a happy state of mind. Angela was entertaining on a lavish scale. Cholmondeley told him of the extraordinary "success" of his wife's parties. According to Cholmondeley every other hostess was completely outshone by the beautiful Angela, whose photograph was now an almost permanent feature in the daily press.

It was on one of these visits that he met Claude. The latter shook hands with him heartily, but seemed ill at ease.

"What's wrong, young feller?" queried Jim.

Claude passed off the question with a laugh. Later, however he came to Jim.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Jim looked at him from under his eyebrows.

"Look here, Jim," said Claude impetuously, "can't you make it up with Angela? It seems silly to prolong a quarrel."

"Eh!"

The ejaculation made Claude start.

"Well, whatever you quarreled about, it can't be much. Come along and see her now."

His frank smile dissipated any suspicions in Jim's mind. Claude actually didn't know what was wrong with the Conlans! He believed it to be a mere marital squabble, that would blow over sooner or later.

"Kid," gasped Jim, "you are the pink limit! I guess there ain't nothing that would stop Angela from regarding me as unsifted muck, just as she has since the first time I saw her."

"What!"

"And you didn't know. Wal, it's all in the family, and you may as well git wise to it."

"But she's—she's your wife—!"

"Yep.... Don't hurry, youngster. Get it right back and masticate it well. They've fine heads for business in your family, not to mention play-acting."

Claude flushed. He stood up and gripped a chair by the back.

"Steady," said Jim. "I'm telling you the truth.... But I thought you knew."

Claude was realizing it fast enough.

"Then there was no quarrel?" he gasped. "She—she simply left you?"

"I told her she might—and she did. But you needn't worry none, I've staked bad claims afore."

Claude came over to him, much affected by the deep emotion that had crept into his voice.

"Jim, I didn't know. I swear I didn't know. I warned you because I didn't believe she could love and respect you as you deserve. But when I heard you were engaged I believed you had melted her in a strange way.... I see now where the money came from.... God! and she was mean enough to do that—to my—my friend."

Jim took him by the shoulder and steadied him.

"She saved your people from a big financial crash, anyway—remember that."

"Is that any mitigation? I'd rather die in the gutter than live on money that was obtained by a vulgar fraud. She acted a lie—a damned despicable lie. That sort of thing is done every day, but the man usually knows what he is doing, and hasn't any scruples, and the girl sometimes learns to love him.... So we're living on the benevolence and innocence of a man who isn't good enough to be the *real* husband of a Featherstone. I wish to God my name were Smith or Jones—or anything that is honest...."

He broke away from Jim, humiliated by the knowledge that had come to him. On the morrow he dropped in at the club, his face set in a way strange to him.

"I dropped in to say good-bye, Jim."

"Eh!"

"We had it all out last night—a real family gathering. I think I got a little militant. Anyhow, it's better this way. What sort of chance is there for a chap like me in Canada, Jim?"

Jim put down his newspaper and stared.

"You don't mean that, kid."

"I do. I leave Liverpool this evening."

Jim stood up and took his hand.

"I reckon you'll do," he said. "But how's the bank? You wouldn't like a kind o' sleeping partner on a fifty-fifty basis, eh?"

Claude shook his head.

"I know what you mean, Jim. But I've money enough to get started at something. If ever I get a partner out there, I shall consider myself lucky if he's half the man you are."

Jim sighed.

"I wish I was coming too.... You're sure about the dough? Come, I'd like to invest a little in a real promising proposition. Say five thousand—jest a small interest—"

Claude gripped his hand.

"You're a real brick, Jim, but it can't be done. No, I can't stay to lunch. I've got one or two calls to make. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He was about to leave when he turned again.

"You mustn't mind me saying this, Jim. Meredith is seeing a great deal too much of Angela. There is doubtless nothing in it, but—well, Angela is my sister, and I don't like Meredith."

When he had gone Jim sat and pondered over the words. A similar hint had been dropped by Cholmondeley. So Angela was already considered fair spoil by men like Meredith! Meredith was out to win the love that he had lost. It rankled—it hurt. But behind his fury there lurked the sinister shadow of defeat and humiliation. There were giddy heights to which he could not climb, and to which Meredith was soaring—Meredith, a man he could have taken in his own hands and broken; a cheat, armed with every weapon that culture could forge, and little else.

In the evening he summoned up his failing courage and went to Angela's house. It was one blaze of light and one tumult of sound. A dapper footman opened the door and took his card. He waited in the hall, running his eyes over the rich decorations. From higher up the hall came sounds of revelry, and now and again he caught sight of figures flitting to and fro. The sound of a string band drifted down to him, and then laughter—cultured, high-toned laughter that grated on his nerves.

When eventually he was shown into the drawing-room, he wished he hadn't come. Angela was one blaze of glory. Her guests bowed to him in a fashion that was intended, and succeeded, to make their superiority felt. Angela was cool and remarkably self-possessed.

"I was passing and jest dropped in," he explained.

"That was very nice of you. Will you take anything to drink?"

He shook his head negatively. He only wanted to get away from these people. They were too polite to whisper to each other, but their silence was eloquent enough. They were laughing in their sleeves at this unfortunate husband. A figure dawdled up, and bowing, took Angela's arm with a smirking smile. It was Meredith.

It was a pleasure to breathe the fresher air outside. Jim caught the next train to Devonshire, feeling like a dog that has been kicked by its mistress. He arrived home to find a pile of bills—debts incurred by Angela—awaiting him. He glared at them, half inclined to return them and repudiate responsibility. But he didn't. He wrote numerous checks for considerable sums and sent them away.

"What a pace! But it's got to stop. God, why can't I get a holt on myself. Jim, you ain't a man. They're putting you through your paces like a circus dog, and you're taking it all lying down."

He jammed on his hat and went striding out into the country.

CHAPTER VII

THE CLIMAX

The months passed and a New Year was ushered in. The lonely man at Little Badholme wondered what it held for him. He had seen Angela only once since the evening when he had called on her. She was riding in the Row with Meredith. She had not seen Jim, but Meredith had, and smiled to himself as though he was pleasantly conscious of the pangs he gave the former.

It was after breakfast one morning that the newspaper brought amazing news to Little Badholme. The first piece of news was to the effect that gold had been discovered in big quantities in the Klondyke, and that a vast stampede was taking place. The second was of far greater importance, so far as Jim was concerned. It was announced in a comparatively small headline, but it leaped out to him as he casually glanced over the columns.

BIG CRASH ON THE STOCK EXCHANGE.
SECRETARY AND DIRECTORS OF THE
AMAZON COPPER COMPANY ABSCOND.

It came as a shock to him. But a few months since he had invested all his money in the Amazon Company! He ran to the telephone and got through to his broker. The reply was what he expected; the Company had gone smash without hope of recovery, the shares were not worth the paper on which they were written. He put up the receiver and sat down to think things over. He was broke. Save for his small bank balance and the house over his head, he had nothing in the world.

He laughed grimly as he reflected upon his meteoric career. In the meantime there was Angela spending as though money came from some eternal fountain! He frowned as he remembered the precious checks that had been paid during the past few months, checks that had reduced his liquid cash reserve to a mere fragment. Though he was unwilling to confess it, it gave him a certain amount of joy to anticipate her fall to earth when she realized that the lavish entertaining must cease—that the source of the magic spring had suddenly dried up.

He took the next train to London, dined at the club, and then prepared to break the news to Angela.

At that moment the adorable Angela was receiving a friend. Hilary Meredith, spotlessly garbed, was lounging in the drawing-room, drinking in the strains of a Chopin Nocturne. Not only were his ears gladdened by romantic music, but his eyes were equally exercised by the radiant figure of Angela, bending over the piano, with the red-shaded lights throwing her bare shoulders into perspective and turning her hair to liquid gold. The nocturne ended, she swung round on Meredith.

"How did you like that, Hilary?"

"Superb—dark avenues on a June night, with odorous breezes and the lap of the sea on the beach below—and you, Angela—always you, dreaming in the moonlight."

"Don't be absurd! Why should I dream in the moonlight? And what should I dream?"

He looked at her from under his long eyelashes.

"Of Love, perhaps—who knows?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I think not."

"Is it then so odious to you?"

"Perhaps."

He flung the end of his cigarette into the fireplace and, standing up, walked across to her.

"You are dazzlingly beautiful to-night, Angela."

"You say that almost every night."

"Why not? A truth cannot too often be reiterated."

She ran her white fingers over the notes of the piano, producing a rippling arpeggio that was like running water.

"Compliments are cheap."

"You think that is a mere compliment? No, you know it isn't. You know I love you madly, desperately, Angela. Let us cease this—acting. Aren't we made for each other? I'm tired of London—tired of everything but you."

She stopped playing and sat perfectly still.

"Aren't you a little impatient, Hilary? You seem to forget I have a husband."

"Husband!" he laughed loudly. "I thought you, too, had forgotten that by this time."

"I haven't," she said.

"Well, it must be an unpleasant memory—the most beautiful woman in London wedded to a cowpuncher! Angela, are you going to waste your life tied to an undesirable? Here is love and devotion waiting.... I haven't all the gold in the universe, but doesn't breeding count?"

"Hilary, you are talking the veriest nonsense."

"Am I? Then why did you ask me here to-night? You knew I would talk this nonsense, and yet you asked me."

"I was lonely—that's all."

She stood up and pushed the stool aside. Her shoulder came up against him. In a moment he seized her arm and held her in a passionate embrace.

"Hilary!"

"Angela. It's got to be to-night—or never. I've waited until I can wait no longer. I'll call for you in an hour's time, and we can catch the midnight train—"

She tried to push him away, but he clung on desperately.

"It's impossible!" she cried. "Please let me go."

"Angela—"

Meredith suddenly stopped. His arms fell to his side. Standing just inside the door was Jim Conlan. Angela turned and saw him too—a great grim figure, with head thrust forward and hands on hips.

"How did you get here?" she demanded.

"Your powdered monkey outside got obstinate. Said you weren't at home. Seems as though he made some error."

He came down the room and planted himself opposite Meredith. He raised one arm and pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he snapped.

Meredith looked at Angela. He would have been glad to get out just then, but he wasn't anxious for Angela to be conscious of that desire.

"Did you get me?—get out!"

Meredith fidgeted. Then to his horror Angela said slowly:

"I beg that you will stay, Mr. Meredith."

The latter began to retreat to the settee. But he never got there. He felt a hand of steel grip him by the shoulder, and looked round to find a pair of infuriated eyes blazing down on him.

"You ain't wanted here, you dirty tinhorn!" yelled Jim. He ran him to the door, opened it, and then shot him into the passage. When he came back Angela was standing exactly in the same place. Her face was white with indignation.

"How dare you—you brute!" she said. "I'll have you put out!"

"Sit down!" thundered Jim.

It was the first time he had ever addressed her in that way and she felt decidedly uncomfortable. She dropped leisurely on to a chair.

"Now then, listen! I've got my wind back agin. Oh, I ain't going to start—recriminations—*some* word, that! It's plain business between me and you. In the first place, we're broke. Did you git that?"

"What!"

"Stoney—clean bust. Wal, money never did cut much ice with me, but it did with you. You've squandered a hell of a lot of money on things that didn't matter, and now here's old man Ruin come to say How-do."

Angela regarded him in astonishment.

"You mean to say—you've lost all your money?"

"Oh no. I only lost some of it. You lost the other. Don't talk. I don't suppose you have any notion of what you've spent in less than six months. Anyway, it's done, and squealing won't help matters.... I jest came to tell you to pack up. Me and you's going to make some more money."

She jumped up.

"What are you talking about?"

"You will pack a box or two with things that are essential for a trip to Alaska."

"Alaska!"

"Jest that. We're joining the stampede—you and me. I'll call for you to-morrow morning at ten. Stampedes don't allow for no waste time. First come first served."

She suddenly burst into laughter. The whole thing was so ridiculous. He imagined she was going to accompany him into the frozen wastes of Alaska to dig gold. It was excruciatingly funny. But when she looked again at him she didn't feel like repeating the laugh. She had never seen such fixity of purpose in any man's expression. He seemed to have added more inches to his colossal height.

"You must be mad!" she said. "I'm sorry you have lost the money, but——"

"You'll be ready at ten o'clock to-morrow."

She saw he was in deadly earnest, but believed he was overreaching himself.

"At any rate, let us talk sense," she said coldly.

"You'll find I'm talking sense all right. I'm through with any other kind of talk," he replied. "I'm making the Klondyke. Ain't it natural for a man to take his wife with him—even though she's only a bought wife?"

"You talk as though I might be fool enough to come. Understand, once and for all, I refuse to go anywhere with you. Please leave me."

He took up his hat.

"I'll be round to-morrow. Get them bags packed, or you'll come without them."

"You are not in Colorado now," she said icily. "You can't abduct women by force in London."

"I guess you'll find I can," he replied. "Good-night!"

After he had gone she sat down and thought the matter over. The financial catastrophe appalled her. She had grown so used to a life of luxury. And the threat? It seemed fantastic, impossible of fulfillment. Never in her life had she been coerced by force. There was one way out—Meredith's way. But she could not bring herself to take that course. Meredith had never succeeded in arousing the slightest passion within her. He had been merely a plaything—a simpering, compliment-throwing nincompoop of a type that most society women felt a need for, as food for their vanity. She decided that the most sensible plan would be to spend the next day with her people.

Jim arrived at ten o'clock precisely, in a cab, with a single bag of luggage. The footman, who had already suffered once at Jim's hands, tremblingly vouchsafed the news that Mrs. Conlan was out.

"Where's she gone?"

He didn't know. She went out very early and had said she might not return that day.

"Tell her maid to get some clothes packed up for her mistress—strong ones. Have 'em ready in an hour."

The man stared.

"Beat it!" growled Jim, "or I'll come and superintend it myself. If they're not ready when I come back, watch out for trouble!"

He ran down the steps and told the driver to drive to Lord Featherstone's house. Instinctively he guessed Angela's port of refuge. Arriving there, a burly footman told him that His Lordship was not at home. The next instant Jim was in the hall. The second flunkey looked at the first. They had received strict instructions that Mr. Conlan was not to be admitted. They both came to the conclusion that physical obstruction in this case was tantamount to suicide.

"Lead the way," said Jim.

"Sir——"

"Lead the way, you powdered nanny-goats!"

Ultimately he arrived at the drawing-room door. He knocked loudly and entered. Angela was sitting reading. Lady Featherstone was doing likewise, and His Lordship was standing before the fire with his hands in his pockets.

"Conlan!" gasped the latter. "How dare you come here?"

Jim fixed his eyes on Angela, who had closed the book and was regarding him in amazement.

"I've come," he said grimly. "Get your clothes on."

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Featherstone.

"I've come to remove my property," said Jim. "You didn't think I was hiking to the Klondyke and leaving fifty thousand pounds' worth of property lying about, did you?"

Featherstone felt the jibe, but he was furious at the intrusion. Jim turned to Angela.

"I'm waiting," he snapped.

"You'd better go," she reported. "You merely succeed in making a fool of yourself."

"Oh dear!" moaned Lady Featherstone. "The man is dangerous. Claude, call John and Henry."

"Yep, call in your tame leopards. Gee—I'm starving for a fight!"

Featherstone, eyeing this six-feet-three of hard knotted muscle, attempted to bring diplomacy to the rescue.

"Conlan," he pleaded, "I beg you to act reasonably. I understand you are going to the Klondyke. But you can scarcely expect Angela to accompany you there. There are certain limits to a wife's marital responsibilities."

Jim's eyes narrowed.

"There ain't no sentiments in business. I bought her for fifty thousand. I'm not writing off anything for depreciation, cos I allow there ain't no depreciation, in a material sense. I'm jest hanging on to my property till I can get a price that leaves a margin of profit—say ten per cent. Make the bidding and I'll quit."

Nothing was more calculated to arouse Featherstone's unbridled wrath.

"You vulgar cowpuncher!" he retorted. "You dare insult me in that way! You dare treat my daughter as bag and baggage—to be sold at auction like an Asiatic slave——!"

"I made the offer," said Jim casually, "because I thought, from experience, that was your line of business."

"Leave my house!" stormed Featherstone.

"Sartenly. Angela, come on, we ain't wanted."

Angela sat like a statue. Suddenly Jim sprang to action.

"I'm giving you two minutes," he snapped.

"If you ain't ready then I'll carry you out. And if any guy tries buttin' in, wal——"

Lady Featherstone gave a shriek of terror.

"Call the police," she wailed.

"My dear Conlan——" commenced His Lordship.

"I'm through with talking. One minute gone!"

Angela stood up.

"I'm not coming to Alaska," she said defiantly, "but I'll come with you out of this house, to save my mother and father further annoyance and insult."

Jim walked to the door and held it open.

"We leave for Liverpool at five o'clock to-morrow morning," he said.

She got her hat and coat and walked majestically to the cab.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WHITE TRAIL

It was a "squaw man" rejoicing in the name of "Slick George" who first revealed the magic wealth of the Klondyke. Whilst making a fire on a small creek now known to the world as Bonanza Creek wherewith to cook his evening meal, he thawed out some of the frozen gravel, and, in the manner of the born prospector, carelessly washed it, to find himself the possessor of nearly a thousand dollars in raw gold.

Making Forty Mile with a view to dissipating his newly found wealth in a gormandizing "jag," he sent the settlers in that ramshackle camp into wild excitement by producing nuggets of a size hitherto unmatched.

In a few hours Forty Mile was a deserted place. Every able-bodied man, and not a few others, responded to the lure of gold with an alacrity that was remarkable. Anything that would float was pushed into the muddy Yukon, and poled up the fifty-two miles river to the new Eldorado.

The news spread with the speed amazing in so sparsely populated a country. From all the townships lying on the banks of the Yukon, from Sitka and from the Canadian borderland, came

endless processions—good men, bad men, women and children—all with the gold-lust overleaping any other considerations.

Dawson, the center of all this itinerant humanity, grew from a struggling camp on a frozen muskeg to a teeming Babylon. The strike proved to be genuine. Already tens of thousands of dollars had been unearthed along some of the smaller creeks. The price of commodities rose as the population increased. When the Arctic winter settled down, and the mountain-locked country was frozen a hundred feet down from the surface, the thousands who had made the journey in ignorance of the conditions obtaining found the food supply inadequate to meet the needs of the wanderers. The law of Supply and Demand operating, only the lucky stakers were able to pay the huge prices demanded for every single commodity.

The news filtered through to the outer world. From the Eastern States and the Pacific Slope, from far-away Europe, came more wanderers. Late in their quest, but hopeful nevertheless, they prepared for the terrible journey over the Chilcoot Pass and down across the frozen lakes to the land of gold.

At Dyea thousands were struggling to get over the Pass. Women and children and dogs and Indians constituted the human octopus spread out over the snow at the mouth of the Dyea Cañon, which is the entrance to the Pass. Rearing above them was the white precipitous peak over which every pound of their gear and food had to be packed.

Included in this crowd were two familiar figures—an immense man, looking even more immense in his bearskin parka, and a woman, garbed in similar fashion, whose faces were set and cold. They folded up their tent as the first light of the morn struck the white pinnacle above, and packed it with the other multitudinous things that formed a dump on the snow beside them.

“Got to make the passage now. There’s wind coming,” said Jim.

Angela said nothing. She had got beyond repartee. The immediate past was a nightmare, filled with terrible journeying, close proximity with the sweepings of the gutter, and sights that at times almost froze the blood within her. And yet the worst had not arrived! Twice she had tried to escape from this enforced pilgrimage, but had failed utterly. Jim had brought her back by brute force. She became aware of the difficulties that faced her. She was his wife—his property. Had any modern Don Quixote felt like rescuing a beautiful woman in distress, he might well have hesitated at sight of the husband. As civilization was left behind so the hope of escape lessened.

Her brain swam as she beheld this terrifying thing over which she was expected—nay, compelled—to travel. Yet other women were doing it—women with children in their arms! But perhaps they loved the men they accompanied, whilst she— She bit her lips as she looked at the grim face of Jim.

All the gear had to be packed over that awful height. Jim, anxious to save time, collared three wiry Indians and bargained with them. For ten cents a pound they were ready to pack the gear. He agreed, and she saw them take on to their backs an immense burden. Each of them carried no less than 200 pounds. With these crushing weights they were going to climb the dizzy path. It was amazing!

The Indians having started, Jim began to strap the rest of the packages about him. Despite her hate, she could not but feel a sense of admiration. When she thought his back was about to break he still added more, grunting as he took up the packages. All but a sack of beans found lodgment on that huge body. The latter he placed into her hands.

“Take that,” he said.

She hesitated, and then took it, carrying it in her arms as she might a child.

“Better shoulder it,” he growled.

“I can carry it better this way,” she retorted.

He said no more but began the ascent. In a few minutes she found herself almost exhausted. She moved the sack to her shoulder and found this method much easier.

Looking at it from the base, the Chilcoot had been terrifying enough, but on the slope it was a thousand times worse. She remembered a conversation between Jim and a man on the steamer who had made the ascent many times.

“Say, is this Chilcoot as husky a thing as they make out?” queried Jim.

“Wal, stranger, I calculated it would be steepish, but darn me if I thought it would lean back!” the other had replied.

She was beginning to realize how nearly true this was. She had made up her mind she would not give way to the terrific fear that gripped her. She hated to think that she might appear contemptible in his eyes. But the last thousand feet broke all her resolutions. It shot up in one unbroken, dizzy ascent. She saw the Indians, like black ants, climbing and resting alternately. She took a few faltering steps, looked down and shivered. Far below was the black train of climbers, reaching away as far as the eye could see. But above—she dare not risk that awful path. She sat down.

“I can’t do it!” she cried.

Jim turned.

“Come on!”

"I can't—I can't!"

He came down to her, slipping and sliding on the frozen snow.

"There's a big wind coming. You'll be blown off if you stay here."

He caught her fingers with his one free hand and began to climb. Step by step they proceeded. Her heart felt cold within her. The Indians had disappeared over the top. It must be flat there, she thought!

A few snowflakes began to fall, and a sullen roar came from the north.

"The blizzard!" growled Jim.

He hastened the pace, dragging her now. The roar increased. The sky to the north and east was inky black. Below them several parties were hastily dumping their packs on the snow and preparing to meet this Arctic monster.... They arrived at the summit at the same moment as the blizzard. She saw a whirling mass of snow, heard a roar like ten thousand demons let loose, and felt the strong grip of Jim pulling her down on the snow.

For an hour it raged. It was beyond her wildest imagination. Never had she beheld or even conceived anything so utterly merciless and devastating. Great masses of snow were lifted from the mountain-top and driven before the almost solid wind. It lashed her few inches of exposed flesh, until she found the antidote by placing her heavy mittens before her face and burying her head close to the ground.

Then it lifted, and the sun shone in dazzling radiance from a frozen sky. The packs and the party were white as the landscape that yawned away on all sides. Before them was a slope as precipitous as that they had just negotiated—but it went *down*. The Indians dug out their packs and, taking their pay, went on in search of further jobs.

Angela wondered how Jim was going to negotiate the dizzy downward path. It ran almost perpendicularly to Crater Lake, beyond which it was easier going.

Jim took the big sled to the top of the slide, and commenced to dump the various packages on to it. With a coil of hemp rope he lashed this load into one compact mass. It hung on the sheer edge of a precipice, ready for instant flight. The meaning of it suddenly came to her.

"You—you aren't going to slide down?"

"I jest am," he said. "Sit you down there."

Reluctantly she obeyed, clinging tightly to the knotted rope. She saw him give the sled a violent push and jump aboard. It started down the incline, gathering momentum at a dreadful rate. In twenty seconds it was rushing onward like a cannon-ball raising the snow and shrieking as it went.... The speed eventually decreased. They passed the frozen lake and made for Linderman, Jim dragging the sled and Angela pushing on the gee-pole.

After that it was a nightmare. Angela's impression was of one endless white wilderness, broken only by a network of frozen lakes and occasional icy precipices. At nights they pitched their tent amid the vast loneliness, banking it with snow to keep out the freezing cold. At times they were held up for days, confined to the evil-smelling tent with a blizzard blowing outside. The oilstove was a blessing, despite its sickening odor, and only the piled-up snow kept the small tent from being blown to ribbons. It was little more than an Esquimo igloo.

When the wind went this merciless husband downed the tent, packed up, and was off again into the wilderness—and there were 400 miles of this! The glare of the sun on the white snow blinded her, until she accepted the snow goggles which she had at first indignantly refused. The stillness frightened her. Never had she imagined such terrible soul-torturing silence; at times she asked questions merely for the pleasure of hearing a human voice. When they overtook some struggling party the desire to stop and talk was all-consuming. But Jim wasn't for wasting time in useless conversation.

She hated him for that. She hated him for all the agony and pain that he had brought her. Fits of uncontrollable anger possessed her. She gave vent to her feelings in bitter rebuke. It had some effect, too. She knew it hurt him by the queer light in his eyes, but he said nothing—which made her angrier still.

He had become even more silent than she. One thing, however, he did regularly. When they partook of the evening meal—a sickly concoction of beans and coffee, or canned meat, and nestled down inside the bearskin sleeping-bags beside the eternal oilstove, his deep voice growled:

"Good-night, Angela!"

Sometimes she responded and sometimes she did not. But it made no difference—the "Good-night" was always uttered.

The last stage of the journey was a fight with time. They struck the Yukon River and went down over the sloppy ice. The break-up was coming, and Dawson was eighty miles away. Despite her bitter feelings she found excitement in the combat. At any moment the ice might split with thundering noise and go smashing down to the sea, piling up in vast pyramids as it went. Each morning they expected to wake and find the ice in movement.

"She'll hold," cried Jim. "Another twenty miles and we're through!"

So they plowed their way to the Eldorado of the North. It was when they were but three miles

from Dawson that the break-up came. It was heralded by ear-splitting explosions. Jim put all his weight on to the sled.

"She won't move much yet," he growled. "Mush on!"

For another mile they kept the river trail, and then with deafening crashes from behind them the whole ice began to move. No time was to be lost now. Jim dragged the sled inland and made the bank at a suitable landing.

An hour later they made Dawson City. The streets were filled with half-melted snow, through which a mixed humanity trudged, laden with all kinds of gear and provisions. Tents were pitched on every available piece of land. Saloons were filled with mobs clamoring for drink and food. Around the Yukon agent's office were crowds waiting to register "claims" that might or might not make their owners millionaires. All the creeks within miles of Dawson had been staked long since, and late-comers were staking likely spots further afield. News came of rich yields in some barren God-forsaken place and immediately a stampede was made for it.

Angela, who had pined for any kind of civilization rather than a continuance of the eternal snows, wondered if this were any better. Jim pitched the tent under some spruce-trees and high up on a bluff beyond the city.

"Wal, we're here," he said.

"Yes," she replied bitterly. "You've got so far. And what next?"

"We're going to git gold. Yep, we sure are—and you're going to help."

She shut her mouth grimly. This was a big city; there were men here going back to civilization after making their fortunes. In a few weeks the river would be free and steamers would be making Vancouver. It oughtn't to be so difficult to find someone who would help her to escape from a man like this!

CHAPTER IX

HIGH STAKES

Before many days had passed Angela realized how wisely Jim had traded in Vancouver. At the time she had wondered why he had been so prodigal in the matter of food. It seemed to her sheer lunacy to travel over icy mountains with what appeared to be enough food for a traveling circus. Now she saw that but for his foresight they might have felt the fine edge of starvation as others were doing.

With remarkable suddenness the cold had vanished and the thermometer mounted daily. A dank, warm atmosphere embraced the country. Under the vanishing snow were green buds that burst into bloom at the first direct rays of the sun. An unwelcome visitor invaded the camp—the mosquito. He rose from the swampy river in myriads, and made life a torture.

Jim had got his usual hustle on. Very quickly he became a popular figure in the town. But two days after his arrival he met an old friend—a gaunt, lanky figure, with a beard a foot long.

"Why, darn me if it ain't Colorado Jim!"

He turned and saw Dan, late owner of the Medicine Bow Hotel, looking wonderfully prosperous and happy.

"Hello, Dan!"

"Gosh, you ain't altered none. Come and hev' some poison."

They pushed their way into a crowded saloon, and Dan flung down a small poke of gold-dust for a bottle of whisky, from which he received no change.

"What's your lay, Jim?"

"Prospectin'."

"Wal, yore sure a queer cuss. Why in hell d'ye want to go prospectin' with a million of the best in the bank?"

Jim laughed.

"I'm broke, Dan."

"What!"

"Yep. An' I'm married."

Dan nearly choked. Then he clapped his hand on his leg and roared with delight.

"Married. Wal, I guess she's a lucky gal, even if you are bust. But how'd it happen?"

"Bad speculation. But I'm through with that. See here, Dan, I'm wantin' to stake a couple of claims, but every darn piece of dirt seems pegged out."

Dan stroked his beard.

"Yore late. I got wise to what it'd be like, so I hiked up here early. Staked twenty-two on Bonanza and sold out yesterday to the Syndicate. Five hundred thousand I got, and never thawed out more'n a square yard of dirt. And now I'm mushing for the bright lights."

Jim's face contracted.

"I hope you'll like 'em, Dan. They sure gave me the croup. Maybe I ain't built that way, and you are. 'Pears to me that the Klondyke is a mission-hall compared to London or New York. They'll take the gold filling from yore false teeth out there."

Dan surveyed him carefully.

"What's wrong, Jim? You seem kinder moody like. Someone kicked you in the hip?"

"You got it."

"Wal, I guess you'll git over it," said Dan philosophically. "Mebbe you'd like me to take some message back, eh?"

"She ain't back there," said Jim. "She's right here."

Dan looked as though he had been shot.

"What's that? You ain't telling me——?"

"Why not?"

"This is a hell of a place for ladies."

Jim frowned. He knew that perfectly well. Now and again a feeling of self-reproach came, but he strangled it by reflecting upon the trick that had been played upon him. After all, he had bought her at her own price, and he meant to keep her.

Two or three of Dan's lucky friends were scanning Jim's enormous figure with obvious interest.

"Say, boys, 'member I told you about a husky guy at Medicine Bow who made a pile and sold out?"

"Sure!"

"Wal, this is him all right. Ain't he a beaut?"

They shook hands with Jim and ordered more whisky. Like Dan they were overburdened with money, and remarkably free with it. They were beguiling the time in innocent "jags" pending the arrival of the boat in the river that was to take them out of the Klondyke.

"Looking for a claim?" inquired one of them.

"Thet's so."

"Nothin' doing this side of Blackwater, but there's a dinky little creek five mile up-river. What do they call that creek where Dave staked, Whitey?"

"Red Ruin," replied Whitey.

"Yep, Red Ruin. There's a mile or so at the lower end unstaked, and if there ain't gold there, my name ain't what it is. Dave staked 250 feet yesterday, and he's sure nuts on gold."

Dan nodded.

"You hike there, Jim, afore it goes to someone else."

"Ain't a healthy sort of name—Red Ruin," said Jim with a laugh.

"Names don't count."

Jim was finally persuaded to try his luck there. He left the party, followed by their best wishes for success, and made for the camp up the hill. He found Angela in a fit of revolt. She had done nothing since he left that morning. Dirty pans and dishes littered the ground and blankets were lying in heaps all round.

"Angela!"

She looked at him.

"You ain't bin hustling overmuch."

She flared up in an instant.

"I'm sick of this. You brought me here by brute force. I won't go on with it. Do you understand? I've tramped over that icy wilderness with you. I've suffered until I can suffer no longer. You never were a gentleman, and ordinary courtesy and respect for a woman are unknown to you, but surely you have a heart somewhere within you. Can't you see this is killing me? Do you want to break my heart?"

"Hearts are hearts, ain't they? And breaking one ain't no worse than breaking another. No, I'm no gentleman—not the kind you bin used to. That's why I came here—because here they're only men, and I'd jest as soon be a man as anything else on earth. I reckon that where a man goes his woman should go too."

She flushed at the appellation "woman."

"You talk like a barbarian. I'm not your woman—you understand? Not your woman."

"Figure out how you may," he retorted, "when you buy a thing, you buy it, and it's yours until someone pays you to git it, or someone is hefty enough to take it from you. As for that, if any guy thinks about cuttin' in, he's welcome to try."

The true sense of his position was made patent. His rough philosophy was good. Had she been his by mere conquest, no man in the Klondyke would have disputed it. Being his wife, legally, his position was doubly strong. Only cunning could win through. She meant to exercise that faculty as soon as opportunity presented itself. And the opportunity was close at hand.

"I'm going up-river to-morrow," he said, "to prospect a creek, and to stake two claims if it's a promising place. I'll be back before sundown.... Ain't you goin' to git supper?"

She was on the point of refusing to carry out the necessary abhorrent domestic work, but the chance of escape which his words gave rise to brought discretion to the forefront. She cooked a dish of beans and opened some canned fruit, and they took their meal, thrusting it beneath the shielding mosquito-nets which seldom left their heads.

Half an hour later they made ready for sleep, in very close proximity to the hard ground, with a hanging canvas curtain between them.

"Good-night, Angela!" he said.

She returned no answer.

Down in the town things were just beginning to wake up. No one worried about time in Dawson City. The nights were like the days, the only difference being that the nights were more noisy. Time was stretched and manipulated with as much ease as an elastic band. Men went to bed at eight in the morning, and woke up to take their breakfast at three or four in the afternoon. Thereafter came dancing, drinking, mirth, and boisterous song. The conditions of the northern summer aided and abetted this queer juggling with time, for it was never dark, and 3 A.M. was not much different to 3 P.M. And as a rule, the life of the saloons was too busy a thing to take notice of any changes in the position of the sun.

The next morning Jim, armed with a pick and shovel and some stakes, left for Red Ruin. Angela watched him disappear over a bluff, and immediately prepared to put into operation her scheme for escape. She packed a small sack with the few things she would require, and wrote a short note which she pinned to the flap of the tent.

"I warned you I should go. There is no other way but this.—ANGELA."

She took the sack and descended to the crowded town. The river was still belching ice into the Bering Sea, but the last floes were leaving the upper reaches, and she knew that in a few hours navigation would be possible, up-stream. Whilst many parties were content to wait for the steamer's arrival, others, less patient, were preparing to "make out" up the river and lakes and over the Chilcoot.

She began to put out a few furtive inquiries, and secured the names of several men who were preparing for immediate departure. She was wise enough to take a look at these worthies before committing herself to their charge, and most of them did not please her. Wandering in the back areas at noon, she noticed a rough shack bearing an obviously new announcement "For Sale." Already a queue of prospective purchasers was lining up. When the owner—a sallow man of about fifty—appeared, he was besieged. The shack was sold in a few minutes to the highest bidder. Angela, nervous but determined, interrogated the sallow man.

"Excuse me, but are you leaving?"

He ran his keen eyes over her, immediately impressed by her beauty and her bearing.

"I am."

"Soon?"

"To-morrow morning if the river's clear."

"Alone?"

"No—two others."

Angela breathed a sigh of relief. There was safety in numbers.

"I want to go to England—or to New York. Will you take me? I've no money or food, but I'll pay you well when I get away."

The man stared.

"As soon as I can cable to my people they will send me money," she resumed. "Take me as far as the first cable station, and in forty-eight hours I will get money to recompense you," she added quickly.

His brows contracted.

"What's the hurry?"

"I want to get away from someone."

"Ah—I see."

"Will you—will you take me? I'll work."

He looked at her soft, exquisite face and figure, and grinned as he reflected that the work she could do was negligible; but the suggestion had its fascination. She was beautiful—and beautiful women were rare in the Klondyke. He opened the door of the shack and called "Tom!" Tom appeared in his shirt-sleeves—a big awry figure with a face like a chimpanzee.

"Got a grub-staker. What do you say?"

Tom's face relaxed into a smirking smile as he also took a long survey of Angela.

"Canoe's purty full up, but I dare say we can find room. Where'd ye want to go?"

"Anywhere out of this. Some place from where I can cable to England—for money."

He looked at "Connie," the sallow man, and nodded. The latter turned to Angela.

"We're off in the morning. Is that your grip?"

"Yes."

"Better leave it in the shack. There's a small room at the back you kin hev' to sleep in to-night."

She thanked him and went inside the shack. Big bundles lay on the floor ready for the journey, and from the window in the back room she saw a long, newly made canoe. She put down her sack, and decided to get some food in the town with the few dollars she possessed, before taking refuge in the shack from Jim, who would doubtless return by the evening.

When she returned the third man was present. She smiled at the three of them as pleasantly as she knew how, and repaired to the back room. She imagined Jim's amazement and wrath when he discovered she had gone. But it was extremely doubtful if he would find her in the short time that remained before her departure.

Time passed slowly enough. From outside came the sound of low voices. She crept to the keyhole and saw her three future companions sitting round the rough table engrossed in a game of cards—poker. Close to hand were two bottles and three mugs. Now and again a low curse came to her ears. She began to wish the door possessed a lock and key!

She went back to the mattress and endeavored to get to sleep, but her brain was too full of the impending adventure to permit its flight into unconsciousness. Moreover, the card party began to get boisterous. She wondered if they were going to keep it up all night. A few minutes later there was a loud crash. She sat up and heard fierce arguments proceeding from the inner room. All three of them were talking at once, and she could not hear any intelligent sentence, but it was all to do with the "deal." She went again to the keyhole just as they settled down again to play.

To her amazement they were playing with matches. The big chimpanzee man, Tom, had a huge pile in front of him. In the center of the table was another pile. She saw Tom put down his cards and growl "Three Queens," picking up the matches in the pool with a triumphant laugh.

"Last deal," said Connie.

"Yep. It's between me and you, Connie, *but I guess she's mine.*"

"Chickens ain't hatched yet."

"She ain't no chicken—she's peaches. Gee—some stake that!"

Angela suddenly felt sick as the truth came to her. She saw now the meaning of those matches. They were not playing for money, *but for her!* She sprang to the window, but escape that way was impossible, for it was not more than a foot square. Her heart beat in terrible suspense. She realized her dreadful position—out here, a mile or more from the town, she was utterly at the mercy of these brutes. They considered her fair prey, as most women were considered in the Klondyke at that time. Pleading a husband would make no difference. A woman ought to know better than to leave her husband. Unwittingly she had placed herself in that position.

There was only one way out, and that way lay through the inner room. She resolved to take it. She took the small sack and approached the door. A look through the keyhole revealed them engrossed in the decisive "hand." With heaving bosom she turned the handle and walked swiftly through the door.

She was almost past the table before they recovered from their surprise. Then the chimpanzee man put out a huge arm and caught her by the wrist.

"Ere, what's this?"

"Let me go."

He grinned maliciously.

"I *should* say. Why, I've jest won you!"

She struggled in vain in his iron grip.

"Git back to thet room!" he ordered, and flung her towards the door.

It was the first time any man had laid hands on her, and it aroused the devil. Her face and neck went crimson. Some of the fear vanished under this storm of violent repugnance. She noticed a naked hunting-knife on a ledge by the window. She flew to it and gripped it menacingly.

She came nearer and raised it to strike any obstructors. Then Connie's lean figure leapt forward. The knife rattled to the floor and her wrist ached from the blow he had dealt it. He took her by the shoulders.

"Cut that! Tom's won you, and you'd better get wise to that."

"You brutes! Do you think you can——"

Her voice petered out as she saw the horrible expression in Tom's eyes. There was no hope of mercy there. Words were lost on this monster. All the evening he had dwelled with rapture upon the object of the gamble. He took her from Connie and held her fast in his arms. Connie laughed.

"You allus had the luck. Wal, perhaps she'll transfer her affections later!"

"Let me go!" she cried, now thoroughly panic-stricken. "Oh, God!—let me go!"

The chimpanzee-man merely gurgled in his throat. He lifted her from the ground and made for the inner room. One of her hands became free. She seized a bunch of his hair until it was wrenched from his hard scalp.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Go on—it's my turn in a minnit."

"You monster!"

"Good-night—boys!" he cried mockingly.

"Happy dreams!" sneered Connie. "Don't forget we start——"

The third man, a silent, morose individual, suddenly gave a gasp as the outer door was flung open. The others turned and saw the enraged face of Colorado Jim behind a big six-shooter.

CHAPTER X

ANGELA MEETS A FRIEND

"Hands up!" snapped Jim.

Connie and the silent man obeyed. Tom, clasping his prize, looked thunderstruck.

"Did you git that, you human gorilla? Put 'em up."

Tom let Angela slip to the floor.

"What's all this?" he growled.

Jim gripped the deal table with one huge hand and flung it across the room. He advanced on Connie and slapped the latter's pockets.

"No guns? Good!"

Connie went flying from a violent shove, likewise the silent man.

"Come here—you!" bawled Jim.

Tom came forward, his ugly face curved in a look of intense hate. He felt Jim snatch the revolver from his belt and pocket it.

"What's your lay?" he growled.

Jim put his own revolver away and Tom's hands dropped to his side.

"So you took a fancy to my property, eh?"

Tom recoiled before the blazing eyes of his adversary. He was big and hefty enough, but no match for the well-proportioned, muscular giant before him. He was good at assessing physical values, and he felt scared.

"She's mine," he said. "I won her."

Angela, crouching at the end of the room, saw the storm brewing. She suddenly remembered the knife, and retrieved it lest one of the trio should lay hands on it. She saw Connie and his silent friend edging behind Jim, and one quick glance from Tom's vile face told her that the three were filled with a common purpose. Connie suddenly snatched up a log of wood.

"Jim!" she cried, as the three men suddenly sprang forward.

The big figure moved like a streak of lightning. Tom was caught by two powerful arms and lifted clean off his feet. He hung for one brief second, six inches from the ground, and then executed an arc in thin air to come down with a crash against the match-boarded wall. The other two were close upon him. He dealt with the log-swinging man first. Connie's arm was already raised and the thick piece of wood was on the point of coming down. Had it descended, the Honorable Angela might have been a widow there and then, but a fifty-inch leg prevented that untimely catastrophe. It came out from Jim's thigh, true in the horizontal plane, and smote Connie in the

tenderest part of his anatomy. He made no sound whatever, but dropped in a crumpled heap and lay still. The silent man was caught in mid-air. He had never expected the amazingly quick movement of the arms that held him. He was a miserable specimen, physically, and turned green when he saw the big fist drawn back to strike.

"No, you ain't big enough to hit," said Jim. "You seem to like me; come closer honey, come close!"

He gathered the man close in and, exerting all his strength, crushed every atom of breath from the man's body. Angela, sick with the sight of this animal manifestation, protested.

"You'll kill him! He never did me any harm."

Jim dropped his victim with a grunt. A queer reaction set in. He was sorry. He could have rescued her without this horse-play, but the sight of her in the arms of a human chimpanzee, who knew no morality but that of the cave-man, had aroused all the innate fury within him. After all, he loved her! Even though she despised him, and preferred the company of licentious beachcombers, he worshiped her. The very thought seemed to mock at him from within.

"Do I have to yank you back, or will you come freely?" he said in a low voice.

"I'll come," she replied.

They walked back to the tent in silence. She noticed that the note had gone from the flap. How he had tracked her down was a mystery. He refrained from mentioning the adventure, but she saw that it had had a great effect upon him. He ate no supper, but sat smoking through the mosquito-netting, gazing pensively at the starry heavens. When they retired he uttered his customary "Good-night, Angela."

"Good-night," she replied.

The next morning found him busy caulking a big flat-bottomed boat, which was already half laden with stores. She looked at him inquiringly.

"Going down the river," he informed her. "I've staked two claims along a creek called 'Red Ruin.'"

"Is it far?"

"Matter of five miles."

"A-ah!"

The remaining gear was placed in the boat. Angela took a seat in the bows whilst Jim threw his weight on the pole, the sole means of propulsion. There was a loud crack, and the punter was almost thrown over the side as the rotten pole broke in the middle. The strong current sent the craft whirling down-stream. Jim grabbed a coil of rope, made it fast to a ring-bolt, and went over the side. He reached the bank and pulled the craft inshore.

"Throw out the ax. I'll go cut a new pole."

She handed him the weapon, keen as a razor, and watched him tramp up the steep bank. A slight breeze shifted the mist from the sprawling, muddy river and the sun clove through. An isolated mass of ice swirled along, melting as it went. A small island in the center of the stream was gashed and scoured by the recent ice-flow. Trees along the bank had been shorn clear by the enormous pressure of the bergs as they fought their way to freedom. She was sitting thinking of the inscrutable future when a canoe hove into sight. The occupants—two Indians and a white man—were driving it up-stream at amazing speed, considering the fact that the down current was running at a speed of at least five knots. They were passing her, scarcely a dozen yards distant, when she gave a cry of astonishment.

"D'Arcy!"

The white man ceased paddling and looked up sharply. He turned to the Indians and rapped out an order. The canoe drifted in towards Angela's craft and D'Arcy held out his hand, with absolute wonder written in his eyes.

"Angela Featherstone, by all that's holy! What are you doing here?"

"I'm with my husband," she replied bitterly.

"But I thought—I read that you were giving house parties, attending race-meetings, and all that sort of thing. I came to Canada the week before you were married. I read about it and wondered who the happy man was."

Angela's hand played with the running water. D'Arcy was scarcely more than an acquaintance, but at least he was one of her own set. Like a lot of other men, D'Arcy had made love to her and been repulsed.

"Look here, I don't understand this," rejoined D'Arcy. "You—you aren't prospecting?"

She nodded.

"Great Scott! It's bad enough for men, but for a woman—!" He looked round. "Is your husband about?"

"He's up the bank cutting a new pole."

"I see."

He gave her another searching look, the meaning of which was clear to her. In the same mute

but eloquent language she gave him to understand the chief fact—she was unhappy.

“To bring you here—to bring a cultured woman into a country like this——!”

Words failed him. He touched her hand softly.

“Where are you making for?”

“A creek down the river called ‘Red Ruin.’ He has staked two claims there.”

He nodded reflectively.

“I’m making for Dawson for some gear. I’ll drop in and see you some day if I may?”

“Do. I should enjoy a talk with you.”

“Your—your husband won’t object?”

“Does it matter?”

He laughed and, shaking her hand, paddled his frail craft out into the stream. Looking up, she saw Jim coming down the bank, with the ax swinging in one hand and a new pole over his shoulder. He unfastened the rope and entered the boat.

“Who was that?” he asked.

“An old friend,” she replied coldly.

She saw his eyes flash as he threw his weight on the pole and sent the boat hurtling down the river. But for the bitterness rankling within her, she might have found time to admire her pilot. Big as he was, there was nothing ungainly about him. Every movement was beautiful in its perfect exhibition of muscular energy. The hard knotted muscles in his bare arms swelled and relaxed as they performed the work allotted them. Little beads of perspiration sparkled on the bare neck, and the wind played among the streaming mass of his black hair. But she had no eyes for this. From the moment when he had unceremoniously forced her on this journey of horror and desolation her wounded pride had smothered every other emotion. Her soul hungered for one thing—escape. Thwarted though her other attempts had been, she meant to try again. To try, and try, until he grew sick of holding a woman against her will. The unexpected genesis of D’Arcy raised her hopes to high pitch.

They ultimately entered the narrow, sluggish creek, and Jim beached the boat on the northern side. She saw several stakes driven in the earth, and realized that these marked the boundaries of the two claims.

They pitched the tent some distance from the claims—high up on the bank, to guard against the trickling water that ran down the bluff and into the creek.

On the morrow Jim started digging. She condescended to take a little interest in this, for the experience was novel. A lucky strike might mean freedom from this life of hardship and misery. Once back in England— The thought was tantalizing. She watched Jim commence to drive a hole through the matted undergrowth, exhibiting surprise when the pick rang hard on the frozen earth beneath.

“Rock?” she queried.

“Nope—earth. It’s froze right down for a hundred feet. Bed-rock ought to be three or four feet down. That’s where the gold is—or ought to be.”

“And if it isn’t there?”

“Sink another hole, an’ keep on doin’ it till I git it.”

Later in the day he reached bed-rock, at a depth of six feet from the surface. The washing-pan came into operation, and he sought eagerly for the golden dust—in vain.

“Muck!” he ejaculated.

The next pan, and the next, produced similar results. He commenced another hole about six feet from the first, driving through fallen trees and vegetable matter that had lain there for tens of centuries. When the evening came no sign of gold had appeared. He went to the tent and partook of the meal that Angela had prepared.

“Any luck?” she asked.

“Nope, but it’ll come. If not here, then somewhere else. But there’s five hundred feet of frontage to be bored yet.”

Angela shrugged her shoulders. He talked as though time was of no importance. She knew he would go on and on until he had achieved what he set out to do. The summer was short—a brief four months. In October down would come the winter, freezing everything solid for eight long months. Between October 21 and November 8 the Yukon would close until the middle of May. She realized that she had, as yet, tasted but the latter end of winter. To live through the whole length of the Arctic night, away in the vast wilderness of the North, was a prospect that appalled her.

She wandered up the bank, and through the dense growth of hemlock that led to a precipitous hill. High up on its slope she stopped and surveyed the landscape. Despite the bitterness of her soul, she could not repress an exclamation of wonderment.

Stretching away in all directions was tier upon tier of snow-clad peaks, aglow with the soft radiance of the low-lying sun as it swept the horizon towards the North in its uninterrupted

circuit of the heavens. The southern end of the Alaskan range seemed like an opalescent serrated bow, changing to violet through all the darker hues of the spectrum by some strange freak of the atmosphere, only to leap into glorious amber as the fringe of a cloud passed across the origin of illumination.

Everything seemed so vast, so forbidding, it reduced her to a state of ignominy. If one desired a sense of Eternity, here it was. Time and space merged into one inscrutable entity—the Spirit of the North. She had felt that Spirit when crossing the passes that led to the Klondyke. Here it was limned in clearer form. The everlasting peaks; the aquamarine glaciers, roaring and plunging into the sea; the vast forests sprawling across the valleys and up the bases of the mountains to some two thousand feet, virgin as they were ten thousand years ago; the noisy fiords cumbered with the ice of crystal rivers, breaking the deathlike silence with ear-splitting concussions—all combined in one awe-inspiring picture of nature's incomparable handiwork.

And here under her feet were fragrant flowers, lured from the shallow covering of earth and matted creeper to last but a brief season, and then to sleep the whole long winter under the snow.

She sighed and made her way down the hill towards the tent. Beside the fire was Jim, gazing into the past. She thought her husband was like this strange immense land—cruel but magnificent, primal and alluring, yet hateful. As she approached, a similar comparison entered Jim's mind, with her as the object.

"Cold and proud as a mountain peak," he muttered. "There's no sun that can melt her, no storm that can move her. God, but she's beautiful!"

CHAPTER XI

FRUITLESS TOIL

The two claims on Red Ruin became as honeycombed as a wasp's nest. Day after day Angela watched the bare-armed, red-shirted figure at work, witnessing his failure with a set face. It became patent that the claims were bad ones, and that Red Ruin was living up to its name. All the labor of driving through matted undergrowth and frozen gravel was vain. "Hope long deferred maketh the heart sick," and it made Angela's sick. She knew that sooner or later Jim must accept the inevitable and abandon the quest—there. She hoped it would be soon. After all, failure meant the same as success—to her.

If Red Ruin failed, what else could he do but pack up and go home, as thousands of others were doing? The patched-up steamers that were now plying up the river were packed with a queer gathering of "failures" and "successes." Men who had staked all on this promising gamble were going back to the harness of civilization, sadder and wiser beings. The relatively few successful ones were making programmes for the future—a future in which an unaccustomed luxury figured prominently. Disease and famine were taking their toll of the participants in the great adventure. From all along the Yukon watershed came news of pestilence and panic. Scurvy raged in Circle City, and a hungry mob at Forty Mile was only quelled by troopers with loaded rifles. A boat coming up-river laden with 200 belated gold-mad men and women was stopped by the Commissioner, and all but those who had foresight enough to bring a twelve-months' food supply were refused a landing, for the famine was acute.

These pitiful facts came to Angela's ears. Even money could no longer purchase food. The knowledge put a terrible weapon into her hands. If she destroyed their food supply freedom was assured. For one hour she even contemplated this means of escape. Was it not for his good too? Could he hope to win where thousands had failed? She tried to convince herself that it would be no act of treachery but one of kindness. The lie rankled in her brain. A revulsion of feeling came as she reflected upon the immediate past, for despite all her antagonism she could not but admire the indomitable will of him. Failure was written all over the two honeycombed claims, but it never daunted him. She heard the spade and ax ringing on the hard earth from early morning till late evening, and saw him swinging up the hill, a little grim, but otherwise unchanged.

She was impatiently waiting for him to confess his failure, but he never did. There was still some hundred feet of river front to be "tried out," and Jim calmly went on boring his monotonous holes. It was maddening to watch him.

One morning two men came poling down the creek in a flat-bottomed boat packed with gear and food. They pulled up at sight of Jim. He recognized them as the owners of two claims farther up the creek.

"Still diggin', pard?" queried one.

"Yep."

"Wal, it's sure a waste of time. There ain't no pay dirt on this yere creek. We got five hundred

feet up yonder plum full of holes, and we ain't shoveled out naught but muck."

Jim stretched himself.

"'Tain't panning out up to schedule," he grunted, "but I'm going through with this bit afore I hit the trail again."

"Better cut it, Cap," said the second man. "I gotta hunch they didn't call this Red Ruin for nothin'. See here, I found six abandoned claims half a mile up. I reckon the guys who pitched that lot over were the same as did the christening of this bit of water."

Jim laughed carelessly. He had little doubt that the location was bad, but it went against his nature to quit before he had carried out his task. The first man stuck a wad of tobacco between his back teeth.

"That pardner o' yourn don't seem to take kindly to diggin'," he ejaculated.

Jim stared at him, and then tightened his lips.

"No need to fly off the handle, Cap. I had a pard like him once, strong on paper but liked the other fellow to do the diggin'."

"What the blazes are you talkin' about?" demanded Jim. "I ain't inviting you to give opinions. What's more, she ain't a *him*. You go to hell—and quick about it!"

The man looked at his comrade and they both grinned. Jim put down the spade in a way that caused them to stare blankly.

"Wal, you're some joker. Pete, am I blind? It's no odds, anyway, and no offense meant, but by ginger! it's the first time I've seen a woman smoke a two-dollar cigar."

"What's that?"

Jim suddenly felt dazed as a new explanation entered his mind. He stepped down towards the boat.

"What's all this?" he inquired. "I'm kinder interested."

The first man explained.

"I bin campin' way back there. The other guys who abandoned them claims played hell with the timber—gormandized the whole lot—must have gone in for the timber business. So I bin cuttin' spruce up there on the hill. Wal, I often seen you drilling holes in this muck, but damn me if I ever seen your pard put a hand to the spade. He seems to live in that darned tent. I seen him twice hiking out—to Dawson, for a jag, I guess. Didn't seem on the level to me——"

Jim's mouth twitched. He had no doubt about the veracity of this statement. Someone had been visiting Angela, and she had said nothing of it.

"Didn't know he went to Dawson," he replied evasively. "Thanks for the information. I'll sure talk to him about it."

They nodded and began to pole down the creek and out into the river. Jim sat down on a pile of muck and mopped his brow. The tent was approachable from the river on the other side of the bluff. The spruce-trees that surrounded it hid it from the view of one working by the creek, though any occupant would have the advantage of seeing without being seen. He remembered reaching the tent a few days before, to find Angela singularly embarrassed. Was that the day on which the stranger had called? Despite his headache he could think no wrong of her. She was lonely, pining for the life she had left. Between him and her loomed an apparently unbridgeable gulf. If she had found a friend in that mixed crowd back in Dawson, hadn't she a right to see him and speak with him? His heart answered in the affirmative, but it hurt just the same.

He said nothing to Angela on the subject, but carried on with his thankless task, with a strange mixture of pride and jealousy eating into his heart. When more wood was needed he innocently(?) hewed down two spruce-trees in close proximity to the tent, whose removal afforded him a view of the tent entrance from the scene of his daily "grind."

For a whole week he kept his eyes intermittently on the brown bell-tent, but the stranger came not. He wondered if Angela had become aware of the increased vision afforded him by the felled trees, and was careful to keep her strange friend away. He noticed some slight change in her disposition—a queer light in her eye and a mocking ring in the monosyllabic replies which she gave to any questions he found it necessary to put to her.

Their conversation had not improved with time. If he addressed her at all it was with reference to the domestic arrangements. She, on her part, never interrogated him on any subject. Every movement of her lips, and of her body, made it clear that she regarded him as a complete stranger under whose jailership certain circumstances had placed her. Her determination was scarcely less than his own. She meant to break his stubborn spirit—to arouse in him, if possible, a violent aversion to her presence. Already the summer was vanishing. The few birds—swallows, swifts, and yellow warblers—that had immigrated at the coming of spring were preparing for a long journey South. Cold winds were turning the leaves brown, and the whole landscape deepened into autumn glory. Angela noted the change with an impatience that was evident to any observer.

Jim, testing the last few yards of claim, pondered over the problem of her change of front. She even sang at times, in a way that only succeeded in deepening his suspicions. Was she singing on account of some happiness newly found?—some interest in life which lay beyond himself and

the immediate surroundings?

It seemed to be the case, and the consciousness of this disturbing truth caused him acute mental agony. Some other man could bring her happiness. Some other man had succeeded in breaking into that icy reserve against which all attempts on his part had been vain. Was it worth while continuing the drama? If he let her escape, forgetfulness might come. Time had its reward no less than its revenges. Why suffer, as he was suffering, all the agonies of burning, unrequited love. At nights, with that hateful curtain between them, he had writhed in anguish to hear the soft breathing within a foot or so of his head. More than once a mad desire to rise up and claim her as mate came to him, only to be cast aside as the better part of him prevailed over these primal instincts.

"She's mine," he argued, "mine by purchase, an' if I was anything of a man I'd go and take her now."

But just because he was a man he didn't. She owed her sanctity to the fact that this rough son of Nature loved her with a love that seemed to rend his heart in twain. The thin canvas between them was as safe a partition as walls of granite. She might have found time to admire the quality of his love, considering the circumstances prevailing, but her pride left scant room for any sentiment of that sort. She merely took these things for granted.

Jim, with the last hole bored in the iron earth, and the precious glint of gold still as absent as ever, gazed back at the tent with knitted brows. Red Ruin was a failure, as he had long known it to be. The future loomed dark and uncertain. There were no more creeks near Dawson worth the staking, but gold lay farther afield—over the vast repelling mountains. It would mean suffering, misery, for her. A winter in the Great Alone, harassed by blizzards, bitten by the intense cold, tracked by wolves and all the ferocious starved things of the foodless wilderness, was all he had to offer—that, and a burning love of which she seemed totally unconscious, or coldly indifferent. Why not let her go now? To see her suffer were but to multiply his own suffering a thousandfold, and yet she was his in the sight of God! He emitted a hard, guttural laugh as the mockery of the phrase was made clear to him.

He collected the gear and, slinging it across his shoulders, mounted the hill. Overhead a long stream of birds was beating toward the South. He bade them a mute farewell, knowing that he would miss their silvern voices, and their morning wrangling among the spruce and hemlocks.

"I guess life might be beautiful enough," he ruminated, "if one only had the things one wants, but the gittin' of 'em is sure hell!"

He flung the pick and ax and washing-pan to the ground, and looked inside the tent. It was empty, and the cooking utensils were lying about as they were left at breakfast-time. Then he noticed that some of Angela's clothes were missing. The latter fact removed any lingering doubts from his mind. If any further evidence were required, it existed in the shape of a pile of cigar ash on the duckboarding.

"So!" he muttered.

He walked outside and stood gazing over the autumn-tinted country. A stray bird twitted among the trees, but the great silence was settling down every hour as the feathered immigrants mounted from copse and dell into the blue vault of heaven.

"So!" he repeated, as though he were powerless to find any fuller expression of his emotions. He went back into the tent and slipped a revolver into his holster, then with huge strides went over the hill towards Dawson.

He covered the five miles in less than fifty minutes, and entered the congested main street. The saloons were busy as usual, and there seemed to be more people than ever. A trading store was selling mackinaws, parkhas, and snow-shoes, as fast as they could be handled. "Old-timers" lounged in the doorway and grinned at the huge prices paid for these winter necessities. Jim evaded the throng and made for the river bank. He guessed that Angela and her "friend" would not risk staying long in Dawson, and had doubtless timed their escape to catch the last boat down-river.

At that moment the *Silas P. Young* gave announcement of its departure by two long blasts from its steam-whistle. Jim came out on the river bank and saw the boat well out in the stream, its paddle churning up the muddy water. Near him was an old man waving a red handkerchief. He recognized Jim and stopped his signaling.

"So you've sent her home, pard? Wal, it's a darn good——"

"What's that?"

"Yore wife. I sent mine too. It's going to be merry hell in this yere town afore the summer comes round——"

Jim stood petrified. He had half expected this, but now that he was face to face with it the blow came harder than he expected it to be. She was going—going out of his life for ever.... Perhaps it was as well that way. He turned to Hanky, the old man.

"Did you see her go?"

"Yep. I saw her go aboard."

"Was—was there any other guy with her?"

"No—leastways, that fellow D'Arcy saw her off. Friend of yours, I take it?"

Jim nodded, scarcely trusting himself to speak. The name was unknown to him, but he remembered the man in the canoe who had spoken to Angela a few months before. It must be the same man—the man who had visited her at the camp, and who had dropped the cigar ash on the floor that morning. D'Arcy had triumphed, then! He concluded that the latter must be aboard, though Hanky had not seen him go on the boat. He thought of Lord Featherstone and all those fine relations and friends of Angela's. How they would chuckle when they heard that she had escaped from her "impossible husband"! His gorge rose as he visualized the scene. They had sold him something only to get it back again for nothing. It wasn't straight dealing—it wasn't on the level. They had bargained on this eventuality when they made the deal. They concluded it would be easy to hoodwink a "cowpuncher."

"No, by God!" he muttered. "I ain't lettin' go."

He turned to Hanky.

"You gotta hoss, Hank?"

"Sure!"

"Will you loan him to me for an hour or two? I'll take care of him. I'm strong on hosses."

"She's yourn," replied Hanky. "Come right along and I'll fix you up. She's stabled at Dan's place."

Ten minutes later Jim was mounted on the big black mare. He waved his hand to Hanky and went up the street like a streak of lightning.

CHAPTER XII

INTO THE WILDERNESS

Hanky's mare, after being cooped up in a stable for a week without exercise, stretched its neck to the fresh air, and under the urging heels of Jim killed space at a remarkable rate. Mounting an almost perpendicular hill, Jim saw the *Silas P. Young* beating down-stream, a mile or two ahead, at a steady ten knots.

He made queer noises with his lips and his mount responded instantly, leaping with distended nostrils over stone and hummocks, like a piece of live steel. To be on a horse again was glorious. Instantly his form had merged with the animal's—they moved as one creature, raising dust and moss as they thundered down the river.

The boat turned a corner and was lost to view for a few minutes, but a mile lower down he saw it again, with a creamy wake streaming behind it. He was nearer now and going strong. He pressed his hand over the glossy neck of the horse and crooned to it.

"Gee, yore some hoss—you beaut! The man that lays whip on your flanks oughter be shot. We're gaining, honey. Another league and we'll be putting it over that 'honking' bunch of machinery. Stead-dee!"

The thundering pace was maintained. Uphill, downhill, on the flat, it was all the same. Heels were no longer necessary. The horse understood that the big "horse-man" wanted to get somewhere in quick time, and meant to see him through.

Twenty minutes later they were abreast of the *Silas P. Young*. Then they shot into a deep gully and were lost among a thick forest of spruce-trees. For two miles horse and man evaded low-hanging branches and treacherous footfalls, until the timber thinned and the straggling Yukon came again to view. Away up-stream was the steamboat, crawling down by the near bank. There was no time to be lost if Angela's escape was to be frustrated. He tethered his foam-flecked mount to a tree and crept down the steep bank. The muddied water swirled along at a ramping five knots—a vile-looking cocoa-colored mass that was scarcely inviting to any swimmer. He raised his hands and dived down.

With a powerful over-arm stroke he made for the line which the steamboat was following. In that wide welter of water the bobbing head would in all probability be lost to view, or any kind of shout would be drowned by the clanking noise of the paddle-wheels. The extreme danger of the exploit was not lost upon him, but the resolve, once rooted, stuck fast.

He looked up and saw the *Silas P. Young* bearing down on him, her squat nose setting her course in dead line with his eyes. Treading water, he waited for the psychological moment. The chief danger lay in the vicinity of the paddle-wheel. To be caught up in that meant certain death. He resolved to fetch the boat as near the bows as possible and on the port side.

He heard a bell ring twice, and then to his horror the boat changed her course. It was barely two hundred yards away, and bore straight down on him. He dived and swam for his life to avoid direct impact.... At that moment a man saw him and yelled out something to the Captain. The latter peered over the side, but saw nothing.

"You're drunk!" he retorted.

"Tell you I seen a man right under her nose. Better stop the boat."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'll keep straight on," he replied. "What's it got to do with me, anyway? He ain't a passenger—"

He stopped and gasped as an enormous, saturated spectre climbed over the side. A crowd of men playing cards nearby stopped their game and stared.

"Who in hell are you?" asked the Captain.

Jim shook the wet from his hair and pushed forward without a word. His keen eyes ranged all over the packed decks. Then he grunted as he caught sight of a familiar figure in the stern of the boat. It was Angela, white of face, and amazed at the appearance of this totally unexpected apparition. The crowd, struck dumb with wonderment, made way for him. He strode up to Angela and stopped within a foot of her, gazing fixedly into her eyes.

"You!"

"Yep—it's me all right. Are you ready?"

"Ready—!"

"Can't wait too long. It's a tidy swim, and the river gits wider every mile."

She recoiled from him in horror. For the past hour she had been dreaming of the comforts and joys of civilization. Once in the river, escape had seemed certain—and here was her pugnacious jailer with determination written all over his set features.

"I'm waiting," he said calmly.

"Are you mad?" she retorted. "I'm finished with that terrible life. This time you have come too late. Unless you go ashore now there will not be another chance."

"Then we'll go right now."

"We!"

"Yep—you and me."

He moved towards her and caught her firmly by the arm. A group of men, interested spectators of the drama, thought it was time to interfere. One of them, a grizzled man of fifty, touched Jim on the arm.

"What's all this, stranger?"

"Don't butt in," growled Jim.

His interrogator disregarded him, and turned to Angela.

"Who is this broiler, missie?"

"He is—he is—. He wants to take me back there, to a place I hate! Oh, please bring the Captain!"

The captain was already pushing his way through the crowd, annoyed at this unconventional method of boarding his ship. He put both hands in his pockets, stuck out his little bearded chin, and glared at Jim.

"What the blazes do you mean by boarding my ship? Where's your ticket, eh? And leave that lady alone—she's a passenger of mine."

Some of his indignation vanished when the fierce gray eyes of Jim fixed him in an unflinching stare. He saw trouble looming in the offing. Jim turned his eyes to Angela.

"We'll be mushing," he said briefly.

Linking her arm in his, he began to push through the crowd. The grizzled man said something to his comrade, and they spread out and formed a human barrier to his further progress.

"Don't butt in, boys—'tain't healthy," warned Jim.

"Git him!" whispered the grizzled man, "and yank him back in the river!"

Jim's hand flew to his belt and the big revolver was jerked out in a trice. He pushed it into the stomach of the foremost man, and caused that worthy to shiver with terror. The latter backed away, whilst his friends hunted for firearms.

"Stand aside!" roared Jim.

The lane widened, but at the end of it were two men handling revolvers, with a dangerous glint in their eyes.

"So yore after stoppin' a man eloping with his own wife, eh?"

"Wife—?"

"Thet's so."

The crowd stared. This put a new complexion on matters. The Captain looked at Angela.

"Say, is that husky your 'old man'?"

Angela flushed with embarrassment.

"I hate him, and I won't go with him!" she cried hotly.

The Captain spread out his hands.

"Why in hell didn't you say so afore?" he asked Jim.

"Is it any of your darned business?"

"I guess it's your funeral, all right," chuckled the grizzled man.

"Better come on as far as Eagle. I'll put you off there," said the Captain. "Can't stop just here."

Jim shook his head and moved towards the rail.

"I'm sure in a hurry," he said. "We ain't scared of a drop of water, are we Angy?"

Angela bestowed upon him a look of mingled contempt and terror. The high wooded bank seemed miles away, and the river ran like a millrace.

"I won't come—I won't!" she hissed.

But he had already reached the rail. Her heart seemed to freeze with horror as he lifted her on to the seat and clasped her firmly round the waist, imprisoning her arms so that resistance became impossible.

"Stop!" yelled the Captain. "You can't go that way——"

A gasp came from the crowd as they saw him take a deep breath and leap down with his burden. They disappeared beneath the filthy water, to come to the surface a few seconds later in exactly the same position as they had entered it—Angela with her arms held from behind, and the amazing husband swimming on his broad back, with head towards the nearest bank. The current carried him down-stream, but his inshore progress was swift and certain. A huge yell came from the admiring spectators as the *Silas P. Young* pursued her course and rounded another bend.

Angela, stunned and terrified by this unexpected precipitation into ice-cold water, lay like a log with eyes closed. She lost all account of time in the mental paralysis that gripped her.... Only when they touched bottom and Jim commenced to carry her to the bank did her full sense come into operation. She stood in her sodden clothing, her pale, beautiful face quivering as she regarded this monster of a man.

"You brute! You heartless ruffian! Oh, if I could only make you feel what I think of you!"

"If I could only make you feel just what I think of you!" he said slowly. "But we're both trying to do just what can't be done. Let's drop it and find the hoss. Better foller behind, and not try running away. Maybe you think it amuses me to yank you back like this every time—but it don't."

He began to tramp along a beaten path that wound up over the hill. Angela followed, with swift steps, for a cold wind blew down the valley and set her teeth chattering. Overhead thick gray clouds obliterated the sun. A mile farther on Jim stopped and, slipping off his coat, went to her.

"You're cold. Put it on."

"No—thanks."

"Put it on!"

"Why this sudden regard for my welfare?"

It was like a stab to him. She saw it and was pleased. But later on she was a little ashamed of that throb of transient joy. She would have liked to express her regrets, but her pride prevented such a descent.

They found the horse, pawing impatiently at the ground. He whinnied plaintively as he heard Jim's footfall and the call that the latter's lips gave utterance to. Without a word Jim lifted Angela into the saddle and mounted behind her. A "cluck" from his lips, and the mare went galloping across the uneven country towards Red Ruin. They arrived there just as the first flakes of snow began to fall.

For a whole week no single word passed between them. The first snow had come, and every day found the thermometer registering a lower temperature. In a week or two the whole land would be in the grip of the pitiless winter. What were Jim's intentions? She saw him pondering over a map and marking routes. After a trip into Dawson he came back with a team of dogs and a new sled, plus dog-feed, snow-shoes, and sundry other gear. One evening he broke the silence.

"Angela!"

She lifted her head from the book that she was reading.

"We're hitting the trail to-morrow."

"To where?"

"North—the Chandalar River district. There's nothing left worth staking down here. But there's gold up there, and we can't afford to waste time."

"Very well," she said icily, and turned to the book again.

He put his arm across and closed the book.

"Better git this thing clear."

"Isn't it clear?"

"Nope. Listen here—we got enough grub to carry us over the winter, that and no more. My last wad of dollars went to buy them dawgs. I guess you think I'm trash, and perhaps I am, but up here in the North men stick by their pardners till they strike gold or leave their bones on the trail. You're my pard now—won't you act on that and make the best of it?"

Her eyes shone defiantly in the glare of the paraffin lamp. Appealing to her sense of justice was useless in the face of circumstances.

"You call it partnership when the one is forced against her will, and the other uses every kind of diabolical means to assist his mastery? I am coming with you because there is no way out of it. You understand. Nothing but force can save me—I see that. Your code of life is based on brute strength devoid of any kind of moral sense."

His lips moved in a way that evidenced his resentment.

"What you call 'moral sense' is a pretty queer thing, I allow. It lets a man sell his daughter for hard cash, and it lets that daughter play with a man's feelings. If that's moral sense I ain't takin' none."

"Will you never forget that? Do you think I would have gone on with that had I believed you misinterpreted the whole thing?"

"Misinterpreted! Say, do your kisses allow of misinterpretation?"

She was amazed at this quick and telling thrust. She had yet much to learn about Colorado Jim. Education is a matter of mind, independent of environment. She made the mistake of believing it to be the special monopoly of high-schools and gentle breeding. She was unable to recognize the diamond in its crude unpolished state.

"When I kissed you, did you think that was a kind o' habit with me?" he queried.

She shrugged her shoulders, not wishing to remember the incident.

"It was the first time anything like that had happened to me," he resumed, "and it was like touching heaven while it lasted. But I see now there was nothing in it—no more than kissing one of them saloon women— Ugh!"

She felt like striking him, in her anger, at the insulting comparison, but she was not unconscious of the truth of it.... She opened the book again, and strove to forget his presence and the approaching horror of Arctic wanderings. She saw him pull the fur cap down over his ears, and disappear through the tent opening to feed the howling malemutes.

On the morrow they packed their tent, loaded the sled with everything they possessed, and set their head for the North. She sat on the sled, clad in thick mackinaw coat, fur cap, and mittens, whilst Jim stood behind with a twenty-foot whip clasped in his hand. The mixed team of twelve dogs snarled and snapped at each other as they waited for the word of command.

"Mush—you malemutes!" cried Jim.

The long curling whip came down with a whistling crack, and the team went trotting across the dazzling white plain.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TERROR OF THE NORTH

There is no stillness like the stillness of the Arctic. In the frozen wastes of the North the human voice is a blessed and desirable thing. Imagine an ice-locked land, stretching on either hand for thousands of miles, with never a bird's song to break the silence, where nothing lives but a few starved wolves, and consumptive Indians existing for the most part in foetid igloos, venturing out but rarely in search of edible roots or an occasional indigenous animal. Ninety per cent. of the human life of Alaska was settled along the Yukon valley, in close proximity to the vast artery that connected with the outer world.

North of that the boundless wilderness stretches away over plain and mountain to the very pole. Traveling is slow and tortuous, for beaten trails are few, and the wanderer must "pack" his own trail where the snow is deep—walking in front of the sled and treading a negotiable sled-track by means of snow-shoes.

The body craves for warmth, and warmth can only be obtained by excessive consumption of food. The normal ration of a healthy being is trebled to counteract the enormous evaporation of bodily heat. Fat is the staff of life. The Esquimo, settled along the coast by the Bering Sea, takes his meal of ten pounds of blubber and feels a better man. By imitative methods the white man

survives the awful cold and the pitiless conditions.

To Angela it seemed that every single discomfort to which human life was subject was epitomized in these appalling wastes. The ice was yet new and river trails were unsafe. Day after day they plowed through the deep snow, ever Northward, with the wind in their teeth, and the sun but a mere spectre mounting the horizon, with an effort, to sink again but a few hours later. The dogs frightened her. They were fierce, untamed brutes who snarled at each other and fought on occasion, until the stinging lash descended on their thick coats to remind them of the terrible master behind the sled. She came to see how necessary was the whip. They responded to that and that alone. Some of them were half wolf—creatures that were the result of interbreeding on the part of Athabaskan Indians. Like their wolf parent their energy was immense. They ate but twice daily—enormous meals of pulped fish and nondescript material which filled two of the sacks on the sled.

They camped on bleak mountains and along frozen creeks. In the latter case Jim made double use of the camp-fire. Before retiring into the snow-banked tent for the night the fire was heaped high with branches. In the morning the thawed ground beneath it was excavated and washed with snow-water, lest it harbor the much desired red mineral.

Muck! Always muck! It seemed to her amazing that he should continue this heartbreaking quest. Much as she had prized the things that money could buy, she began to hate it now. As they penetrated farther North, so the conditions grew more appalling. No longer the sun mounted the horizon. Night and day were much the same thing—a mysterious luminiferousness, merging into the fantastic lights of the great Aurora Borealis, that occasionally leapt across the Northern sky in spectromatic beauty, to flicker and die, and rise again.

Day after day the journey went on. The ice being now strong, they skimmed across rivers and creeks, raising the snow in clouds and “switchbacking” over hummocks in a fashion that under other conditions might have been exhilarating. Then came the monotonous digging and washing, with its inevitable unsuccessful issue.

Striking the Yukon River at the “flats”—where it is reputed to be thirty miles wide—they followed its course for three weary days, until Fort Yukon was passed and the junction of the Chandalar River was made. It was while negotiating the rough surface of Chandalar that the “terror of the North” came down.

Jim heard it coming before Angela was aware of any unusual sound. For two days there had been no wind, saving a light zephyr that laid its bitter finger on the exposed flesh. Now a legion of devils were preparing for attack. A sound like unto a human sigh broke the silence. It died away and came again, a little stronger. Immediately Jim pulled the “leader” dog to the lift and cracked the long whip over the team.

“Mush, darn you, mush!”

“What’s that?” inquired Angela, as an uncanny groaning met her ears.

“The wind. Gee, but she’s going to raise the dead!”

The high bank loomed up and the sled turned a half-circle and came close under a protecting bluff. Jim tied the team to a tree and ran forward to Angela. She was standing terror-stricken at the sound of the approaching monster. Behind her was a huge snow-drift. He pointed to the white mass, and shouted that his voice might be heard above the Niagara of sound.

“We’ll sure freeze stiff unless we git inside that—hurry!”

They bored their way into the crisp snow, like dogs in a rabbit-hole. There was scarcely need to urge Angela to use her strength. The noise of the approaching blizzard was like to fifty thousand shrieking devils. The little light that remained was suddenly blotted out. At nearly a hundred miles an hour the solid mass of wind and snow came roaring down from the mountains. The whole earth seemed to reel under the impact. Inside the sheltering snow mass it was cold enough, but outside nothing human could live. The dogs, familiar with this phenomenon of the higher latitudes, had crawled into the snow and would lie there until the noise subsided.

The two humans huddled up inside the snow heard nothing and saw nothing. It was as if the whole world had suddenly crashed into a sister planet and was hurtling into space, a broken mass. Hours passed and no change came. Occasionally the snow-drift seemed to shift a little, and Jim dreaded that some clutching finger of the wind would tear the frozen morsel of shelter from the cliff and drive it into thin air. That were indeed the end, for at fifty degrees below zero the Arctic hurricane is like a knife, from whose murderous edge no escape is possible.

They crawled lower in the snow until they reached the ice itself. It was suffocating, for the wind had blown in the entrance and fresh air was excluded.... Jim felt the body close to him—it was still as death. A great fear swept through him. She was not strong enough for this trial—she was —! He thrust his hand inside the thick coat and felt the heart. It was beating but slowly, and her hands were cold. He clasped her to him and rubbed the face with snow, growling like an animal in pain as the hideous uproar continued.

She had nearly fainted; but another hour of this poisonous incarceration and she would never recover. He dare not attempt to get to the fresher air. Outside it was certain death, and any moment might assist the wind in carrying out the task it seemed so determined to perform.... A piercing wind suddenly entered, and the whole mass quivered. He realized that the worst was about to happen—the snow was moving. Before he could fix on his mittens the snow and its two inmates were flung like a rifle-shot across the ice. There was a thundering roar, and the whole

pile broke into a myriad parts. Still clasping the unconscious Angela, he went helter-skelter before the blast, pitching and sliding on the ice. The power to think was leaving him. Brain and body seemed numbed and out of action. He was only conscious that he held in his arms the thing from which not even this murderous wind could sever him. He calmly waited for the end—the dreamy, painless end that freezing death would bring....

Then he suddenly gave vent to a choking cry of joy. The wind had suddenly, marvelously vanished. He heard it howling its way across the land to the South. He dragged himself from the ice and looked back. The Aurora was flashing again and the sky was clear. The strange Arctic light was settling down on the scene, turning the snow-clad waste into mysterious colors. He rubbed his frost-bitten hands vigorously with snow and hurried up the river with Angela clasped in his arms.

He found the sled overturned, some distance from where he had left it, and hurriedly rigged up the tent on a suitable place on the bank. In a few minutes he had Angela inside, on a pile of blankets, and was forcing brandy between her lips. Seeing that she was reviving, he lit the oil stove and went to round up the dog-team.

When he returned Angela was boiling the kettle on top of the stove. She handed him a cup of cocoa in silence. He took it without attempting to drink it. Her extraordinary recovery amazed him.

“Is it all over?” she queried ultimately.

“Yep,” he gasped. “But it sure did blow some.”

“Yes—it’s a good job we were inside the snow-drift,” she replied indifferently.

He put down the mug of cocoa that he had taken up. Of all bewildering things this was the most bewildering. She was acting again—acting in her own subtle fashion. He came to the conclusion that women were beyond his comprehension—and Angela most of all.

On the next morning the temperature was moderately high. They left the river and found a good trail along the bank. Angela asked no questions regarding his destination. She had got beyond caring very much now. She determined to adopt an attitude of cold indifference.

The sled was negotiating a bad piece of trail when it suddenly stopped, and she heard an ejaculation from behind her. She saw Jim step down and examine something black in the snow. She gave a little cry as he caught the black object and pulled it up—it was a dead man, frozen as stiff as a board.

“Poor devil!” muttered Jim. “I guess he got caught in that wind.”

He searched through the pockets of the mackinaw coat, but found nothing that would act as a means to identification. He let the body fall and covered it with snow.

“Aren’t you going to bury him?”

He nodded and looked round him in expectant fashion.

“Must have a shack or a tent round about. He’s got no pack of any kind. If it was a tent, likely enough it’s a hundred miles away by now. If it was a shack it’ll be very useful—to us.”

She prayed it might be the latter. Anything was better than this mad wandering.

They found the shack ten minutes later, nestling in a hollow, with its chimney still smoking. They pulled up outside and went to investigate the home of the unfortunate stranger. It was a comfortable affair, containing two rooms and a small outhouse, plus a certain amount of rough furniture. In the corner of the outer room was the ubiquitous Yukon stove, with a fryingpan on the top containing a much overdone “flapjack.” A pair of snow-shoes lay in a corner, and sundry articles of clothing were hanging on nails. In the next room was a camp-bed and more clothes, two bags of flour, one of beans, a few tins of canned meat, a rifle and a hundred cartridges—but no letters or information of any kind respecting its late owner.

“It’ll do,” said Jim. “It’ll be better than a tent, anyway.”

Angela agreed reluctantly. Somehow it seemed heartless to coolly take possession of this place, with its late owner lying dead but a bare mile away. It gave her an uncanny sensation as she glanced at all the little things that belonged to him, that his cold hands had touched but a few hours ago. She reflected that a year ago such an incident as this would have chilled her with horror. But apart from arousing a small amount of sentimentality it affected her now very little. It came as a shock to her to realize that fact—she was becoming as wild as this “cowpuncher” husband of hers, who even now was sallying forth with spade and ax to excavate a shallow grave in the frozen earth, to save a man’s body from prowling wolves. And all without an atom of sentiment!

So little did she know of him! She did not see him remove his cap as he gently placed the luckless man in his last resting-place, or hear the short whispered prayer that he uttered.

The dogs were unharnessed and driven into the outhouse which was to serve as their future domicile. Jim collected the dead man’s belongings together and made a neat pile of them in one corner of the outer room. Angela’s personal things were taken into the more comfortable inner room, which boasted of a match-boarded wall—not to mention half a dozen rather indelicate prints tacked on to the same.

When he had occasion to go into the room again, after Angela had been there, he noticed that the prints had been torn from the walls. Angela was certainly very proper—for a married woman!

CHAPTER XIV

THE BREAKING-POINT

The weeks that followed were a testing-time for Angela. Her resolutions wavered and died, confronted as she was by the terrible isolation and loneliness. Stoicism was easy enough in theory but most difficult in practice. The unchanging icy vista and the eternal silence drove her to desperation. She tried work as an antidote, and found it dulled the edge of her despair.

They were fortunate enough to find a fish-trap in the outhouse. Jim regarded this discovery with great satisfaction. He chopped a hole in the river ice and, baiting the trap with a canned herring, managed to entice a "two-pounder" into the wicker basket. Angela's attempt to cook it was not entirely a failure, and the repast was a pleasant change from the eternal beans and pork.

Thereafter Angela took over the piscatorial department. It meant going to the river each morning and breaking the newly formed ice over the fish-hole—a task that called forth all her physical energy. At times the fish were scarce and the journeys without result, but they were not entirely wasted. She found that her body glowed with the exercise and her soft arms began to develop muscle.

Each day Jim took the sled and the dogs, and explored the creek in the neighborhood. Farther and farther afield he went, staying away at nights and leaving Angela to the melancholia of her soul. The shack seemed full of a strange presence, a ghostly kind of ego that made itself felt. Then along the valley came the bloodcurdling howl of a wolf, to add to her terror and misery.

The icehole froze up on one bitter night, and all the efforts of Jim could not reach water again. He eventually gave up the task as hopeless.

"Frozen right down to the river bed," he explained.

The great loneliness took deeper hold of her. The eternal gloom began to affect her mentally. She became the victim of prolonged fits of depression; Jim, tired and heavy-hearted with his arduous wanderings, noticed the change in her. It caused him acute mental agony, and not a little self-reproach. At nights he pondered the problem. Was he subjecting her to unjustifiable misery? Had he a right to do this? He knew he had not, but he was hoping—hoping vainly that she might abandon that spirit of antagonism, manifest in her every movement, and speak and act as one human being to another. He grew sick to realize that her will was no less strong than his own. What was there left to do but take her back and acknowledge defeat?

Defeat! The word aroused all his innate stubbornness. Never had he acknowledged defeat before. He had won through by sticking to the task at hand. Was he to give in now—to let this frozen-hearted woman beat him all round? How Featherstone would purr with pleasure when he knew! How all those high-browed aristocrats would congratulate this ill-treated wife on disposing of her unfortunate husband!

The old grievance still rankled, and his refusal to forget it reacted upon himself. This wilderness of great cold and hardship could not break his endeavor, but a woman was slowly and surely doing so. All his dreams evolved around her—maddening dreams in which he was grasping and missing her....

The climax was to come, and it came in a way that was totally unexpected. It came with such crushing relentless weight that it left him a mere wreck of a man.

For three days Angela had spoken no word. When he arrived back at the shack after the usual vain hunt for gold, she gave him but a quick glance, sufficient enough to convey to her that he had failed for the hundredth time. On the third night, instead of handing him his meal from the stove she sat down and burst into passionate sobs.

Instinctively he put out his hand to clasp her trembling fingers. She pushed it away fiercely and stood up, shaking with emotion.

"You've got to let me go!" she cried.

"When the spring comes."

"No, now. I can't wait until the spring. This is killing me—killing me. Can't you see that it will be too late then?"

"Angela, we came for a set purpose. If I fail when the spring comes, we'll go back to the life you want."

"I'm going now," she said grimly. "To-night!"

His mouth tightened.

"Be reasonable!"

"Reasonable! You talk of reason—you who brought me here to live like a dog, to treat as a dog ___"

He sighed as he remembered her aversion to any attempted acts of kindness on his part. In every instance she had made it clear that she wanted nothing from him—that she refused kindnesses, sacrifices, on her behalf.

"I ain't treated you in any way different to that in which a husband would treat his wife."

"Wife—you call me that?"

"What do you call it, then?"

"Prisoner—slave!"

His face hardened.

"And if I did, ain't there some justification? If our deal had been a love deal I guess the arrangement would have been canceled long ago. But it wasn't. It was commercial transaction to which you gave your approval. It may be morally wrong to keep you, but the whole darned frame-up was morally wrong. So morals don't come into it—savvy? Legally I got a claim to my—goods, and you're asking me to forgo that claim. But you don't show much regret at taking a hand in that dirty business—"

"I told you I was sorry."

"Yep—sorry, because it's hurting *you*."

She knew this was true, and the fact that he knew it too stung her. She sunk her head in her hands and remained for some time in silence. When she raised it again her face was full of a new determination.

"You are only bringing pain upon yourself," she said tensely.

"I can bear it."

"Can you?—I wanted to spare you—but you are forcing me to this—forcing me to tell you something that is going to hurt you."

The tragic tone of her voice caused him to stand as though petrified.

"I said I should go now—to-night; and I am going."

"So!" he stammered, feeling an awful pang of fear at his heart.

"You have hitherto considered no one but yourself. How far will you carry your desire for vengeance?"

"I don't get you—"

"Wait! I told you it was killing me up here. That didn't seem to influence you much—but suppose there is someone else to be considered—"

"What are you saying?"

"Are you blind? Can't you guess? The other person is as yet unborn."

His eyes were blind with pain. He gripped a chair and swayed dizzily. His mouth moved, but uttered no sound. When at last he spoke the words came as though forced from a clutched throat.

"Not that!—God, you don't mean that? Tell me you don't mean that—Angela—"

She sank her head on her bosom and a sob escaped her. The next moment her head was jerked up and she was gazing into his steely fixed eyes.

"Was it—that man—D'Arcy?"

Another sob convinced him. He flung her arm aside and walked to the door. He had encountered hardships, disappointments, physical and mental pain, but nothing like this devastating destroyer that was gripping him. He stumbled out of the shack like a terribly sick man.

"Oh God!" he groaned. "And I loved her!"

She had won—won by means so foul that he would have died rather than that truth should have become known to him. All life was rotten, rotten to the core! Heaven was uprooted and legions of devils usurped the throne of the Almighty. He unlatched the outhouse and feverishly harnessed six of the dogs to the sled.

Trembling and ill, he crept into the shack to find her vanished to the inner room. He divided up the food in two equal portions, placed half his small financial funds inside a flour-sack, where he knew she would find it, and piled the things onto the sled. Then he called her in a low, almost inaudible, voice. She came from the inner room, closely swathed in furs and with her head sunk.

"The sled's outside.... You can mush the dogs.... They're the tamest six.... Fort Yukon is down the river, and the weather's good...."

She nodded and walked through the door. The Arctic moon, shedding a queer blue radiance over the snow hung high in the black vault. Directly overhead the Great Bear gleamed like hanging lamps, with magnificent Vega blazing like a rich jewel. She turned to him once.

"Jim!"

"Go! Go! Follow the river.... Good—good-bye!"

A choking response came back. The whip cracked and the dogs moved forward. In a few minutes she was a black blur against the scintillating snow. With a groan he turned about and went inside.

For him it was a night of unparalleled agony. Hour after hour saw him there, at the small window, gazing fixedly up the valley, until a slight increase in the light brought him to full consciousness, to realize that a new day was born.

He prepared a meal and, despite his lack of appetite, managed to consume it. Then he took the ax and the rip-saw and made for a bunch of trees higher up the hill. All day the noise of chopping and sawing broke the silence. By the evening, after a day of feverish and unremitting toil, he had fashioned a satisfactory sled.

Sleep came to him then—the deep dreamless sleep of exhaustion. But he awakened early, and began to pack the sled with sufficient food for the long journey. The six fierce brutes that remained were fed and harnessed, and he again ran over the details of his load to assure himself that nothing was missing. At the last moment he remembered the washing-pan and shovel, and placed them with the other miscellaneous articles.

He had no dog-whip, but calculated he could mush the dogs without that. He gave one glance at the shack, emitted a fierce torrent of oaths, and pushed the sled into action.

They went down the incline at a terrific rate and bumped on to the river. Yonder lay Dawson and D'Arcy. Whatever happened, he meant to get D'Arcy, if it meant taking the Pole *en route*. Out of this anticipation he derived some grain of pleasure—and he needed it to leaven the misery in his soul. His hand moved to the revolver in the pocket of the big bearskin coat, only to be withdrawn before he touched it.

"Nope—not that way," he muttered grimly, "but with my two hands."

CHAPTER XV

THE QUEST

It was a weary and travel-stained man that drove a dog-sled into Dawson a fortnight later. The team was like the "musher," lean and wild-eyed, after their four hundred miles of merciless driving. Through wind and snow this man had kept the trail. Sleep became a thing unknown during the latter stages of the journey. He expected to find D'Arcy in Dawson—and the desire to meet D'Arcy had grown into a craving. He had half killed the dogs and himself in this mad journey, but the incentive was tremendous.

How he missed her! Despite her soul-withering confession, he found himself building up visions of her in his brain. Life had become suddenly hopelessly blank, brightened by one thing—the desire for retribution upon the head of the man who had smashed his idol.

Man, sled, and dogs went hurtling down the street—a black mass in the falling snow. He handed them over to a man at the Yukon Hotel and mixed with the crowd in the gaming saloon. No one seemed to know anything about D'Arcy, so he inquired for Hanky Brown. Hanky was at length run to earth in a dance-hall.

"Gosh, it's Colorado Jim!"

The latter hurled at him the question that obsessed him.

"Where's D'Arcy?"

"D'Arcy? Who in hell is D'— Gee, I got you. You won't find D'Arcy in Dawson. He's up in Endicott somewhere."

Jim's face fell. Endicott was north of the Chandalar River. It meant another journey of five hundred miles back beyond the place where he had come.

"You're certain, Hanky?"

"Sure. Ask Tony." He turned round and beckoned a man from the back of the hall.

"Member that swell guy they called D'Arcy—didn't he go with Lonagon and Shanks on that Northern trip?"

"Yep. Struck a rich streak up there—so I heered. Why, what's wrong?"

"Nothin'," said Jim. "I was just kinder anxious to see him. I guess I'll get along."

Hanky was gazing at him curiously. He felt that something was wrong, but couldn't lay his finger on the trouble.

"You ain't going up to Endicott?"

"Maybe I am."

"It's sure a hell of a journey just now, and you ain't likely to find that man among them hills."

"I'll find him all right, Hanky. Are you clearing out next spring?"

"Yes. Gotta quarter share in '26 below' on Black Creek. We sold out yesterday to the Syndicate. The missus'll be crazed when she hears. And how about you?"

"No luck. I don't think I was born lucky, Hank. I used to think so——"

Hanky shook his head and pointed to the untasted spirit in Jim's mug.

"Drink up!"

Jim quaffed the vile spirit and fastened the chin-strap of his cap.

"Jim, don't go to Endicott."

"Eh?"

"Don't. You're looking ugly, boy, and things are done sudden-like when you're that way."

Jim gave a harsh laugh and his eyes flashed madly. Then he stopped, biting off the laugh with a snap of his teeth.

"There are some crimes for which there ain't no punishment but one, Hanky. There's no power on this earth, bar death, that'll stop me from getting D'Arcy. If I don't come back before the break-up you can take it that he saw me coming before I got him."

He thrust his hands into the big mittens strung to his shoulders, and nodding grimly went through the door. Ten minutes later he was cracking the new dog-whip over the backs of his yelping team, and mounting the high bank heading for the North once more.

There is nothing more exciting than a manhunt when the pursuer is convinced that his cause is just, and the punishment he intends to inflict well-merited. Jim, peering through the blinding snow, saw in imagination the man he sought, all unconscious of the swift justice that was coming to him from out of the wilderness. This was man's law, whatever the written law might be. Not for one instant did his determination waver or his conviction falter. D'Arcy had partaken of forbidden fruit—partaken of it consciously, without regard for any suffering it might cause to others—and D'Arcy must pay the penalty!

It was a primitive argument and one that appealed to passions, but he was in many respects still a primitive man, with primitive ideas of right and justice. That law was good enough. It had served through all his experience of Western life, and would serve now!

The storm developed in fury, but still he drove the howling, unwilling dogs into the teeth of it. Icicles were hanging from his two weeks' growth of beard, and thick snow covered him from head to foot. Extraordinary luck favored him, for the snags and pitfalls were innumerable, and any deviation from the old obliterated trail might launch the whole outfit down into an abyss. Fortunately he struck the river again without such a catastrophe happening.

The snow ceased to fall and the sky cleared. The red rim of the sun peeped over the horizon, flooding the landscape with translucent light. Before him lay the snow-clad Yukon, broad and gigantic, running between its high wooded banks, contrary to all precedents, Northwards.

Amid the maze of peaks and valleys, high up on the Endicott Mountains, a strange affray was taking place. In a small hut, sandwiched between two perpendicular ice-walls, three men crouched at holes newly bored through the log sides. They were D'Arcy and his two companions, Lonagon and Shanks.

It was Lonagon who had first struck gold in this desolate region, late in the summer, whilst engaged in hunting caribou. Shanks had gone in with him on a fifty-fifty basis, but both lacked the wherewithal to finance a trip so far North. Against their desire they were obliged to take in a third person. D'Arcy, having assured himself that Lonagon was no liar, put up the money to buy food and gear and joined in. The idea was to thaw out the frozen pay dirt all through the winter, and to wash it when the creek ran again. Unlike the claims nearer Dawson, it made small appeal to the big Capitalized Syndicate. Lonagon was of opinion that more gold could be washed out in one season than the Syndicate would be willing to pay as purchase price.

Lonagon's optimism had been vindicated. The pay streak seemed to run along the whole length of creek.

"It sure goes to the North Pole!" ejaculated Shanks gleefully.

D'Arcy realized that he had struck a good proposition. They built the rough hut and commenced their awful task. Day by day the dump of excavated pay dirt grew larger. They tested it at times to find the yield of gold ever-increasing. At nights they sat and talked of the future. Shanks and Lonagon were for running a big hotel in San Francisco. That seemed to be their highest ideal, and nothing could shift them from it.

The fact that each of them would in all probability possess little short of a million dollars made no difference whatever. They were set on a drinking-place—where one could get drink any hour

of the night without having to knock folks up, or even to get out of bed for it!

D'Arcy was planning for a life of absolute luxury. He had been poor from birth—the worst poverty of all, coupled as it was with social prominence. He glowed with pleasure as he looked forward to a time when moneylenders and dunning creditors would be conspicuously absent.

It was Shanks who brought the trouble upon them. Shanks had hit upon a Thlinklet encampment a mile or two down the creek. There were about a dozen mop-headed, beady-eyed men, and some two dozen women—two apiece—and children. Shanks in his wanderings after adventure had met a more than usually attractive Thlinklet girl. She had not been averse to his approaches and it ended in a pretty little love-scene, upon which the husband was indiscreet enough to intrude. Having some hard things to say to Shanks, who unfortunately for the devoted husband, knew a lot of the Thlinklet dialect, and who resented aspersions upon his character from an “Injun Polygamist,” the latter promptly shot him.

The girl screamed with terror, and the Thlinklet community ran as one man to the scene of the tragedy. Shanks, reading swift annihilation in their eyes, promptly “beat it” for the hut.

They were now in the midst of their trouble. All the Indians had turned out armed to the teeth. Not unskilled in the art of war, they had garbed themselves in white furs, presenting an almost impossible target for the men inside the hut. A spokesman had come forward demanding the body of Shanks, and was told to go to blazes. They now crept along the deep ravine spread out over the snowy whiteness.

“I wish you'd kep' your courtin' till we got to 'Frisco,” growled Lonagon.

“I didn't even kiss the gal!” retorted Shanks. “I was jest telling her——”

There was a report from outside, and a rifle-bullet whizzed within a few inches of his head.

“Gee, they've got guns!” exclaimed Lonagon. “That's darn unfortunate!”

D'Arcy crept forward and, squinting through the small loop-hole, fired twice. He gave a grunt of great satisfaction.

“That's one less.”

A fusillade of shots came from the ravine. They ripped through the thick logs and out the other side. D'Arcy drew in his breath with a hiss.

“They'll get us when the light goes,” he said.

“Hell they will!”

“Looky here,” said Shanks, “let's hike out and get at 'em. Can't shoot through these little slits.”

“They're about four to one—and there are at least six rifles there,” said D'Arcy.

Shanks sneered.

“They couldn't hit an iceberg.”

“Reckon they could, with an arrow,” growled Lonagon. “We'd be crazed to go out there.”

D'Arcy was for following Shanks' advice. They debated the point for a few minutes and then decided to attempt an attack. But the decision was made too late. There came a diabolical yell down the ravine. Shanks ran to a loop-hole.

“Gosh!—they're coming—the whole lot of them!” he cried.

The three men ran to their posts and commenced firing at the leaping figures of the Thlinklets. Three or four of them bit the snow, but the remainder reached the hut. Shots came through and the sound of hatchets sounded on the thick logs.

D'Arcy fired and a scream of anguish followed. Then he threw up his arms and fell back with a groan, his rifle sticking in the slit through which it had fired. Shanks ran to him, and saw a round hole through his coat, near the heart, around which the blood was freezing as it issued. There was obviously nothing to be done with D'Arcy. Shanks dragged the rifle from the hole and reloaded it, cursing and swearing like a madman. Still came the steady thud, thud of the hatchets, but they rang much more hollow, and the two defenders expected to see part of the wall go down at any moment. Suddenly the sound of hatchets ceased and some of the noise subsided. Lonagon peeped through a crack, and saw half a dozen Indians coming up with a battering-ram in the shape of a felled tree. They approached at a wide angle, out of the line of fire.

“Shanks, it's all up. Get your six shooter—we'll have the black devils inside in a minute.”

Shanks flung down the rifle and snatched the revolver from his belt. He bent low and took a glimpse at what was happening outside. The Indians were but twenty yards away, and preparing to charge the half dissected portion of the wall with their heavy ram. He tried to get a shot at them, but could not get enough angle on to the revolver.

He saw them ambling towards him, and then, to his surprise, one of them gasped and pitched headlong. The remainder stood, transfixed, at this inexplicable occurrence. Before they recovered from their amazement another man howled with pain and placed one hand over a perforated shoulder. From afar came the sharp crack of a firearm. Shanks suddenly saw the shooter, high up on the ice wall above them.

“Gee whiz! Lonagon—it's a big feller up on the cliff! Whoever he is, he's got Buffalo Bill beaten to a frazzle. Did you see that? A bull's-eye at three hundred feet, and with a six-shooter. It clean

wallops the band!"

He unbarred the door, as the remaining Thlinklets went helter-skelter down the ravine, and waved his hands to the figure above him. Lonagon turned to the still form of D'Arcy. He lifted the latter on the camp-bed, poured some whisky between his teeth, and saw the eyes open and shine glassily.

"How's it going?" he queried.

D'Arcy gave a weak smile.

"I'm finished with gold-digging, Pat. It's a rotten shame to have to let go just when luck has changed ... but that's life all over.... I'm cold—cold."

Lonagon, who recognized Death when he saw it coming, pulled some blankets over D'Arcy and turned moodily away. His was not a sentimental nature. Forty years in the North had killed sentiment, but he liked D'Arcy—and it hurt. He went out to get a sight of their unknown ally.

He found him and his hungry, grizzled team coming down the ravine with Shanks. It was Jim—but scarcely the Jim of old. For a month he had traveled up from Dawson and among the merciless peaks, eating but half rations and fighting storm and snow with all the power of his indomitable will. He looked like a great gaunt spectre, with hollow cheeks and eyes that shone in unearthly fashion. Shanks could not make head or tail of him. His proffered hand had been neglected and his few questions went unanswered. He was pleased when Lonagon turned up, for he had a deadly fear of madmen.

"What cheer, stranger!" cried Lonagon. "You turned up in the nick of time."

Jim stopped the sled and regarded him fixedly.

"Are you—Lonagon?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Sure!"

"Then where's D'Arcy? I want D'Arcy. D'ye git that? It's D'Arcy I'm after."

Lonagon looked at Shanks. Shanks tapped his forehead significantly to indicate that in his opinion the stranger had left the major portion of his senses out on the trail, and wasn't safe company.

"So—you want D'Arcy?" quavered Lonagon.

"I said so."

"Wal, you're only jest in time. Come right in and see for yourself."

Jim reeled across to the cabin and hesitated on the threshold.

"It's kinder private," he growled.

"Oh, like that, is it?"

Lonagon began to smell a rat. He pursed his lips and met Jim's flaming eyes. Undaunted, he placed his back to the door.

"See here, we're mighty obliged to you for plugging them Injuns, but you ain't going in there till we know what your game is. You ain't safe—there's a skeery look in your eyes and—" he lowered his voice—"D'Arcy is hitting the long trail."

Jim started back in amazement. The news brought him the bitterest disappointment he had yet suffered. After all this terrible time on the trail fate was to rob him of his reward! For a moment he became suspicious.

"So he put you up to that, eh? Better stand away. I ain't in a humor for hossplay. We got a score to settle."

Shanks stepped up to him.

"That score will be settled in less'n an hour. The Injuns got D'Arcy over the heart. Go in and see. I reckon you'll find there's no need to settle scores."

Lonagon, realizing that nothing could worsen D'Arcy's condition, turned away and watched Jim enter the cabin.

Once inside the door, Jim saw that the two men had spoken the truth. D'Arcy's deathly white face was turned towards him and the hands were clenched on the brown blanket. Providence was robbing him of his vengeance, and despite his crushing sense of failure, somewhere in his heart leapt a great gladness. He approached the bed, and the sound of his heavy tread awoke the dying man to consciousness. He turned his glassy eyes on his visitor, and for a moment failed to recognize him. Then memory came.

"You—you are the man—I saw—on the bank at Dawson.... Angela's husband!"

Jim nodded grimly.

"I've come," he said. "Didn't you know I'd come?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREAT LIE

D'Arcy regarded him fixedly. It astonished him that a man should travel hundreds of miles in the Arctic winter to vent his wrath on another.

"Why should you come?" he murmured.

"You—you ask me that! You——"

He stopped as a spasm of pain crossed D'Arcy's face. In the presence of impending Death he found a strange difficulty in giving full vent to his hate.

"I see," gasped D'Arcy. "It's because I helped her to escape. Perhaps I was wrong, but believe me, it was better that way. I knew her years ago.... It gave you pain, but it may have saved her from hating you—eventually...."

This seeming hypocrisy staggered Jim. That any man facing the shadow of Death could act in such manner was amazing. He quivered with violent repulsion.

"I wasn't referring to that," he snapped. "She didn't escape—I brought her back."

"You—you brought her back! Then why did you come here?"

"I came to kill you—with my hands. Did you think I would rest until that score was settled?"

D'Arcy attempted to drag himself into a sitting position, but the pain it caused him rendered the attempt vain. He closed his eyes for a few seconds, then slowly opened them. He became conscious of the fact that they were at cross-purposes.

"I don't understand.... In any case you are too late.... But why do you want to kill me? What I did, I did for the sake of friendship. I don't doubt you would—do the same for a woman in trouble—if—if you loved her."

Jim passed his hand across his brow. It was bewildering, baffling!

"God, ain't you got a soul?" he gasped. "Can you lie there within a few minutes of death and take a pride in what you did? Damn the fate that got you plugged before I could get my hands on you. I suffered hell out there, these two months, hunting you all over the mountains, and now ..."

D'Arcy surveyed the distraught speaker in bewilderment. He had said that Angela had been brought back from the *Silas P. Young*. Then it wasn't that escape that had sent him up here in bitter, revengeful mood. He began to touch the outer edge of the truth.

"I'm cold," he muttered. "And it grows dark.... Where are you?... I must know more, ... tell me what troubles you.... Do you think there was anything more in that business but friendship? Speak!"

"I know!"

"Ah—I see.... So that's it.... See here, friend.... I'm going out ... right out, where perhaps there's a tribunal.... I've done bad things, but not that.... I'm glad you came ... in time. And you thought that of me—O God!"

Jim recoiled with blanched cheeks before these words, ringing as they did with truth. He tried to get a clear grip of the position, but his brain reeled under the force of this astounding dénouement. D'Arcy was speaking again—so faint he could scarcely hear.

"And to think that of—her! Man—man—and you look as though you love her.... She's all that's good and pure, though her pride is—great, too great,... and she's willful and unrelenting.... Go back and put this right. Don't let this terrible unjust suspicion remain...."

"But—she told me that," gasped Jim.

Despite the pain occasioned by the movement, D'Arcy dragged himself higher on the pillow and gazed at Jim in horror.

"She—she told you—that!"

Jim wished he had bitten his tongue off before those words had been uttered. Was ever physical blow more cruel than this—to inflict insult and guilt of so despicable a nature upon a perfectly innocent man! He snatched at the nerveless hand on the bed and held it.

"I'm sorry," he groaned. "I didn't know—I didn't think she would frame up a dirty lie like that."

D'Arcy suddenly smiled wistfully.

"And where is she now?"

"I sent her away."

"You sent her—well, perhaps it was best," he said. "You've got to forget that story. Circumstances excuse many things."

"They don't excuse that."

"I think they do.... All the blame is not with her. That she should give utterance to such a lie

proves to what extremes she was forced. She tried by every other means to escape—and failed. You held her, not by love, but by brute strength.”

“You don’t understand,” retorted Jim. “I bought her. She knows that. I didn’t know I was buying her, but she knew all the time——”

“You—can’t buy a woman’s soul.”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“Everything. It was her soul that writhed under that jailership——”

“Yep—and her soul that told that damned lie.”

D’Arcy shook his head.

“You tried to win by the superiority of your physical strength. Is that moral? Is it justifiable? She had no other way to fight but by subtlety and falsehood. Both ways are equally detestable. Therefore it is not for you to condemn.... Tell Lonagon ... I’m going—going....”

Jim ran outside and brought in Lonagon and Shanks. Before they could reach the bed the soul of D’Arcy had flown from his pain-ridden body. Lonagon put the blanket over the dead man’s face, and Shanks made strange noises in his throat.

“He was a white man, though he was a gentleman,” muttered Lonagon.

Jim staggered to the door, dazed by the outcome of this meeting. But his mind had cooled down and the crazy desire for vengeance, now vanished, left him a more normal creature. But he felt sick and weary. The future seemed so hopeless and blank. Had he the desire to search for Angela and bring her back, his storm-wrecked body would have refused. Lonagon approached him.

“So you didn’t kill him?”

Jim glared.

“Wal, it’s jest as well, for I’d hev sure killed you.”

“And I’d have been darned glad,” growled Jim.

A great nausea overtook him, and he clutched the door-post for support. Shanks looked at him, and shook his head.

“Better not hit the trail to-day. You got fever.”

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

“I’m all right. I’ll be mushing back to my shack. ‘Tain’t far—two days’ run. So long!”

He went to the sled, untethered the dogs, and sent them scuttling up the ravine. But the sickness remained. His head seemed nigh to bursting and all his limbs set up a chronic aching. He vaguely realized that he was in the grip of mountain fever, which had fastened on to his abused body and was breaking him up.

He had estimated his journey back to occupy two days, but he meant to do it in one. Illness on the trail meant death, and little as Life meant to him now, the natural desire to fight for it mastered the inclination to lay down and succumb to the fever and the elements.

Hour after hour the sled whirled along. Once he stopped and mechanically gave the dogs a meal. He became transformed into an automaton, acting by some subliminal power that set his direction correctly and assisted to maintain his body in an upright position.

Only one part of his brain functioned, and that part was memory. All the outstanding incidents of his adventurous career passed before him in perspective. He saw himself fighting and winning from the time when first he had set out with a gripsack to seek a fortune in the wide plains of the West. At the end of this remarkable chain of successes was the dismal picture of his present failure. A woman, rather than suffer subjugation at his hands, had perjured her soul in a dreadful lie.

D’Arcy was right. Souls were not to be bought or “broken-in.” He had won in the old days because the primitive law prevailed in all things. No longer did that work. Civilization assessed man on a different basis. The Law of the Wild had been superseded by other qualities—qualities which, presumably, he did not possess. It was a bitter enough awakening for him to feel himself a failure. Wandering, half deliriously, in a vicious mental circle he came again and again to that point. He had failed in the great test—he had failed to win the heart of the woman he truly loved. So much for all those physical attributes! They conquered women in the stone age. They might conquer women now, of a kind, but they were futile weapons to employ against a modern woman, benefiting by centuries of progress and culture, with fine mentality and inflexible will.

What then were the qualities that counted? Was it love? No, not love, for his bosom was bursting with it. Not sacrifice, for he would have died for her—and she must know it. Was it Culture? Was it Education? Chivalry?

His tortured brain could find no answer. The woman herself had faced that same inward tribunal. To her, too, the obstacle was not quite clear. But it was pride of birth. It saturated her; it subjugated all passions, all emotions. It rendered her incapable of exercising her real feelings. She had placed the man low down in the scale, and had kept him there by the mere consciousness of this accident of birth.

The man behind the sled ceased to ponder the enigma. His mind became a complete blank as

the shack hove into sight along the valley. He lurched from side to side as the dogs, scenting their kennel, increased their speed.

The sled hit a tree, and flung him to the ground, but the dogs went on. He raised himself to his knees, his teeth chattering in ghastly fashion. His half-blind eyes could just make out the hut in the distance, a black smudge against the pure white snow. With a great effort he began to crawl towards his refuge.... His legs felt like lead and soon refused to respond to the weakened will that moved them.

He uttered a deep groan and collapsed in the snow, his head buried in his great arms.

CHAPTER XVII

A CHANGE OF FRONT

For five days the fever raged, and then it left him, a mere wreck of his former self. All through that unconscious period the strangest things had happened. Arms had lifted him up from the pillow, and hands had fed him with liquid foods. Some glorious half-seen stranger had taken him under her care; but her face was hidden in a queer mist that floated before his eyes. At times he had tried to rise from the bed, his unbalanced mind obsessed with the idea of washing for gold, but those same strange, soft hands had always succeeded in preventing this—saving once.

On that occasion he actually succeeded in getting from the bed and standing up. He carefully placed one leaden leg before the other, and was nearly on the threshold of the door when the familiar apparition appeared.

"She doesn't know—I'm wise to all that happened—but I know. She had to do that—poor gal!... I'll jest go and tell her it's all right—not to worry none...."

Two supple arms caught him. He pushed them away, rather irritably.

"Don't butt in.... It's her I'm thinkin' of—Angela. She's sure hard and cold and can't see no good in me,... but she's got to be happy—got to be happy.... Maybe she's right. I'm only fit for hosses and wild women...."

He found himself in bed again, and quite unconscious of the fact that he had ever been out of it; but he still continued to ramble on in monotonous and eerie fashion, about Angela, Colorado, fifty thousand pounds, and sundry other things.

Full consciousness came early one morning. He had been lying trying to piece together all the queer things that floated to his brain through the medium of his disarranged optic nerve. He succeeded in arriving at the fact that there was a bed and he was lying on it, and that the ceiling was comprised of rough logs.... Then an arm was placed behind his head and a mug of something hot was placed to his lips. But he didn't drink. His sight was coming back at tremendous speed. The hazy face before him took definite shape. A pair of intensely blue eyes were fixed on him, and red shapely lips seemed to smile.

"Angela!" he gasped.

She nodded and turned her eyes down.

"Yes, it is I. Don't talk—you are too weak."

"But I don't understand. Why did you come back?"

He saw the mouth quiver.

"I came back because—"

"Go on."

"I came back because I told you a lie.... I didn't realize then what a despicable lie it was—one that reflected upon the character of a good friend, and made me seem like dirt in your eyes.... I wanted my freedom at any price, but that price was too high.... I—I couldn't go and let you think—that."

Her shoulders shook, and he saw that she was trying to conceal her sobs.

"When did you come back?" he queried in a slow voice.

"Two days after I left. I found you gone, but knew you must come back, because some of the gear was here." She hesitated. "Did—did you go after—him?"

He nodded grimly, and she gave a little cry of terror.

"You—you found him?"

He nodded affirmatively.

"And then—?"

"I found him dying from a bad injury."

"Dying——?"

"Yes. He's dead now."

She turned on him with horrified eyes.

"You—you didn't kill him?"

"Nope. I went there for that, but the Injuns got him first."

Tears swam in her eyes. She moved her hands nervelessly and put the painful, crucial question.

"Did he know—why you came?"

He inclined his head, much affected by her attitude of abject shame. She gave a smothered cry and sank her head into her hands.

"Don't, don't!" he implored. "He understood all right, and he's dead and gone. Forget it!"

He took the mug of hot cocoa, anxious to drop a subject which caused him as much pain as it did her. Through the frosted windows he could see the sunlit, beautiful landscape, shining with incomparable radiance. Soon the spring would come, and with it the soul-filling song of birds, breaking the long silence of the winter.

"It must be round about March," he said. "I sure have lost count of time."

"It's March the third or fourth," she replied.

He glanced round the room and was surprised to notice its tidy appearance. All the domestic utensils were clean and neatly arranged on shelves, and the window boasted a pair of curtains. He began to realize how near death he must have been—so near, indeed, but for her he would have crossed the abyss before this.

"Where did you find me?" he asked.

"Away back on the fringe of the wood. The dogs came home with the sled and I followed the tracks till I found you. I—I thought you were dead."

"And you carried me here?"

"I unpacked the sled and went back with it. I managed to get you on to it—the dogs did the rest."

He gave a low sigh.

"I'll soon be up and about again."

"I don't think you will. You are terribly weak—and look so ill."

He laughed weakly.

"I ain't much of an invalid. You'll see."

She did see. His recovery was amazingly rapid. He seemed to change hourly, making new flesh at an astonishing pace. His iron constitution performed miracles of transformation. In three days, despite argument, he was out of bed. On the tenth day he shouldered the shovel and the washing pan and went out to a small creek to hunt the elusive gold. But failure still dogged him. He flung down the shovel and devoted hours to thinking over the position. When the pale sun began to sink behind the multicolored peaks he came to a decision and tramped back to the shack. A meal was awaiting him, spread on a clean white cloth. He noticed that the knives had been cleaned, and that a bowl of water was heated ready for a wash, which he badly needed. It was a pleasant but astonishing change. For the first time it brought a real sense of "home." He half regretted the decision made but an hour before, but he meant to go through with it, hurt how it might.

"Angela," he said. "We're packing up to-morrow."

She looked at him queerly.

"Where to?"

"Dawson."

"And then——"

"The break-up is coming, and there'll be boats out to San Francisco."

"I see. We are going back?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Because you have failed?"

He tightened his lips and his eyes flashed.

"Nope. I ain't failed. I'll never let this thing beat me. I'll git gold if I stay till I'm fifty——"

"But you said we were——"

"I kind o' got it mixed. I meant that you should go home. See here, I've got enough dollars to get you back to England—and it's about time."

She put down her knife and fork, and he saw a queer light gathering in her eyes. He had expected a look of joy and triumph, but it wasn't that.

"Listen," she said. "A year and a half ago you made a business deal. You bought me, with my own consent, for fifty thousand pounds—"

"Cut that out," he muttered. "I ain't sticking to that—now."

"But I am."

"Eh!"

"That night when I escaped from you, by a mean trick, I was glad enough—in a way. But out there, in that cruel wilderness, I came to see that a business transaction, properly conducted, is a sacred affair. When one buys a thing, it belongs to one until someone else can pay the price. That's the position, isn't it?"

"Nope. I can give away my property if I wish."

"Not in this case."

"Hell I can!"

"Hell you can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because—I can't accept anything from you. Food is a different matter. You fixed the conditions yourself—'fifty-fifty' you called it. And that's how it stands."

He jerked his chair back and strode up and down the shack. This unexpected swing of the pendulum upset all his arrangements. He feared she did not understand the true state of affairs.

"Things is different—I've failed," he growled.

"*We've failed*—you mean."

"And I'm broke."

"*We're* broke," she corrected.

Impatiently he caught her by the arms. He lowered his voice to impress upon her the necessity of carrying out his plan.

"Don't you see how we stand? Angela, I'm asking you to do this. I've only that passage money left. This ain't the place for you—"

"Why didn't you discover that before?"

He bit his lips at the retort.

"I guess I was looking at things squint-eyed. I bin used to rough women who were born to hardship—"

She flared up indignantly.

"And that's just it. You want to make me less than these—wild women. Women are women all the world over. If they can suffer uncomplainingly, so can I. If they can dig gold and mush dogs, so can I. I dug out there along the creeks when you were ill and unconscious—"

"You dug—" Words failed him.

"Yes. I *won't* appear contemptible in your eyes. And I won't accept gifts—not even of freedom. You bought me and paid for me, and the debt remains."

"But I didn't buy your—soul."

"And I'm not giving it you," she retorted.

He sunk his head, feeling hopelessly beaten in the argument. All the time he was conscious of inward joy. To let her go was to suffer hell. The sudden fierceness that leaped out from her only increased his insatiable desire for her. She seemed even more beautiful in the rôle of tigress than in the old frigid pose of a Greek goddess.

"Have your own way," he said.

"I intend to. You fixed the laws and you can't abuse them. Fifty thousand pounds is a lot of money—more, perhaps, than most men would pay for me. But one day someone may—"

He clutched her and glared into her eyes in deep resentment.

"Do you think I would give you up for money?—my God!"

"You gave me your word," she said. "You never go back on your word—you said so."

He uttered a groan.

"It was fifty thousand," she said in level tones. "I shall not forget."

"Angela!"

"Plus ten per cent. interest," she added tensely.

CHAPTER XVIII

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

Another week, and Jim had recovered all his old strength. With the spring in close proximity, and the food supply running dangerously short, he spared neither himself nor the dogs in his last feverish endeavor to achieve success.

Angela's attitude puzzled him not a little. Since that fierce passage of words in the shack she had made no single reference to the future. She carried on the housekeeping with increased zest. Never again were the breakfast plates found unwashed at the next meal. She began to take a pride in making the cabin as comfortable as circumstances would allow, even going to the trouble of seeking berried evergreens in the woods and transforming these into table decoration.

Occasionally she went out to meet the disappointed Jim coming back from his fruitless expeditions, and mushed the dogs while he sat on the sled. It seemed that she had succeeded in reconciling the situation—in making the best of a bad job.

One morning Jim announced his intention of exploring a small creek not a great distance from the shack. He started off with shovel and pick and the eternal washing-pan under a leaden sky. It was then an idea came to Angela. On her journey back from her abortive flight she had noticed a creek which displayed all the characteristics of those rich, shallow claims of which the Klondyke yields so many examples. Why not undertake a prospecting trip on her own account? There was a spare shovel, pick, and pan, and she had bored holes in frozen gravel before. She decided to harness up the sled and put her plan into execution.

At noon she started off with her team on the eight-mile journey. A close study of the map had convinced her that by taking the overland route she would save at least two miles either way. But her knowledge of maps was not great, and she entirely neglected to take into consideration the contour markings, which would immediately have warned any experienced traveler against such a passage.

The trail led up over a big hill and down a ravine, and for a mile or two was good "going." Coming out of the ravine the configuration changed. A jumbled mass of precipitous hills and canyons confronted her. She drove the dogs to an elevated point and looked before her. The great serpentine river came to view, clearly outlined by its wooded banks, and no more than two miles distant. On the near side of the river ran the creek she sought.

She gave a sigh of relief and urged the dogs on. The road narrowed and ascended again. The mountain-side fell away, and she found herself on a narrow ledge with a vast chasm beneath. She thought of turning back, but there was no room to turn the dogs round. Catching her breath, she went carefully forward. A few small flakes of snow on her shoulders, and then the inky sky began to empty itself. It came down in a great mass, obliterating everything. A cold terror began to possess her. In the blinding snow she could not discern the path for more than a yard or two ahead, and by the side of her yawned that dreadful chasm!

She edged in close to the perpendicular wall, peering into the whirling mass of snow. The dogs stopped, and she urged them on again, knowing that the pass must soon descend to the river.

Suddenly there was a fierce uproar among the dogs. The sled jerked forward, and commenced to move at tremendous speed. A slight wind created a funnel-like opening in the dense white cloud before her. She gave one long shriek of horror at the sight which met her eyes. The sled was on the very brink of a precipice! It hovered there for a moment—just long enough for her to fling herself sideways against the wall; then it, and the team, vanished over the side, taking a mass of snow down, down into the bottomless depths.

She crouched against the wall, petrified by what had happened. A thundering noise came up from the black hole, reverberating through the pass and over the mountains as sled and dogs were hurled to their doom. She put her fingers in her ears to keep out the dreadful sound.

It ceased, and the great silence came again. Faint and sick, she realized that her left shoulder was aching with intense pain through contact with the rock wall.

There was nothing to be done but go back and confess the catastrophe to Jim. She stood up and commenced creeping along the dreadful path. Her left arm was hanging in useless fashion, setting up acute pain at the shoulder.

The full significance of her folly came to her. She had driven a team of dogs worth at least a thousand dollars to oblivion. Their chief means of travel was gone, and hundreds of miles lay between them and civilization. How could she confess the loss to Jim? What would he say?

For an hour she plodded on through the deep snow, her mind ranging over the past. Whatever might be said of this wild husband of hers, he had played the game as he saw it. She had to admit this. Culture and breeding were very desirable things, but had he not some other natural quality which, at the least computation, balanced these attributes? Could any man of her own set have acted with greater respect for her womanhood than he?

Until recently she had been no companion to him—nothing but a continual drag on the wheel. She had hurt him in speech and action. She had deliberately set her mind on making clear to him his cultural and moral inferiority. In return for this he had given her to feel a complete sense of safety. Sleeping within a few feet of him she had never, for a moment, felt the slightest possibility of molestation or intrusion on his part. It had been easy to take this all for granted—because he was a wild man and she was a cultured woman. She had come to see that “wild men” did not show such a refinement of consideration, even though they might conceivably acknowledge their social inferiority. She knew of no other man with whom she could have entrusted herself as she did with this one. Moreover, he was her husband....

She was glad she was making things a little more pleasant for him. She saw that his natural gayety and *joie de vivre*, long subdued, were again welling up within him. But yesterday she had heard him singing, coming back from his day’s unfruitful task. She knew herself to be the cause of that song. It was rather pleasant to reflect upon.

Now she must tell him of the loss of the dog-team, brought about by her impetuosity and disregard for his position as leader of the expedition.

She came upon the cabin and entered it, to find him still away. She took off her snow-covered garments with great difficulty, for her injured arm hurt her at the least movement. She was putting the kettle on the stove when he entered.

“Gee! but I thought we’d done with snow,” he ejaculated. “But I guess this is the last drop.”

He shook off his mukluks and flung the bearskin parkha into a corner. With his usual quick introspection he noticed that something was amiss.

“Anythin’ wrong?” he queried.

He touched her on the injured arm and she winced with pain.

“Hello, you ain’t hurt your arm?”

She nodded.

“Jim, I’ve done an awful thing. I’ve lost the dog-team.”

She saw him start, and realized the full extent of the loss. To her surprise his furrowed brows relaxed and he smiled whimsically.

“Things do sure happen at the wrong time. But how did you manage that?”

She told him in low, self-reproachful tones, and winced again as a movement of the injured arm brought agony.

“Say, that’s bad.”

“Yes. I know. Without the dogs——”

“Oh, darn the dogs! I meant your arm. It’s hurting you a heap. Ain’t you had a look at it?”

“Not yet. It’s rather a job getting my dress undone.”

He promptly walked across the room, and in a few seconds came back with two huge red handkerchiefs.

“Sit you down,” he ordered. “We’ll start on this right now. How do you manage this arrangement?”

“It—it unbuttons at the back,” she stammered.

She felt his big inexperienced hand at work on the buttons, and soon her dress was slipped over the injured shoulder. A little hiss escaped him as the round white arm came to view, with a hideous black bruise around the shoulder-joint. She stole one look at his face, and saw his perturbed countenance surveying the injury.

“Move your arm a little—that way.”

She did so with a groan.

“Good—there ain’t nothin’ broke.”

He soaked the handkerchief in cold water and tied up the arm with astonishing skill. Then he fashioned a sling with the other handkerchief, and carefully bent her arm and tucked it inside the latter.

“How’s that?”

She smiled gratefully.

“It seems much easier.”

“Sure! It’ll be fine in a day or two. You sit down here and I’ll git some tea.”

Without waiting to see this order obeyed, he ran to the stove and poked the fire into a blaze. The singing kettle began to boil, and a few minutes later they were having tea.

She watched him carefully, and knew that the loss of the dogs was worrying him. Yet he had made so light of that, and so much of her comparatively trivial injury!

“About them dawgs, Angela?”

“Yes.”

"It's kinder unfortunate, because grub's low and it's a hell of a way to Dawson. I guess we'll have to pack up to-morrow and git going. We can do a bit o' digging on the way back."

Her eyes shone strangely.

"It was all my fault, Jim."

"Bound to happen at times," he said. "Dawgs is the silliest things. See here, you're worrying some over that, ain't you now?"

"I—I know what it means—to you."

"It don't mean nothin' so long as you didn't go over that cliff with 'em. We'll make Dawson all right. I've bin up against bigger trouble than this."

He jumped up and commenced vigorously to wash up the cups and saucers, talking rapidly all the while and refusing to allow her to lend a hand.

"I done this for years, back there in Medicine Bow," he said. "Gee, them were times! There wasn't water enough to make tea with in the summer. Me and my two chums used to buy a pail of water for twenty dollars. It had to serve the three of us a whole day. We washed in it, and then drank it—"

"Ugh!"

"Wal, if we'd drank it first we couldn't have washed in it after. I guess them chaps had logic. When we *did* strike a spring, gold wasn't in it for excitement. It was like finding heaven. Hookey swore he'd never touch whisky again, and he didn't until we hit the next saloon."

She laughed merrily as he turned and dried his wet hands.

"It's good to hear you laugh," he said. "If you'd only laugh sometimes, Angela, I wouldn't care a damn about short rations. I seen men laugh on the plains when the chances were that two hours later their scalps would be hanging at the belts of Injuns. I was only a kid then ... but laughing is a fine thing. You can't beat a man who laughs."

"You used to laugh then?"

"Sure!"

"But not now!"

He stared out through the window.

"Maybe that's why I'm being beaten," he said.

She stood up and touched him on the arm.

"I don't think you'll ever be beaten," she said.

He shook his head, almost fearful of meeting those clear, beautiful eyes of hers.

"Only one thing in the world can beat me," he said. "And that is the thing which above all others I'm mad to get; and it ain't gold."

He spent the evening packing up the gear and the food that remained, ready for the journey down the river. The home-made sled was again requisitioned, after undergoing sundry repairs. Late in the evening Angela, from the inner room, called him. Nervously he went inside, to find her with her wonderful hair flowing over her shoulders and her dress half undone.

"I—I can't get it off," she complained.

He attended to the stubborn buttons and pulled the top down over her shoulders. On the threshold of the door he called back.

"Good-night, Angela."

She stood surveying him intently, and then came towards him.

"Whatever lies before us, don't think me ungrateful. I'll try to be a good comrade in the future if you'll let me. You've suffered so much.... It was never my wish that you should suffer. Even a bought wife has—a soul."

He saw the swell of her bosom below the pure white shoulders. All her intoxicating beauty seemed to be pleading to him. Her lips, made for kissing, were like alluring blossoms of spring. For a moment he stood drunk with passionate desire. Then he touched her fingers lightly and went outside.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CRISIS

It was spring on the Yukon—the radiant, glorious spring that is sandwiched between the intense

winter and the dank, enervating summer. Birds sang in the woods, their liquid voices accompanied by the deep noise of the river, belching its millions of tons of ice into the Bering Sea. In the lower valleys the snow had vanished, and the rich green carpet of the earth shimmered in the clear sunlight.

South of Fort Yukon Angela and Jim were threading their way through a pine-forest. Both carried packs on their backs, for the sled had been discarded but a few days before, having served them faithfully for a hundred-odd miles.

Jim found a small clearing and slung the huge pack from his shoulders. Angela discarded her smaller pack and came to help him rig up the tent.

"Better than the winter, eh?" he queried, as an inquisitive bird came and hopped around them.

"In many ways, but the winter's wonderful enough when one has grown acclimatized. I shall never forget those mountains and the glory of the sunset.... Are we far from Dawson?"

"Two hundred miles or so."

"And will the food last out?"

That was the crucial question. Until the river traffic began the purchase of food was almost an impossibility. She saw Jim's face tighten, as it had tightened every time she had broached the subject. A week before he had insisted that the remaining food be equally divided, since they now both engaged in the search for gold—that eternally elusive mineral that seemed as far away as ever. The beans and flour and canned meat had been duly apportioned, and placed in their respective sacks. When they separated for the day each took his food with him, cooking it in primitive fashion in the open.

For the last few days Angela had been anxious about Jim. He seemed to have changed in an extraordinary manner. His cheeks were thinner and his eyes looked dead. Yet he was merry enough when at nights they forgathered around the fire and told their respective tales of vain searching.

She was frying some beans over the fire when he rose and pointed back through the wood.

"I guess I'll jest go along and prospect the lay of the land from the hill," he said.

"But aren't you going to have something to eat?"

"Nope—not now. I ain't hungry. I'll be back again in no time."

She ate her meal reflectively. It was queer that he should want to go to the hill, when but recently they had passed over it and had taken their bearings from the ice-laden river that lay to the east! Despite his assurance of excellent health she knew something was wrong with him. But what?

A little later she followed the path he had taken. The thickly grown wood was alive with spirit of spring. Small animals scampered underfoot, and overhead a bird breathed forth its soul in incomparable song. She stopped for a minute to listen to the latter—clear-throated as an English nightingale—singing away as though winter and the stark desolation had never been. A slight breeze moaned among the tree-tops, and woodland scents were wafted to her nostrils. Adown the gale came the slanting rays of the setting sun, red and wonderful and warm.

From near at hand came another sound—a noise as of one slashing at the earth. Carefully she made her way in the direction of the noise, curious as to its meaning. She peered round a tree, and saw something which took her breath away. Jim was kneeling on the ground, hacking with his jack-knife at the earth. Then from the excavated foot or so he took a root, scraped it with the knife, and began to gnaw it like a dog. She had heard of edible roots, on which half-starved Indians in the North managed to subsist for long periods. But for Jim to do this.... Her brain reeled at the sight. The significance of it dawned upon her. He was afraid of the future. He knew the food could not last out, and was saving his rations for the time of emergency. That was the meaning of those thinning cheeks and the dead eyes. He was famished with hunger...!

With a choke she ran towards him, holding up her hands with horror. He tried to hide the root he was chewing, but became aware that she had seen it, and that she knew the true motive of his expedition.

"Jim, why, you're starving! Why didn't you tell me?"

He stood up and put the knife into his pocket.

"'Tain't as bad as all that," he said casually. "Gotta make that grub pan out, somehow. I told you I was rough—an animal. Don't look so plumb sober. I lived for a month on roots once...."

"Come back!" she cried imperiously. "Why didn't you tell me? I had a right to know!"

He said nothing. There was nothing to be said. She didn't know what starvation was really like, and he did. She led him back to the camp, her face flushed and her eyes moist.

"Now sit down. I'm going to cook you a good meal, and you are going to eat it. Where's your grub sack?"

His mouth closed down with a snap. If she saw the grub sack the whole truth must come out, and he didn't want that.

"I've had my meal," he replied. "Don't trouble now. I ain't a bit hungry. Them roots is sure wonderful when you git used—"

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently, and looked round for his kit. Seeing it a few yards away she rose from her knees and made for it, but his hand came out and stopped her.

"Angela," he said hoarsely. "We got days to go yet...."

She put his arm aside and reached the pile of kit. The sack in which his food was carried was a white canvas one, easily distinguished from the rest. She turned over one or two things and found it—flat and empty.

"Gone—all gone!"

She stood with it hanging from her fingers as a suspicion entered her mind. Slowly she came to him, her bosom throbbing madly.

"What have you done with it?"

"I guess I've bin a bit too free with it."

"What have you done with it?" she reiterated.

"Wal, it's gone, and squealing won't help matters."

"Where has it gone?"

"Where does food usually go? See here, Angela—I'm right sorry about it all. Maybe I'll shoot a bird to-morrow, and then I'll have a gormandizing jag."

But the stratagem failed to have effect. She was thinking of the apparent inexhaustibility of her own supply. Two nights before she had heard him go from the tent, and the next morning the ring which he usually wore on his finger was found in her sack. Moreover, the contents had seemed strangely increased. She saw it all now. The bag slipped from her fingers and she covered her face with her hands.

"I know!... I know now!" she burst out. "I've been eating your food as well as my own. You have been replenishing my supply from your own sack. All this time you've been famished with hunger, and you've let me go on eating—living on your hunger. Oh, God! don't you see how mean I feel?" Then her eyes flashed and her tone changed. "But you had no right to do it. How dare you?"

"I guess I'd dare a lot of things for certain reasons. See here, you've bin through a hell of a lot up here, but you've never suffered hunger, and it wouldn't be good for you, I'm thinking. Cold and frostbite is one thing, and hunger's another. There's nothin' like starvation to freeze up your heart. It's like a red-hot iron inside, gittin' redder and redder.... Shootin' a starvin' dog's a mercy, I reckon."

"Is it any worse for me than you?"

"Yep."

With that dogmatic assertion he relapsed into silence. Angela flew to her own small supply of food and produced the requisities for a good meal. The mixture was soon spluttering over the fire, emitting odors almost unendurable to the hungry, watching Jim. Angela turned it out on to a plate.

"Come along," she said.

"I told you—"

She went to him and put her arm round him.

"If you've any regard for me—if you want to make me happy, eat that."

It was the first time she had ever displayed any real depth of feeling, and it was like balm to him. But his obstinacy prevailed, for in the dish was a normal day's ration for the two of them.

"Maybe you think we'll drop across food on trail, but we won't. There's nothin' to be got until the first freighter comes up the river. Better put it back."

She took her arm away and went to the dish.

"If you won't eat, I'll throw it away—I swear I will!"

"Angela!"

"It's your own maxim, your own teaching—share and share alike. I won't recognize any other doctrine. It shall go to the birds unless...."

She meant what she said, and he knew it.

"All right—I'll eat," he mumbled.

Half an hour later, feeling a hundred per cent. better, he rose to his feet and entered the tent, where Angela was busily engaged putting down the blankets on improvised mattresses of gathered moss and young bracken.

"See," she said, "I've split up the food again. How long will it last if eked out?"

He turned out one of the sacks and ran his eye over the contents.

"Two days, at a pinch."

"And how soon can we make Dawson?"

"A week, hard plugging."

"Then it looks as though the 'pinch' will have to be resorted to—and expanded."

He saw she was smiling as she tucked his bottom blanket carefully under the moss.

"When you put it that way we can make anything," he said. "If I had a canoe we could push up the river a good deal faster than overland, but I ain't got one—and that's the rub."

"Then we'll have to depend on luck."

"No friend o' mine. Luck don't cut much ice up here."

Angela shook her head. She had a slight suspicion that luck had not entirely deserted them. Though the future seemed black and threatening, were there not compensating elements? There were worse things than dying in the wilderness with a "wild man."

CHAPTER XX

COMPLICATIONS

Devinne's trading-post was not the sort of place one expected to find in Alaska. Devinne himself was a queer customer, a man of good education and birth. That he chose to establish a trading-post on the upper reaches of the Yukon was a mystery to all who knew him. The real reason was a secret in the heart of Devinne, and had reference to a quarrel in a Parisian club in which a blow had been struck in a moment of pardonable fury, resulting in the death of a revered citizen of Paris.

Devinne found the Yukon district a comparatively "healthy" spot. He had started the trading-post four years back, and had prospered very considerably. He had started in a small way, taking trips into Indian villages and bargaining for furs. A man of quick intelligence, he soon acquired a substantial knowledge of most of the queer Indian dialects, which proved a tremendous asset from a business point of view.

After one year's profitable trading he had built the "post." It was a fairly commodious affair, boasting three rooms upstairs and three below, plus a long shed attached to the rear of the main building where he carried on his business, with two half-breed assistants, who slept in the shed itself.

A year after the post was completed Natalie, Devinne's only daughter, a woman of uncertain age, came out to keep house for him. Natalie had all the quick passions of her Southern mother, which doubtlessly accounted for the sudden rupture between herself and her husband after but a brief span of married life.

Two years in Alaska had not changed her nature. Unlike Devinne, she was quick to anger. She ruled her father as completely as she had ruled her husband, until that worthy sought refuge under the wing of another, less tyrannous, woman.

On this night, in late May, Natalie and her father sat in the big front room which afforded them an uninterrupted view of the river. Natalie was busy at crochet-work, and Devinne was going over some accounts with a view to finding what profit the year had yielded. Judging by his frequent purrs and sighs, the result was not displeasing. Natalie looked up.

"Well?" she queried, in French.

"Another good season and we'll be able to get away."

"Where to?"

"Los Angeles would not be so bad. A good, equable climate, a little society, and a club or two—ah!"

"But is it safe?"

He furrowed his brows.

"We'll risk it. Four years is a long time, and I think I am changed somewhat. You won't be sorry to leave this country—ma chérie?"

Natalie put down her crochet.

"No. It seems a waste of one's life. Mon Dieu, I am tired of it."

Devinne cocked up his ears as two shrill hoots came from the river. He sprang to the window and saw the dim light of a ship going up the river.

"It's the old *Topeka* back again. She's early this season, which is fortunate, for we're badly in need of that consignment. 'Chips' will have to get up to Dawson to-morrow and bring the stuff back. Maybe the piano is aboard."

"Was it wise to get the piano, when we are leaving next fall?"

"We can sell it—at a profit, too.... What's that?"

"That" was a sharp rap on the outer door. It was repeated again in a few seconds. Callers were unusual at that time of the day, but all callers were welcome enough in Alaska. Natalie ran out and unbarred the door. In the dim light she saw the figure of a big man supporting a woman, who was obviously on the verge of utter collapse.

"Why, vat is it?" she ejaculated in her broken English.

"It's all that's left of us," growled a voice. "I guess we're nearly beat."

He staggered, and Natalie ran to the mute figure of Angela. "Father, father!" she cried.

Devinne appeared in a second, and took in the situation at a glance. While Jim relinquished Angela to the excited Natalie, Devinne took him by the arm and led him into the sitting-room.

"It's good fortune that led you here. How long have you been without food?"

"Two days."

"We'll soon put that right. Don't talk till you've eaten. I'll get you something to take the edge off while Natalie cooks a sound meal."

He left Jim reclining on the couch, and came back with a loaf of bread and some canned beef. Jim eyed the food with ravenous eyes.

"Where's Angela?" he queried.

"Angela?—who is—ah yes, your companion. You haven't told me your name."

"Conlan—Jim Conlan."

"And the lady?"

"My—my sister."

He started to see Angela standing in the doorway, her arm linked in that of Natalie. She regarded him in amazement as the untruth left his lips, and then came and sat down at the table.

"You vill excuse me. I go make something verra nice," said Natalie, and vanished into the kitchen.

"Now go ahead," said Devinne. "Regard that as *hors-d'œuvre* till the supper is ready."

They partook of the good home-made bread, and of the meat, Devinne regarding them with kindly eyes.

"It's a good thing the steamer is early, or we might have been as badly off as you. We have but a week's supply, but the new lot will be down in a day or two.... Where have you come from?"

"Endicott," said Jim. "We lost our dogs and got delayed some. Gee, but food is a wonderful thing!"

Natalie came in and discreetly removed the remainder of the loaf and the meat.

"No more, pleece," she said. "You vill haf no room for zat supper. I haf him on the stove now."

She laughed merrily, not a little pleased at this unexpected invasion. For months she had seen no one but wandering Indians and grizzled miners. It was a delight to hold conversation with a pretty woman—not to mention a strapping son of Hercules, like unto nothing she had ever seen before.

Jim found Devinne a charming and interesting host. Over a pipe they discussed New York and London, these being Devinne's idea of paradise, a point of view which Jim scarcely shared. By the time supper was ready they all felt like old friends. Natalie, much to Angela's embarrassment, displayed particular interest in Jim.

"But your brother—he ees magnifique! Such eyes—such limbs! Mon Dieu, but I haf nevaire seen one lak him. And you go all zat way wit' him?—you are verra brave—and so beautiful."

Angela would have liked to return the compliment—for the French woman was beautiful enough, and fascinating to her finger-tips—but she felt annoyed that Jim should have placed her in this position. Why should he attempt to pass her off as his sister? It was unpardonable! And here was this French woman regarding him with eyes of obvious admiration. Angela felt a queer little stab in the region of her heart.

"I can trade you some food the day after to-morrow, Conlan," said Devinne.

"I guess I'll be making Dawson to-morrow."

"Nonsense! If you succeed in getting food there, it will be at famine price. Better stay. Nay, I insist. It isn't often we have the pleasure of meeting good company, and we claim you as guests for at least two days."

Jim glanced at Angela and saw her mouth twitch. For some reason Angela was keen to get away, but nevertheless there was sound reasoning in Devinne's argument. At Dawson food would fetch a fabulous price, until the freights could bring in bigger supplies. Devinne, with his acute business acumen, had insured a certain supply by ordering the stuff at the close of the last season and paying freightage in advance.

Jim intimated that he would wait for the arrival of the food, much to Angela's chagrin and to Natalie's unconcealed joy.

"We'll have to rig you up a bed in the next room, Conlan," said Devinne. "We only boast one

spare room upstairs, and ladies come first—even in Alaska.”

“Sure!”

“So you’ve no luck at prospecting?”

“Nope. I guess we came too late.”

Devinne shook his head.

“This country is full of gold, but it’s just luck in finding it. I know old-timers who have mused their legs off without striking a cent. On the other hand young Cheechakos, without a grain of experience, have gone straight to the gold and made millions. You aren’t giving up?”

“I never give up,” growled Jim. “But there’s my—my sister to be considered. ’Tain’t a kind thing to yank a woman over the trail in winter.”

Devinne agreed with a nod of his head. Conlan puzzled him a good deal. It was amazing that he should be the brother of that beautiful blonde girl, who spoke in cultured tones and was as different from him as chalk is from cheese. There lurked the suspicions that their relationship was other than brother and sister, but being a cleanminded man he strove to banish the thought.

In the meantime Natalie was showing Angela the sleeping-room reserved for her, and talking at a tremendous rate about “La Belle France” and all the things she had sacrificed—among these latter she omitted to include her late husband. Doubtless she no longer regarded him as a sacrifice!

It was later in the evening that Jim faced the music. He carried Angela’s few belongings up to her room, and was bidding her “good-night” when she turned on him with flashing eyes.

“How dare you tell lies?”

“Eh?”

“How dare you tell that woman I was your sister?”

“I didn’t. I told Devinne.”

“Don’t quibble. I—I thought you were above mean falsehood.”

He shrugged his shoulders, surprised that she did not see his object.

“If I had told her the truth it would have been embarrassing for you.”

“For me!”

“Yep. Angela, don’t you see it would mean—”

“Well?”

“It would mean that we should have to act as man and wife.”

“Well, haven’t you always tried to act as—husband?”

“Have I?—I guess not. And I’m not wanting to take advantage of a situation. If you’ll look clearly you’ll see this thing square. I guess it would have bin awkward if they had yanked us into this room—together.”

He said “good-night” softly and shut the door. Angela sat down on the bed and stared at the wall. So he had thought of that! It was amazing the things he could think of when he tried hard!

She tore off her clothes and flung herself on to the pillow, annoyed, exasperated, and generally bewildered. Then she got up, lighted the candle again, and surveyed her fresh, incomparable beauty in the mirror.

“Am I getting old—ugly?” she murmured. “Ah yes—Natalie is pretty enough to get things if she tries!”

CHAPTER XXI

NATALIE TRIES HER LUCK

Life at the trading-post might have been a pleasant thing to Angela but for one patent fact, and this fact was rendered more palpable every hour. It requires a woman to thoroughly analyze another woman’s feelings, and Angela experienced little difficulty in probing the heart of Natalie. From the moment when Jim had first stepped through the doorway Angela had been aware of the fact that all Natalie’s interest was centered on him.

She had seen the look of suspense in Natalie’s face when Devinne had inquired of Jim their relationship, and had heard the soft sigh when the untruthful answer was returned. Hitherto she

had imagined love at first sight to be a mere figure of speech, but not now. It was chiefly that fact which aroused her anger against Jim. It looked as if he deliberately gave the lie to encourage these passionate advances of Natalie.

Jim himself was the flower of innocence. Natalie was certainly an attractive woman, and she had the knack of enhancing her attractiveness by subtle, and not ungraceful, movement of her body and limbs. But all her charms were eclipsed by the mystical beauty of Angela. But for her constant obtrusiveness, it is doubtful whether Jim would have noticed her prettiness at all. He found the post a pleasant enough place after the eternal discomforts of the trail, and Devinne a thoroughly good fellow.

He did not fail to notice a queer change in Angela—a relapse into moody silence, so different from the cheerfulness which she had exhibited in the immediate past—but ascribed it to the fact that she was still pining for civilization and the old life. And he meant that she should have this, despite her resolution to accept nothing from him. Once they touched Dawson, he meant to get her aboard a boat—by physical force if necessary—and face the miseries of life without her.

For this purpose he kept intact the wad of notes necessary for her passage, and sought Devinne with a view to raising money on an article of great sentimental, and moderate intrinsic, value—the cigarette-case given him by his old chums at Medicine Bow.

Devinne was amazed when the proposition was put to him. He had no idea that his guest was reduced to such plights.

"I'll loan you the food with pleasure," he said. "There's no need to part with something you evidently love."

Jim shook his head.

"What's it worth?"

"Difficult to say—at least a thousand dollars."

"Wal, see here, you loan me five hundred on it with the option of redeeming it within a year. I'll sure strike gold by then."

Devinne nodded.

"Very well, if you insist. I'll be here until next spring. It'll be waiting for you any time you drop in."

Jim pocketed the notes and commenced to bargain for several necessaries apart from the anxiously awaited food.

In the meantime Natalie was preparing for attack. She garbed herself in her most seductive dress, and assailed Jim as he was leaving Devinne, and commenced to inveigle him into accompanying her on a walk.

"I was just going to look over some gear in the stores," he explained.

"Oh, but zat can wait. Zee day is so magnifique. Mees Angela, you say to him hee es to come."

Angela, who had just entered the passage, turned crimson.

"My brother usually pleases himself," she said, and walked away.

A few minutes' artful pleading, and Jim was beaten. It seemed outrageous to refuse her so small a—pleasure. He got his hat and stalked along beside her. Angela watched them disappear towards the river.

She felt furious with Jim—furious because he could not see that this brazen-faced woman was making love to him all the time. The studied voluptuous movements, the bright lift of the eyes, the mad rush to secure for him anything she thought he might need—how could any man but a fool misinterpret these actions? And Jim looked so innocent—too innocent, she thought. At any rate, he had gone with her on that walk, and anything might happen—Natalie wouldn't care.

She went out of the house, feeling very wroth and very dejected. Devinne met her outside the store and smiled in his quiet, pleasant fashion.

"Where's Jim?" he asked.

"I—I think he has gone for a walk with Natalie."

He raised his eyebrows and then laughed.

"Take care of your brother, Miss Conlan. Natalie is a holy terror when she sets her cap at something. I must confess he's enough to turn any normal woman's head. Natalie has a weakness for big men. It'll certainly take a big one to keep her in order."

Angela forced a smile into her features, and went away feeling more miserable than ever. What might not a woman, well versed in love-making, succeed in achieving with an ingenuous fellow like Jim! And she was pretty too...!

It was three hours later when Jim and Natalie returned. Angela saw them coming up through the woods, Natalie chattering away in her broken English and Jim laughing amusedly. She wondered what had been the outcome of that journey. Had Jim proved an easy victim to Natalie's attractions? Judging by the latter's behavior it looked like it. Natalie seemed very happy and very sure of herself.

It gave Angela food for considerable reflection. If Jim chose to fall in love with the woman, could

she—Angela—have any objection? Their relationship all through had been that of master and chattel, and must remain so in the circumstances. She had let him see that she regarded herself merely as his purchased possession, by a contract wherein love had not entered—on her part. Why should he not make love to another woman if he chose? Why not, indeed? But it hurt nevertheless.

In the evening, returning from a walk along the river, she met Natalie gathering spring flowers in the woods beyond the house. The latter welcomed her excitedly and took her arm familiarly.

“Is it that you go to-morrow?” she asked.

“If the food comes Jim is anxious to get to Dawson.”

Natalie shot her a swift glance.

“To see you on zee boat?”

Angela gasped and stood still.

“I don’t understand you. What boat?”

Natalie raised her eyebrows.

“Ees eet not so?”

“No.”

“But he tell papa—yes. He say eet ees no place for you—ziss terr-ble climate. And you are so beautiful.”

Angela felt as though a cold hand had suddenly gripped her heart. So it had come to that in less than two days!

“You are mistaken,” she said.

“But zat is strange. But, ma cherie, would not you be glad to get away?”

Angela made no reply. She felt as though she was choking. They entered the house and found Jim talking with Devinne.

Later she had an opportunity of speaking to him in private.

“Are we leaving to-morrow?” she asked.

“Sure.”

“For Dawson?”

“Yes.”

“And what then?”

She saw his lips tighten, and the delay in replying told her that Natalie was right.

“I’m going to send you back to England,” he said slowly.

“No.”

“Yes.”

“I won’t go.”

“You must. Angela, be reasonable. I’m broke, dead broke. I ought never to have brought you here, but I expected to be successful—and I ain’t.”

“Is that why you want me to go back?”

“Of course. You—you wanted your freedom, and I’m giving it to you.”

“I told you I could take nothing from you.”

“You’ve got to take this. Angela, you must forget all about that—other matter.”

“How can I forget, when for a year you have constantly reminded me of it? If you put me on that steamer I’ll get off at the first stopping-place and come back to you. You bought me and you’ve got to keep me until the debt is paid, no matter how—unhappy it may make you.”

He smiled as he reflected that she thought her presence could make him unhappy, when his whole soul craved for her.

“Maybe it is someone else’s happiness I am thinking of,” he said quietly.

Someone else! The little green god within her seized on the remark. She confronted him with blazing eyes.

“I knew it!” she said. “But you might have been honest—you might have told me the truth. Oh God! and I’ve suffered all that—all that—”

The voice of Natalie came, singing, up the passage. Without another word Angela went to her room, leaving Jim bewildered by this strange outburst.

It was late in the evening, and a full moon sailed in the clear sky. The night was remarkably warm, and Devinne and Natalie and Jim were sitting on the veranda which skirted the south side of the house. Jim sat in a brown study, pondering over Angela’s changed attitude. Devinne, as if by some pre-arranged plan, silently vanished into the house. Jim was suddenly brought to

his senses by feeling Natalie's soft hand on his.

"You are verra—vat you call him—preoccupied, eh?"

"I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"Oh, of many things."

"The future?"

"Sure! It's that that's got me beat."

Her hand tightened on his.

"Why should you care for the future? Ees not zee present—beautiful?"

"Aye—if it could be always the present," he muttered.

"But zee future can be verra beautiful if one wishes so. Eet ees for you and for me to make zat future jus lak heaven!"

Jim pulled himself up with a jerk. It was not the words that affected him so much as the blaze of quick passion in her eyes.

"There's only one heaven for me, and I guess I've fallen out of it," he said. "Let us go in."

"No, no! The night is so wonderful—all, all is wonderful. Everywhere zere ees love—in zee trees, in zee wind. Do you not feel him?"

If Jim felt anything at all it was blue fear. He came to see the position as it was. She believed him a free man—even believed he might love her. The seemingly trivial actions of the afternoon became newly interpreted. Before he could get his breath Natalie rose to the occasion.

"You vill come back to-morrow after zee boat has gone? It has been so beautiful, zese two days. Say you vill come back!"

"Natalie!" he gasped.

She flung her arms round his neck and pressed her face to his.

"Ees eet zat I am too bold for your Eenglish ways? But I am not ashamed—no. I love you—oh, so much!—"

With a gasp he unlinked her arms and stood up.

"Natalie, what are you saying?"

"Why should I not say zat I love you?" she retorted hotly.

"You love me!" he muttered. "By God—I never dreamed—"

"Oh, Jeem!"

"Stop!" he roared. "Listen here, you'd better know the truth. I'm married!"

"Married?" she almost screamed.

"Jest that."

She stood up, all her wonderful castles strewn before her.

"Mon Dieu!" she groaned. "Mon Dieu!"

There was a sound from behind, and a figure slipped from out of the gloom—Angela. She stood facing them, her breast heaving under her emotions. Jim, seizing the opportunity, vanished into the house sick at the thought that Angela should have heard.

Angela approached Natalie and placed her arm round the latter's waist.

"Natalie," she said, "I couldn't help hearing."

"You—you heard?"

"Yes. And I had a right to hear."

"No one had a right—"

"Yes, someone had—his wife."

"You—his wife?"

Angela inclined her head.

"But he say you are his sister—and you act like that."

The problem became clearer to her. "Ah, I see—he say that because he do not want to cause you embarrassment—because you do not love him."

Angela turned to her in righteous indignation.

"You don't understand—he bought me, with money. I—I can't explain.... But I am sorry this has happened."

Natalie wiped away a tear, sniffed, and then composed herself.

"I vill try to forget," she said. "I am verra glad eet ees you—for you are so beautiful.... But I wish it was me he bought," she added wistfully.

CHAPTER XXII

GOLD

The one desire, obsessing Jim's mind, was to get away from Devinne's place. Natalie's unblushing overtures had scared him very considerably. Women had always puzzled him—they puzzled him even more now. He certainly had no use for women who ran at one in that way. Far better for them to be like Angela, cold and unapproachable, alluring yet repellent. One knew where one was with Angela, but never with Natalie.

And Angela had heard, and perhaps seen, all that had taken place! He mopped his brow as he reflected upon her feelings in the matter. He was modest and foolish enough to think that jealousy was out of the question, but she would undoubtedly object to playing second fiddle to Natalie. So much he knew of her.

Fearful of meeting Natalie at breakfast, he rose early and made his way out, determined not to return until Chips the half-breed arrived with his cargo. A little distance from the house he stopped, and returned for the shovel and pick and washing-pan, with a view to filling in his spare time and banishing from his mind the painful scene of last night.

The red sun was just mounting the horizon as he strode off, and birds were singing gayly in the woods. Half an hour's walk brought him out of the timber into comparatively bare country. Aimlessly he wandered on, drinking in the fresh morning air and stopping to gaze at the brilliant landscape from time to time. Below him, to the west, a small creek made a junction with the Yukon, its red water foaming over broken boulders, and leaping ten perpendicular feet to join the parent stream. He sauntered down towards it, the washing-pan clanking against the shovel as he walked.

Few men would have dug for gold along that creek; the surface had all the characteristics of unadulterated muck. He stuck the pick into it for the mere fun of hitting something. Though the sun shone warmly and rich the grass grew on either bank, the eternal ice was down under the surface.

In one hour he managed to dig out a cubic yard of earth. Having satisfied his hunger for exercise, he flung the shovel down and began to smoke.

Looking down the creek, he saw a clumsy flat-bottomed boat, piled high with cargo, swirling down the river, with a tousled-haired man in the stern keeping her from the bank by means of a pole.

"Chips," he murmured. "He must have started last night. So the food is here, and we can hike out to-day, thank God!"

As he looked, the punt struck a submerged sandbank and beached on it. Chips' little body bent on the pole, but except to swivel the punt on its axis it had no other result.

Jim stood up, and seizing his tools, made down the creek. He shouted to Chips, and the latter looked at him imploringly. Jim waded through the water and reached the craft.

"You should have kept her out more in the center, my friend," he said.

"Current go swift there—no make the landing."

"Hm! perhaps you're right. Here, take these aboard—I'll come back with you."

He put the shovel and pick over the side of the boat and catching hold of the stern, pushed hard. Chips gave a yell of joy as the punt slithered and then jolted into deep water. Jim clambered aboard and took the pole. Half an hour later they beached her at the landing-place.

Devinne and the other half-breed came running down the slope. The former looked at Jim in surprise.

"Where did you go to? We waited breakfast for twenty minutes, and then discovered you were not in."

"Sorry," mumbled Jim. "I was mad for a walk. I met Chips up the river, stuck on a sandbank, so I came along. He ain't a good sailor." Chips grinned, and he and his comrade commenced to pack the cargo up the hill. Jim walked back with Devinne; the latter regarded him in curious fashion. Entering the house, he met Angela, but Natalie was pleasantly absent. Angela surveyed his wet figure with a smile.

"Been swimming?" she queried.

"No. I've bin hurrying along the stores. I met Chips."

She was obviously pleased with the news.

"Then we can leave to-day?"

"Sure—and the sooner the better," he responded emphatically.

She was silent for a moment, then she said softly:

"Why weren't you in for breakfast?"

"Didn't feel like it."

"Was it because of last night?"

He nodded gloomily.

"I'm real scared of that woman," he murmured. "Gee! I shan't be happy till we clear away."

"Then you didn't know—know she——"

"Know!" he ejaculated. "Jumping rattlesnakes! It knocked me silly. Angela, you don't think I—gave her reason to believe——"

"I don't think you did. But, Jim, you are an extraordinary man."

"I don't get you."

"Not to know when a woman loves you."

He puckered his lips and shook his head in perplexity.

"How's a chap goin' to tell? It's a kind of disease that takes folks different ways. Can't rely on the symptoms. I once thought——"

She sunk her head.

"Don't talk of that—now. Here comes Devinne. Let us get the packs ready and go, while the day is yet young."

Half an hour later they were ready for the thirty-mile journey to Dawson. They said good-bye to Devinne, and to Natalie, who appeared at the last moment, exhibiting a gayety which was obviously superficial. She kissed Angela, and clung for a moment to Jim's hand to whisper:

"I wish you every happiness. *Bon voyage!*"

They saw her waving her handkerchief as they entered the woods and headed for their destination.

Traveling was pleasant enough, though the packs were heavy. Now that the following day would see them at Dawson, the question of the future loomed larger than ever. Broke, travel-stained, and tormented by the thought of parting, Jim could find little conversation, though Angela seemed cheerful enough. They came to the creek where Jim had rested but an hour or two before, and waded across it at the shallowest part. Traversing the opposite bank, Angela stopped and stared at the newly excavated hole.

"Someone has been digging here!" she exclaimed.

"Me," said Jim. "This morning."

"To find what we always find—muck?"

"I didn't wash it. Chips turned up and was in trouble——"

She stared at him in amazement.

"You dug all that and didn't wash it?"

"What's the use? It didn't look good to me."

She shrugged her shoulders and slipped her pack down.

"What's wrong?" he queried.

"Nothing. I'm going to wash it."

"Better not waste time——"

"Waste time! A few minutes won't make any difference, considering we've wasted a year already."

He turned from her with a sigh. She called it wasted, but it hadn't been wasted to him. Now that the end of the journey was nigh, he found a strange joy in looking back over the past. Every little incident of their strange pilgrimage seemed to have garnered gold about it. Compared to the lonely, forbidding future, the past was like a paradise, to live for ever in his heart and mind. He had missed much, but he had gained something—passionate, all-consuming love for a woman. Though she gave little in return, it mattered not. The finest type of love does not make demands upon that which it worships. He could keep her still by the same means as he had retained her all along, but his mode of thought had changed somewhat. A deeper love had grown out of the old tempestuous, tyrannous thing. It were better to give than to receive.

He watched her shaking the washing-pan in the water, her clear-cut face intent on the task at hand, and her hair glinting in the sunshine. She came splashing through the water with the pan in her hands.

"Look—something glitters there!"

He took it from her and gave one glance at the contents—a small heap of black and yellow.

Then he laughed loudly.

"Then it isn't—" she commenced.

He ceased to laugh as he probed the dust in the pan. The whole thing was so miraculous to him, he could scarcely find expression.

"You've found it, Angela," he said. "It's gold—real high-grade ore. You've dealt a straight flush at the last hand."

"But it doesn't look like gold!"

"That black stuff ain't gold, it's magnetic ore. Gee, wash some more dirt. This looks like Eldorado!"

He flung down his pack and started shoveling out more gravel from the hole. In the meantime Angela washed the pay-dirt and placed the residue in a handkerchief. Excitement grew as the work went forward. Lower down, the yield was enormous. The pile in the handkerchief grew to an enormous size. Taking no heed of time, the work went on until the declining sun called them from their labors.

Jim poured a pound or so of mercury into a tub of water, and submerged the results of their toil in it.

"You think it is gold?" she queried.

"Gold! Tons of it. I'll show you later. Come along and have some food."

An hour or two later Jim brought from the tub the amalgam formed by the combination of the pan gold-dust with the mercury. This was squeezed through a bearskin, the process segregating the gold and depositing the mercury back into the tub.

What little mercury remained in the glittering mass was evaporated out in a shovel over the camp-fire.

For the first time Angela realized why the gold-miner, once successful, could never rid himself of the fever. All the bitter disappointments, pessimism, and misery vanished in the presence of that sizzling mass in the shovel. It was difficult to believe that here, dug from the frozen earth, was the thing for which men suffered, sinned, and died.

Jim seized the gold nugget with his leathern hands and tossed it into the air, caught it again, and dropped it into his hat.

"Angela, you're right. We're bursting with wealth! There ain't bin nothin' like this since that guy found Bonanza Creek. And now I've got to git to Dawson."

"Dawson!"

"Yep. It ain't ours yet. I've got to stake claims—one for you and one for me."

"Then I'll come too."

"Nope. Any prowling broiler might bunch in and take a fancy to this pitch. You jest sit tight. I'll be back to-morrow morning."

"But you can't get to Dawson and back in one night."

"Can't I? Jest watch my smoke. I'll get the claims registered and yank a man up here from the Syndicate. We'll sure sell out and save digging. We'll come down the river. You ain't skeered of stoppin' alone?"

She laughed at his serious question, and watched him making ready for the journey. In a few minutes he had washed, shaved, and put on a pair of walking boots. He turned and nodded and went off with huge strides.

She continued to sit by the fire, no longer wrestling with the future. In that unexpected moment of wonderful luck, she had seen the future clear-cut as it affected her. The pendulum swung the other way now—she meant to leave Alaska with the least possible delay.

CHAPTER XXIII

DEPARTURE

She arose in the morning from dreams that were strangely mixed, to find that the good fortune was no part of the dream, but a reality. Singing she lighted a fire and prepared a more than usually appetizing breakfast to celebrate the occasion.

She estimated that if Jim found the Registrar and the official of the Mining Syndicate early in the morning, he would arrive there about midday. She laughed amusedly as she thought of him and his inflexible will. She imagined him in Dawson, yanking the official out of his office and hustling him down the river at enormous speed.

The morning passed on leaden wings and no boat appeared on the river. Impatiently she

climbed the highest part of the bank and looked towards Dawson, but only a couple of Indian canoes came to view.

It was an hour later when two riders came tearing down the hill. She recognized Jim as the foremost of the two, and ran to meet him. He came thundering down upon her, leaned over, grasped her arms and hauled her up before him. The mount turned, reared high on its hind-legs until she shivered with fear, and then stood perfectly still. Jim laughingly helped her down and waited for the second man.

"Came on hosses," he explained, "because I calculated we'd git back easier that way. I've got the mining man more'n interested, I guess."

The latter arrived, perspiring freely. He shook hands with Angela and sat down to get cool.

"This husband, ma'am, of yours, beats the railroad," he ejaculated.

The horses were put on to some grazing ground, and Stevens, the mining engineer, went to examine the claims which Jim had meanwhile staked.

The examination proved to be a brief affair. Stevens, despite his professional calm, which was a necessary asset to his business, was obviously astonished at the richness of the claims.

"Wal, now to business. What do you want for 'em, Conlan?"

Jim nudged Angela.

"Call it a round million."

Stevens put up his hands in horror.

"My dear sir!"

"Wal, we'll sell elsewhere."

"One moment. You must consider the fact that up-river claims involve great expenditure in working."

"Cut all that," retorted Jim. "What do you offer?"

"I should recommend my company to buy at half a million."

"Nothin' doin'," ejaculated Jim. "Sorry you had the journey for nix. Anyway, we're glad to meet you."

Stevens gulped. He began to realize he was dealing with a "hard" man.

"See here," said Jim, "we're in a hurry, and will sacrifice a pile to git this deal fixed. But you gotta raise that offer."

"Very well, let us say \$600,000."

"No."

"It's the best I can do."

Angela was about to advise Jim to accept, but he stopped her in time.

"You're going to pay \$750,000, or negotiations cease right now. And at that you'll make a mint of money. I ain't breathed a word about this yere creek yet. When I do you'll see Dawson City turning out good and strong to stake claims. It's up to your people to stake the rest of it, if you pay up quick. Better say the word before there's a howling stampede down here."

That argument settled Stevens. His own quick mind had been turning on the same point.

"Call it a bargain," he said. "Better come right back now and get the transfer made."

Two hours later the party set off, Angela seated behind Jim on the big mare, and Stevens riding ahead.

Jim was fortunate in getting two rooms at the best hotel. Leaving Angela there, he went off with Stevens to clinch the deal. He came back later in the evening, looking a trifle downcast.

"Nothing wrong?" she queried.

"Nope. I got the money in American notes."

He pulled a big pile of notes from his pocket and placed them on the table, staring at them for a few moments in silence. Then he began to count them out.

"Better look after your own," he said. "Guess you'll find that correct—375,000 dollars."

Angela took them, then she leaned over the table and looked at him queerly.

"Some time ago and many times since you made an offer?"

His hands gripped the table.

"Eh?"

"You must remember—you—you said I was for purchase to anyone who would pay the price."

"I—" he commenced brokenly.

"You are not going back on your word?"

"O God! Angela, don't force this on me!"

"I mean to—I have found a buyer."

No sound escaped him for a few minutes, then he gasped:

"Who is—he?"

"Myself."

"What!"

"Yes. I want my freedom—and all that freedom means. Fifty thousand pounds you said—plus ten per cent. Here they are—275,000 dollars, with the exchange in your favor. Take them!"

She put the notes in the center of the table, but he made no attempt to touch them. They were still there an hour later when she came from her own room to fetch something she had left in his. He was still sitting there, staring at them.

"Jim, I'm going back to-morrow," she said. "The *Topeka* sails at eight o'clock. I shan't stay to breakfast. I thought I would let you know."

He nodded, then as she was leaving:

"Maybe you wouldn't mind me seeing you off?"

"I should be very glad," she said indifferently.

When she had gone he put on his hat and went into the streets. He had set his mind on a "jag" of the worst description—to drink and forget. He entered a saloon and mixed with the noisy throng. He commenced to lavish drinks on all and sundry, flinging notes around as though they were dirt; but the drink tasted like poison. The whole attempt ended in utter failure. Only a beast could get drunk while the memory of such a woman hung in his brain.

He wandered back to the hotel, sick at heart and hating the fast-approaching morrow with its heartache.... He had found gold, but he had lost—lost completely in the larger battle. He made no attempt to undress, but sat on his bed and groaned.

When the dawn came he made himself presentable and knocked at Angela's door. He found her clad for the journey, and several bags ready for transit. He thought, too, she seemed delighted at the prospects—delighted when his heart was breaking!

"I'll take these things," he said, and picked up the bags.

They made their way to the jetty off which the *Topeka* lay, with a gangway connecting. It was near the time of departure, and nearly all the passengers were aboard. A crowd of men stood on the shore, passing remarks to those who were leaving. Here and there a wet eye was in evidence, as some unfortunate devil saw his wife and child bound for the outer world—and himself left to the tender mercies of the Klondyke.

Jim walked over the gangway and put down the luggage. When he turned to Angela he saw no sign of regret. She seemed as calm and collected as she had been when first he met her.

"So this is the end of the great adventure," she said, smiling.

"Yep."

"And you—what do you intend doing?"

Jim gulped.

"I guess the Klondyke is good enough for me. See here, Angela, I bin pretty rough with you—but—it wasn't that I meant it that way. You gotta make allowances for me. I lived among animals for years. Maybe I kinder got like one, without quite knowing it."

"Perhaps you may make allowances for me, too. I was born in luxury, where hardship and suffering never entered, where flattery and gifts were the daily portion. I have never had a chance—"

"Cut that," he grunted. "You got grit and pluck and—"

"All aboard!" yelled a stentorian voice.

"They're off," said Jim. "I— Good-bye, Angela. Maybe you'll remember—sometimes."

His eyes suddenly swam and he turned his head away.

"Good-bye!" she murmured, and held his hand.

"All aboard!" yelled the voice again.

A man began to move the gangway. The hand in Jim's suddenly clung on.

"I gotta go," he moaned; "they're pulling in the plank."

The steamer "honked" and began to move. He looked at her appealingly and she placed something into the palm of his hand.

"It's something I forgot to give you," she said softly.

He opened his hand and saw—a steamboat ticket.

"But—"

"I bought two," she said. "One for you and one for me; and most of your clothes are in those bags. Didn't you miss them?"

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

It was past midnight, and they were sitting in the stern of the *Topeka* listening to the chopchop of the water under her flat bottom. Save for an occasional guffaw and curse, evidence of some nocturnal card-party, silence reigned aboard.

A full moon flooded the landscape, under which the lofty banks, and the great mountains beyond, shimmered in fantastic manner; wherein the river, mighty as it was, seemed dwarfed like unto a silver serpent, winding and turning down to the sea.

Since morning Jim had lived in some wonderful paradise, which even now seemed unstable, fugitive, and dreamlike.

"Angela, tell me it isn't a dream."

"It's no dream, dear."

"Ah!"

He nestled closer to her and found the soft small hand beneath the rug spread over their knees. There was no attempt on her part to withdraw it. Instead, she gripped the big muscular fingers caressingly.

"I can't get it straight yet," he muttered. "It was only this morning I was in hell. You're sure this ain't some game that'll land me back in the mud?"

She laughed merrily and pulled his arm round her waist.

"You dear, doubting man! If it's me you want I'm here with you. I'm substantial enough to be felt, aren't I?"

"But some things seem too good, and this is one of them. I had a hunch I'd never quite reach out over that pride of yours."

"I've no pride now, Jim, save pride of possession." Her eyes shone in the moonlight. "Back there in the wilderness I dreamed of this day, but it seemed so far away."

He nodded his head slowly.

"And yet you ran away?"

"It was on that last occasion that I found myself. When I uttered that appalling, shameful lie, I thought I hated you for your tyranny. It was only when I had spent a night on the trail alone that I saw how mean and low I had fallen...."

"No—"

"Yes. The tyranny was all imaginary—I saw that. I could think of no act on your part that wasn't kind, or for my good. I came back to find you ill, sick unto death. It seemed it was some punishment on my head.... Oh, everything changed in those few days. If you had died I think I should have died too, though I didn't love you—then."

He gave vent to a low hiss of incomparable joy.

"And you do now?" he asked.

Her rapturous eyes were sufficient answer.

"It beats me," he muttered. "It clean gets me wondering that you can love a chap like me. Once I thought you could, but then I didn't know you as you are—say, you're sure about this, ain't you?"

She gave him a hug.

"I agree with Natalie, no woman could help loving you—eventually."

"Oh, she said that, did she?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I guess love comes easy to a woman like that."

"And you don't like the love that comes easy?"

He made a grimace.

"Nothin' good ever comes easy. All the best things have to be fought for, won by long suffering and ordeal."

They sat in silence for a time, the heart of each overburdened with intense happiness. A light breeze swept up the river, souging through the thick woods on the nearer bank.

"It was on such a night as this, back in England, that I first told you I loved you," he said.

"You can speak of that now without regret?"

"Sure. It was the finest thing I ever did. I thought I was happy then, but now——"

The unfinished sentence conveyed all he meant to convey. She turned her head until her full red lips came near his.

"You kissed me then, Jim. Won't you kiss me now?"

She felt his great heart throbbing against her bosom as he made haste to fulfill the invitation. If he had dallied in his love-making he lingered in his kissing. The whole world seemed to slide into oblivion in that first passionate love-kiss. She clung to him, wholly and eternally his, conscious of nothing but the close presence of the rough, strong man into whose adoring arms a kindly providence had thrown her.

"By God, I'll never let you go again!" he hissed.

"By God, I don't want to," she retorted, with a merry laugh.

"Over there's England," he cried, pointing away to the east.

"And over here's America—Colorado."

"Eh?"

"Are we not to have a honeymoon—we who were married but to-day?"

His eyes opened wide.

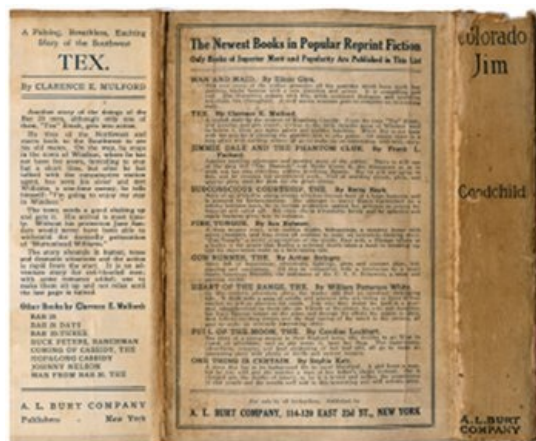
"You don't mean——?"

"I do. I want to spend it in your country, among your people, in the places that you love and will never forget. To me it is all the same, wherever we go—Paradise."

He took her head and pressed his cheek against hers.

"You glorious woman!"

"You wonderful man!"



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